

# communisation



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If we speak of *communisation* and not just *communism*, it is not to invent a new concept which would provide us with the ultimate solution to the revolutionary riddle. Communisation denotes no less than the content and process of a future revolution. For example, only communisation gives meaning to our critique of democracy.

In recent years, communisation has become one of the radical in-words, even outside what is known as the “communisers” (*communisateurs* in French).

As far as we are concerned, we do not regard ourselves any more members of this communising current than we feel close to - or far from – a number of other communist groups.

The communisation issue is further complicated by the emergence of the *commons* theory, according to which deep social change could come from collective usage and extension of what is already treated as common resources and activities (for instance, the open field system in still existing traditional societies, and free software access in the most modern ones). In other words, these “creative commons” would allow us a gradual and peaceful passage toward a human community.

The successive refutation of theories we regard as incomplete or wrong would have obscured our central points. As we wish to keep away from any war of the words, the following essay will try and address the communisation issue as *directly* as possible.

## A few words about the word

In English, the word has been used for a long while, to convey something very different from what we are dealing with here. *To communise* was often a synonym for *to sovietize*, i.e. to implement the full program of the communist party in the Leninist (and later Stalinist) sense: “The fundamental task of Comintern was to seek opportunities to communise Europe and North America.” (R. Service, *Trotsky. A Biography*, Macmillan, 2009, p. 282) This was the *Webster’s* dictionary definition in 1961 and 1993, and roughly the one given by Wikipedia in 2010. This is of course not what we are talking about.

More rarely, *communisation* has been used as a synonym for radical *collectivisation*, with special reference to Spain in 1936-39, when factories, farms, rural and urban areas were run by worker or peasant collectives. Although this is related to what we mean by communising, most of these experiences invented local currencies or took labour-time as a means of barter. These collectives functioned as worker-managed enterprises, for the benefit of the people, yet enterprises all the same.

We are dealing with something else.

It is not sure who first used the word with the meaning this essay is interested in. To the best of our knowledge, it was Dominique Blanc: orally in the years 1972-74, and in writing in *Un Monde sans argent* (A World Without Money), published in 3 booklets in 1975-76 by the OJTR (the same group also published D. Blanc’s *Militancy, the Highest Stage of Alienation*). Whoever coined the word, the idea was being circulated at the time in the small milieu round the bookshop La Vieille Taupe (“The Old Mole”, 1965-72). Since the May 68 events, the bookseller, Pierre Guillaume, ex-Socialisme ou Barbarie and ex-Pouvoir Ouvrier member, but also for a while close to G. Debord (who himself was a member of S. ou B. in 1960-61), had been consistently putting forward the idea of revolution as a communising process, maybe without using the phrase. Yet D. Blanc was the first to publicly emphasize its importance. *Un Monde sans argent* said the difference between communist revolution and all variants of reformism was not that revolution implied insurrection, but that this insurrection would have to start communising society... or it would have no communist content. In that respect, *Un Monde sans argent* remains a pivotal essay.

## In a nutshell

The idea is fairly simple, but simplicity is often one of the most difficult goals to achieve. It means that a revolution is only communist if it changes all social relationships into communist relationships, and this can only be done if the process starts in the very early days of the revolutionary upheaval. Money, wage-labour, the enterprise as a separate unit and a value-accumulating pole, work-time as cut off from the rest of our life, production for value, private property, State agencies as mediators of social life and conflicts, the separation between learning and doing, the quest for maximum and fastest circulation of everything, all of these have to be done away with, and not just be run by collectives or turned over to public ownership: they have to be replaced by communal, moneyless, profitless, Stateless, forms of life. The process will take time to be completed, but it will start at the beginning of the revolution, which will not create the *preconditions* of communism: it will create communism.

## Is it a programme ?

We are not talking about a plan to be fulfilled one day, a project adequate to the needs of the proletarians (and ultimately of humankind), but one that would be exterior to them, like blueprints on the architect's drawing-board before the house is built. Communisation depends on what the proletarian *is* and *does*.

The major difference between Marx and utopian socialists is to be found in Marx's main concern: the labour-capital exploitation relation. Because the proletarian is the heart and body of capital, he or she carries communist potentials within himself or herself. When capital stops buying labour power, labour is nothing. So every deep social crisis opens the possibility for the proletarians to try and invent "something else". Most of the time, nearly all the time in fact, their reaction is far from communism, but the possibility of a breakthrough does exist, as has been proved by a succession of endeavours throughout modern times, from the English Luddites in 1811 to the Greek insurgents in 2008.

This is why it would be pointless to imagine an utterly different society if we fail to understand the present society and how we could move from one to the other. We must consider **what** communism is, **how** it could come about, and **who** would be in the best position to implement the historical change.

## **“The self-emancipation of the proletariat is the collapse of capitalism.”**

The SI once suggested we ought to “go back to a disillusioned study of the classical worker movement” (# 7, 1962). Indeed. To face up to our past, we must break with the legend of a proletariat invariably ready for revolution... and unfortunately sidetracked or betrayed. However, blowing myths does not mean bending the stick the other way, as if the workers had up to now persistently fought only for reforms, had glorified work, believed in industrial progress even more than the bourgeois, and dreamt of some impossible worker-run capitalism. This historical reconstruction replaces one myth by its equally misleading symmetrical opposite. The past two hundred years of proletarian experience cannot be divided into two totally opposed periods, i.e. a first one, closed by the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, during which the proletariat would only have been able to fight for a social programme which could be qualified as “capitalist”, and a second phase (now), when the evolution of capitalism itself would render null and void the “labour capitalist” option, and the only alternative facing the proletariat would become a simple one: communist revolution or descent into barbarism.

The historical evidence offered for this watershed theory is unsubstantial.

Moreover, and more decisively, the mistake lies in the question.

No communist revolution has taken place yet. That obvious fact neither proves... nor disproves that such a revolution has been up to now impossible.

In his analysis of *The Class Struggles in France* (1850), Marx first lays down what he believes to be a general historical principle :

“As soon as it has risen up, a class in which the revolutionary interests of society are concentrated finds the content and the material for its revolutionary activity directly in its own

situation: foes to be laid low, measures dictated by the needs of the struggle to be taken; the consequences of its own deeds drive it on. It makes no theoretical inquiries into its own task.”

Then Marx wonders why, in the democratic revolution of February 1848, “The French working class had not attained this level; it was still incapable of accomplishing its own revolution.

The development of the industrial proletariat is, in general, conditioned by the development of the industrial bourgeoisie. (..) [But in 1848] the industrial bourgeoisie did not rule France. (..) The struggle against capital in its developed, modern form – in its decisive aspect, the struggle of the industrial wage worker against the industrial bourgeois – is in France a partial phenomenon (..) Nothing is more understandable, then, than that the Paris proletariat sought to secure the advancement of its own interests side by side with those of the bourgeoisie (..) ”

Quotation is no proof, and maybe Marx was wrong, but at least let us get his view right. While he regarded full-grown industrial capitalism as a necessary condition for a proletarian revolution, he did not think that the proletarians could and would only fight for reforms for a certain period, until some complete maturity or completeness of capitalism left open one and only option: revolution.

