## The Immortal Science

#### Capitalism causes massive violence and inevitable extinction – the role of the ballot is to endorse the best organizational tactics.

Escalante 19 [Alyson Escalante, M.A., Department of Philosophy @ University of Oregon, “Truth and Practice: The Marxist Theory of Knowledge,” 09/08/19, tinyurl.com/8jksnexs] pat

The world we live in today is in a dire state. Climate destruction continues at a fast pace, and every with every passing day, capitalism proves itself to be incapable of addressing this. Capitalist production and its endless drive for resources to match artificial market demands has created a climate crisis that leaves us on the brink of potential extinction.

Governments around the world are turning to far right and fascist leaders to assuage their fears of an uncertain future, and the most marginalized and oppressed suffer because of it. Fascism is on the rise, and history tells us very clearly what that can result in without opposition.

The decaying US empire continues to lash out in violence across the globe in a desperate attempt to re-assert its power and hegemony. Whole countries are destroyed in its desperate bids for more fossil fuels. The world burns from America’s white phosphorus weaponry.

The need for a revolutionary movement capable of replacing capitalism with something better has never been so clear. The choice between socialism or barbarism has never been so stark. More and more people are starting to realize that reform cannot save us, that capitalism and imperialism themselves are the problem, and that we must unite and band together to fight for a better world.

The question then is: how will we know what strategies, what tactics, and what ideas to unite around? If the skeptics and postmodernists are correct that knowledge is always relative and localized, then we cannot built a global and universal strategy to unite around. If they are correct then we are doomed to small acts of localized or individual resistance in the face of apocalypse. To embrace such a vision of the world (with its accompanying epistemological skepticism) is to embrace defeat.

The masses do not want to embrace defeat, they want to know how to fight back. Marxism can provide the tools necessary to engage in that fight.

Marxism, with its self criticism and its insistence on incorporating the valuable ideas of its critics has created a means for unifying workers across the globe with anti-colonial and anti-imperialist struggles. The Marxist belief in the possibility of true ideas, tested and verified in practice, creates the possibility for unity on a global scale. The scientific status of Marxism means that as our climate changes, as our world looks more and more grim, Marxism will adapt through struggle and practice; it will provide us with the ideas and tools we need to fight and win.

There will be no victory for the workers of the world without the ability to wield a revolutionary science. What is at stake in questions of Marxist epistemology is the very possibility of creating a philosophical and scientific basis for revolution. We must defend this possibility. We must defend the scientific status of Marxism, and must insist on the possibility of victory.

#### The affirmation of the right to strike as something to be recognized places the energy that drives class struggle into containment, rendering the right conditional.

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In other words, nothing would endanger the law more than the possibility of its authority being contested by a violence over which it has no control. The function of the law would therefore be, first and foremost, to contain violence within its own boundaries. It is in this context that, to demonstrate this surprising hypothesis, Benjamin invokes two examples: the right to strike guaranteed by the state and the law of war.

Let us return to the place that the right to strike occupies within class struggle. To begin with, the very idea of such a struggle implies certain forms of violence. The strike could then be understood as one of the recognizable forms that this violence can take. However, this analytical framework is undermined as soon as this form of violence becomes regulated by a “right to strike,” such as the one recognized by law in France in 1864. What this recognition engages is, in fact, the will of the state to control the possible “violence” of the strike. Thus, the “right” of the right to strike appears as the best, if not the only, way for the state to circumscribe within (and via) the law the relative violence of class struggles. We might consider this to be the perfect illustration of the aforementioned hypothesis. Yet, there are two lines of questioning that destabilize this hypothesis that we would do well to consider

First, is it legitimate to present the strike as a form of violence? Who has a vested interest in such a representation? In other words, how can we trace a clear and unequivocal demarcation between violence and nonviolence? Are we not always bound to find residues of violence, even in those actions that we would be tempted to consider nonviolent? The second line of questioning is just as important and is rooted in the distinction established by Georges Sorel, in his Reflections on Violence, between the “political strike” and the “proletarian general strike,” to which Benjamin dedicates a set of complementary analyses in §13 of his essay. Here, again, we are faced with a question of limits. What is at stake is the possibility for a certain type of strike (the proletarian general strike) to exceed the limits of the right to strike— turning, in other words, the right to strike against the law itself. The phenomenon is that of an autoimmune process, in which the right to strike that is meant to protect the law against the possible violence of class struggles is transformed into a means for the destruction of the law. The difference between the two types of strikes is nevertheless introduced with a condition: “The validity of this statement, however, is not unrestricted because it is not unconditional,” notes Benjamin in §7. We would be mistaken in believing that the right to strike is granted and guaranteed unconditionally. Rather, it is structurally subjected to a conflict of interpretations, those of the workers, on the one hand, and of the state on the other. From the point of view of the state, the partial strike cannot under any circumstance be understood as a right to exercise violence, but rather as the right to extract oneself from a preexisting (and verifiable) violence: that of the employer. In this sense, the partial strike should be considered a nonviolent action, what Benjamin named a “pure means.”

The interpretations diverge on two main points. The first clearly depends on the alleged “violence of the employer,” a predicate that begs the question: Who might have the authority to recognize such violence? Evidently it is not the employer. The danger is that the state would similarly lack the incentive to make such a judgment call. It is nearly impossible, in fact, to find a single instance of a strike in which this recognition of violence was not subject to considerable controversy. The political game is thus the following: the state legislated the right to strike in order to contain class struggles, with the condition that workers must have “good reason” to strike. However, it is unlikely that a state systematically allied with (and accomplice to) employers will ever recognize reasons as good, and, as a consequence, it will deem any invocation of the right to strike as illegitimate. Workers will therefore be seen as abusing a right granted by the state, and in so doing transforming it into a violent means. On this point, Benjamin’s analyses remain extremely pertinent and profoundly contemporary. They unveil the enduring strategy of governments confronted with a strike (in education, transportation, or healthcare, for example) who, after claiming to understand the reasons for the protest and the grievances of the workers, deny that the arguments constitute sufficient reason for a strike that will likely paralyze this or that sector of the economy. They deny, in other words, that the conditions denounced by the workers display an intrinsic violence that justifies the strike. Let us note here a point that Benjamin does not mention, but that is part of Sorel’s reflections: this denial inevitably contaminates the (socialist) left once it gains power. What might previously have seemed a good reason to strike when it was the opposition is deemed an insufficient one once it is the ruling party. In the face of popular protest, it always invokes a lack of sufficient rationale, allowing it to avoid recognizing the intrinsic violence of a given social or economic situation, or of a new policy. And it is because it refuses to see this violence and to take responsibility for it that the left regularly loses workers’ support.

