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Socialized Work to Socialized Welfare

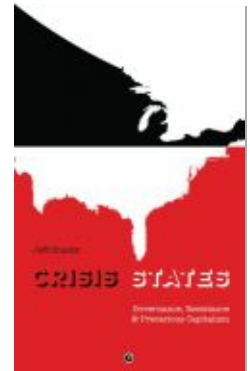
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SOCIALIZED WORK TO SOCIALIZED WELFARE

FOR MARX, THE PRINCIPLE ALIENATION of capitalism is the dominance of the thing (commodity, dead labor, death) over life. Today, in the context of precarious capitalism, the problem of life itself is at the center of debates, particularly since welfare, having been realized, has been defeated (Negri 2008, 208). Well, a particular form of welfare, statist welfare managed through the auspices of the Planner States, has been defeated. But another form arising from within the social sphere itself emerges, still uncertain, still insufficient. According to Negri, “Welfare represented an intervention of the state in life; at a certain point it was pulled apart by neoliberalism but also by its bureaucratic urges” (2008, 208). People want the state out of their lives (but do not want withdrawal of its social provisions in the vicious, demeaning, mean-spirited way undertaken by neoliberal regimes). For Negri, with regard to state provided welfare, “It had experienced a type of refusal by the people” (2008, 208). As Negri argues, “In short, the end of welfare wasn’t due only to the defeat of the working class, but also to the exhaustion and the corruption of the bureaucratic agencies of the working class and the State” (2008, 208).

Crucially, the end of the welfare state affirmed a space of common autonomy. It left a great space “in the social autonomy of the multitude for the reconstruction of the common” (Negri 2008, 208). Yet when confronted by this opportunity or space, the organizations of the Left do not know how to proceed. For Negri, “The materiality of life, the freedom of passion, will not

be dominated by anyone” (2008, 206). The new uprisings assert this desire not to be governed, not to be ruled, not to be dominated. And their refusal of domination extends not only against states and capital but against the traditional parties of the Left as well.

Socialized Welfare and Socialism?

Human survival has always depended on mutual aid, sociality, and care. Thus care is at the heart of socialized (collective) welfare and is the basis for the individual's life. There is, despite Thatcher's claim, and counter to it, no individual, no complete autonomy. Resistance is founded as a commons on the basis of affinity and affection. Mutual aid, which anarchists have always posed as the basis of resistance, forms relations of common struggle. Against the Crisis State discourses of security and risk, the new affinity groupings assert practices of communal care and socialized welfare. They pose a commons of care. This includes enhancing the status, as Lorey (2015, 91) puts it, of care activities like sex work, which have traditionally made much of the Left uncomfortable.

We have commonality in precarity. And rather than running from each other to seek our own individual capitalist market protection, we are called to care for one another in our shared and acknowledged vulnerability. This too disrupts traditional capitalist separations between production and reproduction. Capitalist production in pursuit of surplus value has always drained away time and energy for care relations and activities. The time and labor used up producing surplus value leaves one too tired or unable to take time to care for one's communities after the capitalist work day is done. That extends again conditions of precarity as waged workers hold or seek multiple jobs or have extra time taken in travel to and from the job(s). Care in mutual aid brings production and reproduction together again.

This is the basis for what some of us refer to as commonism. In commonism we create in common our collective futures. Mutual aid and commons of care are positioned against police forms of security based on threatening Others and the production of phobic identities (Ramadan and Shantz 2016).

Socialized Work to Socialized Welfare

The modes of production under Crisis State-managed post-Fordist frameworks extend beyond traditional forms of labor to encompass a range of life activities. Theorists of this socialized labor focus on communicative, cognitive, affective capacities and their flexible utilization. Thinking, speaking, feeling. This socialized work incorporates, and exploits, the whole personality rather than specific labor-related tasks of Fordist production models. Notably, this socialized production overflows the spaces and times of waged labor (Lorey 2015, 75). It is labor without end.

This is an interlocking of production with sociality in which both labor and social life are rendered quite precarious (Lorey 2015, 75). Labor as service work incorporates communication and affect (sympathy, empathy, etc.). This labor brings the whole person into the capitalist process of production (Lorey 2015, 83). And, of fundamental significance, the capitalist process of production now circulates socially. And subjectivities and socialities emerge in this process of production (Lorey 2015, 84).

Socialized work blurs the lines between private and public. New public spheres emerge and production becomes social. All human experiences are made part of the process of production. The hegemonic form of labor consumes the whole person, rather than specific, limited acts. It is affective, based on forms of sociality (care, communication, etc.). This is why questions of self-governance and subjectivity in relation to insecurity become important. But also why forms of socialized work become key.