Slicing up history into phases is very useful, except when it becomes a quest for the “last” phase.

In the past, “final” or “mortal crisis” theoreticians set out to demonstrate (usually with the help of the reproduction schema of *Capital's* volume II) that a phase was bound to come when capitalism would be structurally unable to reproduce itself. All they actually showed was real fundamental contradictions but, as Marx wrote, contradiction does not mean impossibility. Now the demonstration moves away from schema and figures, and sees the impossible reproduction in the capital-labour relation itself. In short, up to now, communist revolution (or a real attempt to make it) has been out of the question, because the domination of capital over society was not complete enough: there was some scope for the worker movement to develop socialist and Stalinist parties, unions, reformist policies; so the working class *had to* be reformist, and the most it could do was to go for a worker-managed capitalism. Now this would be over: capital's completely real domination destroys the possibility of anything but a communist endeavour.

We ought to be a bit wary of the lure of catastrophe theory. When 1914 broke out, and even more so after 1917, communists said that mankind was entering the epoch of wars and revolutions. Since then, we have seen a lot more wars than revolutions, and no communist revolution. And we are well aware of the traps of the “decadence” theory. Only a successful communist revolution one day will allow its participants to say: “We’ve seen capitalism’s last days”. Until then, the only historical obstacle to the reproduction of the present social system will come from the proletarians themselves. There is no era when revolution is structurally impossible, nor another when revolution becomes structurally possible/necessary. All variations of the “ultimate crisis” disregard history: they look for a one-way street that could block the avenues branching off to non-communist roads. Yet history is made of crossroads, revolution being one possibility among non-revolutionary options. The schematisation of history loses its relevance when it heralds the endpoint of evolution – in this case, capitalist evolution - and claims to be the theory to end all theories.

In 1934, as a conclusion to his essay on *The theory of the collapse of capitalism*, and after an in-depth study of the inevitability of major crises, Anton Pannekoek wrote:



“The workers’ movement has not to expect a final catastrophe, but many catastrophes, political — like wars, and economic — like the crises which repeatedly break out, sometimes regularly, sometimes irregularly, but which on the whole, with the growing size of capitalism, become more and more devastating. (..) And should the present crisis abate, new crises and new struggles will arise. In these struggles the working class will develop its strength to struggle, will discover its aims, will train itself, will make itself independent and learn to take into its hands its own destiny, viz., social production itself. In this process the destruction of capitalism is achieved. The self-emancipation of the proletariat is the collapse of capitalism.”

The concept of communisation is important enough as it is, without using it to fuel another variant of the “last phase of capitalism” theory. Our problem is not to prove that we have entered an entirely new epoch when the proletariat can *only* fight for communism. It is to try and define the concrete process of a communist revolution.

## A novelty ?

The communist movement predates the modern proletariat that appeared in England at the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century. It was active in the days of Spartacus, Thomas Münzer and Gerrard Winstanley. Fifty years before Marx, Gracchus Babeuf’s plans had little connection with the growth of industry.

Because of his separation from the means of production (which was not the case of the serf or the tenant-farmer, however poor they were), the proletarian is separated from the means of existence. Such radical dispossession is the condition of his being put to profitable work by capital. But it also entails that, from the early days, the proletariat is capable of a revolution that would do away with property, classes and work as an activity separate from the rest of life.

The theme of communisation is as old as the proletarians’ struggles when they tried to free themselves. Whenever they were on the social offensive, they implicitly and sometimes explicitly aimed at a human community which involved a lot more than better work conditions, or merely replacing the exploitation of man by the exploitation of nature. The logic or intention of the 1871 Paris *communards*, the 1936 Spanish insurgents or the 1969 Turin rebel workers was not to “develop the productive forces”, nor to manage the *same* factories without the boss. It is their failure that pushed aside community and solidarity goals, discarded any plan of man-nature reunion, and brought back to the fore what was compatible with the needs and possibilities of capitalism. True, so far, past struggles have tried to launch few communist changes in the real sense of the word, i.e. changes that broke with the core capitalist structure. But this limitation was as imposed from outside as self-imposed : the proletarians rarely went beyond the insurrectionary phase, as most uprisings were quickly crushed or stifled. When the insurgents carried the day, they did attempt to live and create something very different from a worker-led capitalism. The limits of those attempts (in Spain, 1936-39, particularly) were not just the result of a lack of *social* programme, but at least as much due to the fact of leaving *political* power in the hands of the State and anti-revolutionary forces.

What Rosa Luxemburg called in 1903 the “progress and stagnation of Marxism” can help us understand why a deeply entrenched “communising” prospect has waited so long before becoming explicit. At the dawn of capitalism, the 1830s and 1840s were a time of farseeing communist insights. Marx’s *1844 Manuscripts* probably expressed the sharpest edge of social critique, so sharp that the author himself did not think it necessary to circulate it (the text was only published in 1932). Then, as the worker movement developed against a triumphant bourgeoisie,

the communist intuition turned into demonstration and lost much of its visionary force: the 1848 *Communist Manifesto's* concrete measures were compatible with radical bourgeois democracy, communism is only hinted at in *Capital's* volume I (1967), and it hardly appears in the *Critique of the Gotha programme* (1875). Marx's concern with the "real movement" led him into a search for the "laws of history", and his critique of political economy came close to a critical political economy. (He never lost sight of communism, though, as is clear from his interest in the Russian *mir*: "If revolution comes at the opportune moment, if it concentrates all its forces so as to allow the rural commune full scope, the latter will soon develop as an element of regeneration in Russian society and an element of superiority over the countries enslaved by the capitalist system." (1881) )

However, as soon as the proletariat resumed its assault on bourgeois society, revolutionary theory retrieved its radical momentum: the 1871 Commune showed that State power is not an adequate revolutionary instrument.

Then again, the Paris Commune "lesson" was forgotten until, several decades later, the birth of soviets and councils revived what Marx had written in 1871.

In 1975-76, *A World Without Money* did not evade the issue of how Marx stood regarding communism (a word and concept he never used):

"That Marx and Engels did not talk more about communist society was due, without doubt paradoxically, to the fact that this society, being less near than it is today, was more difficult to envisage, but also to the fact that it was more present in the minds of the revolutionaries of their day. When they spoke of the abolition of the wages system in the *Communist Manifesto* they were understood by those they were echoing. Today it is more difficult to envisage a world freed from the state and commodities because these have become omnipresent. But having become omnipresent, they have lost their historical necessity.

Marx and Engels perhaps grasped less well than a Fourier the nature of communism as the liberation and harmonisation of the emotions. Fourier, however, does not get away from the wages system, since among other things he still wants doctors to be paid, even if according to the health of the community rather than the illnesses of their patients.

