

Getting Past
CAPITALISM



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History, Vision, Hope

Cynthia Kaufman

*For CARLOS and ROSA,
whose love keeps me sane.*

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Introduction

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I FIRST STARTED THINKING ABOUT POLITICS just after the election of Ronald Reagan. It was 1981 and I got involved in the movement to oppose U.S. support of a dictatorial government in El Salvador.

I began reading and talking to people about the world's problems. I began to wonder why there was so much poverty and strife in the world, why the U.S. would support a dictator, and what kinds of things needed to happen to deal with those problems. I quickly came to believe that capitalism was a significant aspect of the problems I saw in the world. But almost as quickly I came to see that talking about capitalism was one of the best ways to get my ideas dismissed as extreme, as in favor of authoritarian communism, or as unrealistic.

I believe that capitalism rewards greed and fosters a society in which it is hard for people to pay good, productive attention to the needs of others and to the ways we are interconnected. But I also realize that many people see it as the only viable form of society in the modern world. Wondering about capitalism has pushed me to think a lot about what other kinds of economic and political systems might be possible.

Although I am opposed to capitalism, I am not opposed to all uses of market mechanisms, trade, or entrepreneurship. Each of those things can play a positive role in an economy, under the right circumstances. But investment for profit becomes a problem when private profit-making consumes such a significant amount of a society's resources that investors gain the power to transform cultural and political systems. When capitalists control a political system, other ways of living and using resources are drowned out.

Capitalism is a problem because it allows those with resources to use them without regard for the needs of others. That disregard leads to the destruction of communities, to millions of people around the world not having access to the basic things they need to live healthy lives, and to environmental degradation. Capitalism is one of the most important forces responsible for the fact that people do not have time to do what they love. Along with racism and sexism, capitalism is a powerful force for generating and maintaining devastating forms of inequality. It is largely to blame for the slow response to the global catastrophe being caused by climate change.

But how do we un-do capitalism, a system that has been developing and growing for more than five-hundred years? By this point, capitalism has become a central part of the fabric of most of the societies we inhabit. How can we dismantle the capitalist home we live in when our activities every day effectively shore it up? In many ways, the 1950s comic strip character Pogo was right: “We have met the enemy and he is us.” No matter how anti-capitalist you are, if you live in a society dominated by capitalism you probably need to work for a wage. Most of us spend many of our waking hours doing paid work and much of our leisure time shopping or otherwise consuming commercial culture. Capitalism even structures our intimate interactions with people. We often express love by buying things for people. We may judge people by the products they use.

When capitalism comes to dominate society, when all other ways of meeting our needs come to be devalued and pushed out, when governments operate to serve the interests of privately owned capital rather than the needs of people, we have a serious problem. That problem is capitalism.

In the year 2000, bowing to demands of the World Bank, the Bolivian government attempted to privatize the water supply of the city of Cochabamba. They placed the water system in the hands of a private consortium, Aguas del Tunari, led by the multinational corporation Bechtel. Once Aguas del Tunari took over, they immediately raised water rates thirty-five percent, with the result that people who were making \$70 per month were paying \$20 per month for water. Immediately after the imposition of the rate hike people took to the streets. They closed down the city of Cochabamba in a general strike that lasted four days. Protests spread throughout the country. One of the organizations involved in the protests was the political party

Movimiento al Socialismo, whose candidate, Evo Morales, became the country's president in 2005.¹ In a speech at the United Nations in 2007, Morales claimed that "capitalism is the worst enemy of humanity."²

All around the world there are movements developing to challenge the negative aspects of capitalism. For some, that involves challenging the privatization of water or electricity. For others, it means fighting against sweatshops or for the rights of undocumented immigrants. Many are beginning to connect the dots that link these issues.

In his book *Illegal People: How Globalization Creates Migration and Criminalizes Immigrants*, photojournalist and activist David Bacon explains how global economic policies create migration. Bacon focuses on the ways the North American Free Trade Agreement of 1994 continues to undermine the Mexican rural economy and turns Mexican rural agriculturalists into undocumented California farmworkers. He shows how the problem of illegal immigration is not so much based on the pull of a great life in wealthy countries as it is driven by a push based on miserable living conditions at home. For him, displacement and migration are key parts of the global capitalist economy. Bacon focuses on the cruelty of scapegoating and punishing people whose lives have been destroyed by macro-economic policies that originate in the countries that, in the end, persecute them.³

To people who are angry about the presence of undocumented immigrants those immigrants are people who break laws and take away jobs from citizens. Their defenders usually focus on the plight of families that are broken up when undocumented people are deported, or on the plight of young people who, brought from other countries as children, cannot work legally in the only country they have ever known. The debate becomes a question of the relative importance of respecting the law versus considering the needs of individuals in hard situations. And when the question arises of whether or not we should allow in all of the billions of people who would likely migrate to the countries of the Global North if they had the chance, many advocates for the rights of the undocumented don't have a good answer.⁴

When undocumented people are understood as pawns in a global political economic game, when their tragic experiences are seen as the negative consequences of the same process through which agribusiness has undermined the U.S. family farm and U.S. jobs have been outsourced to Mexican

sweatshops, it becomes easier to explain what should be done to improve everyone's lives. There is a solution to the problem of undocumented immigration that is good for working class people in wealthy and in poor countries: it is to work for policies that allow people to stay home and live well, which is what most people in this world want.

Around the world, strong sentiments are developing against corporations and in favor of locally grown food, environmentally friendly inventions, and small-scale, locally oriented economies. Environmentally and socially sustainable agriculture is flourishing in many places, including devastated urban environments such as metropolitan Detroit. People are using their creative energies to develop new technologies to help us make the transition to a post-petroleum economy. Towns and cities are finding new ways to encourage walking, to encourage vibrant local economies, and to encourage a sense of community.⁵

In her book *Green Gone Wrong: How Our Economy is Undermining the Environmental Revolution*, journalist Heather Rogers writes of the ways that people wanting a better environment need to take capitalism seriously as a part of the problem they are addressing. She tells the story of Morse Pitts, a New York state egg farmer, who is doing all he can to raise eggs locally, humanely, and sustainably. He sells his eggs for an exorbitant \$14 a dozen and yet earns only about \$7 per hour himself.⁶ In the current context of macro policy, his environmentally sustainable approach to egg growing isn't economically sustainable because, among other reasons, agribusiness is subsidized directly by the government and indirectly through cheap oil, and tax systems favor commercial real estate. She tells of organic certification systems that inadvertently favor large-scale organic producers that don't treat their workers or the land sustainably, and of a public that wants to do the right thing by buying organic and free-trade products, but which is regularly thwarted by fraud and corruption. Rogers writes,

Even with greater public awareness, some pro-environmental legislation (mostly in European countries), and the involvement of third party certifiers, we're still operating under free-market capitalism. In this economic setup, it continues to be highly profitable to strip

natural systems of their resources, kick people out of their forests, and sell to consumers endless streams of goods that in short order end up in the landfill.⁷

Transnational capitalist institutions such as the World Trade Organization set the terms of world trade in ways that favor transnational corporations over small and local ones. National governments almost always adopt policies, such as farm subsidy policies, that favor large multi-national corporations. And people find it hard to afford locally grown food when food is distributed through a market that is shaped by the interests of corporations such as Archer Daniels Midland, that control almost all of the world's food supply. The U.S. government still subsidizes agribusiness through the farm bill that is passed every five years. The 2008 bill spent \$16 billion on subsidies, most of which went to agribusiness. And as of this writing it still subsidizes oil in the form of tax breaks, royalty waivers, and subsidies for research. Millions of dollars have been given to oil companies to make it profitable to drill in deep water.

To the extent that those of us working in movements to improve people's lives and the environment in which we live understand the forces we are up against, we will be able develop more powerful strategies for shaping the context in which our projects are growing. People who have been armed with a clear understanding of how capitalism works are better able to anticipate the consequences of their actions and understand who may be identified as likely allies, who needs to be pressured, and who should not be trusted. They are also better able to uncover lies and manipulations within the dominant stories told to justify harmful policies. Understanding capitalism as that which links what happens in the political and economic realms can help us orient our work for a better world.

This doesn't mean that those working for a better world should always talk about capitalism as a problem. Sometimes naming capitalism is a tactical error. It can lead to marginalization. But a clear understanding of the context in which we operate can help us build more powerful political movements. And discussing capitalism as a phenomenon is often important in helping people see the ways that the problems they experience in the world are interrelated.

What's good for the New York state organic farm is in many cases also good for the small scale agriculturalist in Brazil, who is fighting for the right to work his or her land while agribusiness wants to plow it under and grow soy for industrial beef. When the people of Cochabamba fought to keep their water available to all as a public good they helped inspire people all over the world to fight for public access to the things people need to survive. Similar struggles for access to public goods are taking place in many countries, from the fight for access to electricity in South Africa to the fight for public education in Puerto Rico.

And yet, paradoxically, I have also found that among people who understand the ways that capitalism is devastating to our lives, the analysis of capitalism that they use seldom fosters creative thinking about practical steps to take here and now to challenge it. Opponents of capitalism tend to see it as a system so tightly organized that it operates as an organic whole. This leads to imagining that it operates like a dragon: a malevolent force working with a single-minded focus intent on destruction. Or like a dictator: the supreme seat of power working its evil through control of others. Seeing capitalism as an organic whole leads to the view that the only way to challenge it is to shatter that whole and begin to create a new society from scratch.

Making the changes in society that allow agriculturalists to stay in Mexico, viable organic farming to flourish in the U.S., the poor in South Africa to have access to electricity, or that will bring an end to oil drilling in the deep seas, requires a major reweaving of the threads that hold our societies together. Killing a dragon or overthrowing a dictator is actually much easier to conceptualize than destroying capitalism.

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I STARTED THINKING ABOUT THESE ISSUES when I went to a talk given by the geographer Julie Graham. The main point of her talk was that anti-capitalists should follow feminists in seeing their task as pushing back on practices they are opposed to rather than as overthrowing a system. Feminists have approached the problem of challenging male domination by seeing that the problem is happening in many different places in society and has no core

“command center” that needs to be taken out. This approach leads to strategies of fighting male domination by fighting it in each of its manifestations and by looking to see how separate manifestations are linked to each other.

Much of Graham’s work, along with that of her writing partner, Katherine Gibson under the pseudonym J.K. Gibson-Graham, has been to show the variety of ways in which we currently meet our needs through means not based on capitalism. We take care of our needs by making things at home and sharing with friends. Governments take care of many of our needs with schools, public transportation, and, in some countries, health care. People work at and produce things in worker-owned cooperatives. J.K. Gibson-Graham claims that more than half of the labor performed in the U.S. takes place outside the sphere of profit making.⁸

Before learning about their work I believed capitalism to be a serious problem, but I also thought that the times were not right for challenging it. After all, capitalism was booming in the roaring stock market of the 1990s and the idea of socialism had been thoroughly discredited by the brutality, corruption, and collapse of Soviet communism. The only people who talked about opposing capitalism, such as various Marxist-Leninist groups, talked about trying to foster a revolution to overthrow it. They and their analyses seemed wildly unrealistic.

It was exciting to see that there are realistic alternatives to capitalism, that we thrive in those alternatives right now, and that society can be transformed to the extent that those alternatives can become stronger and more predominant in our lives.⁹ Graham’s and Gibson’s approach allowed me to imagine a world without capitalism and the opening of that space in my imagination gave me the courage to look at organizing against capitalism as a realistic possibility. We can begin to think of fighting capitalism as we think of fighting a fungus or a virus that has damaged our body politic: it has become entangled with our cells and needs to be fought from within and from without by complementary treatments.

With capitalism, “the enemy” exists throughout the social fabric and challenging it will for some involve a struggle to redefine our sense of meaning and purpose in life as well as a struggle with the ruling class. As we work

to get rid of capitalism we will need to work in ways that are more like the Chinese philosophy of Taoism, where we push from the inside to transform a complex network that we ourselves are a part of and that constitutes our very being, rather than as a war where an opponent is defeated.

If we can see capitalism as a set of interrelated practices we can also see its connections for what they are, and not overstate the extent to which they are fused together. We need to develop ways of conceptualizing capitalism that render it solid enough for patterns to be revealed and yet open enough to show the places where it is vulnerable.

Metaphors and images are central to the ways we understand and use concepts, and if our common metaphors and images fail to adequately reflect reality, our thoughts can be structured in ways that do not serve us well.¹⁰ Capitalism is reinforced by the image of a market functioning beautifully by means of an imaginary hand effortlessly allocating resources where they need to go. It is helped by a powerful confusion in people's minds between freedom and democracy in the world of politics and the freedoms of markets and corporations.

Instead of an image of a world composed of rational, competitive individuals, each fighting to get as many resources for him- or herself as possible, we need to develop an image of society as a tapestry of people, and all of nature, interlinked in a common fate. Imagine our different languages and cultures as a variety of patterns that reveal common as well as unique solutions to the problems of being human. Think of capitalism as a fungus that has dulled the colors of the tapestry and weakened its fibers. Only by diligently cleaning every strand of the warp and woof, every embroidery stitch that is implicated in capitalist processes, can we create a human tapestry with greater beauty and brilliance.

Those of us schooled in the dominant anti-capitalist imaginary, in which capitalism is an organic whole—a system that should be overthrown—might consider replacing that concept with an image of capitalism as a set of interrelated practices that need to be pulled out from the tapestry that is our social world.

Think of pulling capitalist elements from the social fabric and replacing them with other social forms. The pulling, cutting, and reweaving must happen at many social locations, from the land and rivers where our food and

water is drawn each year to laboratories where new treatments for disease are developed. Pulling threads in one place often causes holes in other places, and as we reweave society we need to attend to the short-term problems our actions can create. We need to create a better world while still inhabiting the fabric of the one we want to challenge.

This image of reweaving a tapestry is intended to bring to mind the idea of a constant remaking, of the intricate nature of capitalist processes, and of the ways that change on a macro scale is made up of changes on a micro scale. We are constantly making and remaking society through our everyday interactions.¹¹ The social rules we live under are to a large extent created by the simple, unthinking ways in which people treat each other. My own habit of saying “Hello” to people I pass on the street is one of the things that makes saying “Hello” in the street an expected custom. If I treat others as tools for my own material advancement it helps create a culture in which such behavior becomes the norm.

“Overthrowing” a system brings to mind an image of a solid and distinct thing, standing on its own, that can be knocked down. But this way of looking at capitalism is not very helpful. Rather, we should see capitalism as a set of practices implicated in and structuring an immense variety of life’s aspects. Destroying it will be more a matter of transforming its networks than of overturning a structure. The image of overthrow encourages a politics that looks for fulcrums and tipping points. Such an approach oversimplifies what we are doing and makes it hard to identify the tasks in which we need to engage to challenge capitalism.

Remaking society will involve taking on a set of projects within a variety of social locations. We need to take on these projects simultaneously and with an undetermined sense of when they will come together to achieve their ultimate goal. From where we are right now we can push back against the devastations caused by capitalism, and as capitalism is pushed back—as we build toward a total elimination of its practices—life can become better in the short term.

Political movements involve creative thought. There are marvelous moments when people challenging systems of power spend all night talking with their friends about what they’re doing and come up with new concepts to define their work. In times of intense social change such as the U.S.

civil rights movement of the 1950s or the global anti-colonial struggle of the 1960s, the desires and intensions of participants had a focus and a richness that inspires and guides.

Such movements often transition into periods of elaboration, where the foundations and pathways forged in the crucible come to be accepted as “given.” Within transitional periods people tend to shun new ideas and carry on using ideas that were formed in the crucible. For a while, the formative ideas of a movement work just fine. Later they can weigh down a movement and keep it from responding in new ways to new circumstances.

I am writing during the period of global economic collapse that began in 2008. We who are advocating for a world free from the devastations caused by capitalism are experiencing a time of incredible ferment. After many years of dormancy, possibilities for making a difference and making connections are developing at an unprecedented rate. And yet the concepts we are using remain deeply fossilized. This book attempts to break that fossilization in order to allow our theory to resonate with and help inform our practice, while our practice informs our theory. With a fresh understanding of what we are doing we are much more likely to be able to build political campaigns that are effective at liberating our world from capitalism.

Notes

1. Oscar Olivera, *iCochabamba! Water War in Bolivia* (Cambridge, MA: South End Press, 2007).
2. Evo Morales, "Capitalism is the Worst Enemy of Humanity," (2007): <http://climateandcapitalism.com/?p=3607#more-3607> (July 2010).
3. David Bacon, *Illegal People: How Globalization Creates Migration and Criminalizes Immigrants* (Beacon: Boston, 2009).
4. I follow the growing convention here of using the terms Global North and Global South to refer to what in the past were more commonly called the First world and the Third world. Those terms are losing favor, especially among social justice activists in the Global South. Global North refers to the countries of the world where there are generally high levels of wealth, most of which are in the northern hemisphere.
5. Rob Hopkins, *The Transition Handbook: From Oil Dependence to Local Resilience* (White River Junction, VT: Chelsea Green, 2008).
6. Heather Rogers, *Green Gone Wrong: How Our Economy is Undermining the Environmental Revolution* (New York: Scribner, 2009), 21.
7. Rogers, *Green Gone Wrong*, 192.
8. J.K. Gibson-Graham, *A Postcapitalist Politics* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2007), 70.
9. That talk was given by Julie Graham in 1993 at the "Rethinking Marxism" conference. Since that time, Graham and her writing partner Kathy Gibson have written two excellent books on this subject under the pseudonym J.K. Gibson-Graham. See: *The End of Capitalism (As We Knew It): A Feminist Critique of Political Economy* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1996); and *A Postcapitalist Politics*, listed above. I follow their analysis very closely on the subject of imagining a world of non-capitalism. Yet in their work they have never seriously addressed the relationship between non-capitalism and anti-capitalism, that is, how the proliferation of non-capitalist processes can lead to the elimination of capitalism. Their work does not address pro-capitalist forms of agency and the question of how to challenge those forms of agency.
10. Michelle Le Doeuff, *The Philosophical Imaginary* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1989).
11. Pierre Bourdieu, *The Logic of Practice*, trans. Richard Nice (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1990).

What Is Capitalism and Why It Is a Problem

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WHILE THEY DON'T GENERALLY SEE CAPITALISM as a cause for concern, most people agree that we are facing serious problems in the world. Income inequality is growing at an alarming rate, with the richest fifth of the world's population receiving seventy to ninety percent of global income and the poorest fifth receiving one to two percent.¹ For the one billion people at the bottom of the economic ladder, that means barely meeting minimum caloric intakes for survival, no access to clean water, almost no access to modern medical care, no real prospects for a better future, and an average life span of forty years.²

In the U.S., as in many other nations, the political system is dominated by money; anyone wishing to get elected to public office must spend vast quantities of money to get elected and their reelection requires them to give those big donors what they paid for. The principle of "one person, one vote" gets subordinated to the more powerful principle of "one million dollars, one million units of influence."

Global warming is threatening to radically disrupt all forms of life on our planet. In the 1990s Exxon Mobil spent millions of dollars to sow in the U.S. public a sense of doubt about the level of certainty surrounding scientific claims about global warming.³ And as we begin to deal with making the transition to a carbon-free economy, the oil industry continues to receive

billions of dollars worth of government subsidies. As I am writing this, that same industry is working hard to undermine national legislation designed to limit greenhouse gas emissions.

For some, these kinds of problems are caused by “bad capitalism.” In his book, *Capitalism’s Achilles Heel: Dirty Money and How to Renew the Free-Market System*, international businessman Raymond W. Baker acknowledges that the world’s current form of capitalism has resulted in severe inequality and poverty. He believes that the major contributor to that outcome is what he calls “dirty money”—money from illegal transactions, including such things as drug money, but also, and more importantly, all forms of tax evasion as well as illegal accounting tricks. Companies do things such as undervalue the parts of a product that are made in Ghana so that they can pay lower taxes when that part of the product is shipped to the U.S., where it becomes part of a product. He argues persuasively that dirty money results in \$500 billion a year “of illegal proceeds streaming out of poor countries.” Baker claims that for every \$1 in aid that is given to the poor counties of the world \$10 is taken out through illegal financial flows.⁴

And yet Baker is a deeply pro-capitalist thinker. He would like for us to return to the form of capitalism envisioned by Adam Smith, the author of both the *Wealth of Nations* and *Moral Sentiments*. Baker writes,

The foundation of Smith’s philosophy rests on his view that man is ‘fitted by nature’ to subsist ‘only in society,’ that is in the company of others. All members of humanity’s ranks ‘stand in need of each other’s assistance.’ Through interlocking obligations afforded out of love, gratitude, friendship, and esteem, ‘society flourishes and is happy.’

Baker emphasizes the Smith who believed that all people should live well and that a market-based economic system was one means to universal prosperity:

Adam Smith was as smart, decent, and generous as any other figure in the past millennium. Observing the perversion of his core concepts would not enrage him: that was an emotion he did not exhibit. It would however, deeply, deeply grieve him. Enormous concentra-

tions of income, while billions of people are left behind in poverty, is exactly the outcome he sought to avoid.

And yet nothing in Baker's book explains why those with resources, who are getting wealthier and more powerful off of the forms of devastation he describes so well, would choose to give away the power and wealth they have worked so hard to accumulate.

Our present system of capitalism allows those with resources the freedom to use those resources as they please, including influencing political systems, buying media, transforming social policy to favor themselves, and leaving those without resources no moral claim to and no practical means to gaining what they need to survive. The "bad capitalism" Baker describes may not be favored by Adam Smith but it is enabled by a capitalism that allows the wealthy to invest their profits as they please, control government processes, and allow people's fates to be determined by market forces.

Critiques of capitalism are frequently met with a quick retort that we shouldn't bother to challenge capitalism because "there is no alternative."⁵ One of the goals of this book is to develop a clear understanding of the nature of capitalism and in the process to open up space for seeing and developing the alternatives to capitalism that already exist, to develop strategies for expanding the positive forms of non-capitalism that many of us already live.

Seeing Capitalism

VERY FEW OF THE BILLIONS OF PEOPLE who are stuck in mind-numbingly boring jobs with no sense that they can get out of their situations think of capitalism as the cause of their unhappiness. More likely they see their pains as the results of personal failure, bad luck, bad managers and bosses, or rival ethnic groups. Many of the parents who come home from work just in time to say good night to their children carry a heavy burden of guilt and loss. The pain makes them wonder if they have made the right personal choices for their families.

People in small towns whose long-standing retail areas are undercut and decimated by strip malls and who now find big box stores where once there

was open land don't see capitalism as the culprit. They tend to blame individual developers or corporations or just accept the loss of their town center, where people once walked and met each other, as an unfortunate aspect of the way things are. "You can't stop progress."

That many communities of color in the U.S. are ravaged by a lack of economic opportunities and an epidemic of incarceration; that employers are often in a position to mistreat workers on the basis of their gender or sexual identity; that millions of people in the U.S. have no access to health care; that people without cars are often stuck in the suburbs without access to transportation or to a sense of community are problems rarely associated with capitalism.

When the U.S. goes to war saying it needs to free people from a brutal dictator, few see capitalism's ugly handprint on the choice of which dictator to take down, or its timing, or on the policies that put that dictator in power in the first place.

In all of these cases, there are patterns underlying the problems people experience. The problems are interrelated, and the concept of "capitalism" can be helpful for understanding the nature of those interrelations. But since most people don't *experience* these things as part of capitalism, they don't experience capitalism as the destructive force it is in their lives.

Before the consciousness-raising phase of the second wave of the women's movement, many heterosexual women assumed that their frustrations about having to do housework or stay home with the baby were the result of their individual failings or of their male partner. Sharing experiences with other women and reflecting on them revealed that their frustrations had structural causes. Work done at home is often seen as something that women naturally do rather than as work that is socially crucial yet socially invisible. Feminist concepts, such as household labor, have helped women place their experiences into a framework that is helpful for seeing a way forward in addressing the problems. Similarly, many people living under capitalism believe that the devastation it causes in their lives is a result of bad luck, their own personal weaknesses, or a particularly bad institution or person. They might blame immigrants for taking their jobs. They might believe that a return to family values will restore a sense of community and meaning to

their lives. They might believe that locking people of color up in prisons will make them feel safe.

Our experiences are deeply mediated by the ideas we accept, and a significant part of anti-capitalist organizing has to be to make these connections so that it is easier to experience capitalism as the problem it is.⁶ Before developing a critique of capitalism, then, it is important to look at the ways that capitalism is woven into how we see the world, and what its appeals are.

Capitalism and Democracy

ONE OF THE MOST POWERFUL pulls capitalism has on our imaginations is the idea that it freed Europeans from feudalism and monarchy. The claim is that capitalism is linked in important ways with democracy and freedom, and is therefore an important force for giving all people the possibility of living well and the power over important choices in our lives. But is the link between capitalism and democracy as strong as it appears to be?

The thinker most responsible for linking in people's minds the development of capitalism with ideas of freedom, liberation, democracy, and choice was the seventeenth century British political philosopher John Locke. Many of Locke's contemporaries were opponents of feudalism and monarchy. Some of them were pro-capitalist, and some of them, especially those from the poorer classes, were opposed to capitalism from the beginning. Resistance to capitalism was especially strong among families who had lived in relative independence by using the "commons": land held by the monarch but actively used by poor people for haymaking, livestock grazing, or hunting.

Subsistence on the commons was eliminated through a process known as enclosure, wherein, over a period of centuries, land was privatized and ultimately placed in the hands of large-scale capitalist investors. Families that had for generations relied on access to common land were left with no means of support, except to go to work in the emerging industrial economy.

In the sixteenth century, wealthy landowners had increasingly enclosed common land to raise sheep in order to produce the wool that became a staple of trade. Enclosure was so socially disruptive that British writer Thomas More, the author of *Utopia*, referred to the situation as one in which sheep were "devouring men."⁷

The English monarchy had always resisted enclosure, as it created vagabonds who were disruptive to the social order.⁸ Once the monarchy was beaten back in the “Glorious Revolution” of 1688, the new government sided fully with enclosure. John Locke was one of the strongest proponents of enclosure at the time, arguing in his *Two Treatises of Government* that enclosure makes land more productive. Locke used this claim to argue for the dispossession of the land of Native Americans.⁹

And while Locke never argued directly for slavery (in fact he argued against it), he created a loophole through which slavery could be justified in his discussion of “The State of War.” There he claims that

one may destroy a man who makes war upon him, or has discovered an enmity to his being, for the same reason he may kill a wolf or a lion, because they are not under the ties of the common law of reason, may be treated as a beast of prey, those dangerous and noxious creatures that will be sure to destroy him whenever he falls into their power.¹⁰

In other words, if a person cannot be trusted to follow the natural laws that belief in a Christian God obliges him to, there is no natural law restricting our behavior toward that person. This argument leaves the door open to the slavery that Locke did not advocate for in the *Two Treatises of Government* but did invest in and advocate for in his political life.¹¹

One of the most compelling challenges to this early phase of capitalism was Gerrard Winstanley, who in 1649 led the movement called the Diggers in taking over vacant land and farming it communally. In his *A Declaration from the Poor Oppressed People of England*, he wrote to the property owners of his time,

The power of enclosing land and owning property was brought into the creation by your ancestors by the sword; which first did murder their fellow creatures, men, and after plunder or steal away their land, and left this land successively to you, their children. And therefore, though you did not kill or thieve, yet you hold that cursed thing in your hand by the power of the sword.¹²

Locke's philosophy helped to erase from public consciousness the historic theft of common property that Winstanley and the Diggers protested. It also conceptualized the world in a way that succeeded in minimizing attention to the real historical relationships that resulted in some people inheriting enormous wealth and others being born into the world with nothing but their parent's meager protection. It also erases the crucial connections between capitalism on the one hand and colonialism and slavery on the other.

To accomplish these tasks, Locke, in his *Second Treatise of Government*, posits a thought experiment through which we are to imagine society as made up of individuals in a "state of nature." Asking us to go against our experience of life lived in connection with family, tribe, nation, and other forms of kin, he asks us to imagine ourselves as autonomous individuals who have no connections with one another and no sense of history.¹³ He then asks us to imagine how people would act and what kinds of connections they would agree to in such a state. He concludes that people would trade freely with one another and that they would have a limited form of government to mediate their disputes and protect private property.¹⁴

From this thought experiment Locke formed the view that people work best when they are left alone. The core premise behind capitalism is that people with resources, such as productive land, factories, and money for investing, should be able to do what they want with them, and that given this freedom they will naturally use them in ways that lead to the development of more wealth. Another core premise of capitalism is that it assumes that wealth is a good in itself, regardless of who owns, controls, or benefits from it.

Locke has been remembered as a person who argued for the value of freedom over the tyranny of feudal monarchy. A more accurate description of his historical significance is that he helped replace one form of domination with another. By arguing for a society based on the freedom of individuals to dispose of their wealth as they please, without accountability for how they came to control what had been common resources such as land, minerals, or energy sources, and without responsibility to community or family, Locke helped to create the capitalist way of imagining the world.

While capitalism and democracy arose in Europe at the same time, many non-European societies experienced high levels of democracy long before

the advent of capitalism.¹⁵ The Iroquois constitution, called the Great Law of Peace, established around 1100 C.E., begins with the phrase, “We, the people, to form a union, to establish peace, equity, and order . . .” In his book *Forgotten Founders: How the American Indian Helped Shape Democracy*, historian Bruce Johansen writes that the Great Law of Peace

regarded leaders as servants of the people, rather than their masters, and made provisions for the leaders’ impeachment for errant behavior. The Iroquois’ law and custom upheld freedom of expression in political and religious matters, and it forbade the unauthorized entry of homes. It provided for political participation by women and the relatively equitable distribution of wealth.¹⁶

The word “democracy” is based on Greek roots and literally means “rule of the people.” One basic idea most people associate with democracy is that government should be “of the people, by the people and for the people.” Capitalism, on the other hand, is largely an economic system based on wealth going from the commons to the owner, for private use. Democracy predates capitalism, and while it is true that the rise of capitalism did go along with a rise in discussions of democracy for free landowning citizens in Europe and European settler colonies, there are many ways capitalism is antagonistic to democracy. In a society dominated by capitalism, those with economic resources can decide where to place factories and when to ship jobs to a different place. The people whose lives depended on that factory have no say over what the owner does with those jobs. Pro-capitalist thinkers argue that that is fair for the owners and good for society. What they cannot argue is that in such a situation the workers are ruling over themselves. And when large corporations are able to buy candidates and influence the political process, it is also hard to say that the people are ruling.

While the mainstream media often presents the spread of capitalism as if it were the same thing as the spread of democracy, that wasn’t the case in Iran in 1953, Chile in 1973, or Russia in the 1990s. In all of those cases a move to a “free market” economy was imposed on a population that had voted for something different. And in those cases brutal force was used to suppress opposition to a transition that many people tried to resist.¹⁷ In her book, *The Shock Doctrine: The Rise of Disaster Capitalism*, Canadian journalist Naomi

Klein gives countless examples of countries in which a free market was imposed through the use of force, political manipulation, and terror against a population. In 1993 the newly elected government of the African National Congress was blackmailed by the International Monetary Fund into throwing away its commitment to improving the lives of the poor and instead embarking on a rapid privatization of what few public services existed for the Black majority.¹⁸ Klein argues that extreme versions of free market capitalism have been imposed on millions of people in the latter half of the twentieth century, and she shows that in every case the move was devastating to people's living standards.

In their book, *Democracy and Capitalism*, economists Samuel Bowles and Herbert Gintis argue that the idea of democracy has worked as a powerful motivator for social change since the 1600s in Europe. What began as a concept applied in minimal ways to the interactions between free landowning males has been extended over time. It has been a powerful tool in the hands of the oppressed for making claims for a better life. In the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, the concept of democracy helped legitimize claims for racial justice, for justice for women, for gays and lesbians, and for the disabled.

Bowles and Gintis hope that by showing the ways that capitalism is inimical to democracy they will help motivate a movement for the extension of democracy into the economy. And they believe that this extension is incompatible with capitalism. Capitalism puts people into a situation where they must sell their ability to work for a wage, and in this selling they give up their ability to control their everyday lives. Capitalism also puts important social decisions into the hands of those who control capital and keeps society as a whole from being able to influence those decisions in meaningful ways. They argue that "democracy is necessarily a relationship between free people, and economic dependency no less than personal bondage is the antithesis of freedom."¹⁹

Bowles and Gintis also argue that capitalist culture focuses on the idea that we are all free and independent and that we have the power to choose to enter into contracts, and that we have the option to choose who we want to represent us in the state. It discourages us from looking at the ways that our preferences and desires are formed through our interactions with others

in society. As a result, people in a capitalist society are socialized to act as the autonomous, self-interested, rational agents mainstream economic theory claims that we are.

Because a democratic politics relies on voluntary compromise and empathy, it requires at least a minimal identification of the citizen with public life, and with some notion of collective interest. . . . Far from fostering such a democratic pluralism, liberal capitalism has produced a political wasteland stretching between the individual and the state.²⁰

Taking this idea one step further, the Argentinean social theorist Néstor García Canclini argues that capitalist advertising and mass media encourages us to imagine ourselves as consumers much more than as citizens, and to imagine our satisfactions as being met through our consumer choices rather than our social connections. This leads to a transformation of identity

from the citizen as a representative of public opinion to the consumer interested in enjoying a particular quality of life. One indication of this change is that argumentative and critical forms of participation cede their place to the pleasure taken in electronic media spectacles where narration or the simple accumulation of anecdote prevails over reasoned solutions to problems.²¹

In the capitalist way of imagining the world, the concepts of democracy and capitalism are often used as if they were synonyms. Locke helped make the equation of capitalism with democracy through his postulation of society as an aggregation of individuals in “the state of nature” with no social bonds, no history, and no connection with one another. We imagine such individuals as relating to each other through voluntary contacts (I will work for you if you pay me . . . and even if I have no other possibility to survive except to take your job, I am seen as having chosen the job). We suppose that all are equal when those with resources are free to do what they want with those resources and those without resources are free to do what they like to try to get resources (except, of course, for taking the property of others; or, in the case of the colonized, as holding on to one’s land; or, in the case

of the enslaved, as holding on to oneself). This leads to an image of a society where freedom really means the freedom of capital while pretending to be the freedom of people.

This image requires that we forget that people come into the world with vastly different resources at their disposal. It also makes sense only if we forget the forms of violence that pro-capitalist governments have engaged in to protect the ability of owners to reap a profit. Such violence has been used to throw indigenous people off their land (in the formation of settler colonies such as the U.S.), to enslave Africans, to keep colonial governments in power in much of the world, and to break strikes.

The U.S. government has used violence many times to keep people from working together to form unions to advocate for their common needs. One example was the Ludlow Massacre of 1914, in which nineteen people, including children, were killed as the Colorado National Guard put down a strike by coal miners. Throughout the world, many nationalist leaders have been killed when they tried to use the resources of their countries to benefit their people. One example is Salvador Allende, the democratically elected president of Chile, who was murdered in 1973 for trying to nationalize that country's copper mines. These practices of violence go all the way back to the origins of capitalism in the forms of dispossession Winstanley wrote about.

