

# *Common Sense*

**Peter Kennedy**

Reflections on Social Movements & the  
Politics of Need: Locating the Dialectic  
Between Identity and Difference

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**Athena Athanasiou**

Colonial Anthropology: An Enlightenment  
Legacy? The Lockean Discourse on Nature,  
Social Order and Difference

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**Steve Turner**

Guy Debord and the Metaphysics of  
Marxism: an obituary of Guy Debord

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*plus* **Dialogues, Interviews  
& Review Article**

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# Reflections on Social Movements & the Politics of Need: Locating the Dialectic Between Identity & Difference

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Peter Kennedy

## 1. Introduction

During the past two decades the face of anti-capitalist political protest has been transformed. While traditional forms of working class collectivism - trade unions, political parties of the left - were apparently failing to transform capitalism into a classless society, other social movements have taken up the struggle to provide new visions of possible futures. Black and ethnic minorities; women's movements and Environmentalist movements of variable political shades, have increasingly distanced themselves from what is often seen as a forced identity with 'class struggle'. Instead they celebrate their unique *differences* as a way of expressing their *identities*. This is to be welcomed. People are uniquely different in terms of the ethical perceptions they have, moral codes of conduct they choose to live by and cultural values they express. Indeed there are differences *within* the movements mentioned above on how to create a more democratic and environmentally safe society. For example, sections within the black movement struggle for civil rights and integration into the wider community of capitalism; other sections struggle for segregation, despairing of 'ingrained white prejudice'. What springs to mind here, with respect to the latter, is the perceived failure, amongst the dispossessed blacks of North America, of civil rights politics and the growing desire they feel - witnessed by the recent 'million man march' through Washington DC - that segregation is the ultimate solution. There are also differences *within* the women's movement, between Marxist Feminists; Feminist Marxists; and Radical Feminists, as to the causes of women's oppression and the 'correct' solution. The differences *within* the Environmental movement are even more variegated; from mainstream Parliamentary Greens, to deep ecologists, green anarchists, eco-feminists, to green socialists (in no apparent order of 'left-right').

Clearly there are profound differences within each movement; differences which often foster *identities* of interest *between* sections from each movement (as in the example of eco-feminism). For example,

each particular movement has groups who reject the State, parliamentary democracy and class politics; on the basis of which a common interest in local, spontaneous self organisation, with groups from other movements can transpire.<sup>1</sup> Again, whilst making clear a condemnation of the overtly reformist groups within these movements, one can welcome them as a *potentially* progressive and liberating force based on an anti-capitalist united front. Anti-capitalists unreservedly support direct environmental action, at Pollock Park and Newbury, for example, to defend the country side and traditional community life from the State's irrational desire to 'girdle the globe with roads'.<sup>2</sup> Just as one must join and defend blacks, ethnic minorities and women in their struggle and on largely their terms of reference too. The message must surely be learnt by now that capitalism may fetishise individuals as homogeneous abstract identities, but anti-capitalist forces should not! Yet the social movements, quite correctly argue that much of what has passed for 20th century Marxism and 'communism', has done just this. This experience (of which more explanation below), in conjunction with the belief that traditional class based politics are now history, has served to deflect the class resolve of even those who still adhere to some aspects of Marxist analysis within the social movements. Thus, despite all the differences, it can justifiably be said there is of late a broad identity of agreement, that any overlapping alliances, can only be temporary in time and space and populist in character. In other words, gone are the days of 'united front, class based, politics', because the claim of a more substantial class unity *over and above* the concrete struggles of the movement, are seen as nothing more than a chimera. This paper will argue that there is an urgent need for a political movement that can combine a dialectic of difference in unity, based on the politics of social need. In what follows, the paper will explain why social movements have distanced themselves from much of what has passed for 20th century Marxism. After which I discuss the negative implications of the current attraction to the discourse of modernity-post modernity, for the successful execution of an anti-capitalist project. Finally, a re-interpretation of crucial aspects of Marxism, provides the basis for an analysis of the strengths and weaknesses of capitalism and an emergent politics of social need.

## 2

Twentieth century Marxism has been corrupted by two forces. Firstly, the practice of social evolutionism and the methodology of positivism which began to infect Marxism during the latter half of the 19th century; mainly in response to social changes in the composition of labour and capital. Production had become more socialised and capitalist forces, as one consequence, became that much more willing to consider social reform, to circumvent the influence of new unionism and syndicalism amongst key sections of the working class, in order to control a faltering capitalist society and eradicate the threat from labour. Marxists of the Second International were, fatally, to view this trend as evidence of capitalism's peaceful transition to socialism. Secondly, and much more



profound in its negative affects on working class politics, was Stalinism.<sup>3</sup> Once the project of communism had imploded in the Soviet Union, a form of Stalinist Marxism emerged in the Soviet Union, eventually integrating itself within the heartlands of Western Marxism. The combined effect of these two events (evolutionary socialism and Stalinism), debilitated the working class movement politically, impaired the Marxist analysis of class struggle and confine a more theoretical account of 'the law of value' to the metaphysical status of a concept - as I will explain below.

The twin notions of, on the one hand, the inevitability of 'socialism' and, on the other hand, the doctrine of 'socialism in one country', confined the parameters of a Marxist understanding of social transformations occurring in the class structure during the 20th century.<sup>4</sup> For example, once Stalinism, as the praxis of 'socialism in one country', had consolidated itself in the East, its influence deepened amongst the western left. Thus the Communist Party of Great Britain (CPGB) and the Labour Party, although (outwardly) hostile to each other, saw eye to eye on their peculiar notion of what 'socialism in Britain' should look like: one of class collaboration, adherence to State control of industry and 'the National interest'. Arthur Horner and Abe Moffat in their joint roles as leading members of the CPGB and the National Union of Mineworkers, personified this brand of Marxism at its peak in the 1940s and 50s. Horner sang praises to Stalinist Marxism's class collaborationist content and economistic nature, when speaking about the Nationalised industry to which he was linked; 'Basing ourselves on the class consciousness of the mining community and its responsibility for the existence of a labour Government, we are calling for the co-operation of men and management in this common endeavour. In other words, the manpower of the industry, which must of necessity include managers and supervisors, as well as workmen..must now realise that they can no longer afford to regard each other as enemies, but rather as servants of the State called upon to undertake vital services on its behalf'.<sup>5</sup> For Stalinist Marxism, state planning, conveniently, became conflated with 'communism', which was then abstractly opposed to 'the market' and so 'capitalism'. So long as the market and the 'plan' remained separate theoretically, and practically reified as a technical and strictly 'economic' mode of discourse, then the type of class collaboration, expressed by Horner above, could become the accepted norm for 'socialism'.

Of course many Western Marxists fiercely resisted the world view of Stalinist Marxism, as witnessed by the variety of responses from the Frankfurt School to the splintering of Trotskyist groupings around the failed Fourth International. It must be said, however, that, in their efforts to resist Stalinist influence, they too became caught in its extensive theoretical web of flawed and reified 'Marxism' (albeit in crucially different ways). For example, despite the Frankfurt School's tremendous insights into the alienated social psyche of 'one-dimensional man' entrapped by 'instrumental rationality', it prematurely rejected Marx's value theory of labour, on the basis that adherence to it had been the basis for the development of Stalinism. In rejecting the centrality of

the value theory of labour, the Frankfurt School cut a pathway to Weber and a particular critique of modernity which has found general resonance today amongst anti-capitalist social movements (I return to the potentially negative ramifications of this move later).

The more 'orthodox' Western Marxism from Lukacs, Gramsci, to Althusser (despite obvious methodological and substantive differences in emphasis) remained faithful to the labour theory of value. However, they, and subsequent followers,<sup>6</sup> proceeded to reify it as a timeless universal law; without growth development or decay. In affect their conception of the 'law of value' becomes part of a positive epistemology; a phenomenological concept with no other purpose than to regulate and order empirical observations of the 'class struggle'. The 'class struggle becomes reduced to an economic *function* of the pushes and pulls of 'long waves of accumulation', 'falling and rising rates of profits', 'rising organic compositions of capital', etc, all designed to increase surplus value extraction. One has only to scan the published debates amongst Marxist economists during the 1970s and early 1980s, to realise something had gone amiss; increasingly, it appeared workers needed a mathematical background to 'understand' class position! The economism, which had infested an understanding of class, became the breeding ground for the implicit and explicit intolerance by many Marxist sects to oppressed groups striving to air any political differences which could not be *directly* and *neatly* assimilated to 'class location'. For example, the tendency to deride, as a reflex action, the politics of those experiencing different forms of oppression, such as women and blacks, as *inherently* reformist.

Such economism lead to the enforcement of an *abstract class identity*, in the sense that all focus on *difference* was obliterated and stifled. The stifling of difference resulted in social movements expressing their identity in terms different to class. The subsequent decline of the USSR *materially* weakened the force of Stalinist influence within Marxism; a process which, potentially, could have led to a re-orientation of class praxis along a more socially rich dialectic of *identity in difference* (a concept I return to below). However, the decline of Stalinism's negative influence also corresponded with the rise of monetarism, privatisation and the recommodification of work; in short, with the resurgence of an offensive by capitalist forces across the western industrialised world against the collectivist institutions of the so-called Keynesian Welfare State. Events which meant that the social structures, which had nurtured if not exactly nourished class formation, were in disarray by the early 1980s, under the influence of globalisation. As a result there appeared to be less *material* reasons for oppressed groups to remain within the ideological orbit of class politics. In summation; due to the economism of Stalinist influenced Marxism and the decline of class politics, social movements broke free of the constraints of 'class' and embraced the politics of difference. The repulsion from Marxism was to be matched by the attraction of some social movements to the socially contextualising principles of 'Modernity' and 'Post Modernity'; an attraction which, I argue below, leaves social movements politically disarmed in the face of a powerful

global capitalism, confident in its ability to assert its negative identity on society and the environment.

### 3

Social movements such as the women's movement, black and environmental movements, have turned increasingly towards a discourse defined by modernity and post modernity, in an effort to establish an emancipatory project. There are, I would argue, inherent problems with this. The 'modernity-post modernity' discourse, although pulling social movements away from the confines of economic and so abstract class identity, leaves no *social grounding* for the re-establishment of a politics of identity which can match the power of capitalism. Moreover, the modernity-post modernity discourse, in treating capitalism and communism as equal evils in the manifestation of industrialism and instrumental rationality,<sup>7</sup> is ultimately reformist and a harbinger of the politics of despair.

Modernism as a praxis is frustratingly difficult to identify. Suspiciously it is said to have developed at the same time as capitalism – during the 17th century – which leads one to question what the difference is supposed to be? Driven by 'instrumental reason', modernism, it is claimed, universalises all aspects of social life, in the sense that local morals, ethics and cultures are suppressed and exist in distorted form under its sway. Thus, modernity, in emitting universal morals and ethics based on utility and abstract 'rights' and 'obligations', which bear reference only to an abstract 'rational economic man', oppresses, confines and marginalises alternative ways of life.<sup>8</sup> In economics and industry, instrumental reason, in the form of 'Fordism', 'scientific management' and mass production, trammels different labour processes, stripping away any intrinsic creativity.<sup>9</sup> Symbiotically with production, localised consumption norms and differences become suppressed under the welter of mass consumption of one-dimensional products. The catastrophic implications for man's alienation from nature this implies, has been well documented by Environmentalists.<sup>10</sup> In modernity-governed politics, different social groups are, apparently, suppressed and ground into an abstraction – *class* – and provided with equally abstract 'representative democracy'. The eighteenth and nineteenth century political economy and moral philosophy of those such as John Locke, Adam Smith, David Ricardo and Karl Marx, provide copious examples of this trend within modernity, it is claimed.

The destructive powers of 'modernity', as indicated above, are not to be equated solely with capitalism; modernity has promoted the development of rational forms of social organisation, which includes capitalism, but does not exhaust it. As members of the Frankfurt School were later to accept, Communism has been a prime culprit, for did not 'communism' in the East become entranced by 'scientific management' too.<sup>11</sup> Conflating any possible distinction between capitalism and communism has political ramifications; the only option for critical discourse is an abstract opposition to modernity, an opposition which grounds itself in the glorification of difference, fluidity, ambiguity,

irrationalism; anything which appears as offering escape from the evils of 'modernity'. This opposition has become loosely defined as post modernism.

Post modernity endorses the subjective. In doing so, a philosophical disposition is created which views the world as the outcome of *discontinuous* and relativistic cultures, morals and ethics; not having any ontological primacy over another, merely the subject's own preferential primacy. Any attempt to deal in the social currency of universal discourses and notions that differences exist only by virtue of their dialectical relation with identities, is tantamount to reductivist philosophy and authoritarian practice: is tantamount to 'modernity'! Historical progression is anathema to the post modernist because notions of social 'laws' are deemed to be the project of positivistic scientism and, as such, little more than a 'succession of regularities'. The world of the post modernist is a world where 'the surface flux of historical process cannot disclose a deeper level of reality accessible to an emancipatory critique and a progressive praxis'.<sup>12</sup> Those entranced by post modernism, according to Pepper, exude, '...a new, Rousseavian, regard for non rational thought and for other cultures and points of view and for eclectic styles and outlooks...'.<sup>13</sup> In effect, the 'objective world' is just a reification born of instrumental rationality (ironically, itself a reification), which embraces other 'reifications', such as 'meta-theories' and, of course, notions of a universal emancipatory working class.

The influence of post modernism has had a crucial impact on the political activity of some new social movements. For example, the hypersensitivity to *differences* and relativistic world views characteristic of post modernist discourse, often establishes reactionary boundaries on the emancipatory, anti-capitalist project. Once into the post modernist world view, no identity is safe from apparently infinitesimal reduction to still further differences. Kwame Anthony Appiah, for example, questions the whole notion of a black identity, biological, social constructural, cultural, or otherwise. Black identity is a social discourse no more no less.<sup>14</sup> Butler argues the same for women's 'identity' – a language fiction, no more no less! Butler would argue 'that...identity as a point of departure can never hold as the solidifying ground of a feminist political movement'.<sup>15</sup> Whilst not all social movements adhere to post modernist theory, their blanket anti-modernist standpoint often leads to anarchistic politics, which are ultimately no match for the centralised power resources open to the forces of capital. The task of co-ordinating an anti-capitalist front on the basis of the modernity post-modernity philosophical continuum, which celebrates atomistic individualism, not collective action, would appear to be an almost impossible one. I would suggest the low level and fragmented nature of anti-capitalist struggle today, is in no small measure to do with the philosophical and political cul de-sac opened up by the modernity-post modernity discourse.

The fragmentation into a multiplicity of possible identities can result in the kind of nihilistic observations characteristic of Baudrillard: 'Post modernity is the attempt to reach a point where one can live with

what is left. It is more of a survival among the remnants than anything else'.<sup>16</sup> Truly, without a standpoint in identity, one derives the politics of limited horizons; the politics of 'survival among the remnants'. As Pepper notes, 'Green politics often lacks structure and coherence, reject authority and embrace cultural relativism..Therefore, Green politics have much in common with post modernism. They reject universals..being imposed on groups, in favour of self determination, and they reject, in green theorising, the hidden and structural in favour of the superficial'.<sup>17</sup> Radical environmentalists would no doubt argue that this is the point: modernity created rigid universal 'truths' to suppress the emergence of an intimate relation between individuals and the environment; therefore, the fight against modernity must embrace subjectivity, irrationality and plurality.

The rejection of *universal identity* is theoretically erroneous and practically damaging. Individuals develop within a social ontology which exudes a dialectic of difference through universal identity; an anti-capitalist politics must embrace this. The conflict between capital and labour is, fundamentally, a conflict over capital's attempt to crush labour into an *abstract universal* (abstract labour), and labour's ongoing struggle to establish itself as a concrete universal force in the world (thus abolishing itself as a class). If social movements continue to operate a praxis along the continuum of modernity-post modernity, which denies universal identity, against the centralised power of capitalism, which has no doubts about its ability and need to assert its global identity, then the future can only lead to the politics of despair. The next section re-introduces key aspects of Marx's discourse with the aim of strengthening the case for a politics based on labour as a concrete universality.

#### 4

Marx's critique of capitalism was, simultaneously, a critique of the exploitation of labour by capital *and* the corruption of the essence of man's metabolic mediation with nature. Labour (sensuous human productive activity) and its result - 'objectification' (the realisation of social needs), were, for Marx, the negational ground through which the humanisation of nature and naturalisation of man occurred. Marx in this respect took his substantive cue from Aristotle. He accepted the Aristotelian claim that society (or the Polis) had a purpose, or *telos*. Its purpose was to realise the 'good life': to live (thereby to realise material social needs) and to 'live well' (thereby realising man's spiritual, intellectual and practical needs). Central to Marx was how, through mediation with nature, man's social needs are defined, redefined and, in class divided society, corrupted. Marx's definition of social needs was broadly similar to that of Aristotle's. Social needs have two broad interrelative aspects; firstly, core well-being, secondly, self-realising agency. Core well-being refers to the need for survival and physical and psychological health. A safe, clean and considerate relationship to the natural environment, would be fundamental to the achievement of core well-being. Self realising agency refers to the development of central human capacities, such as projectivity (species activity) and affectivity

(capacity to express friendship and fellowship).<sup>18</sup>

Marx's essential gripe was that capitalist social relations alienated *labour* and vilified the act of *objectification*, subordinating both labour capacity/creativity and objectification to the imperatives of accumulating profit. Capitalist society is, by definition, incapable of meeting these social needs. The result is that both man and nature inevitably become de-humanised and denaturalised respectively: transformed into so much private property (in the form of capital). As Marx explains, 'Private property has made us so stupid and one-sided that an object is only ours when we have it - when it exists for us as capital, or when it is directly possessed, eaten, drunk, worn, inhabited, etc. - in short when it is used by us'.<sup>19</sup> In other words, suppressed by the fetishistic drive to accumulate profits, social and natural needs have been reduced to the satisfaction of egocentric 'utility maximisation'. Capitalist society, has 'transformed the personality structure - the values, needs and behaviour of individuals - in a way that binds 'one-dimensional man' to the social order that produces these needs'.<sup>20</sup>

Many radical social movements would no doubt find common agreement with these sentiments. However, it is when Marxists then go on to assert that the 'stupid one sidedness' has a common source - class exploitation - and a common solution - a classless society - that political disagreement manifests. For Marx, humanity would only successfully move towards a classless society, if *different* social movements could *unite as a class* in order to extinguish the profit motive and rejuvenate social need. Given the current unpopularity of class discourse, it would appear to be a vital task for Marxism, if its views concerning the centrality of class are to be taken seriously, to re-clarify the relationship *within* class and *between* class, profit and social need. A small contribution can be made by going back to basics.

At the heart of capitalism is the determination to *sublate* use value and needs into exchange value and maximum profitability. Instrumental reason and 'modernity' is the result, not the cause, of this fetishism, in as much as differential social needs and useful labour activity become distorted and subordinated to the needs of capitalism to create exchange value. When Marx spoke of commodity production relations he used the expression in its widest sense - as a society wide discourse. The heart of the commodity form was its dual purpose: as use value and exchange value. Hence society wide discourse embodied the contradiction between action expressing intrinsic useful activity and social need, and instrumental reasoning based on the cash nexus. While many may agree with this, the view, also expressed by Marx, that this contradiction is one of class struggle, to be fought out by capitalist and proletariat, has been seen by many as narrowly 'economistic'. Indeed (as mentioned earlier in this paper), 'class struggle' has tended, during the course of the 20th century, to degenerate into economism, yet this was not Marx's conception. For Marx, the opposition was both clear and profound: between a capitalist class and associate forces, on the one hand, who worked to ensure that exchange value and profitability continued its dominance over social needs; and a proletariat, on the

other hand, who strove to resist the erosion of social need and extend their control over their environment.