Marx and Engels, however, were sufficiently precise to avoid responsibility for the bureaucracy and financial system of the 'communist' countries being attributed to them. According to Marx, with the coming of communism money straightaway disappears and the producers cease to exchange their products. Engels speaks of the disappearance of commodity production when socialism comes." The communist movement owes much to its time. In this early 21<sup>st</sup> century, we would be naïve to believe that we are wiser than our predecessors because we realize how destructive productive forces can be. Just as the nature of capitalism is invariant, so are the nature and programme of the proletariat. This programme, however, cannot escape the concrete needs and mind-set of each period.

At the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, in a country plagued with misery, starvation and extreme inequality, and with still very few factory workers, Babeuf advocated an egalitarian mainly agrarian communism. His prime concern was to have everyone fed. It was inevitable, and indeed natural for down-trodden men and women to think of themselves as new Prometheus and to equate the end of exploitation with a conquest over nature.

About a hundred years later, as industrial growth was creating a new type of poverty, joblessness and non-property, revolutionaries saw the solution in a worker-run "development of

the productive forces” that would benefit the masses by manufacturing the essentials of life and free humankind from the constraints of necessity. The prime concern was not only to have everyone fed, housed, nursed, but also in a position to enjoy leisure as well as creative activities. As capitalism had developed “the means of social disposable time, in order to reduce labour-time for the whole society to a diminishing minimum”, revolution would be able “to free everyone’s time for their own development.” (Marx, *Grundrisse*, 1857-58)

Another century later, *ecology* is the buzz word. Nobody seriously believes in a factory-induced or a worker-managed paradise, new public orthodoxy declares the industrial dream to be a nightmare, so there is little merit in debunking the techno-cult or advocating renewable energy or green building.

The idea of communisation as a revolution that creates *communism* - and not the *preconditions* of communism - appears more clearly when capitalism rules over everything, extensively in terms of space (the much talked-about globalisation), and intensively in terms of its penetration into everyday life and behaviour. This helps us grasp revolution as a process that from its very beginning would start to undo what it wants to get rid of, and at the same time from its early days start to create new ways of life (the completion of which would of course last a while). That is the best possible answer to the inevitable question: “Why talk of communisation *now*?”

One might wonder why the notion hardly surfaced in Italy 1969-77, when that country came closer than any other to revolutionary breaking point. Part of the answer is likely to be found in the reality of Italian worker autonomy at the time, in theory as in practice. Operaism emphasized more the revolutionary “subject” or agent than the content of the revolution, so the content finally got reduced to autonomy itself. That was linked to the limits of *operaismo*, whose goal was to create or stimulate organisation (top-down, party-led, or bottom-up, council-based). This may be the reason why a wealth of practical communist critiques and endeavours resulted in so little synthetic theorization of communisation. Apart from such hypotheses, it would be risky to embark on sweeping generalizations purporting to explain the (mis)adventures of theory in a particular country by the ups and downs of class struggle in that country. Unless one enjoys being word-drunk, there is little fun in playing the prophet of the past.

## Transition?

We would have nothing to object to the concept of transition if it simply stated the obvious: communism will not be achieved in a flash. Yet the concept implies a lot more, and something totally different: not simply a transitory moment, but a full-fledged transitory *society*.

However debatable Marx’s *labour vouchers* are, at least his *Critique of the Gotha programme* (1875) was trying to describe a society without money, therefore without wage-labour. His scheme of a time-based currency was supposed to be a provisional way of rewarding everyone according to his or her contribution to the creation of common wealth. Afterwards, when social-democrats and Leninists came to embrace the notion of transition, they forgot that objective, and their sole concern was the running of a planned economy. (Although anarchists usually reject a transitory period, they lay the emphasis on *management*, via worker unions or via a confederation of communes: in the best of cases, when the suppression of wage-labour remains on the agenda, it is only as an effect of the socialisation of production, not as one of its causes.)

It is obvious that such a deep and all-encompassing transformation as communism will span decades, perhaps several generations before it takes over the world. Until then, it will be



straddling two eras, and remain vulnerable to internal decay and/or destruction from outside, all the more so as various countries and continents will not be developing new relationships at the same pace. Some areas may lag behind for a long time. Others may go through temporary chaos. But the main point is that the communising process has to start as soon as possible. The closer to Day One the transformation begins and the deeper it goes from the beginning, the greater the likelihood of its success.

So there will a “transition” in the sense that communism will not be achieved overnight. But there will **not** be a “transition period” in what has become the traditional Marxist sense: a period that is no longer capitalist but not yet communist, a period in which the working class would still work, but not for profit or for the boss any more, only for themselves: they would go on developing the “productive forces” (factories, consumer goods, etc.) before being able to enjoy the then fully-matured fruit of industrialization. This is not the programme of a communist revolution. It was not in the past and it is not now. There is no need to go on developing industry, especially industry as it is now. And we are not stating this because of the ecology movement and the anti-industry trend in the radical milieu. As someone said forty years ago, half of the factories will have to be closed.

Some areas will lag behind and others may plunge into temporary chaos. The abolition of money will result in fraternal, non-profit, cooperative relations, but sometimes barter or the black market are likely to surface. Nobody knows how we will evolve from false capitalist abundance to new ways of life, but let us not expect the move to be smooth and peaceful everywhere and all the time.

We will only modify our food habits, for example, as we modify our tastes: changing circumstances go along with changing minds, as was written in the third *Thesis on Feuerbach* in 1845. Our intention is not to create a *new man*, virtuous, reasonable, always able and willing to master his desires, always respectful of sound dietary rules. About a century ago, chestnuts were the staple food of some rural areas of the French Central Massif. Such a “poor” diet does not compare favourably with the variety we have been accustomed to in “rich” countries. But the future is written nowhere. We might well enjoy a more limited range of dishes than the abundance currently sold in the supermarket.

## **Violence and the destruction of the State**

As a quick reminder, let us go back in time.

For reasons we cannot analyse here, the 1871 *communards* did not change much the social fabric: that, plus the insurrection being isolated in one city, prevented the *communards* from really appealing to the rest of the world, in spite of genuine popular support in Paris. Versailles army’s superiority was not due to more troops or better guns: its law and order, pro-property and anti-worker programme was more consistently understood, put forward and fought for by the bourgeois politicians than communalism and social republicanism were by the Commune leaders.

In Russia, 1917, contrary to the *communards*, the Bolsheviks clearly knew what they wanted - the seizure of power - and the power vacuum enabled them to seize it. The insurgents did away with a State machinery which was already dissolving, did not attempt or manage to change the social structure, won a civil war, and eventually created a new State power.

In Spain, the July 1936 worker insurrection neutralised the State machinery, but within a few weeks gave political power back to reformist-conservative forces. Thereafter all social transformations were limited by the pressure of a reconsolidated State apparatus, which less than a year later openly turned its police against the workers.

In the 1960s, the radical wave opposed the instruments of coercion but never dispensed with them. The French general strike made the central political organs powerless, until the passive attitude of most strikers enabled the State to recover its role. The power vacuum could not last more than a few weeks, and had to be filled again.

This brief survey reminds us that if, in the abstract, it is necessary to separate *social* and *political* spheres, in real life, the separation does not exist. Our past failures were not social **or** political: they were both. Bolshevik rule would not have turned into power over the proletarians if they had changed social relationships, and in Spain after 1936 socialisations would not have ended in disaster if the workers had kept the power they had conquered in the streets in July 36.

