





The purpose of The Libertarian Communist is to encourage discussion to aid a critique of the capital system in all its forms and to promote the development of an emancipatory movement that is capable of moving beyond the concepts of value, the state and the market. If you have disagreements with an article in this or any other issue, wish to offer comment or want to contribute something else to the discussion then please get in touch with your articles, letters and comments. You can do this by contacting [libcom.bulletin@yahoo.co.uk](mailto:libcom.bulletin@yahoo.co.uk).

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## "Let the dead bury the dead!"

*For a beautiful month of May*

If you go inside you will see a corpse, and mummies embalming this corpse. We were kindly invited to this mass but we have refused to take part. However we are here - outside, as their bad conscience.

In 2008, the position of these people is false, and as far back as 1968 it was the same. Today, as yesterday, they were wrong about everything: they fantasise about a glorious past which never existed, they take on present society with the theoretical weapons of the past. Already in May 1968, their goal was to realise 1917, to redo 1936; and their recollection of May 1968 precisely is this levelling: even today they dream of Soviets, Red Square, occupied factories and Cultural Revolution in popular China. Indeed the past does not go by.

To help the past go by is to speak about the modernity of yesterday and of the fact that 'this modernity' has turned to dust. In May 1968, the most advanced group was the Situationist International (S.I.) The S.I. combated all the corpses of the Left in the name of another idea of revolution. May 68, in its most surprising aspect, and in practice, was closest to what S.I. had done in theory.

However, May 68 - as the S.I. - belongs, at the same time, to the past and the present. The strength of the revolution of May, as of the Situationists, was to attack capitalist

society as a society of work and to call into question State Communism, parties and trade unions with the help of a new definition of the proletariat. In May 68, one can say that those who defined themselves as revolutionaries were all those who had no power over their life, and who knew it. This goes beyond the traditional definition that this very one literally explodes: with such a vision, one is far away from the good Leninist, anarchist, councilist worker to whom the organisation will dish out the gospel. This is certainly beyond the old definition, but not beyond proletarian messianism. That is where the limit lies.

Whoever wants to get rid of capitalism must go further. One must rid the world and its ideals of all illusions, including the ideals of the left, including those of the most radical left - including thus those of the S.I. and May 68.

Revolutionary theory today knows that there is no revolutionary subject. The only subject is capital as an automation subject, as value, which valorises itself. And this subject - the economy that has become autonomous, what Guy Debord justly used to call "the autonomous movement of the non-living" - transforms each of us into the human resources of its infinite self-reproduction.

In 1968 as in 2008, the critique of work must be put centre stage: not as a consequence of the critique of everyday life, but as the heart

of the new theory and the new practice. And it must be done in a completely disenchanted, post messianic manner. Straight away it must position itself beyond all myths: not only beyond the convention of the sub-critique, beyond the contingencies of realist reformism, beyond the self satisfaction of the "happy unemployed" who believe themselves to be radical because they benefit from social security. But also, and above all, it must be beyond the S.I. which had based its cause on the revolutionary Subject of history.

It is easy to be done with the corpses that May 68 has already ridiculed and who today act as guarantors of the "spirit of May" (from the good democrat Left to the ex Maoists, and right up to the anarchists). It is more difficult to be done with the May 68 which lives still, although fossilised: the one that says never work ever. It is even more difficult, in fact because this old critique still shines. But let's repeat it; it shines with the light of dead stars. Never work ever: to be really done with work, one must get rid of the idea of the proletariat as revolutionary subject of history. The class struggle is an integral part of the capitalist dynamic: it is not a matter of a struggle between the dominant class and the revolutionary class, but between different interests (although differently powerful) within capitalism.

The question is not to remain faithful to 68, but to be equal to the spirit of May. The only method is to be resolutely outside the system.

Beyond conventions, beyond contingencies, beyond attachments!

This was a leaflet that was distributed outside The Conway Hall, London, 10<sup>th</sup> May 2008 to coincide with the so-called May 68 Jamboree.

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## Something to think about (1)

In a letter to Conrad Schmidt, 5<sup>th</sup> August 1890; Engels wrote, "Just as Marx used to say, commenting on the French Marxists of the late 1870s" 'All I know is that I am not a Marxist'.

The following first appeared in Platypus in 2008

## Marx After Marxism: An Interview with Moishe Postone

Benjamin Blumberg, Pam C Nogales, March 2008

Moishe Postone is Professor of History at the University of Chicago, and his seminal book Time, Labor, and Social Domination: A Reinterpretation of Marx's Critical Theory investigates Marx's categories of commodity, labor, and capital, and the saliency of Marx's critique of capital in the neoliberal context of the present. Rescuing Marx's categories from intellectual and political obsolescence, Postone brings them to bear on the global transformations of the past three decades. In the following interview, Postone stresses the importance of an analysis of the history of capital for a progressive anti-capitalist Left today.

**BB:** We would like to begin by asking some questions about your early engagement with Marxism and the impetus for your contribution to it. Very basically, how did you come upon Marx?

**MP:** I went through various stages. My first encounter was, as is the case with many people, the Communist Manifesto, which I thought was... rousing, and not really relevant. For me, in the 1960s, I thought it was a kind of a feel-good manifesto, not that it had been that in its own time, but that it no longer was really very relevant. Also, hearing the remnants of the old Left that were still around campus—Trotskyists and Stalinists arguing with one another—I thought that most of it was pretty removed from people's concerns. It had a museum quality to it. So, I considered myself, in some vague sense, critical, or Left, or then the word was 'radical,' but not particularly Marxist. I was very interested in issues of socialism, but that isn't necessarily the same as Marxism.

Then I discovered, as did many in my generation, the 1844 Manuscripts. I thought they were fantastic... At that point, however, I still bought into the notion, very wide spread then, that the young Marx really had something to say and that then, alas, he became a Victorian and that his thought became petrified. A turning point for me was



an article, "The Unknown Marx," written by Martin Nicolaus while translating the *Grundrisse* in 1967. Its hints at the richness of the *Grundrisse* blew me away.

Another turning point in this direction was a sit-in in the University of Chicago in 1969. Within the sit-in there were intense political arguments, different factions were forming. Progressive Labor (PL) was one. It called itself a Maoist organization, but it was Maoist only in the sense that Mao disagreed with Khrushchev's speech denouncing Stalin, so it was really an unreconstructed Stalinist organization. The other was a group called Revolutionary Youth Movement (RYM), which tried to take cognizance of the major historical shifts of the late 1960s, and did so by focusing on youth and on race. It eventually split; one wing became the Weathermen. At first friends of mine and myself kind of allied with RYM, against PL—but that's because PL was just very vulgar and essentially outside of historical time. But the differences I and some friends had on RYM were expressed tellingly after the sit-in. Two study groups emerged out of the sit-in, one was the RYM study group, called "Youth as a Class," and the other I ran with a friend, called "Hegel and Marx." We felt that social theory was essential to understanding the historical moment, and that RYM's emphasis on surface immediacy was disastrous. We read [Georg] Lukács, who also was an eye-opener—the extent to which he took many of the themes of some conservative critics of capitalism—the critique of bureaucratization, of formalism, of the dominant model of science—and embedded them within Marx's analysis of the commodity form. In a sense this made those conservative critics look a lot more superficial than they had looked beforehand, and deepened and broadened the notion of a Marxian critique. I found it really to be an impressive *tour de force*. In the meantime I was very unhappy with certain directions that the Left had taken.

**BB:** To begin with a basic but fundamental question, one that is very important for your work, why is the commodity form the necessary category of departure for Marx in *Capital*? In other words, why would a category that would appear to be, in certain guises, an economic category be the point of departure for a critique of social modernity capable of grasping social phenomena at an essential level?

**MP:** I think what Marx is trying to do is delineate a form of social relations that is fundamentally different from that in pre-capitalist societies. He maintains that the social relations that characterize capitalism, that drive capitalism, are historically unique, but don't appear to be social. So that, for example, although the amazing intrinsic dynamic of capitalist society is historically specific, it is seen as merely a feature of human interaction with nature. I think one of the things that Marx is trying to argue is that what drives the dynamic of capitalist society are these peculiar social forms that become reified.

**BB:** In your work you emphasize Marx's differentiation between labor as a socially mediating activity, i.e., in its abstract dimension, on the one hand, and on the other, as a way of producing specific and concrete use-values, i.e., participating in the production of particular goods. In your opinion, why is this, for Marx, an important distinction from pre-modern forms of social organization and how does it figure in his theory of Modern capitalist society?

**MP:** Well, this is one place where I differ from most people that write about Marx. I don't think that abstract labor is simply an abstraction from labor, i.e., it's not labor in general, its labor acting as a socially mediating activity. I think that is at the heart of Marx's analysis: Labor is doing something in capitalism that it doesn't do in other societies. So, it's both, in Marx's terms, concrete labor, which is to say, a specific activity that transforms material in a determinate way for a very particular object, as well as abstract labor that is, a means of acquiring the goods of others. In this regard, it is doing something that labor doesn't do in any other societies. Out of this very abstract insight, Marx develops the whole dynamic of capitalism. It seems to me that the central issue for Marx is not only that labor is being exploited—labor is exploited in all societies, other than maybe those of hunter-gatherers—but, rather, that the exploitation of labor is effected by structures that labor itself constitutes.

