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RECONSIDERING THE MARXIST-ANARCHIST CONTROVERSY IN AND THROUGH RADICAL PRAXIS

Lessons Taken from the Greek Uprising, December 2008.

‘O my comrades, there is no comrade’¹

A great deal of ink regarding the Marxist-anarchist dispute and, unfortunately, a great deal of blood on both sides has flowed since the exchange of letters between Proudhon and Marx in 1846. In his letter to Proudhon on 5 May 1846, Marx called on Proudhon for closer cooperation in order to establish regular contact between the German, French and English socialists. The key aim of this connection would be to provide the European socialist movement with a context in which socialists could exchange information regarding the progress and experience of their social, political and theoretical struggles. In this sense, different perspectives and ‘differences of opinion’ could be ‘brought to light and an exchange of ideas and impartial criticism’ could take place.² In his reply on 17 May 1846 Proudhon very prophetically predicted some of the ‘infantile disorders’ which characterized the later course of both Marxism and anarchism and as a result marked their relationship and the development of the labour movement during the last 150 years:

Let us seek together, if you wish, the laws of society, the manner in which these laws are realized, the process by which we shall succeed in discovering them; but, for God’s sake, after having demolished all the *a priori* dogmatisms, do not let us in our turn dream of indoctrinating the people...do not let us leave humanity with a similar mess to clear up as a result of our efforts. I applaud with all my heart your thought of bringing all opinions to light;

let us carry on a good and loyal polemic; let us give the world an example of learned and far-sighted tolerance, but let us not, merely because we are at the head of a movement, make ourselves the leaders of a new intolerance, let us not pose as the apostles of a new religion, even if it be the religion of logic, the religion of reason. Let us gather together and encourage all protests, let us brand all exclusiveness, all mysticism; let us never regard a question as exhausted, and when we have used our last argument, let us begin again, if need be, with eloquence and irony. On that condition, I will gladly enter your association. Otherwise — no!³

The decline of the labour movement and the relationship between Marxism and anarchism prove to have totally vindicated Proudhon in expressing these fears and concerns. Both strands tend to disregard the fact that they come from the same revolutionary tradition and deny their important resemblances, common elements and goals. Over the last 150 years their relationship has been characterized by fanaticism, fierce competition and exclusiveness. They both confused anti-capitalist struggles with closure and sectarianism. They both suffered from their certainties, absolute truths and mutual hostility. They both stopped being critical against presupposed situations, established facts and everything given. In many cases, instead of struggling together for human emancipation, they ended up fighting each other. Having lost the dialectic unity between reason and conscience, they have also lost the ability to separate the important and unimportant, essential and inessential.

A re-examination of the dispute between Marxism and anarchism, however, should not itself be based on assumptions and presuppositions. The prevailing way of thinking about this conflict should not be taken for granted and accepted mechanically. Their

antagonism should not be perceived as fixed, established and everlasting. A re-appreciation of this controversy would enable us to re-address critical issues from a radical perspective and at the same time to draw fruitful conclusions. In distinction to conformism, formalism and quietism, which characterize a large number of both anarchists and Marxists, the role of critical and questioning thought is to provoke insubordination and destroy the horrors of sectarianism, intolerance and political fragmentation. The rethinking of this dispute means reaffirming the meaning of critique as an effort to keep the questions addressed by this controversy open, ‘an inexhaustible fountain of problems’ and ‘a constant warfare against the dogmas.’⁴

This essay argues that the question over the Marxist-anarchist polemic is a ‘practical question’, as ‘the dispute over the reality or non-reality of thinking which isolates itself from practice is a purely scholastic question’.⁵ As Horkheimer reminds us, ‘the dialectic theory does not practice any criticism based solely on ideas. Even in its idealist form it had rejected the notion of a good-in-itself wholly set over against reality. It does not judge by what is beyond time but by what is within time’.⁶ Following Marx’s line of thought, we consider that ‘all mysteries’ in regard to the Marxist-anarchist conflict could ‘find their solution in human practice and in comprehension of this praxis’.⁷ In this respect, the paper reflects on the Greek insurrection of December 2008 and focuses on what we can learn from this about the Marxist-anarchist dispute.

In Athens, on December 6, 2008, a policeman shot 15-year-old Alexis Grigoropoulos in cold blood and killed him. Reacting to the teenager’s murder, thousands of young people

joined in spontaneous marches and were involved in clashes with the police and within days the riots grew into an autonomous rebellion which spread all over the country and lasted for more than two weeks. What made the Greek events the most important revolt in Europe after May '68 in France was its social constitution, radicalism, quick spreading, destructive thinking and practice, explosiveness, and its mass, fluid and subversive character. The uprising was also distinctive in regard to the political groups and trends that joined in. The Greek radical political spectrum has the characteristic of being constituted by a variety of political groups and parties which would label themselves as radical or anti-capitalist. Orthodox Marxists, Marxist-Leninists, Trotskyists, Maoists, radical socialists, anarchists, antiauthoritarians, autonomists, libertarian communists, greens and eco-feminists represent the tradition of the radical movement as it was formed over the last two centuries. In this sense, the Greek revolt signified a fundamental criterion in order to evaluate the practice and role of these political currents. This paper argues that the reflection and evaluation of Marxist and anarchist practice during the unrest could offer valuable lessons regarding the Marxist-anarchist conflict in the direction of reconciliation, synthesis and transcendence of the two opposing traditions.