The second conflict of interpretation concerns what is at stake in the strike. For the state, the strike implies a withdrawal or act of defiance vis-à-vis the employer, while for the workers it is a means of pressuring, if not of blackmail or even of “hostage taking.” The diference is thus between an act of suspension (which can be considered nonviolent) and one of extortion (which includes violence). Does this mean that “pure means” are not free of ambiguity, and that there can be no nonviolent action that does not include a residue of violence? It is not clear that Benjamin’s text allows us to go this far. Nevertheless, the problem of pure means, approached through the notion of the right to strike, raises the following question: Could it be that the text “Zur Kritik der Gewalt,” which we are accustomed to reading as a text on violence, deals in fact with the possibility and ambiguity of nonviolence?

The opposition between the aforementioned conflicts of interpretation manifests itself in Benjamin’s excursus on the revolutionary strike, and specifically in the opposition between the political strike and the proletarian general strike, and in the meaning we should attribute to the latter. As previously discussed, the state will never admit that the right to strike is a right to violence. Its interpretative strategy consists in denying, as much as possible, the effective exercise of the right that it theoretically grants. Under these conditions, the function of the revolutionary strike is to return the strike to its true meaning; in other words, to return it to its own violence. In this context, the imperative is to move beyond idle words: a call to strike is a call to violence. This is the reason why such a call is regularly met with a violent reaction from the state, because trade unions force the state to recognize what it is trying to ignore, what it pretends to have solved by recognizing the right to strike: the irreducible violence of class struggles. This means that the previously discussed alternative between “suspension” and “extortion” is valid only for the political strike—in other words, for a strike whose primary vocation is not, contrary to that of the proletarian general strike, to revolt against the law itself. Essentially, the idea of a proletarian general strike, its myth (to borrow Sorel’s words), is to escape from this dichotomous alternative that inevitably reproduces and perpetuates the violence of domination.

#### Unions are just capitalism-lite. Their bagentos ev spots us the link- says they promote unionization.

Internationalist Perspective IP ’16, is a left-communist publication defending Marxism as a living theory and critiquing left-communist theory, “Trade unions: pillars of capitalism - Internationalist Perspective”, LibCom, 1/5/16, https://libcom.org/library/trade-unions-pillars-capitalism-internationalist-perspective

How the unions became enemies of the working class

Most of us agree that the unions are an integral part of the capitalist system. Not just the corrupt ones and those with a heavy bureaucratic apparatus but also those who profess a belief in "grass roots democracy" or even in "revolution". The arguments given for that position have been mostly empirical. Indeed, time and time again, the unions have screwed the workers, contained and defanged their struggle, have spread capitalist ideology in the working class and acted as capital's police on the shop floor. But empirical arguments are not enough. Indeed, on the basis of past experience alone, one could very well conclude that global revolution is impossible, as Paul wrote. Some have argued that it's the union's function within the capitalist economy - to manage the sale of labor power- which inevitably ties it to the system and hence opposes it to the class whose fundamental interests are irreconciliable with those of that system. That is true but it's not sufficient either. One could argue that as long as the goals of the struggle don't go beyond obtaining better wages and working conditions, or preventing their deterioration, and as long as those goals are achievable within capitalism, the irreconcilability is not immediate and the existence of permanent institutions to negotiate a better price for variable capital remains in the interests of the workers. In short one could argue, as does Adam [Buick of the Socialist Party of Great Britain], that despite the empirical evidence and despite the integration of the unions in the structure of the capitalist economy, the existing unions are bad but unionism is good.

Moreover, despite the widespread disillusion, many workers still see the unions as their (imperfect) organisations, and sometimes the most combative workers are active in them. And sometimes capitalists fight the unions and try to get rid of them. When they attack a union and the workers rise up to defend "their" organisation, should revolutionaries who understand the real role of the union tell them not to wage that fight, even though the attack is clearly meant to defeat the workers and have a free hand to impose more exploitation? What to do when the workers most willing to fight are shop stewards and others who ardently defend the unions - not the leadership but the organisation? Should we simply call upon workers to leave the unions? And what do we offer as alternative, not just in limes of open struggle but also when the conditions for collective struggle aren't ripe while the pressure from capital continues? Is the 'outside and against' directive more than an empty slogan when the only meetings where workers gather are those organised by the unions?

To answer those and many other questions pertaining to the practical aspects of class struggle and the defense of workers' immediate interests, the question why unions are not just counter- revolutionary but against the working class in their daily practice, must be answered first.

The answer is not that obvious. After all, it is a logical reaction of workers, who are utterly powerless as individuals towards their employers who seek to exploit them as much as possible, to band together in permanent organisations to defend the price of their labor power. The first unions were clearly created by the working class even though many did bear the corporatist imprints of the guilds (professional organisations from the pre-capitalist era). Their existence as permanent organisations was a necessity, not only because of the permanency of capitalist pressure, but also because of the need of permanent preparation for confrontations with the capitalists, confrontations which often look the form of wars of attrition which the workers were doomed to lose without this preparation (the build-up of strike funds etc). Likewise, the growth of unions into bigger organisations, operating on a national scale, reflected the need of workers to increase their power by extending their class solidarity. So the growth of the unions reflected and stimulated class consciousness. Capitalists feared and loathed them and fought them bitterly.