Communisation means that revolution will not be a succession of phases: first the dismantling and destruction of State power, then social change afterwards.

While they are ready to admit this in principle, quite a few comrades, “anarchists” or “Marxists”, are reluctant to consider the idea of a communisation which they fear would try and change the social fabric while *not* bothering to smash State power. These comrades miss the point. Communisation is not purely or mainly social and therefore non-political or only marginally political. It implies fighting public - as well as private - organs of repression. Revolution is violent. (By the way, which democratic revolution ever won merely by peaceful means?)

Fundamentally, communisation saps counter-revolutionary forces by removing their support. Communisers’ propulsive force will not come from shooting capitalists, but by depriving them of their function and power. Communisers will not target enemies, but undermine and change social relations. The development of moneyless and profitless relations will ripple through the whole of society, and act as power enhancers that widen the fault lines between the State and growing sections of the population. Our success will ultimately depend on the ability of our human community to be socially expansive. Such is the bottom line.

Social relations, however, are incarnated in buildings, in objects, and in beings of flesh and blood, and historical change is neither instantaneous nor automatic. Some obstacles will have to be swept away: not just exposed, but done away with. We will need more than civil disobedience: passive resistance is not enough. People have to take a stand, some will take sides against communisation, and a revolutionary trial of strength does not just battle with words. States (dictatorial or democratic) are enormous concentrations of armed power. When this armed power is unleashed against us, the greater the insurgents’ fighting spirit, the more the balance of forces will shift away from State power, and the less bloodshed there will be.

An insurrectionary process does not just consist in occupying buildings, erecting barricades and firing guns one day, only to forget all about them the next. It implies more than mere spontaneity and *ad hoc* ephemeral getting together. Unless there is some continuity, our movement will skyrocket today and fizzle out tomorrow. A number of insurgents will have to remain organized and available as armed groupings. (Besides, nobody has talents or desires for everything.) But if these groupings functioned as bodies specialized in armed struggle, they would develop a monopoly of socially legitimate violence, soon we would have a “proletarian” police force, together with a “proletarian government”, a “people’s army”, etc. Revolution would be short-lived.

No doubt this will have to be dealt with in very concrete issues, such as what to do with police files we happen to find. Though revolution may exceptionally use existing police archives and security agency data, basically it will do away with them, as with all kinds of criminal records.

Revolution is not a-political. It is **anti**-political.

Communisation includes the destruction of the State, and the creation of new administrative procedures, whatever forms they may take. Each dimension contributes to the other. None can succeed without the other. Either the two of them combine, or both fail. If the proletarians do not get rid of political parties, parliament, police bodies, the army, etc., all the socialisations they will achieve, however far-reaching, will sooner or later be crushed, or will lose their impetus, as happened in Spain after 1936. On the other hand, if the *necessary* armed struggle against the police and army is only a military struggle, one front against another, and if the insurgents do not also take on the social bases of the State, they will only build up a counter-army, before being defeated on the battlefield, as happened in Spain after 1936. Only a would-be State can out-gun the State.

Communist revolution does not separate its *means* from its *ends*. Consequently, it will not *firstly* take over (or dispense with) political power, and then only *secondly* change society. Both will proceed at the same time and reinforce each other, or both will be doomed.

Communisation can only happen in a society torn by mass work stoppages, huge street demos, widespread occupation of public buildings and workplaces, riots, insurgency attempts, a loss of control by the State over more and more groups of people and areas, in other words an upheaval powerful enough for social transformation to go deeper than an addition of piecemeal adjustments. Resisting anti-revolutionary armed bodies involves our ability to demoralise and neutralise them, **and** to fight back when they attack. As the momentum of communisation grows, it pushes its advantages, raises the stakes and resorts less and less to violence, but only a rose-tinted view can believe in bloodless major historical change.

At the Caracas World Social Forum in 2006, John Holloway declared: “the problem is not to abolish capitalism, but to stop creating it”. This is indeed an aspect of communisation, equally well summed up by one of the characters in Ursula Le Guin’s fiction *The Dispossessed* (1974): our purpose is not so much *to make* as *to be* the revolution. Quite. But J. Holloway’s theory of “changing the world without taking power” empties that process of any reality by denying its antagonism to the State. Like Holloway, we don’t want to *take* power. But unlike him and his many followers, we know that State power will not wither away under the mere pressure of a million local collectives: it will never die a natural death. On the contrary, it is in its nature to mobilize all available resources to defend the existing order. Communisation will not leave State power aside: it will have to destroy it.

The Chartists’ motto “Peacefully if we may, forcibly if we must” is right only in so far as we understand that we will be forced to act “forcibly”.

In revolutionary times, social violence and social inventiveness are inseparable: the capacity of the proletarians to control their own violence will depend on the ability of this violence to be as creative as destructive. For the destruction of the State (we want to destroy power, not to take it) to be more than an empty phrase, negative acts must also be positive. But not creative of a new police, army, Parliament, etc. Creative of new deliberative and administrative bodies, directly dependent on social relationships.

# Who ?

“The proletarian movement is the independent movement of the immense majority, in the interests of that vast majority (..)” (*Communist Manifesto*). Both phrases are crucial : *independent movement* and *immense majority*. That being said, it does not follow that nearly everyone is a proletarian, nor that every proletarian can play the same part in the communising process. Some are more apt than others to initiate the change, which does not mean that they would be the “leaders” of the revolution. On the contrary, they would succeed only in so far as they would gradually lose their specificity. Here we bump into the inevitable contradiction the whole argument hinges around, but it is not an insurmountable contradiction. .

We do not live in a society where just about everybody is exploited and has the same basic interest in an overall change, therefore the same desire and ability to implement what would be a rather peaceful process, as nearly everyone would join in : only 3 to 5% would object, Castoriadis assured us, but no doubt they would soon see the light.

We live neither in a post-industrial society, nor in a post *class* society, nor therefore in a post working class society. If work had become inessential, one might wonder why companies would have bothered in the last twenty years to turn hundreds of millions of earthlings into assembly line workers, crane operators or computer clerks. Work is still central to our societies, and those in the world of work – currently employed or not – will have better social leverage power, at least in the early days or weeks of communisation.

The contradiction can be solved because, unlike the bourgeoisie striving for political power in 1688 (the *Glorious Revolution* that gave birth to what was to become English parliamentary democracy) or in 1789, labour is no ruling class and has no possibility of becoming one, now or then.

General strike, mass disorder and rioting break the normal flow of social reproduction. This suspension of automatisms and beliefs forces proletarians to invent something new that implies subjectivity and freedom: options have to be decided on. Everyone has to find his or her place, not as an isolated individual any more, but in interactions that are productive of a collective reality. When only railway workers go on strike, they are unlikely to look beyond their own condition: they simply do not have to. In a communisation situation, the extension of work stoppages opens the possibility for railway personnel to move on to a different range of activities decided upon and organized by themselves **and** by others: for instance, instead of staying idle, running trains – free of course - to transport strikers or demonstrators from one town to another. It also means starting to think and act differently about the railway system, no longer believing in feats of engineering for progress’s sake, and no longer sticking to the view that “high-speed trains are super because they’re fast”.