Marx had no illusions about the *differentiation* within the proletariat, over the relative importance of various needs and moral discourses; in fact Marx's own personal struggle for communist society was a struggle to establish social conditions within which these differences could flourish (and where the condition of 'proletariat' would be abolished). What Marx was clear about however, was this: within a political movement based on social need, the proletariat had a *unity* of interests *against* capitalism's fetishistic drive for profitability; and in *freeing* the differential expression of social needs from capital's negative orbit; despite the rich differences in the experience of oppression and exploitation on the basis of race, gender and sexuality, Marx was optimistic that a united opposition to capitalism would emerge on the basis of the politics of need. Identity politics (not in the abstract but in the concrete) which has at its basis the politics of social need has, unfortunately, been eliminated from the discourse of post modernism. However, capitalist forces have had no such reservations in asserting their political identity to enforce their own *universal politics*; subsuming labour into abstract labour, exchange value and profit. However, as I argue below, capital has not had it all its own way. The power of capital and its ultimate weakness during the twentieth century, became manifest in the rise and decline of Labourism - a bureaucratic form of regulating capital and de-politicising the proletariat between 1920s-1970s. An overview of its more salient features may convince those who remain sceptical, of the *necessity* of recreating an anti-capitalist *class* identity, based on the politics of social need.

## 5

To understand the significance of Labourism, one must situate it within the commodity form of production. Marx opened his analysis of capital<sup>21</sup> with the observation that capitalist society was characterised by the circulation of commodities and that the commodity should, therefore, become the point of departure of his investigations of the capitalist system. Marx made a number of essential, albeit complex, connections from this initial premise, which become crucial to the politics of social need. Firstly, as already mentioned, commodity society has two natures - an exchange value form and a use value, need fulfilling form. Secondly and relatedly, when the capitalist system is in ascendancy, the exchange value form will invariably dominate use value. In other words, if it is not profitable, social needs will not be met and the capacity for creative labour will remain only a potential. Marx's remarks about commodity fetishism in the opening chapter of *Capital*, capture this structural outcome and the subjective acceptance of it by the majority. Thirdly, the gold standard (as a 'universal equivalent') offered a necessary substantive basis for the dominance of exchange value, by anchoring commodity exchanges to socially necessary labour time, on pain of balance of payment problems and chronic deflation.

When Marx proclaimed that capitalism would inevitably 'dig its

own grave', he referred, fundamentally, to the decline of all three processes described above: the decline of gold, of commodity fetishism and the ability to harness social need to the whims of profitability. How does this help shed light on our understanding of the rise and fall of Labourism? The answer is that Labourism arose to arrest these three aspects of the decline of capitalism, by bureaucratically regulating social need and by administering prices and so monopoly profits. In the limited context of this paper, it must suffice to itemise the essential logic of the process. Firstly, capitalist accumulation establishes a socially integrated labour, which *facilitates collective political resistance* against capitalism (in the case of Britain, one can observe key developments in the labour movement, between 1880 and 1926; first *New Unionism*, then syndicalism). Secondly, primarily through the above institutions, resistance takes the form of a challenge to capitals 'right' to sacrifice use value and needs to exchange value and profits. Thirdly, the political threat from labour makes it increasingly difficult and ultimately impossible for capital to force labour (through deflation and stagnation), to pay for its own inability to secure world socially necessary rates of exploitation. Remaining on the gold standard was the systemic way of achieving this, however, in Britain the social pressure from reformers became too great, and the gold standard was duly sacrificed (in Britain there is an initial move away from gold – 1913-25 – which is made permanent in 1931 and in most other western societies by 1939). Fourthly, and most decisively for the emergence of labourism, capital in losing the gold standard, loses the material ground for the dominance of exchange value over use value. This meant in every day terms that targeted goods and services can be made and consumed *without direct recourse to their consequences for profit*; and, indeed, *without being valorised*. How was capitalism to manage its decline and, more importantly, in the short term, the policing of social needs? The answer, again in the short term, was Labourism.

Labourism, which, before, had remained only latent and on the political margins (the Labour Party's first real decisive election victory occurred in 1945), now moved to centre of the political stage. Labourism's political economy is based on the ability to police and dictate the terms and conditions of the *labour movement's* articulation of *their* use values and social needs. In Britain the policy of full employment; the framework of collective bargaining; and commitment to social welfare, were Labourism's fruits. The Labour Party and TUC *institutionally* represented the aspirations of Labourism. They were, indirectly, assisted significantly by the world wide affects of Stalinism. Stalinism, in *ideological* terms, created the illusion of a socialist virtue out of Labour's 'mixed economy'; while in *practical* terms, it policed working class struggles in line with the needs of Moscow (which invariably meant social democratic appeasement), through the Comintern. The post war boom was predicated on Labourism's ability to regulate social need (through the social contract) and assist profit maximisation (through state subsidies and control of the colonial markets within the 'sterling area').

The failed project of Labourism confronts us in all areas of life



today. The failure was initiated by the growing threat fully employed and confident workers represented to capitalism in the 1960 and 70s, in the face of falling profits, sinking world trade and a rapidly disintegrating Stalinist influence. Finance capital initially responded (via its control of aspects of the State, large boardrooms and money markets) with deflation, de-industrialisation and financial parasitism.<sup>22</sup> On the back of this came the attacks on Labourist institutions, such as the Nationalised industries, public services and the industrial relations system; increasingly they had become impotent as vehicles for policing of social needs. The Thatcher years achieved most of the dismantling of the institutions of Labourism. Major's years in office have been a holding operation in Britain. In defeating Labourism, however, capital has unleashed many forces it now finds difficult to contain. Finance capital has destroyed Labourism, but it has not yet dealt with the deeper structural and systemic manifestations of its decline - the loss of a gold standard, the weakening of commodity fetishism and the systemic subordination of use value and social needs to exchange value and profitability.<sup>23</sup> Clearly, there has been a systematic attempt to recommodify the economy, but it still remains at an unsatisfactory level. The State now intervenes in the economy more than ever, generating more bureaucracy than market, with the multiplication of 'internal-markets' and quangos that have characterised the 1990s.

British capitalism must complete three crucially important tasks: commodify public services to a far greater level than it has managed to thus far; control finance capital; and achieve European monetary union (a surrogate European version of a universal equivalent). If all three are achieved, then, theoretically, investment levels would increase dramatically, to sustain another boom. However, in practice it would take an immense amount of will and collective action on the part of the *European bourgeoisie* to carry through such changes. Yet the will is decidedly weak, and for good reasons. For even if all three tasks were achieved, capital has no control over society once the economy picks up and moves out of recession. Labourism and its life support system - Stalinism - are rapidly becoming *history*, and would no longer have anything like the political resonance they once enjoyed within society to be of any assistance to capital in policing social needs. The irony is only apparent in the fact that, whereas in the 1930s the post war boom was predicated on the movement off gold, in the 1990s it is predicated on the movement back on to some form of surrogate gold standard (EMU). The type of growth strategy implied is one based on a further massive devastation of public services. It is debatable, given the recent social unrest in France and the debilitating affects of unification on Germany, whether the European wide bourgeoisie will ever find the common ground needed to create a unified monetary system. Putting the matter starkly; the two social control mechanisms limiting social need to profit - commodity fetishism and Labourism - are now all but defunct. It is this weakness in 'late' capitalism, which allows openings for political activity based on the politics of social need.

## 6

Given the argument above, the present, *necessarily*, is one of economic slump. In the short term this is the only safe option for capital, in its attempt to harness social need to profit. Yet it is an option that adds dramatically to divisions within capital and so to the rate of its own decline. It is within this contradiction that a potential anti-capitalist political identity, based on the politics of social need, could become a powerful force for progressive change. Seemingly disparate social groups can, on the basis of negotiating social need, come together as a proletarian force capable of resisting capital and transcend present society and eventually reconstitute their unity in difference on a real basis, in a communist society. On a fundamental level, anti-capitalist movements should reject the concept of exchange fetishised by capitalism (social metabolic exchanges mediated by commodities), and embrace exchange on the basis of need fulfilling *labour activity* (social metabolic exchanges through free associate planning).<sup>24</sup> The latter would be the goal, however, there is need of a politics of transition to secure the goal. It is beyond the scope of this current paper to map such a transition in detail, nevertheless, some more obvious examples will suffice to make the point.

In the first instance it is the barrier created by exchange value and profit that inevitably draws social movements together as proletarians.<sup>25</sup> The politics of *social need* will define debates on political alliances and policies. In the past the politics of reform have created divisions. For example, Anti-road demonstrators and car workers, from the point of view of traditional disputes based on market reform are at odds with each other (to the anti-road demonstrators roads are bad *per se*, to the worker the impending loss of job and wages, become more important than curbing road development etc). From the vantage point of a politics based on social needs however, political unity can be fostered. For example, new questions which press for an answer emerge; what social needs might cars and roads fulfil? How has the quest for profit corrupted this fulfilment? How should we organise society to ensure a more adequate fulfilment?

Similarly, any strikes that do occur, should strike at the heart of capitalism, by rejecting exchange value in an obvious and forceful way. For example, a rail strike, if part of a more general and politically coordinated mobilisation of key sectors of the working class, could well be run on the basis of workers running the service for free, thus emphasising the service as a social need and de-emphasising its status as a commodity to be privately consumed through the cash nexus. A similar point can be made for all utilities currently under privatised status. Such action fosters unity and weakens sectionalism, making it harder for capital, through the media, to invoke cries of 'public disruption'. Finally, the current interest on the social democratic left in the concept of a *basic income*, has the potential to become a potent weapon in aid of progressive change. Guaranteeing every person a *basic income*, does much to break the current dependency on profit margins and balanced budgets, for self reproduction. The basic income,

could be 'index linked'; not to 'prices', but to meet differential social needs. Unity in difference would be essential in democratically defining the basic income and the level of differentials. There is no better ethos than, 'from each according to their ability to each according to their need', for deciding the scope of differential social needs. Of course capitalism could never deliver such aspirations, but then isn't this the point: the capitalist social system cannot deliver basic human needs and should therefore give way to a social formation which can.

Perhaps the most important aspect of emphasising the politics of social need, is that by doing so, we strike at the heart of capitalist accumulation, which is, after all, the basis of finance capital's centralised power. In the context of the capitalist predicament outlined above, capitalism's main source of strength is the failure of disparate social movements to overcome their differences and build a political class identity on the basis of a politics of social need.

## Notes

1. D. Pepper (1993), provides an interesting appraisal of the fragmented politics of environmental groups and the cross fertilisation of interests with other movements which may arise out of this.
2. A reference to a song by the group XTC, *Roads Girdle The Globe*.
3. See *Critique*, (Journal of Soviet and socialist studies) which for more than two decades has provided a unique account of the social relations of the former Soviet Union, as well as its affects on the western and eastern working class intelligentsia.
4. In particular the emergence of an industrial relations system, which decomodified (to a degree) wages and labour power, against a backdrop of wider state regulation of the market and provision of social welfare. Stalinist Marxism views this as an evolution to 'socialism', instead of what it was, the product of the political defeat of the labour movement during the 1920s and 30s.
5. Quote taken from Paul Flewers, p21, 1996.
6. For example, see the work of the modern Marxist 'regulation school', epitomised by Michel Aglietta in France (1979), and Bob Jessop in Britain (1993).
7. As Thomas Barry (1992) notes, with reference to the Irish Green movement, although the principle carries further, 'The problem is that many Irish Greens simplistically lump socialism and capitalism together as variants of the superideology 'industrialism', which they see as the real root of the ecological crisis'.
8. It is interesting in this respect that anti-road demonstrators invoke symbols and values from the pre-industrial order, for example, at Wanstead in 1993. Drawing on images of 300 year old peasant revolts against land enclosures, the demonstrators defended George Green against the road builders intent on demolishing houses and trees. See *Aufheben*, Summer 1994, No3, for a detailed account of the conflict.
9. There has been an extensive literature on this process, but perhaps the classical statement of it, although not in terms of 'modernity', was that of

Harry Braverman (1974).

10. For example, see Jeremy Seabrook's accessible book (1988).

11. See, for example, Frederick Pollock, *State Capitalism: Its Possibilities and Limitations*, in, S.E. Bronner et al (1989), who makes no mention of qualitative social differences between the USSR and 'State Capitalism', which are both defined in technologically deterministic terms of reference. This is not to say that I indicate the USSR was in anyway 'progressive'. Far from it. The point I make here is that two different social formations come to be seen as degrees of development of 'State Capitalism'; and, increasingly, in the case of the Frankfurt School, as the products of 'modernity'.

12. S. Bromley, "The Politics of Post Modernism", *Capital & Class*, p. 130.

13. D. Pepper, *op. cit.*, p. 56.

14. Cited in S. Seidman (1994) *Contested Knowledge*, Blackwell, p. 253.

15. Judith Butler, *Contingent Foundations: Feminism and the Question of Post Modernism*, in, J. Butler and J Scott (1992), *Feminists Theorising the Political*, Routledge, New York, pp. 15-16, cited in S. Seidman (1994) *Contested Knowledge*, Blackwell, p. 253.

16. Cited by Kate Soper, *New Left Review*, No 186, p. 122.

17. Pepper, *op. cit.*, p. 57.

18. See S. White (1996), *Needs, Labour and Marx's Conception of Justice*, in *Political Theory*, for a detailed exposition of Marx's conception of social need and how it relates to Marx's theory of communist justice.

19. K. Marx (1975), *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts*, cited in, *Marx & Engels Collected Works*, No3, Lawrence & Wishart, p. 300.

20. Quote by Douglas Kellner (1985), paraphrasing Marcuse, p. 243.

21. K. Marx, *Capital*, (1975), Vol. 1.

22. See, for example, the work of H. Ticktin (1983); J Scott (1989); D. Harvey (1982); M Useem (1984), for a discussion of the power and personal tutelage of finance capital.

23. Although de-politicised, workers remain socially integrated through the extensive and deepening division of labour, a condition of ultimate strength. Harvey notes, 'when British Ford car workers struck and stopped car production in Belgium and West Germany, they suddenly realised that spatial dispersal in the division of labour is not entirely to the capitalist's advantage and international strategies are feasible as well as desirable', *The Condition of Post-Modernity*, p. 358, (1989). It is worth noting also that the new 'flexible' working practices, which also imply less managerial supervision, have important democratic and autonomous implications, which could well find expression if ever there were a confident upsurge in struggle amongst workers.

24. See I. Meszaros's interesting remarks on 'the nature of exchange under communal social relations', in his, *Beyond Capital*, (1995).

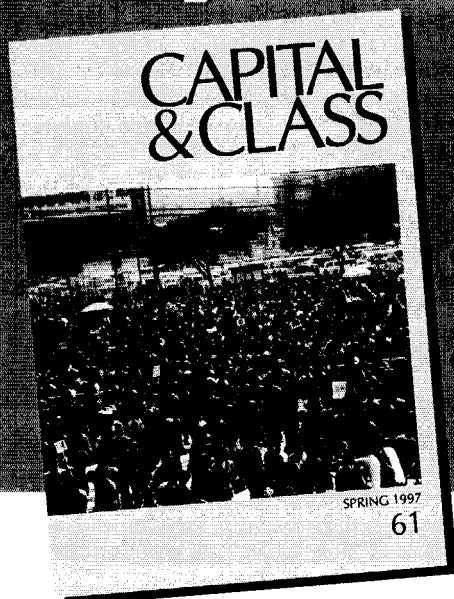
25. Following what has been said, it is clear that by proletarian I in no way mean some homogenous labour movement. A proletariat is a differentiated social movement, who ultimately have a class identity, which they must unite around politically, in order to abolish themselves as a class.

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# Colonial Anthropology: An Enlightenment Legacy? The Lockean Discourse on Nature, Social Order and Difference

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Athena Athanasiou

## Introduction

The fully enlightened world radiates disaster triumphant.

Horkeimer, M. and Adorno, Th., 1944  
*Dialectic of Enlightenment*

Adorno and Horkheimer viewed modernity through the prism of Auschwitz. They viewed the Nazi terror and the pain of the concentration camps as the fate of the Enlightenment truth and its extension, European modernity, in practice. Their argument on Enlightenment as mass-deception was concerned with "the actual reversion of enlightened civilization to barbarism" (Introduction, 1944). In their classic work, they suggested that the claims of the first Enlightenment thinkers, such as Locke and Rousseau, can be traced in the implicit synthesis of reason and domination.

The main purpose of this paper is to reconstruct the dialogue of colonial anthropology with the tradition of Enlightenment and – more specifically – with Locke's accounts of morality and political economy of civil society. Enlightened Europe's encounter with non-Europeans has provided anthropology with two of its fundamental epistemological assumptions: the schematization of time as a single progressive narrative, and the idea of the self-constituting and self-identifying subject (the West, the "peripheral" peoples, a class, the sovereign human agent, and so on). Anthropology is a modern episteme which constructed historically its nonmodern, or perhaps more accurately its premodern, subjects (primitive, preliterate, traditional, indigenous, local) by negotiating the relationship between "common human nature" and "cultural diversity", and by classifying the latter into developmental series. The ethnographic strategies which make the non-Western and/or premodern peoples either the passive object or the active authors of "their own history" say something about the modern anthropology's definitions of itself, and further, say something about the fantastically unified "West"'s definitions of itself.

Nonetheless, these definitions are not monophonic. In a second register, the purpose of this paper is to criticize traditional epistemologies of anthropology and their Lockean legacy. I argue for a poststructuralist position intended to surpass a conventional ethnography which mediates and represents self-other relations as matters of essence rather than of power. Following Foucault's suggestion that Enlightenment "appears as a political problem" rather than "simply as a general process affecting all humanity", such a critique should call into question the deep-seated Enlightenment definitions of the subject and Locke's moral considerations of individual autonomy and the equalizer of reason. It becomes necessary, I believe, for this critique to address the thematic of the sovereign rational actor in ways that show how this paradigm is entangled in efforts to legitimize specific forms of power and subjection. Although it is significant to conceive of ethnography as a protean negotiation involving multiple and multivocal subjects, the conception of ethnography as a dialogical interplay of voices frequently fails to recognize that this intersubjectivity is constituted, situated, and stratified. In other words, this kind of radical questioning intends at once to "de-legitimize" the liberal humanist notion of agency (and its alliance with the idea of "making one's own history" employed by many anthropologists) and to raise the question: "Who" has the authority to define the political and cultural significance of the subjects involved in the encounters of ethnography? Within the context of such a critical paradigm, this de-essentialized "who", enclosed by the ironic quotation marks, is reconceived and refigured in opposition to the master trope of the Enlightenment vision of the sovereign subject, and hence deployed as a discursive formation. Eric Wolf pointed out that modern anthropology is an offspring "of philosophical anthropology", the enterprise of the Enlightenment aimed at understanding the inherent capabilities and limitations of man" (1964:9). Talal Asad (1973) defined anthropology as a "bourgeois discipline" bound up with the tradition of Enlightenment:

We have been reminded time and again by anthropologists of the ideas and ideals of the Enlightenment in which the intellectual inspiration of Anthropology is supposed to lie. (Asad, 1973)

A few months earlier, Raymond Firth in his article "The Sceptical Anthropologist? Social Anthropology and Marxist Views of Society"(1972) had defined anthropology as "the legitimate child of Enlightenment".

By contrast to claims about pure objectivity and value-neutrality, my approach perceives anthropology as a political discipline that advanced to a large extent as a "colonial encounter" on the industrial capitalist and imperialist expansion, and Enlightenment as one of the ideological models on which anthropology has layered its descriptions and assumptions. Nevertheless, as Joan Vincent noted, "Although anthropology as a profession was stimulated by the possession of an empire, it is historically inaccurate to regard the discipline simply as a form of colonial ideology" (1990). I intend to step back from this



particular debate and deal with examining some of the Lockean underlying presuppositions concerning both the anthropology of empire and the anthropology of progress. Interestingly enough, Rousseau, and not Locke, has been usually related to the history of anthropology. It seems, however, that Locke's premises about civil government and natural harmony of human beings has strongly influenced not only the modern liberal tradition, but also the foundational assumptions about social order within the British utilitarian tradition (Stocking, 1987). Furthermore, through this prism we could approach the modernity projects undertaken in the sociocultural contexts of countries of semi-periphery, such as Latin American countries, Mediterranean countries, etc., where catching-up-with-"developed"-Europe is a principal parameter of national- identity construction.