On the one hand, self-governance serves to render people governable or even servile, as Heidi Rimke (2003) has discussed. The crisis-driven dismantling of collective welfare systems (not only statist ones) is coupled with a market-valorizing push to privatize (and individualize) welfare and risk management. As Lorey suggests:

The new quality of insecurity arises not least through the erosion of workers' rights, the restructuring of social, health and educational systems, all the way through to the self-responsible prevention of illness and the loss of wages and pensions. Consequently, a neoliberal individualized self-government and self-responsibility is partly confronted with existential precariousness in a new way. (2015, 89)

The notion that a better life is a matter of individual responsibility, rather than communal action is illusory. Yet, under crisis conditions, people are set in competition with others to secure themselves and their social sphere. This then further undercuts communal action and reinforces individualist approaches in a form of state-managed social Darwinism.

Life is entirely interwoven with politics. At the end of the day, the question is one of welfare. Politics (under neoliberalism) has wanted to withdraw from the things of life, because capitalists insinuated the suspicion that it lacked the money to manage the things of life (thus austerity and so forth) (Negri 2008, 207).

A baby is, for Negri, the beginning of the common "because it sets the whole society to work around it. The founding has always been a very beautiful figure from this point of view" (2008, 207). This is an embodiment of shared labor in the creation and sustenance, the flourishing of life. Under capitalism, though, even this is imperiled as the labor of child care becomes privatized and undersupported. And typically on gendered lines of domination.

This too speaks to the distinction between self-valorization and capitalist valorization. Negri argues, "Money that we invest in life stays in the body of the children we make" (2008, 207).

Yet under capitalist relations this becomes uncertain, a point of struggle.

Negri has argued that the movements of the socialized worker would break with the defensive attitude to restructuring to challenge the Crisis State's managerial control of society (see Dyer-Witheford 1999, 83). Movements of the socialized worker "are informed by an ethic that 'emphasises the connections of social labour and highlights the importance of social cooperation,' and express, in a diffuse but unmistakable form, an aspiration that 'cooperative production can be led from the base, the globality of the post-industrial economy can be assumed by social subjects'" (Dyer-Witheford 1999, 83). Key aspects of the movements of the socialized worker include the emphasis on autonomy and the construction of alternative social structures (Hardt 1996)

The new subjectivities emerging from the transition to post-Fordism, "far from passively accepting the terrain of productive flexibility, appropriated the social terrain as a space of struggle and self-valorization" (Vercellone 1996, 84). And they raise strategies and tactics based on their own needs rather than pre-given notions of comportment. As Michael Hardt suggests:

Self-valorization was a principal concept that circulated in the movements, referring to social forms and structures of value that were relatively autonomous from and posed an effective alternative to capitalist circuits of valorization. Self-valorization was thought of as the building block for constructing a new form of sociality, a new society. (Hardt 1996, 3)

Autonomists refer to these radical and participatory forms of democracy which thrive "outside the power of the State and its mechanisms of representation" as a constituent power, "a free association of constitutive social forces" (Hardt 1996, 5–6). The socialized care within movements poses both a defensive and a constructive aspect. As Hardt suggests, "Self-valorization is one way of understanding the circuits that constitute an alternative sociality, autonomous from the control of the State or capital"

(1996, 6). These movements are engaged in projects to develop democratic and autonomous communities/social relations beyond political representation and hierarchy.

Some theorists have sought to identify social forms of welfare that might constitute alternative networks outside of state control (Hardt 1996; see Vercellone 1996 and Del Re 1996). For radical political theorists in Italy, the experiences of the social movements “show the possibilities of alternative forms of welfare in which systems of aid and socialization are separated from State control and situated instead in autonomous social networks. These alternative experiments may show how systems of social welfare will survive the crisis of the Welfare State” (Vercellone 1996, 81).

In these struggles exists the possibility of alternative forms of welfare “based on autonomous self-management and social solidarity outside of State control” (Vercellone 1996, 96). As Del Re suggests, part of the new parameters for change includes “the proposal to go beyond welfare by taking as our goal the improvement of the quality of life, starting from the reorganization of the time of our lives” (1996, 110). I agree with Hardt’s assertion that the first and primary tasks of political theory are “to identify, affirm, and further the existing instances of social power that allude to a new alternative society, a coming community” (1996, 7). I also agree with Hardt that radical Italian theorists are rights in “continually proposing the impossible as if it were the only reasonable option” (1996, 7). As he suggests: “It is our task to translate this revolutionary potential, to make the impossible real in our own contexts” (Hardt 1996, 7). Illuminati suggests that in the contemporary context “politics has spread out into spheres from which it has traditionally been excluded and where, hence, it has to be reinterpreted” (1996, 167). There is no replaying of the politics outside of the new forms of precarity and socialized work in a way that can challenge systems of exploitation, oppression, and repression.

