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## Against War and the Preconditions of War

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Weiner Bonefeld<sup>1</sup>

## Against War and the Preconditions of War

On Sundays, holidays, there's naught I take  
delight in,  
Like gossiping of war, and war's array,  
The foreign people are a-fighting.  
One at the window sits, with glass and friends,  
And sees all sorts of ships go down the river glid-  
ing;  
And blesses them, as home he wends  
At night, our times of peace abiding.  
(Goethe, Faust I).

### I

Goethe's depiction of the saturated bourgeois, to whom war is a Sunday entertainment and for whom the times are bliss, has an eerie contemporary ring: war as televised entertainment. Even Hollywood can not compete, for this is the real snuff movie. Since 1945, wars have been fought mostly in those areas of the world where the integration of populations into the world market of society is precarious. That is, where capitalist forms of social reproduction are deemed underdeveloped. Between 1945 and the early 1990s, Latin America has had 396,000 war deaths, Africa 5.3 million, the Middle and Far East, 1.8 million, Asia 4.6 Million and Europe 238,000 (Gantzel and Schwinghammer 150). This development of war has continued unabated.

And then there is terrorism. The events of September 11th demonstrated with brutal force the impotence of sense, significance, and thus reason and ultimately truth. The denial of human

quality and difference was absolute - not even their corpses survived. And the response? It confirmed that state terrorism and terrorism are two sides of the same coin. Between them, nothing is allowed to survive. Afghanistan has again been transformed into rubble. Iraq followed, and where next? The militarization of international relations, and concomitantly the militarization of domestic relations, ostensibly in the name of freedom, is both fictitious and real. In the face of the real possibility of a global economic depression with all the devastating consequences that it would entail, militarization works like a pre-emptive counterrevolution to stabilize the increasingly fictitious dimension of capitalist wealth in the form of debt. The present reality of combat, and its extension, seeks to make real the terror of what is so as to ensure the existing social order of debt and its promise of profitability through the conquest of additional atoms of labor time. Terrorism provided the ideal enemy for this pre-emptive counterrevolution "because it is invisible and never disappears" (Soros 11). Nevertheless, the attempt of securing global debt relations through pre-emptive military force is intensely crisis-ridden. It operates like the proverbial elephant in the porcelain shop, destroying and maiming human life in a desperate attempt to find a resolution to the ever more precarious conditions of combat and debt. Like the fictitious character of capitalist accumulation, based as it is on the promise of redemption in the future, militarization projects the resolution of conflict onto some distant future. It depends, in short, on continued terrorist attacks. In the meantime, everything is done to strengthen the promise of the future in the present through the destruction of human life, including the attempt to make debt pay through ever more precarious conditions of work on a global scale. Goethe's bourgeois delights in the deployment of the instruments of war for they carry the promise of a pacified world where the ongoing conversion of human beings into a resourceful utility, cash and product, provides the foundation for the future redemption of debt. His battle-cry is 'work and pray.'

Goethe's depiction has a contemporary ring for another reason too. Those who flee from war, poverty and misery, who seek sanctuary and asylum, are not welcome. They disturb the view, live on the welfare state, and speak a different language. This disturbs the peace which the Bluncketts<sup>2</sup> of the world wish to preserve, at home and also abroad: peace can be noisily silent once the shooting has stopped. The connection between war and the ever tighter restrictions on the right to—and the conditions of—asylum make the existential link between war and

peace clear. Rather than allowing asylum to those to be bombed, they are asked to stay where they are so that peace at home is not disturbed and peace abroad can be imposed properly. A snuff movie without corpses would fall short of the acquired taste. Forewarning is, of course, always given: 'some of you might find some of the footage disturbing'. The fight against war is also a fight for the right to asylum and immigration. Better: the fight against war is a fight against the pre-conditions of war, so that peace is more than just the absence of war but, rather, the condition of human relations.