Yet very soon, the permanency of these large organisations posed a problem. The class struggle goes through ups and clowns which reflect the contradictory tendencies to which the workers, as an exploited class, are subjected. The conditions of exploitation push the workers to fight collectively and thereby to assert itself as a class with interests separate and opposed to those of capital; but those same conditions also create competition among workers, atomisation, alienation, passivity, receptiveness to the ideology of the dominant class. Those two tendencies do not neutralize each other but give the class struggle a very non-linear character, with sudden advances and retreats, moments of rising class consciousness and stretches of 'social peace', as one or the other of those tendencies dominate. During those periods of no collective struggle, when atomisation and alienation prevail, these big permanent organisations cannot express what isn't there, a class collectively fighting. It does not mean they immediately become bourgeois but they inevitably acquire an autonomy from the class they are supposed to represent. As autonomous institutions they inevitably develop hierarchical, authoritarian attitudes and relations and come to have interests which are distinct from those of the class as a whole. Thus the source of conflict of interests between the working class and the unions is already potentially present in the permanence of unions as social institutions.

I write 'potentially' because from this does not yet follow that these institutions must side with capital against the workers. For this to happen, these institutions must first become part of capital, absorbed into the social fabric weaved by the law of value. This did not happen immediately because the extension of the law of value throughout society was a slow, gradual process. ln the early stages of this process, the domination of capital over society was only 'formal'. The work process itself was at first not yet intrinsically capitalist, capitalism only squeezed as much surplus value as possible from it by making the working day as long as possible and keeping the wages as measly as possible. It look a long time for a specifically capitalist method of production (based on machinism, which reversed the relation worker-technology: the tool was an extension of the worker's hand but now the worker became an appendage of the machine) to develop and become dominant. The giant leaps in productivity which technology-based production unleashed created mass production and set the stage for capitalism to transform the totality of society in its own image, which meant that the law of value came to determine social relations not just in the sphere of production but also in distribution, education, entertainment, culture, media and every other aspect of human life.

But before that process (called the transition to real domination of capital) amassed critical weight, there remained a large space within society that was not yet penetrated by the law of value. Therein, not only expressions of pre-capitalist classes survived but organisations of the fledging working class too could maintain a relative autonomy. Unions were not the only permanent workers organisations that flourished in that space: there were workers' cooperatives, mutual aid societies, political mass parties, cultural organisations, newspapers, etc. that were genuine expressions of the working class. The modest size of the bourgeois state apparatus also reflected the merely formal control of capital over society. The fact that the state's policy towards the unions was largely repressive shows that capital had not yet developed the means to organically integrate them; the unions were still by and large standing outside the state.

As the real domination of capital progressed and the complexity, technification and interwovenness of the capitalist economy developed, the state gradually fused with the economy and its tentacles spread over civil society. It's striking how this transformation of the economy and the integration of the unions into the structure of capitalist society went hand in hand, in particular towards the end of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th century.

The test of that integration came when the interests of capitalism and those of the working class (and humanity) became diametrically opposed as never before. What was at issue was not the price of variable capital but its survival or destruction. In the first world war, many millions of proletarians were slaughtered and it happened with the active collaboration of the unions. This epochal event signalled a new paradigm in which both crisis and war meant something different than before: they became both catastrophic and global in nature as well as essential to the continuation of capitalist accumulation.

Today more than ever, there cannot exist any large permanent institution outside of the fabric of capital. That is true not just for unions but also for churches, political parties, cultural institutions and so on. The market either absorbs them, accords them a specialized function within its overall operating structure, a niche according to what they can do for the valorisation of capital, or marginalizes them, makes them disappear. When the class struggle heats up , the market shifts, a demand is created for a company of management of 'human resources' that has a more radical market image, which is quickly filled, either by a new union or by a radicalisation of the existing ones. Neither represents a gain for the working class. Today, there are no longer any progressive factions of capital. The unions' interests are inextricably bound to those of capital, to those of the nation. The logic of capital makes them complicit in trying to impose the worst possible fate on the working class. In the revolutionary struggle, which is a defensive struggle, the working class will have to take on the entire capitalist machinery, including the unions.

It is true that this does not mean that every act or every word of the unions are opposed to the immediate interests of the working class. The productivity-increases made possible by the progress of capital's real domination allowed capital to accord improvements of the living standards and to increase exploitation (increase the portion of the labor day that is unpaid) at the same time, at least in period of expansion. It doesn't like to do this, of course, since every wage gain is a profit loss, but over lime it came to realize that this can be in its own interests. The main reason is that the production process under real domination, with its huge assembly lines and increased specialisation and thus interdependency, became more vulnerable to interruptions, to class struggle. That was a powerful incentive, especially in the post-world war two period, to grant better wages and to give the unions a bigger say in the management of the economy.

The unions have their own particular interests. As companies that manage the sale and the smooth exploitation of variable capital, they compete among themselves and have a market image to defend, both in regard to the workers the y seek to represent and in regard to the enterprises with whom they seek to negotiate. Their credibility is their most valuable asset and if it's necessary to protect it, they can sometimes drive a hard bargain with the buyers of labor power. The most intelligent capitalists realize that unions can only fulfil their capitalist function if they have some credibility as defenders of the workers and must do what they have to do to maintain it.

The international waves of class struggle in the '60's and '70's which repeatedly broke through the dykes of unionism and did great damage to capitalist profits and to the myth of unions as defenders of the working class, was a powerful stimulant to the restructuring of the capitalist economy that followed it. The 'post-Fordism' in which it resulted, with its increased automation, the computerization of labor, the decentralisation of production, the explosion of outsourcing, subcontracting and temp work, the increased mobility of capital (vastly expanding the use layoffs and closings, and the threat thereof, as social weapons) decreased the vulnerability of production to industrial action considerably. By decreasing that vulnerability, capital also decreased its dependence on the unions. This allowed for more anti-unionism among capitalists, and led to a marked increase of 'union-busting'. But this also helped the unions to shore up. their credibility in the eyes of the workers somewhat, because the enemy of your enemy can seem to be your friend.

