

Against an unacceptable fate: Why anti-productivism?¹

I

The defeat of the workers movement has caused the isolation of social critique within limited circles of intransigents. The profound changes in the capitalist system and the growth of the State apparatus prevent any movement [*dérive*] towards a class-based organization that is oriented towards revolutionary objectives. Struggles are now oriented towards immediate demands that principally concern the preservation of jobs, while the flame of the great emancipatory objective is being blown out by the participatory tempest produced by the opening of political power [*des institutions*] to the so-called workers parties. On the terrain of theory, there's been a passage from revolutionary proletarian critique to liberal-bourgeois social ideology and, on the terrain of *praxis*, there's been a transformation of class struggle into unionized dialogue and electoral disputes. The proletariat hasn't come out of this unscathed: it has fused with the new middle classes into an amorphous mass that has been won over by the productivist regime. The successive crises caused by the new contradictions produced by globalization have hardly changed the previous situation. Radical minorities stubbornly reproduce a meaningless ideological workerism and cling to old and out-of-date formulae. Individualist, primitivist and ecologist alternatives are hardly more pertinent, because they are simply spare ideologies and not expressions of transformative movements that are based upon a real comprehension of the current historical conditions.

II

The new social regime developed from a fusion of Capital with the State and, consequently, of the economy with unionized labor and politics. Economic growth was the *sine qua non* condition for the advent of the *Welfare State*,² an objective that replaced “self-management” and “socialism” and, thus, the principal imperative of all party politics. According to the “progressive” mentality of the new leaders, the abundance of commodities and credit, real estate and governmental services – the fruits of a techno-economic “development” that created jobs – would dissolve all social antagonisms and put an end to the era of class struggle. The masses, enclosed within their private lives, would willingly leave all public and wage-related matters in the hands of professional negotiators and would promptly obey the directives transmitted by means of spectacular communication. Consequently, social critique was bound to be against [economic] development, even if it was only to counter the conformism produced by this “well being.” Moreover, it also had to be anti-patriarchal, anti-governmental and anti-political. It had

¹ Unsigned collective statement, published in *Revista Argelaga*, Barcelona, June 2015. <https://argelaga.wordpress.com>. Translated from the French version by NOT BORED! 27 June 2015. All footnotes by the translator. Italicized words and phrases between brackets [*thus*] are the original French. Words within brackets but not italicized [thus] have been added by the translator.

² English in original.

to break with the Social-Democratic tradition and political workerism as well as the machismo and ideology of Progress – deformed beliefs with which the bourgeoisie had contaminated the proletariat.

III

The integration of the workers, in their role as the principal force of commodity consumption, unified industry with life. Economic development was the weapon by which Capital colonized everyday life and destroyed civil society – the workers’ milieu, in particular – depriving it of the least autonomy. De-colonization can only be anti-productivist. The critique of the idea of Progress, like the critique of the neutrality of technology and the State that serves it, are the new points of departure. Other reasons have come to reaffirm anti-productivism as the principal characteristic of anti-capitalism: the downward spirals [*les dérives*] caused by the fusion of the land and the town, to the detriment of the former. The destructive impact of productivist politics on individuals and on the environment endangers the very existence of life on Earth: it contaminates, disturbs the climate, depopulates the countryside, exhausts resources, unbalances the land, and forces upon us an artificial and alienating city-based style of life. And so, social critique incorporates the critiques of industrial agriculture, the wastage of energy, consumerism and urbanism as fundamental elements. Revolution will not cause an acceleration of the economy; it will activate the emergency break. Capitalist forms of production, circulation and distribution are not self-manageable. The national or collective ownership of the eminently destructive means of production and circulation would not resolve any of these problems. Instead, the solution will be diverse processes of de-globalization, industrial dismantling, de-urbanization and the undoing of government [*désétatisation*].

IV

Social critique cannot do without the concepts of alienation, ideology, reason and the historical subject, without which it could never surpass the cultural horizon of domination. The revolutionary subject is an historical being, a community of individuals whose interests are universal, produced and leading towards its full realization in time. Traditional critique granted the roles of the subject of history and the redeemer of humanity to the proletariat, but given current political-economic conditions, we cannot attribute this honor to the disadvantaged mass of salaried workers. Firstly, because it has lost its centrality, it is no longer the principal productive force, which is now technology, that is to say, mechanization; and secondly, because it is no longer a world apart at the heart of society, with its own values, traditions and rules. It cannot constitute itself as a subject – as a community, as a class – by exclusively basing itself on the conditions of the salaried employee. Although legitimate, work-based conflicts are no longer capable of opening up a basic anti-capitalist perspective. Besides, those who, today, claim the honor of being in the first ranks of the fight for the abolition of Capital and the State are, precisely, not salaried workers, who greatly prefer to simply go along with the pragmatic politics of the new middle classes, which are the only ones that have shown a capacity for institutional initiative. The new subject, that is to say, the community of anti-capitalist combatants, must emerge from the conflicts whose resolution is impossible within the framework of the current system of domination.

