Take Power

A pamphlet for changing the world

M. Sanchez

April 5, 2025

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Is there no other way that we could do things than the way we do them now? Everything seems so complicated. The world seems impossible to understand, it seems to be completely random and beyond any of my power to shape it.

At the same time, if I try to avoid participating in this world, I find that I turn out to be very little apart from it. Not even my name or my thoughts are completely mine alone. I am connected to others through our language, and through the reference points we have in that language—-how we measure time, the things we can put into words, the ideas that we share, and so on.

We depend on society to live. We are not completely self-sufficient, no matter how much we wish we were so that we could save ourselves the trouble. Society is what is common between us, even if we are still uniquely ourselves and no one else. We ultimately depend on *nature* to live, which is both what is between us and beyond all of us collectively—-it is what is *more* than society while being part of it in how we act with it. Taken together, society and nature are our *world.*

I come to know who I am by knowing who you are, and what this or that is, and you come to know who you are the same way. In doing this, both of us remain ourselves, while also being more than just "I" or "You." We are part of our world. We are workers, siblings, children, parents, readers, show bingers, travelers, homebodies, believers, non-believers, humans, primates…

But what is this "we?" Aren't "we" distinct people? I'm not you, and you're not me. But distinct doesn't mean *separate.* If we trace all the connections in our lives, they lead to all the other people in the world. Instead of growing all of our food ourselves, we buy most of it from the store with our money. We depend on the people who grow the food, who ship it, and put it out for us to buy it. All of those people work together to make the whole process work, and we bring the process to completion when we buy the food and eat it. If that process breaks down somewhere, like if there's a bad harvest or if a shipping boat gets stuck in a canal, we very quickly see the effects at the store. Most obviously, in a shortage of products.

Our money doesn't create the products that we buy with it, but it is what we use to acquire those products for ourselves in a way that society as a whole recognizes as legitimate. We could steal the products if we wanted to, but this is not the normal or average way that we get things. In other words, it is not *society's* way. Society as a rule is organized through money, even if there are exceptions to that rule.

When I bring my groceries to the cash register, I know the exact amount of time I have spent at work in order to make enough money to afford the final price. With our money, we exchange some equivalent amount of time from our working lives in exchange for some equivalent amount of time from many working lives. When we think about this money, we realize that there is more than meets the eye. Money is the dependency of all of us on all of us, and the cooperation of all of us with all of us, embodied in a little thing with numbers on it. But when we use money, we rarely think about this at all, since we think of the money that we use as ours and ours alone.

When we work with each other and depend on each others' work, we give up some of our control over our lives in order to enhance our collective power. We open up more possibilities than we have when working on our own, since we can do much more together than we can do alone. But we really do lose some control over our own lives, even if our lives would be much smaller and simpler without our cooperation with and dependency on others. How do we reconcile our freedom to determine our own lives with the demands of our cooperation and dependency—-the demands of society as a whole?

Is Freedom on the Market?

Many of us have been taught at school that the solution to this is the invisible hand of the free market. Economists tell us that the market always allocates the collective wealth and power of society to those who want it more than anyone else, and so work the hardest, and so deserve it the most.

Many of us also feel the deep untruth of that bedtime story. The people who work the hardest—-construction workers, agricultural workers, manufacturing workers, restaurant workers, textile workers, transportation workers—-don't seem to make very much money at all. The people who work the least—-stock brokers, social media celebrities, CEOs-—seem to make the most money. How can the distribution of society's wealth and power be based on individual effort, or even on intelligence, if so many of the dumbest and laziest people are the most powerful and wealthy?

Money is actually pretty fair, in a certain sense. It can be used for the same things no matter who owns it. Money seems to be the one thing that's neutral between people. The availability and the interest rates of loans are rarely neutral to the people giving them and the people asking for them, but the money itself is neutral. But what does money even *do*? Isn't it just a bunch of random numbers that we all collectively decide are real? Isn't it all just made up and enforced by the government and the banks?

Money is absolutely imaginary up to a certain point, but so is pretty much anything in society. Imagination is an important part of our engagement with the world. There isn't a world separate from imagination. We always see things from our perspective and with the concepts we can put into language, even if we still see the same things and share the same world as everything else. To say money is imaginary doesn't mean that it's put into the world as if from the outside, as something random and without reason. Money seems to have a method to its madness. But what is that method?

