

The Anarchist Library
Anti-Copyright



The fourth world war has begun

Subcomandante Marcos

Subcomandante Marcos
The fourth world war has begun
September 1997

Retrieved on 31st December 2020 from mondediplo.com
Translated by Ed Emery

theanarchistlibrary.org

September 1997

the enemy. In many battles, it is force that makes it possible to win a victory, but the struggle as a whole can only be won by reason. The strong man will never be able to draw reason from his strength, whereas we can always draw strength from our reason.”

And down below, in smaller letters, he had written “Happy Festivities!”

Obviously, I was no longer hungry and, as usual, the Zapatista festivities were indeed happy.

Subcomandante Marcos

I asked old Antonio to go with me on an exploration up the river. We took only a bit of stew to eat. For hours we followed the winding riverbed, and in the end hunger and the heat began to get to us. We spent the afternoon following a herd of boars. It was almost night when we eventually caught up with them. Suddenly, a huge wild boar detached itself from the group and attacked us. Summoning up all my military know-how, I threw away my gun and climbed the nearest tree. Old Antonio was unarmed, but instead of running away he placed himself behind a thicket of canes. The giant boar ran straight at him, with its full force, and found itself caught up in the undergrowth. Before it could disentangle itself, old Antonio lifted his big old stick, and with one blow provided our evening meal.

The next morning, when I had finished cleaning my modern automatic rifle (a 5.56mm M-16 with a range of 460 metres, a telescopic sight and a drum magazine holding 90 bullets), I settled down to write my field diary. Omitting most of what had happened, I noted only: "Met wild boar. A. killed one. Height 350 metres. Did not rain."

While we were waiting for the meat to grill, I told old Antonio that my portion would serve for the festivities that were being prepared back at base. "Festivities?" he asked, poking the fire. "Yes," I said. "Whatever the month, there's always something to celebrate." And I embarked on what I thought was a brilliant dissertation on the Zapatistas' historical calendar and celebrations. Old Antonio listened to me in silence. Then, imagining that he was not finding it interesting, I settled down to sleep.

While I was still half awake, I saw old Antonio take my notebook and write something in it. The next day, after breakfast, we shared out the meat and each went our separate ways. When I reached camp, I reported back and showed the notes I had made in my notebook. "That's not your writing," someone said, pointing to the page in question. There, beneath what I had written, old Antonio had written, in large letters: "If you cannot have both reason and strength, always choose reason, and leave strength to

Contents

Piece no. 1: The concentration of wealth and the distribution of poverty	10
Piece no. 2: The globalisation of exploitation	11
Piece no. 3: Migration, a nightmare of wandering	14
Piece no. 4: Financial globalisation and the generalisation of crime	15
Piece no. 5: Legitimate violence of illegitimate powers	16
Piece no. 6: Megapolitics and its dwarfs	17

It is not only in the mountains of south-east Mexico that neoliberalism is being resisted. In other regions of Mexico, in Latin America, in the United States and Canada, in the Europe of the Maastricht Treaty, in Africa, in Asia and in Oceania, pockets of resistance are multiplying. Each has its own history, its specificities, its similarities, its demands, its struggles and its successes. If humanity hopes to survive, and to improve itself, its only hope lies in these pockets which are created by the excluded, the marginalised and those who are considered “disposable”.

So what we have here is a drawing of a pocket of resistance. But don't attach too much importance to it. The possible shapes are as numerous as the forms of resistance themselves, as numerous as all the worlds existing in this world. So draw whatever shape you like. In this matter of pockets, as in that of resistance, diversity is a wealth.

Having now drawn, coloured and cut out these seven pieces, you will notice that it is impossible to fit them together. This is the problem. Globalisation has been seeking to put together pieces which don't fit. For this reason, and for others which I cannot develop in this article, it is necessary to build a new world. A world in which there is room for many worlds. A world capable of containing all the worlds.

