



LA Theses

Endnotes

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in this society *unity* appears as accidental, *separation* as normal.

—Marx, *Theories of Surplus Value*

1. We live in an era of long-unfolding social crisis, which is fundamentally the crisis of societies organized in a capitalist mode. Indeed, the employment relations that govern production and consumption in capitalist societies are breaking down. The result has been the reappearance of a structural condition that Marx called **surplus capital alongside surplus population**. Technological transformations continue to take place in spite of economic stagnation, giving rise to a situation in which there are too few jobs for too many people. Meanwhile, huge pools of money scour the earth for profits, leading to periodic expansions of bubbles that burst in massive blowouts. Rising job insecurity and inequality are symptoms of the increasing impossibility of this world as such.
2. In the present moment, these contradictions, formerly contained within capitalist societies, are set to explode. The



2008 crisis was one manifestation of this. It gave rise to a global wave of struggles that is still unfolding today. In order to gain some control over a simmering crisis, states organized coordinated bailouts of financial and other firms. State debt rose to levels not seen since World War II. Bailouts of capitalists thus had to be accompanied by punishing austerity for workers, as states sought to manage their balance sheets while also recreating the conditions for accumulation. Yet these state actions have been only partially successful. Rich economies continue to grow ever more slowly even as they take on huge quantities of debt at every level. Poor economies are also faltering. We call this global situation **the holding pattern** and assert that further economic turbulence is likely to issue in a capitalist crash landing.

3. Workers fought defensive battles in the twentieth century as they still do today. But then, their defensive battles were part of an offensive struggle: workers sought to organize themselves into a **labor movement**, which was growing ever more powerful. This movement would sooner or later expropriate the expropriators in order to begin to build a society organized according to the needs and wants of workers themselves.
4. However, the post-1970s crisis of capitalism, which for many should have spelled its end, led to a deep crisis of the labor movement itself. Its project is no longer adequate to the conditions workers face. Most fundamentally, this is because of the decline of the centrality of industrial work in the economy. With the onset of **deindustrialization** and the decline in the manufacturing share of employment (which was itself one of the fundamental causes of the expansion of surplus populations), the industrial worker could no longer be seen as the leading edge of the class. In addition, due to rising lev-

els of greenhouse gases, it is apparent that the vast industrial apparatus is not only *not* creating the conditions of a better future – it is also destroying them. Most fundamentally of all, work itself is no longer experienced as central to most people’s identities. For most people (although not everyone), it no longer seems as if work could be fulfilling if only it was managed collectively by workers rather than by bosses.

5. At the same time, the decline of the workers’ identity revealed a multiplicity of other **identities**, organizing themselves in relation to struggles that had, until then, been more or less repressed. The resulting “new social movements” made it clear, in retrospect, to what extent the homogeneous working class was actually diverse in character. They have also established that revolution must involve more than the reorganization of the economy: it requires the abolition of gender, racial and national distinctions, and so on. But in the welter of emergent identities, each with their own sectional interests, it is unclear what exactly this revolution must be. For us, the surplus population is not a new revolutionary subject. Rather, it denotes a structural situation in which no fraction of the class can present itself as the revolutionary subject.
6. Under these conditions, the unification of the proletariat is no longer possible. This might seem to be a pessimistic conclusion, but it has a converse implication that is more optimistic: today the problem of unification is a revolutionary problem. At the high points of contemporary movements, in occupied squares and factories, in strikes, riots and popular assemblies, proletarians discover not their power as the real producers of this society, but rather their separation along a multiplicity of identity-lines (employment status, gender, race, etc.). These are marked out and knitted together by the

disintegrating integration of states and labor markets. We describe this problem as **the composition problem**: diverse proletarian fractions must unify but do not find a unity ready-made within the terms of this unraveling society.

7. This is why we think it is so important to study the unfolding of struggles in detail. It is only in those struggles that the revolutionary horizon of the present is delineated. In the course of their struggles, proletarians periodically improvise solutions to the composition problem. They name a fictive unity, beyond the terms of capitalist society (most recently: the black bloc, real democracy, 99%, the movement for black lives, etc.), as a means of fighting against that society. While each of these improvised unities inevitably breaks down, their cumulative failures map out the separations that would have to be overcome by a **communist movement** in the chaotic uproar of a revolution against capital.
8. This is what we mean when we say that class consciousness, today, can only be the **consciousness of capital**. In the fight for their lives, proletarians must destroy that which separates them. In capitalism, that which separates them is also what unites them: the market is both their atomization and their interdependence. It is the consciousness of capital as our unity-in-separation that allows us to posit from within existing conditions – even if only as a photographic negative – humanity’s capacity for communism.

Endnotes, Los Angeles, December 2015