So, for example, if you get rid of aristocrats in a peasant-based society, it's conceivable that the peasants could own their own plots of land and live off of them. However, if you get rid of the capitalists, you are not getting

rid of capital. Social domination will continue to exist in that society until the structures that constitute capital are gotten rid of.

**PN:** How can we account for Marx's statement that the proletariat is a revolutionary force without falling into a vulgar apprehension of its revolutionary character?

**MP:** It seems to me that the proletariat is a revolutionary force in several respects. First of all, the interaction of capital and proletariat is essential for the dynamic of the system. The proletariat is not outside of the system, the proletariat is integral to the system. The class opposition between capitalist and proletariat is not intended by Marx as a sociological picture of society, rather, it isolates that which is central to the dynamism of capitalism, which I think is at the heart of Marx's concerns.

Second, through its actions, the proletariat—and not because it wants to—contributes to the temporal and spatial spread of capital. That is to say, the proletariat is one of the driving forces behind globalization. Nevertheless, one of the differences, for Marx, between the proletariat and other oppressed groups, is that if the proletariat becomes radically dissatisfied with its condition of life, it opens up the possibility of general human emancipation. So it seems to me that one can't take the theory of the proletariat and just abstract it from the theory of capital, they are very much tied to one another.

**BB:** I would like to turn to the seminal thinker Georg Lukács, in particular his essay "Reification and the Consciousness of the Proletariat," first let me ask a general question, what do you take to be the most important insight of this essay?

**MP:** Well, Lukács takes the commodity form and he shows that it is not simply an economic category but that it is the category that can best explain phenomena like those that Weber tried to grapple with through his notion of rationalization, i.e., the increasing bureaucratization and rationalization of all spheres of life. Lukács takes that notion and provides a historical explanation of the nature of that process by grounding it in the commodity. That opened up a whole universe for me.

Lukács also brilliantly shows that the forms that Marx works out in *Capital* are simultaneously forms of consciousness as well as forms of social being. In this way Lukács does away with the whole Marxist base-super structure way of thinking about reality and thought. To use slightly different language, a category like commodity is both a social and a cultural category, so that the categories are subjective and objective categories at the same time.

**BB:** Could you explain your critique of Lukács's identification of the proletariat as the socio-historical subject?

**MP:** Lukács posits the proletariat as the Subject of history, and I think this is a mistake. A lot of people confuse subject and agency. When using the term "Subject," Lukács is thinking of Hegel's notion of the identical subject-object that, in a sense, generates the dynamic of history. Lukács takes the idea of the *Geist* and essentially says that Hegel was right, except that he presented his insight in an idealist fashion. The Subject does exist; however, it's the proletariat. The proletariat becomes, in this sense, the representative of humanity as a whole. I found it very telling, however, that in *Capital* when Marx does use Hegel's language referring to the *Geist* he doesn't refer to the proletariat, he refers to the category of capital. This made a lot of sense to me, because the existence of an ongoing historical dynamic signifies that people aren't real agents. If people were real agents, there wouldn't be a dynamic. That you can plot an ongoing temporal pattern means that there are constraints on agency. It seems to me that by calling capital the Subject, Marx argues for the conditions of possibility that humans can become the subjects of their own history, but that's with a small "s." Then there wouldn't be this ongoing dynamic, necessarily. Rather, change and development would be more the result, presumably, of political decision making. So right now humans make history, but, as it were, behind their own back, i.e., they make history by creating structures that compel them to act in certain ways.

For Lukács, the proletariat is the Subject, which implies that it should realize itself (he is very much a Hegelian) whereas if Marx says capital is the Subject, the goal would be to do away with the Subject, to free humanity



from an ongoing dynamic that it constitutes, rather than to realize the Subject.

**PN:** It has been our experience that "reification" is commonly understood as the mechanization of human life, expressing the loss of the qualitative dimension of human experience. In other words, reification is understood solely as an expression of unfreedom in capitalist society. However, the passage below, from "Reification and the Consciousness of the Proletariat," suggests to us that, for Lukács, the reification of the driving societal principle is also the site for class consciousness, in other words, that transformations in the objective dimension of the working class can only be grasped in reified form.

The class meaning of these changes [i.e., the thoroughgoing capitalist rationalization of society as a whole] lies precisely in the fact that the bourgeoisie regularly transforms each new qualitative gain back onto the quantitative level of yet another rational calculation. Whereas for the proletariat, the 'same' development has a different class meaning: it means the abolition of the isolated individual, it means that the workers can become conscious of the social character of labor, it means that the abstract, universal form of the societal principle as it is manifested can be increasingly concretised and overcome. . . . [1] For the proletariat however, this ability to go beyond the immediate in search for the 'remoter' factors means the transformation of the objective nature of the objects of action. [2]

The passage above seems to imply that for Lukács class consciousness is not imminent to the experiential dimension of labor, i.e., that a Leftist politics is not an immediate product of concrete labor, rather, class consciousness emerges out of the dissolution of this immediacy. From this, we take Lukács to mean that reification is double-sided, in that it is both the ground for a potential overcoming of the societal principle under capital, and an expression of unfreedom. It's both.

**BB:** In other words, reification is not really a structure that has to be done away with so that outlets of freedom and action can emerge, but it's actually the site, the location, from which action is possible in capitalist modernity.

**PN:** That said, in what way does a one-sided appropriation of Lukács's category lose hold of its critical purchase?

**MP:** Well, this is a nice reading...I'm not sure it's Lukács. But that may be beside the point. If you read that longer quote, "the bourgeoisie regularly transforms each new qualitative gain back onto the quantitative level of yet another rational calculation," for Lukács that's reification. What you've done here is taken the notion of reification and you've come to something I actually would be very sympathetic to, which is the idea that capitalism is *constitutive* as well as *constraining*. It opens possibilities as well as closes them. Capitalism itself is double-sided. I'm not sure whether Lukács really has that, but that's neither here nor there.

Lukács emphasizes the abolition of the isolated individual, and this is important for me. There is a sense in Lukács that the proletariat *doing proletarian labor* could exist in a free society, and I don't think this is the case for Marx. Marx's idea of the social individual is a very different one than simply the opposition of the isolated individual and the collectivity. For Marx the social individual is a person who may be working individually, but their individual work depends on, and is an expression of, the wealth of society as a whole. These is opposed to, let's say, proletarian labor, which *increasingly*, as it becomes deskilled, becomes a *condition* of the enormous wealth of society, but is in a sense, *its opposite on the level of the work itself*. "The richer the society, the poorer the worker." Marx is trying to imagine a situation in which the wealth of the whole and the wealth of each—wealth in the sense of capacities and the ability to act on those capacities—are congruent with one another. I am not sure Lukács has that conception... I'm not sure.

**BB:** In some ways I think that the second quote does bring into the field certain issues with the projection of proletariat labor continuing... It depends on interpretation I suppose, because he says, "for the proletariat however, this ability to go beyond the immediate," which is enabled through a process of reification, "in search of the 'remoter' factors means the transformation of the objective nature of the objects of action," now, if "object" is solely taken to mean the material product of concrete labor, it would

be against Lukács's sense of the commodity, by which, as we've already established, he means both a category of subjectivity and objectivity, so the object of action is also the proletariat itself.

**MP:** Yes, but you'll notice in the last third of Lukács's essay, which is about revolutionary consciousness, there is no discussion at all of the development of capital. Everything is the subjective development of the proletariat as it comes to self-consciousness. That process is not presented as historical. What is changing in terms of capital—other than crises—is bracketed. There is dialectic of identity whereby awareness that one is an object generates the possibility of becoming a subject. For me, in a funny way, in the third part of the reification essay history comes to a standstill, and history becomes the subjective history of the Spirit, i.e., the proletariat becoming aware of itself as a Subject, not just object. But there is very little—there's *nothing*—on the conditions of possibility for the abolition of proletariat labor. None. There is no discussion of that at all. So, history freezes in the last third of the essay.

**PN:** Is it possible to struggle to overcome capitalism other than through necessary forms of misrecognition that this organization of social life generates? In other words: If consciousness in capitalist modernity is rooted in phenomenal forms that are the necessary expressions of a deep structure which they simultaneously mask, then how can mass-based Left-wing anti-capitalist politics be founded on anything other than progressive forms of misrecognition, i.e., as opposed to reactionary forms of misrecognition, ranging from populist critiques of finance capital, to chauvinist critiques of globalization, to localist or isolationist critiques of centralized political and economic power?

**MP:** That's a good question. I don't have an easy answer, so maybe I'll start by being very modest. It seems to me that the first question isn't, "what is correct consciousness?", but, rather, "what is *not* adequate?" That in itself would help any anti-capitalist movement immeasurably. To the degree to which movements are blind to the larger context of which they are a part, they necessarily are going to generate

consequences that are undesirable for them as well.

