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What future society?

Some notes to contribute to our debate on the future society.

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In 2019 the IC of the Fourth International discussed a "Proposal for a programmatic debate". Following this it decided to pursue in a broad and open way the discussion on our conception of a new society. In this light it requested three of its commissions that alongside organizing ongoing activity in the existing social movements develop our thinking on the type of society that we want. These three commissions, on Ecology, LGBTIQ questions and women's oppression and feminism, each wrote a short contribution to develop the discussion. We publish these three contributions, along with the original document, in the spirit of promoting such a discussion which is more than ever necessary today. These contributions were of course written before the Covid-19 pandemic.

Our project for a future society must imperatively articulate the dimension of social and political emancipation with the imperative to stop the destruction of life, the climate change, the collapse of biodiversity ... and the need to repair as much as possible the damage already caused.

"There is no solution to the ecological crisis within the framework of capitalism, a system entirely devoted to productivism, consumerism, the ferocious struggle for 'market shares', to capital accumulation and maximizing profits. Its intrinsically perverse logic inevitably leads to the disruption of ecological balance and destructions of ecosystems." [\[1\]](#)

The abolition of capitalism is an indispensable, but by no means sufficient condition. Overcoming the ecological crisis requires going beyond criticism of the capitalist mode of production. A cultural revolution is necessary, which will have to continue far beyond the abolition of capital.

Deconstructing property, building the commons

Capitalist groups in the sectors of energy, the chemical industry, banking and credit, transport, agro-industry, construction...are responsible for the increase in greenhouse gas emissions as well as the destruction of biodiversity.

The logic of accumulation through dispossession is constantly being extended to new lands (water, forests...). Privatisation/merchandisation is even presented as a means not only of optimising production but also of preserving resources: the market for rights to pollute, intellectual property on living things, etc.

The expropriation of capitalist groups and the abolition of private ownership of natural and knowledge resources are necessary. But beyond that, the question of what socialisation is needed? Which systems (energy, transport, agricultural...) are renewable, decentralized and efficient, according to ecological and social imperatives? What common and democratic management of resources according to real human needs, while respecting the proper functioning and renewal capacities of ecosystems?

These questions lead us to deconstruct the notion of ownership in favour of a conception of the common. The common is a social process and not a natural given that would make certain domains inherently common. It is first of all a democratic construction, (an institution) the fruit of a democratic process of deliberation to define what uses? for whom? but also, for example, for land, water, forests... what obligations to take care of, to repair? It is a social construction infinitely richer than exclusive ownership, which puts democracy back at the centre and breaks with the

commodification that standardizes everything it touches by reducing it to a marketable, quantifiable and interchangeable value.

Radically transforming the productive apparatus

The productive apparatus is not neutral, it is entirely constructed, organized for capitalist accumulation, imperialist plundering...

Technologies are indeed destructive (nuclear, armament, biocides, petrochemicals, industrial breeding ...), sectors of activity are useless and destructive like advertising ... and the expropriation of capitalists will not change anything!

It is not only a question of expropriating and socializing the productive apparatus, but of radically transforming its conception. Agriculture is an example of the break necessary to move from industrial agriculture to an ecological, peasant, proximity agriculture that ensures food sovereignty and the protection of biodiversity.

The demands for localization of production and food sovereignty are part of a self-management and internationalist perspective.

"Extending anti-capitalism to objects" (Razmig Keucheyan)

In all areas, it is a question of moving from the production of goods (exchange value) to the production of democratically determined use values. And that changes everything: instead of being disposable with programmed obsolescence, wasteful and energy-consuming, objects would be robust, dismountable/repairable, reusable, and at the end of their life (if end there is) recyclable. These objects could also be beautiful by resolving the division between art and life in a kind of "luxury communism"!

Extension of the sphere of gratuity (free access)

Decommodification also involves extending the sphere of free services, understood as free and equal access to goods (basic food products) and services (public transport, education, health care...) while assuming social and ecological choices: free energy and water for basic needs and, beyond this threshold, strongly progressive pricing according to consumption to combat waste.

Working less

The massive and collective reduction of working time is consistent with the reduction of material production and transport (even if some productions such as agriculture for example will require more lively work). It should be accompanied by some form of sliding scale of working time to distribute useful work. It would free up time for social, political, recreational, artistic, erotic and other activities... The "Reign of Freedom" according to Marx.

The division of necessary work must be conceived from the outset as including the sphere of social reproduction. Today, women take on most of the reproductive work within the family free of charge, and this work is invisible because it does not pass through the market. Another organization of work will have to de-feminize, de-privatize and recognize the essential place of caring for children, the sick, the elderly and globally to care for/repair the living.