British writer Larry Lohman writes that the notion of freedom that we associate with capitalism is deeply distorted:

During the industrial revolution in Europe, many people gained the freedom to move around and sell their labour, but lost the freedom to raise their animals on the commons. Today pension funds managers have the freedom to shunt massive investments from country to country with one or two clicks on a computer mouse, while the citizens of those countries may not have a choice of affordable medicines. Similarly, having the option of driving wherever you want to go can preclude having a choice of getting access to amenities without a car, and eliminates the choice of having urban areas distinct from rural areas. It may also narrow the choices of ordinary people in the Niger delta, or herders along the Chad-Cameroon pipeline.²²

The Hungarian economic historian, Karl Polanyi wrote in his classic 1944 critique of capitalism, *The Great Transformation: the Political and Economic Origins of Our Time*, that the concept of freedom has degenerated into

mere advocacy of free enterprise . . . This means fullness of freedom for those whose income, leisure, and security need no enhancing, and a mere pittance of liberty for the people, who try in vain to attempt to make use of their democratic rights to gain shelter from the power of the owners of property.²³

Locke's way of conceptualizing capitalism helps people not to attend to the ways those systems operate in our lives and helps us to forget about slavery, colonialism, and the ways that women's labor becomes invisible in a world where work for private profit is the only work that is considered to be "work". The idea of the state of nature makes individualism seem to be our natural way and makes interconnections seem forced. Locke's concept of the social contract helps conceptualize government as nothing more than a neutral arbiter to help settle property disputes and protect private property. His conceptualization of the state of nature makes buying and selling, that is, the market, seem to be the most natural way for people to structure their interactions.

Markets

THERE IS SOMETHING AMAZING about the way that capitalism leads to the development of ever more clever and efficient ways of making things and an incredible number of new products and techniques for production. Producers have an incentive to develop products that capture the money people have to spend. They have an incentive to figure out what kinds of things will appeal to people and to make the things people want. Within the marketplace those most able to produce those goods in the cheapest possible way win the race to stay in business. This leads to ever more cost effective ways of making things.

The cornerstone of pro-capitalist thinking is the idea of a *free market*: the ability of people to buy and sell as they please with as few restrictions or

mediating structures as possible. Adam Smith said it best when he wrote, in one of the most quoted phrases of pro-capitalist thought, “It is not from the benevolence of the butcher, the brewer, or the baker that we expect our dinner, but from their regard to their own interest.”²⁴ Within this line of thinking, as each person pursues their own self-interest and buys and sells as they please, everyone ends up getting what they want. The market is seen as an almost magical mechanism for matching products to people’s needs.

According to the Lockean way of looking at the world, this matching process happens with no institutional agreements between participants, with no overhead or bureaucracy. It happens naturally between unconnected rational individuals who are free and equal in their relation to the market. Advocates of capitalism claim that markets work better than any other social mechanisms for deciding how resources should be allocated and used in society.

While there is a certain genius to the ways that markets allow for complex coordination with few explicit agreements, problems arise when markets are empowered to be the central mechanism for deciding who gets what in society or even which society has the right to prosper (while other societies see their natural resources and peoples exploited to the point of extinction). Mainstream economists talk about the beauty of supply and demand working together to satisfy people’s desires. As the great critic of capitalism Karl Marx pointed out in his *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*, the laws of supply and demand do not simply give everyone what they want: you only get what you want if you have money to back up your demand. Otherwise, genuine needs become economically invisible.

No doubt *demand* exists for him [or her] who has no money, but his [or her] demand is a mere thing of the imagination without effect or existence for me, for the third party, for others, and which therefore remains for me *unreal* and *objectless*. The difference between effective demand based on money and ineffective demand based on my need, my passion, my wish, etc., is the difference between *being* and *thinking*, between the imagined which *exists* merely within me and the imagined as it is for me outside me as a real object. If I have no

money for travel, I have no *need*—that is, no real and self-realizing need—to travel. If I have the *vocation* for study but no money for it, I have no vocation to study—that is, no *effective*, no *true* vocation.²⁵

Demand is not simply desire, it is desire backed by money. No matter how much I desire food, no market is going to give it to me unless I have money to back up my demand. My desire for food must be matched with the opportunity to use or exploit my own assets (intelligence, strength, property, etc.) in an exchange with someone who has food they're willing to give up for money.

Markets allow demand backed by money to stimulate supply. In a culture dominated by capitalism, society is organized such that production decisions appear to follow consumption decisions. People want things, and that want, when backed by money, causes things to be created. But desire, of course, is not a fixed thing. It is highly manipulable. In the 2000s one couldn't watch television in the U.S. without seeing an advertisement for a Sports Utility Vehicle. Those cars were much more profitable for the manufacturers than regular cars, and even though they got terrible gas mileage, were difficult to get into, and difficult to park, they were enormously popular.²⁶

In low-income urban neighborhoods it is often impossible to find grocery stores that sell healthy food. In wealthy neighborhoods, vegetables and other healthy foods are used to lure people into the store so they can buy higher-priced items. People in low-income communities don't buy enough higher-priced items to make stores that also sell vegetables and other healthy foods profitable. The markets that exist in low-income neighborhoods tend to sell liquor and cigarettes, which are high profit items, and junk food. Junk food costs practically nothing to produce, is highly advertised, and appeals to our body's natural desire for salt, sugar, and fat.²⁷ People who live in such communities then "choose" to buy junk food. Stressed out parents of all economic levels will give their children sugary cereal because it is widely available and because kids want it.

Taking people's desires into account is an important part of a good economic system, but desire needs to be understood as the transformable thing that it is.²⁸ And while market mechanisms might sometimes be good for helping a society to decide what colors of toothbrushes to produce, they

aren't good for helping a society decide to whom to give medicine, what kinds of medicine to produce, where to place a park, or how much money a senior citizen should have to live on. Markets become socially destructive when they are used for too broad a range of social decisions, or when other important decision-making processes are shunned because they are seen as destructive of the ability of markets to function properly.

Beginning in the 1980s there was a move toward what billionaire investor George Soros has called *market fundamentalism*, whereby any challenges to the freedom of markets came to be seen as endangering their magical properties to create wealth.²⁹ This led to a worldwide challenge to any forms of government intervention in national economies, and a push for the privatization of public ownership of everything from utilities and pension systems to schools, as well as for a deregulation of everything from food production to rules on how capital flows between countries. The economic crash of 2008 slowed down the momentum of this idea, but market fundamentalism still has many followers around the world.

A common term for market fundamentalism is neoliberalism, a reference to a return to the classical liberalism of thinkers such as John Locke. Neoliberalism is an economic policy based on the premise that the more markets are "freed" from intervention and manipulation the better off the economy is and the better off we all are. This idea is usually linked with its converse: whenever markets are restricted through regulation, taxation, or trade barriers, such policies will "distort" the markets and lead to dysfunctions in the economy.

In *Contours of Descent: U.S. Economic Fractures and the Landscape of Global Austerity*, economist Robert Pollin provides a detailed critique of those claims, arguing that the freeing of markets often leads to economic disaster, especially for vulnerable populations. He claims that many governments in the Global South pursued economic development policies in the decades of the 1960s through 1970s that involved restrictions in markets and saw moderate but sustained levels of growth. He shows that in many of those cases, growth was coupled with poverty reduction.³⁰

In Latin America this was done through a policy of import substitution. With that policy, the government puts up protectionist barriers to foster growth of industries deemed important for national development while en-

gaging in external trade in goods that the country is prepared to sell on the global market. In 1977 Brazil put a heavy tariff on computers in order to protect its computer industry in its infancy and allow it to grow to the point that it could be economically competitive.

In the Asian Tiger economies, such as Singapore, Taiwan, and South Korea, governments supported a slightly different set of policies that involved strong state intervention to shape the development of the national economy. In the Asian cases, these often involved land redistribution and led to stronger gains in poverty reduction than did the Latin American models, which tended to leave old patterns of land ownership, and the political power of landowners, in place.³¹

Pollin shows that low- and middle-income countries had a per-capita growth rate of 3.2 percent in the period 1960 through 1980. In contrast, growth slowed to 0.7 percent during the neoliberal period 1981 through 1999.³² And in a more important set of statistics, he shows that inequality surged globally during neoliberalism's ascendancy; the income gap between the richest one percent of people in the world and the poorest one percent of people in the world grew by seventy-seven percent.³³

In much of the Global South, neoliberalism was imposed through economic coercion, not the will of the majority. This contradicted the familiar claim that capitalism is the necessary foundation for democracy.

Governments in developing countries believed that they could not restructure successfully without substantial aid, credit, and foreign investment. This could only come from the advanced capitalist countries and international lending institutions, and such support in turn depends on receiving a seal of approval from the Washington Consensus, and specifically the IMF and World Bank. The only way to qualify for such support was through demonstrating a commitment to the neoliberal model.³⁴

While the World Bank and the IMF were originally set up under the Keynesian model of capitalist economic development to provide resources to help nations weather the storms of instability in their national economies, since the 1980s those institutions have consistently imposed neoliberal re-

forms on economies. Giving an example of how devastating this shift has been, Naomi Klein attributes the Asian Economic Crisis of the late 1990s to the neoliberal edicts of these global institutions.

Watching Asia's consumer market explode, [Western and Japanese investment banks] understandably longed for unfettered access to the region to sell their products. They also wanted the right to buy up the best of the Tigers' corporations—particularly Korea's impressive conglomerates like Daewoo, Hyundai, Samsung, and LG. In the mid-nineties, under pressure from the IMF and the newly created World Trade Organization, Asian governments agreed to split the difference: they would maintain the laws that protected national firms from foreign ownership and resist pressure to privatize their key state companies, but they would lift barriers to their financial sectors, allowing a surge of paper investing and currency trading. In 1997, when the flood of hot money suddenly reversed course in Asia, it was a direct result of this kind of speculative investment, which was legalized only because of Western pressure.³⁵

As those economies went into tailspins, with millions of the region's people being thrown into poverty, rather than offering help to stabilize the situation, the IMF and World Bank took the opportunity of the crises to impose even more severe forms of neoliberalism on the region. As Jeffrey Sachs, one of the architects of the neoliberalization of Russia (now turned critic of neoliberalism) described the situation, "Instead of dousing fire, the IMF in effect screamed 'fire' in the theater."³⁶ British social theorist David Harvey writes of the crisis,

impetuous financial deregulation and the failure to construct adequate regulatory controls over unruly and speculative portfolio investments lay at the heart of the problem. . . . Those countries that had not liberated their capital markets—Singapore, Taiwan, and China—were far less affected than those countries, such as Thailand, Indonesia, Malaysia, and the Philippines, that had. Furthermore, the one country that ignored the IMF and imposed capital controls—Malaysia—recovered faster. Korea, likewise, rejected IMF

advice on industrial and financial restructuring. It also staged a faster recovery.³⁷

The freeing of markets in the last thirty years has seen increased rates of poverty, incredible instability, and dramatically increased levels of inequality. David Harvey claims that the main achievement of neoliberalism has been “to redistribute, rather than to generate, wealth and income.”³⁸ This is what happens so often in capitalism when it takes resources from the common people and puts them into private hands.

Even strong proponents of capitalism such as Joseph Stiglitz, a Nobel Prize-winning economist and former chief economist for the World Bank, argues that freeing markets does not lead to development, and that those who claim it does are more motivated by self-interest and ideology than by the facts.³⁹

Karl Polanyi argued that markets have existed for thousands of years, and have mostly been a benign social form. One of the major changes that goes along with the development of a capitalist economy is that markets became increasingly detached from the kinds of constraints that keep them from being socially destructive. In medieval Europe, the nobility were expected to store enough grain to support the common people in times of food shortages. In American Indian communities of the Pacific Northwest, many tribes engaged in the practice of potlatch, whereby those who had accumulated wealth were expected to throw festivals to get rid of it, thus maintaining a relatively small gap between wealth levels. The Yoruba people of Nigeria have a system of common land holding such that everyone has access to land, and there is a strong sense of mutual responsibility whereby all members of a village are responsible for the well being of others.⁴⁰

Societies have always had laws and ethical systems that deal with large-scale issues of deciding who gets what. They haven't always been fair or highly functional. But only in a modern capitalist economy are such decisions left to the market. In alternative systems markets are embedded within other social institutions that limit their negative impacts on society. Under capitalism, ethical and legal limits to the destructive aspects of markets face an uphill battle. Those who propose them must show that ethical and legal limits won't destroy the magic functioning of the free market.

Polanyi argued that one of the peculiar features of a capitalist economy is that land and human labor come to be subjected deeply to market forces. This means that people themselves come to be commodities in a market.⁴¹ If I am a commodity and I can't find a buyer, I have no means of support. If I am disabled to the point that I cannot work, or if I am too young to sell my labor, I have no demands on the market. My existence is irrelevant to the market. If racism causes people to undervalue me as a producer, the price I can get for my labor will be low and the market will not compensate for the misperception. If the market is deciding who gets water, food, and healthcare, then this is a life-or-death problem. To avoid these pernicious outcomes, non-market mechanisms need to limit the devastations caused by markets.

Even in a society such as ours in the U.S., which is dominated by capitalist logics, there are other social processes operating to give resources to the elderly, the young, the disabled, and those who for whatever reason are not being served by the market in labor. We have a system of taxation that distributes resources to those who need them. We have friendship and family networks where people voluntarily take care of those they are connected to. And we have systems of charity where those who value human life give to virtual strangers so that they can live well. Non-capitalist logics exist alongside the capitalist logic of the market, functioning differently to allocate resources. And often they work very "efficiently."⁴²

In a society dominated by capitalism, these other processes are constantly called out as threatening to the market and destructive of the supposed natural genius of capitalism. Alternative practices challenge the ability of those who profit from capitalism to make as much profit as possible.

Alienation

IN *The Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*, MARX outlined a humanistic critique of capitalism. The main concept he uses in that text is *alienation*. Marx argues that we are an inherently creative species. Important to our existence as fully realized human beings is our ability to have ideas and see those ideas materialize in a community of others for which they also have

meaning. To be fully human is to be in the position to have projects and to make meaning in a social context.

Capitalism, the young Marx argues, is deeply antithetical to that basic human capacity. Under capitalism people sell their abilities to an owner who then uses the worker as an agent of the owner's own drive for profits. As long as the worker is focused on following the owner's plan for profit-making, the worker is alienated from his or her own creativity, sense of meaning, and accomplishment.

The fact that labor is *external* to the worker, i.e., it does not belong to his essential being; that in his work, therefore, he does not affirm himself but denies himself, does not feel content but unhappy, does not develop freely his physical and mental energy but mortifies his body and ruins his mind. The worker therefore only feels himself outside his work, and his work feels outside himself. He is at home when he is not working, and when he is working he is not at home. His labor is therefore not voluntary, but coerced; it is *forced labor*. It is therefore not the satisfaction of a need; it is merely a *means* to satisfy needs external to it. Its alien nature emerges clearly in the fact that as soon as no physical or other compulsion exists, labor is shunned like the plague.⁴³

When Marx was writing, the conditions in factories were much like modern day sweatshops. It isn't hard to see how people working under those conditions were, and are, not able to experience what they do for most of the day as positive forms of making meaning.

In many cases, conditions for people working in capitalist wage labor have improved vastly since Marx's time. Much of that improvement can be attributed to the efforts of working class movements to gain limits to the length of the working day, occupational health and safety standards, health insurance, and child labor laws. In the U.S., those improvements mostly came as a compromise between capital and labor brokered by the government through the reforms instituted by President Franklin Roosevelt in the 1930s in the New Deal.⁴⁴

Throughout the twentieth century, working class people gained many improvements in their quality of life through the process of wresting con-

cessions from their employers. And yet, even for those more comfortable workers, the reality of alienation remains. Human beings have an amazing ability to make the most boring situations meaningful, setting up personal challenges to outdo one's previous speed in producing a hamburger, taking pride in a job well done, or connecting with other workers or customers. But by and large, making work meaningful is a challenge for millions of people working in capitalist wage labor.

As increasing parts of our economy are organized around service, new and deeper forms of alienation are developing. Marx defined that which a worker sells to their employer as "labor power": their ability to perform tasks to produce profit for the employer. In older forms of manufacturing this usually included simply the physical actions of making things with one's hands. In service work, an employee sells their personality and ability to connect with others. A hostess at a restaurant cannot sit back and daydream and remain detached as a person while selling her labor power. Instead, her labor power is constituted by the very personality of the hostess, who must manifest friendliness and care the whole time she is serving customers. Closer to prostitution than to previous forms of wage labor, the service worker sells more deeply into the core of her or his being.⁴⁵

While it is possible to escape from some of the miseries of alienation by getting a better job—one that requires skillful attention and decision-making, or is interesting in the puzzles and challenges it offers—the vast majority of work in capitalist wage labor, where a person is working for a private owner who is able to set the terms of the job and the purpose of the enterprise is to generate profits for the employer, involves a significant amount of alienation.

Consumerism

ALIENATION IS CLOSELY RELATED to the problems of commodification and consumerism. In *Capital*, Marx describes how in a pre-capitalist society things like coats are seen in terms of their *use value*. We think of these objects in terms of the ways that they are helpful to us: How warm will this coat keep me this winter? Under capitalism everything gets reduced to its exchange value: a coat becomes seen in terms of how much money it can

be sold for. The coat comes not to be seen as something useful or beautiful but rather as a repository for a certain amount of money, or exchange value. Money becomes the common denominator for all sense of value.⁴⁶

So under capitalism human values related to the creation of rich and meaningful lives get reduced to commercial exchanges. Artists and musicians are increasingly alienated from the creative process. For many, underlying the creative process is the question of what kinds of creative activity will make them “successful,” while success is increasingly defined in monetary terms. While professional artists in feudal times had to please their patrons as much as a contemporary artist has to please the market, even in earlier periods of history there were forms of creative endeavor organic to society. Throughout human memory people have gathered to play music together, to make beautiful objects for one another, or to make ritual objects for social use.

The equation of success with commercial success, and happiness with consumption, are part of the view of the “good life” that has developed under capitalism. A fascinating and still-developing area of economic research is the reconsideration of this capitalist idea. Psychologists and economists are undertaking empirical studies about what makes people happy. It turns out that no matter how you ask the questions across widely different cultures there are consistent patterns of what makes people feel happy.⁴⁷

Below \$10,000 per year there is a powerful correlation between an individual’s happiness and wealth. For the abject poor of the world, more money really does make you happier (unless you live in a functioning low-income indigenous society). But beyond that point there is no correlation between money and happiness. In a society with income stratification the rich will be happier than the poor, because it turns out that one of the predictors of happiness is status. But as a whole, the people at any given level of wealth are not happier.⁴⁸ In one study, the happiest people were the richest people in America, the Amish of Pennsylvania, the Masai of Kenya, and the Inuit of Greenland.⁴⁹

While buying a new house generally makes a person happier, that happiness only lasts a few years. In his book, *Happiness: Lessons from a New Science*, British economist Richard Layard claims that the kind of happiness that comes from consumption is like the happiness that comes from addic-

tive drugs. It can be a powerful and compelling feeling but it doesn't last long and it takes increasing doses to sustain the same level of effect. Above the level of abject poverty, the things that actually make people happy have to do with the quality of human connections, status or respect from others, and health. People with strong family and friendship ties are much happier than those without them. And improving those things leads to lasting changes to happiness.⁵⁰ This is why so many products are advertised with images of friendship and community: those things are what give us happiness. When beer ads show a group of people drinking and having fun at a party, their job is to associate the beer with the fun of the party. We like the idea of friendship shown in the ads.⁵¹

In his book *Deep Economy: The Wealth of Communities and the Durable Future*, environmental activist and author Bill McKibben claims that the association between buying things and happiness is partially a holdover from an earlier era when it did give people real pleasure to have a few things. Now, although our children may beg for stuffed animals and may feel pleasure at getting them, their lives are not enriched by having rooms stuffed so full of them that they can't find their other things.⁵²

Under capitalism we come increasingly to see ourselves as consumers and to separate our consumption decisions from the rest of reality. Everything in the culture tells us that when we shop we should only consider the costs and benefits to ourselves as consumers. We make consumer choices every day and we are encouraged to be smart buyers, which means buying the best products for the lowest cost. The value of the products we buy is increasingly symbolic: increasingly the brand name matters more than the actual product.⁵³ The impacts of our consumer choices on the wider world are not expected to be of concern to us.

But of course, taken together, our consumer choices have huge impacts. When we shop in big-box stores that take business away from small local businesses, the "main street" areas that many people find charming are destroyed. When we buy shoes made by Nike, which moved its production from Oregon (where workers used to make \$14 per hour) to Vietnam (where people make \$1 per day), we are contributing to competition among laborers to have the lowest wages and the worst working conditions possible. When we consume beef produced by agribusiness, huge amounts of greenhouse

gases are produced and rural agriculturalists in the Global South are displaced.

Mainstream economics says that we show our preferences by our consumer choices; if people shop at Walmart it is because Walmart gives them what they want.⁵⁴ The problem with this logic is that what we want as consumers and what we want as citizens of the world are often two completely different things. Capitalism, by separating production from consumption decisions, by basing the economy on the decisions of consumers, and by discouraging social mechanisms through which we set policies to decide what kinds of towns we want, what kinds of labor standards we think would be fair, or what we want to happen with our atmosphere, reduces our sense of control over our lives to an absurd choice between Coke and Pepsi.

Exploitation

IN *Capital*, MARX EXPLAINED THE core illusion through which the domination that takes place in capitalism is obscured. By basing their explanation of capitalism on the exchange of commodities, thinkers such as Smith and Locke could present capitalism as a system that involved freedom and equality. People buy and sell as they please and each person's desire to buy or sell ends up magically matching needs with products. Everyone seems to get what they want, and does what they want, without any coercion.

Marx pointed out that under this seemingly consensual system is a deep form of unfairness that he called exploitation. What Locke's and Smith's works obscure is that in capitalism many people have nothing to sell except their ability to work; thus, a person comes to be treated as a commodity. When any of us must sell our labor on the market we don't have control over the wages we get or the conditions under which we work. The owners of productive resources are able to set the conditions of the relationship and they make a profit when they are able to pay us less than the full value of what we produce. The owner is able to control that profit and do what he or she wants with it. There is no easy freedom to buy and sell or refrain from buying and selling as one pleases for those who come to the market needing to sell their ability to work.⁵⁵

Marx argued that the survival of any individual capitalist enterprise is dependent upon its ability to get as much production as possible from its workers. Thus, there is an attempt in the early phases of capitalism for the capitalists to try to extend the working day, or to get more work for the same amount of pay. Later, as workers established a limit to the working day through unions, the employers focused on increasing productivity. In capitalism there is a constant struggle to get people to produce more wealth for the same wages, and this leads to a constant development of the means of production. As productivity rises, owners are able to make more profits. But of course as one company introduces new labor-saving technology another will adopt similar means. So as capitalism develops this competition leads to ever more efficient ways to producing things.

This leads to the possibility of much being produced with very little labor. It would seem, then, that capitalism could lead to the elimination of boring work.⁵⁶ Marx argued that this would never happen because the core source of profit in capitalism is the extraction of profits from the difference between the value of what a worker produces and the value of what that worker is paid, or surplus value. As companies develop cost-saving ways of doing things they make more profits. Marx argued that these profits are merely transitional—that they don't last long because there is a tendency for other companies to adopt similar cost-saving means. He argued that the only thing that accounts for long-standing profits in a capitalist firm is the ability of owners to get more from its workers than it pays them. He called this process the extraction of surplus value and saw it as the root of exploitation.⁵⁷

Capitalists exist to produce profit; the production of profit forces all capitalists to increase productivity to maintain a lead over competitors and to pass as little of that productivity gain along to their workers as possible. Capitalism involves a constant battle between owners and workers over how much of what is generated as profit belongs to the owner and how much should be passed on to the workers.

So while capitalism allows for the possibility of much being done with little labor, the owning class controls the profits generated from rises in productivity, unless the workers are able to gain access to that profit through class struggle.⁵⁸

Primitive Accumulation

ONCE CAPITALISM IS IN FULL FORCE, profits are generated by the owners of the means of production getting as much value as they can out of their workforce by paying them as little as possible while simultaneously making their work time as productive as possible. This process often takes place with neither party thinking that there is anything wrong with the situation. The employee is happy to get a job and the employer is happy to make a profit. But in the early phases of capitalism, profit came from something more like just plain stealing.⁵⁹

Marx called this process *primitive accumulation*, and in *Capital* this is how he described it,

The discovery of gold and silver in America, the extirpation, enslavement and entombment in mines of the indigenous population of the continent, the beginnings of the conquest and plunder of India, and the conversion of Africa into a preserve for the commercial hunting of blackskins, are all things which characterize the dawn of the era of capitalist production. These idyllic proceedings are the chief moments of primitive accumulation. Hard on their heels follows the commercial war of European nations, which has the world as its battlefield. . . . The different moments of primitive accumulation are systematically combined together at the end of the seventeenth century in England; the combination embraces the colonies, the national debt, the modern tax system, and the system of protection. These methods depend in part on brute force, for instance the colonial system. But they all employ the power of the state, the concentrated and organized force of society, to hasten, as in a hothouse, the process of transformation of the feudal mode of production into the capitalist mode, and to shorten the transition.⁶⁰

Processes of enclosure, or of taking public resources and making them private, through force, has been a central part of the process of accumulating the resources to compete in capitalist enterprises. Originally, Marxist theorists were interested in primitive accumulation from a historical perspective. It helped answer questions about how capitalism came into being and

how some people ended up being in control of enough capital to be able to exploit the labor of others.⁶¹ More recently, social theorists have been interested in the ways that processes of primitive accumulation, through modern day forms of enclosure, remain an ongoing part of the process of capitalist expansion. All over the world native people are being pushed off their land, which is then given to oil companies to exploit; forests are being destroyed for the timber industry and agribusiness; knowledge of herbal medicine, which has developed in many countries over a period of thousands of years and used for the public good, is being patented so that companies that own the patents can have sole use of that knowledge. Direct violence continues to be used as does the violence of having one's resources and means of living taken away.

In the U.S., the airwaves that belong to the public are sold to large corporations to use in ways that make the most profit but do little to serve the public good. The internet, developed by government agencies, is being colonized and partitioned for private profit. Public schools are being turned over to for-profit companies. Children are subjected to advertising in what used to be non-commercial spaces such as the classroom and school bus. And everywhere, water is being taken out of the public domain and given to private companies to sell for whatever price the market will bear.⁶² In all of these instances our social world is increasingly colonized by profit-making enterprises and businesses are finding new ways to create profit from the natural and social worlds.

Naomi Klein argues that under the present dominant form of capitalism,

The state acts as the colonial frontier, which corporate conquistadors pillage with the same ruthless determination and energy as their predecessors showed when they hauled home the gold and silver of the Andes. Where Smith saw fertile green fields turned into profitable farmlands on the pampas and prairies, Wall Street sees "green field opportunities" in Chile's phone system, Argentina's airlines, Russia's oil fields, Bolivia's water system, the United States' public airwaves, Poland's factories—all built with public wealth, then sold for a trifle. Then there are the treasures to be created by enlisting the state to

put a patent and a price tag on life-forms, on natural resources never dreamed of as commodities—seeds, genes, carbon in the earth’s atmosphere.⁶³

The enclosure of public resources, what David Harvey calls *accumulation by dispossession*, is still a way to make a profit in the contemporary world and it remains a significant aspect of contemporary capitalism.⁶⁴ Along with its more settled territories, where profit is made with little resistance, and with some benefits going to working people and communities, there are still many places where capitalism extends its reach through violence and terror, and where those reaping profits offer nothing of value in return.

What’s “Good for the Economy” Is Not Always Good for Us

IN THE MORE SETTLED TERRITORIES of capitalism, the extraction of profit, alienation, and exploitation all happen without much violence. In those settled territories, people go along with capitalism because they believe that it is good for them. It provides them the jobs they need to live, it provides a tax base for funding schools, parks, and public services, and it offers means for producing the things people need to survive. We come to believe that in order to have those good things we want from society we need to have a “healthy economy.” A healthy economy is assumed to be an economy with high levels of Gross Domestic Product (or GDP), growth, and a rising stock market.⁶⁵

For pro-capitalist thinkers, there is an equivocation around the meaning of the concept “the economy.” “The economy” sometimes refers to those things done to meet our needs through markets. At other times it refers to the totality of productive activity. The things we do to meet our needs that are not accomplished through buying and selling are rendered largely invisible by this conceptual slippage. GDP is often seen as a measure of the health of an economy. According to British economist Richard Layard, GDP

was developed in the 1930s for a very good purpose—to help think about fluctuations in unemployment, and it has been crucial in the

efforts to control boom and bust. But it very quickly got hijacked to become a measure of national welfare.⁶⁶

What GDP actually measures are those economic and social exchanges that are done through the capitalist market. When I take care of my own children I am not generating GDP, and according to most economists I am not being economically productive. When I send my children to preschool, the preschool worker who takes care of them is being productive. Not because she is taking care of more children, but because she is working for a wage. This way of measuring our economies makes it very difficult to analyze how well our societies are doing in terms of how much time we get to engage in non-market activities, and it doesn't ask us to look at how well society is organized to provide the resources we need to engage in care-giving activities.⁶⁷

In her book, *If Women Counted*, New Zealand politician and economist Marilyn Waring argues that because GDP counts all goods and services traded on the market it cannot distinguish social goods from social bads. If an oil tanker runs aground and spills millions of gallons of oil, all of the work and products required to clean it up will count positively as part of the GDP. A related problem is that when people spend less time with their families, and so buy prepared food instead of cooking, the GDP will be positively impacted. So the ways that we measure economic performance helps promote the idea that more capitalist activity is good for everyone and less capitalist activity is bad.⁶⁸

The claim that capitalism leads to a good economy is based on circular reasoning: more capitalist activity is good because more capitalist activity raises GDP. The tools most economists and journalists use to measure the health of our economy are not designed to show how well real people, or our natural environment, are doing. They are designed to show how well capitalists are doing. If we ask a broader set of questions such as how are we doing at reducing poverty, what kinds of policies are good for the environment, or what kinds of policies allow people the time for fulfilled lives, we will get radically different answers.

Progressive economists have developed alternative ways of measuring economies so that what is measured is how well our social systems are serv-

ing our needs as opposed to how much capitalist activity is happening. The Genuine Progress Indicator (GPI) includes household labor and volunteer work as productive activity and subtracts the costs of social “bads” such as pollution and a loss of leisure time.⁶⁹ Nobel Prize-winning economist Amartya Sen argues that people with low incomes can have high quality of life when measured by these alternative measures if they have a certain level of freedom, access to health care, and education. Conversely, he gives the example of Britain, which had a period of development in which incomes rose significantly without life spans increasing. Quality of life has a complex and non-linear relationship with wealth.⁷⁰ Sen argues that we need to switch to quality of life indicators when measuring economies.⁷¹

“Good Capitalism”

RAYMOND W. BAKER, author of *Capitalism's Achilles Heel*, believes that in spite of the negative outcomes he admits are associated with capitalism, a good form of capitalism is helpful for pulling people out of poverty and extending their lives. The twentieth century, after all, saw real increases in longevity in much of the world and real rises in living standards for millions of people.⁷² Those facts lead thinkers like Baker to claim that capitalism must be reformed to live up to what he believes is its true potential for improving human life.

And yet a curious thing about the twentieth century was that those increases in life span and reductions in poverty happened in societies with both capitalist and communist economic systems. It happened in the United States and in the Soviet Union. In many countries in Sub-Saharan Africa, increases in life span and reductions in poverty didn't occur under socialist or capitalist systems. In the Soviet Union's transition from socialism to capitalism, life spans actually shortened dramatically.

Life spans increased in the twentieth century largely as a result of basic public health policies that included the use of sewers, clean water, and good nutrition.⁷³ While in many cases an increase in capitalism has gone along with a decrease in poverty, such as the development of the Asian Tiger Economies in the second half of the twentieth century, in many other cases increases in capitalism have led to increases in poverty (such as the collapse

of those same Tiger economies in the 1990s and the transition from socialism to capitalism in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe). In China, the transition to socialism led to dramatic decreases in poverty, as did the Chinese transition from socialism to capitalism.⁷⁴

Capitalism is often credited with social gains that it is not responsible for. Much of the basic research for the forms of medicine that have contributed to life span increases was provided directly by governments or by scientists working at public institutions. Many of the inventions which have fueled capitalist development such as telephones and the internet were developed by government researchers working on projects designed for the public good.⁷⁵ While it does seem that in many cases trade can have a beneficial effect on people's wellbeing and that markets can play positive roles, both of those things can exist in societies not dominated by capitalist logics.

Conclusion

UNDERSTANDING THE WAYS THAT the world's most pressing problems are linked to capitalism will help us develop effective ways of dealing with them. Without understanding the nature of capitalism we might be tempted to solve the problem of global poverty by freeing markets, leading to worse poverty. If we think that our personal life feels meaningless because we do not have the products that are currently promoted as "the thing" to give us a sense of happiness, then we will buy more consumer products to try to be happy. If we believe that simply finding better medicines will solve the problems of AIDS and malaria then we might believe that giving tax breaks to pharmaceutical corporations will give them necessary incentives to develop the medicines that are needed. The problem of global warming might be seen as solvable by simply encouraging companies to invest in cleaner technologies or allowing them to trade in carbon allocation permits.

An understanding of capitalism clears our vision for really meaningful approaches to those problems. Increases in production don't alleviate poverty on their own without redistribution of land and wealth. A sense of meaning comes from detaching our desires from the market and engaging in meaningful activity with others. Medicines get to the poor when there are good systems of health care delivery. Dealing with global warming re-

quires that we prevent the production of greenhouse gases and increase our ecosystem's ability to absorb carbon sustainably.

In *Late Victorian Holocausts*, historian Mike Davis makes the powerful and heartbreaking case that it was market forces directed by British colonialists that led to the death by starvation of 50 million people in India, China, and Africa in the late 1800s, as weather-related crop failures became human tragedies through a failure to allocate available food.⁷⁶ Millions have been killed in wars that were fueled by the search for resources. Cultures have been destroyed by colonialism. The entire biosphere of the planet, including human life, is in imminent danger from global warming, and capitalism has played an important role in developing a situation where it is very difficult to regulate the production of greenhouse gases.

To solve these, and a myriad of other problems that have capitalism as part of their causes, we need to understand how capitalism works and we need to understand how to replace the destructive social dynamics that are caused by it. We need to understand how capitalism causes the problems and how it is possible to solve them. We need a theory of the nature of capitalism and of anti-capitalism.

Notes

1. Raymond W. Baker, *Capitalism's Achilles Heel: Dirty Money and How to Renew the Free-Market System* (New York: Wiley, 2005), 239.

2. World Health Organization, *Closing the Gap in a Generation: Health Equity Through Action on the Social Determinants of Health* (2008): 167. http://www.who.int/social_determinants/thecommission/en/index.html.

