Here and Elsewhere

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Mikkel Bolt Rasmussen argues that we must both continue to identify the revolutionary perspective as a communist one and continue to describe the revolution as a *communist* revolution. He contributes to the on-going discussion of the revolutionary position by reflecting on the relationship between revolution, counterrevolution and reformism. His essay is also contributing to *Open!'s* Commonist Aesthetics theme.

The Revolutionary Perspective is (Still or Again?) Communist Not Commonist (and Definitely Not State Capitalist)

These are indeed interesting times. After a long period of seeming quiescence, a new wave of class struggle has burst forth after the outbreak of the global economic crisis in 2007–2008. Since then, there have been revolutions in Tunisia, Egypt, Cyrenaica, Tripolitania and Syria, uprisings in Greece, Spain, Brazil, Bulgaria, Turkey and Ukraine, and the emergence (and disappearance) of the first nationwide protest movement in the US since the late 1960s. A one-sided, three-decade class war has suddenly been challenged.

The following text offers some reflections and hypotheses on the failure of the European revolutions from 1917 to 1923, which enabled the capitalist state to integrate and nationalise the Western European working classes, and tries to argue that we still need to identify the revolutionary perspective as communist and describe the revolution as a communist revolution. The text is thus an attempt to contribute to the on-going discussion of the revolutionary position. If it is correct that we still need to think and name the revolution as a communist revolution we have to start by explaining what the communist project consists of and what it is not. This is of course no easy task as the terms of communism and socialism have been seriously distorted during a century long process of falsification from Stalin's idea of "socialism in one country" to the Cold War battle between the "Communist States" in the East and capitalist nation-states in the West onwards to "the Triumph of the West" in 1989 / 1991. The traditional division of politics into left and right further complicates the discussion of the revolutionary position. In the democratic framework, the communist revolution necessarily comes off looking like an excess (identified with frightening names like Saint Just or Lenin).[1]

The relationship between revolution, counterrevolution and reformism is the principal theme of the text. It is not intended as a series of *Leitsätze* (that would not be appropriate; we know that from Genet and Derrida's dialogue on the question of engagement in favour of the black revolutionaries in the early 1970s as well as from Spivak's later reformulations of the question of the subaltern).[2] I offer no guidelines, but I attempt to keep the revolutionary situation open as we move into year four of the long process of "ending the postcolonial world order" (as Hamid Dabashi describes it in his account of the Arab revolutions)[3], affirming the Arab revolutionaries' immense efforts to push for the abolition of the present state of things.

Beyond what the protagonists say about themselves and what they are doing, we can glimpse a communist dimension in the protests – especially in the revolutions in North

Africa and in the Middle East, but also in riots elsewhere. The struggles are being articulated at a distance from old organisational models; there is no single party, and, in general, the protests and upheavals are characterised as very contradictory. It is difficult to say what is beginning and what is ending. There has been a return to "older" models of class struggle – for instance, the general strike – and the streets have once again become the scene of protests. The 1990s discourse of the disappearance of the street as a political space evaporated in the blink of an eye in January 2011 as old-school barricades were built and teargas, Molotov cocktails and bullets filled the air in Tunis and Cairo. In many of the protests there are vague references to "old" reformist programs, but these are clearly extremely difficult to realise in the present conjuncture because the political system seems unable to mediate the protests or unwilling to make compromises. "Programmatism", the workers' movement's attempt to take over the production apparatus and manage capital, forcing it to make a compromise such as the post-war Keynesian wage productivity deal, has broken down in the West and it remains a question of whether it is an option elsewhere. Other protests have clearly rejected the idea of a compromise and, instead, point towards something that for now does not have a name. The current situation is thus one of "means without ends". We are somehow caught in between. There are few images of a better tomorrow anywhere; neither capital nor its would-be antagonists seem to have a clear picture of what is to come. But certain classic patterns repeat themselves and some fundamentals still apply. So let us start with the historical defeats, the counterrevolution and the communist action program.

A short history of revolution

The communist revolution from 1917 to 1923 was the first global attack on capitalism. The proletariat in Russia and Germany were the avant-garde in the communist offensive. The goal was the creation of a communist society without money and a state. The revolution, however, failed in both Russia and Germany. In Germany, the combination of parliamentary elections and the *Freikorps* proved too powerful for the German working class. [4] In Russia, the revolution was contained by Western powers that shelved internal disputes in order to make sure that the revolution did not spread. [5] The starting point for any new revolutionary wave is thus the defeat of the old revolutions. The bourgeoisie isolated the Russian revolution, which never amounted to anything but a political event and thereafter deteriorated into state capitalism. Stalin's "socialism in one country" effectively eradicated any international perspective and identified socialism with the state and the nation. In Western Europe, it took another World War before capital became strong enough to fully integrate the thinned-out working classes into the nation-states.

As Amadeo Bordiga has stressed time and again, World War Two was the final destruction of the first offensive of the communist revolution; the proletariat had suffered a tremendous defeat that made possible the orgiastic development of capital we have seen since. [6] The anti-fascist struggle and post-war, state-led modernisation buried the revolutionary perspective. After 1945, the working class became integrated in both the West and the East and even "the tidal wave of colour" – the anti-colonisation process that took place from the end of World War Two to the late 1950s – did not launch a new revolutionary movement in Europe.

However, the revolutionary perspective re-emerged in the West during the 1960s, when workers and young people rejected the factory's assembly-line work and the leisure made possible by the Keynesian wage productivity deal. The access tonsumption, the satisfaction of basic material needs and the possibility of a life partly outside wage labour was not enough for the new generations who challenged post-war reformism with demands for more and thereby also exposed the Western working class's acceptance of the capitalist relations of production. The revolutionaries during the years around 1968 rediscovered the communist revolution from 1917 to 1923 but did not manage to formulate

a genuine alternative social project. The development from idea to ideal to projection did not take place in 1968. Instead, 1968 was one long experiment with identity, gender, sexuality, art and music.