Changing work

But it is not enough to reduce working hours, it is also necessary to challenge the purpose, content, organization and division of work, to attack work that is forced, alienated, what Marx calls work "virtually devoid of quality". Employees endure not only physical wear and tear, but also the suffering generated by this poorly done, meaningless work.

In order to put an end to the dispossession of workers from the control of their work, to give back all their place to concrete, practical and real knowledge of the work process, to collective and individual know-how, it is necessary to get out of salaried work as a social relationship of domination, to build a real self-management of the production units.

To produce differently is also to get out of the infernal circle of "alienated work, alienated leisure and alienated consumption".

Articulating self-management and planning

Production, distribution and consumption must be organised not only by the "producers" but by society as a whole. Democratic planning must enable men and women to reappropriate as citizens, inhabitants, users, the major social choices relating to production, to decide what to produce. This level of economic and political democracy must be articulated with another level, that which allows us as workers and producers to control the management and organization of our work unit, to decide how to produce. It is the combination of these different levels of democracy that allows cooperation and not competition, a management that is effectively rational from an ecological and social point of view, fulfilling from a human point of view, on the scale of the workshop, the company, the branch... but also of the municipality, the region, the country and even the planet!

On needs

Capitalism is constantly creating new artificial needs, harmful, both unsustainable and alienating. At the same time, vital needs are not/no longer satisfied.

Consumerism, like productivism, is inherent in this system. Consumerist addiction is deeply ingrained in all of us. How do we get out of it? How do we define the needs that need to be met for a good life? Taking into account that these needs must be "universalizable" and not reserved for a few people, or for certain parts of the world.

The motto of capitalist society is: "What is good for everyone is worthless, you will only be respectable if you are better than others," Gorz proposes another motto: "Only what is good for everyone is worthy of you. Only that which neither favours nor demeans anyone is worthy of being produced." The deconstruction of artificial needs and the definition of the needs to be satisfied must be the object of collective deliberation.

Being rather than having

"Freedom in this field can only consist in socialised man, the associated producers, rationally regulating their interchange with Nature, bringing it under their common control, instead of being ruled by it as by the blind forces of Nature; and achieving this with the least expenditure of energy and under conditions most favourable to, and worthy of, their human nature. But it nonetheless still remains a realm of necessity. Beyond it begins that development of human energy which is an end in itself, the true realm of freedom,..." (Marx, *Capital*, Volume 3, Chapter 48). The reign of freedom begins beyond work, therefore beyond the sphere of production. True wealth does not lie in the infinite increase of goods - having - but in the reduction of the working day, and the increase of free time - being. This implies renouncing the joker of abundance and assuming that freedom lies in self-limitation and not in the unlimited, which is necessarily alienating.

Countrysides, cities... slums...

For the first time in the history of mankind, the urban population exceeds the rural population. At the beginning of the twentieth century, only one person in ten lived in a city, a hundred years later, more than one in two do so. According to forecasts, the urban population could reach 70% of the world's population by 2050. Almost half of urbanization today takes place in slums, especially in the poorest regions of the world.

Beyond the imperative to break land speculation, to free the city (not only) from the car in favour of public transport, recreational spaces and soft mobility (spaces reserved for pedestrians and cyclists), and to "de-artificialize" it (urban agriculture and community market gardening, restoration of biotopes embedded in the urban fabric), the question arises of a long-term policy aimed at rebalancing urban and rural populations and overcoming the opposition between town and country. There is also the question of preserving and/or rebuilding livable, sustainable human communities on a scale that allows for real democracy.

Human/non-human

It can be said that in order to put an end to the abject treatment inflicted on animals but also for health, the reduction of GHG emissions, the preservation of biodiversity... we must radically reduce meat consumption and put an end to the meat industry, industrial fishing... But this does not exhaust the question of relations between humans and non-humans.

We have not (yet) made collective progress on this issue. It is rather a question of nourishing our reflection. This passage is thus made up of various contributions, it owes much to the work of Daniel Tanuro.

For Daniel Bensaïd in an article from 2003 (*Un monde à changer*, collection La Discorde, Textuel): "One can however wonder whether it is indispensable to approach responsibility towards animals from a moral point of view (difficult to found), and not simply from an ecological point of view. Why moralize ecology to the point of resurrecting transcendences that evoke ancient natural theologies and the sacralization of the living? Isn't it playing one anthropocentrism (that of the human privilege of being able to think the world in moral terms) against another (that of a selfish humanism placing humanity at the summit of creation)? Would it not be wiser to conceive of the interdependence of beings in the ecosystem and their reciprocal responsibilities from the point of view of the immanent and profane ethics of a critical ecology?"

At least two questions:

- How do you live with animals?

