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Communism: Points for Consideration

L'Insecurite Sociale
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Communism

You want to abolish wage labor, but what do you want to replace it with? What do you propose? This is what we are asked. Can we settle for responding that the abolition of wage labor can only be conceived as a social movement, a process of emancipation and liberation that will affect every aspect of our lives? It means a total transformation of social relations! It means, briefly, communism. So, assuming that it is not the same thing as the image of the Gulag that comes to mind when we think of the self-described communist parties and states, just what is communism?

It would be easy enough to shrug one's shoulders and reflect that those people who cannot or do not want to understand under today's conditions, eventually will come around under the pressure of objective circumstances. One could view those who ask, "so what do you propose?", as just so many sheep in search of new shepherds. This might be true of a few individuals, but this explanation is nonetheless inadequate. It blocks further progress. One could ask if such questions made sense in the past or, at the very least, if they make just as much sense today. You hesitate, before responding in the affirmative: all these questions are typical of a world that has nothing to offer. In the past, alternatives were offered that either broke with or adapted to the prevailing social model. These alternatives were expressed in certain details of everyday life. There was, to a certain extent, a proletarian culture that was represented by certain styles of dress, eating and socializing.... There was an environment in which revolutionary ideas regarding the expropriation of the industrialists and landlords circulated. Today, capitalism has invaded every aspect of life. It has successfully created the illusion that we all share the same existence, with a few quantitative differences. Its domination of society has not been due so much to physical coercion as to the acceptance of a model (the relation of buyers and sellers of commodities), considered as natural and/or necessary, even if it is a necessary evil. This domination implies that men only perceive their real conditions of existence in the form of a link to the worship of an abstraction–money–which appropriates and

shapes all aspects of human activity in accordance with capital's need for accumulation and realization by way of the sale of commodities. Much more radical in this respect than the gods and the tyrants of the past, capital cares about nothing and nobody. Human beings and their relationships, like the means they use to survive, are determined by this one element: money, whose greater or lesser quantity allows for the comparison and representation of the product of a man's activity as well as his honor or his body, an animal hide or a countryside or a forest; everything, absolutely everything, can have its monetary equivalent and thus become quantifiable and measurable. This subjection to the commodity brings about a situation where nothing has value in and of itself. And this movement of mystification has reached its most advanced level with highly developed capital.

One could very well conclude that the proletariat has been totally integrated into capitalism by this process, ruling out any revolutionary perspective. Or one could view the dispossession of human beings with respect to their own lives as nothing but a step towards the abandonment of a society fractured into classes. In the one case, the flood, in the other ... purgatory followed by the earthly paradise. Reality is a little more complicated and makes fools of the prophets.

Just the posing of the question, "what do you propose?", could express both a seed of rebellion (insofar as the question implies the consideration of the possibility of a more human world and therefore a certain degree of alienation from the status quo) as well as an inability to proceed beyond that point. What could therefore be more natural than to ask those who are expressing this temptation to break with today's society–and often collectively theorizing it–what it is that they are thinking ... or, in the dominant language, what it is that they propose. This gets to the root of the swindle: expecting other people to generate a mode of implementation (in political language, a program) in order to passively replace one world with another. This question only makes sense if it means: "I feel this world as something inhuman but can hardly imagine the possibility of another way of life."

That is all very well, but what about Communism?

The definitions that can be provided for communism are many, even without taking into account the state dictatorship that describes the reality of the East Bloc countries or of the "liberated nations" of the third world and the programs of the parties and groupuscules that usurp the label.

If this bleak reality is what many people associate with communism, this is because–among other reasons–it is much easier to conceive of a transition from one system of exploitation to another than it is to conceive of a society that abolishes exploitation. As for the proposition of a long period of incubation of communism within capitalism during which the former consolidates its power to the detriment of the latter, this is an absurdity. It is the realization of this absurd idea that the various "socialisms" propose to accomplish, a kind of ill-defined mode of production, whose advocates have never been able to explain the nature of the social relations upon which this system is supposed to be based, if it is not merely the replacement of private property by state property and the "anarchy" of the market by planning–while preserving the foundations of capitalism: wage labor and the commodity....

Communism, as we understand it, is above all the tendency towards human community which under different forms has been characterized by the quest for a world where there is no law, no property, no State, no status that separates, no wealth that confers distinction, no power that oppresses.

Communism is not just another kind of politics. It is not a program that is opposed to other programs and must be led to victory by the force of its arguments or by the violence of its arms. Those who support communism do not dream of conquering State power and replacing the unjust and perverse power of the bourgeoisie with their own just and responsible power. The triumph of politics, with the State, is not our intention. It is the capitalist class that has achieved this, in our view. The State is not just the ministers, the presidential palaces ... it is the exercise of political power by one part of society over the rest of society. Beyond the various forms of organization of power and the intensity of the oppression inflicted, politics is the social division between rulers and ruled, the division of men into wielders of power and the subjects of that power. The communist revolution, if it takes place, will mark the extirpation rather than the consummation of this tendency. Thus, the ideas of democracy and dictatorship, which refer to juridical forms of state power that were formalized by the philosophy of the Enlightenment, will no longer have any meaning. Dictatorship, like democracy, derives from the requirement to maintain social cohesion, whether through coercion or through idealization, in a society undergoing a process of rupture with the traditional personal bonds that linked groups and individuals. Communism, on the contrary, represents the manifestation of other relations, of a human community. The communist revolution can only be, from its very first steps, the founding act of this community. To believe that it must reconstruct, despotically or democratically, a fictitious community, is to base it in its very origin on the negation of its own dynamic. All subterfuges with regard to this change nothing: the hymns to Politics, the cult of the State, are neither communism nor the roundabout (!) way that leads to it.