3. George Monbiot, *HEAT: How to Stop the Planet from Burning* (Cambridge, MA: South End Press, 2007).

4. Baker, *Capitalism's Achilles Heel*, 352.

5. With the fall of the Soviet Union, British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher proclaimed "There is no Alternative." The expression became so popular among pro-capitalist forces that it became an acronym: TINA. Anti-globalization activist Susan George has countered with her own acronym: TATA, "There are Thousands of Alternatives."

6. Antonio Gramsci, the great twentieth century Italian Marxist philosopher, developed the concept of *hegemony* to make sense of the relationship between the ways we experience the world and the political processes underlying that experience. He argued that proponents of a system of domination develop ways of making the world make sense and making the domination seem to be a part of the things that people love and want. For Gramsci, a crucial part of political organizing has to be the challenging of dominant forms of hegemony and developing new ways to understand the world, or *counter-hegemonies*.

According to Gramsci's theory of hegemony and counter-hegemony, challenging idea systems is a crucial part of political practice. His theory implies that arguing for an alternative point of view requires more than simply making rational arguments. People will tend to hold on to dominant ways of seeing the world in part because these ways of seeing the world are structured to answer some deep desires and needs in their lives. See: Antonio Gramsci, "Philosophy, Common Sense, Language and Folklore," in *The Antonio Gramsci Reader*, ed. David Forgacs (New York: New York University Press, 2000), 323–362.

7. Ellen Meiksins Wood, *The Origin of Capitalism* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1999), 83.

8. Wood, *The Origin of Capitalism*, 83.

9. John Locke (1690), *Two Treatises of Government* (London: Hackett, 1990), 134 (Treatise Two, Section 34).

10. Locke, *Two Treatises of Government*, 125 (Treatise Two, Section 16).

11. Locke, *Two Treatises of Government*, 125. In addition to his investment in the slave trade, Locke wrote the constitution for the Carolinas in the United States, which included slavery.

12. Gerrard Winstanley (1649), quoted in *Winstanley: 'The Law of Freedom' and Other Writings*, ed. Christopher Hill (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 99.

13. While Locke does talk about family, those relationships are seen as anomalous and not part of the generic relations that constitute the state of nature.

14. Locke, *Two Treatises of Government*.

15. Amartya Sen, "Democracy and its Global Roots: Why Democratization is Not the Same as Westernization," *New Republic* 6 (2003), 28–35.
16. Bruce Johansen, *Forgotten Founders: How the American Indian Helped Shape Democracy* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard Common Press, 1987), xiv.
17. Naomi Klein, *The Shock Doctrine: The Rise of Disaster Capitalism* (New York: Metropolitan Books, 2007).
18. Klein, *The Shock Doctrine*, 195–216.
19. Samuel Bowles and Herbert Gintis, *Democracy and Capitalism: Property, Community, and the Contradictions of Modern Social Thought* (New York: Basic Books, 1986), 177.
20. Bowles and Gintis, *Democracy and Capitalism*, 140.
21. Néstor García Canclini, *Consumers and Citizens: Globalization and Multicultural Conflicts* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2001), 24.
22. Larry Lohman, *Carbon Trading: A Critical Conversation on Climate Change, Privatization, and Power* (Upsala: The Dag Hammarskjöld Foundation, 2006), 324.
23. Karl Polanyi, *The Great Transformation: the Political and Economic Origins of Our Time* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1944), page 257.
24. Adam Smith (1776), *Selections from the Wealth of Nations* (Arlington Heights, IL: Harlan Davidson, 1957), 11.
25. Karl Marx. (1844), "Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844," in *The Marx-Engels Reader*, ed. Robert Tucker (New York: Norton, 1972), 105.
26. Heather Rogers, *Green Gone Wrong: How Our Economy is Undermining the Environmental Revolution* (New York: Scribner, 2009), 125.
27. Michael Pollan, *The Omnivore's Dilemma: A Natural History of Four Meals* (New York: Penguin, 2006).
28. One problem with authoritarian models of socialism is that desire is usually left out of the loop; no one making production decisions really cares what people want to consume. For a detailed analysis of how the Soviet Union's economists did and did not deal with demand in their economic models, see: Alec Nove, *The Economics of Feasible Socialism Revisited* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 28.
29. George Soros, *The Crisis of Global Capitalism* (New York: Public Affairs, 1998).
30. The term Global South is a short hand way of referring to the nations of the world which have been devastated by colonialism and which continue to have high levels of poverty, most of which are in the Southern Hemisphere.
31. Robert Pollin, *Contours of Descent: U.S. Economic Fractures and the Landscape of Global Austerity* (New York: Verso, 2003), 128. Pollin is a heterodox economist, a term which refers to any economist who uses tools such as institutional or Marxist analyses rather than the models of the dominant (neo-classical) paradigm of analysis.
32. Pollin, *Contours of Descent*, 130. These figures exclude China, which is a complex case, the sheer size of which swamps data used to make points about other nations. Including China, the numbers are: 3.5% per capita growth during the development of the state era versus 2.0 during the neoliberal era. It is hard to say whether China's strong sustained growth through both periods (within Pollin's study) should count as a victory of

neoliberalism or for state-led development models. While David Harvey includes China in his study of neoliberalism, China's economy has been managed by a strong interventionist state even as much of its economy has been privatized.

33. Pollin, *Contours of Descent*, 133. Again, these data exclude China. When China is included that figure drops to 68%.

34. Pollin, *Contours of Descent*, 129.

35. Klein, *The Shock Doctrine*, 267.

36. Jeffrey Sachs, quoted in Klein, *The Shock Doctrine*, 272.

37. David Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007) 97.

38. Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism*, 159.

39. Joseph E. Stiglitz, *Making Globalization Work* (2007), 30. For a nice survey of the critiques of extreme versions of free market economists by otherwise pro-capitalist thinkers, see Chapter 2 in Derek Wall, *Babylon and Beyond: The Economics of Anti-Capitalism, Anti-Globalist, and Radical Green Movements* (Ann Arbor, MI: Pluto Press, 2001).

40. Segun Gbadegesin, "Yoruba Philosophy: Individuality, Community, and the Moral Order," in *African Philosophy: An Anthology*, ed. Emmanuel Chulwudi Eze (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 1998), 130–41.

41. Polanyi, *The Great Transformation*.

42. The term efficiency is used in two ways in contemporary economics. One meaning is a synonym for effective. The other means "for the least cost possible." This equivocation is one of the places where pro-capitalist thought hides its values. It is very efficient, in the second sense of the term, for a factory owner to use dirty technology if it is cheaper than clean technology. It is not, however, very effective for the goal of doing things in the "best" way for society as a whole. For a good critique of dominant economic notions of efficiency see: Bill McKibben, *Deep Economy: The Wealth of Communities and the Durable Future* (New York: Henry Holt, 2007).

43. Karl Marx. (1844), "Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844," in *The Marx-Engels Reader*, ed. Robert Tucker (New York: Norton, 1972), 74.

44. This accord was much better for white workers than for people for color. Much of the New Deal labor legislation left out domestic and agricultural workers. These exclusions were instituted in order to placate Southern Democrats. We can see the legacy of that set of decisions in the current dismal state of farm labor in the U.S. See: Ira Katznelson, *When Affirmative Action Was White: An Untold History of Racial Inequality in Twentieth-Century America* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2006).

45. Arlie Russell Hochschild, *The Managed Heart: Commercialization of Human Feeling* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983), 190.

46. Marx (1867), in *The Marx-Engels Reader*, 302–329. For a great analysis of how commodification comes to structure everyday life under capitalism, see: Henri Lefebvre, "Toward a Leftist Cultural Politics: Remarks Occasioned by the Centenary of Marx's Death," in *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*, eds. Carrie Nelson and Lawrence Grossberg (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1988), 75–88.

47. Richard Layard, *Happiness: Lessons from a New Science* (New York: Penguin, 2005).
48. Bill McKibben, *Deep Economy: The Wealth of Communities and the Durable Future* (New York: Henry Holt, 2007), 41.
49. David Korten, *Agenda for a New Economy: From Phantom Wealth to Real Wealth* (San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler, 2010), 74.
50. Layard, *Happiness: Lessons from a New Science*, Kindle locations 1748 and 2763.
51. Sut Jhally. "Advertising at the Edge of the Apocalypse." http://www.sutjhally.com/online_pubs/apocalypse.html.
52. McKibben, *Deep Economy*.
53. Juliet Schor, *Plentitude: The New Economics of True Wealth* (New York: Penguin Press, 2010), Kindle location 381.
54. Stacy Mitchell, *Big Box Swindle: The True Cost of Mega-Retailers and the Fight for America's Independent Businesses* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2007).
55. Marx. (1867), in *The Marx-Engels Reader*, 294–428. See also: Robert Paul Wolff, *Understanding Marx: A Reconstruction and Critique of Capital* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985).
56. According to Adam Przeworski, "At an annual rate of productivity growth of less than 3 percent, output per worker doubles in twenty-five years: within one generation we could reduce labor time by one half." Adam Przeworski, *Capitalism and Social Democracy* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1993).
57. Marx claims that surplus value is the value that a worker produces using average technology at the time, over and above what is necessary for the "reproduction" of that worker—in other words, what a person needs to survive at a socially acceptable level. The concept of surplus value has been taken as a cornerstone of Marxist economics and yet it has also been challenged and interpreted differently by generations of Marxist economists. Many have argued that it is impossible to calculate what is the socially necessary amount of labor for any given period. Also, institutionalist economists have argued that one can understand where profits come from by understanding the histories of different sectors of the economy and the patterns of investment and common labor practices without resorting to a concept as hard to nail down as surplus value. See: Karl Marx (1867), *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy, Volume 1*, trans. Samuel Moore and Edward Aveling (New York: International Publishers, 1983), chapter 10; and Ian Steedman et al, *The Value Controversy* (London: Verso, 1981).
58. Antonio Negri, *Marx Beyond Marx: Lessons from the Grundrisse* (New York: Autonomedia, 1991).
59. The Kenyan novelist Ngugi Wa Thiong'o bases his novel *Devil on the Cross* on the premise that capitalism is carried out by a club of robbers and stealers. See Ngugi Wa Thiong'o, *Devil on the Cross* (Portsmouth, N.H.: Heinemann, 1987). David Korten reveals the origins of corporations in the same social processes that spawned piracy. See: David Korten, *Agenda for a New Economy: From Phantom Wealth to Real Wealth* (San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler, 2010), 60.
60. Marx (1867), *The Marx-Engels Reader*, 435.

61. While John Locke is mostly known as an advocate for freedom, equality, and rights, he in fact was involved as an investor in the African slave trade and he was in favor of the appropriation of land from Native Americans. He was also in favor of enclosure. In his *Two Treatises of Government* he justifies these practices on the grounds that they lead to the development of more wealth and to a safer and more rational society.

62. Anatole Anton, Milton Fisk, and Nancy Holmstrom, *Not for Sale: In Defense of Public Goods* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 2000).

63. Klein, *The Shock Doctrine*, 242.

64. Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism*, 156.

65. For an excellent discussion of historical changes in what is taken as constituting a “healthy economy” see: Mark Blyth, *Great Transformations: Economic Ideas and Institutional Change in the Twentieth Century* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2002).

66. Layard, *Happiness: Lessons from a New Science*, Kindle location 1610.

67. Barbara Ehrenreich and Arlie Russell Hochschild, *Global Woman: Nannies, Maids, and Sex Workers in the New Economy* (New York: Owl Press, 2004).

68. Marilyn Waring, *If Women Counted* (New York: Harper Collins, 1990).

69. James Heintz, Nancy Folbre, and the Center for Popular Economics, *The Ultimate Field Guide to the U.S. Economy* (New York: The New Press, 2000), 140. Another popular index is the Happy Planet Index. See: <http://www.happyplanetindex.org>.

70. Amartya Sen, “Development: Which Way Now?,” *The Economic Journal* 93, no. 372 (1983), 745–762; and *Development as Freedom* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 49.

71. The King of Bhutan, a country with a very low GDP but a high level of measured personal happiness, has developed the concept of Gross National Happiness—not a functioning tool for economic analysis but an intriguing one nonetheless.

72. Baker, *Capitalism’s Achilles Heel*.

73. For a look at the causes of life span increases in the twentieth century overall see: Jim Ueppen and James W. Vaupel, “Broken Limits to Life Expectancy,” *Science’s Compass Policy Forum* (2003): http://www.soc.upenn.edu/courses/2003/spring/soc621_iliana/readings/oeppo2b.pdf.

74. Jeffrey Sachs, *The End of Poverty: Economic Possibilities of Our Time* (New York: Penguin, 2005), 153.

75. Fred Block, “Swimming Against the Current: The Rise of Hidden Developmental State in the United States,” *Politics and Society* 36, no. 2 (2008), 169–206.

76. Mike Davis, *Late Victorian Holocausts* (New York: Verso, 2000).

Ways Not to Think About Getting Past Capitalism

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FOR MANY YEARS, I have listened carefully to how people who see capitalism as a problem talk about it in their political work. Usually it is spoken of as a limit. They suggest that we can do so much to change a situation but once the problem we are dealing with goes up against capitalism, we should probably give up. Capitalism, after all, is simply our condition; there is nothing, short of world revolution, that will make that condition change. Opponents to capitalism are long on critiques and very short on positive steps for doing anything practical about it.

Many people doing important political work might characterize their work as *only* reformist. Seeing no alternative to capitalism, they soldier on doing what they know needs to be done. Imagine what excitement and inspiration they might gain if they could see their efforts as part of a long-term project of getting rid of capitalism.

How we think about the nature of capitalism has huge implications for how we are to think about anti-capitalism. If we accept the picture of capitalism as a robust, adaptable system that can create every sort of social effect it needs in order to keep itself functioning, then it is likely that we will see schools, for example, as nothing more than factories for the production of workers, governments as no more than agents of the ruling class, and household labor as something created by capitalism for the reproduction of the workforce. Within this view, the agent called “capitalism” makes these

things happen to keep itself functioning and it co-opts or destroys all efforts to challenge it.

Capitalism comes to be seen as a *Terminator*, destroying all in its path and all powerful in its ability to fight off challengers, changing form and shape when needed, and always intent on its goal of destroying human resistance. Even more powerful than the *Terminator*, capitalism is seen as having such a high level of cunning that only its own internally created crisis point will make it vulnerable enough to be destroyed.

There are good reasons why people opposing capitalism are inclined to see it as a totalistic system. It is a helpful antidote to a kind of thinking, endemic to capitalist society, where connections between social processes are obscured. Karl Marx's critique of capitalism remains unparalleled in its insight into the ways that capitalism operates and the problems it causes. And yet, many within the Marxist tradition have relied on ways of analyzing the problem that make it difficult to imagine realistic approaches to anti-capitalist politics. How can we separate those totalizing threads from our tapestry and envision more promising ways to challenge capitalism?

The Leninist Approach to Anti-capitalism

VLADIMIR LENIN WAS THE FOLLOWER of Marx most aligned with the totalizing streams in Marxism. As the most important leader and theorist of the Russian Revolution—the second revolution made in the name of anti-capitalism—Lenin casts a long shadow over the anti-capitalist tradition.¹

Lenin did not create his position out of whole cloth. Many of his totalizing views have their roots in Marx's own writings, and many have their roots in the work of the profoundly influential nineteenth-century German philosopher G.W.F. Hegel. Some of Marx's best ideas have their roots in Hegel, but some have led to the totalizing views that make it almost impossible to analyze society in ways that point to practical ways to organize social change. The most significant of these Hegelian ideas is the theory of *teleology*, or a natural unfolding. According to the concept of teleology, all things, including human society, have a natural path that they follow. Just as an acorn is destined (unless something goes wrong) to develop into an oak tree, so society is seen to have a natural path of development.

Hegel believed that all of human history worked according to an underlying logic, an inevitable development through various stages of social organization. Marx rejected Hegel's notion that there was a necessary flow to human history and was instead interested in the ways that the outcomes of historical processes are often unpredictable. Still, Marx argued that human societies could be understood as having at any one time a core economic structure called the *mode of production* or what we more commonly refer to today as an economic system, and that on a large scale human history could be seen as the sequential move from one mode of production to the next. Marx argued that as one mode of production matured, problems with that system would inevitably cause social conflict—"contradictions," in Marx's terms—and new modes would develop through various forms of social change.²

Discussing the transition from feudalism to capitalism in the *Manifesto of the Communist Party*, Marx and his writing partner Friedrich Engels wrote,

At a certain stage in the development of these means of production and of exchange, the conditions under which feudal society produced and exchanged, the feudal organization of agriculture and manufacturing industry, in one word, the feudal relations of property became no longer compatible with the already developed productive forces: they became so many fetters. They had to be burst asunder; they were burst asunder.³

Deep in Marx's theory of politics are ideas about inevitability and necessity. Some people would inevitably grow frustrated by the existing economic system—under capitalism, Marx saw industrial workers in this role—and they would then be in a position to overthrow that mode of production, to move society forward to the next economic system.⁴

In the *Manifesto*, Marx and Engels also wrote that as capitalism developed, the working class would be increasingly impoverished as employers used their power to undercut wage levels. Then those industrial workers, the proletariat, would see their common exploitation and come together, first on the factory floor and later in trade unions and then political parties, to overthrow capitalism.

The development of Modern Industry, therefore, cuts from under its feet the very foundation on which the bourgeoisie produces and

appropriates products. What the bourgeoisie, therefore, produces above all, is its own grave-diggers. Its fall and the victory of the proletariat are equally inevitable.⁵

From the idea that human society is a totality that is primarily determined by its economic foundation it is a quick step to the view that all aspects of that society are controlled so that the economy can maintain its equilibrium.

This totalizing view of society has led to a very uni-dimensional view of the state within the Marxist tradition. The most extreme version of this can be found in Lenin, who saw the modern nation state as merely an appendage of the capitalist ruling class, that is, the *bourgeoisie* or the owners of productive assets. The owning class dominates society through a variety of means including, very significantly, the government. For Lenin,

the state is an organ of class *rule*, for the *oppression* of one class by another . . . bourgeois states are most varied in form, but their essence is the same: all these states, whatever their form, in the final analysis are inevitably the dictatorship of the bourgeoisie.⁶

Elections on this view are nothing more than “a snare and deception for the exploited.”⁷ The states constituted by capitalism would need to be completely destroyed—“smashed” was the word he used—because they were structured to serve the owning class.

Lenin attributed this view to Marx. In *State and Revolution* he wrote,

Marx grasped this *essence* of capitalist democracy splendidly when, in analyzing the experience of the Commune, he said that the oppressed are allowed once every few years to decide which particular representatives of the oppressing class shall represent and repress them in parliament! But from this capitalist democracy—that is inevitably narrow and stealthily pushes aside the poor, and is therefore hypocritical and false through and through—forward development does not proceed simply, directly, and smoothly towards “greater and greater democracy,” as the liberal professors and petty-bourgeois opportunists would have us believe. No, forward development, i.e., development towards communism, proceeds through the dictatorship

of the proletariat, and cannot do otherwise, for the *resistance* of the capitalist exploiters cannot be *broken* by anyone else or in any other way.

Marx and Engels had a much more nuanced view of the state. Like Lenin, they both used the expression dictatorship of the proletariat to refer to the period after a revolution when the proletariat would control the state in order to rid it of the institutions that supported capitalist forms of domination. But they also believed that democratic processes could in some cases be used to overthrow capitalism. They believed it was possible for the working class to use the state as a site to struggle with the bourgeoisie. They saw a basic contradiction in the fact that parliamentary democracy puts power in the hands of the majority, and yet the majority is exploited under capitalism.

Marx and Engels believed that because of this contradiction there could be an electoral road to socialism. In the *Manifesto* they wrote:

the first step in the revolution by the working class is to raise the proletariat to the position of ruling class, to win the battle of democracy. The proletariat will use its political supremacy to wrest, by degrees, all capital from the bourgeoisie, to centralize all instruments of production in the hands of the State, i.e., of the proletariat organized as the ruling class; and to increase the total of productive forces as rapidly as possible.⁸

Marx and Engels saw the modern nation state as rising in tandem with capitalism, and as largely offering the framework in which capitalism could function. But they also believed that the state could be captured by the working class and made to serve the needs of a society undivided by class. They saw governments in capitalist societies as being dominated by capitalist forces, but not as mere puppets of the capitalist class. This view of Marx and Engels is often forgotten, or is minimized, and the dominant view among Marxist-influenced revolutionaries has been closer to Lenin's.

The Leninist view that the state functions to serve the needs of the bourgeoisie has led to a polarization in anti-capitalist circles around the concepts of reform versus revolution. There is a tradition on the left of dismissing as reformist any action not specifically designed to instigate a revolution to

smash the state and overthrow capitalism. Early theorists of capitalism believed that the only two options were violent revolution to overthrow capitalism or reformism that accepted capitalism as a given.

Current critiques of reformism often rely for their rhetorical force on reactions that many on the left have had to the “evolutionary socialism” of theorist Eduard Bernstein, a German Social Democratic Party member of the German parliament. His view is often taken to be the paradigm of an anti-capitalist reformist. Arguing against the left wing of his party, Bernstein claimed that the party should give up its demand for a revolution against capitalism and instead work to reform capitalism to make it serve human needs. He believed that capitalism would evolve into socialism without any serious struggle. In his 1909 book, *Evolutionary Socialism*, he wrote,

The whole practical activity of social democracy is directed towards creating circumstances and conditions which shall render possible and secure a transition (free from convulsive outbursts) of the modern social order into a higher one.⁹

The claim that capitalism could be outgrown without “convulsive outbursts” has proven to be wrong, and many organizers at that time, such as the great Polish theorist and revolutionary Rosa Luxemburg, correctly predicted this to be the case.

In a long text criticizing Bernstein, and in many ways setting the stage for some of the problems in later Marxist critiques of reformism, Luxemburg stated her belief that capitalism would be abolished through an inevitable cataclysmic break. Luxemburg argued that Bernstein’s view of a gradual evolution away from capitalism was wrong because the “scientific” understanding of history that was laid out by Marx required there to be a great dramatic break with capitalism.

From the standpoint of scientific socialism, the historical necessity of the socialist revolution manifests itself above all in the growing anarchy of capitalism which drives the system into an impasse. But if one admits, with Bernstein, that capitalist development does not move in the direction of its own ruin, then socialism ceases to be *objectively necessary*.¹⁰

Her faith in the objective necessity of that break, rather than her analysis of whether or not it was so, was grounded in an almost religious acceptance of Hegel's doctrine of teleology, the inevitable stages through which societies progress. Bernstein had correctly argued that capitalism was more flexible than Luxemburg and other revolutionary Marxists had believed. Yet he was wrong in believing that those with power would give up that power without a serious struggle.

At roughly the same time as these debates were raging in Germany, the Russian revolutionary and theorist Leon Trotsky argued that those wanting to abolish capitalism should develop a program of transitional demands. These would be things that working class people wanted as improvements in their lives, such as higher wages and better working conditions. He argued that transitional demands must be close enough to being achievable that people would find them compelling but far enough away that they would not be easily satisfied from within the capitalist system.

Both Trotsky and Luxemburg worried that basing a program on demands that capitalism could satisfy would actually lead to a strengthening of the legitimacy of capitalism, and hence to a strengthening of the capitalist system.¹¹ Their view underlies the attitude of discomfort many contemporary Marxists have with reforms that improve people's lives. Such reforms may lead to a lack of motivation for real change. Instead, revolutionaries need to "heighten the contradictions" in society which will lead to the sort of massive break Marx's theory of teleology foresees, and push the revolution forward.

When Luxemburg and Trotsky were writing and organizing, most Marxists believed that capitalism was crisis prone and that in its periods of crisis it was vulnerable to being overthrown. Basing their ideas on Marx's teleological view of history, both Trotsky and Luxemburg believed that conditions for revolution would be ripe when capitalism was in a crisis period. According to Luxemburg,

the point of departure for a transformation to socialism would be a general and catastrophic crisis . . . the scientific basis of socialism rests on *three* results of capitalist development. First, and most important, on the growing anarchy of the capitalist economy, leading

inevitably to its ruin. Second on the progressive *socialization* of the process of production, which creates the germs of the future social order. And third, on the growing *organization and class consciousness* of the proletariat, which constitutes the active factor in the coming revolution.¹²

Trotsky and Luxemburg believed that because of the crisis-prone nature of capitalism, the key task of those wanting to overthrow capitalism was to help bring the working class together with the right form of consciousness for revolution to take place when the economic structure was at a crisis point. Any approach to challenging capitalism not based on this idea of a major rupture was dismissed as reformist.

While both Trotsky and Luxemburg believed in democracy within revolutionary organizations, they had little faith in the ability of working people to use the democratic openings in the government to improve people's lives. For them the revolution would at some point involve a violent rupture with the present government. Still, for both it was a worthwhile goal to struggle for changes within the current government so as to build a movement for radical change.

For Lenin, even that level of engagement with the bourgeois state was reformist. For him, any approach to revolution that did not try to establish a dictatorship of the proletariat should be seen as a betrayal of revolutionary Marxism. In a polemic against Karl Kautsky, an Austrian social-democratic theorist and organizer, Lenin argued that core to Marxist theory is the idea that the proletariat must destroy all of the institutions of bourgeois democracy and replace them with a dictatorship of the proletariat.¹³ Such an approach, Lenin argued, would come to be in the interests of society as a whole. According to Lenin, "The revolutionary dictatorship of the proletariat is the rule won and maintained by the use of violence by the proletariat against the bourgeoisie, rule that is unrestricted by any laws."¹⁴

Kautsky had argued that Lenin's approach was too dismissive of the importance of democracy and likely to lead to authoritarian forms of government. Lenin responded that a short period of authoritarianism is necessary, and that it will give way to a real democracy once class divisions have been abolished and everyone in society has the same interests. Lenin argued that

the dictatorship of the proletariat is the “essence of proletarian revolution.” Any rejection of the doctrine of the dictatorship of the proletariat “turns Marx into a common liberal.”¹⁵

In Lenin’s view, capitalism is a highly functional system where most events in society can be understood as the effects of the economic system seeking to survive. The fate of that system is largely determined by the actions of its two major classes: the bourgeoisie and the proletariat. These two classes come into a dramatic confrontation when the point of rupture has been reached and the proletariat is ready to play its destined role of overthrowing the capitalist system by smashing the bourgeois state and replacing it with a dictatorship of the proletariat.

Luxemburg and Trotsky wanted to push the state to a point of crisis and develop a new government through a democratic party structure even as the old regime was crumbling. Kautsky wanted to build a democracy from within the structure of the existing bourgeois democracy. Lenin believed that the governments of Europe and Russia were all “bourgeois states” which should, like bugs, be “smashed” from the outside and replaced with workers’ states.

Critique of the Leninist Approach

THE IMAGE OF CAPITALISM as a system that inevitably leads to the immiseration of the proletariat, who are then brought together by their shared fate, made the problem of revolution seem easier than it is. Within this view, the industrial proletariat would find its situation unlivable. It would have a ready-made basis for organizing on the floor of the factory where people form relationships around shared problems. The independent producers organize themselves politically, take over or smash the state, and replace capitalism with collective ownership and management of productive assets.¹⁶

As it has turned out, capitalism is much more flexible and able to respond to challenges than most of its nineteenth-century opponents thought it would be. The radical trade unions that socialists organized to hasten the proletarian revolution succeeded instead in winning relatively comfortable standards of living for millions of workers within capitalist society.¹⁷ The mere fact of oppression under capitalism does not lead to a natural coming together around an agenda of liberation for all. To take just one example,

trade unions in the U.S. have been built on pervasive racial exclusion, where people of color have been prevented from joining the same unions as white workers.¹⁸

How can anti-capitalist organizers bring people together to see the problems inherent in capitalism and find ways to work together to challenge it? We cannot rely on some future crisis to enable the overthrow of capitalism. We need to figure out ways in the present to deal with the complex realities of a global economic system that makes many people dependent upon capitalist wages to survive; of a world full of nation states that largely work to promote capitalist social forms; of a transnational system of institutions that help stabilize capitalist practices; and a spreading culture of consumerism that links happiness with the purchase of commodities.

Class and the Revolutionary Subject

ACCORDING TO MARX AND LENIN, the people best suited to fight capitalism were the proletariat. In Germany at the turn of the twentieth century most anti-capitalists were indeed members of the industrial working class. And yet, from the beginning of anti-capitalist politics, important anti-capitalist agents have come from all classes of society. Many of the movement's intellectual and military leaders have come from the educated middle classes: Marx, Lenin, Luxemburg, and Ho Chi Minh, to name a few. The majority of people who actually fought for anti-capitalist gains in Russia, China, and Vietnam were peasants, not industrial workers. In Mexico, the best-known anti-capitalist group is the largely indigenous Zapatista movement.

In Marx's time the problem of "the revolutionary subject"—the question of who will make up the revolution against capitalism—was already complicated. The rise of capitalism had devastated life for peasants in many countries with emerging capitalist economies. And yet, Marx did not focus on the peasants as the people to overturn capitalism.

Marx chose to focus on factory workers or the industrial proletariat, not because they were the people made most miserable by capitalism but because his analysis argued that they were the group positioned at the leading edge of capitalist development. Because history transitions through stages

and the next stage will be dominated by the industrial working class, that class should be seen as destined to lead the movement.

For Marx, our social class is defined by our relationship to the means of production. Those who own the means of production—things like natural resources, machinery for production, or large tracts of land, are members of the bourgeoisie, or owning class. Those who own nothing significant other than their ability to labor are members of the proletariat or working class.

Marx allowed for the possibility that many people were members of intermediate classes, such as small shopkeepers or professionals, but he also argued that in capitalism these classes would be less politically important than the two major classes. He also acknowledged the existence of small-scale agriculturalists or peasants in Europe but saw them as holdovers from the past, destined to be pushed into industrial labor by the inevitable development of capitalism.

Marx's theory of classes can be very helpful for understanding the conflictual nature of capitalist society. Understanding that members of the bourgeoisie can be expected to act in ways that will tend to protect their privileges as a group is crucial for understanding the ways that capitalism is reproduced.

But class theory is not very helpful for answering the question of which sectors of society are most likely to lead the movement against capitalism. We cannot count on economic conditions leading to an increase in the number of industrial workers—the process Marxists referred to as “proletarianization.” Instead, we need to develop critiques of capitalism that resonate with people's experiences. We need to develop an analysis of the nature of capitalism and how it works, where its vulnerabilities are, and, most importantly, toward what alternatives to it we should be working. We need to organize to bring people from a variety of social communities into the work of getting past capitalism.

When we think about developing anti-capitalist movements, we also need to be aware of the ways that most people today see the ways they are served by capitalism much more readily than they see the ways that they are harmed by it. While capitalism makes us need jobs it also gives us jobs. Capitalism impoverishes our lives in many ways but it also gives us consumer

goods. Everyone, no matter where they are positioned in terms of class, has some interests and desires that *are* served by capitalist practices and others that are thwarted by capitalism. Most people experience the effects of capitalism ambivalently.

Rather than seeing the revolutionary subject as a member of a specific class we should see everyone as a potential anti-capitalist activist.¹⁹ And just as everyone, no matter what their class background, has the potential to act in anti-capitalist ways and to help build anti-capitalist consciousness, everyone also has the potential to act in ways that shore up capitalism.

People involved in present anti-capitalist movements are unemployed, professionals, service and clerical workers, indigenous people, mothers, small business owners, and people for whom their job is not the primary axis of their sense of identity or what moves them politically. Forming organizations only with those who are hurt by capitalism in the same ways that we ourselves are is neither necessary nor sufficient to challenge capitalism in ways that add up to meaningful change.

Revolution

IN MARX'S TIME, when people thought about anti-capitalism the image of major social change that dominated their imaginations was of the revolutions against monarchies that were happening at that time. Following the French Revolution, people in the rest of Europe began in the 1800s to rise up and overthrow monarchies, founding constitutional democracies. The idea of revolution has been very much influenced by the idea of the *coup d'état*, or overthrow of the state, based on the model of the French Revolution.

Marx was very clear that what was happening in Europe in the period of democratic revolutions was not as significant as many people thought, because elite power was still being preserved. The social transformations were mostly a matter of replacing an old feudal ruling class with a new capitalist one—the King and his knights and lords with the industrialists and their investors and lawyers. Marx advocated for revolution in which the capitalist system as a whole, and not just some group in power, would be overthrown. For Marx, the revolution against capitalism would involve deep transformations in all aspects of social life, from the economic structure of society to

the political system to cultural forms of personal moral development, such as the religious institutions that ruled so much of social life at that point. And yet, the image of a revolution as a great dramatic event, like a political coup, remains dominant within the consciousness of those opposed to capitalism.

Any significant challenge to capitalism needs to take seriously the ways that governments work to protect capitalism by destroying anti-capitalist efforts. It needs to deal with questions about the ways that the state can and cannot be captured and used for anti-capitalist ends. Getting past capitalism requires more than an overthrow of the state. Capitalism structures, and is embedded in, political, economic, social, cultural, and psychological aspects of human life. Our images of revolution need to be transformed to make us think of these other aspects of society as strongly as the governmental aspects of society.

A revolution against capitalism has to interrupt the ways that states act in the interests of the owning class. It has to transform the capitalist aspects of the economy by subjecting the means of production to democratic control. But it must also change the social fabric in which our health care, our systems of old age security, childcare, etc., are embedded in capitalism. Our culture needs to be transformed to the extent that people experience or create meaning or expression for sheer pleasure, and alternative forms of culture must find ways of proliferating outside the nexus of commercialization. On a psychological level, getting rid of capitalism means changing how we experience desire so that we don't experience ourselves as consumers and reflections of corporate media images.

When we ask strategic questions about what aspects of capitalism need to be challenged first, it is not at all clear that taking state power should be the first or even an early aspect of our movements. You can overthrow a group of people who are governing a political system and those who take power can expropriate some or all of the economic resources held by the owning class. But when this has been done in the past the very process of holding state power and defending anti-capitalist changes has led to a social and political clampdown as occurred in the Soviet Union. Stalinist repression inhibited the deep transformation of other aspects of human society.

The idea of revolution encourages us to focus on governments and to forget the non-dramatic work of slow building and reweaving that goes be-

yond state power. The image of revolution as a dramatic moment of overthrow also encourages us to suppose that we are done at some point.

Our historical experience of anti-capitalist struggle has shown that the work of getting past capitalism has never reached a final point in any geographic locality. Wherever there has been an anti-capitalist revolution, forces attempting to reinstate capitalism have in every instance persisted in attempting to subvert anti-capitalist gains. Even if capitalism were some day reduced to almost nothing it would seem wise to be continually on the lookout for new accumulations of power based on private appropriation of public goods.

If capitalism is a structure like a building, it can be brought down. If it is deeply woven into the social fabric, then overthrow isn't the right way to destroy it. We need instead to untie the knots that bind us to it. We need to reweave the social fabric in ways that don't rely on it, and that are resistant to it. We need to develop ways of thinking about what we are doing that value the slow process of transforming every aspect of society—what Rudi Dutschke in 1968 called “the long slow march through the institutions” which don't rely on some future “grand” moment of contestation.²⁰ We need to develop ways of thinking about anti-capitalism that foster vigilance against the undermining and destruction of what we create.