### **The 17th and 18th century ideas of "civilization"**

The Enlightenment thinking established civilization as a synonym of reason. It claimed that all humans --by nature bearers of reason-- can participate in the supposedly accumulative development of human knowledge and civilization, provided that they use their innate pure reason. Locke saw the advance of the sciences of "man" (sic) to be dependent upon a careful account of the various operations, faculties, and capacities of the human mind. Locke's influence on eighteenth-century epistemological apparatuses in Britain, but also in France, was extensive. Montesquieu's *De l' esprit des lois* (1748) viewed "savages" and "barbarians" as mainly governed "by nature and by climate"; Montesquieu believed that topography conceptualized social structure. Rousseau's *Discourse on the Origin and Foundations of Inequality among Men* (1755) was a manifestation of primitivism and of the "noble savage".

Enlightenment regarded culture as a consequence, rather than as an aspect, of human reality. Civilization was perceived as a sign of progress. Within the framework of the Enlightenment classificatory discourse, crucial hierarchical binaries were set up: racial, property, and gender hierarchies. What separates "savage man" and "civilized man" is the stage of refinement. The natural world is the reference point of all cultural processes. The threshold difference between savagery and civilization is the triumph over nature, manifested in the rational control over the most basic human instincts and entailing individual liberty and political organization. Civilization in Enlightenment's terms is singular, a universal continuous process, nonetheless geographically located in Europe; the notion of territoriality is crucial in the "Primitive Machine" (Deleuze-Guattari, 1983) and it involves both sides of the colonial encounter.

Enlightenment tales of steady progressive succession and triumphalist march of civilization were highly consonant with romantic tropes of spiritual quests and nostalgia for the "pure past" and "endangered authenticities" of humanity. Thus, the emerging ideas of progress in civilization and of national history as a consistent narrative are intimately associated with the self-consciousness of European

identity. The ways in which colonizers have viewed the indigenous Other is inextricably associated with the ways in which Europeans in the colonies imagined themselves. The discourse of the free and rational consent – focal in the Enlightenment project – has been a major identity-constituting discourse. Therefore, the definition of Western national identities is linked to the cultural imperialism of Enlightenment. In this context, it would be safe to assert that colonial anthropology is discursively intertwined with the emergence of bourgeois Europe.

### **Locke's construction of body politic and civil society**

"Political power, then, I take to be a right of making laws with penalties of death and, consequently, all less penalties for the regulating and preserving of property, and of employing the force of the community in the execution of such laws, and in the defence of the commonwealth from foreign injury, and all this only for the public good" (Locke: 1690). Enlightenment grounds civil society on contractual relationships. Contract is the transaction through which free and equal individuals create social bonds. Locke implies that entering into contractual relationships is rational for human beings, since rational contracts aim to the "public good", that is, the preservation of property and the defence from foreign injury. Taking the certain historically specific white male European bourgeois as representative of humanity, he holds that the domain of rational choice theory constitutes human relations.

It is needless to point out that, in a register of perceiving history as a linear and continuous narrative, Locke's prescriptions for political order were an "improvement" over the dominant political views thus far. His well-known treatise on politics, *Two Treatises of Government* (1690), was a reaction to Robert Filmer's *Patriarcha* (the idea that divine right to political power modelled the royal family after the celestial family), and *The Natural Power of Kings* (1680). His *Reasonableness of Christianity*, as *Delivered in the Scriptures* (1695) was banned by the Grand Jury of Middlesex in 1697. His *Essay concerning Human Understanding* (1671) was censored by some of the Heads of Colleges at Oxford in 1703. In 1768 it was placed on the *Index Librorum Prohibitorum* (Index of Prohibited Books) by the Royal Censor Board in Portugal.

According to Locke's construction of the body politic, par excellence agents of contractual relations are the economic individuals. These individuals can have rights and enter contractual relations with other individuals. In Locke's words, "all men...by their own consents make themselves members of some politic society". They are assumed to be motivated primarily by the aim of serving their own – mostly economic – interests. As long as the contract observes this provision, the individuals grant their consent. Social cohesion is based on relations of trust, truth, reliability and empathy.

The protection of life, liberty, and property is the main purpose of civil society. The society built upon a contract between independent and rationally self-interested individuals is a rational attainment that liberates human beings from the "State of Nature", a schema based on

his fantasy of Native Americans and the popular imagery of Indian peoples as "natural", nomadic, crude, and savage. Locke defines this state which allegedly precedes Civil Society as "a state of liberty, yet it is not a state of licence". He describes the individual governed by the law of nature as entirely different from the rational contractor. According to Locke's account of the origin of civil government, political power and civil justice derive from the prior, unpolitical state of "man", in which the natural reason discovers the laws of nature. The threshold from individuality to communality is marked by a certain loss of some individual rights. Passions and desires, although a part of human nature, are in need of control and proper use; only the faculty of reason can restrain what is considered to be the big hindrance of civilization, namely, desire. Development, production, and exercise of emancipatory-public reason are the distinctive features of humans. Developing the capacities of reason and autonomy is a gradual process of becoming capable of managing freedom. In this sense, Enlightenment is self-represented as the opposite of tutelage.

In the context of his contract theory, Locke conceptualizes the distinction between man and person. What he calls person, is a rational actor and a voluntary agent applying "his" (sic) powers and actions "for the attainment of any end, especially happiness". Locke articulates the concept of person on the basis of action and agency, especially of what he names responsible action and moral agency. Morality is of utmost importance in his elaboration of this concept. In the *Two Treatises of Government* (1690), he asserts that a man who rejects the laws of nature and of civil society should be treated as a non-person. The move from the man to the person is intimately linked with the conceptual move from communal to private property.

Locke perceives humanity as a coherent whole: "God gave the world to men in common" (Locke, 1690). It is God and voluntary agents that form civil and moral history. Human agents realize and substantiate certain divine ideas; these ideas constitute the true morality fitting to human nature. Eventually, reason and God's laws of nature achieve a stable political society. The full development of reason sets up a world of duty and obedience, a world arranged by law and discursive consensus. Locke's understanding of the body politic is based more on the conceptual and logical resolution of harmony, consent and mutuality, than on the political parameters of hierarchies and conflicts.

### **Colonial Anthropology: What does Enlightenment have to do with it? A critical approach**

The "anthropology" of the Enlightenment is sustained by the idea of Europe as a great republic conditioned by the premises of development and rationality, and on the view of the cultural process as universal, moving along a continuum from primitive to civil society. Enlightenment promises of justice and equality have been often deployed by colonial anthropology as mechanisms of exclusion and pathologization. Talal Asad in his article *Two European Images of non-European Rule* elucidates how these taken-for-granted commonsense

Western beliefs are employed to repudiate the "Other": "Although modern orientalist rarely engage in overt propaganda, and have adopted a more secular and detached tone, they have still been concerned to contrast Islamic society and civilization with their own, and to show in what the former has been lacking. In particular, they have been concerned to emphasize the absence of liberty', progress' and humanism' in classic Islam societies..." (Asad, 1973). Reason has been widely utilized as a criterion of understanding and classifying the "Other": a series of Western descriptions and definitions of Islamic contexts either emphasize the irrationality embedded in Islamic societies, or, within the tradition of the orientalizing romanticization of the "primitive", show the "naturalness" of their "diverse" rationality. Beyond what Asad calls "overt propaganda" though, there are various ways of trivialization, exoticization and pathologization. Moreover, the ideological basis of "tribalism" and "primitivism" can be traced back to focal assumptions and discursive repertoires of Enlightenment. By translating social and historical categories into racial "natural" archetypes, these assumptions reflect the power of Western ruling classes and obscure the exploitation and control nexus. Enlightenment discourses, representing a hegemonic site from which Western modern knowledge is produced and validated, perpetuate oppressive power relations between groups or configurations presumed to be essentially different.

Locke's tabula rasa is a model of theory of knowledge based on the experiences of uniformly educated, moral and articulate adults. The subject of Enlightenment, self-identifying and transparent, generates value-neutral knowledge. Locke's conception of the thinking agent still haunts Western liberal thought. The individualist Enlightenment model focuses on subjects with no concern about power-relations and social-historical structures. It holds self-interest to be the dominant motivation of human action (Cornel West, 1993). To arrive at a general and valid definition of human nature requires observing, examining, and understanding the numerous varieties of men. Thus the originally unified human subjectivity of the Enlightenment anthropology has splintered into different deployments of the human enterprise. The European encounter with America discovers and classifies the primitives of the world. Enlightenment constituted some of the pivotal dichotomies that influenced the processes of the colonial anthropology and the modern constructions of primitivism. Thus, the childhood/adulthood divide is analogous to other splits, such as primitive/civilized, modern/nonmodern, dependence/autonomy, private (instrumental) reason/public (emancipatory) reason. Emancipation from the domestic harness presupposes growing-up, self-determination, and awareness. By putting its own reason to use, humanity will reach mature adulthood. Proper use of reason not only allows leaving home and childhood, but also grants access to the public sphere. Rationality is the condition *sine qua non* of enculturation. In other words, a true reform can be accomplished by making use of reason. It is the only way out of immaturity and selflessness. Since the Enlightenment subject is constituted through differentiation, and is individually and not socially

differentiated, the individual minds --through reason, speech, and writing-- are distinguished from the great undifferentiated mass of human "chaotic other".

Locke argues that the individual starts out with simple sensory impressions, forms simple ideas, and, by elaborating them, brings about abstract and complex ideas. His treatise on education is founded on the notion of the gradual acquisition of ideas. All men begin with different character traits, but equal natural faculties; it is moral training, he asserts, that brings about the latent potentials. The mind is represented as a "yet empty cabinet", a white paper (*tabula rasa*), void of ideas and characters. It is being gradually ("by degrees") furnished with conveyed by the senses simple ideas initially, and more complex and sophisticated ones at further stages.

Following this tradition, Emile Durkheim, as a fundamentally evolutionary theorist, puts his emphasis on the progression from simple types of social solidarity to more complex ones (1915; 1984). The ideas that structured thinking about human culture as a whole, and non-European "savages" as a specificity, are more or less based on the assumption that what differentiates "savage" from "civilized" is that the former are still at a less advanced stage of development, the childhood of humanity. The Lockean assumptions of differentiation are very much embedded in speech.

Defining orientalism as a cultural and political "distribution of geographical awareness", Edward Said wrote: "It is, rather than expresses, a certain will or intention to understand, in some cases to control, manipulate, even to incorporate, what is a manifestly different (or alternative and novel) world" (1978, emphasis in original). Said believes that there is a definite connection between the doctrines of classic writers like Locke and racial theories justifying slavery or arguing for colonial exploitation. The Lockean discourse got around the differences either by pretending they do not exist, or by attributing them to a neutral and unmediated nature. According to this discourse, all men are by nature equal: the equality extends to men's power as well as to their justification; they owe one another duties of love and charity, the obligation to treat each other justly and to respect their equal personal status. In Locke's account of the natural and moral order, the law of nature is represented as uncontested, permanent, and universal. Furthermore, membership in a social organization is perceived to be an extension of an allegedly universal, homogeneous and value-free nature. Society is understood as a meritocratic organism governed by the equalizer of reason, and not as a system of relations between different classes, ethnic groups, and genders. That Enlightenment does not recognize society as a set of social and cultural hierarchies that enable domination, exploitation and oppression, can be read as one of the origins of certain claims of liberal bourgeois theorists that these hierarchies no longer exist, or are, at the most, unimportant leftovers. In an Enlightenment context, the various axes of differentiation are natural and hence politically irrelevant.

The first society is formed by a voluntary compact "between man and woman", that is, the conjugal society. Obviously, this

perception of familial bonds is associated with the presumptions of male supremacy and biologically anticipated heterosexuality. Marriage and parenthood are presented as invariant voluntary involvements in the original divine plan and the natural law. Family is represented as an a-political domain ruled by the paternal power, a power that imitates the asymmetrical forces of nature. Feminist scholarship has efficiently substantiated that the family does not legislate a "natural" bonding, but enacts a compulsory status, a dictated "choice" that operates as a systemic consolidation of social priorities, conventions and respective prohibitions. It grants the social nexus the institutional guarantee of an undisturbed continuity and centripetal coherence. In other words, it is not the "natural necessity", but the prevalent social value-system of hierarchized genders and sexualities, that establish the family as a dominating mechanism and a system of power. Enlightenment discourse disguises the established normalities of society as innate imperatives of "human nature". As Carole Pateman points out in her article *The Fraternal Social Contract*: "...the social contract story hides original political right by proclaiming sexual or conjugal right as natural" (1988, emphasis in original). In other words, the contractual perspective obscures the hierarchical relations governing the social and cultural landscape. Enlightenment discourse perceived family as a web of voluntary relationships; the categories of "natural freedom" and "mutuality" stipulate husband as a natural representative and wife's subjection as founded in nature.

The "primitive" past has been constructed in ways that justify the male white bourgeois system of domination. Western self-preservation is pursued through representation of the Other. Locke's interest in the observational knowledge and in hypotheses built on matter of fact and sensible experience is closely related to the function of senses as utilitarian instruments in Modernity. In his account of knowledge, he conceives scientific knowledge as limited to experience and experiment. Gathering of observational data precedes the formation of general explanatory laws; every hypothesis needs to be grounded in observation. He claims that "he that would not deceive himself ought to build his hypothesis on matter of fact and make it out by sensible experience, and not presume on matter of fact because of his hypothesis" (1690). Anthropological representation is attained through "participation" and "observation". Evans-Pritchard, reflecting Malinowski's ethnographic holism, defines the participant observation method: "The social anthropologist studies primitive societies directly, living among them for months or years...The social anthropologist studies societies as wholes" (1951). Malinowski charted out the scientific methods and aims of fieldwork in the first chapter of *Argonauts of the Western Pacific*: the ultimate aim of field research is to depict the social reality and the "whole tribal tradition" (1922) of the "natives"; some years later, he elaborated his perception of fieldwork by stating that its major purpose is to uncover "invisible realities" (1935). One question lurking behind all of this is how politically irrelevant this "direct observation" and "depiction" can be. As C. Nadia Seremetakis aptly remarks, "Balance/imbalance is merely another way of saying

lost/found, West/Other, and permits all sorts of comparison from the perspective of a lack which can be filled up with positivity from other cultures" (1994). This notion of comparison can be traced in the picture of primitive society Maine derived from "comparative jurisprudence" (1861). Fortes, following Radcliffe-Brown, believed that comparative analysis brought anthropologists closer to understanding what behavioral norms emerge from a wide range of societies (1958). Participant observation method, as a visual metaphor and an intervention apparatus, has long been used to legitimize the authoritative stances embedded in constructing what is widely perceived as Otherness. Direct witness has long been supposed to secure objectivity and elaborate classificatory analyses. Panopticism of Enlightenment has influenced the modern implications of representation, at the point that the political aspect of surveillance in representation is generally obscured. With this, I do not assume that all the accounts produced by the above mentioned ideological underpinnings express antipathy or defense against particular sociocultural contexts. As Said (1995) puts it, Hellenism, for instance, as opposed to Orientalism, expresses sympathy for classical Greece (which – obviously – does not make this perspective less problematic). What I am suggesting is that this impulse to observe and describe – embedded in the humanist ethnographic tradition of taxonomy, classification, comparison, and visual representation – is neither politically neutral, nor innocent of the social circumstances in which it was forged, but, rather, is involved in the long tradition of conquest: "we" apply our power to represent "those" who lack the access to this power. K.Marx phrased this attitude in *The Eighteenth Brumaire* of Louis Bonaparte (1852): "They cannot represent themselves; they must be represented". It is worth noting, though, that the idea of intensive study of a specific community did not involve only participant observation, but also modes of measuring skulls and collecting material data in the field. This procedure of gathering was advocated by ethnographers such as Rivers (Cambridge University), Haddon (Cambridge University) and Seligman (London School of Economics).

Current political-epistemological debates about ethnographic writing and the representation of otherness illuminate this part of the story that demonstrates that categories like "participation", "observation", and "society as a whole", fundamental concepts on which fieldwork-defined anthropology has layered its assumptions, are employed to sanction a "contract relation" between researcher and researched extorting the consent of the latter. Recent anthropological scholarship and current ethnographic writing have shown that the give-and-take of ethnographic fieldwork – even if it suggests plural authorship and multivocal interlocutory and textual strategies – has implications beyond these of a mere agreement, dialogue, or a communicative action carried out between voluntary equal agencies; the contractarian rhetoric of "giving voice" to the other by-passes imperative questions, such as: "who" defines the relationship and represents the dialogue? "who" sets the terms of the exchange? "who" assesses the competence of meeting the standards of the project? "who" is the measure and "who" controls cultural evaluations? To ignore the political

implications of anthropological enterprise, and to neglect aspects of power and axes of social stratification, such as ethnic, geopolitical, or gender and sexual hierarchies, is not an accidental omission, but rather a political statement, a situated discursive act.

### **Epilogue: "Operation Desert Storm" and "Multi-culturalism"**

...the site of cultural difference can become the mere phantom of a dire disciplinary struggle in which it has no space or power. Montesquieu's Turkish Despot, Barthes's Japan, Kristeva's China, Derrida's Nambikwara Indians, Lyotard's Cashinahua pagans are part of this strategy of containment where the Other text is forever the exegetical horizon of difference...

Homi Bhabha, 1994  
*The Location of Culture*

The impact of the Enlightenment ideas of civility on Western knowledge about the "exotic" can be outlined in the following strands: the supposed "naturalness" of boundaries, the power of representation and the construction of cultural totalities. Eighteenth-century progressivism, nineteenth-century evolutionist speculations and "grand narratives" of post-enlightenment rationalism, maintain a great affinity with the corpus of Enlightenment beliefs about human "natures" prior to "cultivation": children, savages and outlaws. What we can detect as affinity in this long and discontinuous trajectory is a genealogy of rationalization, not as a directly influential world mastery or a consistent tradition, but rather as a persistence of themes, a commonality of concepts and discursive statements.

I hope that it is evident from all the above that the question is not whether Enlightenment has a certain degree of "truth" in it. Rather, the issue is whether and to what extent this discourse has been an "effective" apparatus for power manipulations. Western visiting participant-observers, colonial administrators, and "enlightened" missionaries, confident of their own cultural superiority, spoke long of "natives", "primitive art", and "exotic" cultures. Their bourgeois experience of travel constructed exotic otherness through the lens of polar designations, such as: "self"/ "other", "home"/ "abroad", and "savage"/ "civilized". They saw cultures as a white paper to project their ideals on, as raw material for their sociological syntheses. Indigenous peoples, placed at the political and imaginary margins of the Occident, were used as markers of Western hermeneutical projects. In this context, I understand the colonial "travelers" gaze as a gesture of power, closely related to the construction of their national identity. As Edward Said points out, "The construction of identity... [...] ...involves establishing opposites and others' whose actuality is always subject to the continuous interpretation and reinterpretation of their differences from us" (1995). Enlightenment's imaginary of spatial distances intertwined cultural translation with ethical judgements, and this way discursively legitimized colonialism. Anthropology has played a great mediatory



role in the power encounter between the so-called West and the so-called Third World. British anthropology expanded in cooperation with the policies of the colonial administration; The Aborigines Protection Society is a striking example of how anthropology and colonial administration have been important to one another in a relationship of a rather active collusion. The commissioning of Evans-Pritchard to study the Nuer after their rebellion and their suppression, and also the fact that he was officially working for the British Government further to explore the Nilotic tribes in North-East Africa signal the political implications of the discipline; we should keep in mind that according to Evans-Pritchard, anthropology "is a child of the Enlightenment and bears throughout its history and today many of the characteristic features of its ancestry" (1951).