The context of constituent power, the power that disintegrates constituted power, “is impoverished experience, reduced to the nakedness of the rules and confronted by the powers of the ab-

stract, while its conflictual articulation requires a structure that is nonrepresentative and does not homologize citizenship” (Illuminati 1996, 173). The structure of action of constituent power “requires a plurality of distinct unities, agents, and reflections, and discards both the solipsism of ‘private languages’ and the internal dialectic of the will, along with the tendency of a social or institutional representation to fuse subjectivities together” (Illuminati 1996, 173). This refers specifically to structures of a party in which previous socialists have sought the space for a re/combination of the diverse forces of the exploited and oppressed.

The “S” Words: Socialized Work and ... Socialism?

For many social commentators the new forms of communications, affective labor, and socialized welfare hold out particular promise for social change and alternatives to capitalist relations. As Negri explains, “I mean to say only that I believe that the inventors of new modes of communicative living are much more socialist than capitalist, much more tied to a concept of solidarity than to that of profit” (2008, 23). Industrialism and totalitarianism cannot exist together because the population cannot be forced to work in the form of slaves any longer (Negri 2008, 201). Liberation is the appropriation of cognitive capital, taking the instruments of communication and managing them positively, socially. There is not postmodern production without freedom.

One of the real problems of socialism was a problem of communication. The management of needs was too bureaucratic, centralized, and authoritarian. More agile, diffuse management, and transmission of information might have allowed for more simplification of the bureaucratic structure without information being made to pass through a centralized command structure (Negri 2008, 23).

For Negri, the term *socialism* still has political space. It will continue to make the rounds on the margins of contemporary

ideology (as the survivors of Bonapartism are still around) (Negri 2008). For Negri, categories like socialism, fascism, Stalinism, or totalitarianism are too generic to add much to the understanding of historical reality. It is more interesting to look at how the struggle between poor and rich, proletarian and bourgeois invests and qualifies these concepts (2008).

Negri argues that, contrary to the history of the Church, communism is free from its Constantine (from Stalinism), from the taste of power (2008, 26). Communism is more extensive, including quite diverse cultural contexts such as feminism, postcolonial studies, informational cultures. It is re-emerging in its libertarian or anarchistic forms, which had been marginalized, silenced, obscured with the rise of the statist forms since the Russian Revolution.

New understandings are emerging, returning notions of social care and the commons to the forefront. Communism is being rethought as the “radical modification of subjects forced to work” and as “the construction of the ‘common,’ as in the *common* capacity to produce and reproduce the social in freedom” (Negri 2008, 260). This is an expression of what I have termed *commonism* (Shantz 2013). For Negri, “Inside it is an ideal of communism and of radical egalitarianism that no longer has any type of qualification, for example, of an anarcho-individualistic type” (2008, 27). In the movements against austerity a new type of social (non)representation emerges beyond the remnants of a defeated extraparliamentary Left (as exist in sectarian factions, mini-Maoisms, Trotskyist cults, and others replaying the road of 1917 in their study groups).

It is a great transition, in which a separated multitude emerges and recomposes politically and socially (Negri 2008, 94). It is organized efficaciously, not technologically — in networks of affection or affinity rather than the party. Groupings have tried to express a coherent mass power of resistance and defense. The movements destabilize the practices of power (Negri 2008, 96). Leading groups face the current challenge of not distracting the multitude from going toward the possibility of uprising nor of organizing it. There is a conundrum of how to keep afloat a mul-

titudinous mass (Negri 2008). According to Negri, “We don’t know what we are doing as far as demonstrations are concerned, and thus we entrust ourselves to a pragmatic, not theoretical, way of acting” (Negri 2008, 101). And this has a nice habit of avoiding old habits and breaking with previous prejudices.

I have termed the new forms of mobilization and social care *commonism*. This suggests a communism outside hierarchal forms and based on mutual aid and distributed engagement. This has implications for an imminent commons against capitalism.

Socialized work and communal cooperation, mutual aid, split from the production relations of crisis capitalism. Many analysts have looked to Paolo Virno’s notion of exodus in explaining this. For Virno this cooperative sociality occurs at a distance from sovereignty, away from the state (2004). This exodus is, for Virno, a mass defection from the state that articulates “a non-state run public sphere” or what can be called socialized welfare (Virno 2004, 68). This is a refusal of capitalist valorization of social life and the trying of new forms of life, experimenting with the uncontrollable. It is a movement of scission in the sense of the term offered by revolutionary syndicalist Georges Sorel. This is a constituent power. It is a recomposition of relations of affinities.