OPENNESS and CRITICAL SOLIDARITY

John Donne's verse over the anatomy of the modern world could be applied with equal force to the state of the radical movement at the beginning of the twenty first century and after 150 years of practical struggles for human emancipation: 'Tis all in pieces, all

coherence gone'. The political and economic dominance of capital, primarily after the demise of the soviet type societies, resulted in a further disarticulation of social relations. In many cases, also, it provoked an apparent evanescence of social and political conflicts and a deeper political division of the labour movement. The aggressiveness of capital was coupled with the resilience of capitalist and neoliberal institutions and caused a tremendous dislocation of human values and an immense movement of depoliticization and privatization. The decomposition of the working class movement has been evident even in the reemergence of the anti-capitalist movement against neoliberal globalization, which continues to be fragmented and sectarian. Even under these new circumstances of anti-capitalist struggles, Marxist and anarchist groups revive a conflict which emanates from their own past failures and defeats. Their dispute has a profound influence on the coherence, community and development of the international labour movement and perpetuates its own crisis. Both currents remain hostage to their own fragmentation and their polemic has been marked by ideological stereotypes, extremisms, severe mutual aggression, exclusiveness and atrocities. Having been deeply immersed in sectarianism, the two opposing traditions exaggerate their differences and overstress whatever distinguishes them.

By seeing black where they should see white, both Marxists and anarchists reproduce a reality which enslaves and politically emasculates them. Since both trends are trapped in an inverted world and present it as a real world, they pass off their sectarianism, futility and stupidity as revolutionary qualities. Yet Marx, who emphatically pointed out that he was not a Marxist, knew very well how to distinguish between a radical movement and

the ‘infantile disorder’ of sectarianism. As he put it in his letter to Schweitzer (13/10/1868), ‘you yourself know the difference between a sect movement and a class movement from personal experience. The sect seeks its *raison d’être* and its *point d’honneur* not in what it has *in common* with the class movement, but in the *particular shibboleth distinguishing* it from that movement’.⁸ Three years later, in his letter to Bolte (23/11/1871), Marx discussed this issue in the same vein: ‘The development of socialist sectarianism and that of the real labour movement always stand in indirect proportion to each other’.⁹ For Marx, the existence of all these radical sects was inseparably interrelated with the immaturity of the working class and its ability to come into being as a self-conscious and autonomous movement of the vast majority of the working class. A similar point was made by Pannekoek: ‘The working class is not weak because it is split up—it is split up because it is weak’.¹⁰ Yet, one could argue here that we are caught up in a vicious cycle of dividing and weakening. The impotence and crisis of the labour movement produces the splits and the factional conflicts and at the same time this dividing reproduces and perpetuates the weakness of our struggles for social emancipation and self-determination.

In the *Communist Manifesto* Marx and Engels asserted that ‘the Communists do not form a separate party opposed to other working-class parties. They have no interests separate and apart from those of the proletariat as a whole. They do not set up any sectarian principles of their own, by which to shape and mould the proletarian movement.’¹¹ Throughout the anti-capitalist struggles of the last century, the opposite was the case regarding the vast majority of Marxist and anarchist groups. Both strands (and primarily

their leading cadres) did their best to separate themselves from any autonomous social initiative, to distinguish themselves from the movement, to set up their own sectarian doctrine. The Greek insurrection on December 2008 demonstrated that this sectarianism is largely the effect of our activity and the outcome of our narrowness, blocking the development of our struggles. We are responsible for our history, our intolerance and our splits. We actively reproduce our closure, weakness and fragmentation. The Greek revolt, as one of these 'rare moments when society is at boiling point and therefore fluid'¹² was evidence that the Marxist-anarchist conflict is neither fixed nor static and unchanging. The volcanic explosion of the insurgents made this relationship fluid and opened the way for active solidarity and the development of social and political interconnections between the Marxists and anarchist militants. Throughout the uprising, both rank and file Marxists and anarchists challenged the established presuppositions regarding their own past mutual hostility and created a space of united action and mutual respect. By the opening of their radical actions and their participation in the rebellion, they overcame, even though temporarily, their fetishized relations and went through a significant process of resocialization and anti-sectarianism.

This openness created a common area of struggles, militant protests, common assemblies, street battles, occupations of public buildings or seizures of television and radio stations. Moreover, Marxists and anarchists together promoted solidarity against state violence and contributed decisively to the defense and release of the 270 people who were arrested during the insurrection. Thus, the rebellion demonstrated that the split between Marxism and anarchism and the various splits within the radical movement are the products of

human activity, that is, of our praxis. The Greek revolt was evidence against the de-humanization and de-personalization of the history of the labour movement and the Marxist-anarchist relationship. Until now, their conflicts and splits have been presented by both sides as reified and naturalized. The militants were considered as objects that grouped themselves mechanically in the petrified formations of the labour movement. The social unrest, however, showed that these reified contradictions are in motion and therefore transient. It revealed that they are neither sclerotic nor rigid antinomies, but historically and socially constituted differentiations. In this movement of contradiction, where the dialectic of subject and object is revealed, the revolutionary praxis exposes the social character of the Marxist-anarchist dispute and demystifies their fetishized praxis. Human social practice sparked off a process of openness, critical solidarity and anti-sectarianism that contravenes the sectarianism and closure of both Marxists and anarchists. Paulo Freire`s words brilliantly epitomize the above development:

