

## Capitals, Technologies and the Realms of Life. The Dispossession of the Four Elements

Adolfo Gilly & Rhina Roux

*For its insightful and comprehensive outlook on the dislocation and extermination of the human, flora and fauna realms of life by the predatory power of capitalism, Jus Semper is republishing this essay by professors Gilly and Roux, well known for their work concerning the grave danger that we humans are inflicting to the sustainability of life on the planet and the almost unimaginable consequences that all life forms will endure if we maintain the current marketocratic ethos. An ethos with no morals, whatsoever, and, thus, no qualms regarding the impact of its, by now, almost ubiquitous sphere of influence on the social, economic and environmental dimensions. Gilly and Roux expose a clearly undemocratic economic system whose only need is the unrelenting consumption of things by we humans, strictly regarded as disposable consumer units, for the sustainability of the reproduction and accumulation of enormous material profit and wealth for a tiny human cluster, namely the 1%, at the expense of the 99% and, more importantly, of a planet with finite resources. Gilly and Roux offer us, from a historical perspective a somewhat deterministic rationale of how capitalism seeks to establish domination-subordination relationships with human societies to fulfil its only goal of maximising the appropriation of the surplus value of work –of the share of income that belongs to wages– through any necessary means: legal or illegal, moral or amoral, gentle or violent. The authors' hope is that human dignity will no longer tolerate a clearly intolerable and ominous state of our world.*

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### ❖ Excerpt

This essay proposes a reflection on the current change of epoch, considered herein as a new worldwide configuration of the capital connection, both in its underpinnings and its trends, and particularly in the foundational relationship between objectified labour and living labour. It addresses this mutation from the viewpoint of history before doing it from the cycles and junctures of the economy. From this analytical perspective, both the global financial crisis and the current chaos in the relationship between capitals appear as necessary parts in the violent processes of global expansion of the capital connection and the crisis and restructuring of domination, where new equilibriums and confrontations are taking shape. This reflection situates the epicentre of such processes not only on the apparent –yet not less real– sheer struggle among a diversity of capitals, but all the more on their relationship of confrontation/resistance and opposition to living labour in all its actual forms. This is one of the lines of thought of this essay.

Every domination enjoys concealing its name; thus precision in language is of essence. What we usually call “the neoliberal model” and “globalisation” actually is a new worldwide configuration of the capital connection, namely, the name chosen for one of its periodical mutations.<sup>1</sup>

The capital connection is a historical form of the domination/subordination relationship in human societies as well as of the extraction and distribution of labour’s surplus value. Despotic rule, coercion, violence, exploitation, humiliation and dispossession are at the core of such social process.

At the same time, we find in its dynamic movement both the alteration and revving of the preceding social relations established over centuries, with their beliefs, customs and assurances, and the creation of new possibilities of knowledge and enjoyment, potentiality and as a pledge, yet not in the real experience of the existing human realms of life. It is those dynamics that mark the destruction of old worlds while promising potential new ones, experienced nonetheless both as horizons and as mirages, framed against the reality of the present time, torn in their societal structures and threatened by environmental and war disasters on the immediate horizon.

Considered at the historical level, the expansion of the capital connection is grounded on two simultaneous and interwoven processes, namely exploitation (the appropriation of surplus product under the form of surplus value) and dispossession (violent appropriation, or appropriation wrapped under legal forms) of the natural goods and communal property or public goods). In his analysis of contemporary capitalism, David Harvey has rightly posed the prevalence of dispossession.<sup>2</sup> However, this is not a new event nor a return to “primeval accumulation.” We think, rather, that it is a permanent process, which is part and parcel of, and always accompanies, the capital’s process.

We want to expose an unprecedented expansion of the latter process and its contemporary companions: the subordination of science to capital, the many forms of plundering, and, consequently, the forms and intensity of violence, both present and latent as a necessary element of the process and of the masked intensity of domination today. We want as well to address its possible limitations.

Let us then start at the beginning, at the substance of social relations in the Society of Capital, the substance that nowadays colours all others: the capital/labour relationship; that is, the objectified labour/living labour relationship, wherein the reality of life’s realms exists in living work under all its ever changing and ever renewed forms.

### ❖ *The prolonged assault against labour*

Increased wage exploitation, competition between capitals and accumulation by dispossession appear now both overlapped and combined, though to a scale that was unimaginable before the expansion of the scientific-technological innovations in the last quarter of the XXth Century (information technology, micro-electronics, genetic engineering, nanotechnology). However, we must keep in mind that we are not dealing with a mere “objective” process resulting from the scientific and technological “progress.”

The capitalist use of these innovations –namely, to affirm the existent domination, gain the edge in the competition between capitals and raise the profit margin– could only be implanted through a series of harsh battles against the positions and conquests of organised labour. The vanguard in this offensive was, in the early 1980s, Fiat in Italy against autoworkers (1980); Ronald Reagan in the U.S. against air controllers (1981); and Margaret Thatcher in Great Britain against mining workers (1984). Similar meanings and objectives –though not equal– were pursued by military dictatorships in Iberian America, from Chile (1973 onwards): Argentina, Uruguay, Brazil, Bolivia, Paraguay, the entire

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1 Giovanni Arrighi, in a recent interview with the Italian paper *Il Manifesto* (Sin Permiso-e, 3 February 2008) dealing with his last book *Adam Smith in Beijing*, poses a different hypothesis on the possible transitoriness of Neoliberalism. Says Arrighi: *Neoliberalism has been a parenthesis of madness during which the United States and its faithful ally, the United Kingdom, strove to impose their [economic] model by hook or by crook/by fair or foul means. Nevertheless both failed, as the collapse of the world's stock exchanges and the defeat of the U.S. in Iraq demonstrate. We are passing a turbulent phase whose outcomes are still difficult to foresee. For the time being, big is the chaos under the skies, but I ignore if this an excellent scenario.* The foundation of this assertion is explained in his book.

2 David Harvey, *El nuevo imperialismo* (The new imperialism), Akal, Madrid, 2004 (1<sup>a</sup>: 2003), chapter IV, “La acumulación por desposesión” (“Accumulation by dispossession”) pages 111-140.