Capital's response was quick and took the form of a thorough capitalist counteroffensive that dispersed the rebellious subjects and replaced them with technology and wage slaves far away from the centre of accumulation. The period from the beginning of the 1970s was one long retreat for the proletariat (the few exceptions such as the Latin American leftist movements headed by Chavez, Lula and Morales among others are in fact state capitalist reforms designed to strengthen national capital accumulation, not socialism or communism).

The communist revolution

The communist revolution is the joint abolition of the nation-state and the capitalist money economy. This is the program Marx and Engels outline in the last pages of *The Communist Manifesto* in 1848. [7] For Marx, the end of the separation of people into nations and the supersession of private property were intimately connected. In capitalist societies, most social activities are mediated by labour and money, and this mediation produces dependency and opaqueness. Capital's inherent logic is the creation of more money beyond all other considerations, including the well-being of human beings, nature, etc. The communist revolution transcends this condition by abolishing the core forms of capitalist economy, not by enabling the workers to take over the production process. The latter would amount to the workers controlling their own exploitation. The revolutionary politics of the 20th century collapsed in attempts to realise that program. The purpose of production in a communist society will not be the creation of surplus value, meanwhile, work as wage labour will have to be abolished. In a communist society, people work to produce means of subsistence, not to make money.

Counterrevolution, then and now

A counterrevolution is a movement that takes over the dynamic in a political-economic transformation when the transformation is devoid of alternatives, transforming the revolutionary energies into an impetuous innovation of modes of production, lifestyles and social relations that re-establish and consolidate capitalist hegemony. A counterrevolution is often nationalist and always an attempt to cancel the revolutionary critique of the capitalist mode of production. A counterrevolution will often try to pick up revolutionary themes and tropes, but it is always opportunistic in its references to the revolutionary communist perspective. In this way, the counterrevolution produces a "negative dialectic" which replaces the egalitarian aspirations of the masses with a version based on the nation-state. As Paolo Virno writes, the counterrevolution uses the very presuppositions and economic, social, and cultural tendencies that the revolution would have been able to engage: it occupies and colonises the territory of its adversary and gives different responses to the same questions that caused the revolution in the first place. [8] The counterrevolution, like its symmetrical opposite, leaves nothing unchanged. It creates an extended state of emergency in which the temporal succession of events seems to accelerate. It actively makes its own "new order" and forges new mentalities, cultural habits, tastes and customs.

In the 1930s, Karl Korsch described the counterrevolution as the variety of efforts in several nations – including nations politically and even militarily opposed to one another – to nullify the independent movement of the proletariat. [9] He differentiated between preventive counterrevolutions like Mussolini's, which were able to incorporate and use large parts of the avant-garde culture (including but not limited to, the Italian Futurists) – what the Situationists would later describe as "recuperation" and what Boris Groys writes about as

the totalitarian state's "*Gesamtkunstwerk*"-continuation of the avant-garde – because the counterrevolution occurred early before the break up became a genuine revolt – and real counterrevolutions like Hitler's and Stalin's, which did not permit any kind of experimentation. [10] The National Socialists, who had to deal with a Keynesian or "reformist" problem and quickly reverse rampant unemployment, were not even able to integrate either the national Bolshevists (Martin Heidegger and Ernst Jünger) or the pro-Nazi expressionist movement (Gottfried Benn and Emil Nolde). But regardless of the timing of the counterrevolution, it is always a conscious attempt to destroy an actual revolutionary process and prevent another one from happening in the future.

The Western military interventions in the Middle East and North Africa have been preventive counterrevolutions aimed at destroying the possibility of Arab autonomy. For decades there have been efforts to prevent an autonomous Arab world from materialising and to keep the Arab masses separate and divided, e.g., through invasions or military interventions. This has been the case with Iraq, Libya and Mali. The interventions in Gaza, Lebanon and Iraq were preventive, the ones in Libya and Mali were attempts to contain the revolutionary forces unleashed by the "Arab Spring". It is never about solving local problems, but about creating new ones in order to prevent development. The revolts in Tunisia and Egypt took the Western powers by surprise, but since then they have not been slow to respond with attempts to derail the revolutionary process. The formula was ready to be implemented when the protests spread to Libya: civil war and military intervention muddled the conflict, which resulted in chaos, with different armed groups fighting each other. The goal is always to drain the revolutionaries of energy. This is also the case with Syria. There the formula is to create civil war and provide economic and military support to the different groups fighting the regime. It is ideal when the revolution can be transformed into a religious and ethnic conflict. The revolutions must be isolated: it is very important that they do not spread. The intervention in Mali had this function; it provided support for Morocco and Algeria. The Tunisian Spring must not be allowed to spread to the other Maghreb countries. As in 1917, when the Western powers intervened in Poland and the Caucasus, it is about blocking the launch of a revolution.

On the ground, we see the different national armies and political Islam that constitute the counterrevolution. In Egypt, the mosques and the military may be fighting each other for the small amount of surplus value that can be created during the crisis, but they are in agreement about the objective: putting an end to the revolution. In Syria, Assad's paramilitary regime is fighting a liberation movement that is being subverted by Islamist forces financed by the Saudis and the Emirates. Political religious forces are always counterrevolutionary. The revolution is always opposed to the idea of a sacred country or city, as well as to the idea of an all-powerful military. The revolutionaries do not recognise themselves in either a uniform or a cassock.