Brecht once said "little Man, the rulers speak of peace. Little Man, make yourself ready for war" (76). Brecht's insight has been overtaken by events. The rulers do speak of war and declare that that means peace. The circumstance that most of the wars since 1945 have been fought in what is called the underdeveloped world should give pause for thought. Poverty and war is one connection. The fragility of debt and the militarized control of populations is another. Yet another is war and access to and control over resources. Never before in history has there been such an accumulation of abstract wealth and never before in history has wealth been concentrated in so few hands. Whole continents are being disemboweled: their dependent populations live at the bare minimum of subsistence, many starve, their resources are plundered to sustain the future accumulation of wealth, and their labor power is deemed redundant, or anyway superfluous to requirements. How many for illicit trade in organs? How many for sweat job work in conditions comparable with slavery? How many for prostitution? How many for pornography? How many for snuff-movies?

## II

In this disturbing yet unsurprising development the social sciences do not wish to stand on the sidelines. It contributes powerfully and forcefully to the creation of the new capitalist world order, urging the resolution to the global crisis of human existence through the empowerment of the individual as a creative, innovative and self-determining being. The popular view in the social sciences is that we are living in an era of modernization that is characterized not only by globalization but also by the emergence of a global civil society. It is a great shame that those advocating the new cosmopolitanism of a global civil society fail on the whole to offer, and this against the background of ever increasing

labor productivity, any views whatsoever on how the accumulated wealth in the developed world can be used to liberate millions and millions of people, not only in the 'developing' societies but in the centers of wealth too, from conditions of misery, poverty and starvation. These conditions are not just an appearance of the contradictions of capitalist social reproduction on a global scale - that too. They are also sharp reminders of a conception of progress that entailed barbarism from its inception.<sup>3</sup> Marx reports on the force of expropriation within capitalist social relations as follows: "One capitalist always kills many" and "along with the constantly diminishing number of the magnates of capital, who usurp and monopolize all advantages of this process of transformation [i.e. the creation of the world market society of capital], grows the mass of misery, oppression, slavery, degradation, exploitation" (*Capital* v.1 714-15). In this process there "develops technology...only by sapping the original sources of wealth - the soil and the labourer" (475). Capital, then, is "reckless of the health or length of life of the labourer, unless under compulsion from society" (257). Society, for Marx, is bourgeois society, one characterized by relations of abstract equality in the inequality of property: capital and labor. The class struggle put, concerning the working day, the exploitation of labor into "golden chains" (257). The ten hour bill amounted for Marx to the victory of a principle, the "political economy of capital" succumbed to the "political economy of labour" (*Inauguraladresse* 11). The welfare state was another of these victories. The value of labour-power is not only determined by the labour-time necessary for the production of the means necessary for the maintenance and reproduction of the worker. It contains also "a historical and moral element" (*Capital* v.1 168). This moral element does not materialize out of nothing. It materializes out of social struggles. The welfare state is an outcome of such struggles which quenched, paraphrasing Marx, the "blind eagerness for plunder that in one case exhausted the soil [and], in the other, torn up by the roots the living force of the nation" (229). The historically achieved moral elements in the determination of the value of labour power are now under attack: it is said to have sapped the individual as a creative, innovative and self-determining being.

The great scandal of global capital is that it is choking itself up on the pyramids of accumulated abstract wealth. Yet, when looking at social conditions, when listening to the ever more urgent demand for greater labour flexibility, it seems as if the global crisis is really just a

consequence of a scarcity of capital. This is indeed the conclusion one would have to reach when one looks at Africa's misery, when one sees the thousands and thousands of children living in poverty, not just in Africa, not just in Latin America and Asia, not just in those areas of the world deemed inessential by global capital, but also in the centers of globalization, in Europe and the USA. Yet, the dramatic increase in poverty and misery across the globe is not caused by conditions of economic scarcity. There is too much capital, too many commodities that can not be sold for profit. Too many workers are overexploited, on the one hand, and, on the other, too many workers are not even exploitable. Over the last two decades, profits have risen, and yet so too has unemployment. Labour productivity has increased dramatically, and as poverty has increased, wages have stagnated and conditions deteriorated. Marx focused this constellation well when he argued that