Condor Plan. In Argentina, since 1976, it took the shape of a selective extermination of factory leaders, planned by the top executive officers of major corporations and implemented by the armed forces.<sup>3</sup>

This is about a protracted process. In 1986, with its violent course already fully fledged, Ernest Mandel analysed it in these terms:

*There is currently a social and political project of the bourgeoisie as a whole, namely of conservatives and neoliberals, adjectives are not that important. Such project goes beyond simply drawing out a certain supplementary rate to their share of the national income at the expense of the working masses, or increasing the rate of the surplus value and recovering the profit margin.*

*Taking advantage of the economic crisis and the relative weakening of the labour movement – a general though unequal phenomenon between countries– the bourgeoisie strives to permanently modify the relations of power between classes and making this lasting modification institutional. In its essence, this means dismantling the most important conquests of the labour movement in the last quarter century, if not the last fifty years [that is to say, since 1936].*

*If one wants to summarise into one single formula these conquests, it can be said that the labour movement had succeeded in imposing a quantitative increase of the objective level of class solidarity by means of a combination of social legislation, trade union strength, control over the work process and political weight. This formula may seem 'objectivist' and vague, yet it is most real and eminently Marxist. The weight of the labour movement took action in society to best protect all the most disadvantaged groups. This is, in the most general terms, the content of all which has occurred since the 1930s crisis. [...]*

*From the moment that those conquests are totally or partially dismantled, solidarity diminishes objectively. Different ranks are impacted in different ways and are left more or less abandoned to their fate, particularly the weakest: immigrants, women, the young, the disabled, senior citizens. But the cumulative effect of this change on the working class becomes sensitive when the phenomenon reaches a certain quantitative range.<sup>4</sup>*

It is a widely studied fact that the declining trend of the rate of profit in the mid-1970s was a key factor in the restructuring of capital. The offensive against work and the intensive introduction of technological innovations have that objective root cause.

As Elmar Altvater recalled back then, *the crisis is nothing more than the dramatic escalation of the bourgeois' normality.*<sup>5</sup> The crisis implies, in a nutshell, a destruction of capital and a devaluation of the work force.<sup>6</sup>

Michel Husson, in a recent study, notes:

*The main trait of globalised capitalism is the fall in the wage's share of income, namely, of the share of GDP absorbed by the salaried worker. That trend equals, in Marxist terms, to an increase in the rate of exploitation. It is a result soundly grounded on indisputable statistics and which applies to the majority of countries both North and South.<sup>7</sup>*

3 Victoria Basualdo, Complicidad patronal-militar en la última dictadura argentina – Los casos de Acindar, Astarsa, Dálmine Siderca, Ford, Ledesma y Mercedes Benz (Military-employer complicity in the last Argentinean dictatorship– The cases of Acindar, Astarsa, Dálmine Siderca, Ford, Ledesma and Mercedes Benz). This special supplement in Engranajes, published by the Federation of Workers of Industry and the Like, Buenos Aires, March 2006, 28 pp., documents in detail the extermination by employers and the military of the trade union delegate corps and the internal commissions of those large industrial corporations, from the date of the military coup, 24 March 1976 onward: *For the workers' movement this was the bloodiest persecution and annihilation plan suffered in its history. For industrial workers, particularly those in great factories, it exceeded any expectation regarding the hatred and revengeful will from those in power. [...] More than half of the thirty-thousand disappearances were part of that young vanguard, thus the systematic control of the factories from within and without was no coincidence*, Victorio Paulón, Secretary of the Metallurgy Workers Union, Villa Constitución, section, Santa Fe, Argentina writes in the prologue.

4 Ernest Mandel, "Las consecuencias sociales de la crisis económica en Europa capitalista", (Social consequences of economic crisis in Capitalist Europe), Inprecor number. 212, Paris, February 3, 1986, quoted in Adolfo Gilly, Nuestra caída en la modernidad, (Our fall to modernity), Joan Boldó I Climent Editores, Mexico, 1986, pp 45-46.

5 Elmar, Altvater, "Crisis económica y planes de austeridad" (Economic crisis and austerity plans"), in Transición, Barcelona, 1978, n° 1.

6 David Harvey, The Limits to Capital, The University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1982, p. 442, at the time noted: *twice in the space of a generation, the world experienced the massive devaluation of capital through physical destruction, the ultimate consumption of labour power as cannon fodder. And further ahead: The world was saved from the terrors of the great depression not by some glorious 'new deal' or the magic touch of Keynesian economics in the treasuries of the world, but by the destruction and death of global war.* (p. 444).

7 Michel Husson, "La hausse tendancielle du taux d'exploitation", Un pur capitalisme, (The tendency to increase the rate of exploitation, Sheer capitalism) chapter I, Editions Page Deux, Paris, 2001.

This falling trend, adds Husson, starts up in the early 1980s with the salaried income tending thereafter to stabilise at very low historical levels.<sup>8</sup>

The devaluation of the labour force and the flexibilisation of labour have been two trends that are combined to increase the rate of exploitation: by depressing real wages, suppressing labour's mechanisms to control the hiring and use of the labour force, dismantling collective agreements, destroying or repressing the organisation of trade unions, prolonging working-life cycles and confiscating universal labour rights (minimum wage, legal limitations of working hours, pension and retirement rights, healthcare, regulation of female labour, prohibition of child labour). Increased unemployment, the fragmentation of the world of labour and the geographic delocalisation of corporations and investments have been some of the routes followed to break resistance.

The result: an upward trend in the rate of exploitation and the recovery of profit margins from the mid-1980s. Such is the gateway to the mutation of the turn of the century. The sequence is not required but indeed significant: the defeat of resistance by organised labour in western centres of capitalism was followed by the collapse of Eastern Europe's bureaucratic regimes as well as the outright overt expansion of the capital connection in the old territories of the USSR, in China, in the countries of Southeast Asia.

### ❖ *The new universalisation of the capital-process*

We are now living in years when the expansion of the capital connection is again going through one of its major cycles. Under the form of a reconfiguration of relations between classes, between nations and between capitals –as well as with nature and human knowledge– it has entered a change of epoch.

This process expands geographically, densifies in-depth and energises the network of capitalistic social relationships that today engulf the entire planet. The global expansion of the rate of salaried employment of the work force, the incorporation of immense territories into the newly deregulated market circuits and the disruption of prior natural and space-time barriers for the assessment of value are the trends that materialise the constitution of this process.