Today, in the era of "new" internationalism and post-colonial critique, we may no longer perceive the employments of difference as the reflections of pre-given fixed cultural, ethnic, or racial traits, but as on-going negotiations (Homi Bhabha, 1994) in a persistent struggle. Viewing the "new world order" of the rhetoric of multi-culturalism and globality as a redistributive process of power interaction, we eventually encounter the question: is colonial enterprise over? Seremetakis is right in pointing out that the label "Operation Desert Storm" invokes the wilderness and bestiality of a distant threatening otherness (1994). In our post-colonial times, Arthur Jenren (Harvard Educational Review, Winter 1969) and Richard Hernstein (Atlantic Monthly, Sept. 1971) suggest that prevailing evidence leads to the conclusion that blacks are, in some sense, genetically inferior. In this way, African American oppression is represented as a part of "the natural order of things" and not as a changeable and historically contingent phenomenon (Cornel West, 1993).

The contractarian economy presents asymmetrical relations as forms of natural sequence, as a triumph of liberty and justice, an outcome of common reason and natural mechanics. Anyone who escapes the regulations of the allegedly coherent social body, is subject to the multiple technologies of exclusion and banishment. He or she is considered a violator of the social pact and therefore his or her own rights and given consent; someone who jeopardizes the discursive consensus of rationality and humanity. The punishment of the anomalous case is justified, therefore, as a political and judicial ritualistic reconstitution of regularity and social peace. As Monique Wittig puts it, "Most people would not use the term 'social contract' to describe their situation within the social order. However, they would agree that there are a certain number of acts and things one must do'. Outlaw and mad are the names for those who refuse to go by the rules and conventions, as well as for those who refuse to or cannot speak the common language" (1992).

In conclusion one could sharply pose the questions: what are the forms taken today by what Barthes calls "our petit-bourgeois myth of the Black" (1990)? How can we better comprehend the ways in which power realizes and redistributes itself through the discourse of a multi-cultural, de-centralized, and fragmented globality? How is multi-

culturalism historically (in perception and memory) intertextualized with slavery for African Americans, ethnocide for Native Americans, military conquest for Mexican Americans, and economic exploitation for countries of the capitalist "periphery"? And last: within the milieu of shifting sociocultural hierarchies and sharply politicized borders of post-modern globalization, how feasible is to engage in the employment of a non-dominative and non-ethnocentric political anthropological discourse, resistant, or even antagonistic to the "new" imperialistic hegemonies?

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On the day I concluded this paper, I heard that Gilles Deleuze had just committed suicide, in Paris.

This is as a small homage to his memory.

November 8, 1995.

## Guy Debord and the Metaphysics of Marxism: an obituary of Guy Debord

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Steve Turner

The French version of existentialism, lacking any sense of excess, could not contain Debord. We, however, are witness to an amusing, paradoxical spectacle. On the one hand, Sartre, whose first concern was to write for future generations, and who was propelled step by step into the arms of the contemporary, drowning in an ever-widening sea of current affairs. On the other hand, Debord, who was only interested in current affairs and finds himself condemned to work towards a distant future where he faces a posthumous fame, which – if I know him – leaves him cold ...

Asger Jorn, 1964

### Guy Debord and the Metaphysics of Marxism

Mankind has grown shorter by a head, and the greatest head of our time to boot

Frederick Engels, *Letter to Sorge*, 15th March 1883

Time, as Hegel showed, is the *necessary* alienation, the environment where the subject realizes himself by losing himself, where he becomes other in order to become truly himself

Guy Debord, *The Society of the Spectacle*

There will be a number of our contemporaries who will no doubt identify with Engel's eloquent testimonial to his friend and collaborator, Karl Marx, finding perhaps within his statement a similar sentiment to the current loss of the late Guy Debord. If this should sound to some a rather pretentious exaggeration, it should be borne in mind that even disinterested commentators have been forced to conclude that his passing surely constitutes an "end of an era" in French cultural and political history; a man who was the "epitome of intellectual radicalism"; and therefore to others an even more trenchant significance. The formidable vacuum that has been created by his departure predictably enough displays a number of paradoxical qualities. As though he

represented possibly one of the last giants of radical theory, a figure of uncompromising rigour; his stature was always curiously belied by his conspicuous absence from public life, a grave gesture to the historical conditions of modern society, whose essential character he was indisputably the ill-famed adversary. This quite self-consciously cultivated sense of authority was therefore always accompanied by the conspiratorial air of a shadowy enigma:

We had never been seen to be involved in the affairs, quibbles, and the business of the radical left politicians and the progressive intelligensia. And now that we can flatter ourselves that we have achieved the most shocking notoriety amongst this riff-raff, we will become even less accessible, we will go even more underground. The more famous our theses become, the more obscure we ourselves will be.

Debord and Sanguinetti, *The Veritable Split in the International*

It is not the purpose of this brief article, however, to attempt to elaborate the various myths that envelop the man, as it shall already be taken for granted that most of its readership are already fairly well acquainted with this particular subject. Those who are less familiar can easily gain access to such material from a number of books which are currently available, and are able to cover this topic in rather more detail. We shall have to confine ourselves to the somewhat more neglected aspect of his lifework: his theoretical legacy. Obviously an article of this nature can make no pretension of comprehensiveness – either in exploring the at times profound subtlety of its “metaphysical” detail, or surveying the entirety of its broad sweep of vision. Instead we shall have to be content with a general survey of its key features.

Though Debord's work has gained fame and is certainly appreciated in certain circles of society, it still often appears far from fully understood. Often critics and commentators would evoke the “chiliastic serenity” and the “crystalline perfection” that characterised his prose; the artistic beauty of its construction, as well as the diamond intensity of its style. Indeed it is precisely this dialectical density that both attracted some while intimidating others, hungry to grasp the underlying meaning of his terminology. “Density” is in fact probably the most fitting description to define his theory, as few writers can compare with Debord for condensing such a wealth of analysis in such a compact and concise manner. Its enduring quality lies precisely in the fact that his books' attraction does not diminish through re-reading, but is rather enriched and rewarded, as the full force of its meaning becomes increasingly apparent.

It is now commonplace to note that Debord's *magnum opus*, the notorious *Society of the Spectacle*, was first published by Buchet-Chastel in 1967; the motive for its timing seems two-fold, both distinct and interrelated. Not only did its appearance coincide with the rising discontent and political radicalisation of this period – which was to

culminate in the tumultuous events of May 1968 (a social movement which the Situationist International both predicted and participated in: "Where there was fire we brought petrol"). Its arrival was also obviously to parallel Marx's launch, exactly a century before, of his major theoretical work *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy*, Debord no doubt echoing Hegel's observation:

... since in all periods of the world a political revolution is sanctioned in men's opinions, when it repeats itself. Thus Napoleon was twice defeated and the Bourbon's twice expelled.

G. W. F. Hegel, *The Philosophy of History*

A point Marx was caustically to take up (following Engels' prompting) adding his own particular twist at the beginning of *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*. This obviously deliberate act of mimicry and sense of re-enactment (a theme that was to feature throughout the entire history of the S. I.) was thereby to serve a number of combined purposes. Firstly no doubt to give a clear sense of identity and orientation to the S. I., firmly establishing it within the trajectory of Western Marxism, and also more boldly, to help stake its claim that it was the *true* heir to the deformed project of the workers' movement, *as well* as the auto-destruction of modern art.

*The Society of the Spectacle*, like everything else within history, is a child of its time. Its excellence therefore is firstly a reflection of the period from which it was compound. After the end of the Second World War, Paris had become the cultural capital of the world – a laboratory of intense artistic and intellectual experimentation which was to produce a pantheon of new movements, and cultural and political figureheads. This fertility was an obvious sign of the enthusiasm of the age: "where one could so easily pass unnoticed". One of Debord's rare qualities was the curious ways he straddled both milieux, in a very distinct though removed manner – as the nucleus of a somewhat obscure organisation which combined the many-sided talents of the artistic avant-garde, largely jettisoned by the early sixties, and a rising generation of theoretical militants. This circumstance was to later play a contributory factor to the "conspiracy of silence" that Debord often seemed to be subjected to, as most of his theoretical rivals were on the whole established academics – usually professors of philosophy: from Althusser to Lefebvre, as well as the exiled school of Critical Theorists (Adorno, Horkheimer, Marcuse, etc). The only notable exception to this rule was Sartre, whose literary and philosophical reputation dominated the period. The intellectual cross-currents which were to shape this generation was the ascendancy and renaissance of two of the most influential thinkers in world history; namely the reigning monarch of classical idealism, G. W. F. Hegel, and his rebellious offspring Karl Marx. And it was a critical encounter between these two "mighty thinkers" that was to forge a whole constellation of position-taking methodological approaches of the era. As Merleau-Ponty was to recognise in one of his influential works:

All the great philosophical ideas of the past century – the philosophies of Marx and Nietzsche, phenomenology, German existentialism, psychoanalysis – had their beginning in Hegel

Merleau-Ponty, *Sense and Non-sense*

In fact it was another of Merleau-Ponty's works, *Adventures of the Dialectic*, that was to focus attention upon the book which was to provide the key locus and foundation of *The Society of the Spectacle*. That book was an early collection of essays by the Hungarian Marxist philosopher Georg Lukács, and was named *History and Class Consciousness*. The fifties and the sixties were to turn Paris into a theatre of philosophical revisionism, mainly in an attempt to salvage Marxism from what was being considered as the ideological deformation of Stalinism, which after its repudiation at the Twentieth Congress of the C. P. S. U. was contaminated by atrocity. In a bid to rescue the materialist conception of history, and with it the fate of the workers' movement, intense interest was centred on the history of Marxism – at its genesis and permutations, to discover the origins of its corruption. Here the rediscovery of the philosophical revisionists of the early twenties was to provide valuable source material for the rethinking of Marxism itself, and this was equally bolstered by the translation and publication of the early, so called "humanist" works of the young Marx (namely the *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844* as well as *The German Ideology*, both unpublished during his lifetime). The main appeal and achievement of Lukács was that he was the first major Marxist thinker, who through his comprehensive knowledge of classical philosophy was to re-awaken interest in the birth of historical materialism from its origins in German idealism, re-establishing Hegel as its central precursor. Not only this, he also attempted to re-synthesise the whole methodological approaches of the two systems to provide a new basis for a Marxist theory of consciousness. He thereby portrayed Marx as not only the dissenting pupil of Hegelian dialectical method, having turned him "right side up" to provide the central framework of materialism; "the science of history" as *The German Ideology* was boldly to claim, but equally its direct descendent and culmination:

... our underlying premise here is the belief that in Marx's theory and method the *true method* by which to understand society and history has *finally* been discovered.

Georg Lukács, *History and Class Consciousness*

This identification of Marxism with the consistent application of Hegelian dialectical method was also later embraced by Debord and heralded as the essence of critical Marxism. Confirmation of this adherence was clearly provided by the lifelong allegiance of not only Marx, but equally Engels (very much a connaisseur of Hegel) to the debt they owed their mentor. This was also true of many of the key figures of their day, often friends and rivals, from Ferdinand Lassalle to Michael

Bakunin, Alexander Herzen to Max Stirner. When later in life, particularly after the first volume of *Capital*, a new generation of "system builders" (like the German socialist professor Eugene Dühring) were proclaiming the Absolute Knowledge of their theoretical doctrines, pompously denigrating many of the titans of philosophy, like Kant and Hegel, both Marx and Engels were to leap to the defense of their predecessors, lambasting the pretensions of their "pygmy plagiarisers" (see Engels' *Anti-Dühring*). This position was also apparent and made vividly clear in one of Engels' last works, though its mode of exposition and at times clumsiness of philosophical conception were later to feed into the controversies of another generation:

... ultimately the Hegelian system merely represents a materialism idealistically turned on its head in method and content

Frederick Engels, *Ludwig Feuerbach and the End of Classical German Philosophy*

To Debord it was precisely the estrangement of Marxism from its roots in the dialectical method which fed into its degeneration in the hands of the socialist theoreticians of the Second International. Firstly with the intransigence of Kautsky, whose scientific conception of socialism was founded more on a mechanical and evolutionary model of history (borrowed mainly from Darwin). Bernstein's disaffection from the orthodoxy of "scientific socialism" to a complete revisionism, and reformism of Marxism, was to provide the first evidence of the theories breach with reality:

The inseparability of Marx's theory from the Hegelian method is itself inseparable from the revolutionary character of the theory, namely its truth

Guy Debord, *The Society of the Spectacle*

Lukács' position in the early twenties was also mirrored, and amplified, by the contemporaneous work of another pivotal Western Marxist, Karl Korsch, whose unorthodox *Marxism and Philosophy* was published in the same year as *History and Class Consciousness*, and was to share the Comintern's wrath by being likewise branded "revisionist". The fact that both Korsch and Lukács were professors of philosophy was viewed as the obvious source of their Hegelian deviationism and ideological error. This was to throw in motion a set of events that were to mark both men for the rest of their lives. For Lukács it was the first of a number of self-criticisms that would tactfully secure his affiliation to the now Moscow-dominated Communist movement, and also led to his accommodation with Stalinism. For Korsch it was the beginning of his rupture with the Comintern, which would lead to expulsion and exile. In 1923 however their work was branded together, and recognised as at least *sharing* some key features. In an afterword to *Marxism and Philosophy* Korsch was to concur:



As far as I am able to establish, I am in fundamental agreement with the themes of the author (Lukács) which relate in many ways to the questions raised in this work, if based on a broader philosophical foundation.

While Lukács had concentrated upon founding a new theory of consciousness Korsch was to apply scrutiny to the history of Marxism itself, and its relation to the totality. To Korsch, theory was the conceptual expression of the real movement of history, in contradistinction to ideology, which was a partial or congealed apprehension of reality. Using this frame of reference, Korsch was to subject the development and history of Marxism to a dialectical examination. This was to lead him to formulate a periodisation of its development and its relationship to the proletariat, which was to be its theoretical expression. The first period lead upto 1848 and the outbreak of the various European revolutions, with Marxism representing an integrated critique which was conceived as a living totality. The second stage was to correspond to the ebbing of the workers' movement and the years of political reaction throughout Europe in which Marx would devote himself to the fundamental science of capitalist society – political economy. As the science of history became fragmented into a number of different disciplines, with the scientific critique of the economy taking centre-stage, this was seen to rob Marxism of its philosophical dimension and to explain why it had eventually developed and culminated in the positivistic "orthodoxy" of scientism within the Second International:

We have already mentioned that Marx and Engels themselves always denied that scientific socialism was any longer a philosophy. But it is easy to show irrefutably, by reference to the sources, that what the revolutionary dialecticians Marx and Engels meant by the opposite of philosophy was something very different to what it meant to later vulgar-Marxism. Nothing was further from them than the claims to impartial, pure, theoretical study, above class differences ...

Karl Korsch, *Marxism and Philosophy*

The third period of Marxism at the beginning of this century when an attempt was made, in conjunction with reality, to return to revolutionary Marxisms (Luxemburg, Lenin, etc.) Here Korsch was to demonstrate that there was also a peculiar parallel between scientific socialism's conception of the problems of the State and philosophy, and the means of their suppression and abolition; that the continuation of the State and philosophy as separate spheres was characteristic of the theoreticians of the Second International. A number of these questions were also to preoccupy the imprisoned Communist leader Antonio Gramsci, in the light of his experiences of the councilist movement 1918-20 in Italy. As Debord notes:

Throughout his life, Marx had maintained a unitary point of view in his theory, but the *exposition* of the theory was carried out on the *terrain* of the dominant thought and became precise in the form of critiques of particular disciplines, principally the critique of the fundamental science of capitalist society, political economy. It is this mutilation, later accepted as definitive, which has constituted 'Marxism'.

Guy Debord, *The Society of the Spectacle*

Debord was highly influenced by this approach, and its traces are deeply embedded within *The Society of the Spectacle's* arguably most famous chapter: "The Proletariat as Subject and as Representation". Not only was Debord to take up this mode of analysis, he also went on not only to uncover the degeneracy of European reformism, but equally its complementary parallel, Marxist-Leninism. Most of the philosophical revisionists were essentially sympathetic to Lenin, and his stature was based on him having combatted many of the strains of European reformism and re-establishing the principal features of revolutionary Marxism. Only later was Korsch to make a frontal attack on Lenin's tactics and conceptions (moving to a similar position as Pannekoek). The key source of Lenin's authoritarianism was viewed as a product of Russian backwardness and the particularly hostile political conditions in which the Bolshevik party was forced to operate. Its prestige after the October revolution was to reverberate throughout the world Communist movement, as its ideological orthodoxy as well as political policy came to dominate party affairs internationally. The disastrous course of Russian history, which was to evolve into the terroristic totalitarianism of Stalin, was later viewed as an outcome whose seeds lay in the authoritarian elitism of the Bolsheviks as formed by Lenin, as the party apparatus germinated into a monolithic bureaucracy after seizing control of the State. The key organisational lessons which Debord was to draw from this monstrous miscarriage of Leninism was chiefly acquired from the works of the philosophical revisionists who were essentially most favourable to the practice of council communism as the true model of proletarian revolution, in which theory and practice could be met in conditions that would be adequate to each other. When Debord was to develop and reformulate the current stage and conditions of the class struggle in modern society – and with it the central goal of *autogestion* (or complete and generalised self-management), he was to identify the means of this struggle through the formation of workers' councils.

We now move on to the equally fertile critique of the contemporary features of modern society and the historical force which drives it: advanced capitalism. Throughout the fifties and sixties the Situationists were to launch their attack on the nature of modern consumer capitalism, and undertake a searing judgement on modern life. Debord was to adopt much of the critique of Lukács as the underlying premise of contemporary alienation – as originally elaborated in *History and Class Consciousness* the centrepiece of which was the now classic essay "Reification and the Consciousness of the

Proletariat". Here Lukács was to explore the consequences of the social relations of modern capitalism based on the commodity structure of society, grounded, mainly upon Marx's analysis of "commodity fetishism" in *Capital*. Here Lukács was skillfully to utilise his knowledge of classical philosophy, in particular German idealism, as a backdrop for investigating capitalism's effect upon man's social consciousness. Although commodity exchange existed in primitive societies, it was only a marginal activity and therefore only had a corresponding social impact. As capitalism developed however the commodity form became dominant and structured their lives accordingly. In this environment in which the commodity based society develops, and takes on greater complexity, this social relation is progressively hidden as a "veil of mystification" descends upon its participants, and social relations between people become transformed into relations between "things". The world of things ruled men through objective laws that were independent of them. The general results of this "reification" is the increasing rationalisation of society and with it a general atomisation in which intrinsic interconnection of things was gradually eroded and lost:

Just as the capitalist system continually produces and reproduces itself economically on higher and higher levels, the structure of reification progressively sinks deeper, more fatefully and more definitely into the consciousness of man.

Georg Lukács, *History and Class Consciousness*

Debord was to adopt this course of analysis as the foundation of his critique of modern consumer capitalism, in which alienated labour was not liberated by the expanding terrain of consumption, but rather complemented and reinforced by it. The rise of consumer society was not then a qualitative break from the economy of production but simply its extension as the underlying laws that governed each of these areas were essentially the same. Despite the material enrichment that accompanies the mass production of commodities, this development can in fact be no more than an expansion of *survival*, leaving the quality of life (the conditions of production) untouched. In fact the greater the extent of the conquest of the commodity the more estranged, the more removed will people be from their own existence:

The spectacle in society corresponds to a concrete manufacture of alienation. Economic expansion is mainly the expansion of this specific industrial production. What grows with the economy in-motion-for-itself can only be the very alienation which was at its origin.