Nor is communism a type of economic organization or a new distribution of property. The communist community will not be established on the basis of “common” property because the concept of property signifies monopoly, the possession of some at the expense of others. In such a community, the circulation of goods cannot be effected according to the modalities of exchange: one good for another good. In a society in which no one is excluded, exchange, buying and selling–money–will be unknown. There will be collective or individual use of what the community produces. The logic of sharing will replace the logic of exchange. Human beings will associate with one another for the purposes of one activity or another, to share this or that pleasure or emotion, and to respond to one or another need of the community, without thereby taking the form of a State–the rule of some over others–or of enterprises that employ wage workers and quantify their production in terms of money. One will not be able to speak, in such a society, of “economic laws”, laws that are actually the expression of the domination of commodity relations.

With the abolition of the State, money and the commodity, human beings will exercise conscious control over their own activity by way of the relations and interactions that they establish among themselves and between them and the rest of nature. Communism will be a society where the most precious wealth will reside in human relations; where all human beings will have the chance to really like what they do, the time and the space in which they live and for which they are themselves responsible. It also presupposes the free association of men, women and children, beyond the roles of dependency and reciprocal submission. Likewise, communism entails the realization that scarcity or poverty are not the result of a shortage of means, of things or of objects, but that it derives from a social organization based on the monopoly of some at the expense of the rest.

All of which implies that in communism, the tendency toward the human community is not exclusively the product of the contradictions of capitalism. From our

point of view, the latter has only one insuperable contradiction: the human species. One might nevertheless at least think that capitalism has developed the foundations that will permit or favor the advent of communism (development of the productive forces, homogenization of the conditions of exploitation....).

But this is an *a posteriori* judgment. If the previously existing modes of production did not lead to communism, one cannot therefore conclude that this was inevitable. The capitalist mode of production has not offered anything new, in any event.

The domination of capitalism, by its presentation as the culmination of the history of humanity, has led to explanations of the past in which the relations between men are always understood under the sign of the conquest of a pie that is not always big enough for everyone to get a slice. This assumption of scarcity as a constant phenomenon, which the human species has confronted since its very beginnings, makes an abstraction of the concrete relations between men whether they are based on cooperation or exploitation. Such a presumption conceals the fact that the opposition between needs and scarcity is in fact the expression of social conditions in which human beings are divided into exploiters and exploited. Thus, according to this logic, scarcity produced human violence, and the latter was fortunately channeled by the development of the economy. The competition between men produced by this development created an outlet for this violence, transforming it into a positive factor since the development of the productive forces permitted the amelioration of the original scarcity, allowing men to have more and more objects and more things. Capital therefore created a higher level of productivity that allows men to put an end to society's division into classes because the growing amount of resources that humanity currently has at its disposal no longer "necessitates" their appropriation by some men at the expense of others.

But even if the "productive forces" and the "relations of production" cannot develop harmoniously (without crises and wars), both express the same relations between men that determine what must be produced and the means to produce it. Since capitalism is a social system in which there is an ongoing process of generalization and expansion of commodity relations, this implies that the quest for the valorization of money makes an abstraction of everything it touches with the sole purpose of transforming it into a commodity. All possible means for saving time and reducing the disturbances and unpredictability concomitant on the realization of the product with the goal of assuring its exchangeability are adopted to give form to a continuous process of commodity production. The search for means to assure the vitality of the market are oriented, on the one hand, towards introducing new "needs" for men and making them feel the impact of new "deficiencies" and "shortages" and, on the other hand, towards reducing their capacity for initiative and mutilating their intellectual and physical faculties. From the manufacturing system to the industrial system, from automation to information technology and robotics, we can see men becoming more superfluous, reduced to a mass of predetermined gestures over which they have no power, even rendering their mutual relations superfluous, as busy as they are with surveillance over and attendance on those processes that are completely beyond their control.

The development of the productive forces expresses the domination of the commodity in its process of reducing human activity to a pure expenditure of energy. Therefore it is not community, the realization of men's potentials, or happiness, that it can provide, but only commodities.

As it has been expressed in the context of different modes of social organization, the communist tendency has been defined by its corresponding vocabulary. Thus, in feudal society, it could assume the disguise and the language of religion. Currently, to define communism as a world without religion, national frontiers or money ... actually amounts to saying that communism ... is not capitalism. Such definitions are nothing but the reflection of the world in which we live. Beyond this reflection, there is a kind of invariance of communism. Not the invariance of a program or any kind of organization; but the permanent aspiration of human beings to associate in order to communicate with each other and to relate to an environment conceived not as an object that human activity must subjugate, but as something complementary to that activity. It is the old aspiration for equality, sharing and community that was manifested in the myth of the golden age, in the slave uprisings of antiquity and the rebellions of the peasants during the Middle Ages. This tendency would later be reflected in certain projects of the utopians, and then, in the attempts on the part of proletarian struggles to go beyond their immediate demands.

This does not mean that the entire history of the human species is a "programmed" evolution towards communism. History has no meaning, not even that of complete irreversibility. What was possible hundreds or thousands of years ago has not been totally erased forever. "History" is not a Moloch devouring the possible, and condemning the future of humanity to its inevitable and irremediable dispossession. It just means that if the communist revolution takes place it will have to grasp things by the root. Man cannot be really human unless he discovers and realizes his potentials: and he cannot even begin this process of discovery and realization without also embarking on the revolution.

A Communist Credo: Questions and Answers-Excerpts (Moses Hess, 1844)

1. What is money?

It is the value of human activity expressed in figures, the selling price of the exchange of our lives.

2. Can human activity be expressed in figures?

Human activity, just as little as man himself, has no price: because human activity is human life, which no sum of money can compensate, it is invaluable.

3. What is the person who can be sold for money or who sells himself for money?

The person who can be sold for money is a slave and the person who sells himself for money has the soul of a slave.

4. What must we deduce from the existence of money?

We must deduce from this existence enslavement, because money is the very sign of human slavery since it is the value of man expressed in figures.

5. How long will people stay slaves and selling their abilities for money?

This will remain so until society provides and guarantees each person the means necessary for human life and action, so that the individual will not be constrained to obtain these means by his own initiative and to this end to sell his activity In order to buy in return the activity of other men. This human commerce, this reciprocal exploitation, this industry which

one calls private, cannot be abolished by any decree; it can only be abolished by the establishment of a communitarian society in which the means will be offered to each to develop and to use their human faculties.