The unions resisted the post-Fordist trend, in part to maintain their credibility in the eyes of the workers and in part because it was and is a threat to their own power. But since the trend reflected not a mere policy choice but the direction in which capitalism, of which they are a part, was going, their resistance was doomed to be ineffective. The alternative of the unions to this trend is conservative, to resist changes in capitalism. As this is impossible, they end up almost invariably defending 'capitalism lite', layouts, but less layoffs than the bosses are demanding, wage cuts, but with a percentage and a half shaved off. But, they need a culprit, a scapegoat for the worker's anger, and since they are tied to national capital, the scapegoat is usually foreign competition (foreign workers really). That makes the unions the most ardent defenders of protectionism. As an economic recipe that is plain stupid and sometimes really annoying to other factions of capital, but politically it is very useful to capital because it makes them work tirelessly to spread the nationalist poison into the working class

#### Ethical abstraction erases the material basis of exploitation and experience as foundational to human social production – you should understand humanity as a historical agent instead.

Eagleton ‘11

[Terry, British literary theorist, critic, and public intellectual, prof of English literature at Lancaster. 2011. “Why Marx Was Right.”] pat – ask me for the PDF

In a boldly innovative move, Marx rejected the passive human subject of middle-class materialism and put in its place an active one. All philosophy had to start from the premise that whatever else they were, men and women were first of all agents. They were creatures who transformed themselves in the act of transforming their material surroundings. They were not the pawns of History or Matter or Spirit, but active, self-determining beings who were capable of making their own history. And this means that the Marxist version of materialism is a democratic one, in contrast to the intellectual elitism of the Enlightenment. Only through the collective practical activity of the majority of people can the ideas which govern our lives be really changed. And this is because these ideas are deeply embedded in our actual behavior.

In this sense, Marx was more of an antiphilosopher than a philosopher. In fact, Etienne Balibar has called him ‘‘perhaps . . . the greatest antiphilosopher of the modern age.’ Antiphilosophers are those who are wary of philosophy—not just in the sense that Brad Pitt might be, but nervous of it for philosophically interesting reasons. They tend to come up with ideas that are suspicious of ideas; and though they are for the most part entirely rational, they tend not to believe that reason is what it all comes down to. Feuerbach, from whom Marx learned some of his materialism, wrote that any authentic philosophy has to begin with its opposite, nonphilosophy. The philosopher, he remarked, must accept ‘‘what in man does not philosophise, what is rather opposed to philosophy and abstract thought.’ He also commented that ‘‘it is man [the human] who thinks, not the Ego or Reason.’ As Alfred Schmidt observes, ‘‘The understanding of man as a needy, sensuous, physiological being is therefore the precondition of any theory of subjectivity.’’ Human consciousness, in other words, is corporeal—which is not to say that it is nothing more than the body. It is rather a sign of the way in which the body is always in a sense unfinished, open-ended, always capable of more creative activity than what it may be manifesting right now.

We think as we do, then, because of the kind of animals we are. If our thought is strung out in time, it is because that is the way our bodies and sense-perceptions are too. Philosophers sometimes wonder whether a machine could think. Maybe it could, but it would be in a way very different from ourselves. This is because a machine’s material makeup is so different from ours. It has no bodily needs, for example, and none of the emotional life which in the case of us humans is bound up with such needs. Our own kind of thinking is inseparable from this sensory, practical and emotional context. This is why, if a machine could think, we might not be able to understand what it was thinking.

The philosophy Marx broke with was for the most part a contemplative affair. Its typical scenario was that of a passive, isolated, disembodied human subject disinterestedly surveying an isolated object. Marx, as we have seen, rejected this kind of subject; but he also insisted that the object of our knowledge is not something eternally fixed and given. It is more likely to be the product of our own historical activity. Just as we have to rethink the subject as a form of practice, so we have to rethink the objective world as the result of human practice. And this means among other things that it can in principle be changed.

Starting with human beings as active and practical, and then situating their thought within that context, help us to cast new light on some of the problems which have plagued philosophers. People who work on the world are less likely to doubt that there is anything out there than those who contemplate it from a leisurely distance. In fact, sceptics can exist in the first place only because there is something out there. If there were not a material world to feed them they would die, and their doubts would perish along with them. If you believe that human beings are passive in the face of reality, this may also persuade you to query the existence of such a world. This is because we confirm the existence of things by experiencing their resistance to our demands. And we do this primarily through our practical activity.

Philosophers have sometimes raised the question of ‘‘other minds.’’ How do we know that the human bodies we encounter have minds like ours? A materialist would reply that if they did not, we would probably not be around to raise the question. There could be no material production to keep us alive without social cooperation, and the capacity to communicate with others is a large part of what we mean by having a mind. One might also point out that the word ‘‘mind’’ is a way of describing the behavior of a particular kind of body: a creative, meaningful, communicative one. We do not need to peer inside people’s heads or wire them up to machines to see whether they possess this mysterious entity. We look at what they do. Consciousness is not some spectral phenomenon; it is something we can see, hear and handle. Human bodies are lumps of material, but peculiarly creative, expressive ones; and it is this creativity that we call ‘‘mind.’’ To call human beings rational is to say that their behavior reveals a pattern of meaning or significance. Enlightenment materialists have sometimes been rightly accused of reducing the world to so much dead, meaningless matter. Just the reverse is true of Marx’s materialism.