* * * * *

A post-script which speaks of dreams couched in love. The sea rests at my side. For a long time it has shared my anxieties, my uncertainties and many of my dreams, but now it sleeps with me in the hot night of the forest. I watch its rippling movements in its sleep and I am struck with wonder again at finding it unchanged: warm, fresh, and at my side. The stifling heat of the night draws me from my bed and guides my hand and my pen to summon up old Antonio, today, as he was many years ago...

come workers in these industrial and transportation sectors. In the same way, in the south-east of Mexico, in the Lacandona Forest, a long-term regional development programme is being set up with the object of making available to capital indigenous lands that are rich not only in dignity and history, but also in oil and uranium.

These projects would end up by fragmenting Mexico, separating the south-east from the rest of the country. They are also framed within a strategy of counter-insurgency, like a pincer movement attempting to encircle the rebellion against neoliberalism that was born in 1994. At the centre are to be found the indigenous rebels of the Zapatista National Liberation Army.

While we are on the subject of rebellious indigenous peoples, a parenthesis would be in order: the Zapatistas believe that in Mexico recovery and defence of national sovereignty are part of the anti-liberal revolution. Paradoxically, the ZNLA finds itself accused of attempting to fragment the Mexican nation.

The reality is that the only forces that have spoken for separatism are the businessmen of the oil-rich state of Tabasco, and the Institutional Revolutionary Party members of parliament from Chiapas. The Zapatistas, for their part, think that it is necessary to defend the nation state in the face of globalisation, and that the attempts to break Mexico into fragments are being made by the government, and not by the just demands of the Indian peoples for autonomy. The ZNLA and the majority of the national indigenous movement want the Indian peoples not to separate from Mexico but to be recognised as an integral part of the country, with their own specificities. They also aspire to a Mexico which espouses democracy, freedom and justice. Whereas the ZNLA fights to defend national sovereignty, the Mexican Federal Army functions to protect a government which has destroyed the material bases of sovereignty and which has offered the country not only to large-scale foreign capital, but also to drug trafficking.

“War is a matter of vital importance for the state; it is the province of life and death, the road which leads to survival or elimination. It is essential to study it in depth”. Sun Tzu, “The Art of War”

As a world system, neoliberalism is a new war for the conquest of territory. The ending of the third world war — meaning the cold war — in no sense means that the world has gone beyond the bipolar and found stability under the domination of a single victor. Because, while there was certainly a defeat (of the socialist camp), it is hard to say who won. The United States? The European Union? Japan? All three?

The defeat of the “evil empire” has opened up new markets, and the struggle over them is leading to a new world war — the fourth.

Like all major conflicts, this war is forcing national states to redefine their identity. The world order seems to have reverted to the earlier epochs of the conquests of America, Africa and Oceania — a strange modernity, this, which progresses by going backwards. The twilight years of the 20th century bear more of a resemblance to the previous centuries of barbarism than to the rational futures described in science fiction novels.

Vast territories, wealth and, above all, a huge and available workforce lie waiting for the world’s new master but, while there is only one position as master on offer, there are many aspiring candidates. And that explains the new war between those who see themselves as part of the “empire of good”.

Unlike the third world war, in which the conflict between capitalism and socialism took place over a variety of terrains and with varying degrees of intensity, the fourth world war is being conducted between major financial centres in theatres of war that are global in scale and with a level of intensity that is fierce and constant.

The ineptly-named cold war actually reached very high temperatures: from underground workings of international espi-

onage to the interstellar space of Ronald Reagan's famous "Star Wars"; from the sands of the Bay of Pigs in Cuba to the Mekong Delta in Vietnam; from the frenzy of the nuclear arms race to the vicious coups d'état in Latin America; from the menacing manoeuvres of NATO armies to the machinations of the CIA agents in Bolivia, where Che Guevara was murdered. The combination of all this led to the socialist camp being undermined as a world system, and to its dissolution as a social alternative.

The third world war showed the benefits of "total war" for its victor, which was capitalism. In the post-cold war period we see the emergence of a new planetary scenario in which the principal conflictual elements are the growing importance of no-man's-lands (arising out of the collapse of the Eastern bloc countries), the expansion of a number of major powers (the United States, the European Union and Japan), a world economic crisis and a new technical revolution based on information technology.