Notably Negri has shifted his language somewhat in *Goodbye Mr. Socialism*. Rather than speaking of the general intellect, as some autonomist theorists have preferred and is a key concept in Negri’s own recent works on Empire, he speaks of the commons. Among other things, this shift re-emphasizes the embodied character of intellect moving beyond the tendency toward a dualist confusion regarding cognitive labor. It also emphasizes the connection, at the center for Negri, between the crucial components of the global precariat (displaced migrant manual labor and the precarious technological classes).

Negri is convinced that a radical democracy provides today “the arms of liberation” for people of various countries (2008, 124). This is not a neoconservative vision of democracy as an American export. Such a vision, with its forms of power and

reproduction of order, “means the maintenance of a class structure and of indecent exploitation that doesn’t improve the current situation” (2008, 124). For Negri, “There exists, instead, another terrain, that of real and absolute democracy, on which we should fight without timidity or hesitations” (2008, 126). When Negri speaks of solidarity, he means “the articulation of subjectivity within the common” (2008, 28). This is not a centralized subsuming of identity. It is more than an articulation of disparate subject positions. And the common is not pre-given or pre-ordained. It is expressed in the struggles against crisis.

No Guarantees

There are no guarantees, however, that crisis and precarity will give rise to resistance or prove real challenges to states and capital, let alone present alternative modes of living. While there are compelling examples of resistance and forms of solidarity-based alternatives, these have not yet endangered the existing social order.

Rather, it appears that large sections of populations in North America and Europe have conformed to conditions of crisis and austerity, have come to terms with them. And these allowances have been made by people of different statuses and for distinct reasons.

In part it relates to the fear of precarity itself — a result of the privatization of insecurity and the fear of falling out or being left behind. Part of it is a related fear that one can be readily replaced — by someone even more precarious, more in crisis, more alone, and more ready to conform.

The increase of policing and repression that has always accompanied neoliberal governance, and cannot be overlooked by a focus on socialization, serves these purposes well. Under Crisis State practices social welfare occurs in a frame of police and military security. Thus, it involves increases in surveillance,

monitoring, control. To be precarious is also to be brought more fully within regimes of regulation.

Organization

The unresolved problem remains, as ever it is, the question of organization. This is the question of politics itself. The exhilaration of risings overshadows the essential, if tedious, work of building infrastructures. Of digging in for the long haul and preparing resources for a sustained struggle out of the crisis states of today. Some hip anarchists like to proclaim that such politics are “boring as fuck.” And indeed building infrastructures of resistance can, like anything, have tedious, even banal, moments. But even more boring than this work is repeatedly losing.

And really, it is rather strange that the acts of building resources, sharing experiences, developing longer-term provisions to sustain communities in struggle would ever be viewed as boring. As opposed to what? Pursuing self-satisfied, and exclusionary, subcultures? Building infrastructures of resistance is the shared capacity for care. It is the arming of joy. This is the excitement of living and learning together.

On the question of such organizing beyond the state Badiou suggests, “For two centuries now the sole political problem has been this: How are we to make the inventions of movement communism endure?” (2012, 112).

The bulk of working people, the precarious, have minimal or no control over essential matters affecting their lives. They have no real voice in the decisions that impact their life chances and realities, from the distribution of community resources to the care of their neighbors to the condition of their environment (social and natural). The majority are present in the world but absent from decisions about it (Badiou 2012, 55–57). The recent movements, uprisings, suggest that those who are absent, excluded from decisions, are insisting on deciding—for themselves.

What in politics is called organization is “the labour of the new truth” (Badiou 2012, 63). The movements must secure sites where they can decide their own destiny.

In the current continuity of war one loses the capacity to be always present and active (Negri 2008, 123). This is a threat always faced by movements, and the well-known problems of “burnout” and demoralization and drift are real (and all too human). The state with its institutions does not face such threats in any way analogous to the movements. As Negri notes, “But this is part of that temporal asymmetry that power uses when faced by the power of the movements, in order to extinguish them in the long run when it doesn’t manage to defeat them on the ground immediately” (2008, 123). This is one of the pressing reasons that infrastructures of resistance are of such critical importance to movements. They offer temporal and spatial supports beyond the individuals directly involved at any given point or time (Shantz 2010).

On organization, Badiou suggests, “I maintain that the time of organization, the time of construction of an empirical duration of the Idea in its post-riot stage, is crucial. Otherwise, we end up thinking that the state must endlessly retain a monopoly on the definition of political time” (2012, 90).

This is a point that insurrectionists often overlook. The delirious joy of insurrection, or even simply riots, provides a perhaps necessary release for direct participants and maybe some hopeful observers. But it does not do nearly enough to change the balance of power and/or conditions of struggle. There is too much of the safety valve in riots and insurrections, a point conservative sociologists like Durkheim have remarked upon and lauded (as beneficial for the longer-term maintenance of the status quo).