[s]ociety suddenly finds itself put back into a state of momentary barbarism; it appears as if famine, a universal war of devastation had cut off the supply of every means of subsistence; industry and commerce seem to be destroyed; and why? Because there is too much civilization, too much means of subsistence; too much industry, too much commerce. The productive forces at the disposal of society no longer tend to further the development of the conditions of bourgeois property; on the contrary, they have become too powerful for these conditions, by which they are fettered, and so soon as they overcome these fetters, they bring disorder into the whole of bourgeois society, endanger the existence of bourgeois property. The conditions of bourgeois society are too narrow to comprise the wealth created by them. And how does bourgeois society get over these crises? On the one hand by enforced destruction of a mass of productive forces; on the other, by the conquest of new markets, and by the more thorough exploitation of the old ones. (Marx and Engels 18-19)

It also overcomes these crises by discovering new forms of commodification such as, for example, the surrogate mother industry where female reproductive autonomy is transformed into a saleable thing.<sup>4</sup>

### III

Against the background of war and poverty, the theoreticians of the new modernity appear to confuse the harsh reality of the capitalist world society with a new glorious beginning. Giddens (1998) urges greater labour flexibility and charges that the welfare state imprisons creative potentials. This critique of the welfare state is cynical. He perverts the Marxist critique of the welfare state as a warfare state in the direction of neo-liberal principles of flexible labour, individual self-reliance and self-responsibility and, most corrupt of all, individual self-determination. The other side of the required release of labour from the welfare prison is the demand for greater educational efforts on the part of the new worker, to render labour employable. Unemployment and poverty of conditions are not, for Giddens, a consequence of the crisis of capitalist accumulation and the destructive efforts for a more thorough exploitation of labour. Instead, these conditions show a lack of responsiveness on the part of workers who fail to adapt to the changing needs of business. Poverty, unemployment, and lack of conditions are thus reformulated as a result of individual shortcomings. Against the background of millions and millions of people laboring to make ends meet in deteriorating conditions, Giddens marketable assertions are not only cynical, they are also shameful. Would the world's proletariat be happily employed if it were to have the employable transferable skills so much desired by the new third way growth theorists? The demand for ever more transferable skills and ever more flexibility amounts not only to a direct attack on the collective organization of the "political economy of labour" (Marx *Inauguraladresse*), it is also a direct attack on the achievements of a century of struggle. Giddens' idea that the new modernity consists of a de-traditionalisation of existing relations is deceitful. He formulates his ideas in terms of progress and conceals their social content. He rejects the historical achievements of class struggles that, if only for a slight degree, had quenched "the vampire thirst for the living blood of labour" as historically obsolete (*Capital* v.1 245). In fact, instead of collective organization, the new worker is urged to become his own employer, or, as Beck (1998) put it, a labour-force-employer. The new modernity is seen as a progressive force in that 'traditional' social relations are disembedded in favor of individual choice and flexibility. The new worker, then, is the employable worker with transferable skills who shifts from one form of employment into unem-

ployment and back into another form of employment. The new adaptability of the working class would mean that the privileged insiders in the labour market are no longer protected by the 'unskilled' outsiders, reducing job security, exerting wage-pressure, and making employment more flexible in terms of place, task, time, and social context. The new adaptable worker is seen as a just-in-time worker - ever ready to be called upon, ever ready to be made redundant, and ever mobile to go where required and to do what is told, however long it takes. In other words, unemployment is not reduced. Rather, the risk of unemployment increases and precarious work conditions are generalized as the waged are pitted against the unwaged in which everybody is potentially both employed and unemployed. Employability makes unemployment invisible.

### IV

I referred above to the relationship between poverty, war and so-called underdevelopment. There is no doubt that the so-called underdeveloped world has transformed to a global slum.<sup>5</sup> For example, in Sao Paulo, of its 14 million inhabitants, 5.5 million live in the Favelas in conditions of unspeakable poverty and desperation. Would their condition be bettered by education, education, education? And the wealthy societies? It was reported in 1999, that 50.000 human beings were made redundant daily in the EU (Negt, "*Arbeit Krieg und menschliche Würde*" 85). This is a frightful figure. Is this human misery, following Giddens, self-inflicted because of a lack of employable skills and educational under-achievement? Beck agrees with Giddens on the idea that labour is responsible for its own employability. He also, however, appears to understand that education is not the only way out of poverty and misery. He suggests, like Giddens, that the new modernity of capital depends on creativity, innovation and self-responsibility. This new modernity is deemed to be socially self-reflective and thus to possess a certain measure of social responsibility beyond the crude utilitarianism of its self-determining actors. He creates the idea of a new Man who combines entrepreneurial qualities with communitarian commitments. This is his figure of the "communal-welfare employer," who combines two contradictory elements: Mother Teresa and Bill Gates ("Die Seele der Demokratie" 332). Mother Teresa is to make, within the confines of a cloister, capitalism humane and Bill Gates is to invest it with entrepre-

neurial sense and energy. This, I suppose, is the conventional idea of flexible Man, whose endeavor to accumulate on the pyramids of accumulation does not lack its charitable attributes. Others called it, and rightly so, the corrosion of character.<sup>6</sup>