The increase in the world's salaried population provides an insight into this movement. An IMF paper estimates that the global work force has quadrupled in the last two decades. The opening of China, India, Southeast Asia and Iberian America to new capital investments, the privatisation of public goods, telecommunications and financial flows expand geographically the capital-process, integrating millions of human beings into the deregulated market circuits, dragging them along in the vortex generated by financial flows.<sup>9</sup>

This expansive movement goes hand in hand with the growing dynamism and density of the capital-process, both powered by scientific and technological innovation. By the term *density* we understand a progressive closing of the natural porosities of the process, in the same way that new technologies also aim at closing the porosities in the work process.<sup>10</sup>

National variants in this global movement depend, on the one hand, on the geographic location of each country, its technological status, the salary and cultural conditions of its working population and the extension and density

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8 Regarding the decrease of the share of wages in the GDP, Husson, op. cit., writes: *In all cases the chronology is similar: wages' share keeps more or less stable up to the mid-1970s crisis, which causes it to abruptly increase. This tendency starts to revert in the first half of the 1980s with the wages share beginning to decrease, to then tending to level off at a historically very low level.* Gerard Duménil and Dominique Lévy in *Crisis y salida de la crisis: orden y desorden neoliberales* (Crisis and exit from crisis, neoliberal order and disorder), Fondo de Cultura Económica, México, 2007 (1st. Ed. Paris 2000 p. 98) they also note: *The increase in the rate of profit during the last two decades had two sources: A growth in capital productivity and a slowdown in wage appreciation.*

9 Florence Jaumotte and Irina Tytell, *How Has the Globalization of Labor Affected the Labor Income Share in Advanced Countries*, IMF Working Paper 07/298, IMF, December 2007. An ILO paper (Sangheon Lee, Deirdre McCann and John C. Messenger, *Working Time Around the World. Trends in working hours, laws and policies in a global comparative perspective*, Routledge/ILO, London and Geneva, 2007, p. 66) reckons that in the 1993-2003 period, the absolute number of wage earners increased from one billion to three billion. As for European wage earners, Jean-Marie Vincent asserts, among others, in "La légende du travail" ("The legend of labour") in Pierre Cours-Salies (coord.), *La liberté du travail* (The Liberty of Labour), Éditions Syllepse, Paris, 1995, pp 71-82: *There is the need to understand how deceitful is the dominant discourse about the disappearance of the working class and the birth of a middle-class society. It cannot be denied that a certain configuration of the social relations of exploitation, proper to a specific stage of capitalism, has receded. Nonetheless, it cannot be concluded that the current activities with a higher intellectual makeup, which are not directly applied to matter, are not exchanged with capital and do not engage in capitalist work relations. There is no working class anymore, but there are increasingly more wage earners facing new forms of appropriation and exploitation of their activities.*

10 Jean-Marie Vincent, op. cit., p. 78, writes: *In its capitalist environment, technology is not and cannot be an instrument of liberation or emancipation; through its training (and career guidance) systems it contributes, however, to label and distribute the socially acceptable and accepted forms of intelligence.*

previously achieved through the diffusion of capitalist relations. They also depend on the relationship of social forces and, in many cases, on the possibility of reverting rights conquered in historical social struggles.

Erasing records from the collective memory, breaking up resistance and imposing throughout devastated land the new rule of capital are crucial requirements of this new tendency. In turn, however, we have the evidence, both historical and empirical, of the perseverance of memory.

The core of this epoch-making mutation, resembling in scope that great transformation analysed by Karl Polanyi in *Industrial Revolution Europe*, is the global (planetary) conformation of the process. This *planetaryisation* of the capital-process, which on the surface appears as an inexorable expansion of the market and takes the shape of a new and impersonal technological power, now expresses itself in the following tendencies:

1) The fragmentation and globalisation of *productive processes*; that is to say, a new spatial division of the work processes, whose stages are located in different national territories incorporated into new transnational industrial networks. The “global-car” concept and the growth of maquila industry (in-bond plants) were early manifestations of this trend towards deterritorialisation and delocalisation of the contemporary factory, which was studied from the 1970s and 1980s by Harry Braverman, Benjamin Coriat, Michel Freyssenet, John Holloway and Marco Revelli among others.<sup>11</sup> The formation of transnational industrial corridors selectively connecting Canada’s and Mexico’s cities and ports with United States’ export markets are, in North America, a mature expression of the same trend.

2) The information and communication technologies (ICT), as a novelty of capitalism’s makeup and as a vehicle that widens and energises the process, breaking space and time barriers to the mobility of capital. For the first time in history, and as a result of these technologies, capital is managed twenty-four hours a day in globally integrated financial markets operating in real time.

3) The expansion (in quantity and velocity) of transportation networks.

4) The increasing and uncontrollable work force migrations (including skilled labour), particularly from the excluded groups in the South towards the North.<sup>12</sup>

We want to set the study of dominant groups (and, thus, of domination) in Iberian America, also in the dynamics, intensity and breathing of such process.

### ❖ *Monopoly of knowledge, monopoly of violence*

The new shape adopted by the universalisation of the capital-process is anchored on violence, just like the prior ones, but all the more in an abstract (or, if you will, impersonal) manner. The monopoly of violence, in turn, is grounded in the subordination of science to the existing form of domination.

Today, that domination is implemented and supported by the most concentrated form of the twofold monopoly over knowledge/violence, known as the subordination of science to capital.