Guy Debord, *The Society of the Spectacle*

On this premise Debord was to found his critique of all aspects of life in modern consumer society, in a quest to identify clearly the galloping unreality of modern life: the pseudo-quality, boredom, and

banality which seemed to be such an integral feature of the contemporary world. The decline and decomposition of everyday life was viewed as resulting from its colonisation by the commodity – where the gratification of human needs were being continuously reproduced by the avarice of commodity logic. The subsequent de-humanization of modern life was therefore only a *consequence* of the consumer onslaught itself. In this environment, where consumption was the *ultimate goal* of social life, all human relations became tailored to this model and life had become a lurid parade in which all merchandise battled for recognition with their increasing claims of total satisfaction. This tendency was also to find its *nec plus ultra* with the corresponding rise of information technology, a medium whose very form seemed to exemplify its social content. As the mass production of commodities spread across the surface of society, it was equally paralleled and reinforced by the emergence of mass communication which would help facilitate its advance. The media surge through this unilateral system of communication was to form the kernel of Debord's conceptual tool for analysing these social mechanisms. That concept was of course *spectacle*. The term was to denote both a general and a particular form. Generally it was viewed as the whole social process where man's production of his overall environment had become transformed into tools for the creation of separations. Specifically it was to define an inversion, or rupture, within reality which was created by a spectacular society. This rupture was actually the outcome of the feature of independent *representation*, and its disjunction of the function of totality; the dialectical interaction of thought and practice: "the image has become the final form of commodity reification". This disjunction had created a cleavage in reality in which an inversion was constituted:

Reality considered *partially* unfolds, in its own general unity, as a pseudo-world *apart*, an object of mere contemplation. The specialisation of images of the world is completed in the world of the autonomous image, where the liar had lied to himself.

Guy Debord, *The Society of the Spectacle*

Though it is worth remembering that what is principally being defined is *not* the medium itself *in the abstract* so much as the social relation it embodies. It would at this point be helpful to recognise that much of the terminology and mode of analysis, the concepts employed and their mediating interrelationship, stems directly from Hegelian dialectical methodology. In fact the whole book itself is saturated with (Marxist) Hegelianism. The overall structure of the book is actually borrowed from the *Lesser Logic* of the *Encyclopedia of Philosophical Sciences*, which is a condensed version of the monumental *Science of Logic*. The *Science of Logic*, "the Bible of Hegelianism" is in fact the centrepiece of Hegel's momentous system of absolute idealism, and was to demonstrate the whole ontological structure of the universe of "Absolute" as Hegel defined it. It is a very abstruse work – pure metaphysics – and the dialectical nature of reality portrayed in pure naked form. Though it is a notoriously difficult work to master, trying to

scale its fatiguing as well as dizzying heights, it can only be counselled that those who are able to complete the journey are certainly in a position to perceive Debord more clearly. Though formally discredited as the ontological exposition of absolute idealism, it still continues to inspire many Marxists. As it represents a completely “veiled” formulation of dialectical materialism, fluency with it is indispensable for a full comprehension of Marxism:

It is impossible completely to understand Marx's *Capital* and especially its first chapter without having thoroughly studied and understood the *whole* of Hegel's *Logic*. Consequently, half a century later none of the Marxists understood Marx!!

V. I. Lenin, *Philosophical Notebooks*

The Hegelian dimension of Debord is also conspicuously present in one of the most neglected features of *The Society of the Spectacle*, which is in fact its very marrow. And that is the central chapters on time and history. Here Debord was to give free reign to one of his central preoccupations and to provide us with one of his most original contributions to historical materialism – the relationship of man and time. In his last film he was to draw attention to this aspect of his work in a very blunt fashion:

The sensation of time slipping has been a keen one for me, and I have been attracted by it, just as others are attracted by the void or by water.

Guy Debord, *In Girum Imus Nocte et Consumimur Igni*

The key chapter “Time and History” probably begins with one of the most potent allegories of the Hegelian notion of unfolding totality. This allegory is given by way of an illustration, a graphic and resonant image, although it's a somewhat opaque contribution to the contentious debate concerning the dialectic of nature:

“History is itself a real part of *natural history*, of the transformation of nature into man” (Marx). Inversely, this “natural history” has no actual existence other than through the process of human history, the only part which captures the historical totality, like the modern telescope whose sight captures, *in time*, the retreat of nebulae at the periphery of the universe. History has always existed, but not always in historical form.

Guy Debord, *The Society of the Spectacle*

The genesis and development of human history is then chronicled and portrayed in a manner that is an unorthodox, yet compatible, perspective on the typical Marxist perception of historical materialism. Classical Marxism is essentially rooted in man's economic

development, and the forces and relations of production, through the development of society through its progressive interaction and subjugation of nature. This process is usually conceived in the basic paradigm of the base and the superstructure metaphor. That upon the economic base of society man erects a social and political superstructure (political, religious, ideological, etc.) which is in essential correspondence with the current stage of economic development: "It is not the consciousness of men which determines their existence: it is rather their social existence which determines their consciousness." To complement this model Debord stresses another component of man's ideological formation which is his conception and social relation with time (the early model of cyclical time which was rooted in the seasonal features of agricultural based societies; the birth of the first monotheistic religions as the first hybrid conception of irreversible time, etc.) What this chapter visibly displays is also clear traces of the Hegelian odyssey of history, of man's journey to self-consciousness through its course. It is therefore the heir not only to the encyclopedic *Philosophy of History*, but equally, and even more distinctively the *Phenomenology of Mind*. In Engels' later writing he was summoned to recall and elaborate Marxism's relationship to classical philosophy, and how one of its keys to unlocking the "riddle of history" was provided by the *Phenomenology*:

... which one may call a parallel to the embryology or paleontology of the mind, an evolution of the individual consciousness through its different stages, expressed in the form of an abbreviated reproduction of the stages through which the consciousness of man has passed in the course of history.

Frederick Engels, *Ludwig Feuerbach and the End of Classical German Philosophy*

This course was to lead us right to the heart of modern society and its portrayal in the chapter "Spectacular Time". The current model and measurement of social time was that of commodity production, the current unit of rationalised labour-power – the quantified unit of commodity time. Here Debord has established that a part of capitalism's intrinsic functioning was founded upon the present social organisation of time, and determined that one of the key features of the present "paralysis of history" was rooted within the ossified congealment of time, of its abstract equivalence (see also Marx's *The Poverty of Philosophy*).

Limitations of space bar the possibility of any real consideration of the subsequent three chapters, which are devoted to the subjects of urbanism, culture, and psychology respectively. All three chapters are striking in their content, clearly displaying the Situationists intense preoccupation with the questions of modern art and the urban environment. The final chapter is most distinctive with its utilization of the concepts of Joseph Gabel, a Marxist clinical psychologist who was highly influenced by the "Lukács Question" and attempted to extend Lukács' theories of consciousness and apply them to the study of mental pathology.

*The Society of the Spectacle* has now passed into one of the most peculiar categories of literature: it has become an obscure classic. Its status has always been a peculiar product of its history and has largely remained outside of academic canonisation, although it is increasingly being moved within the ambit of mainstream and established publishers. Historically not only has its theme telescoped with time but equally its political pertinence will always be recalled against the backdrop of the events of May 1968.

In 1988 Debord was to extend the work with his only other major theoretical text: *Comments on the Society of the Spectacle*. Yet again Debord was to demonstrate his particular talent, or even art, of sketching the broad features of an epoch through his skillful though sweeping brushwork. The style remains the same though tone has changed. Gone is the totalizing Lukácsianism that characterised his earlier work, on the conjunction of theory and history, in which not only did thought seek its realisation in practice but equally practice found theory. The gravity of its message is as ever only subdued by the elegance of the style. Debord thereby recounts the fundamental movements of the times. His countenance is now more that of a classical historian recording for posterity the notable events unfolding within his epoch: "... thus ended the second year of the war of which Thucydides has written the history." Not only has the spectacle recovered from the assault which shook its foundations in the late sixties, now it has advanced, and through chemical combination of its two complementary forms, diffused and concentrated, merged to form a strengthened *integrated* spectacular. Though the message is grave, it is not fatalistic – though the impervious advance of modern capitalism has transformed the world so completely that for the bulk of society the only conventions one is familiar with is its own. It has raised a generation which conforms to its laws. This is not meant in the narrow ideological sense but rather the seductive and mutating phantasmogoria of the media landscape. Alongside these developments is of course the decades of political reaction which had dominated world politics and which serves as a barometer to spectacular society. Whether its health is now immutable however still remains in the realm of uncertainty. With these two theoretical works Debord has surely immortalised himself. To recall the words of Engels once more, this time at the burial of his recently deceased friend and colleague: "His name will live on through the centuries, and so will his work." The question as to who will be able to advance this inheritance is as yet still to be resolved, though in concluding it will be advised to recall the message of a man who was to influence Debord so deeply:

This account of the genesis and the aim of these essays is offered less as an apology than as a stimulus – and this is the true aim of the work – to make the problem of dialectical method the focus of a discussion as an urgent living problem. If these essays provide the beginning or even just the occasion for a genuinely

profitable discussion of dialectical method, if they succeed in making dialectics generally known again, then they will have fulfilled their function perfectly.

Georg Lukács, *History and Class Consciousness*



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Gandhian non-violence, human rights, the search for disarmament and peace, nuclear reactors and nuclear waste disposal, the maintenance of the ecological balance and environmental problems, pesticides poison in food production, rain forest destruction and preservation, good and bad aspects of capitalism, socialism, and communism, discussion of political ideologies, social economics, hope and despair in the market economy in Eastern Europe, European integration, development of innovative international socioeconomic systems, avoidance of both class and structural violence, eliminating poverty through grass root movements' cooperation, survival and development of poor nations, exploitation of third world natural resources, improvement of North-South relations, foreign aid, famine, hunger and food production, economic sanctions, suppression and violence in labour unions especially working class in capitalistic systems, the evils of the dowry system, child labor, racism, nationalism and ethnicity, education, advance technology and unemployment, religious fundamentalism, civil wars and superpower involvement in regional conflicts, dominance of regional superpowers such as India in South Asia, Egypt in Middle East, Sweden in Scandinavia and Germany in Europe, future conflicts in Africa, Latin America and Middle East, emancipation of women, protection of endangered species, Aids Disease, ethnography of disasters, the impact of environmental destruction of floods and draughts, social forestry and tribal welfare, discrimination and destruction of indigenous culture, population threat and encroachment of arable land and wild forest.

## **The REALIDAD<sup>1</sup> in Europe: an account of the first European meeting against neoliberalism and for humanity, Berlin 30th May – 2nd June 1996.**

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Massimo De Angelis

We Begin but we follow on  
We follow on and yet we begin  
We will meet again

Subcomandante Marcos

After the aseptic dinner offered by British Airways, Liora tells me her reason for going to Berlin. She tells me she wants to find her roots, she is meeting there with her father, cousins and other relatives. They will all go visit where her grandfather used to live, and then they will go to Dachau, to see where her grandfather was last seen. She is a mid 40 year old Jewish woman from Israel she is a direct descendant of the holocaust. She is angry and uneasy to land in Germany, where she has never been before. She tells me she is so angry, an anger that she carries with herself all the time, an anger that grows all the time she addresses the question, without finding an answer that would make sense: why?

What a coincidence! Liora goes to Berlin to find her roots, roots of a family tragedy shared with other millions of people. I go to find what are the elements of hope for a new life, a new human society. Liora goes to get in touch with the tragic brutality of Nazism. I go to get in touch with the tragic brutality of Neoliberalism. And then, I think, wait a minute, the Nazis got to power after the failure of Old-liberalism, when old-liberalism got stuck in the Soviet Revolution, the great depression, and the world wide circulation of struggles. Nazism was German capital's way to deal with this crisis and these struggles. This is something to keep in mind.

Yes, Marcos was right to suggest Berlin for the European site of the First conference against neoliberalism and for humanity. In Berlin East and West meet, but also North and South. In Berlin they check underground tickets with dogs. In Berlin you can stare into the eyes of the face of our repression, and also that of our consumerist contentment. But in East and West, the police, as nasty as they are, did not prevent the wall from falling. Right, the wall. It was half past one in the morning in

Alexanderplatz tube station where a fifteen year old punk-looking girl tells me there are no more trains in the direction where I want to go. It turns out we are going the same way. We walk and she tells me she was seven at the time (such a long time ago!), and her father did not like it because he was a soldier – 'no, not a high ranking one' she reassures me – and her mother too did not like it because she was a teacher and she had to go back to university. They are both unemployed now. Anne tells me she now lives with her parents who don't mind her coming home so late. Nine of them in six rooms, five brothers and sisters, and her boyfriend, not so bad, but a weird composition for a patriarchal nuclear family. She tells me she has just been released by the police who had stopped her a few hours earlier because she had been hanging around the street with some friends having fun. The police joked about her look, and beat her head with the club. She showed me the swelling, it was swollen right there, in the shaved part of her head. She also tells me that she has dropped out of school, but next year she will go back. Her hope is to continue to carry on with what she calls 'street life'. When I ask her what she means by this she shakes her shoulder and says 'I don't know'.

So this is Berlin as I have experienced it, minus the meeting, that took most of the rest of my time. The info point was at Mehringhof, in the Kreuzberg area. This was a big building (or two?), two courtyards one of which had outside tables and a pub selling nice German beer. There was a big boiler and a table selling something that must have been soy stew with potatoes. It was tasty, and a large bowl cost 4DM, and an even larger one 6DM. Not bad. The comrades in Berlin had put effort into making affordable food available, although at times I was met with a 2.5DM price tag for a small, tiny somoza. 'In solidarity' was the explanation. It was 7 o'clock on Thursday evening when I arrived, and a big welcoming banner in several languages was at the entrance. One thing about these meetings that always hit me is their colour. Entering the yard in Mehringhof was like leaving the grey tones of a black and white film and entering a colour one. Posters, graffiti, banners, peoples' T-shirts, hair, eyes, skin. (Right, skin. I must say that there were not many blacks around, the European population from Africa was definitely underrepresented). And the colour hits you in a different way as it hits you when you enter a supermarket. Apart from the Trotskyists who will abandon their disguise during the meetings in the following days, nobody really seems to want to sell you anything here. Once you arrive at the meeting point you know you are going to meet with someone who communicates on the same wavelength as you, and you will remember his or her colours. And you will read a poster and you recognise its message and remember the picture. Colours in this context are not a means to an end like in a supermarket, but they come with an end, with communication.

At the info desk they have my name. They show me a map and I realise the meeting will be spread all around Berlin (Also the accommodation will be distributed within a large area. But, I did not hear of anybody remaining without a roof). This, I think, is a bit frustrating. The nice thing about *meetings* is that you meet. And you meet especially after the meeting. It is then when you discuss, exchange

opinions, ideas, laugh, try to convince each other, joke or simply have fun. This of course is facilitated if you all meet in the same area. But anyway, the good thing is that Mehringhof was a centre that everybody passed by in the evening.

This was the structure of the meeting. On Thursday there were some organisational meetings which I missed. On Friday morning there was the general plenary which officially opened the First European Meeting Against Neoliberalism and for Humanity. Then in the afternoon and the entire following day workshops on different themes. Friday and Saturday evenings, the meeting of the delegates from each workshop; so as to inform everybody else of what was going on and decide the structure and content of the final assembly on Sunday. After the assembly, the meetings would be closed with a demonstration.

The plenary on Friday was therefore the first act, the public prelude where everybody met. Even if these sort of things are a bit boring (after all a parade of six speakers is a bit much) and don't allow much time for intervention from the floor, debates and lively arguments, this initial plenary provided the opportunity to hear a selection of different approaches to a common theme. And there were many, many, many perspectives on a common theme, many possible "vanishing lines" starting from the same point, from the same theme. The question of the identification of our enemy, neoliberalism? Or capitalism? Or either plus patriarchy? Plus racism? Or does neoliberalism, or capitalism, include these and more? Many of us of course had our own answer, but I want to press on, because the point is that despite our differences in the act of making sense of our enemy, we were meeting; we were all trying to put a name to it. With the act of describing our enemy the question was: how many ways are there to experience our enemy? We experience neoliberalism (or whatever) in the act of consumerist colonisation of our minds, or in the cuts in hospital beds, or the increase in unemployment, or privatisation and intensification of work in a Russian-Italian-German-French factory, or increased marginalisation of women, etc. etc. How many perspectives, how many sensuous ways are there to say this is it, this is what our enemy is doing to us, these are the ways our dignity is taken away from us.

Oh yes, dignity. Now, if the city of Berlin symbolises the geographical point of encounter between East and West, North and South, misery and contentment, oppression and struggle, the idea of dignity is where our experience of oppression and our drive to get rid of it and our desire to constitute a new realidad meet. This is, I think, what the Zapatistas have taught us, the point at which revolution is not eternal return (like in the movement of stars and planets), but rupture, going beyond. "En el poder pesa el dinero, en el rebelde pesa la dignidad" "Dignity still escapes the logic of the market and gets its weight and value where it really counts, - in the heart. . .". Is this petty voluntarism? Is this romanticism? I don't think so. You had to see the show in the last plenary on Sunday.

An actor on the stage of this very nice congress hall spraying all sorts of disgusting stuff on himself, dirtying himself and his clothes, his long black hair getting sticky and this disgusting show got worse when

he embraced the symbol of neoliberalism, hugged it, offered himself to it, and the symbol stared at us and him immobile, eternal, like the skeleton it was. But then, *Ya Basta*, *Ya basta* what? *Ya basta* the loss of dignity. *Ya basta* the dirt, *ya basta* being humble in front of his oppressor. A big bucket in front of him full of water and he starts to wash himself. Such a refreshing show. He washes his face, his hair. He undresses and washes his body, while someone else starts to pick up the rubbish around him, and mops the floor of the stage. And a voice says "lack of dignity is not waterproof"; "neoliberalism is not waterproof" (now this is a good line). I never thought about that. The big artificial monster, neoliberalism, versus water, the most natural of the natural elements, symbol of cleaning and freshness. It was like expressing the old radical truth in a more spiritual way, in a way much more directed to the senses rather than to the brain: profit and boundless work versus needs and aspirations. It was all so refreshing. At the end, he lights a big lump of incense, leaves the stage and starts to walk among the public, in an act of spiritual cleansing of our bodies, many people offered themselves to participate in this new improvised ritual, this game with a political meaning, like saying yes *compañeros*, lets clean all this *Sheiße*.<sup>2</sup> Until the security guard rushed in and grabbed his arms saying "Gegen die Bestimmungen der Feuerverordnung" (it is against the fire regulation) as if the people around him could not deal with a live coal on the floor, as if we were not alert, as if we needed someone invested with authority to regulate our ritual for dignity, for humanity and against neoliberalism. We, of course, did not let him have his way, and he, of course, was only doing his job.

So, finally, the question, of how can we go beyond our relation with our enemy. How to be for humanity. How? How? So, here is a selection of thoughts, which I will not attribute to any individual person, but I like to think all come out of the same collective brain, all come out of our collective senses, and if they look contradictory, well then, this is not the limitation, but the condition upon which to build our strength. Because I am the writer here, I have the power to dismantle the introductory panel, and make of it a new thing.