For the new modernists the USA is the example of a successfully globalized economy which is said to have achieved full-employment. It is the richest society in the world. Given these achievements, one would have to conclude that Clinton's War on Poverty was successful. However, when looking at conditions in the USA, the declared war on poverty looks more like a war on the poor and miserable. Vulliamy (2002) reports that 33 million people are living below the poverty line. Six million are said to belong to the working poor, often holding more than one job to make ends meet, leading to a working week of between 70 and 80 hours a week (Negt "*Arbeit und menschliche Würde*" 270). The scale of poverty that persists amid USA affluence has led to the most unequal distribution of income among developed countries.<sup>7</sup> Private debt, the motor of the new economy, has increased from 62% of GDP to 70% of GDP between 1992 and 2000 (Evans 35). Soup kitchens have become most popular. According to the anti-hunger group Second Harvest, of all those relying on soup kitchens to meet their basic intake of food, 62% are women, 38% are children, 54% are single parents and 16% are over 65 years of age (Negt "*Arbeit und menschliche Würde*" 273). About 40% of those using soup kitchens are employed - these are the working poor.

The US figures on poverty and low pay are astonishing - the other side of the much celebrated lean economy that made down-sizing and out-sourcing its own. Yet, there is full-employment in the States. It is however the case that a person working for one single hour per week is not registered as unemployed. Is s/he, however, employed? The statistics say yes.

The US is the country that has most profited from globalization. And the 33 million who live in poverty? How many are afraid of a toothache - not because it hurts, but because they cannot afford to see a dentist? How does a person living in poverty deal with cancer? Will he or she simply have to die? It has been estimated that about 15% of the poor in the USA live in conditions of abject deprivation (Negt *Arbeit, und menschliche* 269). According to Vulliamy (2002), one in eleven families, one in nine Americans, and one in six children are officially poor. Most amazingly of all, he reports that the proportion of children

without health coverage has increased from 63.8 percent in 1992 to 67.1 percent in 2000. What misery!

According to Wacquant (1998, 2000) the main task in the USA, over the last decade has been the recruitment, training and employment of prison wardens. This is not surprising since, between 1993 and 1998, 213 new prisons were built. Negt reports that four new prisons have been completed each week since 1996, about 4 every month (*Arbeit, und menschliche* 276). Expenditures on the running of prisons by federal states has risen dramatically and the building of new prisons has risen by 612% between 1979 and 1990. That is about 3 times faster than military expenditures. In 1997, 600 out of 100.000 people were incarcerated, compared with 60-80 out of 100.000 people in the EU. In addition, there are about 5.4 million people under juridical supervision. Over the last 15 years, the prison population has increased three fold. Is this explosion due to the connection between poverty and crime or is it an outcome of public policy, the criminalization of poverty? Placed against the idea of de-traditionalisation effected by the new phase of modernity, the old saying, prison educates, appears to have found new relevance - but for whom? The probability of a black American to spend a year in jail is 1 to 3, of an hispanic American 1 to 6, and for a white American 1 to 23 (Negt *Arbeit, und menschliche* 277). Incarceration has a color as does poverty. This huge increase in the prison population has offered not only profitable opportunities for companies specializing in the building, running and securing of prisons, it has also created a big pool of cheap labour in an expanding prison-industry. According to Wacquant (2000), prisoners deemed employable are contracted out to nearby companies, such as IBM and Microsoft Suffice to say that prisoners disappear from the labour market and prison labour is stripped of all rights: they are set to work as prisoners.