Is this subsumption to capitalism of the formalised collective knowledge –which expands and convolutes the subordination already prevalent in the Industrial Revolution with the automation of machinery– that has been

11 Harry Braverman, *Labor and Monopoly Capital*, Monthly Review Press, New York, 1974; Benjamin Coriat, *El taller y el cronómetro (The Workshop and the Stopwatch)*, Siglo XXI Editores, Mexico, 1982; Michel Freyssenet, *La division capitaliste du travail (The Capitalist Division of Labour)*, Savelli, Paris, 1977; Michel Aglietta, *Regulación y crisis del capitalismo (Regulation and crisis of Capitalism)*, Siglo XXI Editores, Mexico, 1979; Marco Revelli, *Lo Stato della Globalizzazione (The State of Globalisation)*, Leoncavallo Libri Milan, 1998. See also John Holloway, “La rosa roja de Nissan” (Nissan’s red rose), *Brecha magazine*, Mexico, Summer 1987, n° 4, pp. 29-49. A review of this discussion in regards to the relationship between capital, new technologies and labour processes, in Adolfo Gilly, “La mano rebelde del trabajo” (Labour’s rebellious hand), *Coyoacan*, Mexico n° 13, July-September 1981, pp. 15-54. See also María de la Luz Arriaga et al. (prologue by Enrique de la Garza Toledo), *El proceso de trabajo en México (The labour’s process in Mexico)*, Universidad Autónoma Metropolitana-Iztapalapa, Mexico, 1982, pp. 11-51; Pedro López Díaz, *La crisis del capitalismo - Teoría y práctica (The Crisis of Capitalism-Theory and Practice)*, Siglo XXI Editores, 1984, 700 ps. 537-568, and *Cuadernos del Sur*, Buenos Aires, number 1, November 1984, pp. 101-135.

12 Concerning this trend, among other recent documents, see *Seguimiento de la población mundial, con especial referencia a la migración internacional y el desarrollo (Monitoring of worldwide population, with special reference to international migration and development)*, Report by the U.N. Secretary General to the organization’s Economic and Social Council, UN., January 2006, and Xavier Thierry, “Les migrations internationales en Europe: vers l’harmonisation des statistiques (International migrations in Europe: towards statistical harmonisation)”, *Population & Sociétés* n° 442, INED, Paris, February 2008.

consolidating in the accelerated innovation, growth and expansion of knowhow and technologies (IT technologies, microelectronics, robotics, human-genome decoding, biotechnology, nanotechnology).

This process is construed from other fields of thought as the entry to a “post-industrial society”, to an “information age” or to a new “knowledge society”.<sup>13</sup>

The current form of the subordination of science to capital arises, since the 1990s, both in the growth, distribution and intensity of investments in research and development (R&D), as well as in the directional use of research and technologies: in weaponry and war, production processes and nature.

Violence and war, that is: war as the organised and technologised use of violence, from Antiquity to our age, is a matrix of the entire process, whose essence is the domination between human beings. It is imperative to call to mind that the current technological leap, which caught on in the 1970s with the invention of the microprocessor, was incubated during World War II with the invention of the first programmable computer in 1946 and of the transistor in 1947, both triggers of the technological prowess of the so-called “electronic age”.<sup>14</sup> It must be remembered that Silicon Valley, the world’s centre of microelectronics in the early seventies, and the emblematic matrix of today’s technological transformation, enjoyed since inception –as has been well documented– the financing of U.S. military contracts and of research initiatives from the Defence Department.<sup>15</sup>

#### ❖ *Work, science, nature: subsumptions*

Ever since the dawn of modernity, living labour, nature, science and technology have been four constitutive components of the capital connection.<sup>16</sup> The novelty in the mutation of the current era is the radical change that is operating within the proportions and relations between such components.

A new technological composition of the production process emerges on the horizon as a trend, of which the increased weight that electronics bears on the product’s value (as happens today, for instance, even in the automotive industry’s mature technology) is just an illustrative case.

The incorporation of digitalised systems, as well as of IT technology, microelectronics, cybernetic technology, telecommunications and nanotechnology, is revolutionising the sphere of human production and widening the scale of private appropriation of the collective labour to until now unimaginable levels.

Amidst the paraphernalia of the so-called “third scientific-technological revolution” a new technological composition of the *labour process* and the capital-labour relationship is taking place at the *point of production* (namely, at the precise

13 These interpretations fall inside what John Holloway and Eloína Peláez termed “technological determinism”: *Within Marxist tradition there have been for quite some time two schools: one that considers change in terms of class struggle, and another that conceives it as the result of economic and technological development. [...] Technological determinism embodies both a theory about the development of society as well as certain assumptions regarding technology’s development. [...] Focusing the discussion on the impact of technology is wrong: what is to be determined first and foremost is how society shapes/moulds technology. This approach potentially unveils a political understanding of technology. In showing that technology’s course is not predetermined, that the technological process as a whole, from invention to implementation, is brimming with choices, conflicts and negotiations, then the approach demystifies technology and discards the idea of the existence of an implacable logic for technological development. If technology is socially shaped, then it is possible to have an active part in its configuration.* Eloína Peláez and John Holloway, “Aprendiendo a hacer reverencias: posfordismo y determinismo tecnológico” (Learning to bow: Post-Fordism and technological determinism), in Joachim Hirsch et al., *Los estudios sobre el Estado y la reestructuración capitalista* (Studies on State and capitalist restructuring, Editorial Tierra del Fuego, Buenos Aires, 1992, pp.143-154.

14 See in this regard, among others, David Noble’s noted studies, *America by Design. Science, Technology, and the Rise of Corporate Capitalism*, Oxford University Press, New York, 1977; and *Forces of Production: A Social History of Industrial Automation*, Oxford University Press, New York, 1986. In his prologue to *America by Design*, Christopher Lasch writes: *the notion of technological determinism has dominated popular understanding of the Industrial Revolution. It is taken for granted that changes in technology have been the main cause of industrialisation, and the whole process is seen as a pure technological revolution. Nonetheless new inventions, new processes and new applications of scientific discoveries do not, by themselves, determine changes in production. Unless they go hand in hand with changes in social relations, especially in the organisation of work, technological changes tend to be absorbed into extant social structures; far from revolutionising society, they simply reinforce the existing distribution of power and privilege.* In the same sense, Eloína Peláez and John Holloway, op. cit. P. 153: *Technological development, in the same way as all other aspects of social development, is marked by the always contradictory intent of capital of controlling human creativity. The “microelectronic revolution” is not an external phenomenon imposing a certain development on society; it is, essentially, the attempt to programme, to reduce the complex social processes to meticulous rules, to make of society a computable item.*

15 See, among others, Manuel Castells, *La era de la información* (The information age), Siglo XXI, Mexico 1999, 1st, 1996) volume 1, pp. 79-87.