To understand that method, we have to think more about what money does. Money determines not only the distribution of the things that we make based on who has an equivalent amount of money to their prices, but even determines *what* we *make*. We still have a certain freedom in this process, but money is the condition for that freedom.

Those of us who have no money apart from what we need to live have little freedom. We depend on wages to buy what we need, since we don't own the means of production-—machines, tools, large-scale transportation. Those who have a lot of money also tend to own these things. They have money to invest in projects and coordinate what we do with our labor, making them capitalists.

Capitalists decide what we will make or do based on whether and how they think money can be made from the process. Money is the embodiment of the power to make these decisions about society's labor. It is power granted by wealth, in the form of a thing, which is equivalent to all the different things it can be exchanged for. In other words, money is the embodiment of *capital*.

In capital, wealth that can be exchanged between people on the market and power over what people do are identical. They are literally the same thing as money. This capital comes into the world through what we do-—we make money for the owners of it. It doesn't come into the world for our sake, but for its own sake. But what even is this power, which looks so simple and obvious when it's right in front of us in the form of money?

When we spend money, we are deciding how to move around things that we have made, and when capitalists invest money, they are deciding what things we will do in order to make more money. Part of what we make in this process is our ability to make and do things. This has a very simple price tag—-your budget for living up to whatever standard you will accept in order to continuously work at your job. Your wage, which you usually receive as a paycheck, is the price of maintaining your ability to keep working in the whole money-making process. That working ability, which is embodied in you as a person, is your *labor-power*.

When a capitalist pays for your wages, they are paying for your labor-power. But when you show up to work, the point isn't making sure that you can keep paying for your living expenses. That's a precondition for you continuing to show up, but it's not the reason your bosses and society want you there. You're there to make more money for them. But if you personally are just there to work for your paycheck, how is it that you and your coworkers seem to create more money than you're paid in your paychecks? You agreed to these conditions in your contract for the job, but you can't get rid of the feeling that you're being cheated.

To understand how you create more money than you get paid, you have to remember that money is only the embodiment of capital, which is both wealth and power over the products of our past labor as well as over what we do with our new labor. The products can be many different things, practically anything. The only thing that unites them into a single social system of exchange is that they take some amount of labor to make. Not some specific person's labor, but the average amount of labor of people in society as a whole. That average amount of laboring time—*value*—is not what you're paid, but it is the average amount that the products go for on the market when compared to other amounts of labor embodied in the other products.

Of course in reality, meaning outside of this abstracted average, prices move all over the place. Competition determines the distribution of products through the prices. But what exactly are the prices determining? Money can't just can't be conjured up out of thin air, there has to be *something* that eventually corresponds to it and which it can be exchanged for. Financial speculation is still speculation on the *future*, which is why it has patterns that we can measure and predict.

There is always a certain amount of the products of past labor being exchanged on the market, and there's always a certain amount of labor—-the possibility of future products—-that's available for society to use. Society turns this labor into wealth by means of those of us who work, yet we ourselves are also part of that exchange system when we sell our ability to work in exchange for wages. When we make good on that sale by working, turning an ability into an actual reality, we are participating in that total social laboring.

At the same time, the fact that our necessities for keeping up our working ability can be given a price tag does not mean the same thing as for other commodities that are sold on the market. We are free to sell our labor-power for any price, because we own our own bodies. And so we can exchange some potential power of our body on the market, since our body is recognized in society's laws as our property. Our labor-power is only fully surrendered from our laboring body and made into the property of the capitalist once we make things, do things, and move things around. In other words, when we begin labor.

But when we labor, we are not simply transferring out the exact equivalent of past labor as the labor that goes into the products that we budget our wages for. We are making *new* products of labor from our laboring itself, and helping turn those products into money by selling them to customers. When we labor beyond some time equivalent to the amount of things our wages pay for, that is the labor we do *for the capitalist*, who hires us in order to make more money from their money.

The source of that new money is ultimately from the "something more" that we do, the work that we do for someone else. This labor beyond what we do for ourselves creates *surplus-value*.