Sectarianism, fed by fanaticism, is always castrating. Radicalization, nourished by a critical spirit, is always creative. Sectarianism mythicizes and thereby alienates; radicalization criticizes and thereby liberates. Radicalization involves increased commitment to the position one has chosen, and thus ever greater engagement in the effort to transform concrete, objective reality. Conversely, sectarianism, because it is mythicizing and irrational, turns reality into a false (and therefore unchangeable) ‘reality’.¹³

‘NEW’ FORMS OF ORGANIZATION

The practical struggles within the Greek insurrection posed, once again in the history of the radical movement, the critical and controversial organizational issue which lay at the heart of fierce debates that have taken place between Marxists and anarchists since the split of the First International. Based upon the ‘success’ of Soviet Marxism, the Bolsheviks and Lenin managed to impose the organizational model they supported and considered to be more effective. The Leninist party was presented as the organized vanguard of the working class that led to the victory, the ‘success’, of the Russian Revolution. For orthodox Marxists, both critical Marxists and anarchists were simply the defeated. They were the losers, those who failed and therefore they were on the wrong side. Their theories and practices were erroneous. Yet, this capitalist language of success, victory and achievements spoken by Leninists-Stalinists concealed not only the dialectic of form and content, but also the dialectic of success and defeat. The most obvious point that could be made here is that the history of traditional Marxism, primarily in the Soviet type societies, suggests that ‘homage to success is homage to violence’¹⁴ against the struggles of the working class for human emancipation; homage to fear and oppression. And further, that following the Leninist logic both Marxists and anarchists are united now in a common defeat and impotence to create an alternative to capitalism. Such a re-appropriation of the Leninist organizational model, however, would follow the same criteria of success and victory and would be missing the dialectical nature of the victory-defeat relationship. A dialectical re-appreciation could explicitly show that ‘the apparent successes’ of the traditional labour movement ‘are its fundamental failures (reformism or

the establishment of a state bureaucracy), while its failures (the Paris Commune or the Asturias revolt) are its most promising successes so far, for us and for the future'¹⁵. Arguing against Luxemburg's and Pannekoek's political insights regarding the issues of revolutionary organization, Lukács opined that 'organisation is the form of mediation between theory and practice'.¹⁶ The history of the labour movement, however, demonstrates that the 'successful' Leninist form of organization is the form of mediation between the self-organization of the working class and capital, between the self-emancipation and creativity of 'ordinary people' and the capitalist state. From the workers' councils in the Russian Revolution (1917) to Kronstadt (1921), from the Spanish civil war (1936) to Hungary (1956), from May '68 to the Greek revolt (2008), Lenin's organizational legacy was there to block the self-activity of the people, to emasculate the radical practice in the name of 'orthodoxy' and its sterilized ideological and political doctrine.

By following Marx's example and reflection upon the historical experience of the Paris Commune, Lenin himself would suggest his orthodox comrades analyse the historical experiences of the revolutionary movement and 'draw tactical lessons from it'¹⁷. In accordance with Marx, Lenin argued that these experiences could 'provide the answer to the question as to what specific forms (the) organization of the proletariat as the ruling class would assume' and would prompt them, like Marx did with the Commune, 'to begin to study what forms it (the movement) had *discovered*'.¹⁸ Following Lenin's line of thought one could argue that the issue vis-à-vis the forms of organization in an emancipatory movement could be re-examined in the light of the Greek social unrest. The

radical praxis of the insurgents changed the givens of the organizational problem. In a parallel way, it made evident that the Leninist theory of organization and conception of the Party as the group of professional revolutionaries opposes the idea of socialism as the self-organization of the people within society as a whole and endeavors to control and keeps the insurgents in subjection. It also demonstrated the sectarianism and problematic character of the various fragmented anarchist and anti-authoritarian groups.

More specifically, the revolt confirmed in practice, once again, that ‘the very expression “revolutionary party” is a contradiction in terms’¹⁹ and that ‘the tradition of all the dead generations weighs like a nightmare on the brain of the living’²⁰. The Greek Communist Party was completely taken by surprise and stood throughout the social unrest on the side of the right government and tried to restore social order and ensure social stability. Indeed, through their general secretary, Al Pappariga, they argued that the revolted were nothing but ‘masked and hooded individuals linked with the state secret services and centers abroad’ and that ‘in a real uprising...not even one window will be smashed’. Finally, she advised the insurgents to ‘be mature and think calmly’. Even the majority of the minor orthodox Marxist, Leninist and Trotskyist extra-parliamentary groups faced the revolt with contradictory feelings and placed little confidence in the explosiveness, historical creativity, political capacity and autonomous collective will of the insurgents. In cities where around 300 people used to participate in demonstrations organized by anti-capitalist and radical leftist groups suddenly 2,000 or 3,000 people joined in the protests after the assassination of the boy. Radical leftists called for a peaceful demonstration and unexpectedly they saw thousands of young people joining the march.