The idea of revolution is a powerful inspirational image, if what it conjures up in our minds is the idea that capitalism needs to be completely pushed back from our social reality. Revolution means that we should not act in ways that helps capitalism perpetuate itself but that we should do what we can to minimize its negative impacts. The idea of revolution can inspire us to imagine an “outside” to capitalist relations. It means that another world is possible. But revolution also needs to be understood as a complex, multifaceted, never-ending process that takes place at all social levels.

Reformism

IN MANY MOVEMENTS there is a real distinction to be made between those who want to solve a problem at its root and those who want to ameliorate its worst effects. Think about those for whom it is enough to feed people at soup kitchens as opposed to those who want to eliminate the root causes of

poverty. Solving the problem of immigration at its roots means transforming the global economy in ways that allow people to stay in their home countries and for all people to have decent lives wherever they choose to live. This is different from a solution to the problem of immigration that grants amnesty to a few thousand people already living in a wealthy country while still criminalizing new people who enter illegally. Transforming our system of agriculture to the extent that we don't need to use pesticides, underpaid labor, and huge amounts of fossil fuels is a much more ambitious goal than opening a farmer's market. Many people use the terms revolutionary and reformist to mark those sorts of distinctions.

But ideas of revolution and reform can be frozen into an unproductive binary. One option seems to be a total revolution happening all at once at a moment of crisis in capitalism. The other appear to be a reformism that can seem like nothing more than a series of efforts that will ameliorate some of capitalism's worst excesses but will not ultimately make any real difference. Among anti-capitalists, reformism is usually represented by Bernstein's view that capitalism can be encouraged to simply evolve into socialism without any power struggle. The revolutionaries tend to gravitate toward Lenin's position, which calls for a revolution to overthrow capitalism in a way that focuses on a dramatic turning point. Neither of these positions is viable. Some thinkers, such as the early twentieth century Italian anarchist Errico Malatesta, the late twentieth century French socialist André Gorz, and the late twentieth century American radicals James and Grace L. Boggs worked from the position that reforms can lead to deep transformation. Still, contemporary thinking on how to get past capitalism tends to be trapped in a mode that sees challenging capitalism as an all or nothing affair.²¹

One of the main goals of this book is to break the pull of that either/or opposition so that we can explore the space between those views. How can we understand the relationship between things done to improve people's lives and the fight against capitalism? How can we understand the processes that help reproduce capitalism and take action to weaken those links? How can we think about the kinds of power that can be mobilized to fight capitalism and the kinds of actions that are likely to be taken to thwart us? Looking into these kinds of questions will be much more fruitful than the question of whether our actions are reformist or revolutionary. I propose

the concept *revolutionary reform* to refer to the small steps taken to get past capitalism. “Reform” puts emphasis on small steps taken to build toward change, whereas “revolution” is intended to be a reminder of the ultimate goal: getting past capitalism.

Being a Revolutionary

CLOSE YOUR EYES AND CONJURE up the image of an anti-capitalist revolutionary. Perhaps you are looking at a man with a gun. Few of us can be, or want to be, that man with a gun. This masculine fighting stance helps us imagine the situation as serious, but it also allows us to romanticize and displace the action from the places that most of us inhabit.

On most of the fronts where anti-capitalist action is taking place, and needs to take place, a different sort of actor is required. An effective anti-capitalist is someone who is subtle in her perception, flexible in her modes of operation. Sometimes she yells and throws things but often she keeps her silence and builds on the values of others whose worldview is radically different from her own. She is a spy, an insider, and a chameleon, as well as a rebel and a militant. She doesn't think in black-and-white terms but rather has a keen sense of ambiguities and the ability to hold contradictions in her mind. She is more Taoist than cultish.²² She isn't quick to moralize about her own actions or those of others. She can work knowing that there is a radical uncertainty to the situation. With every change in our situations, our analysis and strategies need to be reevaluated, and our stance or style needs to be transformed.²³

An anti-capitalist agent is one who disrupts capitalism and finds new ways to weave the social fabric. She is subversive. She interrupts things that help capitalist logics replicate themselves. She supports the processes that build alternatives and that build a movement for challenging capitalism. She helps us to develop a narrative that will make sense of where we are going and the journey there. An anti-capitalist agent knows the importance of hope and isn't afraid to declare victory sometimes or see the ways that the new is being created from within the body of the old.²⁴

Conclusion

HOW WE THINK ABOUT the nature of capitalism has implications for how we challenge it. If capitalism is a unified system that is able to do anything to stop those challenging it; if capitalism can only be destroyed by smashing that social totality; if capitalism must be brought down by taking over all of the states and transnational structures that support it all at once; then we don't have much hope of a world without capitalism.

If we want to develop ways to engage in practical activity that will make a difference in getting past capitalism then we need to find ways of understanding capitalism's vulnerabilities. We need a theory of the practices that make up the thing we call capitalism that will help us to understand how they are connected and how those connections can be disrupted.

Notes

1. The Mexican revolution was the first. The Lenin described here is the Lenin of *What is to be Done*. In *State and Revolution* Lenin expresses views not consistent with those described here and not followed by many activists who see themselves as Leninists.

2. Within the Marxist tradition there have been debates about the extent to which social reality is determined by the economic conditions of society. In a letter, Friedrich Engels wrote, "Marx and I are ourselves partly to blame for the fact that the younger people sometimes lay more stress on the economic side that is due to it. We had to emphasize the main principle *vis-à-vis* our adversaries, who denied it and we had not always the time, the place or the opportunity to allow other elements in the interaction to come into their own rights." Friedrich Engels (1890), "Letter to Joseph Bloch," in *The Marx-Engels Reader*, ed. Robert Tucker (New York: Norton, 1972), 762.

While there are many complexities to this issue, and many ways that Marx and Engel's own positions are often quite nuanced on these subjects, there is a thread within their work that represents social reality as determined by economic forces, as constituted by one set of economic relations at a time and which constructs the transition from one mode of production to the next as an almost inevitable working out of a natural process of development.

Marx believed that what he was doing was social science, and he thought that the underlying patterns he saw in society worked according to the same level of determination

as the laws of nature. Lenin takes up this view of Marx's analysis of society as a science: "Marx deepened and developed philosophical materialism to the full, and extended the cognition of nature to include the cognition of *human* society. His *historical materialism* was a great achievement in scientific thinking. The chaos and arbitrariness that had previously reigned in views on history and politics were replaced by a strikingly integral and harmonious scientific theory, which shows how, in consequence of the growth of productive forces, out of one system of social life another and higher system develops—how capitalism, for instance, grows out of feudalism." Vladimir Lenin (1913), "The Three Sources and Three Component Parts of Marxism," in *The Lenin Anthology*, ed. Robert Tucker (New York: Norton, 1975), 311–398.

Often Marx's unit of analysis is society taken as a whole, and the economic system is seen as the basis of that social system. Societies are taken to be unified totalities, embodying one main set of contradictions, and the movement caused by the working out of those contradictions is seen as the motor of history. All of this is believed to be understood with scientific certainty.

3. Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels (1848), "Manifesto of the Communist Party," in *The Marx-Engels Reader*, 477–78.

4. In *Making History: Agency, Structure, and Change in Social Theory*, Marxist theorist Alex Callinicos suggests that Marx's own work as well as the work of some contemporary followers of Marx can fall into a form of functionalism, where "every action, particularly by members or representatives of the ruling class, reveals some hidden pattern, is explicable as part of some long-term project somehow corresponding to deep-rooted changes in the structure of capitalism. (As this suggests, the transition from functionalism to a conspiratorial view of history is all too easy.) . . . [such theories] end up treating agents as 'cultural dopes,' the bearers of social norms and values which dictate their actions, so that, as Adam Przeworski puts it, 'the society becomes internal to individuals who manifest their internalized society in their actions.'" Alex Callinicos, *Making History: Agency, Structure, and Change in Social Theory* (Leiden: Brill, 2004), 87. Also see: Adam Przeworski, *Capitalism and Social Democracy* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 93.

5. Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels (1848), "Manifesto of the Communist Party," in *The Marx-Engels Reader*, 483.

6. Vladimir Lenin (1917), "State and Revolution," in *The Lenin Anthology*, 315, 335.

7. Vladimir Lenin (1918), "The Renegade Kautsky," in *The Lenin Anthology*, 469.

8. Marx and Engels (1848), "Manifesto of the Communist Party," in *The Marx-Engels Reader*, 490. For Engels's position on the need for an electoral road to socialism see: Friedrich Engels (1883), "Speech at Karl Marx's Funeral," in *The Communist Manifesto by Karl Marx and Frederick Engels with Related Documents*, ed. John E. Toews (Boston: Bedford and St. Martin's Press, 1999), 164–65.

9. Eduard Bernstein (1909), *Evolutionary Socialism*, Trans. Edith C. Harvey (New York: Schocken, 1975), 146.

10. Rosa Luxemburg (1899), "Social Reform or Revolution," in *The Rosa Luxemburg Reader*, eds. Peter Hudis and Kevin B. Anderson (New York: Monthly Review Press, 2004), 132–33. Emphasis in original.

11. Leon Trotsky (1939), "The Transitional Program: The Death Agony of Capitalism and the Tasks of The Fourth International" (2007): <http://www.socialistparty.net/pub/manifestcomm/transprog.htm>. And see: Rosa Luxemburg (1899), "Social Reform or Revolution," in *The Rosa Luxemburg Reader*, 128–167.
12. Luxemburg (1899), "Social Reform or Revolution," in *The Rosa Luxemburg Reader*, 132.
13. Kautsky was at Engels's deathbed, and for many years was seen as the person responsible for carrying the views of Marx and Engels forward. Born in Prague and raised in Austria, he came to be deeply involved in the German Social Democratic Party.
14. Vladimir Lenin (1918), "The Renegade Kautsky," in *The Lenin Anthology*, 466.
15. Vladimir Lenin (1918), "The Renegade Kautsky," in *The Lenin Anthology*, 462.
16. Marx and Engels (1848), "Manifesto of the Communist Party," in *The Marx-Engels Reader*, 469–500. For an excellent critique of Leninist approaches to the state, see: Nicos Poulantzas (1978), *State, Power, Socialism*, trans. Patrick Camiller (London: Verso, 2000).
17. For a case history of how unionization led by radicals brought about the development of a middle class, see: Glenna Matthews, *Silicon Valley, Women and the California Dream: Gender, Class and Opportunity in the Twentieth Century* (Palo Alto: Stanford University Press, 2003).
18. Howard Zinn, *A People's History of the United States: 1492 to the Present* (New York: Harper Collins, 2001).
19. This is the core argument of Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy* (New York: Verso, 1985).
20. Michael Watts, "1968 and all that . . . ," *Progress in Human Geography* 25, no. 2 (June 2001): 157–188.
21. Vladimir Lenin (1917), "State and Revolution," in *The Lenin Anthology*, 311–398. For a classical anarchist discussion that does not polarize reform and revolution, see: Errico Malatesta, *The Anarchist Revolution*, ed. Vernon Richards (London: Freedom Press, 1995), 83. Good work has also been done by socialists such as André Gorz and James Boggs and Grace Lee Boggs. See André Gorz, *Socialism and Revolution*, trans. N. Denny (London: Allen Lane, 1975). See also: James Boggs and Grace Lee Boggs, *Revolution and Evolution in the Twentieth Century* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1975).
22. Dennis Tourish and Tim Wohlforth, *On the Edge: Political Cults Left and Right* (Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe, 2000).
23. For a great discussion on the value of ambivalence and complexity in radical movements see: Gloria Anzaldúa, *Borderlands: La Frontera: The New Mestiza* (San Francisco: Aunt Lute Books, 1987).
24. Rebecca Solnit, *Hope in the Dark: Untold Histories, Wild Possibilities* (New York: Nation Books, 2004).

The Reproduction of Capitalist Processes

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IF CAPITALISM ISN'T A MONOLITHIC SYSTEM that must be overthrown by a revolutionary working class smashing the state, how can we understand its nature and develop strategies for challenging it? Capitalism is made up of a variety of interrelated practices, from the enclosure of the commons at the dawn of capitalism to today's exploitation of native lands; from our dependency on shopping to feel cool to our dependency on wage labor to survive; from the commercialization of our electoral processes to the commercialization of ways medicine is delivered. Once we begin to understand the ways that the practices that constitute capitalism come together, what the forces for their reproduction are, and where the vulnerabilities in that reproduction lie, we can then begin to develop realistic strategies for working to get past capitalism.

In 1979, in the Central American country of Nicaragua, a group of mostly young people in the Sandinista Party were able to overthrow the government of Anastasio Somoza. Somoza was a brutal dictator kept in power by an elite of large-scale landowners with strong support from the U.S. In 1981 I was deeply involved with supporting a similar revolution in nearby El Salvador, and I went to Nicaragua to see what a living revolution looked like. When I got off the plane in Managua I could feel the excitement in the air. Everywhere I went I saw people working on creative projects for building a new society based on cooperation, with attention to the needs of all. The

Sandinistas attempted to build a new society based on using the government to serve the people's needs. Their goals were noble and they had some real successes.

When the Sandinistas came to power, almost immediately the Reagan administration funded followers of Somoza to take up arms to undermine the revolution in violation of laws passed by the U.S. Congress. What came to be known as the Contra War (named for the Spanish nickname for counter-revolutionaries) diverted huge amounts of Nicaraguan resources that could have been used to build a new economy. The Contra War killed thousands of civilians and ultimately undermined popular support for the revolution. We need to understand how capitalism works so that we can understand how the dreams of those young revolutionaries got thwarted.

The powerful transformations Evo Morales began in Bolivia since his election in 2005 have not been thwarted. Coming to the presidency on the wave of change that first came to world attention with the fights over the privatization of the water system of the city of Cochabamba, Morales has led the Movement for Socialism (known as MAS, meaning "more" in Spanish) to push for and achieve many powerful changes in Bolivian society, such as nationalizing eighty-two percent of the oil industry. Morales himself comes from the Aymara indigenous group, and he incorporated an Aymara ritual into his inauguration. In a country where fifty-five percent of the population is indigenous, Morales's presidency has had powerful meaning for that community. We need to understand how capitalism functions in order to make sense of Morales's successes and the challenges his movement faces.

I am presently involved in the movement to stop catastrophic climate change from destroying life on this planet. As an anti-capitalist I have been fascinated by the ways that the business community in the U.S. is divided in its response to climate change. In 2006, California's Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger signed into law Assembly Bill 32 (AB 32)—one of the most far-reaching laws in the world for dealing with climate change. The law imposes strong regulations on industries that emit greenhouse gases and sets up regulations to foster the development of environmentally friendly alternatives, from helping people finance better insulation for their homes to subsidizing solar power.

AB 32 was supported by many businesses, from agribusiness to the ski industry (both of which stand to lose big with climate change) to green technology (which stands to win big with a new economy). As I write this, two Texas oil companies are promoting a ballot initiative to overturn it. We need to analyze how capitalism functions in order understand the complex dance that is going on with the climate law.

Social Formation Theory

ONE IMPORTANT PLACE to start in understanding the failure of the Nicaraguan Revolution and the drama around California's AB 32 is to look at the complex and contingent ways that capitalism works. In their book, *Racial Formation in The United States*, American sociologists Michael Omi and Howard Winant developed a theoretical approach for understanding race that is helpful for understanding other systems of domination as well. Built into their theory is a method for understanding the ways that social patterns come to be reproduced.¹

Like racism, capitalism can be thought of as a social formation, and theories of how social formations are generated, evolve, and are changed can offer useful parallels for those seeking to end capitalist social formations. Omi's and Winant's approach allows us to grasp capitalism as a set of social forces that create dynamics that are at work in society, without fooling us into believing that those systems are the only forces at work or that somehow all those different sets of forces are interconnected in one overarching system.

Omi and Winant look at racism historically, that is, as a set of beliefs and practices that evolved over time. They argue that before the colonial period began five hundred years ago people had a variety of ways of thinking about people from other places and cultures. Some treated foreigners with respect, at other times with disgust. And many early European views of non-European people were positive. The Portuguese explorers who in the 1500s began traveling along the West coast of Africa brought back stories of fascinating people with beautiful cities and interesting customs.

Bartolomé de las Casas was a sixteenth-century Dominican priest who moved from Spain with his father to the island of Hispaniola and witnessed

firsthand the brutal treatment of indigenous people. He became an opponent of brutal treatment of indigenous people and the enslavement of African people.

As colonialism developed, an increasing number of people came to have an interest in convincing others to look down on colonized and enslaved people, that is, the people they were exploiting, as inherently inferior. By the time of Thomas Jefferson, the notion of a natural inferiority was widely accepted among colonists. Omi and Winant quote Jefferson as saying, “Will not a lover of natural history, then, one who views the gradations in all the animals with the eye of philosophy, excuse an effort to keep those [gradations] in the department of Man as distinct as nature has formed them?”²

Omi and Winant theorize that racist consciousness and racist ways of organizing society developed over time, as different patterns of interaction came to be embedded in society. Racial exploiters passed down their beliefs, habits, laws, and property relations to subsequent generations. People who are subjected to racist ideology and practices create their own notions of racial pride, ways of living, family structures (such as extended and friend-based kin systems) and political organizations.

Altogether, this mix of activities and ideas is what Omi and Winant call a *racial formation*: a set of practices and ideas about race that structure social institutions and culture. Like capitalism, racial formation has no core. There is no central thing making it happen. Rather, the forces that lead to its reproduction are dispersed throughout society and are expressed or acted out by individuals and institutions alike. They are anchored in a variety of social norms, laws, ideas, institutions, and psychological processes. A social formation is a deeply hybrid set of practices which are interrelated but not easily untangled. They have no central “essence” that can be used to explain on a fundamental level how they operate.

When we apply Omi and Winant’s approach to race as a means of understanding current climate politics we can see that while it may make sense for a Texas oil company to oppose strong climate legislation, many other businesses stand to gain from those same laws. Capitalist forces will try to thwart the projects of the Sandinistas but they may not have enough power to get rid of Evo Morales. And Bolivia’s MAS may be more successful build-

ing alliances based on talking about indigenous ways of organizing society than by talking about communism.

Omi and Winant don't follow the Marxist tradition of seeing society as having a material base that is in a complex relationship to a separate structure of ideas. Neither does Jamaican-born, British theorist Stuart Hall. These theorists argue that cultural processes are often the very problems we are trying to address, not simply reflections of real problems that exist on a material level. As Hall puts it:

how things are represented and the “machineries” and regimes of representation in a culture do play a *constitutive*, and not merely a reflexive, after-the-event, role. This gives questions of culture and ideology, and the scenarios of representation—subjectivity, identity, politics—a formative, not merely expressive, place in the constitution of social and political life.³

This is not to say that cultural practices determine social reality on their own but rather they are an important part of the whole complex of social reality. They are not a less significant axis of social power than the economy, as traditional Marxist theory argues.

The Sandinistas were not just trying to overthrow capitalism; they were trying to get rid of a brutal dictator. The *contras* were people displaced by the change and were open to making money as mercenaries. Much of the motivation for the Nicaraguan Revolution was national pride. Evo Morales, for that matter, is able to hold the support of the Bolivian people partly as a result of the cultural pride that comes with being part of an indigenous movement. And because the movement has deep indigenous roots, many of the changes being wrought in Bolivia support the flourishing of indigenous culture.

The U.S. Chamber of Commerce opposes national climate legislation even though some of this legislation seems crucial for maintaining the conditions for a functioning capitalist system. They have had a knee jerk reaction to regulation (capitalists generally oppose regulation) and have been more responsive to their members who represent the old fossil fuel industry than to their members who stand to win in the new green economy. The position

on climate legislation couldn't have been deduced from an analysis of what capitalism needs to reproduce itself. Instead, understanding such a position requires sensitivity to the institutional and historical details of the situation, and includes both cultural and material aspects.

As with racism, there is no essential core that constitutes capitalism. There is no one set of practices that can be disrupted in order to destroy it. But neither is it simply "everywhere". The patterns of capitalist power relations are deeply interwoven with patterns relating to other systems of domination. And like capitalism itself these social patterns have evolved historically and must be analyzed empirically to understand how they are reproduced and how they can be challenged.

As we look at the ways that capitalism operates we will see that a whole body of transnational institutions has developed that support regimes like Anastasio Somoza's and attempts to overthrow leaders like Evo Morales. While capitalist forces tend to work together to uphold the conditions required for capitalism to flourish, the entire owning class in any given country can end up captured by a particular faction acting in its own interest rather than in the general interest of the entire class. The racism that the old Bolivian government practiced against the indigenous population helped to reinforce patterns of land ownership that became part of the structure of how capitalism grew to operate in that country.

Agency and Reproduction

WHEN WE THINK ABOUT how social patterns have evolved we need to look at how people have interacted over time in terms of their individual agency—their ability to make things happen. We also need to consider the ways that social patterns develop.

In the case of racism, Omi and Winant refer to the *racial projects* of individuals, political groups, or social institutions (such as banks) that shape society. These agents have reasons for trying to make certain things happen; they have "projects." But such projects come to have lives of their own and are reproduced in unpredictable ways as they come together to make up the racial formation of a time and place.

Those working to perpetuate racism create laws, develop cultural attitudes, use weapons, enact zoning laws, imprison people, and use a vast variety of other mechanisms to protect their privilege. In the early days of modern racism all of this was done by a fairly small group of people: the early colonists.

In his book, *One Drop of Blood: The American Misadventure of Race*, author Scott L. Malcomson describes what he takes to be the beginning of racism in the U.S. Before the 1640s a black person's status was determined by being a slave and not by being black.

While not all blacks were slaves, many slaves were black (recognizing that the term *Negro* sometimes included Indians). Antiblack legislation and court decisions tended to spring, in the early decades, from a social need to control slaves (rather than to control blacks) . . . slavery, rather than skin color truly determined one's status. After all, one of the earlier human-chattel cases, from 1654, arose when a black master (Anthony Johnson) successfully imposed lifelong bondage on a black servant (John Casor) who had believed himself to be only indentured.⁴

In 1676 a group of people in Virginia rebelled against the government of Virginia in reaction to Indian raids on land held by poor freed people and wealthy landowners (today we know this uprising as Bacon's Rebellion). The ruling class of Virginia responded by hardening the racial lines in the colony and building an alliance between poor whites and wealthy white landowners. In uniting against Indians, whites of different classes came together as *whites* for the first time in the history of the U.S. Through the next decades, the idea of race became increasingly enshrined in U.S. law, as laws were made not for "slaves" but for "blacks"; they were made not for dealing with specific land disputes but for dealing with "Indians."⁵ Whites began acting in the interest of whites rather than as landowners who happened to be white.

Sometimes racial projects are intentional acts, as in the case of the Virginia ruling class, which sought a way to form an alliance with poor whites against blacks and Indians. Intentional racial projects are often carried out by groups of people working together in organizations such as the Ku Klux

Klan or the anti-racist group the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People. In other instances, racial projects form as a result of the unconscious coordination of people who are simply acting out of a shared sense of meaning or purpose. Omi and Winant talk about racial projects as the actions of people or supra-individual bodies that carry and reproduce racial patterns. Racism starts with a particular political project: the justification of forms of exploitation related to slavery and colonialism. These projects set into motion more complex dynamics that take on lives of their own.

Capitalism can be understood in a similar way: a set of practices that begin in a particular historical moment and then develop into patterned structures. Capitalism is better understood as a contingent, or historically accidental, set of interrelated practices rather than as an organism or a machine. And following Omi and Winant, we can think about capitalism as embodied in and perpetuated by the projects of a variety of agents.

The colonial project associated with Columbus and the Age of Exploration developed over time into practices of slavery and colonialism in the rest of the world, and into processes of enclosure and industrialization in much of Europe. In his account of the origins of capitalism in England, British Marxist historian Robin Blackburn argues that it was mostly well-connected members of aristocratic English families who engaged in mercantile enterprises abroad. They then returned to England with money to invest. These merchants propelled the historic shift from local exchange of surplus production to the global hegemony of market relations we now call capitalism.

Many well-connected men were excluded from access to wealth and power by the system of primogeniture, which gave power and resources only to a family's oldest son. These mercantilists began to pressure for a new round of enclosure to justify and allow for their own emergence as the new political and economic elite. This set of processes, Blackburn argues, was crucial for the rise of capitalism.⁶

Many different circumstances contributed to the rise of capitalism. Crucial for our discussion here is the fact that a new group of people found themselves in positions of political and economic power for the first time. Through a complex set of processes they constituted a social formation in which they were able to use their social resources for individual enrichment. As some people took advantage of this opportunity, vast numbers of oth-

ers were subsequently uprooted from their previous ways of meeting their needs and the needs of their families and were left with no other option for survival than to sell their labor for a wage. The younger sons' recipe for success called for the creation of laws and the use of force to insure the proper conditions for early capitalism to flourish.

But how is capitalism as a system maintained long after the demise of mercantilism, primogeniture, British colonialism, and British slavery? A crucial form of agency for capitalist reproduction is the owning class *acting* as a class. In the contemporary world we see that there are institutions such as the World Bank and the IMF as well as the Chambers of Commerce of many towns and cities that work to protect what their members take to be the general interests of business as a whole. While these bodies are made up of individuals, it is not people *as individuals* who make capitalism survive. If an owning class person were to act in opposition to their class interests in any fundamental way the system would find ways to reject that person and their project and would enlist other individuals to carry their pro-capitalist projects forward. The owning class then comes to be a kind of agent. Just as the owning class came together with the white working class in Virginia, so do groups of agents come together to create projects that move different social formations forward.

In the fight to deal with climate change globally few involved see their work as having anything to do with capitalism. Indeed, there are many ways that the climate crisis is about the conditions of a good form of life for all people on the planet; it isn't just capitalist practices that lead to greenhouse gas emissions. And yet, we are coming to a point in the fight against climate change where the technical solutions to the problem are fairly obvious and well-enough developed to solve the problem now.⁷ The forces lining up in the U.S. to prevent strong action are almost entirely the result of pro-capitalist projects, from the actions of oil companies to sow skepticism in the U.S. public to the actions of the U.S. Chamber of Commerce to fight against strong legislation to the attempt by Texas oil companies to invalidate California's landmark climate legislation (AB 32).

One hopeful aspect of the fight against climate change is that the capitalist class is quite divided on what to do about it. Oil, gas, and coal companies are doing all they can to prevent meaningful action. But many pro-

capitalist forces, from green businesses to businesses that rely on a healthy environment (such as those that are tourism related) to individuals such as California's Republican governor Arnold Schwarzenegger, see their interests as dependent on a dream of a new sustainable form of capitalism.⁸

As I am writing this, forces working against climate change are most successful in areas where the issue of capitalism can be easily avoided. Examples of this work include developing win-win incentives for home energy conservation, promoting energy use reduction for businesses, and promoting car pooling. New organizations such as the Movement for Climate justice are working to expose corporations that undermine strong climate legislation, such as Chevron. The Movement for Climate justice is also working to transform the patterns of transportation that favor the interests of capitalist developers over the needs of people in low income communities of color.

The capitalist projects surrounding the Nicaraguan Revolution were also complex. Pro-capitalist aspects of the U.S. government were united in their desire to overthrow the revolutionary government. There were deep divisions in the government about the extent to which the law should be broken in order to do so but little division over the goal itself. European capitalists, on the other hand, saw the Nicaraguan Revolution as pushing for a form of social democracy not unlike their own systems, and could not see how supporting a counterrevolutionary movement to overthrow the Sandinistas was acceptable. The Nicaraguan owning class was deeply divided. Many business owners prospered under the Sandinistas since Somoza could no longer use the military to support his (and his cronies') businesses. Members of all classes shared the nationalist desire for an independent country. And yet some business owners were worried that the movement would eventually lead to deeper forms of socialism, where business would be restricted.

The Sandinistas worked hard not to provoke a backlash by the owning class by moving slowly in taking over businesses, allowing large landowners to keep their land, and allowing businesses to remain in private hands. But the level of social transformation was too much for the U.S. owning class, who saw the revolution as playing an important part in the global division of power between the U.S. and the Soviet Union. To the U.S., the Nicaraguan Revolution was one more scrimmage in the Cold War. By overthrowing a U.S. puppet in favor of a nationalist government that would pursue an inde-

pendent foreign policy and by shifting the economy to serve the interests of the poor, the Sandinistas came up against a pro-capitalist policy of the U.S. government at the time: keep countries of the Global South in a subordinate economic and political position.

In both the Nicaraguan Revolution and the movement to stop climate change, pro- and anti-capitalist agents have projects. Pro-capitalist and anti-capitalist interests are constructed and worked for or worked against in a variety of different ways.

Traditional Marxist analyses often suppose that classes will be unified to advocate for their interests. Even within mainstream sociology there is a tendency to suppose that the choices made by social actors can be deduced from an analysis of social structures.

But if social structures exist on a “fundamental” level and do not require the intent of individuals to exist, do we understand what animates, protects, and challenges social structures? Social structures are agents in their own right and yet how a “system” makes things happen is often very obscure. This idea of an obscure actor having its way with society can lead to a sense of inevitability of that actor’s success, and we may have a hard time grasping how to stop it.

On the other hand, some go to the opposite extreme: perhaps social structures are nothing more than the accumulation of the actions of individuals. If this is the case then the problem becomes: how is it that similarly situated individuals, such as members of a particular racial group, tend to act in predictable ways, when members of other racial groups tend to act in different ways? If society is composed of individuals, then how do we understand the ways that individuals consciously or unconsciously tend to act in ways that exhibit patterns?⁹ How is it, for example, that blacks and Latinos experience much higher rates of incarceration for drugs than do white people, even though the levels of drug usage are roughly the same? We need some sense of a system to understand such outcomes.

One way to think about who and what reproduces social systems, including the system of capitalism, is offered by the concept of *emergent properties*. It arose out of systems theory, an approach to understanding systems—from ecology to computers—developed in the 1950s. An emergent property is one that arises in ways that are not determined in any simple or direct way from

the material it is based on. When a very large number of individuals are acting in relation to one another social patterns form that cannot be reduced to, or understood by, reference to the things happening at a smaller scale.¹⁰ The excitement generated at a crowded rock concert is more than the sum of the individual reactions of each person to the music. The crowd comes to have a reaction that takes on a life of its own. The crowd comes to have a form of agency.

The most common example used to explain an emergent property is the relationship between the neurons of the brain and consciousness. In a sense, our brains are nothing but the sum total of all of the chemical processes happening in them. And yet when we think about what comprises an idea, it is clearly something different from a well-organized pile of chemicals. A thought has properties that go beyond the mere aggregation of all of those chemical reactions.

Agency is an emergent property of a social system. Forms of agency come into being, they persist over time, and they can be disrupted and transformed. They are constituted historically and contingently. We can say this of the agency of individuals and of classes, as well as the agency of social movements.

Capitalism began as a social project supported by the people who directly benefited from it; people acted explicitly to shape their culture in order to enrich their families. Capitalism has since become a social project supported by many forms of agency, from transnational institutions to pro-capitalist aspects of governments to the ways we are dependent upon a successful capitalist economy for jobs to the micro level where our desires for consumer goods encourage us to want the things that capitalism has to offer.

The means by which capitalism is perpetuated can be grouped into four main forms of agency: systems of desire and meaning among the general population; different ways the owning class comes together to act as an agent; the state; and a problem I will call the *economic dependency trap of capitalism*. What I mean by this is that in societies with high levels of capitalism people come to rely on a job that pays a wage to survive. As capitalism has developed as a social formation, each of these forms of agency have evolved in ways that expand the degree to which capitalism has come to work as a dominant set of threads holding together and reproducing the patterns of our lives.

*Systems of Desire and Meaning:
Ideology, Discourses, and Memes*

MARX'S CONCEPT OF *ideology* is a good first approximation at describing the ways systems of ideas help to reproduce capitalism. In one of his most famous phrases for describing ideology, Marx writes that "The ideas of the ruling class are in every epoch the ruling ideas."¹¹ The owning class, or as Marx says here "the ruling class," is able to influence the ways people think about the world through its influence on schools, the media, religion, artistic production, etc.¹² Through ideological processes, owning class ways of looking at the world, and ways of understanding the world that favor the owning class, come to have powerful effects on the idea systems of a society.

But the concept of ideology can become overly simplistic if ideology implies that all of the dominant ideas of a society will be the ideas of the ruling class. From this functionalist perspective our problems can seem simultaneously more intractable and more transformable than they are: more intractable because we become powerless in the face of a ruling class that always gets its way, yet more transformable when ideology comes to mean ruling class values that emerge from non-ruling class agents.

Capitalist ways of being in the world structure our lives at a much deeper level than the concept ideology expresses. Ideology does not simply overlay a set of beliefs onto otherwise blank slates, as if our views had nothing to do with when and how we were raised and the cultures we now inhabit. As such, we need concepts that acknowledge how capitalist ideas are not spread homogeneously across the entire social fabric. We need to look at the complex ways that they are woven into human experience in much of the world.

Twentieth-century French philosopher Michel Foucault used the word *discourse* in a non-traditional meaning of the term to describe a structure of power relations that is manifested through the social order by way of a complex combination of attitudes, ideas, ways of being, and institutions. He argues that particular discourses come to structure social reality in unseen ways as discourses are an important part of what makes people into the agents they believe they are.¹³ We perpetuate those discourses as we live according to what we have come to expect. If we apply this concept to capital-

ism and look at how capitalism operates as a discourse, we can see it as more than merely a set of ideas that the owning class imposes on us; it becomes the ways of being that we live—as consumers, as breadwinners, as bosses, and as union members. Capitalism becomes an important part of who we are.

Foucault argued against understanding challenges to power as the overthrow of something external to our selves. In *The History of Sexuality* he argues that because social power often operates by constructing who we are, we cannot use the idea of the autonomous self as the locus for liberation. In that book, he looks at the ways that the Freudian imperative to “know thyself” comes to be not just a process of self discovery but a process of self creation, where people form themselves into the kinds of people that Freudian psychology supposes we are. Foucault claims that we need to understand the operations of networks of power that constitute our social reality and work to subvert and rework those networks of power.

Foucault’s work operates at a general level, describing the forces that come to create us as agents. The late twentieth-century French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu argued that, because the patterns that underlie social functioning are always being constituted and reconstituted by people in their everyday practices, social structures are not objective, mechanical things. His work is helpful for understanding how discourses come to be reproduced. We reproduce social structures through our everyday activities, through the things we believe, through the things we say, and through how we treat other people. He called the complex structure through which live our *habitus*, from the Latin word for habit.