Let me give you an example from liberal politics. I was thinking of this recently. After 1968 when Hubert Humphrey, who had been Lyndon Johnson's vice-president, was basically given the throne, the progressive base of the Democratic Party—who were very much opposed to this kind of machine politics—attempted to institute a more democratic process of the selection of the candidate for the party. It was then that the primaries really came into their own—you had primaries before, but they weren't nearly as important. The problem is that in a situation like the American one, where you do not have government financing of elections, primaries simply meant that only people who have a lot of money have any chance. The consequences of this push by the progressive base of the Democratic Party were profoundly anti-democratic, in many respects machine politics were more democratic. So what you have now is a bunch of millionaires running in all the primaries, or people who spend all of their time getting money from millionaires. Now, there was nothing the matter with the idea of wanting, within the liberal framework, to have a more democratic process to choose candidates. The context was such however, that the reforms that they suggested rendered the process more susceptible to non-democratic influence. The gap between intention and consequence that results from blindness to context could be extended to many parts of the Left, of course.

**PN:** You give specific attention to the rise and fall of the Soviet Union in your work with reference to the "temporal structuring and restructuring of capitalism in the 20th century." Now, I understood "temporal structuring and restructuring" as an indication of how the political dimension mediates the temporal dynamic of capital, affecting the way that capitalism appears subsequently. In this sense, both forms of state-centrism, the Western Fordist-Keynesian synthesis and the Soviet Union, may in fact look the same because they were both, in one way or another, responding to a crisis in capital. Could you speak about the character of this political mediation?

**MP:** Yes, they were responses to a crisis. I think one of the reasons why the Soviet model appealed to many people outside of



the West, was that the Soviet Union really developed a mode of creating national capital in a context of global capital very different from today. Developing national capital meant creating a proletariat. In a sense, Stalin did in fifteen years what the British did in several centuries. There was immense suffering, and that shouldn't be ignored. That became the model for China, Vietnam, etc. (Eastern Europe is a slightly different case.) Now, the revolution, as imagined by Trotsky—because it's Trotsky who really influences Lenin in 1918—entailed the idea of permanent revolution, in that, revolution in the East would spark revolution in the West. But I think Trotsky had no illusions about the Soviet Union being socialist. This was the point of his debate with Stalin. The problem is that both were right. That is, Trotsky was right: there is no such thing as "socialism in one country." Stalin was right, on the other hand, in claiming that this was the only road that they had open to them once revolution failed in the West, between 1918–1923. Now, did it have to be done with the terror of Stalin? That's a very complicated question, but there was terror and it was enormous, and we don't do ourselves a service by neglecting that. In a sense it becomes an active will against history, as wild as claiming that "history is on our side."

This model of national development ended in the 1970s, and, of course, not just in the Soviet Union. The present moment can be defined as a post-Cold War moment, and this allows the Left to remove an albatross that had been hanging around its neck for a long time. This does not mean that the road to the future is very clear, I think it's extremely murky right now. I don't think we are anywhere near a pre-revolutionary, even a pre-pre-revolutionary situation. I think it becomes incumbent on people to think about new forms of internationalism, and to try to tie together, intrinsically, things that were collections of particular interests.

**BB:** If one accepts the notion that left-wing anti-capitalist politics necessarily has as its aim the abolition of the proletariat—that is, the negation of the structure of alienated social labor bound up with the value form of wealth—what action should one take within the contemporary neoliberal phase of capitalism?

*How could the Left reconcile opposition to the present offensive on the working class with the overarching goal of transcending proletarian labor?*

**MP:** The present moment is very bleak, because as you note in this question, and it's the \$64,000 question, it is difficult to talk about the abolition of proletarian labor at a point where the meagre achievements of the working class in the 20th century have been rolled back everywhere. I don't have a simple answer to that. Because it does seem to me that part of what is on the agenda is actually something quite traditional, which is an international movement that is also an international workers' movement, and I think we are very far away from that. Certainly, to the degree to which working classes are going to compete with one another, it will be their common ruin. We are facing a decline in the standard of living of working classes in the metropolises, there is no question about it, which is pretty bleak, on the one hand.

On the other hand, a great deal of the unemployment has been caused by technological innovations, and not simply by outsourcing. It's not as if the same number of jobs were simply moved overseas. The problems that we face with the capitalist diminution of proletariat labor on a worldwide scale go hand in hand with the increase of gigantic slum cities, e.g., São Paulo, Mexico City, Lagos. Cities of twenty million people in which eighteen million are slum dwellers, that is, people who have no chance of being sucked up into a burgeoning industrial apparatus.

**BB:** Are we in danger then of missing a moment in which Marx's critique of modernity would have a real significance for political action?

*In other words, if the global condition sinks further into barbarism, the kind expressed by slum cities, might we—if we don't seize this moment—end up in a worse situation twenty, thirty years down the line?*

**MP:** I'm sure, but I don't know what 'seizing the moment' at this moment means. I'm very modest at this point. I think that it would help if there was talk about issues that are real. Certain ways of interpreting the world such as, "the world would be a wonderful place if it weren't for George Bush, or the

United States," are going to lead us nowhere, absolutely nowhere. We have to find our way to new forms of true international solidarity, which is different than anti-Americanism. We live in a moment in which the American state and the American government have become a fetish form. It's similar to the reactionary anti-capitalists who were anti-British in the late 19th century—you don't have to be pro-British to know that this was a reification of world capital.

### References

[1]. Lukács, *History and Class Consciousness*, p 171, emphasis in original

[2]. *History*, p 175, emphasis in original

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### Working for Capital in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century: Ricardo Monde

Paul Mattick [2011:79] quite rightly observed that: "capitalism is a system not for providing 'employment' as an abstract goal but for employing people who produce profits; its goal is not the production of useful things but the increase of capital." However to recognise this obvious fact you have to delve below surface appearances. When one is constantly bombarded with so much propaganda about unemployment figures and the need to get people back into "work" it is not difficult to understand why so many are convinced that the capital system is all about employment. Of course there is the situation where governments, aiming to cut their expenditure, are pursuing a hard line policy of getting as many people as they can off the benefit system, including even those who are suffering from either physical or mental disabilities and would formally have been on some form of sickness benefit. Another fear for the capital system is that people will get out of the habit of being wage or salary slaves. However these factors do not override the point made by Mattick.

One of the main claims of the Conservative led coalition government that will play a leading role in the forthcoming election is a decline in unemployment which in the early months of 2015, according to government figures, fell to 5.8% and was at that point at its lowest since 2008. When one delves underneath the surface of this so-called economic miracle there is a picture of what

life is like for millions of people working under the dictates of capital in Britain in 2015, not that the situation here is unique in anyway.

### Rising Self Employment, the role of Job agencies and Umbrella companies and avoiding the Minimum wage

As unemployment has fallen there has been a large growth in self employment. It has been estimated that since 2010 40% of all the jobs "created" are a result of a shift to self employment. In the eyes of many the UK is seen as the self-employed capital of Western Europe. In the Channel 4 programme *Dispatches* shown earlier this year in an interview with a person employed at a job centre, who for obvious reasons wished to withhold their identity, it was claimed that there was intense pressure on job centre staff to get claimants into jobs of any kind and this included pushing them into self employment. One of the victims who had been pushed along this route was only able to earn around £250 in eight months. According to the think tank, Resolution Foundation, many people who have become, or have been forced along the self employment road in the last five years would rather work for a boss (just shows how bad it is). So it is more about having little or no choice rather than freedom of choice. As Norbert Trenkle [2006:205] commented: "Whoever wants to survive must be prepared perpetually to switch between the categories of wage labour and self employment, and to identify with neither – although of course, even this brings no guarantee".

Another point made by the *Dispatches* programme which highlighted the way that companies can get labour on the cheap was the use of Job agencies and Umbrella companies. In the case of the latter the employee has to pay not only their own National Insurance (NI) contributions but also that of the employers. One person was told by an agency, when they questioned why they could not go PAYE, that they would not get employed anywhere in the industry unless they went self employed through an umbrella company. Another told of how they had been made redundant with 1000 other colleagues from a shipyard which was shut down by the Government to buy votes. He added that virtually all the work in what remains of the shipbuilding industry is through 1 or 2 specific agencies and they all



want you to go through an Umbrella company so you pay 2 lots of NI yours and the employers, out of your own pocket.

It has been reported that some job agencies avoid paying the National Minimum wage by claiming that the workers concerned are apprentices when in reality all the training they receive is a few hours of induction training. According to a fairly recent government survey 120,000 workers employed as apprentices are paid below the Minimum wage level. Some employers, a minority admittedly, have come up with a wide range of ways to avoid paying the minimum wage and these include under-recording hours, bogus self-employment, charging for uniforms, not paying for travel between work sites during the working day, clocking workers off when there are no customers in the store or cafe, and employers vanishing to avoid minimum wage fines only to reappear under another name. A report by the TUC earlier this year estimated that at least 250,000 workers are not being paid the legal minimum wage. [TUC: *Enforcing the Minimum Wage - Keeping up the Pressure Jan 2015*]

#### **Under-employment, Zero and short hour's contracts and Low pay**

To a large extent, for those finding work under-employment replaces unemployment. According to one survey around 40% of those working part time are looking for longer hours, (of course what they need is more pay rather than the hours). Since the 2008 crisis, in particular many of those in employment have seen their overall situation deteriorate. Much of this is due to concepts such as job splitting: what was once a 40 hour week can now amount to around three of four jobs either on zero hour or short hours contracts which have become increasingly prominent in the last few years. For those trapped in this situation it is almost impossible to obtain a tenancy agreement let alone being able to get or afford a mortgage. According to a spokesperson for the GMB union around eight million people are subject to such appalling conditions. A typical example is the sort of employment contracts on offer at the chain of Next shops, where 30% of jobs are for 12 hours a week or less. A short time ago Next had 1,200 vacancies 45% of these were temporary posts and 55% were permanent and for each vacancy there was said to be 30

applicants. The wage was only £6.70 an hour for an adult, plus an average 6% bonus every month. According to the High Pay Centre, the chief executive of Next (Lord Wolfson), pocketed £4.6 million in 2013; this was 459 times as much as his employees who get just £10,000 per year. Wolfson must have felt some guilt as he waived a bonus and shared the extra £3.8 million he was due amongst the Next employees.