946 of us are here, the announcement comes right at the beginning. If each of us represent only 10 people, there are almost 10,000 of us here. And what do we want? "Not to conquer the world. Just to build another one." Of course any disenchanted materialist would immediately argue that to make one anew we have first to conquer it. Is it true? Will the eternal question of the assault on the winter palace always be with us? We will start to live only after: after midnight, after the revolution, after we have dealt with the white guard, after we have dealt with the foreign enemies, after the war, after the peace, after the competitor has been beaten, after the traitor has been shot, after the nazis have been defeated, after, after, after. And to keep us in silence, and swallow another frustrated "after", the power of an ideology above us, above everybody: "you shall restraint voicing your needs because there is no time now, because we have not power yet." No, what do we need power, I mean, that power, for? This time we start from needs and aspiration, we first start to voice them in ways everybody can

understand them, and not only those who have been educated in radical-trotskyist-anarchist-socialist-comunist-all-you-can-eat circles. Because communism is for the common people, for that guy rushing a hamburger down his throat at McDonald's; for that woman walking about with two children and four shopping bags; and so many others. So many other minorities making up the majority of us. We start now to voice needs and aspiration without the fear to be labelled "revisionist", "traitors" "social-democratic", because we are beyond all this, we are beyond these old dichotomies. We want to build another world. Period. This is the starting point. Who will negate our right to build another world? Will they send the army against us? Will they build new concentration camps? Will they shoot at us in the street? In the jungles? Of course they will. They have always done it. Now, *that* will be a question of power, of a power relation of us vis-à-vis them. But we don't want power for ourselves at the exclusion of others.

Can we get out of our ghetto and enter into an offensive dialogue with society and political parties? Some part of this collective brain said that neoliberalism is best described as capitalism without limit. But we people we do have a limits. But no form of capitalism has limit. Can we ever understand this? If we could just stop and think for a moment, what is the reason of profit making. How much money is enough? And if money is power, then it presupposes powerlessness. But in Russia, neoliberalism is a recent term, and it carries a positive meaning. Nobody understands that, in Russia, people are still living neoliberalism after the privatisation and its effect. No, every intellectual claims that we need liberalism and after that people will be fine. Ah, yes, the 'after' argument. Again, and in new form, in the Russian case. Is there a link between neoliberalism and the exploitation of women? Or their oppression? Is there hope against this in re-tuning our senses? For a different use of seeing, hearing, feeling. We must have a different use of our senses, says a feminine part of our collective brain, while the masculine one will interrogate from the floor: "what do you mean?", "I don't understand". Enough with the idea of power on other people. Let us deal with the taboo in our society. A taboo is what separates us, like sex, like money. Yes money, what is it? What do we use it for? To buy things, and this depends on our beliefs, our priorities. Why don't we communicate, why don't we ask what does it mean to belong, what does it mean to be lesbian, gay, unemployed, factory worker, student, black. The feminine use of our senses, is this it? is it identification? is this reality not as external objective but as lived experience? We have to take minorities into account. And there are many, many minorities, so many that their sum makes the majority of us. We are divided, because divide and conquer is the enemy's strategy. So we lobby, but by lobbying we accept the taboo, our status as minority. Yes, like the minority represented by the striking French workers in December. It was a great social movement, in which tendencies of self-organisation developed together with a struggle against a particular European form of neoliberalism, Maastricht. But this social movement did not have political expression. Besides, the politics of worsening living condition in France started under a left wing government. We need a different reality

to be counterposed to the existing one, the one we cannot accept. We need an autonomous government by the workers. But who are the workers? Are the workers one of the minorities? I mean, workers as we generally understand them.

A young part of the collective brain intervenes and says that this is old stuff, that we will not get the youth with us if we insist on old analyses, that we don't want to abolish capitalism, only find a new solution. So, some don't like the word abolish. It seems more and more an academic question. Are we for the abolition of capitalism or not, or for finding a solution within it? In the first half there is the disenchantment of those who think that the problem is with the system, that we must abolish it and then we will be liberated. It is the old 'after' argument. In the second half there is the idea that the priority is not confrontation but needs, real issues, here and now, that if we start from these we could convince those with power over us to give it up. I am for a healthy compromise. Let us start from real concrete sensuous needs and aspirations, start to voice them, and organise around them. No, we are not for confrontation. We don't want to ask for it. However, will they be prepared to give up their power, their factories, their resources, their land, their means of communication, their means of socialisation, their means of transport, their brain-colonising consumerist values, their advertising agencies, their arms trade, their neoliberalist Scheiße, their boundless profit motive, their undemocratic parliamentary democracy, their exclusion of grassroots power, their strategies to divide us into a wage hierarchy to better conquer us? If they do, there is no reason for confrontation. But if they don't, confrontation is no longer an academic question. So yes, let us start from needs, and be warned that even if we don't want confrontation, there is a very high chance indeed that we may get it. So it is better to be prepared for it.

The collective brain splits into 24 groups, into 24 workshops. I went to a couple of them, and this was already too much. The one I went to was on the social movement in France and class struggle in Europe. It was spread over two days, Friday and Saturday, and the aim was to discuss self organisation in Europe, how the struggle against neoliberalism was carrying on, to connect with each other, limits and strengths of our efforts, etc. Yet again, too much space was given to the panellist. I voiced it, and the second day it was better. But when, on the first day, the discussion finally started, we all witnessed the parade of various Trotskyist organisations presenting general statements about capitalism and concluding about the needs of a workers party (This, I was told by other comrades attending other groups, was a common problem for many workshops, especially on the first day). You may add that all this was translated into four languages, so the pain of the slowness of the communication added to the pedantry of the message. Oh, yes, the translations. I must say that a tremendous effort was put to allow translations to occur. There were four official languages (German, French, Spanish and English). In the plenary, translation was simultaneous, so all of us got this nice little wireless device where we could select our preferred language, but in the workshops it was more artisan. We were split into different groups around the meeting room,



and each group had a personal translator. This slowed down the meeting enormously, but it worked. It reduced however the ability for interacting. The translator may miss something, may summarise a concept that you think should not be summarised, or give a flavour that indeed is different from the one intended by the speaker. Furthermore, you cannot intervene and say "hey, what the hell are you talking about", because the translator must be told, must agree to break the procedure. In other words, the fact we have different languages in a meeting is a pain, and confines us in rules of procedures which are difficult to act upon, but it is at the same time very educational, because it teaches us patience.

Sergei from Russia comes to see me after the first day's meeting and asks what I think about all these calls for a workers party. I say that it is indecent, that we should not come out with general statements, that we should talk about real issues, real problems faced by the self-organisation in Europe, and ways to overcome it. He agrees, and tells me he is shocked to hear this stuff in Berlin, that he knows, coming from Russia, what all that meant, that we should forbid them to talk. I say the best way is to win the argument and I predict for the next day their silence. After all, they had made their statements, if we ignore them they don't have anything more to say. They are not equipped to talk about the here and now, the concrete ways to move forward. I was right. The following morning the real debate started. A comrade from the French rail workers started to describe the strength of self-organisation in France during the last autumn strikes. And we all tuned in. Intervention from Turkey, Greece, a group of unemployed in Paris, etc., things started to flow, trying to address concrete issues. But wait a minute. Where were the Italians? Anybody from COBAS? Where were the dockers from Liverpool? How many other groups around Europe could have come, could have brought their experience to this meeting; open up with us the problem of their organisations, start to discuss links amongst us? So I make the proposal that next time, because we are going to have a next time, the organisation of the continental meetings should have some national representatives in charge of the co-ordination of national participation. This NOT in order to exclude people and groups. On the contrary, so as to go around the country and invite-promote-suggest-beg groups of workers, activists, trouble makers, artists, that their presence is important, that they should come and offer it to us, so as we can all learn and build connections.

So these were the themes of my group: workers party; no workers party but self-organization; general strike in Europe for a 35 hour working week; why 35 hours?; systematic reduction in the working week; reduction of working time is good only for those who have work, those with low wages and casual labour need higher wages to have the power to refuse to work; proletarian shopping and redistribution of wealth to the marginalised in Paris; difficulty of organisation in Turkish working class communities; circulation of struggles; social wage; class composition and difficulty of organisation; trade union bureaucracies have betrayed the workers in France; trade union bureaucracies have always betrayed the working class and the point is to understand what

were the conditions that allowed this to happen; trade union bureaucracies are incapable of internationalism so this is left to self-organisation; Liverpool dockers as an example of modern anti-neoliberalism struggle on a global level; how does their struggle acquire significance for the unemployed in Paris, part-time women workers in London, students in Berlin, factory workers in Warsaw? Is it possible to build the circulation of our self-organisation on the basis of minimum concrete demands and circulation? In other words, the topics discussed and the issues raised in this workshop were at times opposite (workers party vs self-organisation) at times complementary (self organisation of the French strikers – what can we learn and how to move forward). I am sure in other workshops too there was a variety of positions often contradictory, and lots lots lots of energy had to go on questions of method, of categories used, of problems different people felt relevant, of ways to approach the monster and make sense of it. In my workshop on self-organisation in Europe, the general sense I had was that the notion of the struggling subjects was exclusively defined within the labour market and that there was not much discussion of the relation between antagonistic forms and constitutive processes of a new realidad (the 'for humanity' in the title of the meeting).

I have to tell you something that has been very very instructive for the frustration it has generated, and the limitation and strength of our experience of direct democracy. On Saturday evening we had the meeting of the delegates from the workshops. This was supposed to be the forum within which to decide the organisation of the final day, the content of the final plenary. How to close? With a declaration or not, and what to write in the final declaration? The first thing to point out is of course the question of delegates, their selection. In our group we decided quite sensibly that we were all delegates, and so whoever wanted to go to the meeting of the delegates was free to do so. Other groups apparently elected delegates without raising much opposition while in some the election of delegates among people who did not know each other had been troublesome. Some complained they did not feel represented by their delegates and therefore showed up. So, the groups of "delegates" was a mixture of people some formally elected, some just showing up, some angry because they were not selected, some because "I don't know who is going from my group", some because "we are all delegates". The meeting formally started at 8 o'clock and with the usual format allowing for translation that slowed down communication — one thing we had to learn was patience, patience, patience, in order to wait for the response — we embarked in the decision process. . . Five hours later we were still there in complete frustration as nothing had been decided yet, people getting angry in Spanish, German, French, and English, the moderator bursting into tears and saying enough.

A Mexican comrade tells me what perhaps best describes what has happened: "In Chiapas the indigenous population use direct democracy as a means of survival. Here it seems artificial." He might well have been right. The difficulty was in the very irritating obstructionism I felt came from our petty clash of egos. Although we had reminded ourselves several times that we could only decide simple

practical things, that the general assembly was sovereign for coming up with any general political statement, people kept coming up with general political statements. Back to square one. Although after an exhausting round of interventions it was clear that the overall opinion was that it did not make sense to elect delegates for the July meeting in Chiapas (after all we did not know each other). At times some popped up saying s/he believed we should elect delegates without addressing the opposite argument. Back to square one. Although, after another exhausting round of interventions, the need was expressed for a very simple, general and comprehensive declaration saying very minimalist things such as "this European meeting is closed" to propose to the assembly and formalise the closure of the meeting. Again some popped up saying it was not up to us to propose anything and the assembly was sovereign (like anybody was questioning that). Back to square one. The general impression was therefore that we were not there as persons bringing our background, experience, sensibility to help solve a problem and move forward. No, we were there as representatives of our pre-established fixed opinions of how to do things and it was very difficult to communicate operationally beyond a grand statements level.

This is something we must really start to deal with. At the end, we were all exhausted, a new moderator was found, and we were able to at least approve the agenda for the next day's plenary. At two o'clock in the morning some of us (anybody who wanted, no exclusion, but very few wanted to at that hour) went to the top floor of the Mehringhof building in the Latin American centre to finalise the organisational aspect of the following day. Who speaks first, when will the band play, and this sort of stuff. Good thing they had a kitchen with few boiled potatoes so we fried and ate. And there was plenty of fresh coffee. Still, at about four o'clock, while the others were deciding the schedule of the following day's meeting, I crashed on a mattress between two shelves full of books on Western imperialism in Latin America and was awoken three hours later by the sound of a fax machine in my ear. It was a salute from Marcos . . . if only we got this earlier we could have avoided a lot of stuff, like the question of the delegates. He says that it is up to the national groups to decide who goes and not up to us. Well, we arrived at the same conclusion.

The final cut, the plenary. The collective brain still working. This time representatives of all workshops were delivering in four minutes the results of their discussion. Any new links? Any new organisational connection across Europe? Any new subversive synapses sparked in these two days? The role of science . . . We want a colourful society . . . We need to talk about ourselves, discuss our needs without pressures from industry and big corporations . . . The meeting was a good context to build connections, to network with what is happening in the rest of the world . . . Neoliberalism and individualism, we think of ourselves as individuals at the expense of others . . . Competition . . . low wages . . . fight back . . . fight forward . . . patriarchy . . . women for a better world . . . women against the invisibility we are forced into . . . of our work . . . patriarchal structure that makes our work invisible . . . . as long as there is one oppressed woman (man, child, gay . . . ) there will

not be a new society . . . resolution for the prisoners in Mexico, 2977 political prisoners since 1995, 500 desaparecidos. . . . and many other thoughts and resolutions paraded in the last plenary. At one forty-five the news arrives that the police have surrounded the building. There is also news of some arrests and it is recommended not to leave the building alone., especially foreigners. Someone says: this is normal, every time we have a demo in Germany we have the police.

At three o'clock the planned demo. A thousands of us, but most of these people were not at the conference. The final act of the ritual, the weather turns nasty and a heavy rain replaces the three days of heat. Many of us are marching with our bags. Enough. Too wet, I run towards the subway on my way to the airport. The meeting is officially closed.

## Notes

1. Reality is translated into Spanish as La Realidad. La Realidad is translated into English as aguascaliente. Aguascaliente is that place in the jungle in Chiapas (Mexico South-East) where meetings among people from all over the world are held. People meet in the aguascaliente in order to talk about their struggles and their oppressions. They also have a lot of fun, they dance, sing, exchange jokes. La realidad is thus better translated as human reality, that is, the reality lived by men and women with needs and aspirations and a great desire to be human.

2. "Todo nosotros sabemos que 'Neoliberalismo' se dice en eleman 'Scheisse'", Letter to the European Continental Meeting Against Neoliberalism and For Humanity by Marcos.

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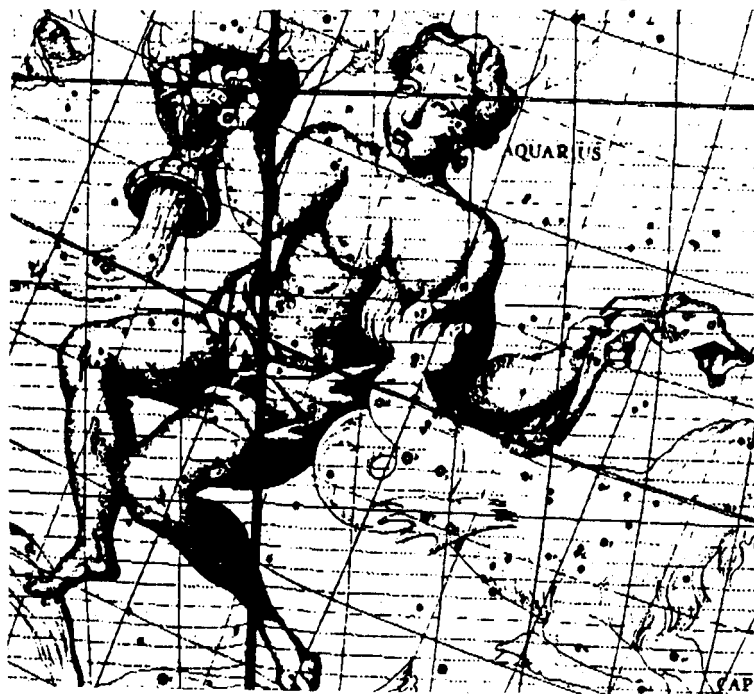
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## Two Zapatista Dialogues

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The two dialogues that follow were written for meetings organised by the zapatistas during last summer.

The first dialogue (here published as a translation from the original Spanish) was part of the Forum on the Reform of the State organised by the EZLN in San Cristobal de las Casas, Chiapas. In the Forum there were over a thousand participants from all over Mexico, including about twenty of the comandantes of the EZLN. The Forum was divided into eight workshops. We took part in the one on "For Humanity and against Neoliberalism". There were about eighty to a hundred people in the workshop, which lasted from Monday to Friday - a mixture of academics, peasants, housewives, students, oil workers, teachers. The aim of the workshop was to discuss what we understand by neoliberalism and talk about experiences of fighting against it. There were poems, stories, songs, academic papers, papers written and presented by groups who could barely read: enormous differences and a tremendous shared enthusiasm for the zapatista revolution.

The second event took place just a few weeks later, again in Chiapas, but now in the heart of the zapatista territory in the Lacandona Jungle. This was the Intercontinental Meeting for Humanity and against Neoliberalism (the first "Intergalactic"), in which about five thousand people from over forty different countries participated. After the opening ceremony in Oventic, we went to

Roberto Barrios (a journey of about ten hours by bus), to the zapatistas' Aguascalientes V (the fifth Aguascalientes or meeting place that they have constructed), where the "economic" workshop took place. In our sub-workshop there were about fifty people, meeting in a roughly constructed room surrounded by deep mud. Simultaneous translation was done by translators whispering to the

huddled groups of English, French, German, Italian and Spanish speakers. Here too there were barriers to be overcome and a tremendous feeling of excitement, of being somewhere that we had never been before, of going somewhere that we had always wanted to go. In the context we decided to do the dialogue as a bilingual dialogue, and we have left it in that form.

The dialogues, for us, are part of the "high" of the two events, of trying to break established patterns, of trying to find new ways of doing things. That is what the zapatista movement is, a recreation of revolution.

The Second Intergalactic will be held somewhere in Europe in

the second half of 1997. The struggle for humanity and against neo-liberalism, for hope and against acceptance, for life and against death, is ours.

## The Dialogue of San Cristobal

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Eloina Pelaez and John Holloway

E: We wanted to present a paper together, but we haven't been able to do it. He wanted to impose his own way of seeing things.

J: And she wouldn't let me say what I wanted to say.

E: So we ended up quarrelling. A barrier arose between us.

J: Yes, she was hemmed in by the barrier.

E: Yes, I felt hemmed in, angry.

Then we remembered yesterday, what our friend from Acapulco was saying about barriers, and how we are hemmed in in our daily lives, isolated from one another.

As between him and me, he [J: she] is hemmed in.

J/E: Both of us are hemmed in.

J: There are many barriers in this table - between academics and non-academics, between women and men, between people from the country and those from the city, between the young and the old. In all these cases, both sides are hemmed in.

E: So - what are we doing here? We're breaking barriers.

Someone was telling us yesterday about a paper in another workshop that was presented in the form of a dialogue. Perhaps, even if we can't come to an agreement, at least we can have a dialogue.

J: All right, let's have a dialogue. Who are you, then? What do you do? Are you from the city or from the countryside? Are you an academic or are you a normal person?

E: I don't know. Why do you want to put a label on me? For the moment

I'm a gardener. I'm one of the millions of people trying to develop a new relation with nature.

J: And here in the Forum, what are you doing?

E: I'm listening, listening to the people, listening to their struggles and trying to understand neoliberalism in my own way. I have great difficulty in understanding neoliberalism just as something that arose from an economic crisis.

To my way of thinking, it was also a crisis of the forms of thought, of the forms of organisation, of the idea of the masses, both on the left and the right, of the concepts of revolution that excluded the day to day struggles of the majority of people.

Neoliberalism is not an economic policy but an attempt to reorganise every aspect of human life. Neoliberalism destroys everything, but at the same time there arise new forms of resistance and struggle. They are no longer the struggles of the masses, but a new rainbow of different struggles, the struggles of women, the struggles of the gay movement, struggles to redefine the relation between people and nature, struggles for the rights of people in all the phases of their lives, as children, adolescents, old people, struggles just to survive, struggles that are often not perceived or recognised as struggles, struggles that, taken individually, are partial but that, seen all together, point towards the construction of human dignity.

And you, what do you do?

J: I am an academic. I too try to understand neoliberalism in my own way. But, to tell you the truth, as an academic and as a man, I find it difficult to listen to people. So I prefer to shut myself into my study and listen to things.

E: Are you crazy? What do you want to listen to things for?