6. In a society thus instituted, is the existence of money possible or imaginable?

No more than the existence of human enslavement. Since men will no longer be obliged to sell to one another their powers and abilities, they will have no more need to calculate their value in figures, they will no longer have any need to account or to pay. In place of human value expressed in figures will appear the true, invaluable human value - in place of usury the flourishing of human faculties and the pleasures of life - in place of competition with unjust weapons, a harmonious co-operation and noble emulation - in place of multiplication tables, the head, heart and hands of free and active beings.

On the domination of the commodity

Some aspects of the domination of the commodity

In traditional societies, whatever the status of their members, the hierarchy, rules and laws that divided human beings into rulers and ruled were counterbalanced by a mass of rights and obligations and were regularly transgressed by social events (festivals, etc.). Furthermore, the relations of dependence and authority that united men were basically personal relations. The oppression was real, but it was transparent. However, from the moment when commodity relations became generalized and the character of the commodity was extended to the purchase and sale of labor power by means of the wages system (an extension that allowed for and accompanied the establishment of capitalist production relations), it was no longer the relations between persons that was determinant, but the production of commodities.

With capitalist domination, human relations no longer seem to depend on men but are realized and determined by a symbol: money. Because they can be represented and transformed by money, all human activities are transformed into a mass of objects subject to laws that are independent of human will. Personal relations are mediated by what is produced and by the relation between commodities.

In capitalist society, all goods are produced for sale, for making a profit. They can only exist insofar as they are commodities defined by their values. In this way, the millions of different types of objects produced by human activity are reduced to a common denominator–commodity value–measured by a common standard: money. It is this that makes it possible to establish relations of equivalence and exchange between them and allows for their total domination by the market.

Money thus becomes the universal abstraction through which everything must pass, and men usually find themselves in a situation where they consider each other to be potential competitors who compensate for their lack of relations with each other in the fetishism that they bestow on commodities. Through the proliferation of objects that have no other use than that of producing money and that are prostheses that replace human activity, the commodity and the greed for possession are presented as expressions of the personality. Capital responds to human needs with the proliferation of fictitious satisfactions: for the individual who aspires to “rediscover” nature, capital offers it to him in a functional and mechanized form; for the person who is overwhelmed by the pressure of everyday demands, it procures entertainment;

for the person who seeks to fill the emptiness of life by taking refuge in love, it inundates him with cheap eroticism. Never before has any society brought together so many human beings or achieved such a degree of interdependence with regard to their mutual activities; nor, however, has any previous form of society rendered human beings so indifferent to each other's fates, nor so hostile, since the ties that bind them–the market and competition–also separate them.

The logic of the domination of the commodity is, furthermore, a system of generalized waste and destruction: goods are produced so that they will not last or in order to induce further sales, natural resources are plundered, the food supply is denatured; the "surplus" agricultural products of one part of the world are destroyed while shortages proliferate elsewhere; generalized war economy....

The internal logic of capitalism is such that the goods produced cannot be considered outside the framework of the process of commodity production. Commodities are not "neutral" goods (use values), which only need to lose their subjection to money (exchange value). Commodity exchange and utility are only two aspects of a single social relation. Capitalism has merged production, sale and use into a single cohesive totality. We would sooner go without something that might seem to be logically fundamental rather than the latest piece of junk that will make us appear fashionable and up-to-date.

By way of consumption, a process of differentiation takes place with regard to those who do not buy a product and a process of identification takes place with regard to those who buy it, and the use of the product is alleged to make us live in a way we did not live before and that will allow us to establish relations that we previously lacked. What matters is the appearance of the advantages offered and it does not matter at all that they only exist in the form of appearances.

The point is reached where one calculates and plans for the necessary deterioration of objects. The market must not be saturated with objects that last too long, since they represent immobilized money. The faster capital can complete its cycle, the sooner it will acquire the form of money in order to once again be transformed into a concrete commodity, which translates into greater profitability. Each time a greater amount is reinvested thanks to the profits obtained in the previous cycle. Everything must therefore circulate rapidly.

As a result, the commodities thrown onto the market form an extremely hierarchical set of objects. There is not just one, or several, commodities for each need, but a multitude of either the same or rival brands. It is claimed that this diversity responds to the variety of the needs of the people: "the customer must have a choice!" In fact there is no choice other than the ones that are allowed by their financial means and their social function. Numerous commodities respond to the same need; but they are distinguished by their qualities and their prices. Different products may correspond to different uses; it is just that such uses are beyond the reach of some individuals. As is the case with production, these uses are socially determined.

In order to disguise the alienation of the human being, reduced to the category of producer and then to that of consumer, capitalism must preserve the illusion of the separation between production and consumption. The separation between production and consumption thus appears as a natural division between two quite distinct spheres of social life. But nothing could be more false. First, the border between what is called the time of production and the time of consumption is not fixed. What category does cooking fit into, and other activities of that kind? Second, every act of production is also necessarily an act of consumption. It only transforms the material in a certain way and for a certain purpose. At the same time that certain things are

destroyed or, if you prefer consumed, one obtains or, if you prefer, produces other things. Consumption is productive and production is also an act of consumption.

The concepts of production and consumption are not neutral. The capitalist use of the concept of production conceals the presence of the human being in his environment, in nature as a whole. A chicken becomes an egg factory. Everything is translated into terms of domination and utilization. Man the producer–who prides himself on being self-controlled and his own master–proceeds to the conquest of nature: claiming that he is its proper owner, just as he is the master of the objects he fashions, he does not cease, however, to be an object himself, his own object.