State capitalism

The Soviet Union was never socialist. The Russian revolution remained just a political victory and the Bolsheviks were unable to subvert the existing bourgeois economic and social framework. They nationalised industry, but the capitalist economy was never abolished. The Soviet worker continued to create surplus value like any other wage labourer. Wage labour was never replaced with anything else and neither were the commodity and price forms. In that sense, capital defined as "money making money" was never replaced in the Soviet Union. The state just took over the production apparatus. But that is neither socialism nor communism. Not only was the Soviet Union not socialist, the Central and Eastern European states, Yugoslavia, Albania, the People's Republic of China, Castro's Cuba, the Socialist Republic of Vietnam and North Korea were or are all capitalist societies and were never socialist societies. Production and circulation have remained capitalist in all of these places, with the state trying to control the market. Wage labour was never questioned, the state simply expropriated the means of production but continued to employ wage labourers and accumulate capital in order to invest in industry and agriculture.

Excursus: Adherents of the "Idea of Communism" all seem to subscribe to some version of state capitalism and none of them have engaged in any kind of serious critique of money. In that sense, what they have kept alive during the days of violent anti-communism is, in fact, not communist or socialist thought but merely reformist or centrist ideas that have plagued the revolutionary tradition all along. Badiou, Žižek, Dean and Bosteels all seem to subscribe to different versions of the state capitalist project. [11]

Commonism as centrism

It remains pivotal to continue the critique of what remains of the Western working class movement that is today yet again ready to perform its historical centrist role of connecting reform and revolution, thereby diverting the revolutionary breakup. The task of the centrist position has always been to use the revolutionary energy to engage in reforms of the existing institutions, diverting the revolutionary attack and its subversion of the existing institutions and wealth. The function of centrism is to turn the revolutionary attack into reforms of the existing institutions. Under the present conditions, a substantial part of the so-called commonist discourse – commonism, the commons, the Common, commonance – is centrist in so far as it remains focused on the working class in the West and stops short of critiquing the money form. Its solidarity with the revolting masses elsewhere is primarily rhetorical and it very quickly ends up talking about the working class in the West. It is social reformism disguised as an "autonomous" venture. [12] It is about reconquering "our" wealth, about "a communalising of reproduction", but always within the framework of the existing society and the nation-state. [13] This program amounts to nothing more than the self-management of surplus production, in other words, to a worker's capitalism in which labour poses itself as the dominant pole *within* the capital / wage labour relation. [14] The communist critique of capital as valorising value tends to disappear. Commonism thus ends up somewhere between a straightforward reformist position and the revolutionary perspective, something like a return to small regional work communities, i.e., a sentimental anti-capitalism à la Proudhon.

Lower and higher stage of socialism

Even though Marx wrote thousands of pages about private property and capital, he never actually wrote anything that could be called a theory of socialism. In the first volume of *Capital*, for instance, the term only appears in a footnote in which Marx quotes an author who uses the term. In a letter to the German Social Democratic Party, which later became known as the "Critique of the Gotha Programme", Marx wrote five pages about a possible post-capitalist economy and the transition from the revolution to a socialist distribution of goods and onwards to communist consumption.[15] These pages constitute the most detailed account – but we are only talking about five pages! – of the economic system Marx thought could replace the capitalist mode of production.

In accordance with his definition of capital as money generating money, Marx focuses on the role of the money form in capitalist society. In a socialist society, or what Lenin and Bordiga called "the lower stage of socialism", money will be replaced by work-time calculations, Marx writes. In the lower stage of socialism, the economy is subjected to certain restrictions (i.e., de-growth). It will thus not be an economy of growth but an economy that "repairs" the capitalist economy's product with its perverted direction towards a market by connecting the economy as a whole to the ability-need relation of the human inhabitants of this planet ("from each according to his ability, to each according to his need"). In fact, the idea of the abolition of money from Marx to Bordiga implies a reorganisation of the institutions of social wealth completely outside of capitalist considerations of money value; all considerations will instead be directed towards the satisfaction of human needs. It will be a transitional economy, what Marx termed socialism. This is so because there is both a judgement of capability and a judgment of need in the idea of "from each according to his ability, to each according to his needs". In other words, the economy is individualised. It is only the distribution of goods that is socialised at this stage. The transformation of production takes place in parallel and is not directed by anything other than the satisfaction of the needs that are considered important (cf. the role of a proletarian power in deciding priorities). It is a transitional economy because the apparatus is the capitalist production apparatus, which the socialists take over and use.[16] The abolition of money also implies the disappearance of capitalist property. In a capitalist society, an individual can sell his or her property without consuming it; in a socialist society this form is replaced by a dissipative organisation of the use of the means of production and a potentially equalitarian distribution of the means of consumption. This should be enough for socialism to prevent money from generating money and to block the self-enhancing of value. So, according to Marx, the important thing about a socialist society is the demonetarisation of production and consumption, i.e., that money is replaced as the means of distribution by work-time allocations or a kind of voucher system whereby everybody is remunerated for contributing to the creation of common wealth.

Marx thus emphasises the abolition of the money form: the abolition of capitalism requires that money is abolished because the wage and price forms conceal the transformation of human work into surplus labour and surplus value. The abolition of money never took place in the Soviet Union or in any other society that called itself socialist in the 20th century. Capital was never abolished in the Soviet Union. What happened was that the state expropriated most of the capital, creating a central, state-run and more or less planned economy. But that is neither socialism nor communism.

Indeed, the transition to socialism requires the negation of all basic forms of capitalist economy, wage, price and profit. The product of work will no longer appear as a commodity with a price that can be sold or bought for money. And the purpose of production will no longer be accumulation but consumption. So, wage labour will be abolished, people will work in order to produce the necessities of life and not in order to acquire means to get access to the necessities of life. Production will only be understood as the consumption of

work time and the products of nature transformed by humans. Production will no longer have a meaning in itself (as the self-expansion of value) but will be the means to consumption. The purpose of a lower stage of socialist production will thus be to produce the most favourable consumption through the least possible work and by stimulating the least destructive use of nature.