What to do with high-speed trains and with buses cannot be the sole decision of train engineers and bus drivers, yet for a while the individual who used to be at the wheel will be more expert at handling and repairing them. His or her role will be *specific and provisional*. The success of communisation depends on the fading away of former sociological distinctions and hierarchies: breaching professional distances will go together with dismantling mental blocks regarding personal competence and aspiration. The process will be more complex than we expect, and more unpredictable: the experience of any large social movement (Germany 1918, Spain 1936, France 1968, Argentina 2001, to name a few) shows how volatile the unprecedented can be, when the situation slips out of control and creates both deadlocks *and breakthroughs*. One thing leads to another point of departure for further development. That particular example prompts the

question of the fading of the difference between “public” and “private” transport, which in turn brings back the vital issue of where and how we live, since today’s means of locomotion are conditioned by the urban segmentation of specific areas reserved for administration, habitation, work, recreation, etc.

## Revolution of daily life

The trouble with philosophers, Polish novelist Witold Gombrowicz once suggested, is that they do not care about trousers and telephones. That remark hardly applied to Nietzsche, who was no revolutionary but refused “to treat as frivolous all the things about life that deserve to be taken very seriously - nutrition, residence, spiritual diet, treatment of the sick, cleanliness, weather !” (*Ecce Homo*, 1888). It is everyday life indeed we will change: cooking, eating, travelling, meeting people, staying on our own, reading, doing nothing, having and bringing up children, debating over our present and future... providing we give daily life its *fullest* meaning. Sadly, since the phrase became fashionable in 1968, “everyday life” has been usually limited to the out-of-work time-space, as if people gave up hope of altering the economy and wage-labour, and were contented with altering acts and doings of a lesser kind: feelings, body, family, sex, couple, food, leisure, culture, friendship, etc.

On the contrary, communisation will treat the minor facts of existence for what they are: a reflection and a manifestation of “big” facts. Money, wage-labour, companies as separate units and value accumulation centres, work-time cut off from the rest of our time, profit-oriented production, obsolescence-induced consumption, agencies acting as mediators in social life and conflicts, speeded-up maximum circulation of everything and everyone... each of these moments, acts and places has to be transformed into cooperative, moneyless, profitless and non-statist relationships, and not just managed by a collective or converted into public ownership.

The capital-labour relation structures and reproduces society, and the abolition of this relation is the prime condition of the rest. But we would be foolish to wait for the *complete* disappearance of the company system, of money and the profit motive, before starting to change schooling and housing. Acting locally will contribute to the whole change.

For instance, communising also implies transforming our personal relation to technique, and our addiction to mediation and mediators. A future society where people would feel a constant need for psychologists, therapists and healers would merely prove its failure at building a human community: we would still be incapable of addressing tensions and conflicts by the flow and interplay of social relations, since we would want these conflicts solved by professionals.

Communisation is the destruction of repressive (and self-repressive) institutions and habits, as well as the creation of non-mercantile links which tend to be more and more irreversible: “Beyond a certain point, one cannot come back. That tipping-point we must reach.” (Kafka)

Making, circulating and using goods without money includes breaking down the wall of a private park for the children to play, or planting a vegetable garden in the town centre. It also implies doing away with the split between the asphalt jungle cityscape and a natural world which is now turned into show and leisure places, where the (mild) hardships of a ten-day desert trek makes up for the aggravating compulsory Saturday drive to a crowded supermarket. It means practising in a social relation what has now to be private and paid for.

Communism is an **anthropological revolution** in the sense that it deals with what Marcel Mauss analysed in *The Gift* (1923): a renewed ability to give, receive and reciprocate. It means no longer treating our next-door neighbour as a stranger, but also no longer regarding the tree down the road as a piece of scenery taken care of by council workers. Communisation is the production of a different relation to others and with oneself, where solidarity is not born out of a moral duty exterior to us, rather out of practical acts and interrelations.

Among other things, communisation will be the withering away of systematic distinction between *learning* and *doing*. We are not saying that ignorance is bliss, or that a few weeks of thorough (self-)teaching are enough for anyone to be able to translate Arabic into English or to play the harpsichord. Though learning can be fun, it often involves long hard work. What communism will do away with is the locking up of youth in classrooms for years (now 15 to 20 years in so-called advanced societies). Actually, modern school is fully aware of the shortcomings of such an absurdity, and tries to bridge the gap by multiplying out-of-school activities and work experience schemes. These remedies have little effect: the rift between school and the rest of society depends on another separation, which goes deeper and is structural to capitalism: the separation between work (i.e. paid and productive labour), and what happens outside the workplace and is treated as non-work (housework, bringing up children, leisure, etc., which are unpaid). Only *superseding work as a separate time-space* will transform the whole learning process.

Here again, and in contrast to most utopias as well as to modern totalitarian regimes, communisation does not pretend to promote a “brave new world” full of *new (wo)men*, each equal in talents and in achievements to his or her fellow beings, able to master all fields of knowledge from Renaissance paintings to astrophysics, and whose own desires would always finally merge in harmonious concord with the desires of other equally amiable fellow beings.

## Distant futures & “here and now”

Few people today would agree with what Victor Serge (then a Bolshevik living in Moscow) wrote in 1921: “Every revolution sacrifices the present to the future.” While it is essential to understand how communisation will do *the opposite* of what Serge believed, this understanding does not give us the whole picture.

One of the strong points of the 1960s-70s, or at least one of the best remembered, was the rejection of a revolution that would postpone its completion to an always receding future.

In the following years, as the radical wave gradually ebbed, the emphasis on the *here and now* remained, albeit deprived of subversive content and purpose, and was reduced to an array of piecemeal changes in our daily life. When they are as all-powerful as they have become, money and wage-labour are compatible with - and sometimes feed on - inoffensive doses of relative freedom. Anyone can now claim that a certain degree of self-management of his neighbourhood, his body, his parenthood, his sexuality, his food, his habitat or his leisure time contributes to a genuine transformation of society, more genuine in fact than the old-fashioned social revolution of yesteryear. Indeed, daily life reformers claim to work for overall change by a multiplication of local changes: they argue that step by step, people’s empowerment is taking over more and more social areas, until finally bourgeois rule is made redundant and the State rendered powerless. The ex-situationist Raoul Vaneigem perfectly encapsulated this vision in a few words (also the title of a book of his in 2010): “The State is nothing any more, let’s be everything.”



In the aftermath of “68”, against Stalinism and Maoist or Trotskyist party-building, radical thought had to combat the reduction of revolution to a seizure of political power, and the postponement of effective change to later days that never came.

Thirty years later, Stalinism is gone, party-building is *passé*, and it is increasingly difficult to differentiate ex-Trots from current far leftists. While it pushes dozens of millions in or out of work, today’s all-encompassing capitalism wears more often a hedonistic than a puritanical mask. It turns Victor Serge’s formula upside down: “**Do not** sacrifice the present... ! Live and communicate *here and now* !”