Some aspects of the abolition of the commodity

Communism, as the creation of new relations between men that will determine a completely different form of human activity, must entail a conception of production that will not simply be a copy of today's system, only without money. If it is possible, for the lack of any better term, to continue to speak of production in order to express the process by which one part of human activity is devoted to the reproduction of human existence and where the faculties of creation, innovation and transformation are expressed, the disappearance of exploitation and the abolition of money will mean that production will no longer imply the subjugation of men to its purposes since they will themselves determine the goals, the means and the conditions under which all production is conducted. It will therefore be an expression of their humanity that will not dispossess men of their other dimensions (love, play, dreaming....). Within a communitarian social order, the producers will not exchange their products: nor will the human activity incorporated in these products appear any longer as their value, as if this were a real quantity that they possessed. These goods will no longer be characterized by having a value; they have no price and cannot be exchanged (in accordance with that value, regardless of the standard by which it is measured), nor, for that same reason, can they be sold. They will have no other purpose than the satisfaction of human desires and needs such as they are expressed at any particular moment.

With the elimination of commodity production, the domination of the product over the producer will also disappear. Man will rediscover the connection with what he makes. With the disappearance of money, goods will be freely available at no charge. One will not have to have a certain amount of money in order to have the right to obtain anything whatsoever. A communist society will therefore not be a mere extension of our "consumer" society. It will not be an immense supermarket where passive beings only have to help themselves. There will be no devastation of resources without worrying about the future nor will there be a pursuit of a constant stream of useless junk that gives us the illusion of stimulating invention and captivates us with its novelty.

If we decide to salvage one or two useful and well-made objects from the present mountain of debris, human activity will be both simpler and more rewarding. This will facilitate the disappearance of numerous consequences of production that are linked to the "needs" of profitability and competition: e.g., the reduced role of human activity in the manufacture of products, waste, pollution, and the international division of labor.

Communism is not the appropriation of value by the producers, but the negation of value. The fact that a product has been made by one person or another will not entail the persistence of the principle of property, even of a "decentralized" variety. Productive activity will no longer be bound to the notion of ownership, but to that of

individual and collective creativity, to the awareness of satisfying human needs for both individuals and for the community as a whole.

With the replacement of exchange by common ownership, goods will no longer have an economic value and will become mere physical objects which human beings can use to satisfy any needs they may have. In this respect, objects will be fundamentally different from those that were created and developed by capitalism (even though they may still have the same outward appearance). It will not be a matter of simply appropriating the goods of the past, but of redesigning them, and often replacing them altogether, in accordance with the criterion of enjoyment rather than that of profit. This change of purpose will have a counterpart in an equally profound change in the productive process, and thus a reconsideration of technology will have to include, as well as the reconsideration of the utilization of the "acquisitions" inherited from capitalism, a rediscovery of technologies that had been abandoned because they were not profitable and innovations that will not subject man to machine.

This new organization of productive activity will not obviate the necessity of undertaking an estimation of the needs and possibilities of the community at any given moment, but they will not be reduced to a common denominator measured according to a universal standard. They will be assessed as physical quantities and only in this respect will measurement have any meaning for human beings. But communism must not be reduced to a matter of mere accounting problems. To do so would mean replacing the perspective of the human community by that of a technocratic ideal that would preserve labor as a social activity external to men. In the past, communists expounded the idea that the distribution of products could be regulated by the circulation of labor coupons that would correspond to a social average labor time calculated after taking account of deductions devoted to social funds. In fact, the existence of a common standard that measures product and labor is incompatible with the real abolition of wage labor, exchange or value.

Furthermore, such a system would require–in order to be totally "fair"–the consideration of certain variables (which are, on the other hand, perfectly arbitrary) in accordance with the difficulty of the job, of its inherent interest.... It would therefore relapse into an "economic calculation" that would require a "unit of value" whether expressed in the form of money or, directly, in that of labor time. Communism, as a society without money, will not, however, need any universal unit of measurement; all calculations will proceed in accordance with the nature of the thing calculated. The appeal of an object will therefore be derived from the object itself and not from any value that is more or less arbitrarily assigned to it. Its production, like its use, will be determined in accordance with its meaning for men and nature.

Along with commercial value, the separation of the human being into producer and consumer will also disappear. For the communist, consumption will not be opposed to production because there will be no antagonism between looking out for oneself and looking out for others. Production will be transformed into creative activity. The self-expression of the group or of the individual will be manifested by what they do. Unless forced to do so by nature, men will no longer need to undergo endless torment, as they will no longer be hounded by the need to produce commodities. The "consumer" will not be able to blame the "producer" for the imperfection of what he makes in the name of the money that he gave in exchange for it, but will be able to simply criticize it as co-participant of the production process. What he will criticize will be the result of their common labors.

The Law of Freedom in a Platform (Gerrard Winstanley, 1652)

> When mankind began to buy and sell, then did he fall from his innocence; for then they began to oppress and cozen one another of their creation birthright.... And the nations of the world will never learn to beat their swords into ploughshares, and their spears into pruning hooks, and leave off warring, until this cheating device of buying and selling be cast out among the rubbish of kingly power.
>
> The earth is to be planted, and the fruits reaped and carried into barns and store-houses, by the assistance of every family. And if any man or family want corn or-other provision they may go to the store-houses and fetch without money. If they want a horse to ride, go into the fields in summer, or to the common stables in winter, and receive one from the keepers; and when your journey is performed, bring him where you had him, without money. If any want food or victuals, they may either go to the butchers' shops, and receive what they want without money; or else go to the flocks of sheep or herds of cattle, and take and kill what meat is needful for their families, without buying and selling.
>
> For as particular families and tradesmen do make several works more than they can make use of: as hats, shoes, gloves, stockings, linen and woollen cloth and the like, and do carry their particular work to store-houses: So it is all reason and equity that they should go to other store-houses, and fetch any other commodity which they want and cannot make; for as other men partakes of their labours, it is reason they should partake of other men's.
>
> As silver and gold is either found out in mines in our own land, or brought by shipping from beyond sea, it shall not be coined with a conqueror's stamp upon it, to set up buying and selling under his name or by his leave; for there shall be no other use of it in the commonwealth than to make dishes and other necessaries for the ornament of houses, as now there is use made of brass, pewter and iron, or any other metal in their use.