The amount of surplus-value that the capitalist gets from the whole process is directly opposed to the amount of necessary labor that we do for ourselves. We want to work only for ourselves, while the capitalist wants us to make as much new value as possible. Value is the average socially necessary labor-time, the social form of all the things that can be done with labor ability in a certain amount of time. To extract more surplus-value means to extract more potential power over society's labor.

Prices determine how products are distributed in the details—-whoever has enough money for a product's price can buy it, if they want to. But this distribution has to be a distribution of *something*, and the products of society's labor taken altogether are only partially money. Most of them are a wide variety of things other than money, from apples to trash cans. What brings them all together is that they are all things which are interchangeable with each other as *products*. What are they products of? Society's total laboring power. In a society where production is production for exchange, that total labor appears as *value*. The total labor is fluid, it can take shape as many things. When it does, it crystallizes in individual *products* of labor. With a system of value, this appears as the value of those products, meaning the share they represent out of the total.

This is right in front of us when we exchange money, the *measure* of value, for a product. But because that money itself is a thing that we exchange, a product with a price (its purchasing power), it's difficult for us to see. I could be half asleep and still make a legitimate transaction with the guy at the gas station. Both of us could have screwdrivers shoved in our brains and still make a legitimate exchange. Money works no matter what the conditions of exchange are, whether we are aware of what we are doing or not, since money is all about the average, abstract, social structure. We have to look at money as not only a thing, but a *relationship*.

Wealth and Power

Time is money, and money is power. We all know these things very well. But it is an impersonal power over people and their products which takes on the form of an exchangeable thing. Anyone can own it, and so anyone can command others, but the basic relationship of command remains the same. Our needs are only means for this power to reinforce itself over us.

The existing capitalist society produces things in order to continue to exist, and continues to exist in order to continue to produce. As part of that production for production's sake, there are also two opposing functions: consumption of things for the sake of consuming them, and accumulation of wealth for the sake of accumulating wealth. Both, however, are means of the continued existence and growth of capital, which brings new wealth into the total process of producing and circulating products from the surplus-value of our labor.

Because we and our needs are only means of society instead of ends, the whole process seems very irrational and inefficient to us. How much of society's work and resources goes into finance? Or movies? Or fast food? And how much labor goes into destroying the ecosystems around us, even destroying our own bodies, which might have otherwise gone to actually improving our lives? So much of what society's wealth goes into is outright harmful for us. Our health isn't the main point, even if we might make it a mandatory consideration by lobbying our government. The point is the creation and accumulation of new wealth, new power over our abilities.

One of the most wasteful manifestations of this system of power that we see every single day of our lives is advertising. Advertising emotionally manipulates us as consumers, using our desires as means to move products around and make money. Advertising is only necessary for society if needs are a means instead of an end. And we have lived in such conditions long enough that advertising has become a gigantic part of our day to day lives, polluting practically every corner with constant assaults on our senses and demands for attention.

Even things that seem to be free are incorporated into the circulation of products on the market by the advertising industry. The data from our usage of social media platforms is sold to the highest bidder, and then used to control us and incorporate us more efficiently into the circulation of products. Our attention and enjoyment is turned into a means for the concentration of wealth and power in fewer and fewer hands. We feel as if we have no home when we see how little of our world is uniquely *ours*.

Anyone in marketing knows that consumers are irrational. Advertisements depend even more on irrational techniques of manipulation as the rational interests of the audience. How many of us have fallen for an advertisement and bought things we didn't necessarily need just because they looked cool or fun? Advertising is a technique by which new products, or more like production, can create new demand.

Yet even advertising, a high point in the wastefulness in a society based on exchange, tells us something about the possibility for a different society. Just as our abilities unfold into a wide variety of possibilities when we work together, our needs also unfold into a wide variety beyond the maintenance of our own bodies when we participate as members of society. Even our spiritual needs can be part of a plan for what we make and do. Advertising already takes advantage of this fact in order to move products around. It reinforces our lack of awareness of the part we play in making society by means of our very own imagination.

Our multifaceted nature is often something we feel as a curse more than an opportunity for a full life. Today, those who work are expected to be jacks of all trades, a body that can be set to work practically anywhere doing practically anything for practically any amount of time. At the same time, we are expected to sit patiently in waiting when no one will hire us, putting a pause on our living until a time when those with money find a use for us. For many, that time never comes.