16 In *The Capital*, Marx writes: *“Like the increased exploitation of natural wealth by the mere increase in the tension of labour-power, science and technology give capital a power of expansion independent of the given magnitude of the capital actually functioning. They react at the same time on that part of the original capital which has entered upon its stage of renewal. This [capital], in passing into its new shape, incorporates gratis the social advance made while its old shape was being used up. And further on: ... the labour-power, the science, and the land embodied in it (by which are to be understood, economically, all conditions of labour furnished by Nature independently of man), form elastic powers of capital, allowing it, within certain limits, a field of action independent of its own magnitude.* Karl Marx, *El capital*, Siglo XXI Editores, Mexico, 1996 (18th edition), Book I, chapter XXII, pp. 749 and 755 (Our emphasis).

point of contact between the human being and technology, or, in other words, the *objectified labour* and *living labour* (or *living labour*). The result is an accelerated pace in the growth of labour's value due to the new relation of objectified labour/living labour (or, in Marxist terms, a colossal expansion of the relative surplus value).

Capital, to be sure, is not a homogeneous unit. The new technological composition of work processes develops unequally in each country and each production branch, depending on geographic and wage advantages, productivity levels and investment return options. Such national diversity in the incorporation of new technology does not deny, but renders relative, what is a universal trend of the capital in this change of epoch.

However, at the same time, the increasingly technological composition of work processes exerts pressure on the rate of return and presses forward in search of cheap workforce reservoirs and, along with it, in the expansion of capitalist connections.

A qualitative leap in the *mercantilisation* of social links emerges on the horizon, pushed further by the breakup of solidarities that had become institutionalised during the so-called "Glorious Thirty Years" (the current trends and pressures towards the privatisation of health-care services, education, retirement, previously conquered as rights; the imposition of labour flexibility and sheer employment instability).

Today, however, the real subsumption of human life to capital not only moves through more sophisticated forms of appropriation of the surplus labour and the dissemination of the abstract mercantilist-capitalist sociality, but also includes subordinating nature and biological processes that are essential for the natural reproduction of life. A new relation of the Society of Capital with biologic-natural processes pertaining to living species (animals, plants and humans) is developing before our very eyes.

In the materialisation of the "capital being" (the valorisation of value, the value capable of appreciation), previously inconceivable forms of capitalist colonisation, both of nature and human life, are now deployed. Subordinating *life's natural processes* to the capital's processes and dynamics is one phenomenon that, under unprecedented, unheard of and unfinished forms defines today's mutation.

Under such coordinates, globalisation is also a loss of control by societies over their relationships and exchanges with nature, to the extent that such process becomes autonomous, a self-regulated process (that is, governed exclusively by the logic of appreciation). The rise of genetically-modified crops in the United States, Canada, Argentina, Brazil, Mexico, China and India –notwithstanding the will of the elites or of the political sign of the State's bureaucracies– is a good example of this growing and expansive movement of the Society of Capital.

It is true that, despite opinions to the contrary, relative to the globalisation of capital, national states remain the main recognised seat of the relation of hegemony (or, in other words, of the command/subordination bond collectively accepted) in any given society. Yet, those states, while maintaining their borders, are simultaneously overwhelmed: they decreasingly regulate capital movements within their own borders, including the changes in the relationship of society with nature. This is the primary reason why all the "rounds" of international negotiations for the control of climate change and biosphere degradation have failed, beginning with the Kyoto negotiations on the control of greenhouse gas emissions.<sup>17</sup>

Accelerated urbanisation, the expansion and multiplication of megalopolis, with their slums and squatter areas, is another phenomenon resulting from the perverse combination of capital accumulation, deregulation, technological change and violence that coexist with the current mutation. Slums<sup>\*18</sup>, whilst they multiply the population and the

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17 This process of destruction of Nature currently presents an uncontrolled acceleration, as revealed by a recent study concerning the extinction of animal species occurring worldwide in the last 35 years (Living Report 2006, WWF/Zoological Society of London/Global Footprint Network). According to this report, between 1970 and 2005, there was a 25 percent reduction of earthbound species, a 28 percent decline of sea life and a 29 percent decline of freshwater species. This is a decrease without precedent in terms of human history, Report editor Jonathan Loh alerted in an interview with the British daily The Independent (16 May 2008): We would have to look at the extinction of dinosaurs to see a decrease as swift as this. The change may seem slow in human life terms, but in the light of the history of the world it is an accelerated one: the current rate of extinction is ten thousand times faster than that historically registered as normal.

18 \* All words with an asterisk from this point on were in English in the original Spanish-language text. T.N.

dynamics of human life –a feature so characteristic of “modernity”– put into question and demean civilising conquests reached by urban life in centuries-old processes.<sup>19</sup>

### ❖ *Dispossession and its New Faces*

Dispossession is not a cruel episode of the past. Along with labour exploitation in wage schemes, accumulation by dispossession is a constitutive event of capital: a tendency engraved in its being as a process of appreciation of value anchored on the permanent and expanded subordination of living labour. In this process, represented by Marx through the image of an ascending spiral, the same story narrated in the “primeval accumulation” is recreated time and time again –only exponentially.<sup>20</sup>

Robbery, depredation, pillage and appropriation by privatisation of the common goods traverse the history of capital since the long-gone time of conquest of the Americas and the enclosure of communal land in England from the XVIth to the XVIIIth centuries, up to the colonial plundering and the tributary mechanisms of the international financial system analysed by Rosa Luxemburg at the turn of the XXth century.

In this centuries-long historical trend, the processes of accumulation by dispossession mean for capital the solution of two vital needs: the existence of a reservoir of a “free” workforce –forced to “sell their skin” to stay alive– and the opening of new areas and territories for the appreciation of value (what David Harvey calls “the logic of Capitalist expansion”). In every case, and always supported by State violence, the processes of accumulation by dispossession traverse through the destruction of other civilising matrixes and the incorporation of previously autonomous producers into the wage schemes of the capitalist market’s network.

Contemporary dispossession acquires its visible and condensed expression in the surge of privatisations of public goods and services that has covered the world in the last two decades: land, media and transportation (ports, airports, highways, railways, airlines), telecommunications (digital telephone and satellite systems), banking and financial services, petroleum and petrochemicals, mining and iron and steel foundries, social security systems (healthcare, education and housing) and even workers’ pension and retirement funds.