Thanks to computers and the technological revolution, the financial markets, operating from their offices and answerable to nobody but themselves, have been imposing their laws and world-view on the planet as a whole. Globalisation is merely the totalitarian extension of the logic of the finance markets to all aspects of life. Where they were once in command of their economies, the nation states (and their governments) are commanded — or rather telecommanded — by the same basic logic of financial power, commercial free trade. And in addition, this logic has profited from a new permeability created by the development of telecommunications to appropriate all aspects of social activity. At last, a world war which is totally total!

One of its first victims has been the national market. Rather like a bullet fired inside a concrete room, the war unleashed by neoliberalism ricochets and ends by wounding the person who fired it. One of the fundamental bases of the power of the modern capitalist state, the national market, is wiped out by the heavy artillery of the global finance economy. The new inter-

Here, then, you have the figure which represents mega-politics. Impossible to find the slightest rationality in it.

Piece no. 7: Pockets of resistance

Figure 7 is constructed by drawing a pocket.

"To begin with, I ask you not to confuse resistance with political opposition. Opposition does not oppose itself to power but to a government, and its fully-formed shape is that of an opposition party; resistance, on the other hand, cannot be a party, by definition: it is not made in order to govern but... to resist." (Tomás Segovia, "Alegatorio", Mexico, 1996)

The apparent infallibility of globalisation comes up hard against the stubborn disobedience of reality. While neoliberalism is pursuing its war, groups of protesters, kernels of rebels, are forming throughout the planet. The empire of financiers with full pockets confronts the rebellion of pockets of resistance. Yes, pockets. Of all sizes, of different colours, of varying shapes. Their sole common point is a desire to resist the "new world order" and the crime against humanity that is represented by this fourth world war.

Neoliberalism attempts to subjugate millions of beings, and seeks to rid itself of all those who have no place in its new ordering of the world. But these "disposable" people are in revolt. Women, children, old people, young people, indigenous peoples, ecological militants, homosexuals, lesbians, HIV activists, workers, and all those who upset the ordered progress of the new world system and who organise and are in struggle. Resistance is being woven by those who are excluded from "modernity".

In Mexico, for example, the so-called "Programme for Integral Development of the Tehuantepec Isthmus" is conceived as constructing a large industrial zone. This zone would consist of industrial factories, a refinery to process one third of Mexico's crude oil, and plant to make petrochemical products. Transit routes between the two oceans would be built: roads, a canal, and a trans-isthmus railway. Two million peasants would be-

oliberal model. The elimination of trade frontiers, the explosion of telecommunications, information superhighways, the omnipresence of financial markets, international free trade agreements — all this contributes to destroying nation states and internal markets. Paradoxically, globalisation produces a fragmented world of isolated pieces, a world full of watertight compartments which may at best be linked by fragile economic gangways. A world of broken mirrors which reflect the useless world unity of the neoliberal puzzle.

But neoliberalism does not merely fragment the world which it claims to be unifying; it also produces the political and economic centre which directs this war. It is urgent that we embark on a discussion of this mega-politics. Mega-politics globalises national politics — in other words it ties them to a centre which has world interests and which operates on the logic of the market. It is in the name of the market that wars, credits, buying and selling of commodities, diplomatic recognition, trade blocs, political support, laws on immigration, breakdowns of relationships between countries and investment — in short, the survival of entire nations — are decided.

The world-wide power of the financial markets is such that they are not concerned about the political complexion of the leaders of individual countries: what counts in their eyes is a country's respect for the economic programme. Financial disciplines are imposed on all alike. These masters of the world can even tolerate the existence of left-wing governments, on condition that they adopt no measure likely to harm the interests of the market. However, they will never accept policies that tend to break with the dominant model.