Marx's theory of impoverishment that had been declared obsolete during the so-called golden age of capitalism does indeed appear to have an all too uncomfortable modern ring. The prophets of modernization appear to accept this. According to Beck, everybody has to take risks and "risks are not only risks, they are also market opportunities" (*Risikogesellschaft* 61). Beck's absurd idea of the new Man—a combination of Mother Teresa and Bill Gates - brings this into sharp focus. He projects the image of the self-determining entrepreneur of laissez fair capitalism onto the new worker and embraces empathy as a resource of charitable self-reflection. His image of Mother Teresa is not really an

image. It is a reality that has gained material existence in the richest society in the world: for example, in soup kitchens, where those without income and the working poor are fed.

## VII

The negation of war, then, if it is taken seriously, is a fight against inhuman conditions. These conditions are not coincidental. Capital is by necessity excessive in its exploitation of labour. To lament this is to misunderstand the social constitution of a form of social reproduction in which Man exists as a mere resource in the accumulation of abstract wealth for accumulation's sake.

Opposition to war and anti-globalization belong together. However, as Daniel Cohen has argued, globalization is not responsible for the ever more precarious conditions of work, poverty, and war (15). Instead, it is the restructuring of work that makes globalization possible and gives globalization a bad name. This then means that anti-globalization has to be a critique of the capitalistically constituted relations of production. It has to demand human conditions, and that means—crucially—that anti-globalization, too, has to demand full-employment as a social program of peace. The fight against war has to rediscover the “principle of the economy of labour”<sup>8</sup> and the demand for greater labour flexibility—this destructive conquest of atoms of additional labour time - has to be rejected. Full-employment, as witnessed in the USA, amounts to the full-employment of wardens, soup kitchen staff, and, to use modern jargon, social service providers—dog walkers and Mac-joppers.

Full-employment, however, makes sense as a condition of peace in a society where labour is no longer a mere factor of production. In short, full-employment makes sense in a society where humanity exists not as an exploitable resource but as a purpose. This, then, is the splendid category of full employment in and through the emancipation of labour that Marx conceived as the democratic organization of necessity through the realm of freedom. In short, anti-globalization's first principle has to be the democratic control of the economy of time by associated labour. However contradictory to the results for labour,” the shortening of the working day is the basic prerequisite” for human emancipation from war, exploitation, and oppression (*Capital* v.3 820). The democratic organization of economic relations of necessity and the reduction of labour time belong together as each other's presupposition. How much

labour time was needed in 2002 to produce the same amount of commodities that was produced in 1992? Twenty percent? Forty percent or fifty percent? Whatever the percentage might be, what is certain is that labour time has not decreased. It has increased. What is certain, too, is that the distribution of wealth is as unequal as ever before. Capitalist accumulation looks more and more like an up-side down pyramid where the real economy of value extraction supports an ever expanding and increasingly fictitious credit-superstructure. And how does bourgeois society cope with the expansion of 'redundant populations', on the one hand, and, on the other, the over-accumulation of abstract wealth, of capital? The contradiction between the forces and relations of production does seek resolution: the destruction of productive forces, the scrapping of labour through war and generalized poverty and misery. And all this against the background of an unprecedented accumulation of wealth. The struggle against war has indeed to be a struggle against the pre-conditions of war, and that is a struggle for the society of the free and equal “in which the free development of each is the condition for the free development of all” (Marx and Engels 35).<sup>9</sup>

## Notes

1. The article was finished at the start of the Iraq war.
2. UK home secretary
3. See Bonefeld, “Primitive Accumulation” (2001).
4. See Mies and Shiva (1993).
5. See Chossudovsky (1997).
6. See Sennet (2000).
7. See Madrick (1995)
8. See Marx, *Inauguraladresse* (1968).
9. For a succinct assessment of liberal-democracy and the struggle for democracy, see Agnoli (2000). See also the volume edited by Bonefeld and Tischler (2002). On the society of the free and equal as the realization of the communist individual, see Marcuse (1969).

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#### Globalization in 25 Words or Less

I define globalization as "a network of transnationalisations, formed by individuals or groups who accept and transcend the notion of boundaries."

Chen Huifen

National University of Singapore  
Singapore

The process in which the world becomes one under the most prevalent aspect known to civilized man, money. The overthrow of current governments and the redefinition of success.

Jessica Pontatello  
University of Kentucky  
United States