Whilst the situation is now changing due to the present very low rate of inflation, real wages have declined by around 10% from their pre-recession peak. Some claim that real wages in the UK have fallen continually for seven years and this trend has happened only twice previously in the last 150 years: 1) Following a deep recession in the late 19th century: 2) following the Great Depression of the 1930s. However, within that story, things have been far worse for those at the bottom end of the pay scale, whilst those at the very top have not done too badly at all. There is of course a danger in just referring to real wages in general, without looking at different sectors and levels. However it is the case that even prior to the 2008 financial crisis, the real wages of the lowest paid were not keeping pace with the earnings of those at the top. The consequence of the recent decline in real wages, for those in the bottom 20% of the earnings distribution, is that their real pay has reverted back to its 1997 level. While at the same time those in the top 10% have seen their real pay climb by around 20%. For some time now, but especially in the last few years, employers have used aggressive tactics to reduce labour costs and curb collective action. The latter is of course aided by laws which make effective collective action more or less impossible to organise. Looking further back, to the period prior to the onset of the economic problems of the 1970s/80s and the anti union legislation, 58% of workers were in trade unions and around 82% of wages were set by collective bargaining. By 2012 the percentage of workers in trade unions was a mere 26% and only 23% are covered by collective bargaining agreements. The plain truth that must be faced, is that the days of strong trade union influence are gone and they are never going to return.

So in Britain today, as is the case in many parts of the world, there are millions in employment who lack security, get no holiday

or sick pay, and whose hours are limited, as of course is their pay. There is little dignity at work; but then, dignity and work under the capital system are distant cousins that have never been on speaking terms. Behind the talk of an economic recovery, there are many families and communities where this so-called economic recovery is just an illusion and there is a developing gulf between a large section who are struggling just to get by and those who are a little more prosperous.

#### **Technology and employment**

However the problems regarding employment and wages are not all just due to either the recent recession, or even the longer term one dating back to the middle 1970s. Technological change has been having an impact for years and the most recent recession has merely brought to a head changes to the labour market that can be traced back several decades. Whilst there has been a growth in employment at both the high and low skilled ends of the job market, in between occupations such as machine operatives and administrative and secretarial positions are in decline. The much forecast decline in employment in the manufacturing sector has been happening before our eyes over the last 30 years. Whereas in the mid 1980s one employed person in five worked in the dominant industry of manufacturing, by 2014 that figure had declined to one in twelve. Technological growth has wiped out a vast amount of jobs that existed three decades ago - jobs that paid a reasonable wage. The production line which employed thousands of workers and was one of the bastions of trade union organisation and influence is almost a thing of the past as far as human labour is concerned, as workers have been replaced by robots. This has meant that factories that once employed tens, hundreds or even thousands of workers are now operated by machines and a few workers who carry out maintenance tasks.

Technological innovation is however not just confined to the factory environment but has effected employment in other areas such as offices. Offices which were once dominated by occupations such as filing and accounts clerks and typing pools have suffered job losses as computerisation means that records are stored on databases and spreadsheets, whilst typing is no longer a specialised function.

The main area of employment growth is at the top and bottom end of the skill spectrum. At the top end there has been a rapid growth of employment amongst workers such as professionals and technicians who have the necessary skills to make the most of modern technology. However there has also been a growing demand for low skilled, low paid labour which can be seen by the growth of small cafés and takeaway food outlets on most high streets in the last ten years or so. The difference is that workers at the top end have seen their real wages rise over the last two decades, whilst despite the high demand for low skilled workers, they have seen their real wages stagnate or fall. The reasons for this are simply demand and supply; there are many people chasing jobs in the bottom end of the labour market, whilst at the high skill end they are in short supply. Those in the middle skilled sector are caught in a trap, as the jobs in that bracket are shrinking and as they do not have the skill levels to move up the ladder, many end up competing for jobs at the lower skill end. This further increases the numbers chasing less skilled jobs, which obviously means that employers are under no pressure to raise wages. Therefore an upward surge in wage levels for those at the bottom end of the scale is most unlikely due to the role technology is playing in the labour market. As previously mentioned, these trends are nothing new, they have been around for the last 30 years but they have come to the forefront due to the 2008 recession. We have not yet seen the end of the impact of technological change, as it is forecast that there is a possibility that translators could come under threat from improvement in algorithms for instance, and we are not that far off from the possibility of driver-less vehicles, which would endanger the jobs of taxi and lorry drivers etc. Furthermore, on-line education resources could reduce jobs in colleges and universities. These developments may take time before they have an impact on jobs, as much depends on when employing the new technologies in place of labour becomes a cost saving. The point is that such changes are on the horizon.

#### **False Conclusions: Critique of Under-consumption Theory**

The impact of these labour market changes, resulting in declining real wages for those at the lower end of the scale have resulted in



increasing inequalities and this has led to some false conclusions. Remembering that the trends we have examined in Britain are similar in many other parts of the world, and this includes the U.S, where several economists have suggested that declining real wages are, partially at least, responsible for the current crisis within capitalism. For example Paul Krugman, Robert Reich and Thomas Piketty. The latter has fairly recently had a book published examining these trends entitled *Capital in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*, in which he argues that the capital system is threatened because a majority have seen their spending power reduced. We are dealing here with the under-consumptionist theory.

Basically under-consumption theories are based on a misunderstanding of the capital system. However in the case of the U.S., Kilman [2012] has also raised doubts about the extent of the decline in the share of wealth going to a majority of employees in the period since the 1970s. His argument is that the under-consumptionist theorists place too much emphasis on wages and salaries, and fail to take into account non wage components such as employer health and retirement benefits, which make up total employee compensation. To such employer benefits must also be added those provided by the state. When all this is taken into consideration, he argues, employee income *has fallen, but not to the extent claimed by under-consumption theorists*, and it is therefore not a major cause of the most recent economic crises [Kilman, *ibid*: p.153, see pp.151-9]. This shows the danger of examining the trends of a concept such as 'real wages', without analysing the whole picture; so the figures looked at earlier in this article should not be accepted without further investigation.

To get back to the point of the under-consumptionist theory being based on misunderstanding: Another valid point Kilman makes, is that a theory that suggests that economic crisis and recessions are caused by insufficient spending power resulting from employees not being paid enough is a strange argument when dealing with the capital system. Such an argument implies that if workers do better, then so does the economy; but reductions in money paid out in wages means more profits for the employers, and profit is the driving force of the system. [*ibid*, p.160] A further point about

this theory is that it concentrates on the market for finished commodities purchased by ordinary people, whilst playing down the role of productive consumption. That is: The demand where companies purchase investment goods from other companies, when they are intent on building new factories, offices and so on, or purchasing new equipment such as hard machinery and software. Whilst it is the case that at the end of the process the finished commodities need to be sold, there can be a situation, for a time at least, where the demand for productive commodities rises faster than that of consumer goods [*ibid*:161, see pp:160-80].

The point about the under-consumptionist theory being based on a misunderstanding of capitalism is also made by Mattick [*op.cit*, p.79] He notes that economists, and this includes left wing economists, have the idea that the objective of an economy is to plan the allocation of resources to meet the demands of consumers, and the main issue to be decided is what sort of mixture of free market and state planning will best meet this objective. So seen in this light it is about promoting public welfare. Economists view profit making as a way of getting people with sufficient amounts of money to invest in production that feeds consumption; but what is ignored in such an analysis is the fact that production within the capitalist system is all about value expansion to feed capital accumulation.

To sum up on this discussion we can do no better than quote Trenkle's argument on how many so called critiques of capitalism fail to get to the core. "*Criticism is not levelled at capital but rather at excessively high profits, unnecessary plant closures (or relocations) or, in a more ideological charged version, at greedy bankers pitting the parasitical needs of Wall Street against the "real" economy of Main Street. Those transformed into commodity subjects, workers no less than anyone else, have long since considered that it is only natural and self-evident that profits must be made, capital valorized, productivity increased, and growth insured at whatever cost. They know that their (however precarious) well-being in this society – and they can scarcely imagine any other – depends on precisely this.*" [*op.cit*, p.203].

The major point of the preceding discussion is not about the problems posed to the capitalist system, but about the problems

that system poses for humanity. The situation is (and the conditions noted in the U.K are more or less a world-wide phenomenon), that it is not only those without work, within a society that poses work for the majority as more or less compulsory, who face a critical situation. There are millions who have work, but who survive rather than being able to live anything near fulfilling lives. As we made clear at the outset, the purpose of the capital system is not to provide employment – It only provides work, a form of slavery – if certain conditions are met; i.e. the prospect that capital can be further accumulated, and the more that takes place, the more capital increases its dominance over our lives.