Turning to the idea of accelerationism, one could argue that we already have a digitalised global infrastructure today within which we can replace money with labour-time calculations. [17] The most important aspect is the global dimension. Today, neither socialism nor communism can be localist. Of course, this will be easier in the higher stages of communism; here there will be no calculation whatsoever, there will be no rationing and everyone will simply take what she needs. In that sense, communism will be something beyond equality in production and in consumption.

The Western workers' movement and the welfare state: integration and self-dissolution

The Western workers' movement stopped being anti-capitalist a long time ago, and it does not constitute any kind of anti-systemic force; rather, it has fused with the dominant order. [18] During the first decades of the 20th century, the old workers' movement allowed itself to be engulfed by the nation-state and its parliamentary democracy. The workers' movement's parties started competing for the national electorate's favour and soon identified with this group. Class war was replaced by national integration. The workers' movement in the West managed to free the West European and North American worker from material lack and even shortened the working day, allowing the worker a life outside wage labour (although it is, of course, not possible to escape completely). The post-war wage productivity deal allowed the workers to work less and buy more, while capital accumulated due to an enormous increase in productivity. The workers' movement not only fought for a bigger paycheque and shorter working hours but also for the generalisation of political rights which the bourgeois revolution launched but only realised for a small segment of the adult population in the West. It was the historical pressure of the workers' movement that secured recognition of the workers as political subjects, as citizens in the nation-state. Everybody is equal in the voting booth. The bourgeois class state transformed itself into the postwar planner state. But the political and economic struggles of the workers' movement took place within the confines of the generalised production of commodities. In this way, the outcome of the struggle was decided in advance and did not point beyond capitalism. The revolutionary perspective disappeared. The abolition of capitalism was suspended in favour of rights, higher wages and welfare.

The welfare state was the biopolitical side of this development, in which the workers were recognised as citizens in the bourgeois state and their conditions were improved due to the implementation of relative surplus value production. The welfare state and the huge growth in productivity made possible an unprecedented improvement in the worker's conditions. Misery and hunger were dramatically reduced in Western Europe and theUS. The welfare state's various benefits, such as social services, subsidies, social housing and pensions, allowed many to live a life partly beyond wage labour. But it is important to remember that the benefits were introduced with a view to maintaining an industrial reserve army, controlling and integrating the working class, and avoiding social unrest. The purpose of welfare is always to keep producing a motivated and mobile labour force. Social benefits and solidarity arrangements were set up in order to uphold national cohesion after World War Two and proletarian internationalism disappeared as the workers recognised themselves in the state and were mediated by its laws, benefits, housing policies and education.

The welfare state's national dimension becomes apparent when the crisis sharpens. Then it becomes evident that its benefits are reserved for the inhabitants of the nation-state and

that it blocks international solidarity. The crisis in the EU has illustrated this, with the northern European nation-states' EU-internal racist mocking of southern Europe. Today the welfare state is really only an option for rich nation-states in northern Europe and it is an open question how long it will even be a possibility there.

Incomplete restructuring

The crisis that broke out in the summer of 2007 and crested around September 2008 is actually a sign of a longer profitability problem in the capitalist world economy, as shown by Robert Brenner. [19] It is not a crisis of financial capitalism caused by greedy bankers and speculators, but one that goes to the heart of capitalism, the relation of productivity and the conditions for valorisation. Since the slowing down of the booming postwar economy that was made possible by two World Wars and the Depression, capital has had difficulties restoring profitability to the US-centred cycle of accumulation. From the 1970s onwards, capital has tried to "re-invent" itself by cutting expenses on variable and constant capital (especially wages and infrastructure). Due to the high credit levels that have sustained parts of the welfare system, the consequences have not been glaring in the Western world. But, in the past two decades, the dismantling of the postwar welfare state has accelerated everywhere, including in the West. In other parts of the world, this period has been characterised by underdevelopment and exclusion all along.

The crisis started 40 years ago, and neoliberalism is a 40-year crisis regime that for decades has tried to shift profits to sectors that generate price but not new value (the so-called FIRE sector). The result has been an intensifying recurrence of crises and the need to save on social reproduction. What we normally term neoliberal globalisation is in fact an unsuccessful attempt to recreate the conditions for a new expansion. The long list of crises and bubbles over the past four decades shows this. Capital has tried to handle the slowdown by turning to finance and moving production elsewhere: outsourcing as a flight from the rebellious workers in the West.

"Miraculous profit"

But the foundation of so-called neoliberal capitalism is unstable. Capitalism always tries to keep the costs of production down, and ordinarily treats labour as both an expense and an investment. But something seems to have changed. Neoliberal globalisation is the dream of profit without wage labour, a kind of capitalism on steroids, which thinks it can create surplus value without surplus labour. But that is impossible.

Exclusion and slums

Since the late 1970s, and especially after the Chinese economy was opened up, hundreds of millions of people in Southeast Asia, North Africa, Southern Africa and Latin America have been forced into wage slavery. But, at the same time, increasing numbers of people have been excluded from the capitalist economy on a global scale over the past 30 years. Even though the productivity of capitalism has increased significantly in the last three decades and neoliberal globalisation has removed numerous barriers to its expansion, capitalism has not been able to create a sufficient rate of profit to integrate a growing world population into its metabolism. More and more people are thus being expelled from wage labour. The growth in informal labour and various kinds of slum work are signs of this development, as described in detail by Serge Latouche. [20] Due to the restructurings that have taken place since the late 1970s – technological innovation, outsourcing and new forms of employment – a growing percentage of the proletariat has become superfluous to the creation of surplus value. They are outside, destined to live what Michael Denning terms "wageless lives". [21] They do not even constitute an industrial reserve army, but are simply excluded from the capitalist economy.