This tidal wave of privatisation, announced in Europe since the early 1980s during Margaret Thatcher’s government, recorded its first great boom in the 1990s in Iberian American countries, concentrating in three of them –Brazil, Argentina and Mexico– almost half of the volume of transfers of public goods to private hands: ports, airports, railways, drinking-water systems, production and distribution of electrical power, petrochemicals, mining and steel foundries, telephone and satellite systems.

This tidal wave, which in Iberian America dismantled the systems of strategic resources of the mid XXth century owned by the State, has shifted in the new century to Asia, where almost 90 percent of the privatisations of the last four years took place in China. Telecommunications, electrical power, natural gas, transportation and water represented half of all the privatisations carried out between 1990 and 2003.<sup>21</sup>

As in the dawn of capitalist modernity, this new cycle of plundering and appropriation is traversing through the dissolution of pure or hybrid forms of the agrarian community, through the transformation of land into a commodity and the destruction of the bonds protecting the material self-sufficiency of agricultural producers. Such a process currently

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19 Mike Davis, *Planet of Slums*, Verso, London, 2006; and *Dead Cities and Other Tales*, The New Press, New York, 2002.

20 The idea of the historical continuity of dispossession, which is present in Marx’s reflections up to his writing on the Russian rural commune, is exposed in the *Grundrisse*. Concerning the idea of dispossession in Marx’s theoretical discourse, see Rhina Roux, “Marx y la cuestión del despojo. Claves teóricas para iluminar un cambio de época” (Marx and the dispossession issue: Theoretical keys to enlighten an epochal change”, *Herramienta. Revista de debate y crítica marxista* n° 38, Buenos Aires, June 2008.

21 Sunita Kikeri and Aishetu Fatima Kolo, *Privatisation: Trends and Recent Developments*, World Bank Policy Research Working Paper 3765, November 2005. This report records that the economic role of the State has declined in China: its share of GDP decreasing from 80 to 17 percent between 1978 and 2003.



operates throughout the immense territories occupied by the former Soviet Union and the bureaucratic regimes of East-central Europe, China and Vietnam,<sup>22</sup> as well as in Mexico and India.<sup>23</sup>

Once freed from the protecting dikes built during the XXth century, in particular after World War II (Welfare State\*, State controlling and planning of national economies, State regulation of labour relations and worldwide financial regulatory mechanisms –Bretton Woods), the new plundering offensive grows by reimposing not only the domination of capital over the land but by engulfing natural common goods: coasts, seashore, forests, woods, rivers, lagoons.

In other words, this is a colossal reenactment of the “enclosure of commons” carried out in Europe between the XIVth and XIXth centuries, which was extended to other regions in the course of colonial expansion. Water and gas wars in Bolivia, the Landless Movement in Brazil and the reemergence of indigenous movements in Iberian America (Mexico, Bolivia, Ecuador) have been part of the new insubordination cycle triggered by the organised plundering of the natural commons.

In correspondence with this process of dispossession of the common goods, there is an expansionary trend of wage stratification of the workforce along with the creation of a huge industrial army reserve: 190 million unemployed and 1,3 billion underemployed worldwide in 2007, officially recognised by the ILO.

A new proletarianization of the peasant population throughout Iberian America, China, India and South-East Asia has been in the works in the last decade. The global decline of the rural world and the rise of the curve of the urban and industrial population, notably in Asia, Africa and Iberian America, is a revealing fact of this trend.<sup>24</sup>

#### ❖ *Innovations, capital and nature: the appropriation of the four elements*

Microelectronics, information technology, genetic engineering and nanotechnology allow today the subsumption of nature, labour, skills and knowledge to the circuits of value appreciation to break down previously insurmountable boundaries: biodiversity, intellectual creation, local wisdom, genomes, radio-electric space, aerial space, eolian energy, human blood and organs, the whole biosphere and even resources that are a natural condition for the reproduction of life such as seeds and water.<sup>25</sup>

Moreover, scientific-technological innovations today allow the empire of the appreciation of value to break natural barriers. Such is the case of the new technological power in the realm of genetic mutations, which permits capital to disrupt the natural cycle of seed reproduction as in the so-called “Terminator technology” or “suicidal seeds” technology: a seed of genetically-modified plants that produces sterile seeds upon germinating and developing.

In the new face of the Society of Capital of the XXIst century, far more sophisticated forms of appropriation of surplus labour and of subordination of living labour emerge. These are illustrated by the experience of Asian peasants forced to harvest these –artificially sterile– transgenic crops, which production and distribution is controlled by the great

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22 In just a decade (1990-2000), almost 116 million hectares (20 percent of arable land) were privatised in the former Soviet Union, with the proportion of land with individual property titles growing from 4 to 22 percent. During the same period, in Central and Eastern Europe, half of all arable land (33 of 66 million hectares) was transferred to private hands, with individual property land increasing from 21 to 78 percent: see Klaus Deininger, *Land Reform Revisited*, World Bank, 2005.

23 In Mexico this process has implied a genuine historical reversal, cancelling in effect what had arisen as one of the Mexican Revolution's central conquests: the assignment of more than half of the nation's territory (103 million hectares) to 3.5 million indigenous people and peasants from almost 30 thousand ejidos and communities. What began with the constitutional amendment of 1992, the offensive against the Mexican ejido has not yet translated into an effective grand-scale sale of ejido lands, but has resulted in a transfer of collective lands to private-investment projects for real-estate and tourism developments, and, according to World Bank's figures, in the rural exodus of more than six million Mexican peasants during the last decade: See World Bank, 2008 World Development Report, *Agriculture for Development*.

24 See Mike Davis, *Planet of Slums*, op. cit., chapter 1, “The Urban Climacteric”, pp. 1-19. In East Asia (China, Hong Kong, Korea, Mongolia), according to the last ILO's report, *People are quickly moving out of agriculture. In 1997, 47,9 per cent of all those employed worked in this sector; in 2007, agriculture accounted for only 38,4 per cent of all jobs. Only South Asia has seen a faster decrease. During the same period, employment in industry increased from 24,3 to 26,9 per cent.* In no other region, adds the report, did agricultural employment diminish at such an accelerated pace as in South Asia (India, Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Pakistan, Nepal, Sri Lanka): *between 1997 and 2007 the working population was reduced by 11,4 percentage points. The decrease was higher among women than among men. Where did the employment move to? Surprisingly, given the large amount of attention paid to outsourcing service sector jobs to India, it was the industrial sector that saw the biggest increase in its job share: in 1997 15,3 per cent of all jobs were found in this sector, in 2007 it was 21,7 per cent. This has been, by far, the biggest increase in all regions and, again, women's share in employment in the sector increased more than men.* *Tendencias mundiales del empleo* (Employment global trends), ILO, January 2008, pp. 26 and 32.