Today a situation exists where capital, as it must do, seeks to bite off, or slowly disconnect the hand that feeds it, as via advanced technology it seeks to replace humans with labour saving machinery [See *Marx: Grundrisse*:p700, (Pelican edition)]. However, when the concept of the work ethic should be on the wane it is as dominant as ever. There is an almost fascistic pressure, not yet 'if you do not work, neither shall you eat', but certainly, *you do not deserve to eat*. Logically, at the very least there should be a discussion about a radically reduced working week, and far earlier retirement; but in its place we are seeing many people having to work longer hours, even if this means having two or three low paid jobs, and the retirement age being increased in this mad house of a system. There was some discussion of a reduction of the working week years ago, but currently such a development is not described as utopian, it is not even on the agenda.

Providing the utilisation of labour power augments the capital accumulation process it does not matter what is being produced. It may threaten the future of the planet by increasing global heating, provide weapons of mass destruction that injure and murder humans in their tens of thousands and further add to the degradation of the planet. Obsolescence is deliberately built in so as to aid increasing consumption and product updates take place continuously to fuel the same unnecessary process whilst vast amounts of superfluous packaging is encouraged which merely adds to waste. All this we are told creates employment *but that is not the underlying aim*.

From any logical point of view, the capital system has to be labelled as a form of

collective insanity. Yet today whilst there are countless struggles, involving probably tens of thousand of people, who are campaigning and fighting against the effects of the system, what is not in sight is the development of an emancipatory movement that has moved beyond the struggle trapped within the system. What exists, as Trenkle has argued is the: "*... Systematic establishment of a fully generalized commodity society, one that has successfully invested the functional logic of capitalism with what appears to be the irrevocability of a natural law.*" [*op.cit*, p.204]

What has to be recognised is that what was seen as the force that would confront and abolish capitalism, the working class (something that today is difficult to define in a coherent manner), has long confined itself to, at the most, making changes internal to the system. Mattick [*op.cit*: pp: 97-8] traces the demise of the working class as a vehicle for fundamental change back to the events of 100 years ago. "*The illusory character of this picture was indicated by the First World War when great socialist organizations fresh from pledges of international class solidarity plunged into the war effort. This miserable debacle demonstrated that traditional workers politics had turned out to be not a harbinger of the overthrow of capitalism but an aspect of its development ...*"

Many have still to recognise this fact and hang on to the illusion of the working class as the gravediggers of capitalism. This illusion is delaying the development of an emancipatory movement which can move beyond the confines of classism. This delay, if not overcome, may end in digging the graves of humanity rather than capitalism.

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Norbert Trenkle: *Struggle Without Classes: Why There is No Resurgence of the Proletariat in the Currently Unfolding Capitalist Crisis*, 2006, **Pages 201-224 in Larsen, Nilges, Robinson and Brown Edited Marxism and the Critique of Value**, 2014 MCM Publishing

The TUC plan: *Enforcing the National Minimum Wage – Keeping up the Pressure* <https://www.tuc.org.uk/sites/default/files/ImprovingNationalMinimumWag%20Enforcement.pdf>



Andrew Kilman: *The Failure of Capitalist Production: Underlying Causes of the Great Recession, 2012, Pluto Press*

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### Something to think about (2)

\*Santaria, a sort of voodoo has made a comeback in Cuba. The harsh anti-religious sanctions of the Castroist regime have pushed people in the black magic swamp. Castro never understood Karl Marx's Theses on Feuerbach: "religion is the heart of the heartless world". You cannot impose a critique of religion, if people want to be religious. You have to change the conditions in which religions strive. This is something Fidel Castro and his ghastly regime have not delivered in the last 50 years. Soon Fidel and Raoul Castro will be no more. They will be forgotten just like their master called Lenin

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Word collected by A.F.

Interview published in *Charlie Hebdo* no 1179/ 25 February 2015. Paris. France. (Translated from the French by M. Prigent on the 8th of March 2015)

### Interview: JIHADIST AND MUSLIM ON THE COUCH.

Why are the Jihadists so allergic to the image of the Prophet? One could search for theological or political explanations. But psychoanalysis casts about a precious light. To understand the general power of images on the human, the specificities of the Muslim society and the leading astray done by the radical Islamists, we have asked two researchers. Gerard Bonnet, psychoanalyst and specialist of images, and Malek Chebel, psychoanalyst and anthropologist of religions. They are both the authors of numerous works relating to these questions. Gerard Bonnet has notably published *La Violence du voir* [The Violence of seeing] [PUF] and *Psychoanalyse d'un meurtrier* [Psychoanalysis of a murderer] [Payot]. And Malek Chebel *L'Inconscient de l'Islam* [The Subconscious of Islam] [CNRS Editions] and *Le Sujet dans l'Islam* [Seuil] [The Subject in Islam].

**Charlie Hebdo:** *The representation of the Prophet is unbearable for some. Can one make the link of the representation of the primitive scene which is the archetype of the*

*taboo scene in psychoanalysis?*

**Gerard Bonnet:** Exactly. Maternal sex is the place from where I come from and which condenses all the values which inhabit me. It is there that one rejoins the question of ideals. The common point between the primitive scene and the religious images is that they bring you back to the questions of the origins. An image can be impure, because what one represents is never up to what one has really in oneself. The fact of showing an image can bring things into disrepute. To forbid the image, is to preserve it from all blemish and to give it more power to what it symbolises.

**Malek Chebel:** It is valid for the whole of the monotheist religions; the forbidding of something sacralises this thing. What is totalitarian is the will of imposing one's own quest for purity to everyone. But concerning Islam, there are particular points. Islam arrived in the VII century, in a world where one represented divinities. The Prophet wanted to smash this link between representations and the pagan population of the polytheist period. He said to himself that by destroying all the images which filled the pantheon of that epoch was going to create a direct link between men and God. He destroyed all the idols to leave only one, the Kaaba itself, which has become the centre of the representations of Islam.

*Nevertheless, Mohammed has not himself forbidden his own representation.*

**M.C.:** Actually, he has not said anything on the image, and in the Koran also for that matter. But the Prophet died in 632, and things got worse during the VIII century. At that time, there is the war of images amongst Christians. The Byzantine bishops are leading a fierce struggle against images. They took three centuries of bitter fighting among themselves, up to the day when images were accepted following a Council. This fight between Christians had an impact on Islam. Because during that time, the Arabo-Muslim Empire expanded itself and covered the Byzantine Empire. The Muslims took in the Christian problematics and they chose to forbid images.

*In fact, all these quarrels about images have started with the Christians. But since these last ones ended up allowing them, why did the Muslims do the opposite?*

**G.B.:** It is true that the Christians did start. It was a close shave that they too would become iconoclasts by forbidding them. But if the Muslims rushed into the forbidding of images, it is also because they were already on that very side. And, it is also a manner of saying: "We, we make it a rule to do so, it is our strength, our wealth." But it shouldn't be forgotten that, from the beginning, as from the Christians, there has always been oppositions between partisans and adversaries of the religious images.

*If the fact of forbidding the image reinforces the power of religion, how can one explain that? The Catholic Inquisition allowed images, while the religious power was precisely very strong?*

**M.C.:** The Inquisition took place during several centuries after the Council which led to the acceptance of images. These had already been accepted officially by the clergy, one couldn't hark back to the past.

*How do you explain that the Shiites authorize images, contrary to the Sunnies?*

**M.C.:** The differences did not take place because of doctrinal reasons, but for questions of political power. At the death of the Prophet, fights took place for his succession. There were four caliphs. The fourth caliph was Ali, and the clan which was set up around him led to Shiism. Little by little, the Shiites structured themselves into a clergy. This is not the case with the Sunnies: since they have no clergy, everything goes back directly to God, and God having not decreed that the image is forbidden or allowed, men could not authorize it. The fact that the Shiites have a clergy, this has permitted to take human initiatives, of the kind like "I authorize or I do not authorize images". This permitted niches in which the human desire could be inscribed, including in disputes. But even the Shiites did not authorize images in an open manner, and it is only elite which has assumed this right for itself. This has also existed amongst certain Sunnies, during the XVI and XVII centuries which have represented the Prophet in miniatures, but it was reserved to a minority elite.

*In fact, all this comes back to grant a disproportionate importance to the image. People who can't bear the caricatures of the Prophet do not understand thus that the*

*image of the Prophet is not the Prophet?*

**G.B.:** They effectively think if you lay into the image of the Prophet you are laying into Mohammed himself. They have remained at an infantile stage which confuses the real and its representation. It is like the primitive who believes that if one takes a photograph of him, one takes his soul. It is an enormous regression.

*Ultimately, one can understand this taboo of religious images for believers, but why should it be imposed to everyone?*

**M.C.:** In Islam, there is no difference between the religious and the political. This comes from the fact that the Prophet never defined himself as only a prophet, or even a sovereign, but the two at the same time. He was at the same time a prophet, a husband, a political leader, a founder of a civilisation, the guarantor of the conformity of all of this, in some way a judge. All these attributes of the Prophet have made it so that grassroots Muslims do not manage to distinguish him in all his different roles. It is not like Jesus: he was holiness incarnate, but he did not get involved in the business of men, he did not go to war, and he did not create a city. In Islam, all the problems come from the fact that the Prophet got involved in the business of men, and this is what has led to the confusion between the political and the religious.