Who were they? Where did they come from? Orthodox Marxists and Leftists started not only to get into a state of panic, but they proceeded to accuse each other of not being able to 'guard' their peaceful demonstration. Who brought them? Who called them to join the protest? Were they 'anarchists' who came from other cities? Were they just 'hooligans' who were called by anarchists to engage in violent clashes with the police and consequently to undermine the political content of the protests? Having settled for decades 'for the role of revolutionary-by-proxy', 'cuckolded and defeated as revolutionaries *sans* revolution'²¹ leftists started attacking anarchists for mobilizing all these people and for being violent. In fact, anarchists were not only able to trigger off this spontaneous social explosion, but in many cases the uprising exceeded in radicalism the expectations even of the most radical antiauthoritarian groups. Anarchists, anti-authoritarians, libertarian communists and autonomists joined the revolt and wholeheartedly supported it, though throughout the rebellion the limited, sectarian and fragmented characteristics of the anarchist groupings were more than obvious.

Even after the uprising, many of the Marxist and anarchist groups kept on asking: Where did all these hooded and masked youths go? Why did they not join en masse the various anarchist organizations or at least, why did they not vote for the Marxist and radical parties during the recent parliamentary elections? The events of December made it clear that the insurgents rejected and transcended hierarchical and repressive organizations such as political parties and trade unions. They were also not attracted by the anarchist sects. Over a century now, all these parties and groups have reinforced our subjection to capital by viewing the class struggle as a struggle between parties and groups. By doing

so and by fighting each other, both Marxists and anarchists create their own enslavement and entrapment. Their ‘imprisonment is its own handi-work’.²² Even worse, in most cases their personal differences and conflicts dominate class issues, personal and narcissist issues prevail over political ones and private and micro-political problems replace anti-capitalist struggles. Once again, both Marxists and anarchists reduce temporary and problematic characteristics of the labour movement into situations that are perceived as permanent. The Greek social unrest revealed the fact that all these Marxist and anarchist groups are socially constituted, that is to say, they express human social relations organized in a specific way. They should not, thereby, be presupposed as given or eternal structures and forms of political organization, but should be considered as ‘ephemeral’ formations, as ‘simply an episode’ in the history of the radical movement.²³ They are transitory forms of organization in the process of being changed by human activity.

The human and radical actions during the Greek insurrection revealed and brought to light what has been well shown from the social struggles of the oppressed several times, that is, we are capable of undertaking independent and autonomous social initiative without having a need for the organized vanguard of a ‘revolutionary party’. The collective and radical praxis of those involved in the social unrest posed the question as regards the means-end relation and the answer was given by the revolted themselves through the formation of ‘*open popular assemblies*’. The insurgents negated the ‘cold hand of Tradition’²⁴ and with their actions came to a rupture with the Leninist tradition of the revolutionary party. Moving ‘from a politics of organization to a politics of events’²⁵, the dialectics between their struggles and the organisational forms of negativity were

displayed. In doing so, they rejected the professional politicians and the party form. They created, through and in their own radical activity, forms of self-organisation that contradicted the conservative political line of the various 'central committees' and transcended in practice the pre-existing division within the labour movement between the rulers and the ruled, the directors and the performers. Instead, they performed through the open assemblies against the 'rationalization' of politics. Assemblies promoted dialogue, intense debates and were based on direct democracy. There were neither leaders nor hierarchy nor political representation. Everyone could participate and thousands of militants joined the discussions, overcoming the division between the sphere of professionalized politics and the sphere of everyday interest and activities. Within the open assemblies there were no 'revolutionary professionals' and the participants defended the unity between the forms of organization and the content of social emancipation. Both rank and file Marxists and anarchists participated in open assemblies reunifying, even temporarily, in reality their split and fragmented worlds. Without necessarily always being aware of it, with their participation they overcame their separation and their tendency towards isolation and marginalization. They both went through a process of re-politicization unfolding, at the same time, their repressed possibilities for united anti-capitalist action.

Open assemblies were the spontaneous forms of organization which depicted and included the radical activities of the insurgents. In contradistinction to crystallized and sclerotic Leninist forms of organization, open assemblies in terms of their form and content united elements of self-discipline and freedom. The revolted created a community

of struggle that experienced ‘something of the freedom and the spontaneity which will mark the future’.²⁶ This spontaneity expressed in and through open assemblies and radical activities was their self-organization. By doing so, they overcame in practice the closure and sectarianism of the anarchist groups, as well as hierarchical relations existent within the Leninist and Leftist parties which reproduce the logic of capitalist social relations, that is, obedience, discipline and division between directors and executants, rulers and ruled. In this process of their self-activity the young people overcame also the division between representatives and the represented. By using the internet, blogs, websites, mobile phones and cyber-environments they organized themselves without having the need for mediators and professional politicians to represent them.

THE INVISIBLE HAND AND THE CHALK CIRCLE

In *Red Dyed Hair*, one of the most outstanding Greek novels over the last 30 years, the officer speaks on behalf of the omnipresent power: ‘There is a piece of chalk. Who holds it is unimportant. But whoever does, he has the power to mark out your limits. Within those limits, anything goes. Outside, everything is forbidden.’²⁷ For capital and its state, for economic and political power, the rules of the game are fixed: there is an invisible hand that holds the chalk, draws the circle and imposes the limits. We, the world of the oppressed, can in part do what we like provided we act within these limits, their limits. The response coming from the side of Louis, the protagonist of the novel, was blunt and angry: ‘General, that chalk of yours, you can take it and stuff it. Me, personally, I spend

sixty percent of my time outside that chalk circle of yours'.²⁸ And this was the response of the insurgents during the Greek revolt. Capital is the making of circles in every aspect of our lives, the endeavour made so that our doing is detached from thinking and feeling. It is the 'imposition on our lives of a certain form of doing'²⁹, a form of living within circles: the circles of work, of school, of marriage, of career, of our car, of the tv program, of holidays, of state, of time, of the language of capital. The Greek revolt was a struggle against and outside all these circles. It was a brief reminder that capital's circles are made of chalk, that is to say, we can erase them. They are fragile and could be broken. They should not be taken as given and natural. And beyond that, the insurrection was evidence that every one of us, the world of the oppressed and exploited, holds a piece of chalk to shape our dreams against and beyond the circles of capital and its state.