The materialist’s response to the sceptic is not a knockdown argument. You might always claim that our experience of social cooperation, or of the world’s resistance to our projects, is itself not to be trusted. Perhaps we are only imagining these things. But looking at such problems in a materialist spirit can illuminate them in a new way. It is possible to see, for example, how intellectuals who begin from the disembodied mind, and quite often end up there as well, are likely to be puzzled by how the mind relates to the body, as well as to the bodies of others. It may be that they see a gap between mind and world. This is ironic, since it is quite often the way the world shapes their own minds that gives rise to this idea. Intellectuals themselves are a caste of people somewhat remote from the material world. Only on the back of a material surplus in society is it possible to produce a professional elite of priests, sages, artists, counsellors, Oxford dons and the like.

Plato thought that philosophy required a leisured aristocratic elite. You cannot have literary salons and learned societies if everyone has to work just to keep social life ticking over. Ivory towers are as rare as bowling alleys in tribal cultures. (They are just as rare in advanced societies, where universities have become organs of corporate capitalism.) Because intellectuals do not need to labour in the sense that bricklayers do, they can come to regard themselves and their ideas as independent of the rest of social existence. And this is one of the many things that Marxists mean by ideology. Such people tend not to see that their very distance from society is itself socially conditioned. The prejudice that thought is independent of reality is itself shaped by social reality.

#### Capitalism is unsustainable and causes extinction -- multiple intertwined crises make collapse inevitable which means its try-or-die -- we got charts.

von Weizsäcker and Wijkman ‘17

Ernest Ulrich von Weizsäcker, Professor and Director of the United Nation Centre for Science and Technology for Development, Founder and President of the Wuppertal Institute, Member of the German Bundestag, chairing the Committees on Globalization and the Environment, Dean of the graduate School of Environmental Science and Management at the University of California, appointed Co-Chair of UNEP’s International Resource Panel, Anders Wijkman, chairman of the Swedish Association of Recycling Industries, member of the Board of the Swedish Development Authority (SIDA), appointed chair of the Swedish Cross-Party Committee on Environmental Objectives, member of the European Parliament, Assistant Secretary-General of the United Nations and Policy Director of UNDP, Secretary General of the Swedish Red Cross and Director General of the Swedish Agency for Research Cooperation with Developing Countries, Member of the Swedish Royal Academy of Sciences, the World Future Council and the International Resource Panel, 2017 (“Come On! Capitalism, Short-termism, Population and the Destruction of the Planet – A Report to the Club”, November 11th, Available Online via Subscription to Springer, Accessed 03-20-2018)

1.1 Introduction: The World in Disarray We all know that the world is in crisis. Science tells us that almost half of the top soils on earth have been depleted in the last 150 years1 ; nearly 90% of fish stocks are either overfished or fully fished.2 Climate stability is in real danger (Sects. 1.5 and 3.7); and the earth is now in the sixth mass extinction period in history.3 Perhaps the most accurate account of the ecological situation is the 2012 ‘Imperative to act’,4 launched by all the 18 recipients (till 2012) of the Blue Planet Prize, including Gro Harlem Brundtland, James Hansen, Amory Lovins, James Lovelock and Susan Solomon. Its key message reads, ‘The human ability to do has vastly outstripped the ability to understand. As a result, civilization is faced with a perfect storm of problems, driven by overpopulation, overconsumption by the rich, the use of environmentally malign technologies and gross inequalities’. And further, ‘The rapidly deteriorating biophysical situation is barely recognized by a global society infected by the irrational belief that physical economies can grow forever’. 1.1.1 Different Types of Crisis and a Feeling of Helplessness The crisis is not cyclical but growing. And it is not limited to the nature around us. There are also a social crisis, a political and a cultural crisis, a moral crisis, as well as a crisis of democracy, of ideologies and of the capitalist system. The crisis also consists of deepened poverty in many countries and the loss of jobs for a considerable part of the population worldwide. Billions of people have reached a state of mind where they don’t trust their government anymore.5 Seen from a geographic point of view, symptoms of crisis are found nearly everywhere. The ‘Arab Spring’ was followed by a series of wars and civil wars, serious human rights violations and many millions of refugees. The internal situation is not better in Eritrea, South Sudan, Somalia, Yemen or Honduras. Venezuela and Argentina, once among the richer states of the world, face huge economic challenges, and neighbouring Brazil has gone through many years of recession and political turmoil. Russia and several East European countries are struggling with major economic and political problems in their post-communist phase. Japan finds it difficult to overcome decadelong stagnation, and to deal with the 2011 tsunami and ensuing nuclear disaster. And the temporary economic upswing several African countries have enjoyed lost its dynamism as soon as the prices of mineral resources collapsed, and partly due to very unusual droughts. Land grabbing is plaguing much of Africa, but also other parts of the world, leading to involuntary dislocations of millions of people and the related problems with refugees both within countries and abroad.6 The response of governments has been concentrated, at worst, on managing their own political image, and at best to treat the symptoms of the crisis, not the cause. The problem is that the political class in the whole world is strongly influenced by investors and by powerful private companies. This indicates that the current crisis is also a crisis of global capitalism. Since the 1980s, capitalism has moved from furthering the economic development of countries, regions and the world towards maximizing profits, and then to a large extent profits from speculation. In addition, the capitalism unleashed since 1980 in the Anglo-Saxon world, and since 1990 worldwide, is mainly financial. This trend was supported by excessive deregulation and liberalization of the economy (see Sect. 2.4). The term ‘shareholder value’ popped up in the business pages of the media worldwide, as if that was now the new epiphany and guardrail for all economic action. In reality, it served to narrow business down to short-term gains, often at the expense of social and ecological values. The myth of shareholder value has been effectively debunked in a recent book by Lynn Stout.7 A different, if related, feature of ‘disarray’ is the rise of aggressive, mostly rightwing movements against globalization in OECD countries, often referred to as populism. These have become overt through Brexit and the Trump victory in the United States. As Fareed Zakaria observes, ‘Trump is part of a broad populist