In the eyes of mega-politics, national politics are conducted by dwarfs who are expected to comply with the dictates of the financial giant. And this is the way it will always be — until the dwarfs revolt.

national capitalism renders national capitalism obsolete and effectively starves their public powers into extinction. The blow has been so brutal that sovereign states have lost the strength to defend their citizens' interests.

The fine showcase inherited from the ending of the cold war — the new world order — has shattered into fragments as a result of the neoliberal explosion. It takes no more than a few minutes for companies and states to be sunk — but they are sunk not by winds of proletarian revolution, but by the violence of the hurricanes of world finance.

The son (neoliberalism) is devouring the father (national capital) and, in the process, is destroying the lies of capitalist ideology: in the new world order there is neither democracy nor freedom, neither equality nor fraternity. The planetary stage is transformed into a new battlefield, in which chaos reigns.

Towards the end of the cold war, capitalism created a new military horror: the neutron bomb, a weapon which destroys life while sparing buildings. But a new wonder has been discovered as the fourth world war unfolds: the finance bomb. Unlike the bombs at Hiroshima and Nagasaki, this new bomb does not simply destroy the *polis* (in this case, the nation) and bring death, terror and misery to those who live there; it also transforms its target into a piece in the jigsaw puzzle of the process of economic globalisation. The result of the explosion is not a pile of smoking ruins, or thousands of dead bodies, but a neighbourhood added to one of the commercial megalopolis of the new planetary hypermarket, and a labour force which is reshaped to fit in with the new planetary job market.

The European Union is a result of this fourth world war. In Europe globalisation has succeeded in eliminating the frontiers between rival states that had been enemies for centuries, and has forced them to converge towards political union. On the way from the nation state to the European Federation the road will be paved with destruction and ruin, and one of these ruins will be that of European civilisation.

Megalopolises are reproducing themselves right across the planet. Their favourite spawning ground is in the world's free trade areas. In North America, the North American Free Trade Agreement between Canada, the United States and Mexico is a prelude to the accomplishment of an old dream of US conquest: "America for the Americans".

Are megalopolises replacing nations? No, or rather not merely that. They are assigning them new functions, new limits and new perspectives. Entire countries are becoming departments of the neoliberal mega-enterprise. Neoliberalism thus produces, on the one hand, destruction and depopulation, and, on the other, the reconstruction and reorganisation of regions and nations.

Unlike nuclear bombs, which had a dissuasive, intimidating and coercive character in the third world war, the financial hyperbombs of the fourth world war are different in nature. They serve to attack territories (national states) by the destruction of the material bases of their sovereignty and by producing a qualitative depopulation of those territories. This depopulation involves the exclusion of all persons who are of no use to the new economy (indigenous peoples, for instance). But at the same time the financial centres are working on a *reconstruction* of nation states and are *reorganising* them within a new logic: the economic has the upper hand over the social.

The indigenous world is full of examples illustrating this strategy: Ian Chambers, director of the Central America section of the International Labour Organisation, has stated that the worldwide populations of indigenous peoples (300 million people) lives in zones which house 60 % of the planet's natural resources. It is therefore "not surprising that there are multiple conflicts over the use and future of their lands in relation to the interests of business and governments (...). The exploitation of natural resources (oil and minerals) and tourism are the princi-

This is one of the (least studied and most condemned) aspects of the challenges launched by the indigenous peoples in arms and in rebellion of the Zapatista National Liberation Army against neoliberalism and for humanity.

The symbol of American military power is the pentagon. The new world police wants national armies and police to be simple security bodies guaranteeing order and progress within the megalopolises of neoliberalism.

Piece no. 6: Megapolitics and its dwarfs

Figure 6 is constructed by scribbling a doodle.

We said earlier that nation states are attacked by the finance markets and forced to dissolve themselves within megalopolises. But neoliberalism does not conduct its war solely by "unifying" nations and regions. Its strategy of destruction/depopulation and reconstruction/reorganisation also produces a fracture or fractures within the nation state. This is the paradox of this fourth world war: while ostensibly working to eliminate frontiers and "unite" nations, it actually leads to a multiplication of frontiers and the smashing apart of nations.