Communising will indeed experiment new ways of life, but it will be much more and something other than an extension of the socially innocuous temporary or permanent “autonomous zones” where we are now allowed to play, providing we do not trespass their limits, i.e. if we respect the existence of wage-labour and recognize the benevolence of the State.

## Commons?

The Marxist-progressivist approach has consistently thrown scorn on pre-capitalist forms, as if they were incapable of contributing to communism: only industrialization was supposed to pave the way for proletarian revolution.

In the past and still in many aspects of *the present*, quite a few things and activities were owned by no-one and enjoyed by many. Community-defined rules imposed bounds on private property. Plough-sharing, unfenced fields and common pasture land used to be frequent in rural life. Village public meetings and collective decisions were not unusual, mostly on minor topics, sometimes on important matters.

While they provide us with valuable insights into what a possible future world would look like, and indeed often contribute to its coming, these habits and practices are unable to achieve this coming by themselves. A century ago, the Russian *mir* had neither the strength nor the intention of revolutionising society : rural cooperation depended on a social system and a political order that was beyond the grasp of the village autonomy. Nowadays, millions of co-ops meet their match when they attempt to play multinationals – unless they turn into big business themselves.

Our critique of progressivism does not mean supporting tradition against modernity. Societal customs have many oppressive features (particularly but not only regarding women) that are just as anti-communist as the domination of money and wage-labour. Communisation will succeed by being critical of both modernity and tradition. To mention just two recent examples, the protracted rebellion in Kabylia and the insurgency in Oaxaca have proved how collective links and assemblies can be reborn and strengthen popular resistance. Communisation will include the revitalization of old community forms, when by resurrecting them people get *more* than what they used to get from these forms in the past. Reviving former collective customs will help the communisation process by *transforming* these customs.

## Community

Countless and varied visions of a future communist world have been suggested in modern times, by Sylvain Maréchal and G. Babeuf, Marx, even Arthur Rimbaud in 1871, Kropotkin and many

anarchists, the Dutch council communists in the 1930s, etc. Their most common features may be summed up in the following equation:

communism =  
direct democracy =  
fulfilment of needs =  
community + abundance =  
equality

Since the historical subject of the future is envisioned as a self-organised human community, the big question is to know how it will organise itself. Who will lead: everybody, a few, or nobody? Who will decide: the collectivity, or a wise minority? Will the human species delegate responsibilities to a few persons, and if so, how?

We will not go back here to the critique of democracy, which we have dealt with in other essays, and we will focus on one point: because the vast majority of revolutionaries (Marxists and anarchists) regard communism above all as a new way of organising society, they are first of all concerned by how to find the best possible organisational forms, institutions in other words, be they fixed or adaptable, complex or extremely simple. (Individual anarchism is but another type of organisation: a coexistence of egos who are free and equal because each is independent of the others.)

We start from another standpoint: communism concerns as much the *activity* of human beings as their *inter-relations*. The way they relate to each other depends on what they **do** together. Communism organises production and has no fear of institutions, yet it is first of all neither institution nor production: it is activity.

The following sections only give a few elements on how *work* could be transformed into *activity*.

## No money

Communising is not just making everything available to everyone without anyone paying, as if we merely freed instruments of production and modes of consumption from their commodity form: shopping made easy... without a purse or a Visa card.

The existence of money is often explained by the (sad, alas inevitable) need of having a means of distributing items that are too scarce to be handed out free: a bottle of Champagne has to have a price tag because there is little Champagne produced. Well, although millions of junk food items are manufactured every day, unless I give \$ 1 in exchange for a bag of crisps, I am likely to get into trouble with the security guard.

Money is more than an unpleasant yet indispensable instrument: it materializes the way activities relate to one another, and human beings to one another. We keep measuring objects, comparing and exchanging them according to the average labour time (really or supposedly) necessary to make them, which logically leads to assessing acts and people in the same way.

The duality of *use value* and *exchange value* was born out of a situation where each activity (and the object resulting from it) ceased to be experienced and appreciated for what it specifically is, be it bread or a jar. From then on, that loaf of bread and that jar existed above all through their ability to be exchanged for each other, and were treated on the basis of what they had in common: in spite of their different concrete natures and uses, both they were comparable results of the same practice, labour in general, or abstract labour, liable to be reduced to a universal and quantifiable element, the average human effort necessary to produce that bread and that jar. Activity was turned into work. Money is crystallised labour: it gives a material form to that common substance.

Up to our time included, nearly all societies have found only work as a means to organise their life in common, and money connects what is separated by the division of labour.

A few millennia after “abstract labour” was born, capitalism has extended worldwide the condition of the proletarian, i.e. of the utterly dispossessed who can only live by selling his or her labour power on a free market. As the proletarian is the commodity upon which the whole commodity system depends, he or she has in himself or herself the possibility of subverting this system. A proletarian revolution can create a new type of social interaction where beings and things will not need to be compared and quantified in order to be produced and circulated. Money and commodity will no longer be the highway to universality.

Therefore, communisation will not abolish *exchange value* while keeping *use value*, because one complements the other.

In quite a few past uprisings, in the Paris Commune or in October 1917, permanent armed fighters were *paid* as soldiers of the revolution, which is what they were.

From the early hours and days of a future communist revolution, the participants will neither need, use nor receive money to fight or to feed themselves, because goods will not be reduced to a quantum of something comparable to another quantum. Circulation will be based on the fact that each action and person is specific and does not need to be measured to another in order to exist.

Superficial critics of capitalism denounce finance and praise what is known as the “real” economy, but today a car or a bag of flour only have some use because they are treated (and acted upon) according to their cost in money terms, i.e. ultimately to the labour time incorporated in them. Nothing now seriously exists apart from its cost. It is unthinkable for parents who have a son and daughter to buy a car as birthday present for her and a T-shirt for him. If they do, everyone will measure their love for their two children according to the respective amount of money spent on each of them. In today’s world, for objects, acts, talents and persons to exist socially, they have to be compared, reduced to a substance that is both common and quantifiable.

When building a house, there is a difference between making sure the builders will not be short of bricks and mortar (which we can safely assume communist builders will care about) and budgeting a house plan (which in this present society is a prior condition). Communisation will be our getting used to counting *physical realities* without resorting to accountancy. The pen and

pencil (or possibly the computer) of the bricklayer are not the same as the double-entry book of the accounts department.

“In the communist revolution, the productive act will never be *only* productive. One sign of this among others will be the fact that the product considered will be particular: it will correspond to needs expressed *personally* (by the direct producers at the time or by others) and that the satisfaction of the need won't be separated from the productive act itself. Let's think, for example, about how the construction of housing will change as soon as standardization disappears. Production without productivity will mean that any individual engaged in the project will be in a position to give his opinion concerning the product and the methods. Things will go much slower than in today's industrialized building industry. The participants in the project may even wish to live there after the building is finished. Will it be a total mess? Let's just say that time will not count and that cases in which the project isn't completed, in which everything is abandoned in midstream - maybe because production of the inputs is without productivity too - won't be a problem. Again, this is because the activity will have found its justification in itself, independently of its productive result.