25 In ten years (1996-2006), the surface of genetically-modified crops around the world (soy, corn, cotton) spiralled from 1,7 to 102 million hectares, and today covers all five continents. Between 2005 and 2006 a higher proportional surge of transgenic crops was registered in India (192 percent), South Africa (180 percent) and the Philippines (100 percent). Cf. James Clive, *Global Status of Commercialized Biotech/GM Crops: 2006*, ISAAA Brief No. 35, ISAAA, Ithaca, New York, 2006.

multinationals, led by Monsanto. Concurrently, four multinationals (Suez, Veolia, Thames Water and Bouygues) dominate in turn the market of storage and distribution of drinking water.<sup>26</sup>

This would be impossible without the methods of dispossession, protected by renovated legal forms, which appear in the many contemporary forms of private appropriation of knowledge and of natural goods: patents, trademarks, and intellectual property rights, like those authorised by the WTO in TRIPS (Agreement on Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights). In the 1990s a spectacular boom in patents on biotechnology and telecommunications was recorded, followed by pharmaceuticals, medical engineering and, more recently, nanotechnology.<sup>27</sup>

This is about a qualitative, global process of new enclosures\*, followed as if it were a fatal shadow, by the material proliferation of border barriers (Israel-Palestine, United States-Mexico, Spain-Morocco), of rigorously watched private enclosures, of fenced public spaces and of private security corps put at the core of civilian life in cities and their surroundings.

It is nobody's evil. It is an abstract force that finally leads to general, belligerent violence and to the extermination of entire populations, of woods and forests, rivers and lakes, glaciers and millenary crops, all inherent to human life. Already symptomatic in this day and age, is the alarm at the worldwide food crisis, soaring grain and agricultural products' prices and famines.<sup>28</sup>

The construction of a seeds warehouse in the Antarctic Pole, of a modern Noah's Arch to safeguard this natural link of life from nuclear wars and ecological catastrophes, financed by governments and large corporations, is a revealing image of this change of epoch delirium.<sup>29</sup>

The world of capital, nourished by this expropriation of natural goods and of the collective intellect, seems to know no limits. Today it takes ownership of the four elements of the ancient world: water, air, earth and fire; destroying in this way the ancestral, sacred ties of the human being with nature, and imposes, in its paroxysm, the logic of its constitutive instrumental reason.

It is possible that this may be its last and insurmountable limit. Yet, this is another matter whose response, whether human or inhuman, has not been said and could prove terrible.<sup>30</sup>

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26 Recent studies report that ninety percent of farmers who sowed transgenic crops in 2006 (more than 10 million) were poor peasants in China, India, the Philippines and South Africa, who were coerced for their survival into the genetically-modified crops market, of which 60 percent is controlled by Monsanto, which additionally controlled in that same year more than 20 percent of the market of patented seeds. Thus, Monsanto appropriates part of the lands' income by forcing the peasants to buy seeds and fertilisers exclusively from Monsanto. Cf. James Clive, op. cit. For a follow-up on this matter, see Sílvia Ribeiro articles "El imperio de Monsanto y la destrucción del maíz" (Monsanto's Empire and the destruction of maize), La Jornada, Mexico, 26 May 2007 and "Las caras de la privatización del agua" (The faces of water privatisation), La Jornada, Mexico, 30 April 2005.

27 According to the OECD, between 1990 and 2000, the number of biotechnology patents granted increased 15 percent annually in the United States and 10 percent in Europe. In the field of "genetic inventions", just in 2001 more than five thousand patents were granted in the United States and Japan in relation to DNA. Cf. *Inventions Génétiques, Droits de Propriété Intellectuelle et Pratiques d'Octroi de Licences: éléments d'information et politiques* (Genetic Inventions, Intellectual Property Rights and Licensing Practices: information and policy elements, OECD, 2002.

28 *This is a silent mass murder*, stated Jean Ziegler, U.N.'s special rapporteur, regarding the present food crisis and its victims in the Southern Hemisphere countries (La Jornada, 12 May 2008). These silent genocides, it bears recalling, have been recurrent in the history of capitalism. Each wave of capital's global expansion goes together with food and ecological disasters (droughts, famines, climate alterations) like those described by Mike Davis in his analysis of XX century British colonial expansion. Mike Davis, *Late Victorian Holocausts. El Niño Famines and the Making of the Third World*, Verso, London, 2001. The current food crisis is provoking hunger riots that bring to mind, only on a wider scale, those studied by E.P. Thompson in *The Moral Economy of the English Crowd in the Eighteenth Century*.

29 On 26 February 2008 the Svalbard Global Seed Vault, near the Arctic Circle, was inaugurated with a ceremony in which, initially, 268 thousand samples of seeds from some one hundred nations were hermetically enclosed to preserve and ensure their survival in the event of phenomena such as climate change and natural disasters. El País, Madrid, 26 febrero 2008. Alejandro Nadal, in "Zoológico para semillas del mundo" (A zoo for seeds from around the world), writes concerning this matter. *The project's core objective is to maintain this seed bank in the event that a global catastrophe threatens mankind's food security. [...] The project has been inaugurated precisely at the moment when sustainable agriculture undergoes its worst crisis. Multinational corporations, the governments of many nations and international organisations responsible for the agriculture/farm sector have declared an unrelenting war against the millions of subsistence peasants and farmers who use -ecosystem principles as the basis for their production strategies. Not surprisingly, the project is supported by the Rockefeller and Bill and Melinda Gates Foundations, the World Bank and corporations like DuPont (Pioneer) and Syngenta. These partners of the Norwegian government have no good reputation in the field of sustainable agriculture.* Alejandro Nadal's conclusion has a bitter undertaste: *When people start thinking about the day of the Last Judgment, we better prepare for the worst.*