2011 as a threshold

After more than 30 years of neoliberal counterrevolution, something happened in 2011. The so-called "movement of the squares *[www.onlineopen.org/affect-space]*" spread from Tunis and Cairo to Madrid, Athens and New York in the course of a few months in 2011, and has since sprung up in other places such as São Paulo and Istanbul. This was an important change from a one-sided class war to active proletarian resistance against neoliberal globalisation and the present austerity regime. The new cycle of protests has so far not caused any changes in the economic policy being carried out on a governmental level, but it has produced a new vocabulary with which to address the capitalist crisis in different ways. The "private", self-accusing individualisation discourse is being rejected. It is not being replaced by a critical public conversation about the crisis – this does not seem possible at present – but the neoliberal self-optimisation doctrine is being challenged by destructive acts and blank refusal. In negative terms, the structural nature of the crisis is becoming visible in images of smashed windows and burned cars.

No causality

There is unfortunately no causality here: the communist revolution is a possibility and nothing more. A crisis is not necessarily a springboard for proletarian victory. The revolution is not inevitable and the transition from formal subsumption to real subsumption does not guarantee that a revolution will occur when a crisis happens. Not at all. We are currently in the midst of a capitalist crisis, but there is no straight line between crisis and revolution, between an economic downturn and a proletarian uprising in which workers destroy themselves as wage labourers. The crises and disasters that are themselves results of the continual mutation of capital do not necessarily transform themselves into a catastrophe for capitalism. Capitalism will not disappear by itself; it will not simply stop functioning due to declining profits, exclusion of workers, market saturation, etc., as Claude Bitot argues in his recent attempt to rethink the revolution (*sans prolétariat*). [22] The revolution will still have to entail the active self-dissolution of the proletariat, that is, the abolition of the labour upon which capital depends.

A crisis can also be very useful for a counterrevolution. This is one of the lessons from the 1930s. Nationalism and fascism thrive in periods of dissolution and chaos and can be used to divert revolutionary energy. As Mark Mazover shows in *Dark Continent*, authoritarian forms of political rule – in the 1930s, combinations of industrial capitalism, colonialism and imperialism, modern science and technology, eugenics and national chauvinism – can easily present themselves as the best solutions to an accelerated political development. [23]

Arab revolutions in the making

But there is a breath of fresh air coming from the other side of the Mediterranean. The Arab masses have started moving. The Arab revolts, which have seen local lumpen despots like Ben Ali and Mubarak and Gaddafi dethroned and Assad using all the means necessary to avoid the same fate, are so far the most substantial challenge to the ruling order and the capitalist world economy. The postcolonial construction is starting to crack. But despite the tremendous efforts of the Arab revolutionaries, the local ruling orders have so far been able to control the revolutionary breakup and divert the frustration into support for mosques and armies. The lumpen despots have, however, thus far managed to survive. But the disputes between the different factions of the local bourgeoisies are a sign of the accelerated tempo of the crisis and of the fundamental socioeconomic problems in the region. All attempts to derail the discontent come up against the hard reality of economic misery, and the unemployed young people are becoming more radicalised. As Gilbert Achcar argues in *The People Want*, the decapitation of this or that dictator will not satisfy the revolutionary masses, who seem intent on continuing to the bitter end.[24] The Nile Delta has been in a state of permanent unrest since 2006 and everything seems to indicate that the crisis will only intensify in Egypt, Tunisia, Libya, Syria, Iraq, Sudan and probably also in Algeria. The ills of the capitalist world manifest themselves in their purest form in these countries: They all suffer from lack of accumulation, which means overproduction, a tendency of the rate of profit to fall, and a growth of dead labour.

No future

Governments all over the world responded to the financial crisis by intensifying the degradation that has been the dominant modus operandi for the last 20 or 30 years: more neoliberal crisis management as fire fighting. The solution to the popped bubbles was cuts. This has been the IMF-sanctioned approach for more than two decades in places such as Latin America, North Africa and the former Eastern Bloc. Now the consequences of neoliberal austerity policies are plain to see, especially in southern Europe. Societies have been torn apart by waves of privatisation and cuts.

This development, which is destroying the likelihood of a better future within the framework of the present order, is paradoxically connecting the youth in the North with the youth in the South. In both parts of the world, more and more people are confronted with lives of debt or of living on the edges of wage labour – if, that is, they are even able to access capital's metabolism. This is a new development. In the late 1960s, Vietnam and China also played a mobilising role for the youth in the West, but more as abstract references than as lived reality (that is perhaps also why many people refrained from a critique of Mao Zedong and Ho Chi Minh's economic policies, which were, in fact, latter-day variants of the Soviet "socialism in one country" state capitalism). Today, the youth in the North and South are bound together by the absence of a future.

State bankruptcy: one, two, many...

As the Endnotes group argues in "The Holding Pattern", the austerity policies introduced after 2008 in most Western countries are actually a sign of the weakness of the local capitalist states. [25] The obvious solution to the economic crisis would be to increase public expenditures and inject money into society. However, the capitalist states are only able to do so to a very limited extent because most of them are already heavily indebted due to the long downturn since the early 1970s. Massive state debts make it difficult to take on new loans. At the same time, the states have to stave off deflation. Therefore they have to lend and spend money while making cuts. They are trapped by the previous period's lack of growth and have already been taking out large loans for a long time. Thus we are now in a situation in which the state debts of the large economies are undermining the prospect of a real recovery. This, of course, opens the door to radical perspectives. If the trust in the states' ability to guarantee the value of money disappears and money actually loses its value, real changes will begin to happen.