Most importantly, the revolt challenged many of the Marxist and anarchist assumptions and preconceptions about their own anti-capitalist struggle. Until the insurrection, both currents seemed to live within their own circles which are the circles of absolute truths and sterilized dogmas. The insurgents in and through their radical praxis disputed the Marxist and anarchist 'circles of certainty'³⁰ and rejected their own imprisonment in the self-enclosed spheres of traditional parties and sects. They shook the foundations of their separate 'homes' and reminded both Marxists and anarchists that 'real adventures...do not happen to people who remain at home'.³¹ The largest part of the revolt was outside the circles made by capital and its state. It was outside the circles made by both Marxists and anarchists. In this sense, the revolted broke with the force of habit and questioned the pre-established and prevailing Marxist and anarchist banalities as regards the capitalist

state and its role. Both Marxists and anarchists are now obliged to reflect anew on the issue of the state and the forms of extra-institutional opposition. On this point, Agnoli made a very significant remark on the influence of the 1968 movement that could equally depict the influence and the significance of the Greek revolt:

To act extra-institutionally within society assures the possibility of influence. In this regard, the experience of the 1968 movement is very instructive. It was able to exert political influence only for as long as it did not participate in a direct and immediate sense in state politics (*Staatspolitik*). Its ratio emancipationis (Vernunft) came into play as long as it assembled in the streets; its Vernunft went astray as soon as the movement began the long institutional march.³²

Throughout the revolt and while thousands of young people were building barricades against the police and were fighting against capital and the state, many Marxist groups or radical leftist political parties were endeavouring to channel the insurrection within the limits of capitalist society and its state. For this reason, they made ‘political proposals’ for the disarmament of the police, the resignation of the government and a call for national parliamentary elections. The fundamental message of the revolted, however, that is needed to get across to Marxists is their contempt for state-oriented politics. The insurgents struggled against capital outside the state institutions. They neither sought another government nor had any concrete political demands with the view of improving and beautifying capitalist society.

The lesson of the Greek revolt for the Marxists was that extra-institutional (but within society) radical action radicalizes the political class struggle and cannot be incorporated within the system. The insurgents were neither defeated nor reconciled. The traditional

Marxist instrumentalist conception of the state tends to neglect the fact that it is not ‘just a state in a capitalist society, but a capitalist state’.³³ By overlooking the social constitution of the state, for Marxists the concept of state is assumed and taken for granted. The Greek civil unrest showed to Marxists that the most fundamental element of the state is its class character. The capitalist state is not capitalist because it is run by capitalists or right wing governments but because it reproduces capitalist social relations. Throughout the revolt the capitalist state was there to guarantee and protect private property, formal equality and to monopolize and exercise brutal violence against those who resisted and negated capital. Having been trapped into the circle of state and representative democracy, Marxists need to understand that the struggle against state power is one moment of the class struggle against capital.³⁴ On the other hand, the Greek revolt shed light on the problematic and dogmatic anarchist concept of state. Many anarchist groups perceive the state as a ‘thing’ and fail to grasp its essence as ‘a process of forming social relations’.³⁵ During the insurrection and even after it, anarchists fetishized violence against the capitalist state. For them, capital state power takes tangible forms and is personified in the face of state buildings, banks or police, which should be attacked and smashed from outside by means of violence. Yet, as Clarke put it

workers can violate capitalist property rights by occupying a factory, by liberating supermarkets, or by burning down banks. But this does not transform capitalist social relations of production; for capital is a social relation that exists as a totality and that cannot be reduced to one of its forms. Capitalist property is founded not on the rule of law or on the supposed state monopoly of violence, but on capitalist social relations of production.³⁶

The state is neither an ‘instrument of revolution’ nor a ‘thing’. The state belongs to the society that generates it and it is socially constituted. The capitalist state is linked with capitalist society; it is not a separate and autonomous political form, it does not have an independent and tangible existence. In this sense, it does not really matter who runs it or how many police cars are going to be burnt. This entails, then, that if we want to abolish state power, to liberate ourselves from the state, we need first to change the capitalist social relations from which it springs.