Bourdieu’s concept of habitus is intended to help explain how social patterns are reproduced by our daily activities and our way of understanding the world. Our habitus is the background culture that we both inhabit and create, and that forms the basis for what most sociologists call social structures. Bourdieu intends for this concept to help us get past seeing social patterns as objective or as existing outside the consciousness and intentions of others (and hence hard to imagine how they change) or, alternatively, as things formed by the will and intention of individuals.¹⁴

Bourdieu describes practice, or the things people do, as a form of regulated improvisation within the habitus. Improvisation is a helpful metaphor because it illuminates the idea that we are active and creative in what we do,

while at the same time we are limited. Just as in improvisatory music, if our creative actions are to have meaning they must regularly refer back to older patterns. Yet they are, within this frame, open for possibility.¹⁵

In music, a repeating form is called *leitmotif*. The repetition and transformation of leitmotifs is important for giving a piece of music its coherence and meaning. In political theory the concept of *meme* plays a similar role. According to the Oxford English Dictionary, a meme is defined as “an element of a culture or a system of behavior that may be considered to be passed from one individual to another by non-genetic means, especially imitation.”¹⁶ A meme can be as simple as the habit of saying “Hello” to strangers on the street or not saying “Hello” to them; that is, it can be as simple as an expression or manner of speaking. Social structures are helped in their reproduction by memes. Through memes we come to interpret the world that we inhabit and make sense of what is happening to us, what we do, and why others act the ways that they do.

While Bourdieu’s notion of habitus refers to the ways that social structures, or discourses, come to be reproduced, a meme can be understood as an element of a habitus. In order to understand the ways that capitalism is reproduced it is helpful to study the pro-capitalist memes that in one sense create us so that we can find ways to pull them out of the social fabric. Through an understanding of memes we are able to shift our perspective and see capitalism not as an unchangeable social totality but as threads of cultural and social practices that we can begin to unravel.

Living in a society dominated by capitalism, we inhabit a world where pleasure is increasingly structured as something to be bought. Fulfillment is conceived as something to be attained through the consumption of commodities. If we don’t make conscious choices or have a clear sense of our options we can reproduce capitalist ways of being in the world, for ourselves and for others, by following the expected ways of being. These practices then become memes, or self-reproducing practices.

Understanding the cultural memes that support capitalism will help open the way for imagining how to get past capitalism. Capitalism is built around Locke’s meme of people as fundamentally separate from one another and as individual at the core. It is built on the meme of fusing capitalism with democracy in our imaginations. It relies on the meme of a magical but

delicate market as a force the conjuring up wealth but whose functioning is so fragile that any tinkering will destroy its magic. Another meme is the shadow image of the “only” alternative to capitalism: a police state in which people have no control over their own lives and where everyone is poor and no one has any motivation to better themselves.

In the U.S. one of the most prevalent pro-capitalist memes is that of upward mobility. Deep in our culture are the beliefs that anyone can “make it” if they try, that working for a wage is morally righteous, and that those who have not made it are lazy, immoral, or simply happy being poor. Making it is defined in terms of wealth and the trappings of wealth are taken for the signs of a good life.

As mentioned in Chapter 2, there is a strand of economic theory developing that is based on an empirical analysis of what actually makes people happy. Not surprisingly, theorists have found across many different societies that above an income level of about \$10,000 dollars per year, there is no correlation at all between happiness and wealth. The strongest correlates of happiness are health and a sense of connection to others. Yet the belief that happiness comes from wealth is so deeply embedded in our culture that many people, when they look into their hearts and ask what they want from life, find that what they want is material wealth, fame, and beauty.¹⁷ As Foucault argues, social discourses reach deeply into who we are. They are not merely superficial overlays on a steady self.

One vector for the spread of such memes is the pervasive capitalist-oriented mass media that provide an image of happiness associated with the purchase of more consumer goods, bigger houses, and entertainment. The vast majority of media in the U.S. are privately held by an ever-shrinking number of huge transnational corporations. The owners of these businesses are in a strong position to control the media to suit their private purposes. But the actions of media owners are also constrained by what the public is interested in and by some still culturally held norms about honesty, freedom of speech, balance, etc.

In countries where larger percentages of the media are controlled by the public or by independent non-profits, there exists a wider general literacy about the complexities of the world. The U.S. media operate largely according to commodity logic, where the marketers decide what programming will

sell the most advertising, cause the least trouble, and be the cheapest to produce. Capitalist logic has led the media to move increasingly in the direction of entertainment and pandering. This has worked well to support capitalism, as people increasingly see themselves as consumers and pleasure seekers.

When news is presented as entertainment, people's response is connected to their desires for pleasure rather than to their interests as citizens of the world who have a stake in what is viewed.¹⁸ Entertainment-oriented media not only helps to develop a predilection for consumerism as a way of living a good life but also helps to develop passive orientation to the political world.

Consumerism is one of the central memes of capitalist reproduction. Our consciousness is deeply colonized by an orientation to the world that says that the most immediate way to respond to a desire is to buy something to satisfy it. Our sense of self comes to be thoroughly mediated by the kinds of products we buy. The ways we decorate our living spaces, the cars we drive, how we dress and do our hair, the things we do for fun—the texture of our day-to-day lives becomes caught up in the process of buying products. Ever more green products are marketed for us to buy to satisfy our desire to be green, such as disposable, “sustainably grown” bamboo plates. Even rebellious and anti-materialistic subcultures such as punk and grunge produce consumable goods to help one be seen by others as a member of a particular subculture. The consumerist way of being in the world has woven itself so deeply into our being that many people believe that it is simply human nature to want to buy ever more and “better” products (*Better* is necessarily placed in quotation marks here, since planned obsolescence of goods makes the life span of most products ever shorter. Some are so short they are broken before you get them home).¹⁹

Pro-capitalist memes abound. Pulling on almost any cultural thread will lead to a pro-capitalist meme. The phenomenon of coolness provides an illustrative example. In his book, *The Conquest of Cool*, American journalist and author Thomas Frank explores the ways that 1960s cultural rebellion was, from its inception, wrapped in the logic of consumerism.

The enthusiastic discovery of the counterculture by the branches of American business . . . marked the consolidation of a new species

of hip consumerism, a cultural perpetual motion machine in which disgust with the falseness, shoddiness, and everyday oppressions of consumer society could be enlisted to drive the ever-accelerating wheels of consumption.²⁰

Frank argues that hip consumerism is a way capitalism has successfully subverted an incipient anti-capitalist ethos. Hip consumers can submit to the workplace as obedient, complacent laborers but have an outlet for a seemingly more creative life as consumers engaged in a “nonstop carnival.”

Hip and square are now permanently locked together, like images of Coke and Pepsi, in a self-perpetuating pageant of workplace deference and advertising outrage. Our celebrities are not just glamorous, they are insurrectionaries; our police and soldiers are not just good guys, they break the rules for a higher purpose. And through them and our imagined participation in whatever the latest permutation of the rebel Pepsi generation, we have not solved, but we have diffused the problems of mass society. Impervious to criticism of any kind, and virtually without historical memory, hip has become what Normal Mailer predicted: the public philosophy of the age of flexible accumulation.²¹

If we see coolness as a meme, then we can understand it as something that has come to have social effectivity, which works in a virus-like fashion to reproduce itself. It would likely continue to be reproduced through a variety of cultural forms even if all advertising were to be outlawed, just as products are currently promoted to us through seemingly innocuous placements in entertainment media. That is because it is in how we experience our bodies, in our images of ourselves, and in how we see and experience each other.²² Extricating ourselves from it requires that we create new patterns of interaction, new bases for our sense of identity, and new forms of pleasure. And extricating ourselves from it requires that we begin to see the ways that we become constituted as what French social theorists Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guatarri call *capitalist desiring subjects*.²³

Capitalism is reproduced through a variety of discourses and memes that have evolved over time. These discourses and memes are constituted

by things as disparate as structures of ownership of the mass media, the ways we come to desire products, and the ways we experience our sense of self. The better we understand these practices in their historical contingency and in the ways they reinforce one another, the better position we will be in to challenge them.

The Owning Class

MUCH OF THE WORK OF REPLICATING capitalism occurs through memes that are deeply embedded in our social forms and that are not necessarily the result of the action of individuals working consciously to protect capitalism. No one needs to figure out how to promote consumerism as a way of life for it to be perpetuated ever more deeply into the social fabric. Each capitalist firm pursuing its own self-interest will look for ways to sell its product. Commercial media, which survive on advertising, create a welcoming space for those messages. Individuals who live in an environment saturated with such messages and with little free time to pursue other ways of being come to desire consumption as a way of living.

The viral forms of agency that perpetuate capitalism are often supplemented, especially in times of crisis, by intentional forms of agency. Where there are movements that threaten the powers and privileges of the owning class, that class often comes together as an intentional agent to fight back. The owning class often functions as what Marx called a *class for itself*, that is, as a class which knows its own interests and operates to protect them.²⁴

This claim is somewhat counter-intuitive since individual capitalists at competing companies are in a ruthless fight for customers and profits. Capitalists from Coke and Pepsi may fight with each other over market shares and factions of the owning class fight for preferential conditions for their industries over other industries, such as when water bottling companies fight fisheries or farming interests for access to a river's flow. And yet, the competition that exists between companies or industries takes place within a context of cooperation to maintain the conditions in which that competition occurs.²⁵ Even small towns in the U.S. have a Chamber of Commerce which operates to protect conditions for capitalism to flourish. In all countries with large capitalist sectors there are trade associations and business lobby groups that

fight tenaciously to make sure the national government provides the conditions conducive to its flourishing.

And, as sociologist William Robinson has argued, there is a transnational capitalist class still in the process of development, working to create optimal conditions for transnational forms of capitalism. Robinson calls that system of alliances a transnational state. The nation state came into being over the past few hundred years while capitalism was also coming into being. As such, ways of serving the needs of capitalism have become deeply embedded in the forms and functioning of nation states. As transnational capitalism is developing, a set of transnational institutions to support it is also developing. Robinson argues that this transnational state is not so much displacing nation states as it is linking them together under the predominance of new transnational institutions, such as the European Union, NAFTA, or the World Trade Association.

In describing the ways that members of the owning class work to create these transnational forms, Robinson writes,

Global corporate executives, for instance, manage their European capital operations through EU administrative structures, plan investments in North America through the NAFTA, consult with the IMF and WB on Latin American macroeconomic performance as regards their South American activities, coordinate their Asian plans with the Asian Development Bank over infrastructural needs, and so on. These same executives share their worldwide experience and strategies at the annual meetings of the WEF in Davos, Switzerland, over what proposals to bring to the WTO or the UN, just as IMF and WB officials, central bankers, and private transnational bankers might mingle together each year at the annual IMF and WB meetings in Washington, D.C., to discuss global finances and draw up policy. As transnational capitalists move about the world, their practices integrate these diverse supranational forums into a coherent network.²⁶

The owning class works quite intentionally to create conditions for the functioning of capitalism as a whole, for the success of their specific busi-

nesses, and for the interests of the owning class as a class. As such, it is one of the main forms of agency that operates to reproduce capitalism.

This owning class operates through its business practices, through setting up think tanks to perpetuate its ideas, through control over media, and through pushing for specific forms of legislation at every level of government. At the transnational level these forces fight for institutions such as the World Trade Organization. At the national level they work together for particular labor laws, tax policies, and trade agreements. At the local level they make sure developers are favored in planning processes. The owning class has many powerful tools at its disposal. One of the most powerful tools is that it can influence governments, referred to in political theory as states, that then themselves become agents of capitalism.

The State

ONE OF THE ODDEST THINGS about capitalism is that it is often thought of as if it were an independent set of practices having nothing to do with government. Markets are imagined to be completely autonomous and self-replicating. Governments are seen as prone to meddle with a capitalism that does better when left to operate on its own. And yet, in many ways, the state is a necessary twin of a capitalist economy. Capitalism arose at the same time as parliamentary democracy in Europe. Many members of the owning class advocated for parliamentary democracy in the early days of capitalism as a way to challenge the forms of authority and governmental structures that had existed under feudalism. In doing this they created the political space for their own rise to power. But this alliance between capitalists and advocates of democracy has always proven to be unstable.

From the very beginning, the democratic governments that emerged out of the European enlightenment were, on the one hand, mechanisms for people to be able to express their desires and interests and, on the other, mechanisms for the protection of the conditions required for a capitalist economy to function.²⁷

Thinkers such as Locke were able to make the case for a government as an arbiter between rational individuals pursuing their self-interest. For

Locke, the primary purpose of government was the protection of private property. As capitalism has become more predominant, owners of the means of production have been able to pressure or persuade governments to offer other services crucial for the smooth functioning of capitalism.

Describing the role of government in a society dominated by capitalism, British social theorist David Harvey writes in *A Brief History of Neoliberalism*,

The state has to guarantee, for example, the quality and integrity of money. It must also set up those military, defense, police, and legal structures and functions required to secure private property rights and to guarantee, by force if need be, the proper functioning of markets. Furthermore, if markets do not exist (in areas such as land, water, education, health care, social security, or environmental pollution) then they must be created, by state action if necessary. But beyond these tasks the state should not venture. State interventions in markets (once created) must be kept to a bare minimum because, according to the theory, the state cannot possibly possess enough information to second guess market-signals (prices) and because powerful interest groups will inevitably distort and bias state interventions (particularly in democracies) for their own benefit.²⁸

An important part of capitalism from its beginning has been the use of violence to protect the conditions necessary for resource extraction, to thwart the militancy of labor, to control and disempower undocumented immigrants, and to get “surplus populations” off the streets.²⁹ Governments have been dependable sources of violence to serve the needs of the owning class.³⁰

According to the Leninist way of thinking, in a capitalist society the state is nothing more than a powerful tool in the hands of the owning class. It provides all of the infrastructural needs Harvey mentions as well as the violence required to control anti-capitalist activity. By means of farcical elections the state appears to be legitimate in eyes of the population.

In his classic 1974 essay “State and Ruling Class in Corporate America,” sociologist William Domhoff made the case that ruling class interests are able to obtain their desired outcomes through the state by means of four main processes: “the special interest process,” through which corporations

and business groups use their considerable economic resources to lobby the government for policies which serve them; “the policy planning process,” through which they work with powerful think tanks and prominent individuals to formulate the outlines of acceptable general policies; “the candidate selection process,” through which members of the ruling class put resources behind candidates who share their interests; and through “the ideology process,” through which ruling class interests propagate values and attitudes which are conducive to the perpetuation of things as they are.³¹

Because pro-capitalist forces are able to dominate the state through these sorts of mechanisms, many anti-capitalists argue that there is no point in trying to do anything with the state but smash it. And yet, while Domhoff is right in arguing that the ruling class has had extraordinary success in influencing the policies of governments through the processes he outlines, his analysis makes these outcomes seem more inevitable than they are.

While it is true in the contemporary U.S. that we have two parties that largely represent ruling class interests, there are many capitalist dominated democracies around the world wherein political parties that represent ideologies challenging to capitalism have come to power. Huge changes are being wrought in Latin America by presidents who came to power through elections in the first decade of the 2000s, Evo Morales being just one example among many. Even in the U.S. there are numerous cases where mass movements have put policies on the political agenda and succeeded in getting them adopted, in opposition to ruling class interests. In the 1970s the environmental movement was able to push for the passage of groundbreaking laws, including the Clean Air Act and Clean Water Act, while Richard Nixon was president. In that period offshore drilling was banned in almost all of the U.S. The Gulf of Mexico was a tragic exception.

The Economic Dependency Trap of Capitalism

IN HIS BOOK, *Capitalism and Social Democracy*, Polish-born political theorist Adam Przeworski criticizes the ways that Marxists have tended to see the state as nothing but an agent of the ruling class. He argues that many are attracted to this sort of analysis because they have not been able to explain why it is that socialist parties in Europe throughout the twentieth century

accommodated themselves to capitalism rather than overthrowing it. Looking in some detail at Przeworski's analysis of European social democracy will help us to understand his view of the state as more than simply an agent of bourgeois domination. Further, it will be helpful for understanding both the ways that the state can be used for anti-capitalist action as well as some powerful constraints on such use. It directs us to look outside the state for important forms of agency that perpetuate capitalism.

Przeworski shows that in Europe there is a basic paradox for socialist parties: to win elections they must stand for improving the lives of the majority, not just the industrial working class. The best way to improve the lives of the majority quickly enough to win reelection is to gain concessions from the owning class, such as higher wages, a social safety net, and better working conditions. The European social democracies have accomplished this to a high level without challenging the private ownership of the means of production.³²

Przeworski argues that attempts to nationalize the means of production would lead to capitalists withdrawing from their side of the bargain and not investing in the national economy. Anti-capitalist organizing faces the challenge of the economic dependency trap of capitalism, wherein it becomes difficult to move stepwise away from capitalism since getting a job from a capitalist is the most likely way one can get what is needed to survive in a society dominated by capitalist processes. People in a largely capitalist society will generally see that their interests are served by the election of candidates who are able to provide a context in which business can be successful.

Elections then serve the owning class in two powerful ways. They help stabilize the capitalist economic structure by (usually) placing people in power who will prioritize protecting the conditions for capital accumulation. Elections also help to legitimize the system by showing that the majority has freely chosen capitalist priorities. Working class people will only ever vote to get rid of capitalism if anti-capitalist forces are able to transform society to the extent that peoples' well being is not dependent upon the well being of capitalists.

Przeworski shows that we don't need a functionalist theory of the state that posits an all powerful bourgeoisie invariably getting its needs met by the state, or a complex theory of how the masses are tricked by a false con-

sciousness set in place by bourgeois forces, to understand why European voters have not chosen to abolish capitalism. Instead, the explanation for why people choose capitalism is quite simple: it is often in their short-term self-interest.³³

The problem is not simply that capitalism is protected by a capitalist state. Przeworski's analysis shifts our attention from the state to the economic dependencies created by capitalism. This analysis leaves us with an understanding of the state as an important site of contestation but not as the central fulcrum point for anti-capitalist action.

The modern nation state is a place where different political forces, sectors of business, labor unions, and other interest groups vie for social leverage. Getting past capitalism does not become easier when we see the state in this way but our tasks become clearer as we understand the forms of agency and structural traps built into a society dominated by capitalism.³⁴

Conclusion

CAPITALISM IS REPRODUCED EVERY DAY by the ways we shop and desire to shop, as well as by how we talk to and judge each other. It is reproduced through legitimating processes such as elections, schools, and the media.³⁵ The state operates to give the capitalist owning class much of what it needs to function. Economic ideas are perpetuated that lead people to believe that their economic survival requires that they go along with what is in the interest of the ruling class, and ruling class interests have enormous power to use economic resources to discipline populations. In many cases people will vote in free elections for pro-capitalist parties because they know it will serve their short-term needs for jobs. And when the processes that keep capitalism humming along are seriously challenged, the capitalist owning class has access to force, which can operate on a variety of levels but especially at the level of the state in order to insure that capitalism continues to be reproduced throughout the social body.

Notes

1. Michael Omi and Howard Winant, *Racial Formation in The United States: From the 1600s to the 1980s* (New York: Routledge, 1994).
 2. Thomas Jefferson, quoted in Omi and Winant, *Racial Formation in The United States*, 63–64.
 3. Stuart Hall (1989), “New Ethnicities,” in *Stuart Hall: Critical Dialogues*, eds. David Morley and Kuan-Hsing Chen (New York: Routledge, 1996), 443. In an interesting twist on the question of the relationship between material reality and culture, George Yúdice points out that one of the main commodities, and therefore one of the main elements of the economic base of contemporary society is commercial culture. See George Yúdice, *The Expediency of Culture: Uses of Culture in the Global Era* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003).
 4. Scott L. Malcomson, *One Drop of Blood: The American Misadventure of Race* (New York: Farrar Strauss Giroux, 2000), 172.
 5. Malcomson, *One Drop of Blood*, 172–3.
 6. Robin Blackburn, *The Making of New World Slavery: From the Baroque to the Modern 1492–1800* (New York: Verso, 1997).
 7. For a detailed analysis of the array of solutions already available in 2007 and an analysis of how each solution could easily lead to 90% reductions in a period of twenty years, see George Monbiot, *HEAT: How to Stop the Planet from Burning* (Cambridge, MA: South End Press, 2007).
 8. Whether or not this dream is possible remains an open question. I believe that the fight against climate change will require much higher levels of government intervention in the economy as well as a deep transformation of our consumerist way of life, which is incompatible with the current level of capitalism in our economic and political systems. It is likely that the fight against climate change will be an important aspect of the fight against capitalism.
 9. The British sociologist Anthony Giddens (who made some important contributions to radical sociology before going on to be an apologist for neoliberal forms of capitalism) critiques what he sees as a dualism of structure and agency that is encouraged by most sociological thinking. He argues that much sociological thinking is built upon a problematic dualism of structure versus agency. That dualism imagines social structures to be like the walls of a room, with agents as the beings that move around in the rooms. As such, society is understood in one of two ways. It is either seen in functional terms, as a way of doing things that simply repeats and perpetuates itself no matter what happens and by any means necessary—that is, determined by the placement of the walls of the room. Or it is seen in individualistic terms—individual people simply make things happen by occasionally breaking through or reconstructing the walls of the room. See: Anthony Giddens, *The Constitution of Society: Outline of the Theory of Structuration* (Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 1986), 174.
- Giddens has also suggested that most of the ways that people, including sociologists, conceptualize social structures is as if they were the iron bars holding a building together. They then see the work of social analysis as peeling away superficial layers which appear to our eyes in order to get to the (real) solid layer which is the structure. For him, the

metaphor of the room and the metaphor of the building lead us astray. The building is in fact constituted by superficial layers in much the way an onion is made up of layers. Giddens calls this structuring through the totality of actions *structuration*. People's values and beliefs, the everyday practices they engage in, are just as much constitutive of social reality as are the material relations of production (as a Marxist would see the girders), or the laws and social norms (as a sociologist influenced by Max Weber might see them). See: Giddens, *The Constitution of Society*, 16.

10. In the article "Networks: the Ecology of the Movement," the Notes from Nowhere Collective explains, within their discussion of the value of decentered forms of organizing, the concept of emergence this way: "Think of the billions of neurons in your brain. A neuron on its own cannot write poetry, move a muscle, or dream, but working with other neurons it can produce extraordinary things. Now think of a dense mass of bees swarming across a landscape in search of the perfect location for a new hive; all this happens without anyone in charge, without any single command center. It wasn't until the advent of high-speed computers that scientists were able to unravel this mystery. Prior to that, they had observed the phenomena, but because they were attached to their clockwork view of the world, they literally couldn't believe their eyes. For years, after the idea had been first posited in the 1950s by Alan Turing, inventor of the computer, scientists couldn't believe it, and kept looking for a lead bird, a leading cell. Only computers could model these hugely complex self-organized, and interconnected systems. What scientists saw was astounding—each element, seemed to be following simple rules, and yet what the multitude did when the multitude was working together they were forming a highly intelligent sophisticated self-organized system. Nowadays software designers, urban planners and ecologists all use these concepts in their day-to-day work; the realm of politics has yet to catch up." See: Notes from Nowhere, ed., "Networks: The Ecology of Movements," in *We Are Everywhere: The Irresistible Rise of Global Anti-Capitalism* (New York: Verso, 2003), 63–73.

11. Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels (1845–46), "The German Ideology," in *The Marx-Engels Reader*, ed. Robert Tucker (New York: Norton, 1972), 172.

12. I prefer to use the term *owning class* to refer to the bourgeoisie rather than the term *ruling class* (as Marx tends to), because the extent to which they actually rule is an important part of what we need to be fighting over in the process of getting rid of capitalism.

13. Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality, Vol. 1*, Trans. Robert Hurley (New York: Vintage, 1980).

14. In the *The Logic of Practice*, Bourdieu writes: "The *habitus*—embodied history, internalized as a second nature and so forgotten as history—is the active presence of the whole past of which it is the product. As such, it is what gives practices their relative autonomy with respect to external determinations of the immediate present. This autonomy is that of the past, enacted and acting, which functioning as accumulated capital, produces history on the basis of history and so ensures the permanence in change that makes the individual agent a world within a world. The *habitus* is a spontaneity without consciousness, or will, opposed as much to the mechanical necessity of things without history in mechanistic theories as it is to the reflexive freedom of subjects 'without inertia' in rationalist theories." See: Pierre Bourdieu, *The Logic of Practice*, trans. Richard Nice (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1990), 56.

15. Bourdieu, *The Logic of Practice*, 57.

16. I first encountered this concept in an excellent article by Patrick Reinsborough. See: “Decolonizing the Revolutionary Imagination,” in *Globalize Liberation: How to Uproot the System and Build a Better World*, ed. David Solnit (San Francisco: City Lights Books, 2004), 161–212. The term was invented by biologist Richard Dawkins (1975), in his unfortunately titled book, *The Selfish Gene* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007).

17. Bill McKibben, *Deep Economy: The Wealth of Communities and the Durable Future* (New York: Henry Holt, 2007), 41.

18. Benjamin R. Barber, *Consumed: How Markets Corrupt Children, Infantilize Adults, and Swallow Citizens Whole* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2007).

19. For a discussion of how people in a capitalist society come to see consumerism as natural, see: Juliet B. Shor, *The Overworked American: The Unexpected Decline of Leisure* (New York: Basic Books, 1992), 117.

20. Thomas Frank, *The Conquest of Cool: Business, Culture, and the Rise of Hip Consumerism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997), 31.

21. Frank, *The Conquest of Cool*, 232–33.

22. See also: Mike Featherstone, *Undoing Culture: Globalization, Postmodernism, and Identity* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 1995), 23; and Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgment of Taste*, trans. R. Nice (London: Routledge, 1984).

23. Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guatarri, *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. Robert Hurley (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1983).

24. This concept was developed by Georg Lukács in *History and Class Consciousness* (1923), trans. Rodney Livingstone (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1990).

25. Paul Sweezy, “The Capitalist Class,” in *The Capitalist System, second edition*, eds. Richard Edwards, Michael Reich, and Thomas Weisskopf (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1978), pages 1645–78.

26. William Robinson, *A Theory of Global Capitalism: Production, Class, and State in a Transnational World* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2004), 119–20.

27. Talal Asad, *Formations of the Secular: Christianity, Islam, Modernity* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2003).

28. David Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 2.

29. Ruth Wilson Gilmore, *The Golden Gulag: Prisons, Surplus, Crisis, and Opposition in Globalizing California* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007).

30. One of the beauties of capitalism, from an owning class perspective, is that it ends up being reproduced without very much force on a day-to-day basis. People go to work, they do their job, and they get their paycheck. They submit to the authority of the boss every day and it is a rare day when this process doesn’t go smoothly. Gramsci argues that people accepting a system of domination through consent accept it not because they have been tricked though false consciousness to believe that capitalism is good; rather, they come to accept their conditions because they know on some level that if they don’t,

force will be used. The implicit threat of the use of force underlies many forms of consent in a capitalist society. Antonio Gramsci (1935), "The Intellectuals," in *The Antonio Gramsci Reader*, ed. David Forgacs (New York: New York University Press, 2000), 307. For an excellent analysis of Gramsci's view of the relationship between force and consent, see: Adam Przeworski, *Capitalism and Social Democracy* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 163–69.

31. William Domhoff, "State and Ruling Class in Corporate America," *Insurgent Sociologist* 4, no.3 (Spring 1974). The essay is reprinted in a somewhat abridged version in Richard Edwards, Michael Reich, and Thomas Weisskopf, eds., *The Capitalist System*, second edition (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1978), 163–251.

32. Przeworski, *Capitalism and Social Democracy*.

33. Przeworski, *Capitalism and Social Democracy*, 202.

34. For another analysis of the contested nature of the state in capitalist society, see: Nicos Poulantzas (1978), *Socialism, Power, Socialism*, trans. Patrick Camiller (London: Verso, 2000). This was his last book. In his earlier works his position was closer to a functionalist approach.

35. Samuel Bowles and Herbert Gintis, *Schooling in Capitalist America: Educational Reform and the Contradictions of Economic Life* (New York: Basic Books, 1976).

*Getting Past Capitalism ...
or How to Fight a Hydra in a Fog*

...

SINCE CAPITALISM IS A set of practices promoted by people enjoying consumer pleasures; and a culture whose imagination has been colonized by consumerism; and a ruling class that can keep voting majorities dependent on pro-capitalist policies (as well as the power of violence); how do we achieve a socially just and environmentally sustainable world?

There is no one core place to go to destroy capitalism. This is why it cannot be overthrown—why a coup against it won't work—and why even having a group of anti-capitalists take state power will not mean that it has been destroyed. Even countries like Bolivia, which have elected anti-capitalist governments, have to deal with local wealthy landowners, pro-capitalist media, the transnational capitalist ruling class, and transnational corporations, all working to undermine their progress to a new economy.

Capitalist logics have woven themselves deeply into the social fabric. They function as a widely-dispersed set of memes. Much like the work done by public health officials in virus eradication, anti-capitalists must use a multiplicity of means and they must be ever vigilant against the continual reemergence of new memes that will reproduce capitalist forms of destruction.

Traditionally, anti-capitalists have focused on the state as the central locus of anti-capitalist activity, usually attempting to overthrow governments that support capitalism. But while states are an important locus of strug-

gle, our analysis of how and when to fight states needs to be more nuanced than the idea of simply overthrowing the current group of people holding state power. In *Capitalism and Social Democracy*, Adam Przeworski argues that when given a choice, people often vote for capitalism because they know that when capitalists suffer so do their employees. Going along with capitalism is in many people's short-term self-interest. States are often places where pro- and anti-capitalist interests vie for influence. Crucial to anti-capitalist struggle is challenging the conditions that make peoples' short-term self-interest dependent on capitalism, and that make them feel compelled to act according to short-term material interest rather than emotional, spiritual, environmental, or social interest.

Much of the way people who are critical of capitalism think of challenging it involves visions of military struggle. The concepts we use suppose an "us" on one side and a "them" on the other. We imagine that someday, somehow, "we" will defeat "them" and the world will be ours.

For over a century, radical anti-capitalists have assumed that they need to confront the state through armed struggle. While they have debated the relative merits of smashing or simply taking control of the state, they have agreed that the most pressing action in challenging capitalism would be an armed struggle against capitalist-dominated nation states. Many anti-capitalist activists imagine taking state power through military means to be the central task for opposing capitalism.

Even before modern high-tech weaponry made military insurrection so unlikely in getting rid of pro-capitalist states, Italian Marxist philosopher Antonio Gramsci, who used military metaphors quite a bit in his writing, argued that defeating capitalism would not proceed through any simple kind of warfare against the state.¹ Responding to the success of the Russian Revolution and the belief among many in Western Europe that the Russians had found a model for others to follow, Gramsci pointed out that the Russians were able to overthrow their government through a quick military strategy largely because the Russian state was not very deeply woven into the social fabric of everyday life.

For Gramsci, pro-capitalist ways were so deeply entrenched in the social fabric in Western Europe that overthrowing them would involve a new way of thinking about war. The problem was akin to fighting a battle where the

opponent was hiding in many rows of trenches. The government represents just one of those rows.²

Gramsci made a distinction between two parts of the struggle against capitalism. The more traditionally military one is a war of maneuver, where each side uses direct force to battle the other side. The other is a war of position, where the primary means of struggle are the building of forms of hegemony or the weaving of systems of meaning and social practices that place your side in a better position to win. He argued that in Western Europe, as contrasted with Russia, a large part of the struggle against capitalism would occur as the latter of these: a war of position.

The traditional military imagery implied by the war of maneuver is misleading in two important ways. One is that it leads us to take a warlike stance and posit people on one side as enemies of the people on the other, as if we could tell the good guys from the bad guys by the color of their hats. The other is that it makes the problem of getting past capitalism look easier than it is. Winning a war would be vastly more simple than our task of reweaving the fabric of society.

Unlike a nationalist war situation, in the fight against capitalism it is very difficult to get people to see capitalism as their enemy. Because of the ways that capitalism provides us with what we need and what we believe we need, those opposed to it cannot count on others to join their side out of any simple, objectively-determined set of interests. People at all levels of society work to reproduce capitalist forms of agency through many activities, including their consumption, their beliefs, the ways they vote, and the ways they engage in leisure. Members of the owning class are not the only ones acting to reproduce capitalism. We all reproduce it through our everyday activities.

This means that the fight against capitalism involves interrupting systems of the reproduction of capitalism at all levels and not simply fighting against the owning class or against the government that supports it. The enemy exists throughout the social fabric. As such, a militant stance that tries to paint the world in black and white is counterproductive to building an anti-capitalist movement.

A Taoist stance is more likely to help us in engage in a reweaving of the social fabric. Taoism rests on the idea that you should pay as much attention

to the situation before you as possible. You need to be open in your perceptions and not let your desires for how things should be, or for simplifying, cloud your perception. You need to see the situation in all of its complexity. To challenge someone or something, Taoism suggests that you need to look for places where your opponent is off balance. Looking for openings or cracks, you use your opponent's force against him or her as much as possible. Taoism is not a pacifist philosophy that rejects the use of force categorically. Rather, it argues that one should use the least force necessary. And it says that you should not overly polarize, but rather see things in the complex ways that they are intertwined.³ A Taoist stance is a way of fighting that is much more nuanced than overpowering a political opponent.

Another problem with the metaphor of war of maneuver is that we usually conceptualize struggle as having a clear and specific goal: the taking of state power as a first step to expropriating the owners of the means of production. The fight against capitalism, while it will almost certainly involve taking state power at some points, is never coextensive with taking state power.

There are many anti-capitalist gains we can achieve short of taking state power. These include achieving increases in free time, development of autonomous forms of culture, and increases in living standards for the poor. Gains in these arenas can lay the foundation for more gains, which we can then consolidate into a widening anti-capitalist movement.

Conversely, the taking of state power by anti-capitalist forces is only a partial step in getting rid of forms of capitalism woven deeply into the social fabric. Even when anti-capitalists hold state power, such as in Nicaragua in the 1980s, businesses can undermine anti-capitalist government policies. The population as a whole may still want increases in consumer pleasures. The military force of other nations can overthrow or subvert those holding state power. And economic sanctions such as embargoes and boycotts can undermine the possibilities of an anti-capitalist government.

Getting rid of capitalism requires a social revolution as much as, or even more than, a political revolution. Within that social revolution our victories and losses will not appear to us in the same way as they would on the battlefield. All of our gains are fraught and partial, and we can never be sure of the ways that our activities will add up to meaningful change.

The Zapatistas radically transformed anti-capitalist politics when they put out the position in the early 1990s that they were a guerilla force that was *not* attempting to take state power. Their position was to try to push the Mexican government out of their region as much as possible and to raise the possibility of another way of living. As the Irish sociologist John Holloway has argued in his book, *Change the World Without Taking Power*, the Zapatistas have pursued a strategy of pushing back against capitalist and statist forms of social control. In the process they have indirectly pushed the whole Mexican political system into a major process of realignment. The Zapatistas use military means to push back, rather than overthrow, capitalism.⁴

In 1994, on the day that the North American Free Trade Agreement came into force, the Zapatista movement captured the world's imagination in a powerful, often romanticized, way when some of their members came out of the Lacandon jungle armed and ready to fight. And yet the Zapatistas never had plans to use the armed part of their movement to "win" against the Mexican government. Rather, they are involved in a complex set of political practices where the armed struggle is linked with cooperative building and democratic self-government, and the attempt to form a new/old society within the boundaries of the pro-capitalist Mexican state.