"In a general way, one can say that communisation replaces the circulation of goods between "associated producers" with the circulation of people from one activity to another." (Bruno Astarian)

## Critic after dinner

“In communist society, where nobody has one exclusive sphere of activity but each can become accomplished in any branch he wishes, society regulates the general production and thus makes it possible for me to do one thing today and another tomorrow, to hunt in the morning, fish in the afternoon, rear cattle in the evening, criticise after dinner, just as I have a mind, without ever becoming hunter, fisherman, herdsman or critic.” (Marx, [German Ideology](#), 1845)

This statement has been ridiculed by bourgeois for its naivety, and attacked by radicals for its acceptance of objectionable activities, hunting of course, more generally its endorsement of man's domination over animals. An even more critical view might ask why Marx reserves philosophy or art for the evening, as an afterthought, as if there was no time for it while producing food, which seems to take up most of the day in Marx's vision...

In 1845, Marx was providing no blueprint for the future, and he inserted his prejudices and preconceptions of his time. But *so do we today*, and we would be pretentious to think ourselves devoid of prejudices.

The most valid aspect of that statement remains the idea that people living in a communist world would not be tied to a trade or function for life, which still remains the fate of most of us. When this is not the case, mobility is often forced upon us: the least skilled usually get the worst jobs, the poorest pay and lowest social image, and they are the first to be laid off and pressured into a re-training scheme. Besides, “multi-tasking” is a way of making workers more productive.

As long as *work* exists *as such*, that is as a time-space reserved for production (and earning money), a hierarchy of skills will remain. Only the opening-up of productive acts to the rest of life will change the situation. Among other things, this implies the end of the present work-place as a specific distinct place, where only those involved in it are allowed in.

# Scarcity vs. abundance: Prometheus unbound ?

For many a communist (once again, most Marxists and quite a few anarchists), the original cause of the exploitation of man by man was the emergence of *asurplus* of production in societies still plagued by *scarcity*. The tenets of the argument could be summarized as follows. For thousands of years, a minority was able to make the majority work for the benefit of a privileged few who kept most of the surplus for themselves. Fortunately, despite its past and present horrors, capitalism is now bringing about an unheard-of and ever-growing wealth: thereby the age-old need (and desire) to exploit and dominate loses its former objective cause. The poverty of the masses is no longer the condition for education, leisure and art to be enjoyed only by economic, political and cultural elites.

It is therefore logical that the goal (shared by most variants of the worker movement) should be to create a society of abundance. Against capitalism which forces us to work without fulfilling our needs, and distributes its products in most unequal fashion, revolution must organise the mass production of useful goods beneficial to all. And it *can*, thanks to the celebrated “development of the productive forces”.

Besides, industrialization organises and unifies the working class in such numbers that they will have the means to topple the ruling class and make a revolution which Roman slaves or late medieval peasants attempted but were incapable of achieving.

Moreover, and this is no minor point, if money is the root of all evil, and if scarcity is the ultimate cause of money, such a vision believes that reaching a stage of abundance will transform humankind. When men and women are properly fed, housed, schooled, educated, cared for, “struggle for life” antagonisms and attitudes will gradually disappear, individualism will give way to altruism, people will behave well to each other and have no motive, therefore no desire, for greed, domination or violence. So the only real question that remains is how to adequately manage this society of abundance: in a democratic way, or via leaders? With Kropotkin’s moneyless system of helping oneself to goods that are plentiful, and democratic rationed sharing-out of goods that are not plentiful? or with some labour-time accounting as suggested by the Dutch councilists in the 1930s? The answer usually given by anarchists and non-Leninist communists is a society of “associated producers” run by worker collectives. Whatever the details, all these schemes describe a different *economy*, but an economy all the same: they start from the assumption that social life is based on the necessity to allocate resources in the best possible way to produce goods (in the genuine and democratically-decided interests of all, there lies the difference with bourgeois economy).

This is precisely where we beg to differ.

Women and men must eat (among other necessities)... or die, there is no denying it. Basic needs do exist. So, of course we are aiming at society which fairly, soundly and ecologically matches resources with needs. What we dispute is that human life consists primarily in fulfilling needs, and that, logically, revolution should primarily consist in creating a society where physical needs are fulfilled. Human beings only satisfy – or fail to satisfy – all their needs within social interrelations. Only in extreme circumstances do we eat just in order not to starve. In most cases, we eat in the company of others (or we decide or are led or forced to eat on our own, which also is a social situation). We follow a diet. We may overeat or voluntarily skip a meal. This is true of nearly all other social acts. Contrary to widespread popular misbelief, the “materialistic conception of history” (as exposed in *The German Ideology* for example) does not say that the economy rules the world. It states something quite different: social relations depend on the way we produce our

material conditions of life, and not, say, on our ideas or ideals. And we produce these material conditions in relation to other beings (in most societies, these are class relations). A plough, a lathe or a computer does not determine history by itself. In fact, the “materialistic conception” explains the present rule of the economy as a historical phenomenon, which did not exist in Athens 500 B.C., and will no longer exist after a communist revolution.

The human Number One question, or the revolution question, is not to find how to bridge the gap between resources and needs (as economists would have it), nor to turn artificial and extravagant needs into natural and reasonable ones (as ecologists would like us to). It is to understand basic needs for what they are. Communism obviously takes basic needs into account, especially in a world where about one billion people are underfed. But how will this vital food issue be addressed? As *Hic Salta* explained in 1998, the natural urge to grow food, potatoes for instance, will be met through the birth of social links which will also result in vegetable gardening. Communists will not say: “Let’s grow potatoes because we need to feed ourselves.” Rather, they will imagine and invent a way to meet, to get and be together, that will include vegetable gardening and be productive of potatoes. Maybe potato growing will require more time than under capitalism, but that possibility will not be evaluated in terms of labour-time cost and saving.

“When communist *artisans* associate with one another, theory, propaganda, etc., is their first end. But at the same time, as a result of this association, they acquire a new need – the need for society – and what appears as a means becomes an end.” (1844 Manuscripts)

A typical feature of what we have been used to calling “the economy” is to produce goods separately from needs (which may be “natural” or “artificial”, authentic or manipulated, that matters but is not essential at this point), before offering them on a market where they will be bought to be consumed.

“Socialism” or “communism” has usually been thought of as the symmetrical opposite of *that* economy: it would start from people’s needs (real ones, this time, and collectively decided upon) to produce accordingly and distribute fairly.

Communism is not a new “economy”, even a regulated, bottom-up, decentralized and self-managed one.