V

Having reached its internal and external limits, capitalism is now perpetually in crisis and pursues its course through innumerable confrontations. If we leave aside military geopolitics, which is responsible for wars fought for the control of natural resources, and if we limit ourselves to local conditions, there are two types of struggles that are capable of bringing the nature of the system into question: urban struggles and the defense of the land.³ In the conurbations,⁴ there's been resistance against deportations and the intensified repression that the surveillance and control [*le contrôle*] of deported masses requires. Examples of such resistance include struggles against deportation, privatization, disposable employees [*précarisation*], and the abuses of law enforcement and the criminal justice system. And yet it is in the non-urban regions – where the living conditions are getting worse and endanger the very lives of the population and, consequently, where greater anti-productivist awareness could appear – that the biggest conflicts have taken place. The outlying suburbs, purged of agricultural activities, are being transformed into places for huge speculative projects that have little or no utility for the inhabitants: unconventional methods of exploring for oil and gas; the construction of immense infrastructures,⁵ macro-prisons, garbage dumps, incinerators, power plants, holiday residences, etc. Consequently, the defense of the territory against exploitative reorganization constitutes the axis around which anti-productivist struggle pivots – and this struggle has the particularity of surpassing the rural horizon. Its effects mostly proceed from the conurbations.

VI

The kinds of organization that arise from the new conflicts are based more upon neighborhood relations than workplace relations. Above all, the [historical] subject reconstitutes itself as a neighborhood organization, not as a union, coalition or political party, and thus the social question is presented more and more as an urban and land-based question. These kinds of organization, which include all spheres of social activity, have the advantage of being better prepared against bureaucratization, because they function horizontally, on the principle that representatives and tasks should be rotated among all of their members. These organizations do not have a single face, because they are the products of local conditions, acting as an assembly or platform, as a support group or a “zone to be defended.”⁶ They aren't immune from recuperation or reformism because anti-productivist consciousness doesn't accompany their struggles with sufficient vigor to render them irrecoverable and revolutionary. And this consciousness doesn't accompany them to the extent that the combatants' degree of dissidence is low and their fetishism of politics is high, which prevents their isolation from becoming a weapon. But it is precisely because the system cannot be reformed that the struggle shouldn't only focus on that system's negative aspects, but also upon those aspects that in some way constitute experimental

³ For the latter, cf. “What is anti-industrialism and what does it want?” by Miguel Amorós (2014): <http://www.notbored.org/anti-industrialism.pdf>.

⁴ The “urban sprawl,” which unites both city and suburb.

⁵ See as well the proposed construction of an international airport at Notre-Dame-des-Landes.

⁶ Cf. the “zone à défendre” (ZAD) at Notre-Dame-des-Landes, France: <https://zad.nadir.org/?lang=en>.

embryos of a new society. Community is created in mobilization and resistance as well as in constructive and creative work. Thus, in urban spaces, there have appeared neighborhood agoras, coordinated assemblies of workers, communitarian orchards, working-class canteens, alternative clinics, self-managed workshops and other more-or-less successful initiatives in response to concrete problems. Out in the countryside, there have been experiments with ruralization, such as complete cooperatives, occupations of sites, guerrilla gardening [*des plantations sauvages*], the recovery of communal goods,⁷ demands for [a return to] traditional self-governing practices (committees, councils, and universities), etc. These examples are dispersed, marginal, voluntarist and badly equipped, but have considerable importance because they show the way to follow when a veritable social movement crystallizes and surpasses the stage of barricades.

VII

To recapitulate: anti-productivism is a critical reflection and an antagonistic practice born from the conflicts that were caused by [economic] development in the ultimate stage of the capitalist regime. It is an open theory that evaluates the class struggles of the past and incorporates from the old anarchist and socialist traditions the critiques of urbanism, science, technology and progress. At the same time, it is pushed to action by a vague and widespread [*diffus*] feeling that [otherwise] the future will be a fruitless failure. The programmed obsolescence of humanity can only be stopped by the dismantling of industries and infrastructures, the reestablishment of a demographic balance between town and country, social decentralization and the undoing of government [*désétatisation*] – actions [*thèmes*] that the disasters of globalization have placed in the foreground. The revolutionary subject will arise from the confluence between the feeling of irreparable loss that is transmitted by the attacks made by Capital/the State (the system) and the insurrection against an unacceptable fate.

⁷ Such as moorlands. Cf. François de Beaulieu, “The Usage of the Commons at Notre-Dame-des-Landes, Yesterday and Today”: <http://www.notbored.org/Beaulieu.pdf>.