Human relations

Against dehumanization

Capitalism is the reign of the separations that compartmentalize our lives. The end-user, the producer (whether "productive" or "unproductive"), the wage worker as much as the unemployed worker, all of them lose, under the sway of domination, the meaning of life. Dispossessed of everything and of themselves, individuals lead a parcelized (work time/leisure time), specialized (job category, strictly demarcated and enforced job descriptions), scattered (time spent in commuting for those displaced by the geographical division between home and work, as well as the necessary arrangements for managing one's own misery). This leftover existence chains us to our situation as end-users and consumers. It leads us to a situation of relations of dependence on or indifference towards others. Differences in age, ability, knowledge, intellectual or emotional inclination, physical appearance, etc. ... all these diversities that could provide the motivation for a constellation of enriching relations and interdependencies, are instead transformed into a system of authority and obedience, superiority and inferiority, rights and duties, privileges and privations. This hierarchical

stratification of signs of differentiation is not manifested only in social relations: its impact is also felt within each individual with regard to his apprehension of natural, social or personal phenomena. It is not just the way we act in common and communicate with each other that is stratified hierarchically; so is the way we understand the world, and the feelings of each person in the organization of the immensely diversified material provided by the senses, memory, thoughts, values, passions....

In connection with the other forms of social conditioning, education also collaborates in the project of preserving this dispersed and hierarchically stratified existence. This is why man lives his life in separate stages: during the first years of his life, it is dominated by "education"; later, by work (as if the learning process, the quest for knowledge, and the curiosity regarding new ways of thinking, could not continue to develop over the whole course of one's life). This separation between productive life, on the one hand, and education, on the other, is not the fruit of any human need. It is not at all founded in the growing importance of "knowledge" that has to be forced down one's throat. As far as knowledge is concerned, the school is nothing but a simulacrum.

School is where one learns to read and to write, but, above all, where one learns to endure boredom, to respect authority, to compete with one's comrades, to dissimulate and to lie. What is crucial is that the child learns how to read because he has to know how to read and not because it satisfies his curiosity or his love of books. The paradoxical result is that if schooling has reduced illiteracy, it has simultaneously snuffed out most people's taste for reading as well as their real ability to read.

School is the training in submission and renunciation. First of all, the student must be tamed in order to teach him anything. The structures of control, testing, discipline, etc. ... immerse him in a dizzying and hallucinatory rhythm, totally independent of the actual work he does. Then, the little that he does learn is situated under the sign of self-abnegation and permanent regression: every result obtained is immediately devalued, when it is not absolutely annulled. What has been taught is nothing; what is important is what has not yet been taught, without which one can do nothing in life. Therefore, what is important is that nothing is achieved, and that the wheel of conditioning goes on turning forever. Tomorrow will be abolished and replaced by the boredom and repetition of today. This is why the school schedule is based on that of the workers. Submission must be worked on, it must be learned.... The school is nothing but the purgatory that prepares the way for hell.... Never have people "learned" so much, and yet been so ignorant of their own lives.

Today, we are drowning in a torrent of information, from educational institutions, newspapers, and television. In this accumulation of the commodity of knowledge, everything is interchangeable and everything is indistinct. It is a dead knowledge, incapable of understanding life, because its most profound nature consists in having been violently separated from lived experience.

Basically, what has allowed class societies to endure up until now is the more or less openly proclaimed support of the exploited for the morality and the representations that express their renunciation in relation to a life over which they have no type of control, that is, their submission to the rule and exploitation that they themselves uphold. This submission can only be challenged when representations of human activity arise that express the rejection of the stereotyped roles in which, up until now, that activity has been represented in a fixed and immobilized way. This condition of passivity is, strictly speaking, an authentic condition of dehumanization and dispossession, but by no means signifies complete submission to or support for capitalism. Its rule over life does nothing but suffocate what is human, love, creativity and

initiative. Attempts to protect oneself from this rule consequently often result in locking oneself into a lie.

In the remains of a family reduced to its most simple expression (parents, children, television) hypocrisy rules. Relations between parents and children often scrape the bottom of degradation, when appearances are based solely on the common possession of a certain number of commodities. What is called love is really only economic, emotional or sexual security.

People also aspire to own things in order to resist the destruction of their personal lives by capitalism, even if this represents a derisory guarantee against the violence of the world and the "others". Modern property does not stop noise from penetrating poorly-insulated walls in apartment buildings; nor does it prevent the pollution caused by the demands of the market; nor the unemployment that undermines the economic expectations on the basis of which people buy cars or houses on credit; nor does it prevent foreclosure and eviction from one's home; nor does it prevent boredom.... If the idea of property applies to a reality, it also serves to disguise the reality of the world. Property is the product of human relations that are relations of force that are based on violence and expropriation. The generalization of money has masked this open violence in order to allow whoever possesses it to employ a social power without the need to resort to direct force. In this way it is possible to express the distance (real or imagined) that separates one person from another. In this way one can discover, when one is a party to a civil action at court, who it is that really controls the commodity and who does not. Until the 19th century, a certain number of rules and regulations still limited the power of the owner, who, in a rural society, was only entitled to the yield of the first mowing of a meadow, and had to allow other people to graze their cattle on the meadow afterwards. With the generalization of commodity relations, local customs are no longer observed. All that remains, in a few marginal rural regions, are a few customs such as easement rights, access to springs and other water sources, etc. The commodity and capital require a set of effective rules that can be applied to any particular situation. In the bourgeois world, the whole world is a free proprietor: the peasant, of his farm; the industrialist, of his factory; the worker, of his labor power.... Property conceals relations of exploitation.

For a human community

Communism means the end of the separations that compartmentalize our lives. In it, human beings will no longer define themselves as simple end-users. The human aspiration towards communism is an aspiration for a world where man will no longer be either a consumer (of goods, of relations) or a producer of commodities, and where human activity will be transformed. With the abolition of wages and money, man will really be able to become active; he will take action with regard to his existence and his environment rather than, as is the case now, "being acted upon by them".

This end of separations will be encountered in the very heart of the productive process where every idea like the division of labor or of skill levels will be challenged. For the apostles of labor, it is necessarily a monstrosity to believe that some day there will be neither bricklayers, nor laborers, nor professional architects, and that the same man will have to perform the role of architect as well as push a wheelbarrow: however, what kind of world is it where people are eternally unskilled laborers, for whom their work life is separated from all other human activities?