To use K. Polanyi’s word in *The Great Transformation* (1944), capitalism has *disembedded* the production of the means of existence from both social life and nature. No Marxist and certainly not a communist, Polanyi was not opposed to the existence of a market, but he analysed the institution of the economic process as a distinct system with its own laws of motion. *The Great Transformation*, written in the aftermath of the Great Depression, coincided with a capitalist effort to regulate market forces. In the last decades, there has been a renewed interest in Polanyi’s emphasis on “embeddedness”: many reformers would like the economy to be brought under social control, in order to create a sustainable relationship with nature. Unfortunately, as the liberals are right to point out, we cannot have the advantages of capitalism without its defects: its regulation is a momentary step before going into overdrive. To do away with capitalist illimitation, we must go beyond the market itself and the economy as such, i.e. beyond capital and wage-labour.

As we wrote in the section on “the revolution of daily life”, communisation will be tantamount to an *anthropological* change, with a re-embedding of organic links that were severed when the economy came to dominate both society and nature.



# Equality

There would be no communist movement without our spontaneous indignation when we witness a Rolls-Royce driving by slums. Sylvain Maréchal, Babeuf's comrade, wrote in the *Manifesto of the Equals* (1796):

“No more individual property in land: *the land belongs to no one*. We demand, we want, the common enjoyment of the fruits of the land: *the fruits belong to all*.”

We declare that we can no longer put up with the fact that the great majority work and sweat for the smallest of minorities.

Long enough, and for too long, less than a million individuals have disposed of that which belongs to 20 million of their like, their equals.”

S. Maréchal's statement was asserting the existence of a human species whose members are similar and should have a fair share of available resources.

Communisation demands a fraternity that involves, among other things, *mutual aid* as theorized by Kropotkin, and equality as expressed in *The Internationale* lines: “There are no supreme saviours/Neither God, nor Caesar, nor tribune”.

But *equality is not to be achieved by book-keeping*. As long as we measure in order to share out and “equalize”, inequality is sure to be present. Communism is not a “fair” distribution of riches. Even if, particularly at the beginning and under the pressure of circumstances, our priority may sometimes be to share goods and resources in the most equitable way (which, whether we like it or not, amounts to some form of rationing), our prime motive and mover will not be the best and fairest way to circulate goods, but our human links and the activities that result from them.

# Universality

Where do capitalism's powerful drive and resilience come from? Undoubtedly from its amazing and always renewed capacity to invent advanced ways of exploiting labour, to raise productivity, to accumulate and circulate wealth. But also from its fluidity, its ability to supersede rigid forms, to remodel hierarchy and discard vested interests when it needs to, not forgetting its adaptability to the most varied doctrines and regimes. This plasticity has no precedent in history. It derives from the fact that capitalism has no other motive than to create abstract value, to maximize its flow, and eventually to set in motion and accumulate more figures than goods.

That aspect is documented enough for us not to go into details. What matters here is that capitalist civilization develops extreme individualism, while creating a *universality* of sorts, which is also a form of *freedom* (of which democracy is the political realization): it breeds and favours a new type of human being potentially disconnected from the ties of tradition, land, birth, family, religion and established creeds. In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the modern Londoner eats a banana grown in the West Indies (where she was holidaying last week), watches an Argentinean film, chats up an Australian woman on the Internet, rents a Korean car, and from her living-room accesses any classical or outrageously avant-garde work of art as well as all schools of thought. Capitalism is selling her no less than an infinity of possibilities. Fool's gold, we might object, because it is made of passivity and spectacle in the situationist sense, instead of truly lived-in experience. Indeed... Yet, however specious this feeling of empowerment, it socially “functions” as it is able to arouse emotion and even passion.

We would be wrong to assume that a period when communisation is possible and attempted would automatically and quickly eliminate the appeal of false riches – material or spiritual. Two centuries of modern capitalist evolution have taught us how resourceful that system can prove. In troubled times, social creativity will not only be on our side: in order to ride out the storm, capitalism also will put forward authenticity and collectiveness. It will provide the individual with opportunities to go beyond his atomized self. It will suggest critiques of “formal” democracy, defend planet Earth as a shared heritage, oppose cooperation to competition and use to appropriation. In short, it will pretend to change everything... except capital and wage-labour.

The communist perspective has always put forward an unlimited development of human potentials. Materially speaking: everyone should be able to enjoy all the fruits of the world. But also in the “behavioural” field, in order to promote, harmonise and fulfil talents and desires. The surrealists (“absolute freedom”) and the situationists (“to live without restraints”) went even further and extolled the subversive merits of transgression.

Today, the most advanced forms of capitalism turn this critique back on us. Current Political Correctness and its Empire of Good leave ample room for provocation, for verbal and often factual transgression. Let us take a look at the many screens that surround us: compared to 1950, the boundary is increasingly blurred between what is sacred and profane, forbidden and allowed, private and public. English readers had to wait until 1960 to buy the unexpurgated version of *Lady Chatterley’s Lover*: fifty years later, on-line pornography, whatever that word covers, is widespread (according to some figures, 12% of all sites and 25% of Internet searches deal with pornography). Contemporary counter-revolution will appeal much less to moral order than it did in the 1920s and 30s, and often have a “liberal-libertarian” and permissive-transgressive flavour. Communisation, on the other hand, will prevail by giving birth to ways of life that will tend to be universal, but not dominated by addiction, virtuality and public imagery.

## The inescapable contradiction

Communisation will be possible because those who make the world can also unmake it, because the class of labour (whether its members are currently employed or out of a job) is also the class of the critique of work. Unlike the exploited in pre-capitalist times, wage-earners can put an end to exploitation, because commodified (wo)men have the means to abolish the realm of commodity. It is the *working class /proletariat* duality we are talking about: a class, as Marx put it in 1844, which is not a class while it has the capacity to terminate class societies.

Marxists often turn this definition into formulaic dialectics. Non-Marxists make fun of it: the French liberal Raymond Aron used to say that the “working class” is worthy of the fine name “proletariat” when it acts in a (revolutionary) way that suits Marxists. Anyone who takes this definition seriously cannot evade the obvious: this duality is *contradictory*. Those who handle the modern means of production and have thereby the ability to subvert the world, are **also** those with a vested interest in the “development of the productive forces”, including utterly destructive ones, and are often caught up, willy-nilly, not just in the defence of their own wages, shop-floor conditions and jobs, but also of industry, of the ideology of work and the myth of progress.

We have no other terrain apart from this contradiction. It dramatically exploded in January 1919, when a few thousand Spartakist insurgents went to battle amidst the quasi indifference of several hundred thousand Berlin workers. Communisation will be the positive resolution of the contradiction, when the proletarians are able and willing to solve the social crisis by superseding capitalism. Therefore communisation will also be a settling of scores of the proletarian with him/herself.

Until then, and as a contribution to this resolution, communist theory will have to acknowledge the contradiction, and proletarians to address it.

# For further reading

To the best of our knowledge, *Un monde sans argent* has not been translated in English, except for short extracts published in the SPGB magazine *Socialist Standard* (July 1979) : John Gray "For communism" site : reocities.com

Bruno Astarian, *Crisis Activity & Communitisation*, 2010: hicsalta-communitisation.net (with other texts by B. Astarian on communism)

Background information on how the "communitisation" idea became explicit in the 1970s :

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And :

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