In the late 1990s, the Zapatistas held a series of large meetings called *Encuentros* where thousands of activists from all over the world went to the jungle to discuss politics. These meetings were central for the development within many activists of the belief that another world is possible. This consciousness was helpful in the formation of the movement to publicly challenge the transnational ruling class at the World Trade Organization meeting in Seattle in 1999 and many additional anti-summit protests that followed.

In fighting against capitalism we need to be aware of how capitalist forms of agency function—that people experience the world through capitalist memes and have both limitations and opportunities for disengaging from capitalism. We need to be aware what sorts of alliances and strategies are likely to build forms of resistance to capitalism and we need to design our tactics accordingly.

As we engage in anti-capitalist activity it will seldom be clear when our activities will add up to lasting anti-capitalist action. They may simply yield improvements in people's lives and may not have wider significance. They

may even lay a foundation for countermoves that will actually strengthen the hand of pro-capitalist forces. An example is authoritarian state socialism, which has, for many years, led millions of people to refuse to listen to critiques of capitalism. Any politics is radically contingent. Understanding that reality and facing it squarely requires that we constantly reevaluate our work and the political potential it holds.

We will do better if we begin to conceptualize success by looking for advances rather than clear victories. An advance is a place where something positive has happened that seems likely to help us to liberate the world from capitalist logics. We can look at all acts of resistance in terms of a broadly understood strategy for building anti-capitalist power.

As we are working to build anti-capitalist power, pro-capitalist forces will do everything they can to push for capitalism's extension and for more resources for the ruling class. They will do everything they can to destroy alternative models that might give people the impression that another world is possible. Pro-capitalist forces will also do everything they can to re-legitimize capitalism and to destroy or co-opt capitalism's opponents. They will use the media, economic sanctions, schools, propagandizing think tanks, cooptation of forms of funding, and a variety of forms of violence.

In addition to those active tools there is one tool in the pro-capitalist toolbox that works passively in capitalism's favor as a core structural component of a society dominated by capitalist processes: the economic dependency trap of capitalism that I described in chapter 3. Working class people in a capitalist society need a wage to get the money they need to survive. In many places in the world, capitalism operates according to a basic compromise: workers will fight with capitalists over how much of the surplus will go to the workers and how much will go to the owners.⁵ They will fight for improved working conditions. People as a whole may fight through the state to constrain somewhat the operations of businesses. But everyone challenging capitalism in this way knows that their demands are limited by what a company can afford and still remain profitable, and by what a national economy can "afford" before policies that are good for the population begin to be "bad for the economy," that is, counterproductive to attracting capital for investment in the economy. Even in the initial days of the disastrous BP

oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico in 2010, many people were opposed to limiting dangerous deep sea drilling since it would cost jobs.

There are many ways that the economic dependency trap of capitalism functions without any pro-capitalist forces taking concerted action to impose it on working class people. It is simply true that a business pushed beyond profitability will cease to exist to employ people. And on a macro scale any policies that make investing undesirable for business will lead to unemployment. Once a society comes to have a large enough capitalist sector the economic dependency trap thus functions passively as one of the most powerful tools favoring the interests of capitalism.

In addition to passively benefiting from this reality of capitalism, pro-capitalist forces will also make active use of the vulnerabilities created by the economic dependency trap through strategies such as the capital strike. Just as workers can combine to refuse to supply labor in order to increase their bargaining position, owners of capital can refuse to invest in towns or in countries which promote policies that are not conducive to the interests of the capitalist ruling class. Pro-capitalist forces use the capital strike, or the threat of a capital strike, to constrain the policies of nation states, communities, and labor unions.

When Socialist Party president Salvador Allende came to power in Chile through an election in 1970, truckers who were opposed to his economic policy went on strike and brought the economy to a halt. This led many in the general population to lose faith in Allende's ability to govern, and that strike ultimately led to the coup that placed a dictator in power who massacred Allende's supporters. These dictators ran the economy on extreme market fundamentalist principles for decades.

Fear that something like what happened in Chile would also happen to the Sandinistas in Nicaragua constrained their ambitions. As the U.S. economy began to meltdown in 2008, one of the most powerful arguments for bailing out the banks was that if they did not get government support they would not be able to invest money in the everyday economy to keep businesses functioning. This fear of a capital strike was enough to get Congress to appropriate billions of dollars to Wall Street firms with virtually no strings attached.

When capitalist forces do not distribute enough of their surplus to workers failing to hold up their side of the basic capitalist bargain they are vulnerable. Socialist revolutions of the political and military form that occurred as recently as 1979 in Nicaragua and 1994 in South Africa may still be possible in places where the majority of people do not feel that their interests are served by capitalism, and where transnational military and economic forces feel constrained not to intervene to stop the process.

In Nicaragua, the revolution came to power as European governments felt they could live with the Sandinistas. The U.S. government was still suffering from the aftermath of the defeat in Vietnam. In South Africa, the worldwide opposition to white minority rule made it very difficult to keep the African National Congress from power through military means. Both revolutions “worked” in the sense that the revolutionaries took state power but both failed in the sense that a working anti-capitalist economic system was never allowed to flourish. This was the case in Nicaragua because of the Contra War and the economic sanctions associated with it, and in South Africa because of IMF influence on the economic policies adopted by the ANC.

And as a wave of elections in Latin American in the early 2000s showed, it is possible for people who represent anti-capitalist interests to come to power through elections and to use that power to nationalize some parts of the means of production. This option is especially open where capitalism does not serve the basic material needs of much of the population so there can be short-term gains to the population from anti-capitalist programs. Such programs include nationalizing large mining or petroleum resources, or using government money to feed the poor.

And yet the economic dependency trap of capitalism shows that even in these places there is a very serious difficulty in pushing back capitalism. These countries exist in a world economic system and will be punished by transnational capital through divestment. If their economies need capital investment from transnational corporations, as some members of the African National Congress believed South Africa did when the ANC came to power in 1994, then leaders of these nations will continue to play the games dictated by capitalism.⁶ Any government that moves, whether through elections or through revolution, away from capitalism, is vulnerable to a capital

strike and to being undermined if it cannot provide ways for its people to live well.⁷

In each of these situations people in power need to engage in a complex dance, wherein the living situation of the poor majority continues to improve while there is enough foreign capital flowing into the country so as to not shock the economic system. They need to avoid conflict with superpowers trying to undermine them through direct military force (as in Nicaragua) or manipulation of local elections (as is routinely the case in Venezuela).

The economic dependency trap of capitalism needs to be taken into account when constructing anti-capitalist strategies. Anti-capitalist organizers will be severely limited and not likely to find much support if they advocate for policies that will run directly against the ability of people to maintain their standard of living. To deal with this reality we need a strategy based on a massive social change movement along the lines envisioned by Gramsci's war of position, where we foster alternative forms of consciousness, build alternative institutions for generating wealth, and restructure society in ways that are inhospitable to the propagation of pro-capitalist memes. This is being done in "transition towns" in England, where local communities are building sustainable economies; in the Zapatista controlled Lacandon jungle; in much of Bolivia; and within cooperative enterprises around the world.⁸

Anti-capitalist strategies that push us right up against capitalism's economic dependency trap need to be used with caution and with an understanding of what is likely to happen. When unions organize strikes they almost always undertake an analysis of the profitability of a company. If it looks like the demands of the workers will make the company unprofitable enough that it cannot compete, the union usually decides that those demands are unreasonable. When a socialist party comes to power through elections it almost always looks at the ways that its policies will lead to capital flight, and tries to balance the dependencies on those forms of capital that are likely to flee against policies that entice other forms of capital to remain. When a town raises taxes it usually looks carefully at the businesses in its environment and is careful to find ways not to scare off too many businesses.

Taking these steps is prudent, and anti-capitalists should not expect those trying to improve lives within a capitalist context to do otherwise. We can build powerful anti-capitalist strategies around shrinking the power that

the capitalist vortex has on people's lives. One of the tools that pro-capitalist forces use is to exaggerate the power of the economic dependency trap to the extent such that people are convinced that pro-capitalist policies are essential to their personal well-being or that without them businesses will fail. Another tool is the spread of pro-capitalist forms of desiring. Anti-capitalists can strengthen their position by supporting ways to meet more of our needs outside the nexus of consumerism and capitalist-mediated forms of desire. To the extent that we can generate non-capitalist forms of economic activity we are also less dependent upon capitalism for meeting our basic economic needs.

Exactly where and when anti-capitalist practice will involve challenging states or working with states is an open question and can't be answered on a theoretical level. Instead, anti-capitalists need to be constantly mindful of the ways that states have the power to undermine anti-capitalist action through laws and through the use of force. They need to look for the ways they might use or capture state mechanisms for some anti-capitalist ends. And they need to be creative and flexible in working around the set of realities imposed by the economic dependency trap of capitalism.

Conclusion

Members of the owning class will resist all of the limits we impose on efforts to extend capitalism. They will fight to use the economic dependency trap of capitalism to their advantage wherever possible and they can use their control of the state and its military and police apparatuses to protect its future. Given that right now the forces supporting capitalism have nuclear weapons at their disposal, it is hard to imagine any way that capitalism can be overthrown using a traditional militarist strategy. How far a multifaceted movement against capitalism based on revolutionary reform can take us is an open question.

Quarantining the virus that is capitalism will be much more likely once we have won some measure of success in our first priorities: making elections as democratic as possible; undermining public support for militarism and police abuse; creating forms of pleasure outside of consumerism and forms

of knowledge outside the corporate media; and developing community-controlled forms of capital so that we can meet our needs outside of capitalist economic relations.

We need to develop anti-capitalist strategies that strengthen the world that exists outside the vortex of the economic dependency trap of capitalism. We need to take fuel away from the economic dependency trap even as we avoid directly coming up against its power. If we succeed in this, the economic dependency trap will no longer have the power it presently has to thwart anti-capitalist practice.

Debating how capitalism can be ultimately defeated has already consumed too much activist energy. We can proceed without knowing whether or not we can totally eliminate it. Whether or not we will meet our goals in their entirety through a multifaceted process of social change, much of the work we do to push back capitalism will improve human lives and the environment in the process.

The old strategy of trying to heighten the contradictions of capitalism by making life worse to the point that people will revolt against capitalism doesn't work because pro-capitalist forces are too flexible and because people will not generally get involved in a strategy that will lead to disaster in the short term.

Working for revolutionary reforms to capitalism, we do need to be mindful of the ways in that movements often lose momentum as people's lives are improved. When Barack Obama was elected president in 2008 he promised to pull U.S. troops out of Iraq. Obama was elected partly on the basis of his opposition to the war in Iraq. That success could have spurred the anti-war movement to a victory in getting Obama to pull out of Afghanistan and stop bombing Pakistan. Instead, the immediate effect of Obama's election was to take the wind out of the sails of the anti-war movement.

We can help victories build on victories as we build an ever more clear vision of the world we are fighting for and understand the steps it takes to get there. As individual anti-capitalist gains are woven into the stories we tell each other of the ultimate goal of getting past capitalism, they help inspire more action. Success breeds more action as it leads to an increase in a sense of hope and a belief that another world is possible and indeed within reach.

Notes

1. Antonio Gramsci, "War of Position War of Maneuver," in *The Antonio Gramsci Reader*, ed. David Forgacs (New York: New York University Press, 2000), 222–45.
2. Gramsci, "War of Position War of Maneuver," in *The Antonio Gramsci Reader*, 229.
3. Lao Tzu (500 BCE), *Tao Te Ching*, trans. Charles Muller (New York: Barnes and Noble Classics, 2005).
4. John Holloway, *Change the World Without Taking Power* (Sterling, Virginia: Pluto Press, 2002). See also: Manuel Callahan, "Zapatismo and Global Struggle: A Revolution to Make Revolution Possible," in *Confronting Capitalism: Dispatches from a Global Movement*, eds. Eddie Yuen, Daniel Burton-Rose, and George Katsiaficas (New York: Soft Skull Press, 2004), 11–18.
5. For a discussion of how business and labor come to reach states of equilibrium that help provide the stability in which capitalists need to operate, see: David Kotz, Terrence McDonough, and Michael Reich, eds., *Social Structures of Accumulation: The Political Economy of Growth and Crisis* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1994).
6. For a detailed explanation of the process through which the ANC came to abandon its commitment to socialist economic principles and submit its population to IMF rules, see: Naomi Klein, *The Shock Doctrine: The Rise of Disaster Capitalism* (New York: Metropolitan Books, 2007), 195–216.
7. When the Worker's Party candidate Luis Ignacio de Silva was elected in Brazil in 2002, investors fled the economy, leading the value of Brazil's currency to plummet by one third almost immediately. BBC News, "Brazil Warned to Tread Carefully Over Debt" (November 21, 2002): <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/low/business/2499657.stm>.
8. Rob Hopkins, *The Transition Handbook: From Oil Dependency to Local Resilience* (White River Jct., VT: Chelsea Green, 2008).

Alternatives to Capitalism

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ONE PROBLEM IN DEVELOPING an anti-capitalist strategy is that while capitalism destroys our lives it also offers many pleasures and what we need to survive. While racism gives very little to people of color, capitalism gives a lot to working class people. And like the addictive drugs, sugar, alcohol, caffeine, and nicotine that played such an important role in its beginning, its products appeal to vulnerable parts of our selves.¹

When capitalists do badly in the short term, so do the rest of us. Even when Marx and Engels wrote to the working class “You have nothing to lose but your chains,” they were in fact engaged in a bit of wishful thinking. In “Wage Labor and Capital,” they suggested that capital and labor are two sides of the same bad coin: capital gives labor a job, and labor needs that job to survive under a capitalist system. As is the case today, workers at the time Marx and Engels were writing could lose their means of existence in the fight against capitalism.²

And now the problem is only deeper. People realize that they could lose their air conditioning, iPods, movies, stylish clothes, a sense of themselves as cool, and all sorts of other daily pleasures. Even the billion people living in the world’s urban slums, in squalid housing with unsafe drinking water, have dreams of the consumer lifestyle that capitalism seems to promise.³ It is very difficult to build an anti-capitalist movement if people believe that giving up on capitalism also implies giving up on forms of pleasure, the means of survival, and the dreams that inspire them.

The pleasures of life under capitalism revolve around having consumer goods appear to meet every desire we have. It also revolves around the satisfaction of desires created through advertising and a consumer culture. Products are packaged in appealing ways, devices are invented to help with every quirky thing we want to do, foods are created for those with no time to cook or eat. We create and express our identities through the clothes and accessories we wear, the ways we decorate our apartments and renovate our houses, the cars we drive, the bikes we ride, and the food we eat. Most of the music we listen to, the television and movies we watch, the news sources through which we relate to the wider world, and the books we read, are created through deeply capitalist processes.

Local television news stations are owned by large media conglomerates whose only interest is profit. The “if it bleeds, it leads” version of the local news exploits our impulses to care about or at least give attention to those among us who are injured or wronged and turns that instinctual empathy into a magnet for advertising dollars. A local news station that tried to focus on stories of cooperation or local politics would likely not draw as large an audience and eventually would be bought out by the more commercially successful station.

And aside from the forms of pleasure it provides, the brute fact is that so long as it is working, capitalism provides the jobs we need to survive, the stores we use to buy the things we need to live, the services we require to maintain our lives, and the businesses that provide tax revenue for public services such as schools and parks.

Any program to push back capitalism must take into consideration the fear people have of making their lives more impoverished in the short term. It must offer a vision of a life full of pleasures that are at least as compelling as the pleasures offered by capitalism and the capitalist dream industry.⁴

Fighting capitalism involves the creation of alternative forms of pleasure and alternative forms of dreaming. I oppose capitalism because I love the idea of everyone having enough to eat, and having the time and ability to do the things they want to do. I oppose it because I love the idea of a future in which everyone has the resources they need to be as healthy as they can be. I oppose it because I love the idea that in different parts of the world people could experience flourishing democratic political systems that develop in

different directions and create a variety of fascinating and affirming ways to support human life and the lives of other species.

A life without capitalism is one where well-being becomes unlinked from consumerism; where people have the things they need and desire but their desires are not manipulated for profits; where people have the time to create their own forms of meaning; where entertainment through consumption is replaced by the enjoyment that comes with interaction with others, nature, and the spiritual forces people have in their lives; and where people work together to accomplish the things they want to accomplish.

One of the biggest impediments to people's desire to eradicate capitalism, or even to entertain what might be wrong with capitalism, is that few believe there are viable, realistic alternatives. If pushing back capitalism means that we must move toward a society in which people have no freedom, in which a strong state controls our lives, in which we no longer have our consumer pleasures, and in which the very idea of a pleasurable life seems precluded, then there is little motivation to take the criticism of capitalism very far. Our ability to build a movement to get rid of capitalism hinges on our ability to show that life outside of capitalism is better than life inside it. Anti-capitalist agents need to show that there are better alternatives and that it is actually possible to get from where we are to a world without capitalism.

If our strategy for pushing back capitalism is to work from where we are right now to build lives outside of the nexus of capitalist relations then we need to know just what it is we need to be building. We can't defer the question of what kind of alternatives we want to be answered by a future generation.

Getting outside of the bubble of capitalist ways of imagining social relations helps us to challenge the idea that we must accept things as they are because there is no alternative. And as we fight capitalism we must have some sense of what kinds of realities we want to be building and which practices we want to reject. If we can see the strands of a better world glimmering through the malaise of the present order of things then we can shine light on those non-capitalist ways of doing things, nurture them, and help weave them more deeply into the social fabric.

From the time of Marx, most theorists of anti-capitalism have posited capitalism and socialism as two completely opposed social totalities, as if a

nation could be either socialist or capitalist without any political diversity. This has led those arguing about capitalism to focus on whether a whole society that is socialist is better than a whole society that is capitalist. The argument then led to comparisons of the U.S. and the Soviet Union, and quickly devolved into the equation of socialism with an authoritarian police state. Developing an anti-capitalist imaginary requires that we ask whether a post-capitalist society can be built that does not have the problems of those authoritarian societies that have called themselves socialist.

Equally important to understanding alternatives to capitalism is looking at the ways that we can push back capitalism and build a better society from right where we are, without leaping into the dark and making a complete break to an alternative and unknown new social totality. Our ability to conceptualize alternatives to capitalism is also helped by looking at all of the viable non-capitalist social forms that already exist and work well.

Socialism

FOR ABOUT ONE HUNDRED YEARS, when people talked about challenging capitalism the obvious alternative was socialism. From 1917 to 1989 the Soviet Union was the main place to which people looked when they wanted an idea of what socialism was. For people interested in democratic and life affirming alternatives to capitalism, the authoritarian nature of the Soviet Union and of other states that called themselves socialist stood and still stands as a major barrier to imagining compelling alternatives to capitalism.

Socialism can be defined as a political-economic model in which major economic resources are commonly owned and distributed through a state.⁵ That definition of socialism does not specify whether that state is authoritarian, democratic, or somewhere in between. Cuba calls itself a socialist state but so do social democratic governments such as France and Sweden.⁶ Socialism generally refers to those societies that have tried to remove capitalist processes from most if not all of the economic system. Societies that have retained large capitalist sectors in their economies are usually referred to as social democracies.

In narrowly economic terms, many countries with mostly socialist economic systems have had fairly healthy economies when judged in terms of

growth, poverty reduction, and levels of inequality. Both the Soviet Union and China were able to develop modern industry under authoritarian socialism. Cuba was able to develop one of the best and fairest medical systems in the Global South. Tanzanian socialism led to a society with some of the lowest levels of inequality in the world. In the twentieth century, human longevity increases in the socialist nations matched those in the capitalist nations.

Still, the fact remains that even if socialism were able to provide for a decent standard of living, many people would reject it on political grounds: they don't want to move toward socialism because they don't want to move toward living under an authoritarian political system. Most nations that have called themselves socialist have had repressive governments; Tanzania, India, and Nicaragua are the rare exceptions. When we talk about the political record of socialism the vast majority of cases confirm the general view that socialism leads to authoritarianism. All of the states of Eastern Europe as well as China and Cuba have had powerful central governments run by one political party. In all of these cases the government has jailed dissidents and outlawed political parties that challenged the views of the ruling party. None of these states have had free presses and none of them have allowed for much freedom of expression.

The leaders of these countries have largely justified their lack of political freedoms by arguing that if they allowed for more openness, pro-capitalist forces would destroy their socialist experiments. And of course there is much truth to this claim. If there were free elections in Cuba, the United States would not sit by and allow such elections to take their course without doing everything it could to assure a pro-capitalist outcome. And in Venezuela it has meddled in the elections that involved Hugo Chavez. Similarly, when the Bolsheviks first came to power in Russia, the West financed and supported a civil war to destroy Russian communism. Every attempt at socialism has been met with a brutal response from the nations that support capitalism. The inevitability of a capitalist backlash was the basis for arguments by Marx, Engels, and Lenin that anti-capitalist revolutions need to create a dictatorship of the proletariat to protect their victories.

Another source of the authoritarianism of most of the existing socialist states is ideological. None of socialism's founding fathers (again, Marx, En-

gels, or Lenin) supported democracy in any serious way. All of them were concerned with challenging the false promises of bourgeois democracy that hid undemocratic economic realities under the cloak of political democracy. As such, people working within countries dominated by a Marxist ideology have not been able to draw on resources from their dominant ideology to support more democratic societies.

A third source for the authoritarian nature of “actually existing” socialism is a structural conundrum that is built into socialism: the strong state required by central planning of the economy concentrates tremendous power in the state’s bureaucracy. It is very easy for those with this power to use it for their own interests. As Alec Nove writes in his analysis of the Soviet Union in *The Economics of Feasible Socialism Revisited*,

It does seem that the despotic nature of central power was much enhanced by the nature of the economic system. Thus a strict state monopoly of printing presses and editorial offices facilitated (along with censorship) a dreary homogenization of news and comment. It was easy to blacklist “undesirables,” to deprive them of employment, if the state was the only employer, and the damage is greater when unofficial ways of earning a living are illegal. . . . The hierarchical structure of the planned non-market economy is paralleled by a similar structure of society as a whole, and no Marxist should be surprised that this is so.⁷

Nove argues that a centrally planned economy will tend to concentrate power in ways that are likely to lead to authoritarianism. For that reason he argues for a form of socialism that allows markets to develop for consumer needs and for strong measures to hold accountable those making bureaucratic decisions.

While there is much evidence to show that contrary to the dominant view socialism often works quite well in economic terms, there are also numerous cases where it hasn’t. There are plenty of examples of government-run institutions that are poorly managed: where workers who do a bad job are kept in their positions, where the interests of the bureaucracy come to dominate over the public purpose that the institution was created to serve,

where inefficient ways of doing things become entrenched, and where the quality of the services provided is low.⁸

Many of these problems exist in capitalist firms but one of the strongest characteristics of capitalism is that it promotes efficiency since competition often forces inefficient firms out of business. While capitalist entities have competition as a natural engine for efficiency, socialist institutions can create mechanisms of accountability to make sure that they are also efficient.

This has led some advocates of socialism to argue for a hybrid system wherein democratic political structures plan the macro economy and social priorities while markets are used to match supply and demand for consumer goods. By allowing markets to function in limited ways we can draw on the positive qualities of markets to match people's desires with products and to promote efficiency within firms that do production. This can work as long as the market is strongly embedded in political processes that make sure that everyone's needs are considered equally, and that social interests—from safe working conditions to affordable housing—are not overridden by individual interests.⁹

Looking at socialism as something to be instituted by a whole nation state (and that must begin with a political revolution, as in the Leninist imaginary) encourages us to see these problems with socialism as inevitable. But if we think of capitalism as a set of practices dispersed like threads through the social fabric we can unravel and reweave a society into something more desirable. We can develop strategies of reweaving society without incorporating into it authoritarianism or low standards of living. We can build forms of socialism that are economically effective and compatible with democracy.

This has been done to a large extent in the Indian state of Kerala, where health indicators are dramatically higher than in the rest of India.¹⁰ It is being done in Bolivia at the national level where a democratically elected government maintains civil liberties while at the same time reorienting the economy to serve human needs. And many countries, such as Canada, have systems of national health care that work efficiently to promote people's wellbeing.

For analyzing the possibilities of anti-capitalism it is crucial to shift our attention from social wholes and instead to understand societies as hybrids, or mixtures, of different political and economic forms.¹¹ In *A Postcapitalist*

Politics, J.K. Gibson-Graham argues that activities that happen outside of capitalist production such as household labor, informal networks of sharing and barter, and the government sector, make up at least half of the productive hours that people in the U.S. work.¹² We have many systems, such as our libraries, parks, public education, and transportation systems, where we pool the resources of society and distribute them according to a political process regulated by the government. While pro-capitalist forces support many of these public goods, it is also important to acknowledge the human needs that many of them meet. Only in rare cases are they simply tools of capitalist domination. We can also understand them in part as aspects of our economies that function according to socialist logics.

If we shift our attention to the successes of socialism in societies that have a large capitalist sector we also see many positive results. Much of Europe since World War II has developed along the lines of a strongly social democratic model where resources are pooled through taxation and used for the common good to provide public transportation, health care, schools, and many forms of social security.¹³ All of these sectors represent parts of the economy that are in socialist hands, where resources are owned by the government and managed through a political process for the social good.

Even in the U.S. there is a strong history of parts of the economy run successfully by government, largely in the public interest. In his book, *America Beyond Capitalism: Reclaiming our Wealth, our Liberty and Our Democracy*, Gar Alperovitz explores the proliferation of projects around the U.S. that are organized by governments according to what I would call socialist logics. He claims that these projects are often run more efficiently, even when judged in narrowly economic terms, and are more likely to serve the public good than projects controlled by private enterprise.

It is often held that public ownership must be inefficient. Studies of municipal electric utilities, however, belie this view. One out of seven Americans (a total of roughly 40 million people) rely on power from the two thousand public utilities currently operating in urban and rural settings. . . . Although the majority of such systems are located in smaller communities, publicly owned systems are also found in large urban areas such as Los Angeles, Long Island, San Antonio,

Sacramento, Nashville, Jacksonville, and Memphis. In contrast to these, residential customers of investor-owned utilities (IOUs) commonly pay electricity rates roughly 20 percent higher than those paid by public power customers.¹⁴

According to Alperovitz, one of the main premises of capitalist thought is that privatizing public entities serves some public good, but

many of the hoped-for gains of contracting public services to private firms have proven to be exaggerated or illusory. Superficial assessments . . . often ignore the high costs of monitoring and rewriting contracts to maintain quality control. In addition, often cost savings are simply the result of lower-quality services. Sometimes corruption enters the picture. It is estimated that difficulties in the privatization of waste collection in New York City, for instance, cost business \$500 million.¹⁵

Before they began to be destroyed by the anti-tax revolution of the 1980s, many municipalities in the United States had excellent public schools that were very well run and very effective. By and large the postal system and many other government agencies were quite good at doing their work. Part of the genius of the Reagan revolution was to destroy public services by under-funding them and then turn around and point to those poor public services in order to support the belief that government cannot run services effectively.

Government-run projects that exist in a political context dominated by capitalism are often compromised and do not serve human needs as well as they might. In their classic study, *Schooling in Capitalist America*, Samuel Bowles and Herbert Gintis discuss ways that the U.S. educational system has been structured to meet the needs of capital for compliant laborers.¹⁶ Yet despite this capitalist corruption of socialist logics, all of the government institutions listed above are contested spaces where some human needs are met by government. They are also examples of governments successfully and efficiently running economic enterprises.

Socialist projects that exist in largely capitalist societies are always contested spaces where different interests vie for control. While the European

social democracies have achieved high standards of living within a basically capitalist context there are many weaknesses that make them less than ideal as models of development.

Social democracies have worked by maintaining a balance between the interests of capital and the interests of labor. Governments have taken a fairly large share of the profits from the owners of the means of production and used them for social goods. This has turned out well for employers who find high levels of social stability in which to operate their enterprises. And it has worked out well in many ways for the people who live in those societies. European social democracies are some of the most positive forms of capitalism the world has seen. They generally have had low levels of unemployment, low levels of poverty, almost no homelessness, universal access to high quality medical care, and excellent systems of public transportation.

In all of the European social democracies, capitalist processes continue to control quite a bit of economic activity. In these societies most workers still work under conditions of exploitation and alienation. Perhaps more seriously, the large transnational corporations that call Europe home continue to wreak havoc in the Global South, and their home states still operate to perpetuate capitalism in ways that are devastating to the people of the world and to the environment.

Pro-capitalist interests have enough power in those nation states to thwart meaningful responses to global climate change, to support the U.S. in many of its imperial adventures, and to support policies in the transnational trading structures that prevent nations of the Global South from developing policies that would eliminate poverty. European social democracy has achieved some of the goals that an anti-capitalist movement might want to achieve in the U.S. and in the Global South, but these societies continue to proliferate many destructive capitalist practices.

The point of discussing the forms of socialism that exist within capitalist contexts is not that we should take social democracy as an ideal. Rather, the successes of social democracy show that states can run aspects of an economy in ways that meet people's needs instead of simply creating profit. If we think about our best-run public institutions, from publicly owned power to our public universities and libraries, they usually have some sort of governing body that is accountable to the public. And a strongly democratic political

process is important to representing the needs of stakeholders and in holding that institution accountable to the public it is intended to serve.

Democracy is important within socialist efforts if we want to achieve high levels of efficiency and prevent dangerous accumulations of power. The most powerful critique of socialism is the historical reality that so many socialist societies have had totalitarian political systems.

For socialism to be the basis for a liberated society and not just a part of one we would need to develop economic models that allocate resources efficiently and in ways that serve the common good and that do not lead to the development of an unaccountable state. There need to be powerful mechanisms in place to assure the accountability of those in power. There also needs to be some way to assure the viability of democratic processes even when the socialist society is under attack from pro-capitalist forces. And this socialism would need to develop in a culture with a strong political commitment to democracy.

It is hard to imagine any of these things happening in a society that achieves socialism through a quick political revolution. They are more likely to be achievable as we work in a stepwise fashion to spread socialist aspects of the societies we inhabit.

Many anarchists have argued that no matter how much socialists attempt to build democracy and accountability into their system a socialist experiment is doomed to fall into authoritarianism as long as it relies on a state. If socialism is defined as a system where economic resources are distributed through a state then what we think of the nature of the state will have some bearing on what we think of socialism. Following Trotsky, who claimed that “every state is founded on force,”¹⁷ the German sociologist Max Weber defined the state as “a human community that (successfully) claims the monopoly of the legitimate use of physical force within a given territory.”¹⁸ For Weber,

the state is a relation of men dominating men, a relation supported by means of legitimate (i.e. considered to be legitimate) violence. If the state is to exist, the dominated must obey the authority claimed by the powers that be.¹⁹

If a state is, by definition, an institution that wields the power to use violence to back up its dictates, and which limits the use of violence coming from other parts of society, then it makes sense to see states as inherently prone to unaccountable misuses of power.

In a similar vein, Engels wrote that the state is “Nothing but a machine for the oppression of one class by another.”²⁰ Like Lenin, Engels argued that the state that supported the bourgeoisie should be smashed and replaced by one that supported the working class. In his summary of Marx and Engel’s polemics with anarchists, Lenin writes that Marx did not

oppose the view that the state would disappear when classes disappeared, or that it would be abolished when classes were abolished. What he did oppose was the proposition that the workers should renounce the use of arms, organized violence, *that is, the state*, which is to serve to “crush the resistance of the bourgeoisie.”²¹

In the Marxist tradition, the state is a necessary evil in the transition to an ultimately classless, stateless, society. Both Marxists and anarchists see the state as primarily a means of coercion.

Consider debates between Marxists and anarchists at the end of the nineteenth century. The main bone of contention was the role of the government in a transition to a stateless society.²² The Marxists believed that some form of government was necessary to keep the bourgeoisie from reasserting its power and bringing back capitalism. Anarchists believed that such a path would lead to new forms of domination.

Debating with Marxists at that time, Russian anarchist theorist and organizer Mikhail Bakunin argued that while the dictatorship of the proletariat would be made up of workers, these same workers,

as soon as they become the people’s governors and representatives, will stop being workers and will begin to look down upon the proletarian world from the heights of the State: they will then represent, not the people, but themselves and their ambitions to govern it. Anyone who queries that does not know human nature.²³

Bakunin’s critique of the dictatorship of the proletariat has stood the test of time. The Marxists believed class domination to be the root of social con-

flict. They thought that when a classless society was achieved there would be no reason for those running the state to oppress others. Bakunin and other anarchists at the time relied on a more intuitive conception of power, recognizing correctly that people in positions of power have a tendency to use that power to dominate others.

What the nineteenth century anarchists were less clear about was the legitimate means for limiting the accumulation of power in large-scale social organizations, that is, what means could be used to stop the bourgeoisie from reasserting itself and what forms were acceptable for managing the infrastructure needed in a large-scale society.

In their writings on the Paris commune, a two-month period in 1871 when the working class in Paris overthrew the French government and ran society in socialist ways, both Bakunin and Marx praised the commune for the democratic assemblies it set up and for its use of armed militias to fight back against the old army.²⁴

Marx saw the establishment of a repressive force to fight the old powers as an inevitable part of revolution. Bakunin was less clear on how necessary such a move was and wrote of the commune's creation of a state and use of force as if they were necessary in that situation without making any claims about their general necessity. In a response to the repression of the commune by the government at Versailles, Bakunin writes that the revolutionaries had to

counter with a revolutionary government and fight the government and army of Versailles, that is to say, in order to combat the monarchist and clerical backlash, they were obliged to set aside and sacrifice the basic premise of revolutionary socialism and organize themselves into a Jacobin counter.²⁵

Bakunin was never very precise in explaining how the commune (which was to be praised) was not a new form of state. Indeed, the Russian anarchist Peter Kropotkin rejected the commune once it became organized into a way of administering the needs of society. Kropotkin praised the early days of the revolution when everyone was on the street debating and envisioning a better world. But for him, as soon as the commune began to organize to run society it lost its revolutionary character.

Then came the elections, the members of the commune were appointed, and little by little the power of commitment, the enthusiasm for action faded. Everybody returned to his customary routine, saying “Now we have an honest government, let’s get on with it.”²⁶

For Kropotkin, anarchism meant a spontaneous free association that grows when states are abolished. “Overthrow the State and the federated society will sprout from its ruins, truly one, truly indivisible, but free and expanding in solidarity by virtue of that freedom.”²⁷

Generally anarchists want a society in which people actively engage in the decisions affecting their lives. They do not want a society organized around forms of representative government where the representatives are not deeply accountable to the people.²⁸ They are highly suspicious of social forms that need police, incarceration, and military power. Beyond these generally valuable impulses, there is often in the anarchist tradition a lack of clarity around what social forms are legitimate for building a good society.

If the state is defined as an institution that allows one class to use violence to oppress another class, then it is clear that an ideal society would not have a state. But rejection of the state often confuses notions of what kinds of organization are useful and what kinds of already-existing governmental functions should continue to exist in a non-capitalist society.

