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May Day Talk

James Herod

Summer 2012

Text of a talk given at the May Day noon rally in the City Hall Plaza in Boston on Tuesday, May 1, 2012.

Capitalists have always been criminals. They have been willing to exterminate entire peoples in order to keep the profits rolling in. May Day stems from a capitalist crime. In 1886, in Chicago, during a period of intense class struggle, they rounded up eight anarchists and accused them of something they didn't do. Four were hanged a year later after a fake trial. These executions sparked an international furor of protest. May First was thereafter celebrated as a workers day in honor of the Haymarket Martyrs.

So here it is 126 years later and the crimes of capitalists are continuing unabated, except that they have now reached earth killing levels. Global warming, which is being caused by capitalists, has the potential of killing all life on earth. This is the mother of all crimes. But even their lesser crimes are now global in scope and destructiveness.

Thus it is more urgent than ever that we defeat capitalists. Fortunately, we are in a window of opportunity. The keenest scholars of capitalism and its history are agreed that we are entering a period of chaos during which no one nation will be hegemonic.

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This gives us an opening to establish a world full of democratic, autonomous communities, free of capitalism, states, wage-slavery, hierarchy, markets, and money, a world without borders or war, based on peace and justice.

How to do it? That is the question, and always has been. We have tried many things. We must keep trying. We must be creative and keep inventing new tactics and strategies. One thing is for sure: we can never defeat them militarily. But this is not a plea for nonviolence. In fact, we must expunge that false debate from our thinking once and for all. Rather, it is a claim that we can only defeat capitalists by organizing ourselves socially in ways superior to theirs.

Why don't we pick up and run with two concepts from the recent Occupy Wall Street, and try to extend them? Occupations and Assemblies. Both practices have always been part of revolutionary movements. For example: during the Spanish Revolution factories and farms were occupied in key towns and provinces; during the French Revolution workers in Paris set up 48 assemblies, one for each section of the city. More recently, beginning in Chiapas in 1994, assemblies have been popping up everywhere, in Algeria, Argentina, Bolivia, Oaxaca, Greece, and just last year in Egypt, Spain, and finally in New York City.

If we could extend these assemblies to expanded households of 200 or more people, to neighborhoods, and to workplaces, we would begin to organize ourselves socially in such a way as to be able to defeat capitalists.

There is much merit in the recent slogan: "Occupy Everything." What does this mean? It means that we counter the capitalist drive to "privatize" everything, that is, to put everything under the control of corporations, with our own drive to place everything back into the commons, the public domain, into common ownership.

Traditionally, most anti-capitalists have believed that we could get rid of capitalism by capturing the state, either through an armed revolution or by winning elections. That has proved not to be the case.

This leaves us with the two anarchist strategies: anarcho-syndicalism and anarcho-communism. Certainly, as already indicated, taking over our workplaces, both profit and non-profit, will be a necessary part of defeating capitalists. And certainly, trying to create sustainable democratic communities is essential also. But we need something more. I'm not sure we any longer have the time to build a new society within the shell of the old, although we must keep struggling along that path. Our problem now is not how to defeat capitalists, but how to defeat capitalists *quickly*. We all need to be thinking hard about how to do this.

First, we need to attack the very idea of the state. Capitalists and their states are inseparable. We cannot get rid of capitalists without also getting rid of the state. So we should organize a massive and vigorous campaign to discredit the state, especially in its popular form of representative government, and to foster instead the idea of direct democracy, through popular assemblies. Then we should add to this a drive to build a strong global movement to stop paying taxes. Governments cannot exist without taxes.

Second, we need to focus on the big players, those who actually control the world, mostly through their control of money. This is what was so exciting about Occupy Wall Street. Finally, a group had put the spot light on the money-bags. A recent study by a research team in Switzerland identified these particular capitalists. They surveyed 43,060 transnational corporations, and the interconnections between them. They found that out of those, 1318 were the core, and that of those, only 147 controlled 40% of the world's economy. Many of them were banks.

We must break the control that these capitalists have over our lives. Just one tactic we might consider is to occupy all the stock exchanges of the world. Flood them with thousands of people and shut these casinos down. I'm sure we can think of other tactics too, like refusing to pay interest on loans, and even repudiating the very idea of debt.

But one thing we know: The oil companies must be stopped. Goldman-Sachs must be stopped. Monsanto must be stopped. The World Bank must be stopped. The CIA must be stopped. It is an absolute evil if there ever was one. The arms industry worldwide must be stopped. The Pentagon must be stopped. The corporate media must be stopped. All these institutions and many more like them must simply be overrun and dismantled.

So there is plenty to do for everyone. Let's get to it.

Thank You