A communist society will no longer oppose work life and emotional life ... time devoted to consumption and time devoted to production.... The locations where education, production, and entertainment take place ... will no longer be closed

universes estranged from each other. The achievement of these changes will perhaps take some time. But the commitment to achieve them can only be immediate, just like the abolition of commodity production and wage labor, from the very beginning of the revolutionary process. To carry out any activity, whether it is productive or not, people will no longer be brought together in obedience to the power of capital. Their association, however, will not require the resurrection of past forms, like the old patriarchal family. People will associate with each other, brought together by their shared tastes and affinities, and these associations will be characterized by the fact that interpersonal relations will be just as important as the activities they intend to carry out.

The domination that transforms human beings into instruments of production, into objects like tools or machines, has infiltrated into the most profound recesses of the human personality, shaping our language, our gestures, and our most trivial everyday attitudes. The conception of communism, on the other hand, consists in understanding that we must put an end to this perception of individuals in terms of conflicts where the ego is not just a person distinguished from the "others", but a person who is trying to dominate and subjugate them. In this relation, the thought of the individual being is defined by his rule over objects and the reduction of the other individuals to the status of objects that are only valued for their usefulness. Insofar as individual "needs" only exist for the individual and do not take into consideration the integrity of the other, the others remain as pure objects and the manipulation of these objects becomes their appropriation. In opposition to this view, communism opposes a relation of complementarity between men, where the other will be recognized as an end-in-himself and where the needs of the other will be defined in terms of reciprocity. These links will constitute the true negation of the relations of domination that render impossible and deny any real human relations today.

This by no means implies that all conflicts will be abolished, but that the irreconcilable opposition between human groups and interests will come to an end. We must put an end to "miserabilism" and the glorification of confrontation: the definitions that issued from the bourgeoisie which proclaim that "man is wolf to man" and assert that nothing will ever change. Communism will not abolish what is human; it will instead rehabilitate it in all of its possibilities that far transcend gestures of aggression between human beings (our current everyday fate). This does not mean that life on earth will be a "paradise", but that the relations between people will no longer be relations between individuals who are indifferent with regard to each other's existences. People will be able to associate or not without any external pressure.

There can be no doubt that dependence will always exist, but it will signify complementarity rather than domination. Children will always depend on adults for the satisfaction of their basic physical needs, just as they will need their learning and experience. For their part, the older generations will still depend on the younger generations for the reproduction of society and for the necessary stimulus that constitutes the spirit of discovery and innovation. As a result, the current conception that defines the other in terms of "superiority" or "inferiority" will be replaced by a concept of respect and mutual enrichment. There is no other "guarantee" for the development of a human community, where it is not a question of fixed regulations of the relations between the generations and the sexes.... So much the worse for all those for whom this is disturbing because they do not want to do without the sanction of the police, the teacher and the priest.

In communism, the elderly will not be warehoused in nursing homes that are merely the last stop before the cemetery, nor will children have to submit to their

parents because of their need to eat. Nor will education be compulsory as a preparation for wage labor. The child will learn to read and write because he feels the need to do so. Since the world of childhood is not separated from the rest of social life, his education will be an imperious need, just like learning to walk and to talk, although it will be manifested later as it is one of the last human developmental needs. There will thus be no need to warehouse the children for hours every day, since they will always have the opportunity to devote themselves to multiple activities. Reading, or any other kind of learning, can then form part of life instead of being an obligation subject to judgment and punishment.

Romantic relations based on love will be the foundations of life, replacing marriage, which will lose its reason for existence. The question of whether two ... or three or ten people want to live together, or to agree to do so by means of a tacit contract, is nobody's business but their own.

In communism, the end of relations based on force, on violence and the universal antagonism of each against all ... will presuppose the end of ownership rights over people and things. The abolition of private property means putting an end to their foundations: the domination of the "other" (man or nature); appropriation, which only perceives the other in relation to utility; and the generalized degradation of the relations between men and also between the latter and nature.

One will no longer be able to "use and abuse" something, whatever it is, just because one owns it. Nothing will belong to anybody anymore. A thing will be defined by its use. A bicycle will be used to travel and not just so that Mr. Jones, its 'legitimate owner', can travel. The very idea of property will soon be considered to be absurd. The question regarding whether, for sentimental or any other kinds of reasons, human beings or some human beings have a need for a particular territory or for objects over which they can establish tacit rights, has nothing whatsoever to do with property. Each person's material and emotional security will, on the other hand, be reinforced: the disappearance of relations of force and of money will allow for human relations in which each person will have the right to food and clothing, and to live alone or with others, depending on his tastes. It is the interest of each person that takes precedence over the rights of property, of force, or of money, which one may or may not possess. The end of institutionalized violence and indifference will allow each person to live in peace, without being destroyed or ignored.

How Matters are Managed (Chapter 14 of *News from Nowhere* by William Morris, 1889)

> Said I: "How about your relations with foreign nations?"
>
> "I will not affect not to know what you mean," said he, "but I will tell you at once that the whole system of rival and contending nations which played so great a part in the 'government' of the world of civilisation has disappeared along with the inequality betwixt man and man in society."
>
> "Does not that make the world duller?" said I.
>
> "Why?" said the old man.
>
> "The obliteration of national variety," said I.
>
> "Nonsense," he said, somewhat snappishly. "Cross the water and see. You will find plenty of variety: the landscape the building, the diet, the amusements, all various. The men and women varying in looks as well as in habits of thought; the costume more various than in the commercial

> period. How should it add to the variety or dispel the dulness, to coerce certain families or tribes, often heterogeneous and jarring with one another into certain artificial and mechanical groups and call them nations, and stimulate their patriotism - i.e., their foolish and envious prejudices?"
>
> "Well - I don't know how," said I.
>
> "That's right," said Hammond cheerily; "you can easily understand that now we are freed from this folly it is obvious to us that by means of this very diversity the different strains of blood in the world can be serviceable and pleasant to each other, without in the least wanting to rob each other: we are all bent on the same enterprise, making the most of our lives. And I must tell you whatever quarrels or misunderstandings arise, they very seldom take place between people of different race; and consequently since there is less unreason in them, they are the more readily appeased."