J: No, I am not crazy. It is capitalism that is crazy. It is crazy because it converts relations between people into things. I listen to money, for example. The struggle to eat and have a reasonable life is converted into the anguish of money, it is turned into the anguish of debt and, looking at it as a whole, it is converted into the constant expansion of credit which plays a more and more important role in the reproduction of capitalism. This expansion of credit is in turn the basis of the explosive expansion of the financial markets in recent years. The struggle for a dignified life is converted through money into something that terrorises us, but also something that constitutes an enormous and unprecedented fragility at the very core of capitalism, where more than a trillion dollars are exchanged each day on the money markets. This fragility of capitalism is the core of the violence of neoliberalism.

E: So?

J: So, we are different and have different perspectives.



E: Yes, we are all different. We all have our own voice, our own song.

J: Out of neoliberalism there arises a new noise, a new discordant music of struggle. The old forms of struggle were exhausted and destroyed, but the resistance goes on. We are being born as a new subject, we who are here and those like us who fill the whole world. A new music of resistance is being born, a music of discordant sounds, an unbearable din of people playing different types of music with different instruments - you with your marimba and me with my bagpipes. Sometimes the noise is horrible, but we don't know if it is simply that our ears have not become attuned or if it is that we, the musicians, have not yet learned to play very well. But there is no one who can teach us.

E: Yes, it doesn't matter if we play different tunes. What matters is that we are playing ourselves. Listening we learn to play together. We are not going to ask either the parties or the state to play for us.

J: No, especially not the state. After a century of failures in the whole world, we have to learn that society cannot be changed through the state. It is not possible, simply because the state is integrated into a worldwide network of capitalist relations which leave it no possibility to change society.

But if not through the state, then how?

E: Then by listening. Listen to what the women from Acapulco are saying, listen to the women from Durango, listen to the women from the universities, listen to what the women was saying about the conquest of our own spaces. Listen to all the proposals that are being made in this forum. Listen, and perhaps you can incorporate them into your next academic paper.

We do not know the melody of the new world because we are creating it as we play.

[Listening we play.]

J: Playing we dance.

E: Playing we listen.

*[Forum on the Reform of the State  
San Cristobal de las Casas, 2nd July 1996].*

## El Dialogo de Aguascalientes V

*(The Dialogue of Aguascalientes V)*

---

Eloina Pelaez y John Holloway  
*(John Holloway and Eloina Pelaez)*

E: No vale la pena traducir lo que vamos a decir.

J: No, it's not worth translating what we were going to say. This is really very embarrassing. You see, we were going to present a paper together, but we couldn't agree on what to say.

E: No nos pudimos poner de acuerdo en lo que queríamos decir. El quería imponer lo suyo. Quería hablar de la crisis del neoliberalismo, de la baja tendencial de la tasa de ganancia, de la teoría del Estado, etc., etc., etc. Yo quería algo nuevo, algo que refleje que estamos aquí, donde nunca habíamos estado antes, algo que refleje que estamos construyendo un mundo nuevo.

J: She wouldn't let me talk about the self-valorisation of labour or crisis theory, she doesn't want me to have the old discussions with my equally old friends. But yet, there is a real problem about how we relate to those old debates - they can't just be dismissed.

E: Bueno, si quieres tu puedes tener tus discusiones academicas con tus amigos academicos. Yo quiero algo nuevo.

J: All right. You want something new, just because we're somewhere where we've never been before. Right then, we can try to do what we're doing - to have a dialogue. But first, tell me, who are you?

E: ¿Por que me preguntas quien soy? ¿Por que me quieres poner una etiqueta? Te lo digo en ingles para que me entiendas: Why do you want to put a label on me?

J: But I have to put a label on you. That's what academics like to do and that's what people here want to hear. Tell us. You're Mexican, aren't you? You're a gardener, aren't you? You're a woman. I know - you're a third world woman, you're one of those third world women that we European left-wing academics like so much to talk about.

E: Si, soy eso, pero soy mucho mas que todo eso. Me puedes poner todas las etiquetas que quieras y siempre te voy a decir que soy mas que eso. Soy lo que soy, pero tambien soy lo que no soy.

J: You say that any label that I put on you is wrong because you are always more than that. But what about me? Here my card says that I'm part of the Irish delegation. If I give up my identity, then the Irish delegation won't exist, and I won't be able to have meetings with myself for hours every morning.

Don't you see that when I say "I'm Irish", this is part of the struggle against neoliberalism? Neoliberalism destroys national identities and other identities too. So when I say "I'm the Irish delegation" I'm fighting against neoliberal globalisation, I'm defending our national sovereignty, I'm fighting for autonomy. After all, we Celts are the indigenous of Europe.

E: !Por favor John! (Al publico:) ?Oyeron lo que dijo en su idioma del imperialismo? Dijo que afirmar su identidad como irlandes es luchar contra la globalizacion neoliberal, es defender su soberania nacional, es luchar por la autonomia de los celtas, los indigenas europeos?

?No ves lo peligroso que es? ?No ves lo que esta pasando en todo el mundo? No ves lo que esta pasando en la ex-Yugoslavia? ?Lo que esta pasando en Italia, en Alemania? ?No has visto la destruccion sin sentido de las luchas nacionalistas en lo que que llamas "mi pais"? ?No ves que contradictoria es la afirmacion de las identidades?

J: (To the public:) She says that the affirmation of identities is always contradictory, always dangerous. But look, I didn't say I'm English, I said I'm Irish, and that's a progressive, anti-imperialist identity. I didn't say I'm Spanish, I said I'm Basque. I didn't say I'm white, I said I'm black. I didn't say I'm a man, I said I'm a woman.

E: ?Pero no ves que la afirmacion de una identidad es siempre contradictoria?

?No ves lo que ha pasado con parte del movimiento negro en Estados Unidos, con sus ataques contra los judios? ?No ves que tan reaccionaria se ha vuelto parte del movimiento feminista con su santificacion de la Mujer?

Tenemos que tener mucho, pero mucho cuidado cuando hablamos de "nosotros", cuando hablamos de "soberania nacional", cuando hablamos de "recursos nacionales", incluso cuando hablamos de "liberacion nacional". Tenemos que decir "somos lo que somos y somos lo que no somos".

J: You are right. The affirmation of an identity is always contradictory, whether it is "progressive" or "reactionary". We have to be very, very careful when we say "we", or when we talk of "national sovereignty" or "national resources", or even when we speak of "national liberation". We must see that we are what we are and what we are not.

E: Yes, of course I'm right.

E: Si, y los zapatistas lo han dicho mil veces ?verdad? Que su lucha es una

lucha que no se deja definir, una lucha que no se deja clasificar, una lucha sin limites. El peligro es que a veces no los escuchamos, que queremos clasificar su lucha como lucha indigena, o chiapaneca, o mexicana, o tercermundista. Es una lucha para afirmar y al mismo tiempo superar las identidades. Soy indigena y soy mas que eso; soy mujer y soy mas que eso; tu eres irlandes y eres mas que eso. Como dijo la mayor Ana Maria en su discurso el otro dia, "detras de nosotros estamos ustedes". La lucha zapatista es la lucha de "nosotros vivimos" contra "yo soy".

J: What Eloina said was very pretty, wasn't it? She said the struggle of the zapatistas is the struggle of "we live" against "I am", and that the zapatistas have said a thousand times that their struggle is a struggle against classification. But that implies a new way of thinking about politics. It means thinking of politics in terms of a dialogue, a dialogue that is the articulation of struggles, a dialogue that does not respect autonomies, but respects them and overcomes them at the same time.

E: Si, necesitamos un nuevo concepto de la politica, un concepto que no respeta autonomias, sino uno que respeta y supera las autonomias al mismo tiempo.

J: We are in agreement then, Eloina.

E: No, John, no podemos estar de acuerdo, queremos un mundo con diferencias.

(Aguascalientes V, Roberto Barrios, 31st July, 1996)

## **Mersey Dockers Interview**

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The following interview was taken from the internet and is republished here with a view to further promoting the on-going struggle of the Liverpool Dock Workers to regain their jobs. Details of the web-site are as follows:

From: list aut-op-sy@lists.village.virginia.edu

Date: 15 Dec 1996 17:01:23

Sender: news@xchange.apana.org.au

Reply-To: Conference "iww.news" <iww-news@igc.apc.org>

*Date of interview: 5th December 1996*

Jimmy: I'm 60 years of age, and I can get a pension and that, but all I want out of there is the scabs, that's the first thing. My father actually got killed on the docks, my brother was down, there, my grandfather and everything, so I'm one of them that won't give in. But there is lads that will give in, I've got to say that.

Steve: We've had a talk many a day down on the Alex gate and we have our Doctor Doom's among us. People get disheartened saying "Oh well we've been down these docks 14 months now and what's the outcome?" None of us knows the outcome, but we know that we've got nowhere else to go.

I mean there are certain guys saying if they upped this offer now to maybe 35, they'll snatch their hand off if it comes to a ballot. Well I say we've lost near enough that much in the 14 months we've been out of work, so we'd be paying ourselves to disappear from this dock dispute and doing the Mersey Docks and Harbour Company a favour. And the thing is, those scabs in there are going to earn that in the next 12 months, we've got to live off that severance and feed our families for the rest of our lives if we don't touch for any more work outside the dock gate. But the likes of me, Jimmy and the lads who are sitting around here now, we're resilient, we've just got to buck those up that are getting disheartened.

Brian: As it's gone on for nearly 15 months now, I'm actually getting stronger, not weaker. I decided from the off to get involved in the dispute and play a positive part, so I put myself down for delegations. And when you go round the country and see the commitment that people have for you, you owe it to them to win a victory not only for ourselves but for other trade unionists.

I want to see the scabs out of the port, I want to see the men back that want to go back, and I want to see the union back in there calling the shots, and let's have decent conditions. That's what I want.

Jimmy: If anything does happen to us and we do move away from that dock gate, every man jack working for the Dock Board is gonna get a new contract of low wages. The Port Police are gonna get sacked, and there'll be Expo or someone in their place. So we're actually fighting for those men's jobs who are working in there, besides our own, so I think they should even be proud of us, 'cos we're not proud of them.

Q: What makes you think it's possible to win?

Steve: It's just a gut feeling that they are starting to crumble a little bit inside those dock gates. I think there is a bit of turmoil going on now it's actually getting to them, and I feel that we're on the turning point and we've just got to stay where we are and "Hold the Line" and I think we'll get the result.

Brian: It's the commitment of the men that is going to make us win. They might moan and groan down on the picket line and it's only natural after 14 or 15 months, but, you hear them here at the meeting, and if there's anything that comes out, they're very supportive of what the shop stewards say so the men's commitment is still there and that's what's going to win it for us.

LabourNet: There are workers in this country who could, in theory, take action in support. What would you say to them?

Brian: I'd say to them to get on board, because as we've always said right the way throughout this strike, victory for us isn't only a victory for us, it's gonna be a victory for everybody. Because the conditions that they did actually impose upon us when we were in them gates are beginning to creep in to other industries. And since them days it's snowballed, and I think it's crucial for the trade union movement that we win this. It's gonna give everybody inspiration, and I think it will affect the course of industrial relations in the future.

We want physical support. We want people now to have the guts to come out and say "What's happened to those Liverpool dockers is wrong", and any other workers that's been sacked as well. And get on board and say "Well ok, we send containers to there. They're not going

there." Drivers to have the balls to do what the French drivers done and say "No, we're not going across a picket line." We want to get back to the days when workers supported workers, and that's the only way that workers are gonna win things.

Steve: We should be striving for a national day of action. We should start with that foot in the door, a couple of hours stop work and then maybe a national day of action in all unions, and all industries. I mean without sounding rebellious, that's what we need.

LabourNet: What's holding people back?

Jimmy: Fear.

Steve: Fear.

Brian: Economic fear.

Jimmy: They're frightened because they know there's someone there to take their job, the minute they look round the corner.

Brian: See the idea that they're frightened of losing their jobs by taking action, they're still gonna lose their jobs anyway because they're frightened to take action. All they want in the docks is 'yes men' who jump through hoops. So they've got to show that they're strong. And they should've come on board with us from the very off. If everyone in that port had supported us that strike wouldn't have lasted a couple of weeks.

Steve: I'm very confident that we'll get a result, now whether that result is total reinstatement, which is what we're striving for, I don't know. But I'm very optimistic that we will win this battle. Whatever is negotiated at the end of the day between the union and the Mersey Docks and Harbour Company, I think that it will be suitable, that most men will be happy with the result.

Jimmy: All I want is the lads who want to go back, to go back, because the likes of me, I don't want to go back. It suits me to retire. But the lads who want to go back, they've got to go back. If we split, that's it. Even the kids, they've got to go back.

Brian: The settlement of this dispute has got to involve everybody. Otherwise we've been taking this action for 15 months for nothing. So there's no way that a deal can be sorted without Torside, Nelson Freight, and all the other parts, it's got to involve everybody.

Steve: On a personal level, I've been on the docks since the day I left school and I've never been unemployed in my life until this dispute started, and we're talking 28 years. And I've enjoyed working on the docks, I've learnt a lot off a lot of fellas, I've learned to develop a lot of

friendships with the people down there, and I don't think that I should be torn away from those docks over this dispute and the way we were set up. I know there's a living for me down on them docks and I want to go back to it.

*Photo on Page 71 courtesy of  
London Dockers Support Group  
22 Lassa Road, London SE9 6PU.  
Please send donations, offers of help & support, etc.*





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DOCKERS  
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# THE INDIAN JOURNAL OF LABOUR ECONOMICS

The Journal, in print since 1958, is published quarterly as the organ of the *Indian Society of Labour Economics* which is a broad-based organisation in which all schools of analysis are welcome to participate. The chief aim of the Journal is to promote scientific studies in labour economics, trade unionism, industrial relations and related topics. Apart from peer-reviewed articles and research notes, the Journal publishes communications of seminars and conferences, documentation of important Government reports/research studies concerning labour, selected labour statistics, and book reviews.

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## The Game's A Bogey: John Maclean and class recomposition today

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Allan Armstrong

**A review article on James D. Young's *John Maclean, Clydeside Socialist* - A reply to Bob Pitt.**

James Connolly (1868-1916) and John Maclean (1879-1923) were two Scottish-born revolutionaries. To this day their names have the capacity to rouse passionate arguments, beyond the immediate circles of the self-declared revolutionary 'parties' or aspiring party leaderships. With the collapse of the Berlin Wall in 1989 and the USSR in 1991, even the names of Stalin and Trotsky have ceased to have the same capacity to arouse conflict between socialists. Lenin has been torn down from his pedestal. Invoking his name and writings as holy writ no longer has the power to overawe a new generation of militants, trying to get to grips with the new problems we face today.

The battle over the significance of Connolly and Maclean goes on. Furthermore, this isn't merely a reflection of the collapse of an 'international socialist' perspective, with Scottish militants looking 'to their own', in a desperate last ditch attempt to save something of 'socialism', in the face of the 'Collapse of Communism' and the rise of 'New Labour'. A close examination of the politics of Connolly and Maclean shows that they still have considerable significance when trying to come to terms with present day developments.

### Bob Pitt defends the 'Party', Jim Young defends Maclean

The Scottish socialist historian, James D. Young (Jim Young), has recently written a pamphlet, which shows that the name and ideas of John Maclean have had and continue to have a considerable hold on popular thought in Scotland. This recent pamphlet, *John Maclean, Clydeside Socialist*, is a short follow-up to Jim's book of the same name. However, the new pamphlet has a specific purpose outlined in its subtitle, *A reply to Bob Pitt*. Pitt is the author of another pamphlet, entitled *John Maclean and the CPGB*, published in 1995.

Pitt mounts a sustained attack on John Maclean's personal conduct and politics, in an attempt to defend the manner in which the

Communist Party of Great Britain (CPGB) was first set up. His pamphlet adopts a very narrow focus, ignoring the ebbing of the wider international revolutionary movement from late 1919. The international communism, which had emerged from and broken with pre-war social democracy, increasingly gave way to national bolshevism, as the remaining working class political power was pushed back in the infant 'Soviet' Union, before being finally crushed during the Kronstadt Rising of 1921. By his adoption of a 'British road to socialism' perspective, Pitt also fails to appreciate the distinctive pattern of political developments in Scotland and Ireland. He does, however, deal with the changing tempo of industrial struggles, particularly after 1920, when the CPGB itself belatedly adopted a strategy for trade union work.

Pitt's purpose today reflects his British Trotskyist and Labour entrlist politics. He wants to defend both the continuing relevance of a Bolshevik-type Party and an orientation on the Labour Party. His pamphlet does have the merit of publishing a considerable amount of material from earlier communist and socialist newspapers, (including the full text of John Maclean's *Open Letter to Lenin*) prison medical officers' and Special Branch reports and cabinet minutes. Pitt, however, is noticeably readier to identify the particular political leanings of the CPGB's detractors and Maclean's defenders, than he is to explain the political motives of the cast of witnesses for his attack on Maclean.

Pitt's pamphlet does warrant a detailed reply, which places the arguments surrounding the formation of the Third International and its national sections in their fuller historical context. The issue of working class organisation remains a very important one today. Pitt's Canute-like attempt to limit this debate to an uncritical defence of the Party is unlikely to hold back the waves of questioning which are now drowning this historically limited form of organisation.<sup>1</sup>

Jim, however, is not particularly interested in Pitt's Party concerns. His concern is to protect John Maclean's reputation. Therefore, his pamphlet does not make a point by point reply to Pitt's arguments. It is a pity that Jim does not acknowledge one correction, which Pitt makes to Jim's book. In this, Jim claims that "the communists (meaning the 'official' communists) did not publish a single obituary or account of Maclean's death." Pitt provides the evidence to contradict this from *Workers Weekly* (7/12/1923) and *The Worker* (8/12/1923).

The value of Jim's pamphlet is that it outlines how significant political figures, such as John Maclean, enter popular consciousness and imagination and continue to have relevance in new and changing circumstances. Therefore, the real focus of Jim's reply is his attack on Pitt's disparaging conclusion that, "by the time of his death in November 1923 Maclean had been marginalised, even in terms of local politics."<sup>2</sup> From Maclean's huge funeral procession through to his impact on popular consciousness and imagination to this day, Jim easily refutes Pitt's conclusion. If you were to take the names of any of the founders of the CPGB, or even its best-known later leader, Harry Pollitt, they haven't remotely approached Maclean (or Connolly) in their continuing influence on popular consciousness and imagination.

### Connolly, Maclean and Class Recomposition

The readers of *Common Sense* will be familiar with the concept of class decomposition and class recomposition. These terms are useful in helping us understand the manner in which workers gain growing class confidence and find new forms of organisation as a result of refining their strength as 'living labour' or the creative pole of the capital relationship. This class recomposition is a response to the decomposition imposed by the controllers of 'dead labour' breaking up earlier collectivities and consciousness.

At present we are living in a period of class decomposition, which could be termed the Capitalist Offensive. It began around 1975 as the employers' and state's response to a Working Class Offensive, dating from the early 1960's to a high point between 1968-75. Since 1975, however, a combination of anti-trade union laws, closures, resort to temporary and part time contract work, attacks on welfare benefits and increased personal indebtedness, coupled to a succession of measures to divide the class on racist and sexist lines, has largely broken or marginalised the class organisations associated with the earlier period. There has also been a marked shift in consciousness, with an apparent greater acceptance of 'market solutions'.

In response to this, our class is slowly but surely recomposing itself, finding strengths where it once saw weakness. 'Communities of resistance' have arisen in the 'Six Counties', in the inner city areas, in the mining communities during the strike of 1984-5 and in defiance of the poll tax. New organisations, independent of both the political and trade union bureaucracies, have been created. This has been shown in the Anti-Poll Tax Rebellion and the Liverpool Dockers Dispute. Furthermore, the ruling class is showing increased divisions over the best way to maintain its state, the constitutional monarchist United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland. This is a sure sign that there are greater social and political explosions ahead.