The machines that make the world run so quickly and efficiently also seem to make things harder for us. Some machines constantly throw many of us out of jobs, while other machines make sure we pay for everything when we have practically no money to our names at all.

When we can't keep up with automation, we become painfully aware that our lives aren't the point of society. We are only the means that can be replaced by other means. Yet we are also the only source of new value. The machines are made up of products of society's labor after all. On average, there is less money to make per product with automation, even if more products can be made in the same amount of time as before. How can we be both the source of new value, and nothing but working hands that can be fired and condemned to unemployment? This dilemma makes us question why we live, what we live for, how we can continue to live.

Politicians pretend to give us an easy answer for these questions, rushing to answer it on our behalf. They might blame foreigners, they might blame the other parties, or they might promise to make the system work for everyone, both owners and workers. They tell us we can make things good again, whether they mean more jobs, more healthcare, cheaper products, or some other empty promise. They tell us not to give up and dream of another world, but to hold onto what they tell us immediately possible in the name of hard-headed realism and pragmatism.

In reality, their pragmatism limits what we can actually do. Their aspirations are narrower than ours, rarely going any further than their careers and their self-preservation. Politicians and their followers try to hold on to the present, but they only hold onto the things left to us from the past in the present. They don't want us to look into the future and see the possibility of making a world for ourselves, independently from their political machines and their voter engagement. They want you to give up on answering the questions of life for yourself and to let them answer *for* you.

But you don't have to keep being a resource for them to move around. You have the power to think for yourself, if you only refuse to simply repeat the thoughts that are thrown at you by social media, television, and politicians. Will you hold onto dead things and try to recover them, or will you let go in order to reach for the world?

We Can Take Power

What if we acted and thought in a different way to what we do now, without giving up the questions of life? Many of us feel like this isn't possible, that we should only worry about our bills. But we could come together even *through* our precariousness, through the very fact that we own nothing and that our whole livelihood depends on working for other people. Whether we have a job or not, whether we are a citizen or not, whether we are pessimists or optimists, we are *dispossessed* of society's wealth.

In these conditions, we can only truly stand independently if we work together. Not only as people who earn wages. We should not limit our power to begging for jobs from the owners, for hours from our employers, and for a pay that's never enough. We should not stop there, but extend ourselves out to the biggest questions of life. We should determine why we live for ourselves, in political action independent of the politicians, the rich donors, and the experts. When we start to ask radical questions and set out to determine an answer to them together, that sets our thinking on the long road to taking power over the world together.

In the way we live now, the real questions of life are secondary at best. We could work from the cradle to the grave, regardless of if we cared about our job at all, or if we thought our labor mattered for society or not. It doesn't really matter what we think is good for the world as long as we keep clocking in and only clocking in. If we come together to stand for ourselves, and begin to seize control over the machines, the neighborhoods, the infrastructure, the transportation, the means of communication, the wealth that today we use to make others rich, we could begin to determine what is good in life for ourselves.

Despite what economists might tell you about free markets being the opposite of stuffy bureaucratic planning, money already works as a kind of plan. It does this even before corporations, banks, and governments begin to work to adjust that plan with plans of their own. If we laborers plan the use of our own labor, if we organize our own actions, and we organize society as a whole on these principles, we would begin to make our needs as people the point of society's wealth and power once again. By doing so, we would make determining what is good into the point of living, even if we never decide once and for all what that is. We would question what is good for ourselves individually, for society as a whole, even for our world as a whole, our home which is more than us.

Each of us would likely answer that question in a different way, and that's great. The point is the questioning and the determining more than any final answer we might think we have come to a stop at. Questioning is what's great in life, because it is how we see things from new angles and do things that we would never otherwise have known were possible. With power and wealth in the hands of society, the associated producers—-that is, we—-would have many more possibilities open to us which under the reign of capitalism go to waste for lack of exploitability in money-making.

Questioning things without having power is only a first step along a long path. As workers who own nothing but our abilities, we do not yet have the power to determine and direct society's power and wealth. To do that, we have to begin valuing our own independence and our own freedom to determine our lives more than we value the fantasy of one day owning enough money to control others. We have to determine our lives for ourselves and determine life with other people at the same time. When we learn to do this in the long process of seizing power, we will finally begin to reconcile our own freedom to choose and the creative power of society together into the explosive force of a revolutionary rebirth of our world.