By breaking the Marxist and anarchist circles of certainty vis-à-vis the state, the Greek revolt broke capitalist time, ruptured the form of time as perceived by capitalist logic. It also broke the Marxist and anarchist conception of time as an anniversary, ceremonial and repetitive time which reified and petrified social struggles within the cyclical organization of political events, ritual protests or occupation of state buildings. The insurgents produced their own temporality, which was ‘the time of insubordination, the struggle for human dignity’.³⁷ Their time of resistance showed to both Marxists and anarchists that there is a ‘unity of the revolutionary project’, a ‘historical inheritance and continuity’³⁸ of the revolutionary tradition of the exploited which runs throughout the last century and is still active. It is this radical experience that demonstrates that the time of the united radical movement, the time of self-organization of the people overcomes the reified time of the Marxist parties and the anarchist sects and defies the bourgeois linear conception of time. But which is this capitalist time and how could it be calculated? In his *Democracy in America*, Alexis de Tocqueville provided us with a very lucid explanation of the capitalist perception of time. As he put it, ‘twelve years in America

counts for as much as half a century in Europe'.³⁹ Tocqueville's conception of time is the time of progress, money, velocity, technology, domination, instrumental rationality, functionality, efficiency and quantity. On the other hand, in his interpretation of the Hungarian events of 1956, Castoriadis explicated very clearly the revolutionary alternative to capitalist time: 'these events lasted only a few weeks. I hold that these weeks — like the few weeks of the Paris Commune — are, *for us*, no less important and no less meaningful than three thousand years of Egyptian pharaonic history'.⁴⁰ This is the time of resistance, negation, dignity, self-organisation, solidarity, subversion, poetic talking and overflow of soul. Similarly, we could say that two weeks of the Greek insurrection was more significant than the last 30 years of the political activity of both the Marxist parties and the anarchist sects. The social unrest continued the revolutionary tradition of collective and united radical action which overcomes the fragmented and freezing time of the Marxist-anarchist dispute. It created its own temporality of insubordination and it was a lesson for both tendencies that 'there is not a moment that would not carry with it *its* revolutionary chance'.⁴¹ As Horkheimer would put it, 'for the revolutionary, conditions have always been ripe' and he/she is always 'with the desperate people for whom everything is on the line, not with those who have time'.⁴²

POSTSCRIPT: Towards a Creative Destruction

The perpetuation of the Marxist- anarchist conflict acts as a burden in the struggle for human emancipation and remains an obstacle on the path to radical social transformation.

The political and theoretical failure of orthodox Marxism has not led to a marked revival of anarchism. By remaining hostage to their own fragmentation and sectarianism, both Marxism and anarchism are united in a common impotence to build a radical alternative to neo-liberal capitalism. It is the absence of any radical alternative and the on-going crisis of the labour movement that call for the eradication of all mystifications in an attempt to make clear what remained hidden under the appearance of the Marxist-anarchist dispute. This process of demystification brings to the fore old questions addressed in a new way, eliminates presuppositions and attacks everything that conceals the truth. The failure and crisis call everything into question. As Karel Kosik argued, ‘in every crisis everything is again theoretically examined and analyzed, and things that once seemed to be resolved and clear have long ceased to be obvious and appear problematical; that is, as vital questions that must forever and always be examined and analyzed’.⁴³ Critique and reflection upon the Marxist-anarchist controversy in and through the Greek revolt could disclose radical tendencies and illustrate future-oriented revolutionary elements. In miserable times in which, as Ernst Bloch put it, ‘the old does not die and the new is not born’⁴⁴, the critical re-evaluation of the anarchism-Marxism conflict is highly significant not only on a theoretical level but also on a political one, in order to ‘return to that practical and not merely ideological broadmindedness’⁴⁵ of the First International Working Men’s Association.

Inevitably, however, a number of themes and questions arise here: Do we need Marxism and anarchism in order for the form and the content of the First International to be re-established? Does a new and radical alternative to capitalism need the various Marxist

and anarchist groups? The Greek revolt showed that the questions of the forms of organizations are equally significant as the questions of the content. Throughout the subversive events of December 2008 there was no leadership. There was neither orthodoxy nor avant-garde party. Once again, historical experience and intense moments of social struggle revealed that both Marxists and anarchists could play a positive role in the re-organization of the emancipatory anti-capitalist struggles on condition that they both overcome their circles of certainty, orthodoxy, closure, sectarianism and fragmentation. In this regard, one could say that cold and warm streams coexist in both Marxism and anarchism.⁴⁶ Their ‘cold streams’, inconsistencies and contradictions, however, cannot be overcome separately from the social reality, from social and political struggles. We need the warm streams that exist in both traditions. Revolutionary struggles could be enriched by the revolutionary culture of both trends provided that they both undergo a ‘creative destruction’, an ‘Aufhebung’ and get dissolved ‘in the end into the democracy of the councils’.⁴⁷ Open assemblies, communes and councils defend the unity between the forms of organization and the content of social emancipation. They could spread all over the world and include the warm streams from both the Marxist and anarchist traditions. This unity of the two conflicting strands could be achieved in a way similar to the Hegelian concept of *Aufhebung*, since as Hegel put it, ‘what transcends itself does not thereby become Nothing...To transcend (aufheben) has this double meaning, that it signifies to keep or to preserve and also to make to cease, to finish...Thus, what is transcended is also preserved; it has only lost its immediacy and is not on that account annihilated’.⁴⁸ In other words, the application of the Hegelian ‘Aufhebung’ to both Marxism and anarchism within the forms of assemblies and councils

could be seen not only as ‘transcendence’ and ‘annihilation’ of their historical form and independent existence, but also as ‘preservation’ and ‘maintenance’ of their ‘warm streams’, their most radical substance and essence in the new form of the ‘democracy of the councils’. As Ernst Bloch brilliantly put it, ‘a new good is never completely new. Most of the past is interrupted future, future in the past’.⁴⁹ The new radical and revolutionary alternative to capitalism cannot be completely new. It needs, as a large part of its foundations, the ‘warm streams’ of both Marxism and anarchism. Both traditions could constitute the fundamental bases for the future development of the radical and emancipatory movement. As Karel Kosik aptly pointed out, ‘anything without a foundation is unstable, shallow, empty’ and by losing our foundation we ‘overcome by nothingness’ and ‘nothing means *nihil*’.⁵⁰