We can explore the path proposed by Jocelyne Porcher ("Living with Animals: A Utopia for the 21st Century") for whom animals should not be seen as "work tools" but as special collaborators in "the human world of work". It is not only a question of welfare but also of recognising what animals specifically bring to work. "It is therefore basically a question of establishing a kind of labour (or work) law for pets, which would lay the basis for our obligations towards them in terms of the work we expect of them and what they expect from us. A labour law that implies "also offering animals the living conditions that best suit their own world and tastes", integrating the fact that, "as for employees, there is a life outside of work and after years of work".

- Learning to think in two again

Based on his work with the Runa, the anthropologist Eduardo Kohn (*How Forests Think: Towards an Anthropology Beyond the Human*, University of California Press (2013)), puts forward the idea that the extreme complexity and permanent danger of the Ecuadorian forest have made the ability to interpret the signs produced by non-humans a condition for the survival of humans in this particular environment.

It invites us to assume our duality as a species that is "unnatural by nature". Made "too human" by modernity, we must learn to "think in two" again. And he argues for an "arduous process of decolonization of thought" aimed at "making room for another kind of thinking - a broader kind of thinking that embraces and sustains the human". "The type of thinking that thinks through the lives of people like the Runa (or others) who interact intimately with the living beings of the forest in a way that amplifies the distinctive logic of life. This type of thinking cannot exist without contact with other forms of life, plants and animals. Kohn is not looking back to the mythical "good old days" but to a future to be built urgently, and it is in the name of human interest that he argues against anthropocentrism: "If we want to survive the Anthropocene, this indeterminate era of ours, in which the world beyond the human is increasingly transfigured by the too-human, we must actively cultivate these ways of thinking (...) learn to pay attention to the kind of lives that exist beyond the human, so as to allow the logic of life beyond the human to work within us".

Anthropologist Philippe Descola explains that for the Achuars of the Amazon "non-humans were anything but nature. They were social partners who were neither divinized nor sacralized since they were hunted and eaten, plants and animals alike. Nevertheless, they were endowed with a dignity of subjects that allowed for subject-to-subject communication."

Humanity-Nature

During the twentieth century, the countries of so-called "really existing socialism" were unable to offer an alternative to the productivist destruction of the environment, to which they contributed significantly.

The record of the USSR, China and the countries of the East cannot be attributed exclusively to bureaucratic degeneration and Stalinist counterrevolution.

On the ideological level, it was favoured in part by the permeation of the revolutionary movement by mechanistic scientific conceptions. These conceptions, which must be analysed in their historical context, determined a vision of the environment as an element to be dominated, which could be shaped at will and without limits. These ideas were present in most tendencies of the workers' movement, even in the left-wing opposition to Stalinism.

For Philippe Descola: "Nature does not exist. Nature is a concept, an abstraction. It is a way of establishing a distance between humans and non-humans (...) that took its definitive form with the scientific revolution. (...) a metaphysical device, which the West and the Europeans invented in order to highlight the distance between humans and the world, a world that was then becoming a system of resources, an area to be explored and whose laws we are trying to understand." He adds: "Capitalism needs this underpinning that I have called naturalism; that is, this clear distinction between humans and nonhumans, the overseeing position of humans vis-à-vis nature," and proposes "to invent alternative forms of inhabiting the Earth, alternative forms of organizing among humans and maintaining relations with nonhumans."

It is a question of developing step by step a new ecological awareness, a new cosmogony [theory of the origin of the universe], a new culture developing values of respect, care and prudence. Humanity has caused much ecological destruction, but there is no reason to think that human intelligence and sensitivity cannot allow us to relearn what mechanistic conceptions of nature have made us forget, to take care of the environment, to rebuild what can be rebuilt and, in so doing, to invent a new culture of our relationship with the rest of nature.

The vision of "true nature" as nature without human beings is ahistorical and misanthropic. It offers no real solution, since this "true (virgin) nature", does not exist anywhere on the surface of the globe. In the face of this impasse, the cosmogony of the indigenous peoples (Mother Earth) is a source of inspiration for another conception of the relationship between humanity and nature, one that is free from the monomania of value and instrumental rationality that is characteristic of the "icy waters of selfish calculation". But it is a source of inspiration, not an export product. A classless communist society will be similar in some respects to so-called "primitive" societies, but will be quite different, given the level of development of the productive forces. Likewise, such a society will develop a conception of human-nature relations which will probably resemble in some respects that of indigenous peoples; but will nevertheless be different. A conception in which the ethical notions of precaution, respect and responsibility, as well as wonder at the beauty of the world, will constantly interfere with a scientific apprehension that is both increasingly refined and clearly incomplete.

PS:

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[1] Michael Löwy ["Thirteen theses on the imminent ecological catastrophe and the (revolutionary) means of averting it" <http://www.internationalviewpoint.org/spip.php?article6391>].