*Certain Muslims feel personally offended by the caricatures of the Prophet, and do not understand that to mock religion is not the same thing as taking on the person. How do you explain that?*

**M.C.:** This comes from the fact that there is no concept of the individual with Muslims. They perceive themselves as a unified community through a sole dogma, even if they do not love each other. In the West, the century of Enlightenment, and the emergence of the notion of the autonomous and responsible individual, has been a giant's leap. Muslims have not done that work. Each one functions as an atom of the whole: he cannot say "I think that I am right or I am wrong" nor "I think that my neighbour is right or is wrong"; he says "We think so". This is why to insult the Prophet comes back to insulting the whole of Muslims. Islam will not progress as long as it does not give the individual his full place, that is to say



the individual who offends the individual who is offended, the individual who blasphemes, the individual who wants to be an agnostic, or atheist. The day when it will recognise the fully fledged individual, creative, inventive, disobedient, Islam will have made a great progress in modernity. What prevents it is the religious who have decreed about the doctrinal, philosophical, moral, spiritual orientation of the whole of the Muslim planet: they are scared of the individual, because he represents an opposition force, which could bring about the dissolution of their obscure power.

**G.B.:** The absence of the concept of autonomous and free subject in the Muslim world has another consequence. Amongst certain teenagers this can influence the enlistment in radical Islam. What some Western teenagers subject their families to is unthinkable in a Muslim family. They can't go through their adolescent crisis in their own milieu, so they do it elsewhere, in society. Instead of fighting the ideals of their own society, they fight against the ideals of our own society. The problem, is in this struggle they are co-opted by people who tell them "you are right to fight, you mustn't be taken over by this established world", but unfortunately they fetch their ideals on the side of religion instead of going to find them on the side of the human.

*One hears often Muslims say that to caricature the Prophet, it is like insulting their mother. On the psychoanalytical level, how do you interpret this?*

**M.C.:** This refers equally to the notion of the individual. In the Arab world and in Islam, the greatest of taboos is the sexuality of the woman, and most particularly the sexuality of the mother. In the West, one has managed to free oneself a little bit by bit from this taboo with the creation of the individual. But the Muslim behaves like the child who has not reached the stage of "I": he is always in a complete fusion with his mother and, thus, with his religion. It is very tribal.

**G.B.:** The ideals are the basis of our life. Freedom, beauty, justice, all these values stem from the relation to the mother, which has allowed us to integrate them when we were small. It is the same principle with religions. At a given moment, a society condenses a certain number of ideals around one man: Jesus, Buddha, or Mohammed,

becomes the representative of everything that is the basis of existence. The problem is that if one confuses the ideals with this person, this becomes totalitarian. To avoid that, one must succeed to extricate the ideals from people who incarnate them. For example, during the French Revolution, one has forged the ideals -liberty, equality, fraternity- outside of all religion, in order to give coherence to our nation. The work that you undertake at *Charlie* is to say that one can poke fun at Mohammed because one separates the image from the person. But for people who have remained in the collage between the ideal and reality of origin, it is unbearable. You force them into a revolution for which they are not yet ready. They are still of the idea that if you take on Mohammed it is the same thing as taking on my mother, in other words to the ideals which unable me to live

*What could be needed to make acceptable the idea of the critique of religion is not the critique of the individual, that is to say to make acceptable the idea of the blasphemy and more generally, the principle of secularism in the Muslim world?*

**M.C.:** This is one of my principal fights. One should explain to Muslims that we are human beings and that we have the right of poking fun at ourselves. This implies separating religion from politics. Some have already attempted to do that. Like the theologian Ali Abderraziq in 1925 who wrote a book called *L'Islam et les fondements du pouvoir* in which he says that one must separate the space of the Prophet linked to God from the one linked to men. I particularly back him up, and also on the century of the renaissance, the XVIII and the XIX, in Turkey, Syria, and in Egypt, to say that it is totally possible to include secularism today in the Muslim project. Unfortunately, we are still in the minority, to hold such discourses.

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### Climate Change News (Bad News)

#### Fracking

New York has banned fracking because the danger to public health is simply too high, but in the UK David Cameron and his cronies in Big Oil are intent of carrying on with the fracking mania, even to the extent of drilling under our houses and leaving poisonous

chemicals in the ground. The government claim that fracking is safe for people and the environment. But their own report into fracking impacts suggests that it is full of various dangers. Meanwhile health experts have warned it could poison water supplies and pollute the air. Scratch beneath the surface, and fracking is revealed as a giant gamble cooked up by a dying industry and a government hoping for a quick fix to the energy crisis. Fracking locks us into a future of climate-changing fossil fuels and it could have other devastating effects as well.

[https://secure.avaaz.org/en/uk\\_fracking\\_51/?taPfbob](https://secure.avaaz.org/en/uk_fracking_51/?taPfbob)

#### Further information

New York bans fracking over "significant health risks" (BBC)

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/business-30525540>  
Lancashire fracking in doubt following critical report (The Independent)  
<http://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/home-news/lancashire-fracking-in-doubt-following-critical-report-9992724.html>

Cuadrilla Lancashire fracking application 'should be refused' (BBC)

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-lancashire-30913269>

D-Day set for Fylde fracking bids (Blackpool Gazette)

<http://www.blackpoolgazette.co.uk/news/business/local-business/d-day-set-for-fylde-fracking-bids-1-7008497>

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### Coral Reef on the Danger List?

It has been reported [[avaaz.org](http://www.avaaz.org)] that mining millionaires are trying to build a coal super-highway right through the heart of the most stunning jewel of our ocean - the Great Barrier Reef! It's a disaster waiting to happen — **just one coal ship spill could completely smother the home of endangered turtles and corals** found nowhere else in the planet. The United Nations is concerned to the extent that they may put the reef on the "in danger" list. In response the coal-crazy Australian government is putting enormous diplomatic pressure on them to back down

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### Toxic Plumes of Methane Growing

A short time ago, a scientist went on his biannual tour of the Russian Arctic Ocean, checking for toxic plumes of methane gas bubbling up from the ocean. He'd previously seen hundreds of these plumes, about a meter wide each, emitting gas 50 times more damaging to our climate than carbon dioxide. This time, as he came across the first plume, he couldn't believe it. It was a KILOMETER wide. A vast column of gas entering our atmosphere. He sailed on and found another a kilometre wide, and another, and another. Hundreds of them. **This could be what the experts warned us about.** As the earth warms, it creates many "tipping points" that accelerate the warming out of control. Warming thaws the Arctic sea ice, destroying the giant white 'mirror' that reflects heat back into space, which massively heats up the ocean, and melts more ice, and so on. We spin out of control. In 2014 everything was off the charts - it was the hottest year in recorded history.

#### Further information:

Ocean Life Faces Mass Extinction, Broad Study Says. (New York Times)  
[http://www.nytimes.com/2015/01/16/science/earth/study-raises-alarm-for-health-of-ocean-life.html?\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2015/01/16/science/earth/study-raises-alarm-for-health-of-ocean-life.html?_r=0)

Conservationists call for UK to create world's largest marine reserve (Guardian)  
<http://www.theguardian.com/environment/2015/feb/10/conservationists-call-for-uk-to-create-worlds-largest-marine-reserve>

U.N. moves toward ocean biodiversity treaty (AFP)  
<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2015/01/25/world/science-health-world/u-n-moves-toward-ocean-biodiversity-treaty/#.VPiOomR4q-B>

The ocean is broken (Newcastle Herald)  
<http://www.theherald.com.au/story/1848433/the-ocean-is-broken/-this/>

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### Want to protest about Global Heating then Pay for it yourself

A short time ago the **police told a group of climate change campaigners they must hire a private security firm** to run their forthcoming demonstration at a cost of thousands of pounds! By all accounts several groups were informed that they would have to pay for private firms to steward their marches. The police say that they don't have



the resources to send officers to demonstrations, and have told demonstrators to hire private companies to regulate the traffic instead, **slapping a huge price-tag on peaceful protest that many simply cannot afford.** The demand that campaign groups must pay for the security for their demonstrations will kill off many protests before they even happen. Many marches are facing cancellation because they just simply can't afford it.

[https://secure.avaaz.org/en/uk\\_protest\\_loc/?baPFobb&v=53589](https://secure.avaaz.org/en/uk_protest_loc/?baPFobb&v=53589)

#### More Information:

Climate change marchers told to hire private security firm (The Guardian)

<http://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/feb/07/climate-change-marchers-private-security-protest-police>

UK police demand protesters to hire own security firm (Press TV)

<http://www.presstv.ir/Detail/2015/02/08/396688/Right-to-protest-undermined-in-UK>

Charging protest groups 'outrageous' says MP (BBC News)

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-london-31304266>

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### **The Capital System is Polluting the Oceans**

When seasoned sailor Ivan Macfadyen returned from his last Pacific crossing he raised an ominous alarm:

*"I'm used to seeing turtles, dolphins, sharks and big flurries of feeding birds. But this time, for 3000 nautical miles there was nothing alive to be seen."*

This once vibrant expanse of sea was hauntingly quiet, and covered with trash.

#### **Experts are calling it the silent collapse.**

Overfishing, climate change, acidification, and pollution are devastating the oceans and wiping out entire species. It's not just the annihilation of millennia of wonder and beauty; it impacts our climate and all life on Earth.