The age of riots

Despite persistent attempts to stop the breakup, protests continue. People have taken to the streets once more in Mahalla, Alexandria and Cairo. Similar scenarios have occurred in Istanbul and other Turkish cities, where protesters have clashed with the police. Protesters have begun to revolt again in Ukraine; there are riots in Barcelona and Madrid; protests continue in Bosnia and Herzegovina; when one strike ends somewhere in China a new one begins elsewhere in the country; etc. [26] The age of riots does indeed seem to be upon us. [27] More and more cities in the Mediterranean region, in Egypt, Spain, Bosnia, but also in Ukraine have entered a state of permanent unrest. This is the case in Cairo, Mahalla, Madrid, Sarajevo, Istanbul, Izmir, Kiev and Lviv. Meanwhile, the civil war continues to rage in Syria. And as the protests continue, resurface and take on new forms, the reformist illusions about national democracy and the peaceful survival of the national working classes fall by the wayside. This is important, because only by spreading can the new protest cycle continue. It is the same everywhere, whether it be in Egypt, Syria, Bosnia or Ukraine: A revolution must expand and spread, otherwise it will die out. This is one of the lessons of previous revolutions. The communist perspective is permanent world revolution. If a revolution is limited to a national context, the counterrevolutionary dynamic will take over. The course of events in Egypt shows this historical rule to be true: The ruling class will take over the political disruption and negate the capital-subverting dimension. The situation in Syria is also telling: There the situation is even more tragic, as the revolutionary breakup is being transformed into mass death and a spiral of state terror and counterterror sponsored by foreign imperialist and regional powers that all want to see the revolutionaries bleed to death.

World revolution

The revolution is once again taking off in the "margins", as it did in 1848 and 1917. In 1848, Germany was the weak link, in 1917 it was Russia, and today it is Tunisia and Egypt. [28] Then as now, it is important to create a connection between the centre and periphery in order to ensure that the Arab masses are not caught up in a form of autocratic socialist accumulation. The remains of the working class in Europe, the US and Japan must also be mobilised, as has occurred in the case of the square occupation movement in 2011 (*los indignados* and OWS). The 20th century is full of tragic examples of attempts to create "socialism in one country", and we need to ensure that this will not be the fate of the Arab masses if they manage to produce an autonomous space. As C.L.R. James wrote, the only exit remains a world revolution:

Marxists must know and seek every possible means of making it clear that the national quality of the state must be destroyed; that is to say, the revolution has to be an international socialist revolution. … The nation-state cannot function today. And not to know that, not to make that clear means the destruction of the revolution.[29]

The abolition of capitalism and the money system can only occur through a joint effort of workers in both the "old centre" as well as "the weak links". Only through the radical questioning of the fundamental premises of this society – an economy based on the production of value – will we be able to transcend the contradictions capitalism confronts us with, including the nation-state and attempts to embed socialism in one country.

What can be done? It is important that the revolutionaries in Egypt, Bosnia, Ukraine, etc. are not left on their own. If their resistance is not to be in vain, we must establish an international solidarity movement. As long as there is no revolutionary situation in the West, the task for revolutionaries here must be to establish a strategic support movement fighting for open borders and against Western intervention aimed at counterrevolution in the regions where there is resistance, i.e., the Middle East, North Africa and the Balkan Peninsula.

But the revolution only stands a chance if it is international. The neoliberal restructuring has created a global labour market, therefore the revolution has to be global. A social revolution in North Africa and the Middle East is not possible without a general showdown with the capital relation in the West. The chances of this happening are no doubt slim, but the question is, of course, whether there are any other options if we are to avoid future wars and a biospheric meltdown. Before long we may find ourselves in a situation where we are left with a choice between communism or the destruction of the planet. As Bordiga wrote in 1956, after the sinking of the ocean liner SS Andrea Doria (we can update the example with the recent sinking of the MV Sewol Ferry in Korea):

The ruling class, for its part, (is) incapable of struggling against the devil of business activity, superproduction and superconstruction for its own skin, thus demonstrates the end of its control over society, and it is foolish to expect that, in the name of a progress with its trail indicated by bloodstains, it can produce safer ships than those of the past.[30]

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Footnotes

1. The left-right political spectrum is a huge problem for the revolutionary perspective and does not make any sense. In daily life, we pretend to know what the distinction means but it in fact has no logical signification whatsoever. The historical origin of the distinction between "left" and "right" goes back to September 1789 when a Parisian paper first used it to describe opposed fractions in the National Assembly. To the left of the president's chair in the Assembly were the opponents of the monarchy gathered and to the right the king's supporters. Traditionally, the place of honour in the Assemblée was on the right of the president and this place belonged to the aristocracy. The division of the political sphere into left and right thus came into place: The right being the ones who wanted to maintain the status quo while the ones on the left were in favour of change. If the National Assembly had been arranged the other way around we would be labelling Bordiga, Rühle, Gorter and Mattick "ultra-rightists". The way the left-right division is used distorts capitalist society and creates political sympathies that are based on unconscious political reflexes alone. The actual political effect of this dichotomy in Western Europe is more often than not a very surprising equal division between those voting left and right. This is not the effect of a corresponding uniformity in the social constitution of these states; it is instead caused by the manifestation of the left–right model's purely mathematical logic. The figure produces a polarisation of the population, which cuts across social groupings. The population is split into two more or less equal political groups who are by definition opposed to each other. The polarisation inherent in the left-right dichotomy "naturally" privileges the centre and political compromise. The problem is, of course, that the capitalist mode of production is anything but moderate! It is radical in the sense of going to the core of things. Life in the most basic sense – people and the biosphere – is being threatened by capitalist production and capitalist work. The solution ought to be as radical – the negation of the capitalist system. But the left-right dichotomy prevents the development of this radical project. Within the left-right political spectrum, radicalism and the revolutionary perspective takes on the form of "extremism", which is loaded with negative associations and is portrayed as blind passion and terror. People on the left are afraid to go to the extreme, to step outside the normal cosy political spectrum and end up standing alone. The abolition of the capitalist system is thus abandoned. The fear of extremism functions as a deterrent to thinking (through matters). The result is that "the left" functions as a guarantee for the continuation of the current political thinking. In that sense, the important distinction is not one between left and right but between being for or against the communist revolution.
2. As Derrida wrote to his friend, when committing oneself to George Jackson's case it was crucial not to reproduce the submission that Jackson had already been subjected to in the first place. Cf. my analysis of the exchange between Genet and Derrida in 1971, when Genet mobilised a group of French intellectuals in defence of Jackson. "Yes of Course, but… Derrida to Genet on Commitment in Favour of Jackson", *New Formations*, no. 75, 2012, pp. 140–153.
3. Hamid Dabashi: *The Arab Spring: The End of Postcolonialism* (London: Zed Books, 2012).
4. As vividly described by Sebastian Haffner in *Failure of a Revolution: Germany 1918–1919* (Chicago: Banner Press, 1986).
5. For a still very useful account, see Arno Mayer: *Politics and Diplomacy of Peacemaking: Containment and Counterrevolution at Versailles*, 1918-1919 (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1967).
6. Amadeo Bordiga: "Class Struggle and 'Bosses' Offensives", 1949, www.marxists.org.
7. Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels: *Manifesto of the Communist Party*, 1848, www.marxists.org. For a good and careful reading of Marx's communist action program in the Manifesto, see Etienne Balibar: 'Remarques de circonstance sur le communisme', *Actuel Marx*, no. 48, 2010, pp. 33–45.