State, Nation ... or human community

The State, that is, the organization of the division of men into masters and subjects, has always been based on the notion of territory, which simultaneously responds to the needs of the various kinds of exploiters to fix their slaves and subjects on a specific territory and to give notice to their potential enemies concerning which regions, men, animals and plants belong to them.

The national idea is based on the myths engendered by a sedentary life: myths of the land of one's birth, of the foreigner ... myths that limit and distort one's view of the world. The development of commodity relations, determined by as well as dissolving hierarchical or community relations through which the dependence and/or cooperation between men are directly expressed, has not challenged this dependence on territory because the formation of the nation-states and the myth of the fatherland were the direct results of the emergence of capitalism. Simultaneously recuperating the limitations and the aspirations of the old communities, capitalism conferred value not on a real community, but on the image of a community that is manifested in the feeble fetishism of national flags and heroes. The spread of impersonal relations between men was accompanied by the invention of a community of fate masking the division between socially antagonistic classes, making way for a rationalization of capitalism's rule by imposing upon its agents, divided by competition, a unity corresponding to the higher interests of the State, guardian and manager of the general social relation, protecting it against the dissolving influences of the market.

While this capitalist rule shelters behind the borders of the State, it relies on a process of globalization of commodity relations, on the imperialist tendency to conquer, unify and, most importantly, create markets. Colonization, world wars, the development of new poles of accumulation, and the formation of new nation-states, have been stages in this process. In the current epoch, exchange has standardized life throughout the world and you find the same kind of food, urbanism, education and news everywhere. The carefully nourished local color is a marketing ploy that contributes to the generalization of exchange. Nationalism and xenophobia, on the other hand, have developed where man's knowledge of and his sense of belonging in his environment have decayed.

Communism signals a radical break with the old ideas of territory, fatherland, nation and State. The problems that will have to be solved will be global and can only be resolved by a worldwide human community that totally destroys national and

international barriers.

Breaking with the “logic of progress”, the communist revolution will have to assume, on the broadest possible basis, the task of protecting nature and those who live within it. Communism will not be established like capitalism by means of the imposition of a social structure that breaks up existing traditional communities. The populations of such communities and their relations with the rest of humanity will certainly be transformed, but this transformation will not have to take the form of the destruction of men or a negation of communitarian values.

Communism will introduce an unprecedented freedom: the freedom to travel over the whole surface of the planet without having to answer to anybody or show any documentation, the freedom to go wherever you want whenever you want and to stay there as long as you want. Men will not be imprisoned behind state borders, and therefore cultural and ethnic frontiers will disappear, too. The only collectivity in communism will be the human community, organized on egalitarian and communitarian foundations that will obviously take the form of particular collectivities, but where man will not have the limited vision characteristic of our time since he will know, on the one hand, that the differences that exist between communities do not constitute an obstacle to his contact with the outside due to the vital aspects of a single humanity, and, on the other hand, that he can, thanks to his needs and desires, join and participate in one or another community without his birthplace being an obstacle to his being accepted.

Revolution and communization

Between capitalism and communism there is no mixed or intermediate mode of production. The “transition” period, or, more properly ... the period of rupture, is that phase in which a communist process must confront the human and material consequences of an era of slavery and neutralize the forces that defend them. There will not be a hard and fast chronological dividing line between an initial armed revolution, and the subsequent transformation of social reality that will be made possible by that revolution. Revolution and communization are intimately linked. The revolution is the communization of the relations between men by way of mass movements directed against commodity relations and the State.

The revolution will be a formidable social upheaval. It implies confrontations and does not exclude violence. However, while the revolution is a power, its essential problem is not that of violence, and the prerequisite for its success is not essentially a question of power. It will not fight against the powerful for control over the State and the Economy. The communist revolution does not pursue power, not even when it is attributed with the power to implement its measures that express the practical rejection of the State and capitalism. This practical rejection will be expressed by the formation of communities of struggle independent of state-oriented institutions (parties, trade unions, police, army), allowing for the true engagement of everyone, the unity and effective transparency of decision making and its execution, rejecting the division between representatives and their constituencies, by the establishment of non-commercial relations that, from the start, can be used with regard to certain aspects of the existing productive structures by reorienting them in the sense of the satisfaction of human needs by way of the distribution of products.

The power of the revolution will in fact be a social relation that will completely transform all other relations and that will make men the subjects of their own history. It is by shattering the bonds of dependence and isolation that it will destroy the State and politics; it is by abolishing commodity relations that it will destroy

capitalism.

The communist revolution is not a clash between two armies, one of which follows the orders of the privileged and the exploiters while the other serves the proletarians. It cannot be reduced to a war for the seizure of power and the control over territory. The proletarians will play the enemy's game if they submit to a confrontation of force, if they seek to establish a relation of forces and to safeguard "conquests" for the construction of another state structure. The revolution would then degenerate into a civil war, fatally falling victim to the mere repetition of the mistakes of the past. The confrontation between two armies, the red and the white, will not be the communist revolution but the transformation of the proletarians into troops of one or another vanguard.

The proletarians must be active in order to be victorious, not having any fatherland to defend or any state to construct. They will face the army and the police, as well as those who want human beings to be perpetually dominated and exploited, or those who can only perceive human life in this way. For the immediate and radical transformation of the social organization, it is necessary for the military troops and those who want to preserve the existing society to be deprived of anything to defend. The army and the paramilitary formations cannot do everything by themselves as organizations of violence. Their actions can be directly expressed in the destruction of men and things, or else they can be expressed indirectly by creating and maintaining a situation of poverty that is conducive to the fostering of egoism and fear.... Those for whom this is the best of all possible worlds, who will attempt to redirect the violence of the exploited, will assist them in this task. By advocating the mass liquidations of real or imagined opponents, and by providing murderous objectives to the frustrations that will begin to be expressed, they will appeal to homicide in order to avoid posing the need for men to organize their own lives.