If anyone still doubts that this globalisation is a world war, let them look at the conflicts that arose out of the collapse of the USSR, of Czechoslovakia and of Yugoslavia, and the deep crises which have shattered not only the political and economic foundations of nation states, but also their social cohesion.

Both the construction of megalopolises and the fragmentation of states are founded on the destruction of the nation state. Are these two independent and parallel events? Are they symptoms of a mega-crisis about to occur? Or are they simply separate and isolated facts?

We think that they represent a contradiction inherent in the process of globalisation, and one of the core realities of the ne-

ation. They are places for contact between governments, businessmen and Mafia bosses.

So here we have the rectangular mirror within which legality and illegality exchange reflections. On which side of the mirror is the criminal? And on which side is the person who pursues him?

Piece no. 5: Legitimate violence of illegitimate powers

Figure 5 is constructed by drawing a pentagon.

In the cabaret of globalisation, the state performs a striptease, at the end of which it is left wearing the minimum necessary: its powers of repression. With its material base destroyed, its sovereignty and independence abolished, and its political class eradicated, the nation state increasingly becomes a mere security apparatus in the service of the mega-enterprises which neoliberalism is constructing. Instead of orienting public investment towards social spending, it prefers to improve the equipment which enables it to control society more effectively.

What is to be done when the violence derives from the laws of the market? Where is legitimate violence then? And where the illegitimate? What monopoly of violence can the hapless nation states demand when the free interplay of supply and demand defies any such monopoly? Have we not shown, in Piece 4, that organised crime, government and finance centres are intimately interlinked? Is it not obvious that organised crime has veritable armies on which it can count? The monopoly of violence no longer belongs to nation states: the market has put it up for auction.

However, when the monopoly of violence is contested not on the basis of the laws of the market, but in the interests of “those from below”, then world power sees it as “aggression”.

pal industries threatening indigenous territories in America.”¹ And then come pollution, prostitution and drugs.

In this new war, politics, as the organiser of the nation state, no longer exists. Now politics serves solely in order to manage the economy, and politicians are now merely company managers.

The world’s new masters have no need to govern directly. National governments take on the role of running things on their behalf. This is what the new order means – unification of the world into one single market. States are simply enterprises with managers in the guise of governments, and the new regional alliances bear more of a resemblance to shopping malls than political federations. The unification produced by neoliberalism is economic: in the giant planetary hypermarket it is only commodities that circulate freely, not people.

This economic globalisation is also accompanied by a general way of thinking. The “American way of life” which followed American troops into Europe during the second world war, then to Vietnam in the 1960s, and more recently into the Gulf war, is now extending itself to the planet as a whole, via computers. What we have here is a destruction of the material bases of nation states, but we also have a destruction of history and culture.

All the cultures which nations have forged – the noble past of the indigenous peoples of the Americas, the brilliance of European civilisation, the cultured history of the Asian nations and the ancestral wealth of Africa and Oceania – all these are under attack from the American way of life. Neoliberalism thus imposes the destruction of nations and of groups of nations in order to fuse them into one single model. The war which neoliberalism is conducting against humanity is thus a planetary war, and is the worst and most cruel ever seen.

¹ Interview with Martha García, *La Jornada*, 28 May 1997.

What we have here is a puzzle. When we attempt to put its pieces together in order to arrive at an understanding of today's world, we find that a lot of the pieces are missing. Still, we can make a start with seven of them, in the hope that this conflict will not end with the destruction of humanity. Seven pieces to draw, colour in, cut out and put together with others, in order to try to solve this global puzzle.

The first of these pieces is the two-fold accumulation of wealth and of poverty at the two poles of planetary society. The second is the total exploitation of the totality of the world. The third is the nightmare of that part of humanity condemned to a life of wandering. The fourth is the sickening relationship between crime and state power. The fifth is state violence. The sixth is the mystery of megapolitics. The seventh is the multiple forms of resistance which humanity is deploying against neoliberalism.