8. Paolo Virno: "Do You Remember Counterrevolution?", Michael Hardt and Paolo Virno (eds.): *Radical Thought in Italy: A Potential Politics* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996), p. 241.
9. Karl Korsch: "State and Counter-Revolution", 1939, www.marxists.org. The best descriptions of the counterrevolutionary dynamic remains Korsch's articles from the 1920s and 1930s and Bordiga's articles from the 1950s.
10. Boris Groys: *The Total Work of Stalinism: Avant-Garde, Aesthetic Dictatorship, and Beyond* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992).
11. One of the problems with Badiou and Žižek is that neither have any kind of historical analysis but remain on a respectively "philosophical" and "political" level where communism is either an idea or a political project that has to be realised by a leader (what Žižek has recently termed a "Left Thatcher"). This means that they actually do not engage in any kind of analysis of capital's development, i.e., the moving contradiction of the value form. Communism is precisely an idea (for Badiou), a new beginning (for Žižek) and a horizon (for Bosteels and Dean). In a way, it is "mistake" to accuse Badiou of omitting the Marxist critique of political economy as he does so on principled post-Maoist grounds ("to be of the world means to act without Idea" versus "the only possible reawakening is the popular initiative in which the power of the idea will take root"). But the fact remains that this bracketing of the objective determinants leaves him unable to account for the historical circumstances. This gives his account of communism an extra-worldly quality that presents huge difficulties for communist politics as it severs revolutionary praxis from its historical field of emergence and creates a formalistic and selective history that leaps from the French Revolution to the Commune and from the Russian Revolution to the Cultural Revolution. This, in turn, paves the way for a truly problematic understanding of historical figures such as Mao. Marx, of course, understood communism as "the real movement that abolishes the present state of things", in other words, communism as a historical possibility. It is not a question of the desirability of communism but the material conditions of the possibility of communism. But as Badiou and Žižek (as well as Bosteels and Dean) rarely engage in any kind of historical analysis of the capitalist mode of production – i.e., refrain from engaging in/with a critique of political economy – they are left with abstract ruminations about communism, the party form, historical sequences (Badiou) or the people (Dean). If there is a crystalline clarity to Badiou's philosophy, Žižek is in some regards the opposite, as he seems to be trying to adopt all possible positions within the Hegel-Marx-Lacan triangle he operates. He, of course, often gets things right, but his analysis of the historical development remains very rudimentary and pell-mell. This comes forth very clearly in his analysis of neoliberalism, which he presents as a political project carried forth by politicians like Reagan and Thatcher, as if the structural changes that have been taking place in the capitalist world economy since the 1970s have simply been a matter of political decisions; Reagan and Thatcher deciding to do this or that. Neoliberalism cannot be reduced to a political project that has to do with leadership. When the development of capitalism moved towards a dismantling of the Keynesian wage-productivity-deal after the oil crisis in 1973, liberalism experienced a revival and, equipped with the prefix "neo" neoliberalism, became the official ideology legitimising the privatisations and cuts that governments all over the world carried out. To simplify, you could say that neoliberalism is the ideology that comes with the re-structuring in the late 1970s and early 1980s. Neoliberalism is thus not the "cause" of the shift. This does not mean that Thatcher did not intend to pursue the policies she did. What it does mean is that the shift did not take place because she was elected. Thatcher was elected because neoliberalism was the available policy at that moment in history. Even the Socialist Mitterand was forced to change his course and accept a more liberal-capitalist and market-oriented agenda two years after he was elected. The purpose of the re-structuring was to re-establish the extraction of surplus value by expanding the surplus labour on a global scale. But Žižek remains utterly indifferent to these structural constraints. As for Bosteels and Dean, they explicitly refer to Venezuela and Bolivia as communist experiments and argue in favour of a state-led economy, which has

nothing to do with communism. A Leninist party and a strong state that runs and plans the economy (being in charge of the production of surplus value) are thus presented as the means to abolish capitalism. "We will need the state in order to abolish capitalism", as Dean explains in an interview in *Platypus Review* (platypus1917.org). But getting the state (instead of the bourgeoisie) to control the national accumulation of capital is neither socialism nor communism. We are, in other words, apparently back in 1926 when the idea of "socialism in one country" was adopted by the Third International.

