

Libertarian Critique and the Left Wing of Capitalism

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Capital has proletarianized the world and at that same time has visibly abolished classes. If antagonisms have been integrated, if there is no class struggle, then there are no classes. And there are no trade unions in the genuine sense of the term. In effect, if the scandal of the social cleavage between possessors and the dispossessed, between leaders and led, between exploiters and exploited, has ceased to be the principal source of conflict, and if struggles take place within—and without questioning—the system, there are no classes in struggle, but masses adrift. The trade unions, the corpse of a dissolved class, pursue a different goal: to preserve the fiction of a labor market. The worker is the basis of capital, not its negation. Capital seizes upon every activity and its principle structures all of society: it realizes labor, it transforms the world into a world of workers. This implies the end of a separate working class outside of and opposed to capital, and the generalization of wage labor. Within, there is nothing but wage earning, although not uniform, but rather fragmented, masses: each fragment occupies a rung in the social hierarchy corresponding to its buying power. Without, there is an excluded and written-off mass of people who are striving to be reintegrated. Each layer is defined by its capacity for consumption. The middle classes, the quantitative remnants of the disappearance of social antagonisms, are reinforced as they rise above the old petty bourgeoisie in the form of wage earning college graduates engaged in unproductive labor. These classes were born with the rationalization and bureaucratization of the capitalist regime, and underwent further expansion thanks to the progressive tertiarization of the economy (and of the technology that made this trend possible). They consist of a mass of executives, white collar employees and civil servants amidst a market society. When the economy functions, all of them are pragmatic, and therefore supporters of the established order, that is, of the *partiocracy*. The *partiocracy* is what we call the political regime ordinarily adopted by capitalism. This is an authoritarian government of the highest echelons of the parties (without separation of powers), the modern form of an oligarchy, which entails the formation of an autonomous bureaucracy with its own particular interests and its own clientele that has made politics its *modus vivendi*. Even more than the bourgeoisie, the middle classes view the State as the mediator between the logic of the market and civil society, or, more precisely, between private interests and their own particular interests that are presented as public interests. And it was precisely the separation between public and private that gave rise to the administrative-

political bureaucracy, an essential part of the middle classes. The partocratic State determines, in one way or another, their private existence. In favorable conditions, which allow for a consumerist lifestyle, these classes are not politicized; it is the crisis of the so-called *Welfare State* that causes their politicization. Then, the parties created by the crisis speak in the name of all of society, and consider themselves to be its most authentic representatives.

We are immersed in a crisis that is not just economic but total: it is the crisis of capitalism. It is manifested both on the structural plane, in the impossibility of sufficient growth, as well as on the territorial plane, with the destructive effects of generalized industrialization. The consequences are the multiplication of inequalities, exclusion, pollution, climate change, austerity and increasing social control. During the stage of globalization (when the working class no longer exists) a highly visible divorce took place between the professional politicians and the masses who had to endure the consequences of globalization. The gap between these two sectors grew larger when the crisis reached and impoverished the middle classes, the submissive base of the partocracy. In the countries of southern Europe the civil society ideology perfectly reflects their reaction to being abandoned in that fashion. Unlike the old proletariat, which framed the question in social terms, these classes pose it exclusively in political terms. They must therefore resort to the ruling language, that of domination, preferentially employing the progressive and democratic vocabulary that best corresponds to their mental universe. This entails that they speak as if they were a universal class, the *citizenry*, whose mission consists in reforming a *low quality* democracy. The ideology that best reflects this transformation, the *civil society ideology*, is a legalist democratism that reproduces, with one cliché after another, the bourgeois liberalism of the past, and with a lot of verbal fireworks attempts to correct its course by turning it a little towards the left. It considers *democracy*, that is, the parliamentary system of parties, as a categorical imperative. Thus, formally, it is situated on the left of the system. It is the left wing of capitalism.