**The polluters are said to be the fishing empires, and agribusiness.** Right now, fishing boats are scraping the ocean floor clean, and over 80% of sea pollution is

coming from fertilisers, pesticides, and plastics pouring off land. The reports are dire: in less than 50 years, our oceans could be completely fished-out. In 100 years, all coral reefs might be dead.

We are in a precarious moment when there are still fewer marine mammal extinctions than there are on land, and when ocean ecosystems have shrunk less than those on land.

**We have not yet passed the tipping point for our oceans,** but we will if we don't act soon and at a scale that rivals the enormity of the problem.

#### **Further Information**

Ocean Life Faces Mass Extinction, Broad Study Says. (New York Times)

[http://www.nytimes.com/2015/01/16/science/earth/study-raises-alarm-for-health-of-ocean-life.html?\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2015/01/16/science/earth/study-raises-alarm-for-health-of-ocean-life.html?_r=0)

Conservationists call for UK to create world's largest marine reserve (Guardian)

<http://www.theguardian.com/environment/2015/feb/10/conservationists-call-for-uk-to-create-worlds-largest-marine-reserve>

U.N. moves toward ocean biodiversity treaty (AFP)

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2015/01/25/world/science-health-world/u-n-moves-toward-ocean-biodiversity-treaty/#.VPIOmR4q-B>

The ocean is broken (Newcastle Herald)

<http://www.theherald.com.au/story/1848433/the-ocean-is-broken/--this/>

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### **Natural limits, sustainability and socialism**

**An edited version of a talk given at the Communist University, by Gabriel Levy, 26 August 2012.**

#### **Natural limits**

In the discussion about natural limits, socialists often feel, with good reason, that they are called upon to respond to Malthusian arguments, [1] i.e. that there are too many people, or – in more recent versions – that there are too many consumers. Judging by the socialists' collective response to the Occupy movement, for example, I am not convinced that we have really got our act

together in this respect. I hope the following might help to put this right.

*The first point* is: there are natural limits within which the economy operates, within which humanity lives, and societies have constantly come up against them in the past. In my view the clearest explanation of the natural limits as they stand at present has been given by a group of scientific researchers at the Stockholm Environment Institute.[2] They aimed to "define planetary boundaries within which we expect that humanity can operate safely", and to estimate whether, and to what extent, such boundaries are being breached. They concluded that the economy has already gone over the boundaries in three ways:

1. *Global warming*, the main cause of which is the emission of carbon dioxide into the atmosphere in the process of burning fossil fuels, which in turn results in the "greenhouse effect". The range of possibly disastrous effects is well known. As I understand the projections by many scientists, they show that the likely results of global warming include sea-level rise such that large parts of countries such as Bangladesh would be submerged. Even earlier in the process there are weather effects on the tropical zone that make agriculture difficult and in some respects impossible – after a history of imperialism that has already been about, for hundreds of years, the tropical zone being looted by the temperate zone. There is a limit.

2. *Biodiversity loss*, which is happening at an extremely rapid rate. It produces changes in the earth systems that are hard to predict, hard to understand, and very hard for agriculture to adapt to. The disappearance of species, just like the evolution of new species, happens in nature continuously. The point is about the rate of change: under the impact of industry and industrial agriculture, species are being lost at such a rate that uncontrollable consequences follow.

3. *The disruption of the nitrogen cycle*, i.e. the cycle of nitrogen through the ecological system. The amount of nitrogen in its reactive forms (i.e. forms that can be metabolised by plants and form the basis of nutrients) has doubled in the past fifty years, and it gathers in concentrations that cause a range of other environmental problems.

The argument by the researchers at Stockholm is that humanity, through the world capitalist economy, is impacting on earth systems unsustainably in those three ways. They looked at, and tried to determine where the limits are, for other aspects of the earth's natural systems, including ocean acidification; stratospheric ozone; the phosphorus cycle; and freshwater use. In these cases, they concluded that the impact is problematic but not yet unsustainable.

We can not understand the capitalist economy if we do not understand the way that it hits up against these natural limits. I think this is a modern version of scarcity, not the sort of scarcity that socialists faced in the 1920s. The type of scarcity that was faced then, which caused millions of people to die from hunger, is still present – largely as a result of capitalist social relations, and there is a great deal of research showing that agriculture, at its present level of technology, could feed a much greater number of people than there are alive now – but there is this other type of scarcity, scarcity of natural systems and natural resources on which the economy impacts.

*The second point* is that the history of the people-nature relationship is important. People have many times in history come up against natural limits to economic practices. There are known examples, starting from the time when settled agriculture began, that suggest that people, living in various types of social relations, conducted economic activity unsustainably.

There have been discussions in academia about this history, for example the one about *Collapse*, the popular book on environmental history by Jared Diamond. He argued that in all the cases of societies that in his view collapsed – and that idea of collapse is itself contested – there has been an environmental element among the causes. Diamond surveys many societies, including such well-known cases such as the Mayans, the Easter Island society, etc. There are ways in which his argument plays into the Malthusian view of population as the cause of the problem.

Those who are polemicising with Diamond have shown, quite convincingly in my view, that he has exaggerated the extent to which these different cases are related. But there is little disagreement over one fundamental



point, that there are ways in which societies come up against the natural limits. For example, that many societies have practiced agriculture in such a way that has caused deforestation, and consequent soil erosion, at a level that reacts back on to agriculture and the humans supported by it. This history needs to be studied.

*The third point* is that the clash between socialism and Malthusianism is not about whether natural limits to economic activity exist, as they clearly do, but about how the economy confronts those limits and how its unsustainable characteristics are to be measured and understood.

Take for example the recent Rio +20 conference, at which representatives of most of the nations in the world got together and reviewed the targets they had set themselves for making the economy sustainable at the Rio summit 20 years earlier. They had to conclude that they had not come near to meeting these targets.

Prior to the conference, a special issue of *Nature* was published that presented the most relevant scientific research. When it came to proposals about what action should be taken, it seems to me significant that the most substantial article was co-authored by the biologist Paul Ehrlich, who in the 1970s made a reputation as an aggressive, Malthusian advocate of population control. Ehrlich, together with two colleagues, now takes what I would describe as a modified Malthusian stance: they emphasise the importance of reducing population – albeit e.g. by providing contraception, and education, rather than compulsorily – and, while they acknowledge the “enormous inequity in wealth” that must be dealt with alongside “environmental hazard”, they retain the approach that the key to dealing with unsustainability is to reduce the number of people and to reduce their level of consumption.

To my mind, their methodology is crude and wrong, and as far as I know it has gone largely unchallenged by other scientists or economists. It passes over the importance of social relations in producing impact on the environment. The equation used to work out environmental impacts, first devised in the 1970s and still used today, is  $\text{Impact} = \text{Population} \times \text{Affluence} \times \text{Technology}$  (IPAT).

In other words, that the impact of human activity on the environment can be measured with reference to the size of the population, its level of material wealth, and the technology used to produce the goods it consumes.

Even some socialist writers accept the validity of this equation completely, although others have, at least, sketched out the beginnings of a critique of it.<sup>[3]</sup> In my view we need to go further. Points that would be included in such a critique of the neo-Malthusian approach are:

- The economy comprises a specific set of social relations, i.e. capitalism, and that is driven in the first place not by consumption but by the constant drive of capital to expand itself, and thereby to expand production.
- This economy by its nature produces vast quantities of waste.
- Types of consumption are not fixed but socially determined – and those common under capitalism would clearly have little or no place under any remotely human social relations. An extreme example is the consumption of hamburgers, the production of which is so incredibly expensive in terms of the amount of water used, and which are so damaging to the health of millions of people affected by obesity. (There are estimated to be 400 million obese people in the world, nearly half the number of undernourished people.) Another example is the extent of motor car ownership. The point I am making, as a person living in a relatively rich country, is not that millions of Chinese or Indian people who now wish to own a car should not do so. The point is that that capitalist society has throughout its recent history assumed and encouraged mass motor car production, which requires endless purchases of motor cars. *If and when we live differently*, people would not want motor cars in many cases.

The conclusion of this section is that we need a rounded approach that (1) explains the impact of the economy on the natural environment, and (2) envisages a transition to socialism that takes into account the economy's collision with the natural limits, which I regard as the big scarcity of the 21st century. Socialism can and will transcend those scarcities.

## References

[1] Thomas Malthus argued (1) that population increased geometrically while agricultural production increased only in a linear way (which turned out to be wrong: he underestimated the potential of farming technology) (2) that population growth, rather than capitalist social relations, was the cause of poverty; and (iii) that the state should not do anything to keep alive those impoverished by changes in the capitalist economy. Marx not only denounced Malthus's views on poverty, but also polemicised against him theoretically, arguing that “surplus population” had to be understood in the specific historical context, i.e. this population was surplus to the capitalist economy, not surplus in any other sense. Many twentieth-century environmentalist writers have embraced Malthusian arguments, often explicitly (e.g. Garrett Hardin, author of *The Tragedy of the Commons*), sometimes implicitly and partially.