Piece no. 1: The concentration of wealth and the distribution of poverty

Figure 1 is constructed by drawing a sign for money.

In the history of humanity, a variety of models have fought it out over the erection of absurdities as the distinguishing features of world order. Neoliberalism will have pride of place when it comes to the prize-giving, because in its "distribution" of wealth all it achieves is a two-fold absurdity of accumulation: an accumulation of wealth for the few, and an accumulation of poverty for millions of others. Injustice and inequality are the distinguishing traits of today's world. The earth has five billion human inhabitants: of these, only 500 million live comfortably; the remaining 4.5 billion endure lives of poverty. The rich make up for their numerical minority by their ownership of billions of dollars. The total wealth owned by the 358 richest people in the world, the dollar billionaires, is greater than the annual

Piece no. 4: Financial globalisation and the generalisation of crime

Figure 4 is constructed by drawing a rectangle.

If you think that the world of crime has to be shady and underhand, you are wrong. In the period of the so-called cold war, organised crime acquired a more respectable image. Not only did it begin to function in the same way as any other modern enterprise, but it also penetrated deeply into the political and economic systems of nation states.

With the beginning of the fourth world war, organised crime has globalised its activities. The criminal organisations of five continents have taken on board the "spirit of world cooperation" and have joined together in order to participate in the conquest of new markets. They are investing in legal businesses, not only in order to launder dirty money, but in order to acquire capital for illegal operations. Their preferred activities are luxury property investment, the leisure industry, the media — and banking.

Ali Baba and the Forty Bankers? Worse than that. Commercial banks are using the dirty money of organised crime for their legal activities. According to a UN report, the involvement of crime syndicates has been facilitated by the programmes of structural adjustment which debtor countries have been forced to accept in order to gain access to International Monetary Fund loans³.

Organised crime also relies on the existence of tax havens: there are some 55 of these. One of them, the Cayman Islands, ranks fifth in the world as a banking centre, and has more banks and registered companies than inhabitants. As well as laundering money, these tax paradises make it possible to escape tax-

³ Ochoa Chi and Juanita del Pilar, "Mercado mundial de fuerza de trabajo en el capitalismo contemporáneo", UNAM, Economía, Mexico City,

Piece no. 3: Migration, a nightmare of wandering

Figure 3 is constructed by drawing a circle.

We have already spoken of the existence, at the end of the third world war, of new territories waiting to be conquered (the former socialist countries) and others to be re-conquered for the “new world order”. This situation involves the financial centres in a threefold strategy: there is a proliferation of “regional wars” and “internal conflicts”; capital follows paths of atypical accumulation; and large masses of workers are mobilised. Result: a huge rolling wheel of millions of migrants moving across the planet. As “foreigners” in that “world without frontiers” which had been promised by the victors of the cold war, they are forced to endure racist persecution, precarious employment, the loss of their cultural identity, police repression, hunger, imprisonment and murder.

The nightmare of emigration, whatever its cause, continues to grow. The number of those coming within the ambit of the United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) has grown disproportionately from 2 million in 1975 to more than 27 million in 1995.

The objective of neoliberalism’s migration policy is more to destabilise the world labour market than to put a brake on immigration. The fourth world war — with its mechanisms of destruction/depopulation and reconstruction/reorganisation — involves the displacement of millions of people. Their destiny is to wander the world, carrying the burden of their nightmare with them, so as to constitute a threat to workers who have a job, a scapegoat designed to make people forget their bosses, and to provide a basis for the racism that neoliberalism provokes.

income of almost half the world’s poorest inhabitants, in other words about 2.6 billion people.

The progress of the major transnational companies does not necessarily involve the advance of the countries of the developed world. On the contrary, the richer these giant companies become, the more poverty there is in the so-called “wealthy” countries. The gap between rich and poor is enormous: far from decreasing, social inequalities are growing.

This monetary sign that you have drawn represents the symbol of world economic power. Now colour it dollar-green. Ignore the sickening stench; this smell of dung, mire and blood are the smells of its birthing...