The communist revolution will not be nourished by the taste for blood or the spirit of vengeance. Its goal is not massacre, but the emergence of a reconciled community. The movements of the past show that bloodshed is generally due only in small part to the actions of the rebels. It was the forces of social conservatism that massacred, imprisoned, and deported. Blood was spilled during the armed clashes, but often only after their victory. For them it was necessary to destroy those in whom the revolution appeared to be based. On the other hand, the ethics of the communist movement implies the possibility that the enemies could undergo a change in their lives, by acting in such a way that they will come to understand, in the most comprehensive manner possible, that real pleasure is not to be found in inflicting humiliation and death, but in the realization of the community of men without masters or slaves. War is, above all, the destruction and subjugation of men. The goal of the communist revolution is to eliminate the material and mental structures of oppression rather than to destroy and subjugate men.

Communism therefore is about the rejection of the world of domination, breaking with all the relations upon which it is based: it is not about creating an army, but of abolishing the army; it is not about raising up some individuals to be ministers or peoples commissars, but of rendering such functions useless.

Conclusion

1: Against the denial of humanity that capitalism represents, all that can finally be proposed is another life where our actions, our speech, our imagination, and all of our feelings will no longer be held in bondage. It is obvious that this can only be achieved by the destruction of capitalist society, but it cannot be reduced to only this

dimension. This destructive process will have to confront all the old barriers inherited from the old class societies. It will have to proceed in tandem with a positive movement to create a human community. Although it distorts it, capitalism cannot entirely dispense with human activity. Human beings are not objects; men chafe under the roles in which they are enclosed by this society and can express their rejection of all of this. This contradiction is the only insuperable one for capitalism, and it is this contradiction that makes communism a human possibility.

2: All of humanity has an interest in the suppression of capitalist rule. This does not mean, however, that capital and the state have become abstract monsters against which all of humanity is potentially and unanimously opposed. There are still classes that direct and manage the production and sale of commodities. There are still proletarians and the exploited, not possessing anything but their labor power, whose existence is therefore dependent on the sale of that labor power. Likewise, there are still social categories, even among wage workers, that participate in the reproduction and perpetuation of wage labor. While the communist revolution will be fought "in the name of humanity", it cannot be considered separately from the place that this or that person occupies in the organization of this society; it can only be the negation of that organization.

3: While the exploited and the oppressed, through their class movements, play an important role in the spread of the communist perspective, the latter will not be simply an incremental product of the struggles whose goal is to adapt to the demands of commodity society. It will not be engendered by alienated consciousnesses coming to terms with their essential determinations, but by human beings who cannot bear to be reduced to their roles as producers and consumers of commodities. The human community cannot be attained by forming partial and separated communities that never pose an obstacle for capital, or by cultivating the individual existence in which one will finally discover the "true man". It is not enough to reaffirm individuality, even as a first moment of rebellion. Doesn't this society already produce a cult of the individual–in separation and atomization? The communist revolution will not be made by individuals who want to fit into this society, nor will it be made by unhappy consciousnesses that suffer in life, nor by the desperate, nor by the fragmented and unsatisfied, but by human beings who are seeking their humanity, and only when they have the vision of another possible way of life. Beings are only really human–and therefore, potentially subversive–when they are explorers of the possible and are not content with what is presented to them as immediately realizable.

4: The yearning for community is a constant feature of human history and has repeatedly assumed concrete forms. Its eventual realization will therefore not be the product of an alleged sense of history, nor will it be the end of history. It will be the product of a practical movement of human intervention. After its appearance, society will not then be fixed and closed to any further development; man will not be a passive being, enjoying in a dreamlike state goods that have no connection with his activity and his creativity. His enjoyment will depend on what he does and what he is within the community. It does not make sense to ask if this tendency will or will not be successful because we have not chosen it: it is this tendency itself that draws us on and allows us to explain what we think is best about us.

On the Lack of Incentive to Labour in a Communist Society (Chapter 15 of *News from Nowhere* by William Morris, 1889)

"But the labour-saving machines?"

"Heyday!" quoth he. "What's that you are saying? the labour-saving machines? Yes, they were meant to 'save labour' (or, to speak more plainly, the lives of men) on one piece of work in order that it might be expended – I will say wasted – on another, probably useless, piece of work. Friend, all their devices for cheapening labour simply resulted in increasing the burden of labour. The appetite of the World-Market grew with what it fed on: the countries within the ring of 'civilisation' (that is organised misery) were glutted with the abortions of the market, and force and fraud were used unsparingly to 'open up' countries outside that pale. This process of 'opening up' is a strange one to those who have read the professions of the men of that period and do not understand their practice; and perhaps shows us at its worst the great vice of the nineteenth century, the use of hypocrisy and cant to evade the responsibility of vicarious ferocity. When the civilised World-Market coveted a country not yet in its clutches some transparent pretext was found – the suppression of a slavery different from, and not so cruel as that of commerce; the pushing of a religion no longer believed in by its promoters; the 'rescue' of some desperado or homicidal madman whose misdeeds had got him into trouble amongst the natives of the 'barbarous' country – any stick, in short, which would beat the dog at all. Then some bold, unprincipled, ignorant adventurer was found (no difficult task in the days of competition), and he was bribed to 'create a market' by breaking up whatever traditional society there might be in the doomed country, and by destroying whatever leisure or pleasure he found there. He forced wares on the natives which they did not want, and took their natural products in 'exchange', as this form of robbery was called, and thereby he 'created new wants', to supply which (that is, to be allowed to live by their new masters) the hapless helpless people had to sell themselves into the slavery of hopeless toil so that they might have something wherewith to purchase the nullities of 'civilisation.'"Ah," said the old man, pointing to the Museum, "I have read books and papers in there, telling strange stories indeed of the dealings of civilisation (or organised misery) with 'non-civilisation'; from the time when the British Government deliberately sent blankets infected with small-pox as choice gifts to inconvenient tribes of Red-skins, to the time when Africa was infested by a man named Stanley, who -"