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Written by M. Sanchez, 2025
Universal Press

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Our attention and enjoyment is turned into a means for the concentration of wealth and power in fewer and fewer hands. We feel as if we have no home when we see how little of our world is uniquely *ours*. Anyone in marketing knows that consumers are irrational. Advertisements depend even more on irrational techniques of manipulation as the rational interests of the audience. How many of us have fallen for an advertisement and bought things we didn't necessarily need just because they looked cool or fun? Advertising is a technique by which new products, or more like production, can create new demand.

Yet even advertising, a high point in the wastefulness in a society based on exchange, tells us something about the possibility for a different society. Just as our abilities unfold into a wide variety of possibilities when we work together, our needs also unfold into a wide variety beyond the maintenance of our own bodies when we participate as members of society. Even our spiritual needs can be part of a plan for what we make and do.

Money is absolutely imaginary up to a certain point, but so is pretty much anything in society. Imagination is an important part of our engagement with the world. There isn't a world separate from imagination. We always see things from our perspective and with the concepts we can put into language, even if we still see the same things and share the same world as everything else. To say money is imaginary doesn't mean that it's put into the world as if from the outside, as something random and without reason. Money seems to have a method to its madness. But what is that method?

To understand that method, we have to think more about what money does. Money determines not only the distribution of the things that we make based on who has an equivalent amount of money to their prices, but even determines *what* we *make*. We still have a certain freedom in this process, but money is the condition for that freedom.

Those of us who have no money apart from what we need to live have little freedom. We depend on wages to buy what we need, since we don't own the means of production—machines, tools, large-scale transportation. Those who have a lot of money also tend to own these things. They have money to invest in projects and coordinate what we do with our labor, making them capitalists.

Capitalists decide what we will make or do based on whether and how they think money can be made from the process. Money is the embodiment of the power to make these decisions about society's labor. It is power granted by wealth, in the form of a thing, which is equivalent to all the different things it can be exchanged for. In other words, money is the embodiment of *capital*.

In capital, wealth that can be exchanged between people on the market and power over what people do are identical. They are literally the same thing as money.

So much of what society's wealth goes into is outright harmful for us. Our health isn't the main point, even if we might make it a mandatory consideration by lobbying our government. The point is the creation and accumulation of new wealth, new power over our abilities.

One of the most wasteful manifestations of this system of power that we see every single day of our lives is advertising. Advertising emotionally manipulates us as consumers, using our desires as means to move products around and make money. Advertising is only necessary for society if needs are a means instead of an end. And we have lived in such conditions long enough that advertising has become a gigantic part of our day to day lives, polluting practically every corner with constant assaults on our senses and demands for attention. Even things that seem to be free are incorporated into the circulation of products on the market by the advertising industry. The data from our usage of social media platforms is sold to the highest bidder, and then used to control us and incorporate us more efficiently into the circulation of products.

The existing capitalist society produces things in order to continue to exist, and continues to exist in order to continue to produce. As part of that production for production's sake, there are also two opposing functions: consumption of things for the sake of consuming them, and accumulation of wealth for the sake of accumulating wealth. Both, however, are means of the continued existence and growth of capital, which brings new wealth into the total process of producing and circulating products from the surplus-value of our labor.

Because we and our needs are only means of society instead of ends, the whole process seems very irrational and inefficient to us. How much of society's work and resources goes into finance? Or movies? Or fast food? And how much labor goes into destroying the ecosystems around us, even destroying our own bodies, which might have otherwise gone to actually improving our lives?

This capital comes into the world through what we do—we make money for the owners of it. It doesn't come into the world for our sake, but for its own sake. But what even is this power, which looks so simple and obvious when it's right in front of us in the form of money?

When we spend money, we are deciding how to move around things that we have made, and when capitalists invest money, they are deciding what things we will do in order to make more money. Part of what we make in this process is our ability to make and do things. This has a very simple price tag—your budget for living up to whatever standard you will accept in order to continuously work at your job. Your wage, which you usually receive as a paycheck, is the price of maintaining your ability to keep working in the whole money-making process. That working ability, which is embodied in you as a person, is your *labor-power*.