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upsurge running through the Western world. … In most (countries), populism remains an opposition movement, although one that is growing in strength; in others, such as Hungary, it is now the reigning ideology’.8 This phenomenon of right-wing populism can be explained to an extent by the ‘trunk valley of the elephant curve’ (Fig. 1.1) 9 showing the decline of developed world middle classes, during a 20-year period. While more than half of the world’s population was enjoying over 60% income rises, OECD’s middle classes suffered losses caused mainly by the deindustrialization and job losses in major parts of the United States, Britain and other countries. In the United States, the median income increased by a meagre 1.2% since 1979. The stunning income growth on the left-hand side of the curve, the ‘back of the elephant’, lifting some two billion people out of poverty, was caused mainly by China’s and some other countries’ economic success. What remains invisible on the picture is the far end of ‘the trunk of the elephant’: The richest 1% of the world and, more revolting, the richest eight persons of the world now own as much wealth as the poorest half of the world population combined, a figure publicized by Oxfam during the 2017 World Economic Forum.10 The ‘elephant curve’ gives an incomplete picture for a second reason. The Oxford Poverty and Human Development Initiative (OPHI) has proposed a Multidimensional Poverty Index (MPI) going beyond just income and including ten indicators around health, education and living standards. Using that MPI, OPHI counts 1.6 billion people living in ‘multidimensional poverty’ in 2016 – nearly twice as many as the number of people living in extreme poverty measured by income alone.11 Thirdly, the interpretation of the curve requires an analysis of the people in each percentile group. In fact, they tend to move. And the curve does not distinguish those in Russia and East European countries who lost much of their income after 1990 from those in Detroit or middle England who, for very different reasons, also were among the losers.12 Another fact cannot be seen in the picture: the massive shift of money and income from the manufacturing and trade sectors to the financial sector.13 Bruce Bartlett, a senior policy advisor to both the Reagan and Bush administrations, argues that this ‘financialization’ of the economy is the cause of income inequality, falling wages and the poor performance. David Stockman, Reagan’s director of the Office of Management and Budget, agrees, describing our current situation as ‘corrosive financialization that has turned the economy into a giant casino since the 1970s’.14 Populist politicians in the OECD countries see themselves as speaking for the forgotten ‘ordinary’ people and for genuine patriotism, but they tend to fight and antagonize the people representing democratic institutions – what an irony! For the European Union (EU), the strongest trigger for populism has been the millions of refugees who came or would like to come to Europe from the Near East, from Afghanistan and from Africa. Even the most generous European countries have reached their own assumed limits for receiving these masses of refugees. The EU institutions were too weak (not too powerful, as they are depicted by the new nationalists) to deal with the ‘refugee crisis’, resulting eventually in an identity crisis in the EU. Once a success story of an entity ensuring peace and economic development, the EU has lost some of its unifying narrative. The populist right-wing movements or parties see and criticize the EU as the culprit for all kinds of undesired events. The irony is that continuing the success story would require more, not less, powers for the Union. The Union should be entrusted with border protection, a well-funded common asylum and refugee policy to deal with the refugee crisis and maintain the advantages of the Schengen agreement. And for the re-stabilization of the Euro, the EU or at least the Euro zone needs a common fiscal policy, as the new French President Emmanuel Macron is proposing. But it is these very measures of which nationalist populists are most afraid. The EU in its present form is not without shortcomings. Free market principles have come to dominate EU policymaking, leading to a subordination of other policies, like environment. Notably the UK wanted that priority, as it preferred to see the EU chiefly as a union for mutual trade. And the austerity policies pursued have blocked many benign investments and led to unnecessary suffering among tens of millions of Europeans. Such shortcomings, however, should never be used to put in question the overall objectives of the EU – a union of peace, the rule of law, human rights, cultural understanding and sustainability. Addressing the global crisis of democracy, the German Bertelsmann Foundation has published a 3000-page empirical report on progress (or lack thereof) on democracy and a social market economy, as measured by the Bertelsmann Transformation Index (BTI).15 Over the last few years, the report sees a consistent decay of such parameters as civil rights, free and fair elections, freedom of opinion and of press, freedom of assembly and separation of powers. Within the same time frame, the number of countries in which authoritarian, mostly religious, dogmas influence political decision making rose from 22% to 33%. That report was published before the assaults on democracy and civil rights that occurred in summer 2016 in Turkey or the Philippines. Symptoms of tyranny are spreading, including in some of the countries with a solid tradition of freedom and democracy.16 Let us briefly turn to a different kind of crisis. Well, not exactly a crisis but an unpleasant feature in an otherwise fruitful communication tool, the ‘social media’. Aside from being practical and useful for everyday arrangements and exchange of news and reasonable opinions, social media also have become vehicles for enhancing conflicts and vilification of mostly innocent individuals, and for spreading ‘post truth’ nonsense. Much of the contents of social media political conversation is selfenhancing political rubbish, as those media serve as ‘echo chambers’ for networks of like-minded frustrated citizens.17 An empirical study from China found that anger and indignation are the emotions that are most likely to get viral in the social media, meaning they are multiplied faster and stronger than other emotions.18 The Internet and the social media are also vehicles for ‘bots’ (short for robots) that can disrupt or destroy messages, multiply nonsense and create all kinds of mischief. There are dozens of types of malicious bots (and botnets) to harvest email addresses, to grab content of websites and reuse it without permission, to spread viruses and worms, to buy up good seats for entertainment events, to increase views for YouTube videos or to increase traffic counts in order to extract money from advertisers. A more frightening cause of disarray relates to terrorism. In earlier times, humanity’s violent conflicts occurred mostly between different countries. In recent times, systemic and at least partly religious conflicts prevail, using terror attacks with the explicit intention of making people feel insecure. During much of the twentieth century, religions remained quiet, non-aggressive and geographically confined to rather stable territories. This no longer is true. Partly because of globalized populations moving or being forced to leave their home territories, some factions of Islam have expanded geographically and are claiming strong influence over national states, for example, attacking countries like France with its tradition of laicism that does not permit religion to dominate politics. What tends to be underrepresented in the media is the positive role of religions. In Christian-dominated Europe, liberal and tolerant religion became part of the European identity a century after the Enlightenment successfully discredited the earlier doctrinaire, authoritarian and colonialist-missionary manifestations of the faith. During the Cold War, Christian goals of social cohesion helped build the system of ‘Western values’, often described as the social welfare state, or the ‘social market economy’ (for its partial demise, see Sect. 2.4). With a view towards leading Islam into an equally benign and co-operative social role, some Islamic scholars, such as Syrian born Bassam Tibi, call on Muslims in Europe to integrate into democratic society.19 Tibi, however, is not popular