[2] Johan Rockstrom et al., “Planetary boundaries: exploring the safe operating space for humanity”, *Ecology and Society* 14(2). Also see: Donella Meadows, Jorgen Randers and Dennis Meadows, *Limits to Growth: the 30-year Update* (Chelsea Green, 2004). Written by members of the research team who produced the initial “limits to growth” report in 1972, it is broadly neo-Malthusian in its approach, but refers to much important empirical research.

[3] Minqi Li, *The Rise of China and the Demise of the Capitalist World Economy* (Pluto Press, 2008), pp. 139-147, uses the IPAT equation. There is a critique of it in John Bellamy Foster, Brett Clark and Richard York, *The Ecological Rift: capitalism's war on the earth* (Monthly Review Press, 2010), pp. 377-399.

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## A Critique of Yanis Varoufakis, an Economist turned Minister of Finance.

*“Value enters as subject”.*

Grundrisse/ K. Marx. Page 311/Pelican Edition.

## For Marx capital is an automaton.

I read the Varoufakis article in *The Guardian* [18 Feb. 2015]. A mish mash coming from a minister of finance who claims to be a Marxist. And yet, Varoufakis is a lot more grounded in the real world than, for instance, the quasi-Hegelians that call themselves Marxists.

He has joined the government because he is worried that ultra-right-wingers could take over if it gets worse in Greece. It would be interesting to see how he justifies that position now that he's on the right-wing of a left-party with a mandate from the electorate. I'll bet he still does because he's a reformist. If Greece does not manage a deal with the EU, it will fall back unto the Russian orthodox Putinist swamp.

Varoufakis speaks of the dialectical perspective, where everything is pregnant with its opposite. Yes, he hasn't got over the Hegelian codswallop, and yet there is a kernel of truth in Hegel!

He speaks of value, but does not mention *the critique of value*. Not by name but he criticizes Marx's attempt to derive a determinant system. One expression of that is Value Form Theory. He may be a 'class enemy' but he is not an idiot: then he says:

*“Having explained why I owe whatever understanding of our social world I may possess largely to Karl Marx, I now want to explain why I remain terribly angry with him. In other words, I shall outline why I am by choice an erratic, inconsistent Marxist. Marx committed two spectacular mistakes, one of them an error of omission, the other one of commission. Even today, these mistakes still hamper the left's effectiveness, especially in Europe. Marx's first error - the error of omission was that he failed to give sufficient thought to the impact of his own theorizing on the world that he was theorizing about. (...) How come he showed no concern that his disciples, people with a better grasp of these powerful ideas than the average worker, might use to bestowed upon them, via Marx's own ideas in order to abuse other comrades, to build their own power base, to gain positions of influence?”*

Not true. Marx used his supposed theoretical superiority as a source of authority to



advance the power of the Social Democrats in the International. (The struggles in the First International against Bakunin and his supporters did not help). Politically, Marx was an authoritarian, social democrat, similar to Lenin. With one difference Marx was **never** in power like Lenin. He never ordered firing on people, just like Lenin and Trotsky did in Kronstadt in 1921 against workers and sailors who wanted more freedom and autonomy. And less bloody State rule from the Bolsheviks. Varoufakis forgets that this syndrome took shape from the moment that Lenin and Co took State power in Russia. And then "Lenin paved the way for Stalin" as Ante Ciliga wrote in his book *The Russian Enigma*.

But Varoufakis also makes a massive error of omission. He hasn't taken into account the effect that left-reformists, such as himself, have had on the propping up of the capitalist system and the suffocation of revolutionary ideas under their political bureaucracy.

Further in his article in *The Guardian* he can be positive about Lenin:

*"Even as unemployment doubled and then trebled, under Thatcher's radical neoliberal leadership interventions, I continued to harbour hope that Lenin was right: 'Things have to get worse before they get better'..."*

That was 30 years ago and he's talking his disillusionment with the idea. Then he says he is angry towards Karl Marx for his second error:

*"...the one I ascribe to commission was worse. It was his assumption that truth about capitalism could be discovered in the mathematics of his models".*

Varoufakis also commits a similar error of commission in believing that because he understands the mechanism of capitalism he can reform it to make it less oppressive for the majority. He doesn't fully appreciate the effect of the alienation he describes. The participants in capitalism, with the most power, i.e. money, don't see capitalism as the cause of the problem but the solution. This means that whilst the system is broken they may tolerate change but once it starts working again they will reassert the core values and the whole neoliberal experiment will start anew.

Marx might have drawn up mathematical models but in the end he only knew one science that is to say history which could change society. By history, he meant, the vast majority of people who have to sell their labour-power in order to survive in the capitalist world. Then Varoufakis admits that he believes in sin:

*"It is the reason I am happy to confess to the sin I am accused of by some of my critics on the left: the sin of choosing not to propose radical political programs that seek to exploit the crisis as an opportunity to overthrow European capitalism, to dismantle the awful Euro zone, and to undermine the European Union of the cartels and the bankrupt bankers".*

Varoufakis is a joker; he could not put forward a radical idea in the Tsipras government, even if he wanted to. What is at stake is getting the Greek economy bailed out. The Greek government's margins of manoeuvre are slim. A few years ago one could hear the following under the heading: **No Government in Greece:** *"Up to recently it was more costly to gather taxes, than the taxes collected".* Source: *Hellenic Chamber of Commerce in London/ Sky News, 9th November 2011.*

Paul Krugman made a good point on News night: the Greek govt. isn't asking for a relief from the current austerity regime but just for its continuation while the EU wants to increase it. The face-saving way out would be for the EU to extend the current arrangement while 'negotiations continue' and nobody really gets hurt.

As for Varoufakis he can always go back to his economics lecturer job...

It is well-known that Karl Marx did not put up with fools. There were fierce theoretical and practical battles all through his life. He would not have achieved anything by giving in to those who did not want to change society. Lenin was lucky that Marx was no longer around when he took power in Russia in 1917. The critical mind would have taken the power hungry maniac to the theoretical cleaners. Indeed today, we still have a Russian problem, it is called Putin. The article in today's *Guardian* is called: *How I became an erratic Marxist/ 18 Fe.2015.* It was originally a lecture that was given at

6th Subversive Festival in Zagreb in 2013.

A few days ago Greece was given a four months respite by the EU.

*This critique of Yanis Varoufakis is written by a friend of Junius on the 22nd of February 2015 with help from a friend in Wales.*

Additional materials.

### Exasperation

"Why has M. Schauble, profoundly European, taken the risk of moving up on the frontline against Athens? The finance minister gave one part of the question, on Thursday night, during a meeting with his Portuguese counterpart, Maria Luis Albuquerque. *"It is not the rules which are important. It is trust. It is not a problem of the troika. It is a problem of mutual trust. The one who destroys mutual trust destroys Europe"*, said the minister. Thus, Germany does not have any trust in the duo made of the Greek prime minister and of its finance minister. The alliance of Syriza with an extreme-right wing party, its demands for war damages to Berlin, and to finish the cartoons which compare M. Schauble to a Nazi: all this has exasperated the Germans. 52% of who think the behaviour of the two men to be "insulting". One part of the Conservatives and some medias such as the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* seem to wish for a Greek withdrawal from the Euro zone. Friday, the weekly *Bild* thanked M. Schauble on behalf of Germany for his firmness".

**Le Monde, 21st February 2015.**

(Berlin, Brussels, correspondents/ Frederic Lemaitre/Cecile Ducourtieux/ Translated from the French by a friend of Junius on the 22nd of February 2015).

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### Never Work – Conference at Cardiff University– Friday 10 July 2015 –

Two prominent critique of value theorists are coming to speak in Wales this July:

**"A corpse rules society – the corpse of labour." – Manifesto Against Labour, Krisis-Group**

Since the 1970s modern societies have been increasingly faced with social issues caused by a reliance on a form of life that technological development is making redundant: work. Competition drives companies to eject human beings from the labour process even while it relies on those people as consumers and producers of value. Equally, more human beings than ever before depend upon the capitalist production process for their survival, yet at this historical juncture it appears no longer to have need of them. It is this contradiction that some contemporary social critics have diagnosed as the basis of a crisis of civilisation through which we are currently living. The symptoms of this crisis are manifold and, one can argue, affect every aspect of society: privatisation, financialisation and economic crises, mass unemployment, the casualisation of labour and austerity programmes, regional conflict, the rise of political extremism, growing wealth inequality, individualisation, school shootings and the ever-growing number of people suffering from narcissistic personality disorders, to name but a few. Despite the sheer scale of problems that society currently faces, the dominant social discourse has rarely considered that a crisis of the very categories of capitalist society could be the source of the problem. Work, in particular, is central to modern notions of individual and collective identity, of morality and even of human nature. It is the means through which individuals are expected to realise themselves and to gain access to social wealth. It is perhaps for this reason that, while work is often seen as central to resolving the current crisis – either through calls for higher wages and the right to work or through attacks on immigrants and the unemployed – it is rarely seen as the problem in itself. The aim of this conference is therefore to ask what might a critique of work usefully offer us in addressing contemporary social issues and, if one will allow it, the possibility of a greater crisis of modern civilisation.

Confirmed keynote speakers will be: Anselm Jappe (author of *Guy Debord, Les Aventures de la marchandise, Cr dit   mort*) and Norbert Trenkle (author of *Die Gro e Entwurteilung, Dead Men Working*). Both of our keynotes are members of the *wertkritik*, or "critique of value", school of Marxian critique.