

CRACK CAPITALISM

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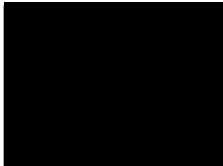
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We are the forces of production: our power is the power of doing.

We are the heat cracking the ice. We are the weeds breaking through the pavement. Could it be that this is a time of birth, and not just a time of death and destruction?

Marx presents a powerful image of revolution as the breakthrough of a new world:

The monopoly of capital becomes a fetter upon the mode of production, which has sprung up and flourished along with, and under it. Centralisation of the means of production and socialisation of labour at last reach a point where they become incompatible with their capitalist integument. This integument is burst asunder. The knell of capitalist private property sounds. The expropriators are expropriated. (1867/1965: 763; 1867/1990: 929)

Is this what is happening? Are the cracks the bursting asunder of the capitalist integument and the pushing through of a new world?

Traditional Marxism presents this breaking of the integument in terms of the clash between the forces of production and the relations of production. As Marx puts it in the Preface to the *Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*:

At a certain stage of development, the material productive forces of society come into conflict with the existing relations of production or ... with the property relations within the framework of which they have operated hitherto. From forms of development of the productive forces these relations turn into their fetters. – Then begins an era of social revolution. (1859/1971: 21)

The difficulty with the traditional interpretation of ‘productive forces’ is that it presents them as an external force (the force of

technological development) which has a dynamic independent of social relations. This runs counter to two points that have been central in the argument here (and in Marx's own argument): first, that we humans are the creative power in society, and secondly, that our creative power does not develop independently of its social context, but rather in a relation of in-against-and-beyond. The relation of content to form is neither a relation of independence (autonomous forces of production clashing against the relations of production) nor of total containment (the forces of production being completely contained in and determined by the relations of production), but always an ec-static relation, a relation of containment, antagonism and pushing beyond. Thus, doing (useful labour) exists in-against-and-beyond abstract labour; use value exists in-against-and-beyond value and the forces of production exist in-against-and-beyond the relations of production.

Another expression that Marx frequently uses points us away from the traditional interpretation, the apparent separation of the forces of production from human creative power: he speaks in *Capital* of the 'productive powers of social labour', or 'labour's social productive forces'. Here it is clear that we are speaking of the power of human creativity, the power of doing, our power-to-do, our being-able-to. In capitalism, our power-to-do separates itself from us and appears as something alien, as the power of capital, or as the power of capitalist technology:

With the development of relative surplus-value in the actual specifically capitalist mode of production, whereby the productive powers of social labour are developed, these productive powers and the social interrelations of labour in the direct labour-process seem transferred from labour to capital. Capital thus becomes a very mystic being since all of labour's social productive forces appear to be due to capital, rather than labour as such, and seem to issue from the womb of capital itself. (1894/1971: 827)

Criticism is the recovery of the social productive forces for us, the understanding of the social productive forces as our power to do. We, then, are the forces of production. Ours are the 'productive powers of social labour'. The 'productive power of social labour'

is the existence of our power to do under capitalism, our power to do in-against-and-beyond labour.

We are the forces of production, the development of our creative power in-against-and-beyond capital. The orthodox view sees this creative power as developing harmoniously within capital until a point of antagonism is reached, leading to a rupture which opens the world of creativity beyond capitalist social relations: in, against and beyond are clearly separated, both conceptually and in time. Clearly, this cannot be so: frustration is constitutive of capitalism since the beginning. Capital, since the beginning, says to people, 'your creativity is valid only within the bounds of value production: if you do not produce value, your creativity counts for nothing'. And since the beginning people have obeyed-and-rebelled. The productive (and therefore destructive) power of human doing has expanded enormously in this constant slippage between obedience and rebellion, this constant creative pushing at the limits of the system and the expansion of the limits to contain some (but not all) of the creative pushing within the bounds of capitalist production. As the productive-and-destructive power of human doing grows, so does the tug of discomfort, the ec-static pain of frustration, the feeling that the Progressive development of our creative power is taking us in the wrong direction. Certainly we do not want to reject our growing power-to-do, our growing being-able-to, for this being-able-to is also a being-able-to do things quite differently: in other words, the technological capabilities that we have developed in-against-and-beyond capital are also the real capability of a different-doing. This is not just empty possibility¹ but real push, expressed in the drive of many, many people to use their skills to push the world in a different direction, develop alternative technologies, use their computing skills in a different way, and so on. Citing the example of permaculture, Carlsson (2008: 56–8) argues that the 'realm of science and technology is a central location for the present battle between collective, human values and those of capital ... Among dissenting scientists and technologists the power to think is re-shaping itself in directions beyond the narrow confines of capital.'

We are the forces of production, and the development of our productive power, our power-to-do, is closely bound

up with its socialisation. The more we join with others, the greater our creative power. The problem, as we have seen, is that under capitalism, socialisation exists as abstraction: it is through abstraction that the social coming together of different doings is established. It is not surprising then that the revolt against abstract labour should take the form of a revolt against socialisation: doing our own thing, expressing ourselves, creating small projects. The traditional concept of socialism seems of little relevance here: it poses an image of post-capitalist society as a society characterised by a greater socialisation of production with ever bigger units of production, but reduces the question of self-determination to the entirely abstract idea of the Plan rather than to the actual process of doing.

The development of our power-to-do must not be understood as a rejection of socialisation. The challenge, rather, is to construct through the cracks a different socialisation, a socialisation more loosely woven than the social synthesis of capitalism and based on the full recognition of the particularities of our individual and collective activities and of their thrust towards self-determination. There are already many initiatives in this direction. The insistence of the so-called anti-globalisation movement that it is not opposed to globalisation but favours a different sort of globalisation and is therefore an alter-globalisation movement makes precisely the point that the struggle is not for a romantic return to isolated units but for a different sort of social interconnection. Horizontality, dignity, alternative economy, commons: all these terms relate to explorations in the construction of a different form of socialisation.

The breakthrough is the breakthrough of our social power-to-do, our social being-able-to, but what is happening does not correspond to the traditional socialist imagery of the breakthrough of the forces of production. It does not take the form of the imposition of a new totality: rather, it is a multiple cracking of the old system. The attacks on the existing organisation of human activity and the pushing towards a different doing come from all sides: from all the millions of people who have made their appearance in the pages of this book and many, many more. It is doing that is at the centre, not a new discourse, not a new way of thinking, not a new form of

organising, not a new -ism: doing. Doing, because it is our doing here and now that produces capitalism and destruction, or else produces a world fit for human and non-human life. Revolution is simply that: the assuming of our responsibility as the creators of social reality, the social assuming of our power-to-do.