among radical Muslims, to put it mildly. But to understand the radicalization of Islam, one must not underestimate the role played by the West, in particular the United States, in interfering with Near Eastern states. Some would say that the troublesome situations mentioned so far, the recurring topics of media headlines, are only the surface of our world’s ‘disarray’. Deeper and more systemic problems include the breath-taking speed of technological development that may very easily run out of control. One trend is digitization that potentially threatens millions of jobs (see Sect. 1.11.4). Another trend or development can be observed in the biological sciences and technologies. The enormous acceleration of genetic engineering through the CRISPR-Cas9 technology20 is causing fears of monster creation or the extinction of species or varieties not seen as valuable under human utilitarian criteria. Generally, a non-specific feeling is spreading that ‘progress’ has scary sides and that the genie may already have left the bottle (see Sect. 1.11.3). No doubt there is a need to analyse and understand the symptoms and roots of the variety of crises, political, economic, social, technological and environmental. It is also important to recognize the extent to which people perceive the various phenomena of disarray and feel disoriented, and to recognize that the reality and the feelings of disarray have a moral and even religious dimension. 1.1.2 Financialization: A Phenomenon of Disarray An important part of the disorientation relates to financial markets. Historians will look back at the last 30 years with concern, when looking at the explosion in bank balance sheets, backed up by declining levels of equity and massive borrowing. One of the results was a temporary private-sector-led boom. The other was a massive increase in the world’s financial sector (finance, insurance, real estate – FIRE), often called financialization, and subsequently the financial crisis of 2008–2009. Excessive risk-taking developed into a crisis that was close to bringing the whole financial system to a halt. When the bubble burst, many governments were forced to step in with broad support programmes. Governments caught by the new mind-set (see Sect. 2.4) were intimately involved in all of this. True, there are many examples of serious malpractices within the private financial sector. But had it not been for the systematic deregulation of the banks by governments, with the purpose of stimulating economic growth by issuing more debt, the situation would have been radically different. The causes behind the crisis were many and varied: – Excessive lending by the banking industry – Lack of action on the part of regulators and central banks to stop (i) excessive lending, (ii) the spread of exotic financial instruments (synthetic assets and bonds, collateralized mortgage obligations/CMOs, structured debt issues, etc.) and (iii) pure speculative transactions – Opaque tax havens, and the absence of a binding legal framework that is accepted and implemented by the international community, in general, and the major jurisdictions and financial centres – Securitization and distribution by investment banks and other financial actors of mortgage-related assets and investment vehicles transferring the credit risk from the original lender to the ultimate bondholders – Failure by some rating agencies and auditing firms to properly assess and report the inherent risks posed by many of the financial products A deeper analysis is presented by economists Anat Admati and Martin Hellwig21 about the main causes behind the financial crisis. Western banks borrowed far too much with far too little equity in their balance sheets to act as a buffer if things went wrong in their business – from trading in the multitrillion-dollar derivatives markets to often reckless lending on real estate. In the decades following the Second World War, banks operated with between 20% and 30% of their liabilities as equity. By 2008, that had shrunk to just 3%. Banks obviously believed that they had invented instruments that removed the risk, allowing them to run their banks with a tenth of the buffer they had before. It proved to be very unrealistic. But they counted with the state to underwrite their risks. Bankers have enriched themselves spectacularly in the process. They made themselves ‘too big to fail’ – and too big to jail. The 2008 financial crisis was mostly caused by that irresponsible greed.22 Yet, in 2009, not only did bankers avoid criminal prosecutions and receive hundreds of billions in government bailouts, but some still paid themselves record bonuses. At the same time, almost nine million households in the United States had to abandon their homes when the value of their houses plummeted and they could no longer service the adjustable-rate mortgages – the so-called foreclosure crisis.23 Financialization refers to the dominance of the financial sector in the global economy and the tendency for accumulated profits (and leverage) to flow into real estate and other speculative investment. Debt is an intrinsic element in this process. In the United States, for example, both household debt and private sector debt more than doubled relative to GDP between 1980 and 2007.24 The same is true for most OECD countries. At the same time, ‘the value of financial assets grew from four times GDP in 1980 to ten times GDP in 2007 and the finance sector’s share of corporate profits grew from about 10% in the early 1980s to almost 40% by 2006’.25 Adair Turner, chair of the UK’s Financial Services Authority in the years following the 2007–2008 crisis, regards unchecked private credit creation as the key system fault that led to that crisis with its devastating consequences.26 From this follows that the financial sector constitutes a significant and increasing risk factor in the economy. The degree of financialization varies from country to country but the increase in the power of finance is general. The current finance sector evolved in the context of the deregulation that gathered pace from the late 1970s and expanded dramatically after the 1999 removal of the separation between commercial and investment banking in the United States.27 This barrier had been put in place in 1933 by the Roosevelt administration in response to the Wall Street Crash of 1929, when a period of rampant credit creation and financial speculation collapsed. Similar speculation preceded the crisis of 2007–2008: The face value of financial products reached US$640 trillion in September 2008, 14 times the GDP of all the countries on earth.28 Lietaer et al.29 compare speculation with ordinary money transfers paying for goods and services: ‘In 2010, the volume of foreign exchange transactions reached $4 trillion per day’, which does not even include derivatives. In comparison, ‘one day’s exports or imports of all goods and services in the world amount to about 2% of those $4 trillion’. Transactions not paying for goods and services, almost by definition are speculative. Such financial products and transactions, the authors continue, lead regularly to monetary crashes, sovereign debt crises and systemic crashes with an average of more than ten countries in crisis every year. One of the consequences of this development is that a significant part of economic growth has been distributed to the wealthy, as mentioned with the new Oxfam figures in the previous subchapter. Practices within the financial sector demonstrate a disregard for the impact they have on both people and the planet. That includes a distinct short-termism, the ratio of banks’ reserves to their loans, the ratio of banks’ lending that support the real economy versus speculation in property and derivatives, unchecked credit creation – in fact money creation – and the failure to account for long-term climate and environmental risks. In the words of Otto Scharmer at MIT,30 ‘We have a system that accumulates oversupply of money in areas that produce high financial and low environmental and social returns, while at the same an undersupply of money in areas that serve important societal investment needs’. The failure to account for environmental risks means that the pressure on already scarce natural resources accelerates – trees are felled, waterways polluted, wetlands drained and the exploitation of oil, gas and coal accelerating, as long as there is demand. It also means that huge savings, among them pension funds, are locked into investments in fossil-based assets. Such assets are increasingly looked upon as high-risk assets (see Sect. 3.4).