The Greek revolt confirmed in practice, once again, that Marxists and anarchists by dissolving into the democracy of open assemblies could contribute enormously to the creation of what Marx and Engels called the ‘proletarian movement’, which is ‘the self-conscious, independent movement of the immense majority, in the interest of the immense majority’.⁵¹ It will be a self-conscious, independent and radical movement that includes Marxists and anarchists and at the same time goes beyond them, a self-organized movement that calls everything into question and keeps the question open⁵² and most importantly, an emancipatory movement which ‘cherish(es) the questions themselves’, ‘live(s) the questions’, lives everything.⁵³ Of course, as Castoriadis argued, the forms of open assemblies and councils are not ‘a panacea’, as they cannot themselves guarantee the development of our autonomous activity and self-organization. Yet, the form of open

assemblies and councils make ‘this development possible’.⁵⁴ Only within these council forms can we develop a radical anti-capitalist movement which will rely ‘solely and exclusively upon the intellectual development of the working class, as it necessarily had to ensue from united action and discussion’.⁵⁵ Within these council forms of organization there will be no absolute truth, no infallible dogma, no official political theory, but independent and free thought, intellectual development, self-organization, united action and critical solidarity that espouses Luxemburg’s words: ‘Freedom is always and exclusively freedom for the one who thinks differently’.⁵⁶ We can start from the accumulated theoretical and practical experience of our struggles. The Greek revolt shows us the way. As Ernst Bloch would say to both Marxists and anarchists ‘I am. We are. That is enough. Now we have to begin’.⁵⁷

¹ I paraphrase here Aristotle’s words: ‘O my friends, there is no friend’. Quoted by Michel de Montaigne, *The Complete Essays*, Penguin, 1991, p.214.

² Marx to Pierre-Joseph Proudhon in Paris, 5 May 1846, in Karl Marx, Frederick Engels, *Collected Works*, Lawrence and Wishart, 1982, Vol. 38, p. 39.

³ Proudhon to Marx, Lyon, 17 May 1846.

[http://www.marxists.org/reference/subject/economics/proudhon/letters/46_05_17.htm], accessed on 13 January 2010.

⁴ R. G. Collingwood, *An Autobiography*, Clarendon Press, Oxford 2002, p.75.

⁵ Karl Marx, ‘Theses on Feuerbach’, (Thesis II) in Marx-Engels, *Selected Works*, Lawrence and Wishart, 1991, p. 28.

⁶ Max Horkheimer, ‘Postscript’ [Traditional and Critical Theory], in Max Horkheimer, *Critical Theory. Selected Essays*, Herder and Herder, 1972, p. 250.

⁷ Karl Marx, ‘Theses on Feuerbach’, (Thesis VIII), p. 30.

⁸ Marx to Schweitzer, 13 October 1868, in Karl Marx, Frederick Engels, *Collected Works*, Lawrence and Wishart, 1988, Vol. 43, p. 133.

⁹ Marx to Friedrich Bolte, 23 November 1871, in Marx-Engels, *Selected Works*, Lawrence and Wishart, 1991, p. 641.

¹⁰ Anton Pannekoek *Party and Working Class* (1936)

[<http://www.marxists.org/archive/pannekoe/1936/party-working-class.htm>] accessed on 19 February 2009.

¹¹ Karl Marx, Frederick Engels, ‘Manifesto of the Communist Party’, in Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *Selected Works*, Lawrence and Wishart, 1991, p. 45.

¹² C.L.R James, *The Black Jacobins*, Penguin Books, 2001, p. xix.