12. One good example of commonism's reformism can be found in David Bolier and Silke Helfrich's introduction to the comprehensive, 73 essay-long e-anthology, *The Wealth of the Commons*, where they write about the need to create "an architecture of law and policy to support the commons". As they phrase it: "The future of the commons would be much brighter if the state would begin to provide formal charters and legal doctrines to recognise the collective interests and right of commoners. There is also a need to reinvent market structures so that the old, centralised corporate structures of capitalism do not dominate, and squeeze out, the more locally responsive, socially mindful business alternatives." *The Wealth of the Commons: A World Beyond Market & State* (Amherst, Massachusetts: Levellers Press, 2012), www.wealthofthecommons.org.

13. It is a characteristic of the commonist discourse, which often combines a subjectivist notion of self-liberation with an appeal to the state, that Peter Linebaugh ends the introduction to his, in other ways magnificent, *The Magna Carta Manifesto: Liberties and Commons for All* saluting Hugo Chavez's and Evo Morales's regimes in Venezuela and Bolivia. "As an economic issue, the commons seems pie-in-the-sky, but scholarly scrutiny shows that on the contrary it is down-to-earth. … [T]he world's commoners … must begin to think constitutionally, as already is the case in Venezuela, Bolivia, and Mexico." *The Magna Cart a Manifesto: Liberties and Commons for All* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008), p. 20.

14. Pierre Dardot and Christian Laval's *Commun. Essai sur la révolution au XXIe siècle* is a case in point. Dardot and Laval end up proposing a conception of socialism as the extension of democracy into economic life. "It is not a question of 'removing' the market as some have previously thought in order to replace it with a bureaucratic planning and distribution organ, it is about integrating the market into society, inscribing the freedom of individual consumption choices in a collectively decided framework … constructing a new 'civic' market institution that can unite the producers self-government with the consumers' collective sovereignty." *Commun. Essai sur la révolution au XXIe siècle* (Paris: La Découverte, 2014), pp. 495–496. This is a return to the idea of producer cooperatives where the means of production is collectively owned but where wage, price and profit are not abolished. The workers then receive the profits but continue to create surplus value, thus effectively exploiting themselves (and each-other if they allow wage differences).

15. Karl Marx: "Critique of the Gotha Programme", 1875, www.marxists.org.

16. There is a tendency in so-called communisation theory to radicalise the critique of the idea of a period of transition to such a degree that communism begins to look like a kind of magic that can be established immediately. That is not very likely. Revolution as the abolition of the value form and of the proletariat (as wage labourers) has to begin today, here and now, not in some distant utopia; it has to be part of the revolutionary process right away, but that does not mean that communism can be achieved from one day to the next, to paraphrase Jacques Camatte. It therefore remains very important to continue to develop the communist money critique along the lines Marx outlined in his "Critique of the Gotha Programme". Camatte contributed to this work with his *Capital and Community*, 1976, www.marxists.org. The Danish value-form theorist Gustav Bunzel, who was also part of the post-Bordigist group in the 1970s, also made some important contributions to the analysis of a transitional economy without money, especially in his small book *Teser om kommunismen* (Bergen: Ariadne, 1984). Unfortunately, none of Bunzel's texts have been translated.

17. Nick Srncik and Alex Williams: "Manifesto for an Accelerationist Politics", 2013, accelerationism.files.wordpress.com.
18. For a very useful analysis of the historical failure of the Western workers' movement, see "Freundinnen und Freunden der klassenlosen Gesellschaft: 28 Theses on Class Society", 2007, www.kosmoprolet.org.
19. Robert Brenner: *The Economies of Global Turbulence* (London: Verso, 2006).
20. Serge Latouche: *In the Wake of the Affluent Society: An Exploration of Post-Development* (London: Zed Books, 1993).
21. Michael Denning: "Wageless Life", *New Left Review*, no. 66, 2010, pp. 79–97.
22. Claude Bitot: *Repenser la révolution* (Paris: Spartacus, 2013). In his attempt to rethink the revolution, Bitot unfortunately ends up abandoning the idea of the proletariat (and the proletariat's active self-dissolution and the destruction of capitalism) and affirms the idea of the decadence of capitalism.
23. Mark Mazover: *Dark Continent: Europe's Twentieth Century* (London: Allen Lane, 1998).
24. Gilbert Achcar: *The People Want: A Radical Exploration of the Arab Uprising* (London: Saqi Books, 2013). Achcar gives a very good account of the socioeconomic background of the protests, but, unfortunately (though in accordance with his focus on the state and not the movements), ends up calling for a return to "the developmentalist policies of the post-war period without the despotism and corruption that accompanied them" (p. 286); this amounts to yet another round of state capitalism.
25. Endnotes: "The Holding Pattern", *Endnotes*, no. 3, 2013, endnotes.org.uk.
26. For a good presentation of the rise in the number of strikes over the past ten years in China, see *Mouvement Communiste*: "Workers' Autonomy Strikes in China", 2011, www.mouvement-communiste.com.
27. To use Badiou's description of the present epoch. Alain Badiou: *The Rebirth of History: Times of Riots and Uprisings* (London: Verso, 2012).
28. It was, of course, Trotsky who developed the idea of a permanent world revolution in which a proletarian offensive at the centre of accumulation went hand in hand with an independent workers' resistance located at the weak links of capitalist accumulation. Leon Trotsky: *The Permanent Revolution*, 1929, www.marxists.org.
29. C.L.R. James: "The Way Out – World Revolution", *Radical America,* no. 7, 1971, pp. 57–58.
30. Amadeo Bordiga: "Weird and Wonderful Tales of Modern Social Decadence", 1956, www.marxists.org.

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