In our criticisms of the state we need to be clear about the ways that pro-capitalist interests use the state and the ways that states use violence and even elections to stifle dissent. But we also need to be clear about what forms of political participation lead to effective management of social resources, what kinds of structures hold societal administrators accountable, and what social forms are required to keep those who would mistreat others or destroy democratic institutions from doing so.

Both the socialist and the anarchist traditions have not been as strong as they could be in their articulation of the mechanisms that might be developed for keeping large-scale social institutions accountable to the public, for checking unjust accumulations of power, or for developing meaningful ways to prevent the administration of society from turning from forms of social control that are disempowering.²⁹

Libertarian socialists and social anarchists often disagree in their views of the necessity of engaging with the state, but beneath that disagreement they tend to agree that a just society needs high levels of democracy; abolition of decision-making based on ownership of private property; and some forms of coordination. Whether or not such a system is called socialism, council communism, or anarchism, and whether or not it is seen as having a state seems in many ways to be a more a semantic difference than an actual political difference.

Because socialism argues for a rejection of domination of economic life by those who own capital, the possibilities for socialism to be democratic are much stronger than they are for capitalism. Both socialist and capitalist economic forms have existed under authoritarian governments; think of Chile's brutal capitalist dictatorship as well as the Soviet Union, and then of course there is contemporary authoritarian capitalist China. Both capitalist and socialist economic systems have existed along with somewhat democratic ones; think of European social democracy as well as Tanzania and Bolivia.

It seems hard to imagine a society run through small scale cooperatives without at least some large-scale systems of coordination to prevent those not involved in the cooperatives from destroying them. It also seems hard to imagine effective ways to run society without some large-scale system of coordination for transportation, public infrastructure, and resource management. In the era of global warming it is equally hard to imagine a good society that does not have some world-scale system for controlling the amount of greenhouse gases people are allowed to put into the atmosphere. Whether we call it a federation, a state, or a transnational institution, life in the modern world seems more likely to be better off with some highly accountable, large-scale institutions for managing common social needs than without them.

The history of socialist experiments also shows that strong systems of accountability and democratic input are necessary to prevent socialism from turning into authoritarianism. The image of socialism is an important part of the anti-capitalist tool-box, and those advocating for socialism must insist that the term democratic be added to all uses of the term socialism.

Non-capitalism All Around Us

WHEN WE LOOK AT OUR LARGE-SCALE modern societies we can see many ways in which we include important social mechanisms for meeting human needs that have nothing to do with capitalist economic structures. We can begin to minimize capitalism's extension by promoting social logics other than the logic of appropriation. When we expand the social impact of values such as solidarity, humanism, and concern for the broader environment, we are constraining the extent to which pro-capitalist values predominate in and destroy the human and non-human worlds.

In *Capital*, Marx showed how under capitalism everything comes to be seen as a commodity. Our mental translation of all things into a monetary equivalent is one of the capitalist memes that needs to be disrupted. If people think that our ability to work is the same as our ability to sell our labor to a capitalist then it becomes difficult to imagine forms of labor outside of capitalism.³⁰

Feminists have done important work showing that much of what is valuable in our lives exists outside the nexus of capitalist relations, from the activities we engage in to take care of our families and friends to the things we make in our homes.³¹ If we expand the extent to which we can take care of our own needs and the needs of others through care-giving labor, sharing, and producing for ourselves, then to some extent we have freed ourselves from the economic dependency trap of capitalism. And when we look at those aspects of our lives we can see how effective non-capitalist economic forms can be. If we take our totality of needs into account then we can see that our dependence upon capital is a relative matter and we can think of pushing back on capitalism as matter of pushing back the extent of that dependence.

Even in the deeply capitalist United States there are many aspects of our everyday lives that are free of economic logics. If we think about our friendship and family networks we can see that there are all kinds of things we do to meet our needs that have nothing to do with the capitalist market. We take care of each other's children. We cook dinner for each other. We fix

each other's cars. We offer emotional support. We play; we create; we have projects.³²

While capitalist forms of pleasure, such as shopping and buying commercial cultural products, are increasingly colonizing our life worlds, all of us still experience some forms on non-capitalist ways of meeting our needs or satisfying our desires. By pushing back the extension of capitalism into our lives and expanding the realm of non-capitalist forms of mutual cooperation we can minimize our dependence on capitalism for our survival.

Many individuals are redefining their lives in ways that require less money. These “downshifTERS” have found that if one works less and consumes less one can have more time for meaningful experiences. In *Radical Homemakers: Reclaiming Domesticity from a Consumer Culture*, “radical homemaker” and researcher Shannon Hayes argues for a radical and feminist reclaiming of the values of the domestic sphere as a path to richer, more meaningful lives with low environmental impacts.

The greater our domestic skills, be they to plant a garden, grow tomatoes on an apartment balcony, mend a shirt, repair an appliance, provide for our own entertainment, cook and preserve a local harvest or care for our children and loved ones, the less dependent we are on the gold.³³

In *Plentitude: The New Economics of True Wealth*, economist Juliet Schor argues for an economy based on short work hours, low material output, and high levels of happiness. Her model for an economy based on plentitude

aspires to transform self-provisioning from a marginal craft movement into something economically significant. That requires raising the productivity of the hours spent in these activities . . . [N]ew agricultural knowledge, and the invention of small-scale smart machines make it possible to turn household provisioning into a high-productivity—and economically viable—use of time.³⁴

Schor argues that an environmentally sustainable economy is technically within reach and will not require lowering our standards of living. Instead,

shifting to a plentitude economy means much shorter working hours, less drudgery, and more of a sense of community and meaning in the work we do.

Tribal societies provide an interesting example of ways of living without significant forms of accumulations of wealth or capital. Attention to them is important for developing a vision of a world without capitalism. Throughout the world there are thousands of small-scale societies in which people have organized their lives in non-capitalist ways. These societies have evolved over thousands of years, from before capitalism came into existence as well as in recent centuries, in response to capitalism. Most contain some forms of hierarchy, whether it is gender hierarchy or simple role hierarchy. But the levels of hierarchy are usually smaller than in modern capitalist societies. And one of the most common characteristics of tribal societies is that the needs of every member is socially significant.

Another characteristic of most tribal societies is that there is no such thing as “the economy.” In other words, people do things to meet their needs without money being involved, and the social processes that decide where to place resources and how to distribute them are connected to the social processes related to other kinds of decisions. Many have complex processes for distributing wealth. In all human societies, what we call economic activity is intertwined with a variety of other cultural processes. Under capitalism we tend to forget those interconnections and see the economy as if it were something independent.

The cooperation in these societies is not an accident or the result of altruistic human nature. Rather, tribal societies generally have social processes for promoting forms of cooperation and accountability and for allocating resources according to non-market logics. Many of those living outside of capitalism prefer it and tribal people throughout the world are fighting to maintain those forms of life.³⁵

Much of life lived within capitalism that is most rewarding takes place in the margins of capitalist processes. We are happiest when we are deeply embedded in friendship, family, and community networks.³⁶ That we find this hard to see is more a testament to the structure of the capitalist way of imagining the world than it is to the impossibility of organizing society on terms other than those of capitalism.

Expanding Community Forms of Capital

THROUGHOUT THE WORLD there are many communities in which people have developed projects for generating wealth and meeting human needs and the resources to develop the projects has come from governments or from private individuals who make no claim on the profits or wealth generated by the project. What makes such projects different from democratic socialism or from capitalism is that the wealth generated is deeply tied to local communities.

In the essay “Imagining and Enacting Noncapitalist Futures,” AnneMarie Russo, commenting on her work for a planning agency in the rural western Massachusetts town of Holyoke, offers a model of economic development that relies on local networks of non-capitalist cooperation and which directs resources given by governments for projects that develop community capital.

What often happens with economic development is gentrification and displacement of low-income residents from housing that is affordable. I wonder what will happen to the neighborhood economy that sustains the low-income community. But I am the only one in the planning office who sees this economy, where women and men are taking care of their homes, raising their kids, and helping each other get by. The kind of help they provide might include caring for a neighbor’s children, cooking for a neighbor who is ill, allowing a neighbor use of the phone, driving a neighbor to a doctor’s appointment, and so forth. All these activities and many more make up what I have come to think of as the “household-based neighborhood economy.” This is not the economy that gets valued, supported or “developed” by prevailing economic development practices. . . . Imagine a conversation among members of a community that elicits their skills and capacities, assets that might be useful in achieving goals they agree upon. Perhaps they will want to develop more effective systems of neighborhood care and support, building on what already exists—aftercare for school children, care for elders, food production by those who want to stay home for those who must go out and work. Perhaps they will want to create urban gardens or rehabilitate

rundown buildings as affordable housing, as many communities have done. Where there is money for economic development, it might go toward enhancing the neighborhood support systems that already sustain the community (rather than to businesses to create jobs that will not benefit neighborhood residents and may contribute to their displacement).³⁷

The activities that Russo discusses are all examples of people meeting their needs outside the market. All of that productive activity relies on the capital that is present in communities. There is a wealth of resources that exist in any community that can be mobilized to meet human needs. This community-based capital can be mobilized and developed if it is given the right kinds of support. It is much more likely to stay in a community and lead to the betterment of life than privately controlled capital, which has no inherent commitment to any given location and is usually required to return a profit.

In their book *Reclaiming Capital: Democratic Initiatives and Community Development*, Christopher Gunn and Hazel Dayton Gunn address the challenges faced by those trying to achieve local development by enticing companies into their communities. Using the term “capital” to refer to privately held accumulated resources or private capital, Gunn and Gunn write:

Capital is conceptually distinct from communities. It can be understood as both financial wherewithal for economic development and as a group in society that controls economic resources and shares an interest in perpetuating control over them. Capital wants profit; communities want development. Communities want well-paying jobs for their residents; investors are driven to pay the lowest possible wages relative to capital costs at given levels of productivity. Capital seeks an environment free of costly regulation; communities require a life sustaining ecology. Communities are defined by place and stability; capital is concerned with location primarily as a factor in transportation and transaction costs. These are some of the major issues over which confrontation occurs between capital and communities.³⁸

Gunn and Gunn argue that private capital can be constrained in important ways through zoning laws, such as inclusionary zoning that requires low income housing when a developer wants to build in a community; wage laws, such as living wage ordinances that require employers to pay a minimum wage higher than that required by the state government; and taxation policies, such as local taxes for meeting community needs. They also discuss a wide variety of forms of community development that generate wealth from community resources through community development corporations, worker-owned cooperatives, consumer cooperatives, and publicly-owned development projects.

In *America Beyond Capitalism: Reclaiming our Wealth, our Liberty and our Democracy*, Gar Alperovitz gives examples of some of these approaches to community development. He discusses the use of Community Development Corporations (CDCs), in which a community-based organization is established to meet a particular community need. Often these organizations are built in ways that will largely be self-sustaining economically. Organizers usually begin by gathering money through governments, foundations, or individuals. Projects are then developed in an attempt to become self-sustaining. Capital circulates in ways that are controlled by democratic processes, which require that the projects that are developed serve the communities they were constituted to serve.

One example among the many he describes in his book is the New Community Corporation in Newark, New Jersey:

New Community Corporation enterprises employ 2,000 neighborhood residents and create roughly \$300 million in economic activity each year. Profits help operate day care and after-school programs, a nursing home, and two medical day care centers for seniors. Proceeds from business activities help support job-training, educational, health, and other programs.³⁹

Alperovitz also discusses the powerful and widespread example of worker-owned cooperatives on the edge of capitalism. These are a significant means for creating non-capitalist economic activity and for developing alternative forms of capital. In many ways they function like businesses in

a capitalist economy. They compete with other business, and like all businesses in a capitalist context they must market themselves. What they offer that is very different from capitalist companies is this: the people who work in cooperatives are also owners and managers and thus have a stake in what happens. Workers in cooperatives often have opportunities to use their creativity, succeed when the business succeeds, and can feel a sense of accomplishment. They also share in the profits so no one is getting rich off their labor. And many cooperatives have some sort of social charter, such that the surplus generated is donated to projects that serve community needs.

The most famous worker-owned cooperative is the Mondragón network of cooperatives in the Basque region of Spain. Founded in 1956 by a Catholic priest, José Maria Arizmendiarietta, the cooperatives have become the leading manufacturer of appliances such as refrigerators and washing machines for the Spanish market. They employ over 20,000 workers. The workers are owners and are involved in management decisions. Each enterprise is part of a network that is guided by a strict set of guidelines on pay differences between highest and lowest paid workers, on worker input into the production process, and on how profits are to be distributed. Investment capital from each cooperative supports the development of new cooperatives.⁴⁰ There are presently one hundred and fifty cooperatives in the Mondragón network, which together constitute the seventh largest corporation in Spain.⁴¹

Writing about the cooperative movement in the U.S., Alperovitz writes,

It is rarely realized that there are more than 48,000 co-ops operating in the United States—and that 20 million Americans are co-op members. Roughly 10,000 credit unions (with a total assets of over \$600 billion) supply financial services to 83 million members; 36 million Americans purchase their electricity from rural electric cooperatives; more than a thousand mutual insurance companies (with more than \$80 billion in assets) are owned by their policyholders; approximately 30 percent of farm products are marketed through cooperatives.⁴²

Many progressive cooperatives, including Mondragón, operate according to the principles put forth in 1844 by the British Rochdale cooperative, which used the concepts developed by utopian socialist Robert Owen. The

Rochdale principles stipulate such things as self-management, putting people before profits, wage solidarity, and social transformation.⁴³ And while many of the cooperatives that Alperovitz counts are not progressive enough to be in accord with the Rochdale principles, they offer alternatives to capitalist ways of organizing production and consumption.

The development of community-based forms of capital through Community Development Corporations and worker-owned cooperatives are powerful ways to take fuel from capitalism. To the extent that we can develop functioning non-capitalist economic institutions we can lessen the dependency of individuals and communities and even nations on the capital that capitalism provides. We can instead develop forms of capital that are controlled by processes more likely to serve human needs.

Conclusion

THERE ARE LITERALLY THOUSANDS of alternatives to capitalism functioning in the world right now. Nations are providing health care for their populations; education systems that provide access to all are flourishing; and people take care of their needs within meaningful relations with friends and family. Throughout the world many people work in thriving cooperative enterprises.

It is profoundly easier to build opposition to capitalism if people believe that alternatives are possible. Building these alternatives and building consciousness of them are important parts of the movement to push capitalism back from our social world.

Notes

1. Robin Blackburn, *The Making of New World Slavery: From the Baroque to the Modern 1492–1800* (New York: Verso, 1997), 11. See also: Retort, *Afflicted Powers: Capital and Spectacle in a New Age of War* (New York; Verso, 2005), 20.
2. Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels (1891), “Wage Labor and Capital,” in *The Marx-Engels Reader*, ed. Robert Tucker (New York: Norton, 1972), page 210.
3. Retort, *Afflicted Powers*, 171–96.
4. Erik Olin Wright, *Envisioning Real Utopias*, unpublished manuscript (2007): <http://www.ssc.wisc.edu/~wright>.
5. Here I follow Stephen Resnick and Richard Wolff in defining communism as a class process through which resources are allocated by means of a cooperative process and socialism as a class process through which resources are allocated by a state. See: Stephen A. Resnick and Richard D. Wolff, *Knowledge and Class: A Marxian Critique of Political Economy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987).
6. The terms socialism and communism are often used in contradictory ways. For Marx, socialism was the stage of society that came after capitalism and was characterized by a strong state that would mediate conflicts that arose because society was still in transition. Communism was the name for a totally free, stateless society. In contemporary usage, communists are usually more amenable to a strong authoritarian state than socialists.
7. Alec Nove, *The Economics of Feasible Socialism Revisited* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 120.
8. For an excellent analysis of the economic strengths and weaknesses of different forms of socialism as they have been practiced, see: Nove, *The Economics of Feasible Socialism Revisited*.
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*Practical Steps for Building a
Movement to Get Past Capitalism*

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AT THIS MOMENT, organizers and activists in all parts of the world are pursuing a vast proliferation of ways to push back capitalism. We are speaking out against capitalism in order to spread new memes such as slow food, appropriate technology, a downshift to low consumption lifestyles, a sense of happiness based on community, and visions of how another world is possible. We are developing non-capitalist social forms like co-ops. We are fighting the efforts of pro-capitalists who seek to improve their bargaining positions by fighting free trade agreements; we are challenging the development of projects proposed by those holding private capital when such projects threaten to destroy the social fabric or ecological basis for life. All of these activities are limiting capitalism's range of motion and we should celebrate them as parts of an anti-capitalist struggle.

When I began work on this book, I set out to answer the question of whether or not it was possible to look at anti-capitalist struggle through the same lens that I use to look at feminist struggle. When we think about fighting sexist oppression, most of us don't think that all the problems caused by sexist oppression are wrapped into one logical system that needs to be overthrown. Instead, we see before us an array of problems that need to be fought with a variety of tactics.

Through working on this book, I came to see the various ways that the problems caused by capitalism are woven into the fabric of society. I came

to see that there are a number of separate fronts on which capitalism can be challenged.

In Chapter 3, I identified an important structural dynamic that acts as a vortex to thwart much anti-capitalist action. This is a trap within capitalism whereby people become economically dependent upon the success of capitalism for their own economic survival. Many of us need jobs in wage labor to survive, and jobs are produced when capitalism is doing well. But there is another major trap that needs to be understood in order to develop strategies for challenging capitalism, which is that there are many cultural forces that turn us into capitalist desiring agents: people who want the things that involvement with consumerism offers us. We sometimes attain a sense of ourselves as socially successful because of the products we buy and how we display them.

Both dynamics can be challenged by a variety of means. As discussed in Chapter 3, we can shrink the energy in the vortex that pulls us into physical as well as cultural dependency upon capitalism.

When reading all the literature I could find on the structural nature of capitalism, I could not find any sort of lynchpin that needed to be pulled, or any sort of core practices that needed to be engaged, in order to eliminate capitalism. What I found is that many people who challenge capitalism work in an ad hoc way, challenging the things they find problematic in the world in ways that seem politically productive and promising at a specific time and place. This book is meant to affirm those practices and approaches.

When I began this book, I thought that their approach was right but I couldn't find a fully articulated analysis of capitalism that argued for it. Instead I found the following attitude: "We might as well do these things, as nothing else seems possible." I generally found there to be a deep pessimism among anti-capitalists, due to their disbelief that anti-capitalist practices could really challenge capitalism in any significant way. Capitalism had largely been conceptualized as a system that would always win against any attempt to challenge it in a less than totalized way.

This chapter, then, does not offer a grand new answer to how to get past capitalism. Its aim is quite modest: to reiterate some of the varied activities of people engaged in challenging the practices that constitute capitalism, and to give voice to a variety of tactics that seem productive. This chapter puts

those activities into the context of the analysis presented throughout this book, acknowledging the economic dependency trap of capitalism as well as the cultural dependency trap, in light of the practices that can shrink the vortex that pulls toward those traps.

Fear that our efforts are insignificant because our projects don't attempt to overthrow the system overshadows much anti-capitalist work today. But our projects are doing more than merely blunting the pain caused by an unchangeable system. If we understand the means through which capitalism replicates itself we will be in a better position to be strategic in deciding where to place our anti-capitalist energy.

By reframing how we think about the nature of capitalism, I hope this book will open doors to more productive ways of challenging it. I hope that it will embolden anti-capitalists to ask realistic questions about the significance of their actions and begin to make the linkages that will enhance the anti-capitalist potential of their projects. And I hope that it will begin a productive dialogue among anti-capitalists, a dialogue that focuses on what specific strategies will build powerful movements to challenge capitalism.

The following sections look at specific parts of the work that needs to be done to get past capitalism. The first looks at the cultural task of spreading the view that capitalism is a problem, and of disrupting the ideas that perpetuate a pro-capitalist view of the world. The second looks at ways that movements already challenging other forms of domination can be strengthened by the inclusion of an anti-capitalist analysis. The third looks at ways to disrupt the economic and political practices that constitute capitalism. The fourth section looks at some broad questions about organizational forms. Finally, the fifth section gives a summary of ways to take action to push back capitalism.

SECTION I

Delegitimizing Capitalism and Disrupting Its Cultural Memes

THE FIGHT AGAINST RACISM, while very far from over, turned an important political corner in the 1970s as white supremacy began to be delegitimized. In earlier phases of the anti-racist movement in the U.S. people had fought

against practices such as lynching that were fundamentally racist, but they fought them on the basis of their being inhumane and not racist *per se*. In her influential 1892 pamphlet on lynching, *Southern Horrors: Lynch Laws in All Its Phases*, Ida B. Wells doesn't use the term "racism" even once. Instead, she writes of the horrors of lynching and the many ways that African Americans were being mistreated. She couldn't use the charge of racism to undermine support for lynching because racism was not widely understood to be a problem.

As activists continued to challenge other horrific practices, people outside the movement increasingly began to recognize the underlying social pattern of racism. As racial liberation movements developed, activists consolidated their critiques of racism. In a dynamic process, as activists challenged racist practices on the basis of widely held moral values, an anti-racist consciousness spread.

As it was in the early days of anti-racist organizing, most people who are opposed to capitalism today don't name capitalism in their political work. While most believe that working against capitalism at the present time is deeply unpromising much can be done to break out of that pessimistic view. We can develop a rich and coherent picture of what is wrong with capitalism, what the alternatives might look like, and what oppositional practices we want to develop. This work, among those who already see themselves as anti-capitalists, is crucial for paving the way to broader conversations with people who do not yet see capitalism as the cause of the problems they find in the world.

Even as we begin to do that internal work there is much that we can do to explain what is wrong with capitalism to a broader public and to disrupt some of the cultural beliefs and attitudes that reinforce it. Anti-capitalists can transform the culture to undermine capitalist ways of looking at the world. They can do this through critiques of ideology, through creation of alternative forms of consciousness, and through culture jamming.

Ideology critique can involve writing books that challenge pro-capitalist ideas and cultural forms. It can involve the spreading of ideas through conversations, teaching, blogging, and art. Artists can directly criticize pro-capitalist memes and create ways of experiencing and looking at the world that offer a glimpse of alternative versions of living that help us see the non-

capitalist aspects of the world around us. Dorothea Lange and Walker Evans did this in the early part of the twentieth century. By documenting the lives of poor people in beautiful and moving photographs they brought to the public's attention the plight of the poor. This undermined a sense of complacency among the middle class. Contemporary artists such as Brian Jungen, Chris Jordan, Barbara Kruger, and Bettie Saar all do work that helps us see what is wrong with capitalism.

Culture jamming involves using mass media against themselves, most famously by modifying billboards but also by using logos and advertising slogans and images against themselves. According to Naomi Klein,

Culture jamming baldly rejects the idea that marketing—because it buys its way into our public spaces—must be passively accepted as a one-way information flow. The most sophisticated culture jams are not stand-alone ad parodies but interceptions—counter-messages that hack into a corporation's own method of communication to send a message starkly at odds with the one that was intended.¹

As capitalism spreads through pro-capitalist memes in everyday discourse, in the mass media, and in all forms of art, anti-capitalist workers can disrupt those memes and create alternative memes of their own. In the essay "Decolonizing the Revolutionary Imagination," Patrick Reinsborough writes that

Culture jamming has largely been applied like a wrench to disable the brainwashing infrastructure of corporate consumerism. We must supplement the wrench with the seed of planting new transformative stories that use the information-replicating networks of modern society to grow and spread. Our actions must create image events and launch designer memes with the power to supersede the controlling mythologies of consumer culture, the American empire, and pathological capitalism.²

Since pro-capitalist memes and dreams of consumer excess define what is possible for so many people today, an important part of anti-capitalist struggle needs to be the creation of counter-discourses. We need images that help us understand the devastating nature of capitalism and the ways that

the profit motive underpins so much misery in today's world. And we need to create vibrant images of a rich and livable world beyond capitalism. Artists and activists are producing materials that show the viability of alternatives to capitalism. In 1980 the BBC produced a helpful documentary on the Basque cooperative movement called "The Mondragón Experiment." An international group of prominent musicians put out a CD in 2005 called "Another World is Possible." The editors of the magazine *Yes* publish in every issue stories of social justice actions that have had some success.

Mainstream economic discourse is one of the most powerful mechanisms supporting capitalism ideologically. Every year hundreds of thousands of college students around the world are taught a set of pro-capitalist beliefs as if they were scientific fact: that markets are the only path to prosperity; that the more that markets are unregulated the better off we all are; that growth is good; that state intervention is bad for the economy; that minimum wage laws are bad for the economy. Almost all media reporting on the economy echoes these perspectives. We should be happy, it tells us, when the stock market is going up. And we are supposed to feel optimistic about our future when we hear that more people are buying more things. Media wants us to equate the spread of free markets with the spread of democracy.³

In his book, *Great Transformations: Economic Ideas and Institutional Change in the Twentieth Century*, Mark Blyth argues that one of the main reasons that pro-business forces were able to undermine the high-functioning social democracy of Sweden in the 1990s was that those supporting labor and a strong social network did not have their own coherent economic theory to use to challenge the ideas put out by the pro-business economists and think tanks. In the U.S. during that same period, neoliberals put enormous resources into think tanks that pushed pro-business economic theory in the general culture. Those criticizing neoliberalism had no effective way to question how such a model would lead to prosperity. Blyth argues that the failure of imagination of those opposed to neoliberalism helped to position pro-capitalist forces to get their way on social policy.⁴

A crucial part of anti-capitalist activism needs to be the development and propagation of alternative economic models. When pro-capitalist forces

in a small town argue that a developer should be given free reign because it will be “good for the economy,” we need to be ready with rigorous alternative economic models to throw into the conversation in order to make the case that townspeople will do better if something different happens. Authors such as Juliet Schor, David Korten, and Bill McKibben offer powerful visions of functioning economic systems that are non-capitalist.⁵

We need to work with progressive media outlets to encourage the use of alternative economic indicators so that when people want to know if society is on the right path the answer is not simply that the Gross Domestic Product is increasing. Widespread use of alternative economic indicators such as the Genuine Progress Indicator, the Happy Planet Index, and the Human Development Index, that take into account aspects such as literacy rates, infant mortality, longevity, and the environment, would radically change the calculus of many economic decisions.

If alternative media became fluent with these other ways of considering the health of the economy it would help us make the case that they should be used more broadly. Imagine a news story that reported on the economic successes of a country that had managed to raise people’s living standards. Imagine that success, in this case, was defined as an increase in longevity and literacy of the population, while its carbon footprint was diminished. There are policies (such as land reform) that lead to these outcomes, but when they are not reported as such we cannot, in general, conceptualize such a victory. We need to develop speakers’ bureaus, think tanks, and easily accessible information sources to help foster alternative economic ideas.

Delegitimizing capitalism is one of the most important parts of anti-capitalist struggle at this point in history. Capitalism can be delegitimized by writing and talking about it and by disrupting the pro-capitalist memes that infuse our culture and help to create our desire for capitalist ways of living. The more we can develop an awareness of the ways we already live outside of capitalism—ways of organizing society more broadly on non-capitalist values—the more people will dare to criticize capitalism. And the more people criticize capitalism, the more fertile the ground is for the kinds of structural changes that are required to get past capitalism.

SECTION 2

*Working at the Intersections of
Different Systems of Domination*

SOCIAL FORMATION THEORY TELLS US that social patterns develop in complex and historically contingent ways. One of the implications of that body of theory is that different systems of power come to be mutually constituted and interwoven into the social fabric in ways that need to be understood in their historical specificity. Racism, sexism, disability, and homophobia all intersect with capitalism in complex and contradictory ways. Each of these social dynamics colors the social fabric with its own set of social formations that would probably exist even if capitalism hadn't developed. And yet each of them now intertwines so thoroughly with capitalism, and with each other, that attempts to challenge one form of domination are virtually impossible without challenging the others. Let's look very briefly at some of the ways that fruitful coalitions can be built by understanding the ways that capitalism intersects with these systems of domination.

Sexism

FEMINISTS CAN CHALLENGE many forms of sexism from within a capitalist framework. Much important work has been done to improve the lives of women simply by insisting that women be treated the same as men within a capitalist-dominated society. This call for equality within the dominant framework of society has been highly productive, especially for middle class women and, in the U.S., for middle-class white women.

But the women's movement is increasingly running into areas where the gains are harder. In the article "Rethinking Women's Oppression" by Maria Ramas and Johanna Brenner, published in the book *Women and the Politics of Class*, the authors point out that,

Biological facts of reproduction—pregnancy, childbirth, lactation—are not readily compatible with capitalist production, and to make them so would require capital outlays on maternity leave, nursing facilities, childcare, and so on. Capitalists are not willing to make such

expenditures, as they increase the costs of variable capital without comparable increases in labor productivity and thus cut into rates of profit. In the absence of such expenditures, however, the reproduction of labor power becomes problematic for the working class as a whole, and for women in particular.⁶

As long as women don't challenge the basic capitalist logic that undervalues and does not give enough resources to aspects of life that do not support capitalist production, women's advances will be limited by the disproportionate amount of non-paid care-giving labor expected of them. The fight between men and women about who does care giving is part of the struggle, but the fight for social resources for that labor is also important.

A feminism that does not take anti-capitalism seriously can actually reinforce both sexism and capitalism. If women think the path to equality is to get poor women to do their domestic labor then the domestic sphere is further colonized by capitalism. Poor women don't get feminist liberation. Arguing that poor women have a right to stay home and take care of their children is a demand that runs counter to capitalist logic, which depends on people who work outside the home.

Fighting for social support for the care-giving labor that poor women and women of color want must be at the top of a feminist agenda. Succeeding at it requires that we boldly reframe the debate and make the case that parents who want to spend time with their children should have the option to do so. This demand involves a commitment to devoting resources to non-capitalist activities—to valuing pleasures that do not come from consuming commodities.

It is also important to fight for the provision of financial support to people who chose to care for the elderly or for children in the home, as many European nations do.

Organizing around women's issues can be substantially strengthened by bringing an anti-capitalist analysis to it. Anti-capitalist feminists can organize to fight for adequate respect and resources for care-giving labor. Examples of these include better wages and professional development opportunities for child- and eldercare workers, and patient limits for nurses. Anti-capitalist feminists can work with others to change laws that make it more possible for

people to take care of family needs outside the market. In the U.S. the most important of these is the provision of universal health care (universal, in this case, means health care for all regardless of employment status).

Racism

MICHAEL OMI AND HOWARD WINANT ARGUE IN *Racial Formation in the United States* that human beings before the advent of capitalism found many ways to dislike and mistreat one another and that dislike was often based on differences in language, place of origin, or cultural practices.⁷ Yet only with the advent of the European encounters with the Americas in the 1500s, they argue, was the contemporary idea of race consolidated:

The “conquest of America” was not simply an epochal historical event—however unparalleled in its importance. It was also the advent of a consolidated social structure of exploitation, appropriation, and domination. Its representation, first in religious terms, but soon enough in scientific and political ones, initiated modern racial awareness.⁸

Racism developed as a form of dehumanization that helped to make the emerging colonialist and proto-capitalist forms of exploitation that were developing at that time easier to manage.

As with feminism, anti-racist movements have made many significant gains without challenging capitalism. One doesn't need to challenge capitalist ideas and values to argue for an end to discrimination against people of color. Many important changes, such as the end of legal segregation, have happened without challenging capitalism.

And yet, as with feminism, much of what remains to be changed at the present time requires that we look at how racism and capitalism are intertwined. Because capitalist ways of thinking tend to erase consciousness of the effects of history, many in a capitalist society cannot see the ways that unequal distribution of opportunities in the past has led to radically unequal opportunities in the present. Capitalist ideas such the belief that everyone is fundamentally “on their own” and that no one is responsible for mak-

ing sure that everyone has the conditions available to make a good life for themselves undermine support for the kinds of policies that would erase the poverty that comes with racism. And the ways that capitalism assumes that everyone should work undermines public support for helping the poor, who are devastated by a lack of resources for education, childcare, and job opportunities.

Racism is often used to obscure issues that might otherwise bring to light the negative consequences of capitalism. Ideologues point to cultures of people of color as the source of multi-generational poverty rather than the historical legacy of laws such as the GI Bill or the mortgage interest deduction tax regulations that favored the wealthy and the white. Pro-capitalist politicians often try to whip up anti-immigrant hysteria to divert people's attention from those responsible for macro-economic policy. Working class whites often blame their problems on people of color or foreigners who compete with them for jobs. Even more than in most other multiracial societies, racism in the U.S. has a powerful ability to impede the development of critical consciousness of capitalism.

One of the most profound problems facing people of color in the U.S. at the present moment is the shift in social resources from the welfare state to our prison systems. In her analysis of the exponential growth in rates of incarceration in California from the 1980s through the turn of the millennium, sociologist Ruth Gilmore argues that a variety of forces came together to create an unprecedented boom in incarceration as a whole, and extremely disproportionate increases in the incarceration of people of color at a time when crime rates were already steadily falling.

Gilmore argues that one partial cause was the ideology of tax revolt, in which conservative ideologues succeeded in focusing the frustrations of white working- and middle-class people on government programs that largely benefited the poor and, especially, poor people of color. Additionally, she argues that in California there was a sector of capital that had profited from government bonds for building public structures such as schools and libraries. As public investment in those areas dried up, investors looked for new public projects that would be palatable to an anti-tax public. This situation was exacerbated by a large population that was made superfluous

by deindustrialization, by anti-immigrant campaigns, and by a media that fed, and in some cases created, racist fear of African-American and Latino men. This combination of forces led to the perfect storm for prison building and to changes in law (such as California's infamous "three strikes" law) that would provide the prisoners to fill the new prisons to capacity.⁹

The interaction of capitalism and racism is fundamental to the development of what Ruth Gilmore calls the *prison industrial complex*. The ideology of tax revolt is fostered by the capitalist meme that denigrates taxation in general, and it is linked with the racist meme that casts large sectors of our society as undeserving of government services. The fear of unemployed youth of color is a racist phenomenon but the fact that so many youth of color are unemployed is a part of the dynamics of a racialized capitalist labor market. Racist desires *per se* did not motivate the finance capitalists that promoted prison building, but it has had profoundly racist impacts.

Racism and capitalism are deeply intertwined and anti-capitalist politics need to be anti-racist to the core. An anti-capitalism that does not take race seriously can end up reinforcing racist dynamics, for instance, by theorizing as if the working class were exclusively white. This version of anti-capitalism would be narrow in its political appeal as well as faulty in its analysis of how capitalism operates. Both anti-racist and anti-capitalist movements can be more powerful in analyzing what they are up against if they are able to understand the ways that these two systems of domination share a significant common history and interconnected dynamics.

Disability

WHILE MANY SOCIETIES have mistreated people historically there are specific ways that oppression of disabled people manifests itself under capitalism. Capitalism is also the cause of many forms of disability, from workplace injuries (both physical and mental) to the injuries caused by a lack of health care to the disabilities caused by imperialist wars.