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- ¹³ Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, Penguin, 1996, p.19.
- ¹⁴ Russel Jacoby, *Dialectic of Defeat*, Cambridge University Press, 2002, p. 4.
- ¹⁵ Guy Debord, Attila Kotányi, Raoul Vaneigem, ‘Theses on the Paris Commune’, in Ken Knabb (ed) *Situationist International Anthology*, Bureau of Public Secrets, 1981, p. 314.
- ¹⁶ Georg Lukács, *History and Class Consciousness*, Merlin Press, 1990, p. 299.
- ¹⁷ V.I. Lenin, *The State and Revolution*, Penguin, 1992, p. 33.
- ¹⁸ V.I. Lenin, *The State and Revolution*, pp. 37, 50.
- ¹⁹ Anton Pannekoek *Party and Working Class* (1936).
- ²⁰ Karl Marx, ‘The Eighteenth Brumaire of Luis Bonaparte’, in Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *Selected Works*, p. 93.
- ²¹ Raul Vaneigem, *The Revolution of Everyday Life*, Rebel Press, 2006, p. 277.
- ²² Theodor Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, Continuum, 2003, p. 172.
- ²³ For Marx’s account of the party as an ‘ephemeral’ and ‘simply an episode’ in the history of working class movement, which ‘is everywhere springing up naturally out of the soil of modern society’, see his letter to Freiligrath, 29 February 1860, in Karl Marx, Frederick Engels, *Collected Works*, Lawrence and Wishart, 1985, Vol. 41, pp. 81, 82.
- ²⁴ John Holloway, *Change the World Without Taking Power*, Pluto, 2005, p. 213.
- ²⁵ John Holloway, *Change the World Without Taking Power*, p. 214.
- ²⁶ Max Horkheimer, ‘Traditional and Critical Theory’ in Max Horkheimer, *Critical Theory. Selected Essays*, Herder and Herder, 1972, p. 218.
- ²⁷ Kostas Mourselas, *Red Dyed Hair*, Kedros, 1992, p. 55.
- ²⁸ Kostas Mourselas, *Red Dyed Hair*, p. 74.
- ²⁹ John Holloway, ‘Where is Class Struggle?’ in Alfredo Saad-Filho (ed), *Anti-Capitalism. A Marxist Introduction*, Pluto Press, 2003, p.229.
- ³⁰ Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, p.20.
- ³¹ James Joyce, *The Dubliners*, Collector’s Library, 2005, p. 20.
- ³² Johannes Agnoli, ‘Emancipation: Paths and Goals’, in Werner Bonefeld and Sergio Tischler(ed), *What is to be Done? Leninism, Anti-Leninist Marxism and the question of revolution today*, Ashgate, 2002, p. 194.
- ³³ John Holloway, *Change the World Without Taking Power*, p. 94.
- ³⁴ On this point see Simon Clarke, ‘State, Class Struggle, and the Reproduction of Capital’ in Simon Clarke, *The State Debate*, MacMillan, 1991, p. 201.
- ³⁵ John Holloway, *Change the World Without Taking Power*, p. 94. On this see also John Holloway, ‘Global Capital and the National State’, in Werner Bonefeld and John Holloway, *Global Capital, National State and the Politics of Money*, MacMillan, 1996, esp. pp. 119-122.
- ³⁶ Simon Clarke, ‘State, Class Struggle, and the Reproduction of Capital’, p. 187.
- ³⁷ Sergio Tischler, ‘Time of Reification and Time of Insubordination. Some Notes’, in Werner Bonefeld and Kosmas Psychopedis, *Human Dignity*, Ashgate, 2005, p. 141.
- ³⁸ Cornelius Castoriadis, ‘The Hungarian Source’, in David Ames Curtis(ed) *Cornelius Castoriadis, Political and Social Writings*, Vol. 3, 1961-1979, University of Minnesota Press, p. 259.
- ³⁹ Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, HarperPerennial, 1988, p. 346.
- ⁴⁰ Cornelius Castoriadis, ‘The Hungarian Source’, p. 259.
- ⁴¹ Walter Benjamin, Paralipomena to ‘On the Concept of History’, in Howard Eiland and Michael W. Jennings, Walter Benjamin. *Selected Writings*, Vol. 4, 1938-1940, Harvard University Press, 2003, p. 402.
- ⁴² Max Horkheimer, ‘The Authoritarian State’, in Andrew Arato and Eike Gebhardt (ed), *The Essential Frankfurt School Reader*, Blackwell, 1978, p. 106.
- ⁴³⁴⁴ Karel Kosik, ‘Socialism and the Crisis of Modern Man’, in Karel Kosik, *The crisis of Modernity: Essays and Observations from the 1968 Era*, p. 59.
- ⁴⁴ Michael Landmann, ‘Talking with Ernst Bloch: Korčula, 1968’, *Telos*, Fall 1975, Vol. 25, p. 167.
- ⁴⁵ Karl Korsch, ‘Marxism and the Present Task of the Proletarian Class Struggle’, in Douglas Kellner (ed), *Karl Korsch: Revolutionary Theory*, University of Texas Press, 1977, p. 193.
- ⁴⁶ I use here Ernst Bloch’s account: ‘in Marxism a cold stream and a warm stream run parallel’. Michael Landmann, ‘Talking with Ernst Bloch: Korčula, 1968’, p. 167.
- ⁴⁷ Max Horkheimer, ‘The Authoritarian State’, p. 99.
- ⁴⁸ G.W.F. Hegel, *Science of Logic*, Vol. One. Allen and Unwin, 1969, pp. 119,120.
- ⁴⁹ Michael Landmann, ‘Talking with Ernst Bloch: Korčula, 1968’, p. 179.

⁵⁰ Karel Kosik, 'Reason and Conscience', pp. 13, 15.

⁵¹ Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, 'Manifesto of the Communist Party', in Marx-Engels, *Selected Works*, Lawrence and Wishart, 1991, p. 44.

⁵² Kostas Axelos, 'Theses on Marx', in Norman Fischer, Louis Patsouras, N. Georgopoulos, *Continuity and Change in Marxism*, Humanities Press, 1982, p. 67.

⁵³ Rainer Maria Rilke, *Letters to a Young Poet*, Sidgwick and Jackson, 1946, p. 21.

⁵⁴ Cornelius Castoriadis, 'The Hungarian Source', p. 261.

⁵⁵ Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, 'Manifesto of the Communist Party', from the preface to the fourth 1890 German edition, p. 33.

⁵⁶ Rosa Luxemburg, 'The Russian Revolution', in Mary-Alice Waters, *Rosa Luxemburg Speaks*, Pathfinder Press, 1970, p. 389.

⁵⁷ Ernst Bloch, *The Spirit of Utopia*, Stanford University Press, 2000, pp. 1 and 233.

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