When a capitalist pays for your wages, they are paying for your labor-power. But when you show up to work, the point isn't making sure that you can keep paying for your living expenses. That's a precondition for you continuing to show up, but it's not the reason your bosses and society want you there. You're there to make more money for them. But if you personally are just there to work for your paycheck, how is it that you and your coworkers seem to create more money than you're paid in your paychecks? You agreed to these conditions in your contract for the job, but you can't get rid of the feeling that you're being cheated.

To understand how you create more money than you get paid, you have to remember that money is only the embodiment of capital, which is both wealth and power over the products of our past labor as well as over what we do with our new labor. The products can be many different things, practically anything. The only thing that unites them into a single social system of exchange is that they take some amount of labor to make.

This is right in front of us when we exchange money, the *measure* of value, for a product. But because that money itself is a thing that we exchange, a product with a price (its purchasing power), it's difficult for us to see. I could be half asleep and still make a legitimate transaction with the guy at the gas station. Both of us could have screwdrivers shoved in our brains and still make a legitimate exchange.

Money works no matter what the conditions of exchange are, whether we are aware of what we are doing or not, since money is all about the average, abstract, social structure. We have to look at money as not only a thing, but a *relationship*.

Wealth and Power

Time is money, and money is power. We all know these things very well. But it is an impersonal power over people and their products which takes on the form of an exchangeable thing. Anyone can own it, and so anyone can command others, but the basic relationship of command remains the same. Our needs are only means for this power to reinforce itself over us.

Prices determine how products are distributed in the details—whoever has enough money for a product's price can buy it, if they want to. But this distribution has to be a distribution of *something*, and the products of society's labor taken altogether are only partially money. Most of them are a wide variety of things other than money, from apples to trash cans.

What brings them all together is that they are all things which are interchangeable with each other as *products*. What are they products of? Society's total laboring power. In a society where production is production for exchange, that total labor appears as *value*.

The total labor is fluid, it can take shape as many things. When it does, it crystallizes in individual *products* of labor. With a system of value, this appears as the value of those products, meaning the share they represent out of the total.

Not some specific person's labor, but the average amount of labor of people in society as a whole. That average amount of laboring time—*value*—is not what you're paid, but it is the average amount that the products go for on the market when compared to other amounts of labor embodied in the other products.

Of course in reality, meaning outside of this abstracted average, prices move all over the place. Competition determines the distribution of products through the prices. But what exactly are the prices determining? Money can't just can't be conjured up out of thin air, there has to be *something* that eventually corresponds to it and which it can be exchanged for. Financial speculation is still speculation on the *future*, which is why it has patterns that we can measure and predict.

There is always a certain amount of the products of past labor being exchanged on the market, and there's always a certain amount of labor—the possibility of future products—that's available for society to use.

Society turns this labor into wealth by means of those of us who work, yet we ourselves are also part of that exchange system when we sell our ability to work in exchange for wages. When we make good on that sale by working, turning an ability into an actual reality, we are participating in that total social laboring.

At the same time, the fact that our necessities for keeping up our working ability can be given a price tag does not mean the same thing as for other commodities that are sold on the market. We are free to sell our labor-power for any price, because we own our own bodies. And so we can exchange some potential power of our body on the market, since our body is recognized in society's laws as our property. Our labor-power is only fully surrendered from our laboring body and made into the property of the capitalist once we make things, do things, and move things around. In other words, when we begin labor.

But when we labor, we are not simply transferring out the exact equivalent of past labor as the labor that goes into the products that we budget our wages for. We are making *new* products of labor from our

laboring itself, and helping turn those products into money by selling them to customers. When we labor beyond some time equivalent to the amount of things our wages pay for, that is the labor we do *for the capitalist*, who hires us in order to make more money from their money.

The source of that new money is ultimately from the "something more" that we do, the work that we do for someone else. This labor beyond what we do for ourselves creates *surplus-value*. The amount of surplus-value that the capitalist gets from the whole process is directly opposed to the amount of necessary labor that we do for ourselves. We want to work only for ourselves, while the capitalist wants us to make as much new value as possible. Value is the average socially necessary labor-time, the social form of all the things that can be done with labor ability in a certain amount of time. To extract more surplus-value means to extract more potential power over society's labor.

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Take Power
A pamphlet for changing the world
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