Piece no. 2: The globalisation of exploitation

Figure 2 is constructed by drawing a triangle.

One of the lies of neoliberalism is that the economic growth of companies produces employment and a better distribution of wealth. This is untrue. In the same way that the increasing power of a king does not lead to an increase in the power of his subjects (far from it), the absolutism of finance capital does not improve the distribution of wealth, and does not create jobs. In fact its structural consequences are poverty, unemployment and precariousness.

In the 1960s and 1970s, the number of poor people in the world (defined by the World Bank as having an income of less than one dollar per day) rose to some 200 million. By the start of the 1990s, their numbers stood at two billion.

Hence, increasing numbers of people who are poor or have been made poor. Fewer and fewer people who are rich or have become rich. These are the lessons of Piece 1 of our puzzle. In order to obtain this absurd result, the world capitalist system is “modernising” the production, circulation and consumption

of commodities. The new technological revolution (information technology) and the new revolution in politics (the megapolises emerging from the ruins of the nation state) produce a new social “revolution”. This social revolution consists of a re-arrangement, a reorganisation of social forces and, principally, of the workforce.

The world’s economically active population (EAP) went from 1.38 billion in 1960 to 2.37 billion in 1990. A large increase in the number of human beings capable of working and generating wealth. But the new world order arranges this workforce within specific geographical and productive areas, and reassigns their functions (or non-functions, in the case of unemployed and precarious workers) within the plan of world globalisation. The world’s economically active population by sector (EAPS) has undergone radical changes during the past 20 years. Agriculture and fishing fell from 22 % in 1970 to 12 % in 1990; manufacture from 25 % to 22 %; but the tertiary sector (commercial, transport, banking and services) has risen from 42 % to 56 %. In developing countries, the tertiary sector has grown from 40 % in 1970 to 57 % in 1990, while agriculture and fishing have fallen from 30 % to 15 %². This means that increasing numbers of workers are channelled into the kind of activities necessary for increasing productivity or speeding up the creation of commodities. The neoliberal system thus functions as a kind of mega-boss for whom the world market is viewed as a single, unified enterprise, to be managed by “modernising” criteria.

But neoliberalism’s “modernity” seems closer to the bestial birth of capitalism as a world system than to utopian “rationality”, because this “modern” capitalist production continues to rely on child labour. Out of 1.15 billion children in the world, at least 100 million live on the streets and 200 million work —

² Ochoa Chi and Juanita del Pilar, “Mercado mundial de fuerza de trabajo en el capitalismo contemporáneo”, UNAM, Economía, Mexico City,

and according to forecasts this figure will rise to 400 million by the year 2000. In Asia alone, 146 million children work in manufacturing. And in the North too, hundreds of thousands of children have to work in order to supplement family incomes, or merely to survive. There are also many children employed in the “pleasure industries”: according to the United Nations, every year a million children are driven into the sex trade.

The unemployment and precarious labour of millions of workers throughout the world is a reality which does not look set to disappear. In the countries of the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), unemployment went from 3.8 % in 1966 to 6.3 % in 1990; in Europe it went from 2.2 % to 6.4 %. The globalised market is destroying small and medium-sized companies. With the disappearance of local and regional markets, small and medium producers have no protection and are unable to compete with the giant transnationals. Millions of workers thus find themselves unemployed. One of the absurdities of neoliberalism is that far from creating jobs, the growth of production actually destroys them. The UN speaks of “growth without jobs”.

But the nightmare does not end there. Workers are also being forced to accept precarious conditions. Less job security, longer working hours and lower wages: these are the consequences of globalisation in general and the explosion in the service sector in particular.

All this combines to create a specific surplus: an excess of human beings who are useless in terms of the new world order because they do not produce, do not consume, and do not borrow from banks. In short, human beings who are disposable. Each day the big finance centres impose their laws on countries and groups of countries all around the world. They re-arrange and re-order the inhabitants of those countries. And at the end of the operation they find there is still an “excess” of people.

What you have now is a figure resembling a triangle: this depicts the pyramid of worldwide exploitation.