The significance of Connolly and Maclean today, is that they too were associated with a period of class recomposition, which developed in response to an earlier major capitalist offensive, which had commenced in the 1870's. Marxists were to characterise this particular capitalist offensive as 'imperialism', 'monopoly' or 'finance capitalism'. The proud craft unions associated with an earlier rapid development of factory production became increasingly conservative. In those areas of Europe experiencing the latest phase of 'agricultural revolution', or undergoing the 'industrial revolution' for the first time, there were desperate revolts by peasants or artisans. Millions in Africa, Asia and the Americas, were also involved in heroic struggles to defend communally organised societies from the traders, plantation and mining promoters, backed by ruthless imperial armies, determined to create profitable colonies.

After a period of retreat, the working class recomposed itself. The 'Socialist Revival' beginning in the late 1880's developed to such an extent, that it culminated in the International Revolutionary Wave of 1916-21. In Scotland, a new working class was created, which looked

beyond the earlier craft unions and the Liberal Party. These new workers were drawn from an increasingly wide area, including tens of thousands of displaced tenant farmers and farmworkers, from Ireland and the Highlands and Islands; and thousands of Italians, Poles, Lithuanians, Letts and Jews fleeing poverty or persecution. Neither was it just in the huge new workshops and ship yards, that new class consciousness and organisation was formed. Whole new urban environments were built, leading to new ways of living. The radical uprooting and mixing of people from many different cultural backgrounds prepared the ground for a vibrant new working class culture and politics, which demanded far-reaching changes in every aspect of life. The struggle over housing, organised largely by women, reached its highpoint in the 1915 Glasgow Rent Strike. However, these developments, particularly in the Clyde Valley were just the Scottish examples of a much wider international trend. Their counterparts could be found in and around Chicago, St. Petersburg, Berlin and Budapest, for example.

### **From Socialist Revival to International Revolutionary Wave (1880s-1916)**

It was the land struggles in Ireland and Scotland of the mid 1880's and the matchworkers' and dockers' strikes of 1889 in England which heralded a new period of class recomposition. There were to be many setbacks, but the working class came back from each of these pioneering both new forms of organisation and struggle. Both Connolly and Maclean paid close attention to the new forms of struggle that developed, particularly in the period of great industrial unrest between 1910-14.

Connolly and Maclean represented the left wing of a new socialist culture. Despite the growing influence of various revolutionary tendencies, the dominant political force to emerge throughout this period, in most European countries, was the reformist socialism, found in the various national versions of social democracy, loosely federated in the Second International. The First World War, launched with the open connivance of many of these social democrats, looked as if it might completely undermine all the gains of this long pre-war period of growing working class consciousness and organisation. Many militants, including self-declared revolutionaries, capitulated.

Connolly and Maclean, however, based their politics on addressing the needs of the most militant of the existing organised workers. They also saw the significance of conducting political work amongst the previously unorganised (and often despised) migrant and women workers. Fighting back from this base, they were able, at great personal cost, to extend the influence of revolutionary socialism. Along with the Lenin's Bolsheviks and others in the Russian Empire, Gorter, Leibknight, Luxemburg and Pannekoek in Germany and the Netherlands, this new internationalist revolutionary tendency fought against the tide and opposed the war on the grounds it was a capitalist war and that concerted class action was needed to bring it to an end.

The result of this was the International Revolutionary Wave beginning of the with the Dublin Rising of 1916. A year later, this International Revolutionary Wave was to receive a mighty impetus from the 'Russian' Revolution, whilst 1919 was to see revolutionary attempts to seize power in Bavaria, Hungary and Slovakia and major industrial and political struggles from Seattle to Glasgow and from Limerick to Amritsar. Reformists and revolutionaries, previously united in the Second International, parted company. National social democracy and international communism now openly confronted each other. For five years this international communism was able to draw millions to its banner, leading to the formation of new political parties and industrial organisations, under the umbrella of a new International.

### **From International Communism to National Bolshevism (1916-1921)**

So powerful and widespread was this surge of working class power, it couldn't be killed off by bloody suppression alone, as the 1871 Paris Commune had been. Instead, counter-revolution emerged from within the revolution itself (a phenomenon with several historical precedents). The inability of many revolutionaries to fully break with the Second International political legacy undoubtedly contributed to capital's ability to recoup itself. International communism was forced into retreat and the new Communist International which initially united nearly all self-declared communists began to fragment. National bolshevism emerged first in the 'Soviet Union', creating a new Party-state for itself. To achieve this, attempts to recreate the mir in rural Russia and the Ukraine and to hang on to independent organs of working class control were crushed. The new Party-state's drive to seek diplomatic recognition abroad, coupled to the open promotion of capitalist production relations within the USSR, split the ranks of international communism. International communists were vilified, expelled, imprisoned and later shot, as the centralised powers of the new Comintern bureaucracy were ruthlessly wielded to suppress all opposition.

Connolly played a leading role in the Dublin Rising, which Lenin marked as the beginning of the new international revolutionary offensive. However, he gave his life in the attempt to break Ireland free from the British war effort. Maclean lived throughout the International Revolutionary Wave, but died in 1923 shortly after its demise. Like Connolly, Maclean was a man of great integrity and independence of thought. He, more than any other marxist then living in the UK, tried to grapple with the significance of the rapidly changing turn of events from 1917-21.

As the International Revolutionary Wave developed, Maclean became exceedingly sceptical about the proposers of a new CPGB. During 1919, he was impatient with those who advocated forming a new communist party on the basis of activity around 'Hands Off Russia' solidarity work. Maclean, the Bolshevik consul in Glasgow, had done more than any to organise solidarity with Russia, but for him the only reason for the creation of a new communist party in Britain, was to

immediately prepare for revolution here, not merely cheer the Russian Revolution from afar. He never wavered from upholding a revolutionary strategy. He did, however, change his opinion over how this strategy should develop from a largely industrial struggle-based 'British road to socialism' to a wider political struggle-based 'Break-up of the British state and Empire road to communism'. He was aware, during 1919, that the British ruling class had regained some of their lost confidence, through a policy of coercion (the use of soldiers in Glasgow's George Square) and concessions (the Sankey Commission's hints of coal industry nationalisation).

Therefore, Maclean increasingly saw the republican challenge to the UK state in Ireland as holding greater revolutionary potential than industrial struggles. This did not mean that he had abandoned industrial struggle. Maclean never separated the political from the industrial. However, he realised that, for a short term period at least, the initiative on the industrial front had passed decidedly towards the employers. From 1920, they resorted to mass unemployment to break union organisation and roll back the post-war concessions. Maclean threw himself into the organising of the unemployed, both to prevent their use in the forthcoming attacks on the remaining well-organised sections, such as the miners, or as 'volunteers' for repression in Ireland.

During this period Maclean found himself working with other communists, such as Sylvia Pankhurst. She saw more clearly the growing dangers of national bolshevism and its fatal impact on the International Revolutionary Wave. Pankhurst's paper, *Workers Dreadnought*, gave space to the emerging communist opposition within the 'Soviet' Union. She was expelled from the CPGB. She joined the first Fourth International, founded in 1921 by German oppositional communists. When Maclean formed his Scottish Workers Republican party in 1923, it too joined. His last few years were spent attempting to uphold his communist vision, in the face of 'pink Labour' and the social democratic 'communism' of the CPGB.

### **The Relevance of John Maclean in a New Period of Working Class Offensive (Mid 1960s-1975) and Capitalist (Counter)-Offensive(1975-?)**

The fourth and sixth sections of Jim's pamphlet outline the process by which John Maclean retained and extended his place in popular consciousness and imagination, after his death in November 1923. He looks at political pamphlets, popular novels and poetry, mainly from the 1920s and '30s. However, for the purposes of this review, the seventh section is most relevant. It is here that Jim charts the progress of Maclean's legacy in the period of the Working Class Offensive from the mid '60s to 1975 and the Capitalist (counter)-Offensive from 1975.

During the early 1970's, the Clydeside once more became a centre of industrial militancy, highlighted by such events as the 1971-2 Plesseys occupation at Alexandria and the UCS work-in at Govan. This conjured up images of the 'Red Clydeside' which had emerged during the First World War. The name of John Maclean was linked, above all



others, to this earlier period of working class challenge. Furthermore, the tensions associated with maintaining the British unionist state once more came to the surface, giving Maclean (and Connolly's) distinctive 'break-up of the UK' revolutionary strategy contemporary relevance. Maclean's ideas once more found an audience. Maclean became the subject of new biographies, songs and plays.

From the world of song, the name of John Maclean had already appeared in Hamish Henderson's fine anthem, *Freedom Come All Ye*. Jim could also have mentioned *The John Maclean March* and Matt McGinn's *Dominie, Dominie*. These became part of the repertoire of the folk song revival, which had a strong connection to the working class movement of the time. Jim mentions the "play by Tom Fleming and Roddy Macmillan called *Krassiv, Krassiv: A Portrait of John Maclean... broadcast on radio*" (1973),<sup>3</sup> to which he could have added John McGrath's *The Game's a Bogey*,<sup>4</sup> which toured extensively in 1973-4, and the later *Shoulder to Shoulder* by Archie Hind. In 1973 two biographies appeared, both entitled *John Maclean*, one by John Bloom and another by Maclean's daughter, Nan Milton. In 1977, the first collection of Maclean's writings, *In the Rapids of Revolution*, also appeared, edited by Nan Milton.

The counter-offensive soon began in earnest. One example was the eminent pro-Labour historian, Kenneth O. Morgan, writing in his 1975 biography of Keir Hardie. "Hardie had been linked... with British socialism, not with the Glasgow parochialism of the Clyde or the Celtic communism of John Maclean."<sup>5</sup> In defending the British Labour Party and its very "British socialism" Morgan knew the political legacy he had to attack. However, Morgan's defence of Keir Hardie's "British socialism" against Maclean's so-called "Celtic communism", unwittingly reveals the British nationalism and racism underlying much of "British socialism".

To show this, Hardie and Maclean's politics can be compared in very similar circumstances. They both spent a considerable time in the Lanarkshire coalfields. When impoverished Lithuanian immigrants arrived there in 1887, "Keir Hardie demanded their removal on the grounds that 'their prescence is a menace to the health and morality of the place and is, besides, being used to reduce the already too low wages earned by the workmen'"<sup>6</sup> Maclean, however, came to the aid of the Lithuanian community, after a new wave of political refugees arrived in the wake of the defeat of the 1905 Revolution, and again when attempts were made to enlist them into the British army in 1917.<sup>7</sup>

The endemic racism of "British socialism" was to be a recurring feature of official Labour politics in Scotland and elsewhere in the UK. Maclean, in his break from a 'British road to socialism', was to deepen his anti-imperialist and anti-racist commitment. He had strong support in the immigrant communities on Clydeside (particularly amongst Irish and Lithuanian revolutionaries) and appreciated the work of the black American communist, Claude Mackay, who wrote in Sylvia Pankhurst's *Workers Vanguard*. Towards the end of his life, Maclean befriended Barbadian socialist, Neil Johnston.<sup>8</sup>

By the 1980's the Capitalist Offensive had risen to new levels.

Once the issue of the political future of Scotland appeared to have been dealt with in the 1979 Devolution Referendum, all attention was turned to wiping out both the recent and past memories of 'Red Clydeside'. Iain Maclean wrote a book with a title which revealed its ideological purpose, *The Legend of Red Clydeside*, (1983). This book dismissed John Maclean, preferring to emphasise the importance of his contemporaries, amongst the politicians of the Labour Party machine. This was music to the ears of those Labour politicians in the 1980s, who wanted to build a new Glasgow over the ruins of Red Clydeside. This book was an ideological forerunner to the *Glasgow's Miles Better* campaign and to the city's later bid for European City of Culture in 1990. Through these measures a Tory Scottish Office and Labour Local Authority alliance used public and private investment to create a completely new image for the city, attempting to marginalise the working class and its fighting traditions.

The widespread support for the miners' strike (1984-5) and the Caterpillar Occupation at Uddingston, just outside Glasgow, (1987) showed the resilience of these fighting traditions. Furthermore, in a gesture of international solidarity, the Caterpillar Occupation Committee set aside a Caterpillar vehicle, the 'Pink Panther', to be sent to Nicaragua. Later, the Anti-Poll Tax Campaign was to have a major impact in Glasgow, with 'no go' areas for sheriff officers pursuing warrant sales and also for Labour canvassers, during the Govan by-election. The Workers City group also challenged the 'yuppie' image the Labour controlled city council was trying to promote.<sup>9</sup>

In this context, John Maclean has continued to attract political and biographical attention in David Howell's *The Lost Left: Three Studies in Socialism and Nationalism* (1987), B.J. Ripley and J. McHugh's *John Maclean* (1989) and Jim's own book (1992). On top of this there has been a continuing stream of pamphlets - by Jim in 1988 and the new one this year; by Graham Bain (for the John Maclean Society); by Jim Cameron (Scottish Militant Labour); and Pitt's own pamphlet (1995) in direct contradiction to his claim of Maclean's political irrelevance by 1923!

### **The British Road to Socialism' or 'The Break-up of the UK Road to Communism'**

Today we are told that we have reached the "end of history" and are witnessing the 'final triumph' of the capitalist order. Yet, whilst the legacy of the 'official' communism can be ridiculed or patronised, the legacies of Maclean and Connolly still continue to make the ruling class and its apologists feel uneasy. This is because the concerns of Maclean and Connolly have not been erased from the 'class memory'. Jim's pamphlet documents this. However, Jim's hostility to the international communist tradition prevents him from seeing the wider significance of John Maclean today.

For, whatever other differences there are between Jim and Bob Pitt, they both oppose genuine communism. They equate communism with the 'official' communism of the Parties of the Third International.

Pitt fails to see that the 'communism' increasingly promoted by the leadership of the Third International was a social democratic 'communism', which drew heavily upon pre-war centrist conceptions. He strongly supports this 'official' communism, whilst showing no awareness that this amounted to a wholesale revision of the communism Marx originally envisaged in his *Critique of the Gotha Programme*. Jim, however, whilst agreeing with Pitt that the Third International and the CPGB were promoting 'communism', prefers the pre-World War One socialism, when there was greater 'ecumenicism', with reformists, centrists and revolutionaries together in the one International.

Jim clearly displays his own political leanings when he claims that after "the death of John Maclean, the Independent Labour Party in Glasgow continued to carry the torch of socialist enlightenment."<sup>10</sup> Despite the fact that John Maclean strongly opposed the politics of the Independent Labour Party during his political life, this hardly gets a mention in Jim's book. There is but one reference to the Independent Labour Party in the index and that is *passim*!

Jim is also ambivalent towards James Connolly's legacy, particularly his role during the Dublin Rising. Although Jim rightly points towards the growing significance of events in Ireland for Maclean's politics from 1919 onwards, he wants to maintain a distance between Connolly and Maclean. Turning once more to the index of Jim's book, the entry reads, "Connolly, James and Maclean, John, with whom he never met or corresponded"! Now, this is contradicted by Connolly's daughter, Nora Connolly O'Brien.<sup>11</sup> However, despite Jim's claim that "James Connolly's contacts in Glasgow and the West of Scotland were with Irish nationalists rather than with socialists in the British Socialist Party" (Maclean's party at the time),<sup>12</sup> Connolly had extensive contacts with socialists in the Socialist Labour Party and the Independent Labour Party, through his speaking tours and writing for the Glasgow socialist paper, *Forward*. It is also highly likely that Connolly met Maclean when touring Clydeside at the time of the Dublin Lock-Out. But, just as Jim wants to exorcise communism, genuine or 'official', from his socialist tradition, so he wants to quarantine the deeply rooted insurrectionary tradition of Irish revolutionary politics.

Another interesting feature of both Connolly and Maclean's marxism, was their concern for developments in the colonial world. They did not have to look far to find parallels. They found these in the last dying remnants of the old communal organisation of Gaelic society in Ireland and the Highlands and Islands of Scotland. Connolly held a vision where the future of Ireland was "a reorganisation of society on the basis of a broader and more developed form of the common property which underlay the social structure of Ancient Erin."<sup>13</sup> Maclean said that "Bolshevism, to put it roughly, is but the modern expression of the communism of the 'mir'."<sup>14</sup> Although Maclean was unaware of the Bolsheviks' role in suppressing any attempt to recreate the mir, he, along with Connolly, was obviously interested in the theories of Engels put forward in *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State*. In their practical politics they both came close to the position of Marx at the end of his life, when he too saw possibilities for communism, in

resistance to capitalist encroachment.<sup>15</sup> This obviously has relevance today, with the revival of the struggles of 'first peoples'.

Whereas Connolly engaged with and challenged contemporary Irish nationalist historians over a considerable period,<sup>16</sup> Maclean only began to take an interest in Scottish history from 1919. He was more uncritical of the nationalist historians he studied. He also tended to use the sloppy language of his day, referring to 'race' when 'nationality' would be a more appropriate term.<sup>17</sup> The later rise of fascism made socialists more aware of the necessity to distinguish between the concepts of race (physical characteristics) and nationality (cultural characteristics). Jim, however, still uses the terms "racial differences" and "Irish and Scottish Celts" somewhat uncritically.<sup>18</sup> This is also linked to his counterposing "Scottish and English politics",<sup>19</sup> rather than British and English, Irish, Scottish and Welsh politics. This is in line with the radical Scottish nationalist view which sees the the British state as a unitary 'Greater English' state.

The UK state, however, is a unionist state, which unites the English, Northern Irish, Scottish and Welsh components of a British ruling class and disunites the people of the constituent nations. The existence of each nation is constitutionally or administratively recognised, but the right of self-determination is denied. Policing workers on behalf of the UK state, the British Labour Party and TUC misrepresent and disorganise the workers of England, the 'Six Counties', Scotland and Wales. Whilst all the advocates of a 'British road to socialism' look to the unity of a British state as their bureaucratic guarantee of the unity of a 'British' working class, radical Scottish nationalists cannot see that the answer lies not in rejecting all things English, but in voluntary 'internationalism from below'.

Now that the legacy of Lenin and Trotsky, of the Bolsheviks and the Third International and of the CPGB can be widely accepted as being the subject of critical scrutiny by communists, it would be wrong to try and seek new gods to put in their place. Both Connolly and Maclean were heroic figures, but they also displayed some of the limits of their times. Their own political positions changed, but contrary to their 'orthodox' socialist detractors, neither betrayed their earlier socialist principles. Both eventually saw that a political confrontation with the British imperial state was central to any revolutionary strategy. After his experiences with the British leaders of the TUC, during the Dublin Lock-out, Connolly fully appreciated the need for independent working class action in Ireland to trigger off any wider class response and the need for a new internationalism from below. It wasn't until 1919, that Maclean began to arrive at a similar conclusion, with respect to Scotland. In abandoning a 'British road to socialism', neither Connolly nor Maclean became nationalists. Instead they became respectively, Irish and Scottish internationalists, with a much deeper internationalism than the British socialists they parted company with.

However, neither Connolly nor Maclean were all-seeing individuals who could 'objectively' develop the 'correct line'. The attribution of such characteristics to individuals had its origins in the

Second International, but was only elevated into unquestioned dogma with the degeneration of the Comintern. Neither Connolly nor Maclean, for example, were able to return to the communism of Marx outlined in his *Critique of the Gotha Programme*. They were still heavily influenced by Second International conceptions of socialism and 'communism', even though Maclean was later proud to declare himself a Communist and a Bolshevik (in the sense that earlier marxists celebrated the Communards).

As the revolutionary tide ebbed and broke up, class consciousness ebbed and broke-up too, leaving communist organisations and individuals in possession of only partial 'truths'. However, one 'truth' that they did both grasp, that has relevance today, was the realisation that a revolutionary challenge to the state would not take the form of a 'British road to socialism', but rather a 'Break-up of the UK road to communism'. Whilst, Jim Young will not agree with this particular aim, his outline of the continuing cultural and political significance of John Maclean to the most conscious sections of our class points in this political direction.

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