The crisis, viewed in its political aspect, is a crisis of the traditional party system and, needless to say, of the two-party system. The corruption of cronyism, lying, waste, and embezzlement of public funds, only becomes scandalous when unemployment, cutbacks in public services, wage cuts, and higher taxes reach a certain level. Then the old parties are not enough to guarantee the stability of the partocracy. Most of the new parties and alliances, led for the most part by professors and lawyers, are trying to replace a bad bureaucratic clique with a good one to win the support of the moderate voters of the left or of the right, a task that neo-Stalinism and leftism were never able to perform. In fact, what they are trying to do is to play the role of a new social democracy or a new center party, not to mention those who are looking for a solution in the politics of regional separatism. Their declared intentions are not serious, which is why they cannot expect any immediate, profound electoral, juridical or constitutional reforms, much less the transformation of the *regime of 1978*. First of all, the wave of candidates who have won elections on the civil society platform must work to construct new political majorities, or, as they say, assure governability, since no one wants a social rupture, even if that is the price that must be paid for splitting the national state. The demobilizations that have followed the various campaigns testify to this fact. The tactic of the left wing of capital is obvious: it is aware of the fact that the State is essential for capitalism and that in periods of economic expansion this dependence allows for *social* policies, that is, a diversion of a share of the profits towards the pockets of the most disadvantaged. A little neo-Keynesianism added to neoliberal practices to support the State. Here we see the utopia of the distribution State: a *social State*, but in the framework of a *market-based Europe*. The civil society strategy of *assault on the institutions* is based above all on

the conformist voters who are disappointed with the same old parties and to a lesser extent with the social movements led by careerists and celebrities. Although the crisis cannot be overcome, since it is “a long-term depression on a global scale” according to the experts, this fact must be dissimulated by reconstructing the State as helper and mediator, and focusing attention on the spectacle of its reconstruction.

In the final analysis, this civil society movement is not about changing society but about managing capitalism—inside or outside of the Eurozone—with the least expense and with as little repression as possible for the middle classes. It is about showing that another road of capitalist accumulation is possible and that the *bailout of persons* is just as important as the bailout of banks, that is, although it is necessary for the middle classes to make some sacrifices, there will nonetheless be neither development nor progress without them. Therefore, appeals are made to efficacy and realism, not to big changes and revolutions. Dialogue, voting and alliances are the weapons of the civil society movement, not mass demonstrations or general strikes. It wants a direct dialogue with power, a virtual dialogue with those “persons” mentioned above. The middle classes are, more than any other classes, nonviolent and computer literate: their identity is determined by fear and the internet. In their pure state, that is, when they are not contaminated by elements that are more susceptible to the appeal of racism or xenophobia, such as indebted farmers, uprooted workers or lumpenized rabble, they only want a peaceful and gradual change of the status quo from within. However, in these times of economic reconversion, of extractivism and austerity, the civil society parties must content themselves with symbolic institutional actions, since their capacity for solving social problems is very small. They rely on the world situation, that of the Market, and the latter is not favorable for them and probably will not be favorable for them in the future. In short, their photo ops must cover up their lack of results while they wait for better times, awaiting, or rather fearing, the rise of other more resolute forces in one sense (a much more formidable totalitarianism) or another (the revolution).