One of the primary evils of capitalism is that it reduces humanity to our ability to engage in wage labor. Our ability to produce for capitalist bosses seriously circumscribes our access to the resources we need to survive. Because of this, people with disabilities, including many elderly people, must

engage in an uphill battle to get the resources they need. The fact that some resources are allocated to people with disabilities is a testament both to the organizing done by people in the disability rights movement and the survival of non-capitalist forms of consciousness that value people for more than their ability to generate profits.¹⁰

Homophobia

JUST AS CAPITALISM HAS BEEN helpful to middle-class women who wanted to get out of the home and into wage labor, there are some ways that capitalism has been good to queer people. Historian of homosexuality John D'Emilio has argued that it is in the anonymity of cities, which grew along with capitalism, that people were able to break free from small communities and the expectations of heterosexual reproduction and create queer subcultures.¹¹

Queer theorist Rosemary Hennessey argues that,

while capitalism does not structurally require patriarchal gender asymmetry, . . . historically it has made use of the institution of marriage and heterosexual gender norms it regulates to reproduce gendered divisions of labor both in and outside the family.¹²

The relationship between capitalism and queer people is one that is constantly in flux. Hennessey points out that,

the once rigid links between sex, gender, and sexual desire that the invisible heterosexual matrix so firmly secured in bourgeois culture have become more flexible as the gendered divisions of labor among the middle class in industrialized countries have shifted.¹³

Queer liberation has involved a transition from ways of living based on strict and often puritanical moral codes to ways of living that put a higher premium on pleasure. While this transition has been crucial for queer liberation and has played a positive role in fostering more joyful ways of living, it also dovetails closely with consumerism.¹⁴

The image of the pleasure-seeking gay consumer can be problematic for the community as a whole.

Redressing gay invisibility by promoting images of a seamlessly middle class gay consumer or by inviting us to see queer identities only in terms of style, textuality, or performative play helps produce imaginary gay-queer subjects that keep invisible the divisions of wealth and labor that these images and knowledges depend on. These commodified perspectives blot from view lesbians, gays, and queers who are manual workers, sex workers, unemployed, and imprisoned. About a quarter to a half million homosexual and bisexual youths are annually thrown out of their homes and subjected to prostitution and violence in the streets.¹⁵

While capitalism can work in conjunction with queer liberation, the forms of alienation and immiseration caused by capitalism affect queer people as they affect everyone else, and there are some ways that capitalism is particularly harmful to queers. The reality under capitalism that an employer can rule like a dictator means that a boss who is homophobic for reasons having nothing to do with capitalism is empowered by capitalism to fire queer employees. Capitalism enables personal forms of homophobia to have devastating impacts on people's lives. And in a capitalist society such as the U.S., where health benefits are tied to employment or marriage, limited access to marriage often means a lack of access to health care for gay men and lesbians.

A queer liberation movement that is clearly anti-capitalist would not reduce queers to consumers. Instead, it would focus on de-linking health care with jobs and marriage. It would focus on not allowing employers to use their personal homophobia to ruin people's working lives. And it could use the rebellious energy that comes from rejection of traditional sexual mores to help us imagine lives filled with pleasure that are based on real liberation.

Conclusion to Section 2

ANTI-CAPITALISTS NEED TO MAKE CLEAR how capitalism connects many of the problems that various movements for justice and liberation are fighting, and we need to talk about these connections both among ourselves and with other activists who are open to analyzing the systemic nature of these

problems. Our movements will grow in depth and sophistication as more and more activists develop an anti-capitalist consciousness.

But in the effort to link anti-capitalist analysis with other struggles for liberation it is crucial that anti-capitalists do not act opportunistically—engaging in an anti-racist or anti-sexist campaign, for instance, with the primary motive of recruiting more adherents to anti-capitalist struggle and only secondarily invested in the issues identified by others in the struggle. The anti-capitalist movement has a long and negative history of using other movements in opportunistic ways. As long as anti-capitalists engage in coalitions with mutual respect everyone can gain through a cross-fertilization of perspectives and strategies.

SECTION 3

Disrupting Capitalist Practices

CAPITALISM IS REPRODUCED THROUGH a capitalist dominated mass media; through the propagation of pro-capitalist memes; by electoral systems that are overrun by money; and by numerous forms of violence, including violent overthrow of governments that try to take a less capitalist path and violence against those organizing to oppose capitalism or the consequences of capitalism. At present, movements that are not explicitly anti-capitalist are challenging all of these processes of capitalist replication.

Anti-war movements spring up for all of the imperialist and neo-colonial wars fought by the world's pro-capitalist powers. Police abuse and the prison industrial complex are subject to local and national pressures. Organizers are working to challenge the corporate control of the media. People are fighting for access to clean drinking water, local sustainable agriculture, an end to climate change, and shorter working hours.

Few in any of those movements would identify themselves as anti-capitalist or see value in developing an anti-capitalist analysis. Much of this work can help to push back capitalism even if it is not explicit enough to actually help foster an anti-capitalist movement. We can push back capitalism by creating economic alternatives that decrease people's dependence on capitalism such as worker owned cooperatives or community-controlled capital that builds projects that are useful to communities. We can push back capi-

talism by fighting against institutions such as the IMF or World Bank, or by fighting free trade agreements. Successful work in these areas constrains the range of motion of capitalist activity. We also can help promote anti-capitalism by developing anti-capitalist nodes, where dispersed forms of organizing can be swept together to add up to more than the sum of their parts.

Developing economic alternatives is important at the level of our imaginations. It helps us to create believable responses to the claim that “there is no alternative.” It is also important on a practical level for breaking our dependencies on capitalism for our survival. We can begin to develop coherent narratives about the positive ways that non-capitalist aspects of our economies function. We can point to ways that government provision of services often works, such as the fact that Social Security has largely ended the abject poverty of the elderly in the U.S. We can point to the ways we take care of our own needs without buying services or commodities to meet them. And we can point to the ways in which cooperative enterprises work well.

In addition to this intellectual work it is also important to build community forms of capital so that we are less vulnerable to the whims of capitalist investors. We can do this by building and supporting cooperatives and community development corporations. We can also do it by arguing for taxation to support common goods such as schools and transportation services.

We can also decrease the ways that capitalism wreaks havoc on people’s lives and on the life of the planet by making capitalist processes more accountable to the public. Those wanting to transform capitalism from the inside are working to insert non-capitalist values into capitalist processes by taking over the boards of directors of companies or large public institutions in order to make them use their resources for the social good.

In a 2002 article on the power of shareholder action in bringing down the apartheid government of South Africa, Archbishop Desmond Tutu wrote:

Faith based leaders informed their followers, union members pressured their companies, stock holders and consumers questioned their store owners, students played an especially important role by compelling universities to change their portfolios. Eventually, institutions pulled the financial plug, and the South African government thought twice about its policies.¹⁶

In their Spring 2004 newsletter entitled “Shareholders in Action,” *Co-op Quarterly* offers a manual on using the power of shareholders to pressure corporations from the inside. They report shareholder actions that have led corporations to take climate change seriously, to stop predatory lending practices, and to develop policies against discrimination of gay, lesbian, and transgender people.

These actions work like reverse viruses; they use capitalism’s DNA to spread anti-capitalist memes such as notions of fairness and social solidarity. In the fair trade movement, organizations help small-scale farmers gain better terms of trade, often in exchange for using sustainable environmental and labor practices.

Anti-capitalists may be tempted to reject forms of activism that use capitalist means to curtail the range of capitalism. These sorts of activities can help to legitimize capitalism by creating friendlier forms of it. But rather than rejecting these forms of activism we need to look at them carefully and analyze their political effects. Sometimes we can claim these activities as small victories, as when non-capitalist memes have transformed (at least partially) purely capitalist ones. Rather than denouncing or ignoring these sorts of developments we should find ways to bring out their anti-capitalist potential. We need to make our own anti-capitalist analysis clear enough so that these activists see their accomplishments as part of a larger effort to push back the capitalist notion that profit is the supreme value. If we are very clear about the complex nature of what is going on then we can generate critical discourses that help undermine the ways that these uses of capitalism for anti-capitalist goals might help to legitimize capitalism.

One highly contested example of using capitalist methods to thwart the worst impacts of capitalism is the Grameen Bank that, along with other micro-lending institutions, works to help the very poor in practical ways while at the same time articulating people into capitalism. The Grameen Bank loans very small amounts of money, often as little as \$20, to the world’s poorest people (usually women) to allow them to operate very small businesses, such as trading or craft work.

In *A Postcapitalist Politics*, J.K. Gibson-Graham points out that the Grameen model has weaknesses based on its relationship to capitalism. It creates a dependency on an outside bank and it turns the women who

get its loans into individual entrepreneurs, who are not brought into community relationships in their enterprises. Other models, such as the Mararikulam experiment in the Kerala state in India, focus more on using community capital to create cooperative sectors, which do more to build community than does the Grameen model.¹⁷

Progressive forms of capitalism, such as micro lending and influencing corporate boards of directors, can spread anti-capitalist memes. In both of these cases it is important to do an empirical analysis of the kinds of political potentials these movement unleash, what other possibilities they perhaps foreclose, and how they actually function on the ground.

Those working to reduce the devastation caused by global forms of capitalism have been arguing that there are many reforms to transnational global institutions that would make an enormous difference to people who live in poverty in much of the Global South. Taxes could be imposed on speculative uses of capital, transnational institutions could be made more democratic, and loopholes that allow transnational businesses not to pay taxes could be closed.¹⁸ All of these changes would make capital a bit less able to destroy our world. These approaches insert non-capitalist values into the heart of capitalist processes, and as such should be seen as part of a broad anti-capitalist movement. These sorts of action are not enough to eliminate capitalism and indeed may be needed to save capitalism from destroying the social base on which it depends, but they can be part of a broad multileveled and multi-pronged effort reduce the range of capitalist action.

We are co-opted when we take the values of capitalism to be our own, or when we believe that another world is not possible. We have not been co-opted when we declare a partial victory, when we work with our opponents, or when we engage in complex strategies that we are not sure will help or hurt our cause.

Sometimes the fights against what people find problematic in capitalism end up turning into nodes where a variety of issues come together to create a movement that is larger than the sum of its parts. These nodes can be important places for anti-capitalist activists to work, as people motivated by a variety of concerns come together across the lines of single-issue politics to develop common analyses of the deeper cause of the problems they face.

Accordingly, they begin to push for the transformation of social patterns or institutions.

One example of a powerful node is the struggle against transnational capitalist institutions such as the WTO, IMF, and World Bank. In the 1990s people all around the world saw the negative impacts of these institutions. Some opposed them because of their destructive environmental policies, others because of the ways that they undermined international labor rights. Some opposed the cultural homogenization that comes from transnational commercialism. Still others were interested in protecting traditional forms of existence or knowledge from enclosure and privatization.

A range of single-issue activists came together in a vortex of common organizing against the WTO and other transnational summits of the 1990s and early 2000s. Working together helped deepen the political perspective of millions of people around the world as they saw how linked issues formed the underlying dynamic of their (related) problems. Working in the strategic node of this global justice movement helped focus what had been disparate energies onto a common target and led to a vast multiplication of the impact any one of those single-issue movements could have had.

The anti-summit organizing of that period kept the WTO from coming up with a new round of agreements for regulating world trade. Suddenly, people who had been working on “small issues” that didn’t get much attention, such as those working to have tuna fished in ways that were dolphin-safe, were part of organizations that prevented the transnational elite from writing rules of trade that would force questions such as dolphin safety to be seen as barriers to free trade.

By stopping the WTO from coming to a close in the negotiations that began in 2001 (and as of 2011 have still not been completed), these organizations changed the DNA of the capitalism system in a profound way—much more profound than anything they could have achieved alone. Not only is there no global system that would support a country that wants to call “dolphin free” a trade barrier, the notion of subordinating environmental concerns to free market concerns no longer has global acceptance.

Anti-capitalists working in a strategic node can help build organizations that are organically related to existing struggles and also have an anti-capi-

talist analysis. Sometimes that work can succeed in transforming significant social structures that support the reproduction of capitalism.

As I am writing this, a node is developing around the twin fights against global climate change and the economic meltdown that began with the crash of the U.S. housing market in 2008. In both areas, people doing all sorts of work are being pulled into coalition. At the nexus of these issues is a potential vortex for the development of anti-capitalist consciousness. People who have for years worked for justice in the global economy are increasingly working on climate change, and are beginning to work with others who are interested in creating living wage jobs for low-income people of color in the U.S.

Environmentalists concerned about energy conservation are beginning to see how transnational energy companies have been skimming off community resources in the form of utility bill payments. They're joining hands with anti-poverty groups in arguing for prioritizing energy efficiency investments in poor communities as a way of increasing poor people's energy independence. Powerful organizations such as Green for All, Apollo Alliance, and the Emerald Cities Collaborative, while not taking on capitalism in any of their work, are effectively pulling together these constituencies for powerful work at the nexus of fighting climate change, overcoming poverty for communities of color, and creating a sustainable economy.

Environmentalists are looking at large-scale social forces and are increasingly seeing the ways that capitalism is a significant cause of inaction on climate change. The only way to limit global emissions to an acceptable level is to massively curtail the basic capitalist premise that businesses can do what they want. A critique of throwaway culture is emerging, exemplified by the immense popularity of Anne Leonard's short film *The Story of Stuff*.¹⁹ There are calls around the world for a green "new deal" that would finally address issues of global inequity, wherein development is measured in terms of quality of life rather than increases in GDP and where sustainable pathways out of poverty are supported generously by the wealthier nations.²⁰

The fight against climate change may also end up pulling together another set of issues that are very promising for the development of an anti-capitalist node: the movement for work-time reduction. In his book *Sharing the Work, Sparing the Planet*, sociologist and work-time reduction ac-

tivist Anders Hayden argues that if we were to spend less time at work we would have more time for forms of life that are not about buying and selling. We could enjoy ourselves through forms of culture that we create rather than ones we buy. If we were to fight for work-time reduction, we would have more time for our families and for relationships that matter; we would also consume less and drive to work less, and so help the environment.²¹ To the extent that workers are able to achieve work-time reduction, they will lessen their dependence on capitalist processes for their survival.

The task of making small anti-capitalist actions add up to more than the sum of their parts can be guided by the following three general principles. First, actions that lead to major structural transformations are likely to have lasting effects. Major structural transformations can include things like the reorientation or destruction of institutions such as the WTO; the development of a powerful network to link the resources of cooperative businesses; changing significant laws or international treaties; or changing who holds governmental power. Second, actions that help to build anti-capitalist consciousness in the general population can have long lasting effects. In all of the work we do it is crucial to build on the potential for delegitimizing capitalism as we engage in that work. The protests around the WTO did not just stop the organization from closing a trade deal; it educated millions about how capitalism operates. And third, also crucial for long-term transformation is the building of organizational forms that will develop in organizers a deep analysis of capitalism and of ways to propagate and support anti-capitalist activity.

SECTION 4

Building Powerful Organizations

AT THE PRESENT TIME in the U.S. there are probably more people working for social justice than at any other time in our history. Many people do it for a living and they are accomplishing much of value through this work. There are people working to challenge the racism in our schools at all levels; there are people working to protect the environment in their neighborhoods and at the transnational level; and in the U.S. people are working for universal health care.

One way to understand this period in the U.S. is by realizing that we are at the tail end of the incorporation into the social body of much of the energy for change that was unleashed in the period that began with the Civil Rights movement of the 1950s. This movement has been successful at delegitimizing many forms of oppression, including racism, sexism, homophobia, and oppression against people with disabilities. We are still reweaving the social fabric to incorporate the insights of this movement.

Many older activists long for the times, earlier in this cycle, when there was a sense of a mass movement; when there was a public culture to support social justice; and where they could see each other in many public arenas. Social movement theorist Bill Moyer writes that often, in the early phases of a movement, a small group of people perceives a problem and begins to develop an alternative way of understanding the world. Their analysis is usually seen as far outside the mainstream and not widely understood or accepted. That small group begins to agitate in different ways and to capture the attention of the public. As the movement grows, there is usually a phase where large numbers of people are exposed to the alternative view and are compelled, through protest actions and other tactics, to take it seriously. Eventually, if a movement is successful, the critique of society developed by the original organizers comes to be widely accepted. After a long period of contestation, institutions are slowly transformed by the pressures brought to bear by the movement.²²

Using Moyer's analysis, we can see that the social forces unleashed in the 1950s have reached a point where they have become capable of making long lasting changes in the social fabric, but this stage of transformation happens in ways that are very different from the politics of confrontation that characterized earlier phases of the movement. In the later phase of institutional change, the energy and potential that had built up in the earlier phases becomes woven more deeply into the social fabric.²³ Many of us in the current period are involved in what German activist Rudi Dutschke called "the long march through the institutions."²⁴ In the U.S. in recent years, the long march through the institutions has been led by thousands of social justice advocates doing the slow work of reweaving the social fabric from the location of their jobs in the public sector, in non-profits, and in non-gov-

ernmental organizations (NGOs). Increasingly they are doing this work in government positions, as well.

When we look at what organizational forms we need to develop to challenge capitalism we are looking from the viewpoint of a society permeated by NGOs and an NGO-dominated approach to thinking about social change. Many of the essays collected in the book *The Revolution will not be Funded* argue that the prominence of NGOs in current social movements is a dangerous trend. In her essay “We Were Never Meant to Survive,” anti-violence advocate Ana Clarissa Rojas Durazo writes,

The non-profitization of social movements occurs in a global context, in which privatization is extended more and more to all aspects of our lives, including resistance. . . . Everyone, whether an educator, a health care worker, or a domestic violence advocate is working in pseudo-corporate environments where the culture and organization of the market is increasingly encroaching on our lives. Instead of organizers, we have managers and bureaucrats, receptionists and clients. Instead of social change, we have service deliverables, and the vision that once drove our deep commitments to fight violence against women has been replaced by outcomes.²⁵

While not completely rejecting the value of NGOs, Rojas Durazo and her co-authors argue that NGOs are not capable of leading or completely carrying out a radical transformation of society without the presence of other aspects of a movement in which people’s social change work is not tied to their employment, in which large-scale funders are not to be relied on, and in which short-term achievements do not need to be pointed to for success. Only under these conditions can larger-scale and more radical visions proliferate.

The NGOs that have grown over the years to deal with racism, sexism, homophobia, and oppression of the disabled have accomplished much and should not be denigrated. They work well at taking a part of the social fabric and reworking it when there is a fairly widespread belief that the tasks they are working for are acceptable. And they save lives and improve living conditions for many.

But a movement against capitalism, at least for the foreseeable future, needs much more life and dynamism than NGOs alone can generate. NGOs tend to avoid asking big questions about the nature of the problems being addressed and they tend not to focus on ways to use their work to build a larger movement. And while the funders of many non-profits are liberal in their desires to get rid of some forms of oppression, many liberals fear jeopardizing the sources of their relative power: the capitalist enterprises they rely on for their resources.²⁶

I believe that an anti-capitalist movement should see itself as at the early phase of Moyer's typology. We are not at a place where we need to be working in the interstices of the system to make quiet changes. We are at the very first stage, where we need to be developing our alternative understanding of the world. We need to begin to make that alternative understood by others through forms of agitation.

Traditionally, anti-capitalist thinkers have argued that the only way to keep attention, strategy and analysis as focused as it needs to be (for so large a task as the elimination of capitalism) is to work through very disciplined and tightly organized structures, such as the Leninist vanguard party. One of the major advantages of a vanguard party is that it is able to develop a clear analysis of the situation, and to train people to do what is necessary. Through tight centralization it can make sure that all of its members are acting in coordinated ways and following the priorities, or "line of march," set down by those doing the analysis.

Unfortunately, history shows that the tightness and focus that lead to the well-coordinated activities and intellectual development of vanguard party members tends to breed both rigidity and opportunism. Leninist organizations often become overly rigid because the analysis that has been elaborated by the leadership often comes to be taken as essential to the definition of the organization, and ideological variations are seen as threatening the organization's unity and strength. Vanguardists also tend to act opportunistically because such a focused organization can forget that other organizations and social formations also have worthwhile goals. A Leninist organization often tries to mine other organizations for new recruits and opportunities to forward its own agenda.

In contrast to the Leninist model, the Global Justice Movement, particularly in the North, has utilized decentralized forms of coordination, direct democracy, and networks of networks.²⁷ These forms work brilliantly for animating large numbers of people. They encourage in people a feeling of empowerment; they unleash creativity; and they are often highly effective because a network of networks can rely on the “logic of the swarm” in ways that tightly structured organizations often cannot.²⁸

The organization 350.org successfully harnessed the logic of the swarm, as well as the power of the internet and social media, to bring attention to the need for serious action on climate change. The organization asked people to do some sort of visual action around the number 350 (which is the parts per million of CO₂ some scientists consider a safe level for Earth’s atmosphere). On October 24, 2009, more than 5,200 actions were taken in 181 countries, most of them very creative and many of them receiving media attention.

Some social change thinkers have criticized these looser organizational structures for their inability to hold people together for long periods of time. Their ephemeral nature often means that people do not work together long enough or in ways that are intentional enough to develop long-term strategies or enhance participants’ skills at organizing and analyzing political realities.

Ironically, those who have worked in Leninist organizations are often much more able to organize on their own and make sense of new political situations than those who have participated in loose networks. Loose networks often leave participants without training as organizers. They often leave participants without skills related to strategic thinking and without developing their capacity to understand the complex and interrelated nature of the problems that face them.

We are at a point in the development of the present round of anti-capitalist struggle where we don’t know what it is possible to attain, so the question of how to attain it seems very elusive. If we wanted to overthrow a government that is not deeply entrenched in the social fabric then a very small, highly secretive, and disciplined organization might be the best form of organization. If we want to help many people see the limitations of capitalism then it would probably be best to organize ourselves as a loose net-

work of mutually inspiring cultural workers. If we think we need to spread an analysis of capitalism that helps us to see its vulnerabilities, then the most important next step is to have those already oriented toward anti-capitalism spend more time reading and talking with one another to develop a common frame of reference for the work they do, and to strategize.

I believe that for the present moment our sense of what we are doing is so weak, and where it might lead is so unclear, that it does not make sense to advocate for tightly controlled forms of organization, at least not in the U.S. Rather, it seems to be a period for study groups, networking, and experimentation. We need to know the strengths and weaknesses of different forms of organizing. We need to take seriously the questions of how to organize ourselves and how to develop the best forms as conditions change.

SECTION 5

Guidelines for Action

WE ARE AT A PROPITIOUS TIME for challenging capitalism. Energy for changing our society in profound and lasting ways is growing. There is an infinite number of things that can be done to move us along in the process of getting past capitalism. Below are nine priorities to help focus that energy and keep it productive.

1. **DELEGITIMIZE CAPITALISM.** For many years those opposed to capitalism have been afraid to even name it. If, like the anti-racist and feminist movements, we are able to get to the point where it is common knowledge that capitalism is a destructive social form, and where many people understand the ways it works, more people will be able to decode pro-capitalist manipulations; more people will be able not to vote for them; more people will be able to organize against them; and more people will be able to contest the ideological space in which pro-capitalist memes propagate. We need to talk about capitalism as the destructive force that it is. When engaging in protest actions, make connections for people. Write pamphlets. Make creative protest signs. Name capitalism whenever appropriate.

2. **CHALLENGE, JAM, AND REPLACE** pro-capitalist memes, and generate and propagate anti-capitalism memes and dreams. Cultural workers who under-

stand the ways that capitalist culture is propagated can critique capitalist memes through analysis and explanation and by jamming them. Anti-capitalist memes can similarly be explained and argued for and can be spread through alternative cultural forms. Anne Leonard's video, *The Story of Stuff*, has changed an understanding of consumer culture for millions of viewers. Make videos. Make art. Engage in creative protest.

3. LIVE IN WAYS THAT HELP YOU not to be a capitalist desiring subject. Find ways of generating pleasure and meaning in your life that do not rely on consumerism. Downshift your own expectations to the extent that pleasure comes from making and doing rather than buying. Attend to the quality of your relations with others and with the natural world.

4. PROPAGATE ANTI-CAPITALIST WAYS of understanding and measuring the economy. People will continue to vote for pro-capitalist policies if they believe that such policies are good for the economy. The more people understand that what is good for private capital is not necessarily good for people or for communities, the more space we have to transform the social fabric. Developing ways to measure what is good for the economy that center on what is good for human and environmental development creates a powerful opening for a radical transformation in values. The use and propagation by radical media outlets of alternative economic indicators would begin to wean people from the belief that what is good for capitalism is good for everyone. Pressure your local alternative media to begin to use alternative economic indicators in its news coverage.

5. CHALLENGE THE MAJOR PROCESSES of capitalist reproduction in respectful coalition with others. Elaborate systems of social power, including mass media, the electoral and justice systems, state-sanctioned violence, and systemic discrimination, all reinforce capitalism in different ways. Many people who are not committed to eradicating capitalism are doing important work to challenge these systems and thus are weakening capitalism's hold on people's imaginations and physical survival. Anti-capitalists can work in these arenas to support such work. They can also, where appropriate, deepen this work by sharing their anti-capitalist analysis. Work to end the prison industrial complex, to support sustainable agriculture, and to end inhumane

immigration laws. In coalition work, don't talk about capitalism when it will not help the movement achieve its goals but do talk about it when an anti-capitalist analysis will help people understand the deep forces at play in relation to their projects.

6. DEVELOP LARGER STRATEGIES THAT WILL BUILD SYNERGY between small-scale and dispersed activities. As we engage in our dispersed tactics to push back capitalism, we need constantly to consider which of these strategies build most effectively toward a non-capitalist future. We need to understand how small actions come together to make major transformations. We need to focus on actions that will lead to major structural transformations, to deep changes in consciousness, and to the development of powerful organizations. Working to make your small town as independent of capitalism as possible is a good goal, but joining with the Transition Town movement, so that models can be shared, is even better.

7. MAKE VISIBLE ALL OF THE WAYS that non-capitalism works well in our lives. We can foster the courage to criticize capitalism by promoting an understanding of all of the non-capitalist economic forms that are functioning well in our lives. We can draw attention to the systems of sharing and mutual support we all rely on, to the ways that state-run economic activity often works well, and to the ways that cooperatives function well. Learn about non-capitalist economic forms and talk about them.

8. SUPPORT THE DEVELOPMENT of community controlled forms of capital. We can lessen our dependence upon the economic dependency trap of capitalism by supporting the efforts of non-capitalist entities such as local governments, community development projects, and cooperative businesses. Developing forms of community capital is powerful for decreasing the dependence of individual people as well as national governments on private capital. These non-capitalist forms of life can also serve to puncture the pro-capitalist meme that claims "there is no alternative." Bring non-capitalist economic forms to where you live by starting a co-op, supporting co-ops, or by trying to get your local government to use community capital to serve community needs.

9. **BUILD MOVEMENTS IN WAYS THAT DEVELOP PEOPLE'S CAPACITIES.** We need to develop organizational forms that will build in people a sense of commitment to a world without capitalism. We need a deep analysis of the problems surrounding them and a sense of flexibility in carrying out a multi-pronged and long-term struggle to eradicate capitalism. We need what Gramsci called "pessimism of the intellect and optimism of the will," that is, we need to understand the seriousness of what we are up against while holding in our hearts and our intellects the belief that a world without capitalism is possible. Work with others, and attend to the ways that people are fed by those organizations. Make sure they feed people's sense of possibility. Make sure they offer a sense of community and belonging. Make them fun. Make sure they develop people's leadership capacities. Make sure you network with others who are doing similar work.

10. **THINK STRATEGICALLY.** Fighting against an enemy that is dispersed through the whole fabric of society, that is implicated in our own desires, and that has no central core holding it together and making it function, requires subtle forms of analysis. We need to give up on the binary of reform versus revolution and look to build revolutionary reforms: actions that step by step begin to liberate us from capitalism. We need to avoid oversimplifying and looking for simple solutions, fulcrum points, or a black-and-white understanding of what we are doing. In all of your work, think about what you are doing and how it will add up to meaningful change. If we want to get past capitalism we need to be clever, flexible, perceptive, and brave.

Conclusion

WE NEED TO GIVE UP ON FALSE HOPES of a major rupture where capitalism implodes on itself all at once. We need to stop focusing on states as the major locus of anti-capitalist activity. We are up against a shape-shifting seducer as well as a tyrant and abuser. Capitalism is supported by the use of violence, by the creation of forms of dependency, and by our own desires. Capitalism is more of a mutating virus or a chameleon than a building that could be toppled.

We don't need to wait for "the revolution" to begin to get past capitalism. Getting past capitalism happens as we build economic forms based on community forms of capital, gift-based economies, worker-owned cooperatives, and government actions that serve human needs. We get past capitalism when we work in coalition with others to constrain the ways that capitalism is reproduced at all levels of society, from cultural memes that promote consumerism, to economic structures of dependency, to transnational legal apparatuses. We build a movement to get past capitalism as we spread realistic analysis of how capitalism functions, what is wrong with it, and how we can push it back.

Rather than undermining practical political activity by pointing out that it is not revolutionary, anti-capitalist analysis can help inspire the work people are already doing on many fronts. We can show how other forms of struggle can be part of a movement for a truly better world: one without alienation, without exploitation, and one based on sustainable economics.

As we build that movement, at every step along the way life can be made better for those who are now unable to gain minimal means for a healthy existence as well as for those who are privileged. Life can be more secure, more interesting, more environmentally sustainable, and more equitable. It can be less alienating, less exploitative, and less dominated by the race for profits at all cost. And perhaps one day it can be completely free from capitalism.

Notes

1. Naomi Klein, *No Logo: Taking Aim at the Brand Name Bullies* (New York: Picador, 1999), 281.
2. Patrick Reinsborough, "Decolonizing the Revolutionary Imagination," in *Globalize Liberation: How to Uproot the System and Build a Better World*, ed David Solnit (San Francisco: City Lights Books, 2004), 161–212.
3. Bill McKibben argues that we need an approach to economics that will focus on what is good for people or the planet rather than what is good for a set of numbers. He calls this a "post-autistic economics." See: Bill McKibben, *Deep Economy: The Wealth of Communities and the Durable Future* (New York: Henry Holt, 2007), 100.
4. Mark Blyth, *Great Transformations: Economic Ideas and Institutional Change in the Twentieth Century* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2002).
5. Juliet Schor, *Plentitude: The New Economics of True Wealth* (New York: Penguin Press, 2010); David Korten, *Agenda for a New Economy: From Phantom Wealth to Real Wealth* (San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler, 2010); McKibben, *Deep Economy*.
6. Johanna Brenner, *Women and the Politics of Class* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 2000), 26.
7. They argue that the very idea of race evolved along with racism. While there is biological variation among human beings that is related to places of ancestral origin, there is no scientific basis for drawing lines of demarcation between groups. Given the history of human migration, people's biological heritages are incredibly mixed. See Michael Omi and Howard Winant, *Racial Formation in the United States: From the 1960s to the 1990s* (New York: Routledge, 1994), 4.
8. Omi and Winant, *Racial Formation in the United States*, 2.
9. Ruth Wilson Gilmore, *The Golden Gulag: Prisons, Surplus, Crisis, and Opposition in Globalizing California* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007).
10. Joseph P. Shapiro, *No Pity: People with Disabilities Forging a New Civil Rights Movement* (New York: Random House, 1993).
11. John D'Emilio, "Capitalism and Gay Identity," in *Powers of Desire: The Politics of Sexuality*, eds. Ann Snitow et al (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1983). See also: Rosemary Hennessey, *Profit and Pleasure: Sexual Identities in Late Capitalism* (New York: Routledge, 2000), 175.
12. Hennessey, *Profit and Pleasure*, 65.
13. Hennessey, *Profit and Pleasure*, 136.
14. Hennessey, *Profit and Pleasure*, 133.
15. Hennessey, *Profit and Pleasure*, 141.
16. Desmond Tutu, quoted *Co-Op America Quarterly* 62 (2002): <http://www.greenamerica.org/pdf/caq62.pdf>.

17. J.K. Gibson-Graham, *A Postcapitalist Politics* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2007), 180–81 and 235–36. For a scathing critique of Grameen, see: Lamia Karim, “Demystifying Micro-Credit: The Grameen Bank, NGOs, and Neoliberalism in Bangladesh,” *Cultural Dynamics* 20, no. 1 (2008): 5–29. For an argument in favor of micro lending by Grameen’s founder, see: Muhammad Yanus, *Banker to the Poor: Micro-Lending and the Battle Against World Poverty* (New York: Public Affairs, 2003).

18. For a program to reform the global economic system, see: The International Forum on Globalization, *Alternatives to Economic Globalization: A Better World is Possible*, eds. John Cavanagh and Jerry Mander (San Francisco, Berrett-Koehler, 2004).

19. Anne Leonard, *The Story of Stuff* (2007): <http://www.thestoryofstuff.com>.

20. For a detailed argument for the claim that the only way to solve the global climate crisis is to work for an end to global poverty, refer to the work of the organization EcoEquity. See: <http://www.ecoequity.org>.

21. Anders Hayden, *Sharing the Work, Sparing the Planet: Work Time, Consumption, and Ecology* (New York: Zed Books, 1999). See also: Juliet Schor, *The Overworked American: The Unexpected Decline of Leisure* (New York, Basic Books, 1992); and Juliet Schor, *Plentitude: The New Economics of True Wealth*, Kindle location 1486. In 1994, France moved to reduce the normal workweek to thirty-five hours. The government gave some concessions to businesses such as reducing the amount they would have to pay for pensions, in trade for reducing the workweek without cutting pay. The initiative resulted in generating more jobs and freeing a large number of French workers from a significant amount of wage labor. In *Plentitude*, Schor claims that if people in the U.S shifted to the same work patterns as those in Western Europe, energy consumption would decline by twenty percent.

22. Bill Moyer, *Doing Democracy: The MAAP Model for Organizing Social Movements* (Gabriola Island, B.C., Canada: New Society Publishers, 2001).

23. Moyer, *Doing Democracy*.

24. See: Michael Watts, “1968 and all that . . .” *Progress in Human Geography* 25, no. 2 (2001), 167.

25. Ana Clarissa Rojas Durazo, “We Were Never Meant to Survive,” in *The Revolution Will Not Be Funded: Beyond the Non-Profit Industrial Complex*, ed. INCITE! Women of Color Against Violence (Cambridge, MA: South End Press, 2007), 123.

26. For a critique of the reliance of progressives on foundation funding, see: Joan Roelofs, *Foundations and Public Policy: The Mask of Pluralism* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2003). Her book contains much good research on the ways that the foundations that fund progressive organizations have attempted to manipulate those movements.

27. See: Starhawk, *Webs of Power: Notes from the Global Uprising* (Gabriola Island, B.C., Canada: New Society Publishers, 2002); Notes from Nowhere, ed., *We Are Everywhere: The Irresistible Rise of Global Anti-Capitalism* (New York: Verso, 2003), 63–73; Eddie Yuen, Daniel Burton-Rose, and George Katsiaficas, eds., *Confronting Capitalism: Dispatches from a Global Movement* (New York: Soft Skull Press, 2004).

28. This expression comes from: Notes from Nowhere, ed., “Networks: The Ecology of Movements,” in *We Are Everywhere*, 63–73.

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