#### Vote neg to join the party – dual power organizing is the only path to revolutionary change.

Escalante ‘18

[Alyson, philosophy at U of Oregon. 08/24/2018. “Against Electoralism, For Dual Power!” <https://theforgenews.org/2018/08/24/against-electoralism-for-dual-power/>] pat

I am sure that at this point, the opportunists reading this have already begun to type out their typical objection: the world is different than it was in 1917, and the conditions of the United States in no way echo the conditions which enabled the Bolsheviks to achieve revolutionary success.

To this tried and true objection, there is one simple answer: you are entirely correct, and that is why we need to abandon electoralism and working within the bourgeois state.

What were the conditions which allowed the Bolsheviks to successfully revolt? The conditions were that of Dual Power. Alongside the capitalist state, there existed a whole set of institutions and councils which met the needs of the workers. The soviets, a parallel socialist government made up of individual councils, successfully took over many governmental responsibilities in some parts of Petrograd. In the radical Viborg district, the Bolshevik controlled soviets provided government services like mail, alongside programs that could meet the needs of workers. When a far right coup was attempted against the provisional government, it was troops loyal to the Bolshevik factions within the soviet who repelled the coup plotters, proving concretely to the workers of Petrograd that the socialists could not only provide for their needs, but also for their defense.

In short: the Bolsheviks recognized that instead of integrating into the bourgeois state, they could operate outside of it to build dual power. They could establish programs of elected representatives who would serve the workers. They would not bolster the capitalist state in the name of socialism, they would offer an alternative to it.

And so, when the time came for revolt, the masses were already to loyal to the Bolsheviks. The only party who had never compromised, who had denounced the unpopular imperialist wars, who had rejected the provisional government entirely, was the party who successfully gained the support of the workers.

And so, many of us on the more radical fringes of the socialist movement wonder why it is the the DSA and other socialist opportunists seem to think that we can win by bolstering the capitalist state? We wonder, given this powerful historical precedent, why they devote their energy to getting more Ocasios elected; what good does one more left democrat who will abandon the workers do for us?

The answer we receive in return is always the same: we want to win small changes that will make life for the workers easier; we want to protect food stamps and healthcare.

And do this, we reply: what makes you think reformism is the only way to do this. When the bourgeois state in California was happy to let black children go to school unfed, the Black Panthers didn’t rally around democratic candidates, they became militant and fed the children themselves. In the 40s and 50s, socialists in New York saw people going without healthcare and instead of rallying behind democratic candidates, they built the IWO to provide healthcare directly. Both these groups took up our pressing revolutionary task: building dual power.

Imagine if all those hours the DSA poured into electing Ocasio were instead used to feed the people of New York, to provide them with medical care, to ensure their needs were met. Imagine the masses seeing socialism not as a pipe dream we might achieve through electing more imperialists, but as a concrete movement which is currently meeting their needs?

The fact is, we are not nearly ready for revolution. Socialists in the United States have failed to meet the needs of the people, and as long as their only concrete interaction with the masses is handing them a voter registration form, they will continue to fail the people. Our task now is not to elect representatives to advocate for the people; it is much more gruelingly laborious than that. Our task is to serve the people. Our task is to build dual power.

The movement to do this is underway. Members of the DSA refoundation caucus have begun to move the left of the DSA in this direct, socialist groups like Philly Socialists have begun to build dual power through GED programs and tenants unions, many branches of the Party For Socialism and Liberation have begun to feed the people and provide for their concrete needs, and Red Guard collectives in Los Angeles have built serve the people programs and taken on a stance of militant resistance to gentrification. The movement is growing, its time is coming, and dual power is achievable within our life time.

The opportunists are, in a sense, correct. We are not where we were in 1917, but we can begin to move in that direction and dual power can take us there. In order to achieve dual power we have to recognize that Lenin was right: there will be no socialist gains by working within state institutions designed to crush socialism. Furthermore, we must recognize that the strategies of the electoral opportunists trade off with dual power. Electing candidates drains resources, time, and energy away from actually serving the people.

And so, we should commit to undertake the difficult and dangerous task of building dual power. We must reject opportunism, we must name the democratic party as our enemy, we must rally around power directly in the hands of the socialist movement. We do not have a parallel system of soviets in the United States. We can change that. Someday the cry “all power to the soviets” will be heard again. Lets make it happen.

## Case