Capitalism is in decline, but its decline is not felt equally everywhere. In the south of Europe the crisis is interpreted as an economic threat and as a political problem. In the north, it tends to be viewed as an Islamic invasion and a terrorist threat, that is, as a problem of borders and security. There, everything depends on the skin color, the nationality and the religion of the *working poor*. The south is mostly Europeanist and opposed to austerity; the north is entirely the opposite. The mesocratic reaction is contradictory because, on the one hand, it is dominated by the illusion of reform and openness, while on the other hand, national particularism and the need for absolute control of the population are being imposed. Its proponents do not view the crisis as a multiple crisis: financial, demographic, urban, ecological and social. Libertarians must denounce this state of affairs by attempting to construct autonomous protest movements on the social terrain and that of everyday life and must defend them. Political abstention is a first step towards secession from the system. The political perspective can be overcome by way of a radical change—or rather a return to the beginnings—in the way we act and in the way we live by supporting those extra-mercantile relations that capitalism has not been able to destroy or the memory of which it has not yet erased. And also by way of a return to the concrete in the way we think: the critique of the postmodern bourgeois worldview is more urgent than ever before, because an escape from capitalism is not conceivable with a consciousness that is colonized by the values of its domination. The necessary de-acculturation (disalienation) that destroys all the *make-believe identities* (as Bauman calls them) with which the system rewards us, must seriously challenge parliamentarism, the State, the idea of progress, developmentalism, the spectacle ... but not in

order to offer new improved versions of those same things. And we must not attempt to elaborate a single theory with answers and formulas for everything, a kind of modern *Kathedersozialismus* [academic, reformist, bourgeois socialism], or contrive an entelechy (*a strong people, proletarian class, nation*) that would justify an arch-militant, vanguard organizational model, nor should we literally return to the past, but, we insist, it is a matter of leaving the mental and material universe of capitalism by taking our inspiration from historical examples of non-capitalist ways of living together. A big part of the revolutionary task is restoration.

It is true that anti-capitalist struggles are still weak and often recuperated, but if they can survive and then spread beyond the local scale they may extend far enough to overthrow the institutional way along with the servile way of life that upholds it. At this point, the crisis is still only half a crisis. The system has come up against its internal limits (economic stagnation, restriction of credit, insufficient accumulation, falling rate of profit), but has not yet reached the last straw with regard to its external limits (energy, environment, culture, social issues). A much more profound crisis is needed that would accelerate the dynamic of disintegration, that would make the system unviable and stimulate the rise of new forces capable of restoring the social fabric with fraternal methods, in accordance with non-mercantile rules (as in Greece), while also articulating an effective defense (as in Rojava). However, the crisis in itself leads to ruin, not to liberation, unless the excluded attain a new dignity and unless such oppositional forces that do arise concentrate a sufficient power outside of the institutions. The current strategy (the use of exclusion and social struggles for the attainment of a higher goal) must lead—both with regard to the everyday construction of alternatives as well as the day-to-day defensive struggle—in the direction of the formation of a rooted, autonomous, conscious and combative community.

Libertarians do not want to survive in an inhuman capitalism with a democratic face and even less under a dictatorship that rules in the name of freedom. They do not pursue goals different from those of the masses in revolt, and therefore must not organize on their own account within or outside of the struggles. They do not recognize any kind of social contract as the basic principle of society, nor do they recognize the struggle of each against all; nor is their struggle based on tradition, progress, religion, the nation or nature. Libertarian communism is a social system characterized by communal property and structured by solidarity or mutual aid as its essential correlate. In this social system, labor—collective or individual—never loses its natural form to adopt an abstract and fantastic form. Technologies are accepted provided that they do not alter the egalitarian and solidarity-based functioning of society. Stability is prioritized over growth, and territorial equilibrium over production. Relations between individuals are always direct, not mediated by the commodity, which is why all the institutions that are derived from these relations are equally direct, both with regard to their forms as well as their content. Its institutions are based in society and are not separated from it. Now is the time for a new historical society that is free of alienating mediations and constraints, without institutions that plan from above, without the labor-commodity, without a market and without wage workers. The proletariat only exists in capitalism due to the division between manual labor and intellectual labor. Similarly, the conurbations are the products of the absurd separation between the countryside and the city. A self-managed society has no need for employees and civil servants because the public is not separated from the private. It must turn its back on complexity and simplify. A free society is a fraternal, horizontal and balanced, de-industrialized, de-urbanized and anti-patriarchal society without a state. In it, the territory recovers its lost importance, for, unlike the current society, it will be a society with roots.

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