30 David Harvey, *The Limits to Capital*, cit., p. 445, wrote twenty-five years ago: *present theory suggests a rather more sinister and terrifying interpretation of military expenditures: not only must weapons be bought and paid for out of surpluses of capital and labour, but they must also be put to use. For this is the only means that capitalism has at its disposal to achieve the levels of devaluation now required.* Adolfo Gilly, *El siglo del relámpago* (Century of Lightning), Itaca, Mexico, 2002, part I, "Globalización, violencia, revoluciones – Nueve tesis" (Globalisation, violence, revolutions – nine theses), pp. 17-43, annotates: *A new relationship between domination, violence and resistance is taking shape in globalisation. If this is true, this globalisation brings within the seed for new wars, revolts and revolutions, where violence, as the ultimate reason, will redefine those relationships. Any other assumption, given the current state of human affairs, fully enters fantasy's territory.*

❖ *Living Labour, domination and violence: processes and changes*

To conceive the new form of domination and its other face, the resistance and insubordination of the lower classes, we need to take into account the current changes in the makeup of the workforce. Along with the capitalist appropriation of science and technology, hundreds of millions of human beings are also taking property of a world of knowledge: they integrate wisdoms and skills, they travel and communicate across borders, becoming indispensable and, to a certain extent, uncontrollable. A new density and complexity of living labour is being formed in this epochal mutation.

*There is no handwork without brainwork, or of the brain without the hand; this is a truth as old as the exercise of philosophy. None of the great prowesses made possible by today's technological innovation, including instantly connecting with all corners of the world by pressing a microcomputer's button, would be feasible without the cumulative social knowledge (Marx called it general intellect) in the manual dexterity and the intellectual work of past generations. It is these wisdoms and skills that today are condensed into the new density of living labour.*

The foregoing finds its embodiment in the new collective worker globalised in the productive processes, yet still anchored nationally in the State's processes for the control of capital, with the latter still maintaining the spaces for the construction of its hegemony in the borders of the national State.

It is true that the State relationship proper to the old protective State –in its distinctive national variants– has almost vanished. We do not know with precision the shapes and paths that the new emerging modes of domination in development will adopt in this open and conflictive process. Yet, we are certain that it would be fruitless to think about the new forms of command and obedience –and the roads of their subversion– if the changes in the new technological composition in the relationships of domination are not detected and analysed. In other words, we mean the new weight, height and density of the mass of objectified labour at the core of capital's domination: the appropriation of living labour.

For this reason, at the same time, the scientific-technological development expands day by day the borders of what Marx used to call "available time": the reduction of necessary work and, thus, the widening of the abstract possibility of pleasure and enjoyment for human beings; that is, a new liberating balance in the old relation labour/enjoyment.

Social knowledge accumulated throughout the history of the human species' manual and intellectual labour, objectified in technologies, then makes materially possible what was glimpsed, since antiquity, as a material premise of human liberty: the availability of free time. *If each of the instruments could fulfil by itself their mission, obeying orders or anticipating them... if, in like manner, the needle would weave by itself and the plectrum touch the lyre..., builders would not need assistants, nor masters slaves,* Aristotle wrote more than twenty centuries ago in reflecting upon this material premise of human liberty.<sup>31</sup>

Under the domination of capital, however, the time freed by technological development turns into an opportunity to grab more of labour's value. Capital captures all the sciences and puts them to its service. At the heart of capitalism is the free appropriation of the accumulated social knowledge and skills, of the productive force generated by the collective intellect, subsumed as a power in the process of the appreciation of value (as Marx warned in his analysis of machinery and big industry). Science, then, manifests itself before living labour not as a liberating process of its own creation, but as an alien and overwhelming power.<sup>32</sup>

The capitalist use of new technologies not only allows for the imposition of more flexible methods for the hiring of labour (temporary, part-time or work from home), whose weight tends to increase in the sum of total salaried labour; it permits

31 Aristotle, *Política*, Gredos, Madrid, 2nd printing 1999, Book I, p. 55.

32 Relative to this relation see Alfred Sohn Rethel, *Intellectual and Manual Labour*, MacMillan, London, 1978. See too Karl Marx, *Capital y tecnología* (Manuscritos inéditos) [Capital and Technology (Unpublished writings)], Terra Nova, Mexico 1980, pp. 158-160. Marx points out *the alienation of labour –of past labour- with respect to living labour as a direct contradiction; at the same time, past labour (namely, labour's social forces, including natural and scientific forces) presents itself in part as a weapon useful to put workers on the street and reduce them to the condition of redundant men; in part to deprive them of any specialisation and thus stripping them from their inherent entitlements; and partly to deftly subjecting them to the despotism of the factory and to the military discipline of capital. [...] Capital is presented as the incarnation of the social forces and of the forms of their common work, counter-posed to each and every labourer. Capital becomes present as well under the form of past labour, –in automatic machinery and machinery put in motion by capital itself; it becomes present, as can be demonstrated, as independent from living labour; instead of subjecting itself to living labour, it subjects living labour to itself, the iron man intervenes against the flesh-and-bone man. [...] Past labour domination over living labour, together with the machine –and the machine shop based on the machine– turns not only social, conveyed in the relationship between capitalist and labourer, but also, so to speak, a technological truth". This "truth" is what appears reflected in the various ideologies revolving around the "knowledge society.*

as well to increase and densify the control and domination over labour at the point of production: the live and conflictive point where objectified labour and living labour meet, between past and present labour.<sup>33</sup>

The control over workforce expenditures and over the pace and pauses of the productive process, the dispossession of capacities and skills, the tendency to reduce the productive process to a mere labour expense (deprived of any thoughts or initiatives of its own), new processes for re-qualifying the workforce or making it obsolete and a growing separation between idea generation and execution of the whole process (expanding the gap between manual and intellectual labour), are all essential underpinnings of the new domination mode, already sketched out during the 1970s and 1980s in many papers on the new labour processes.

Their basic traits, summarised in the tendency to an increasingly intensive tight reining of the labour force and of society in general, can be enumerated here, yet not exhaustively:

1. Extension of the work schedule, along with the sealing of working time porosity/ slack time.
2. "Vigilant" State: total-control technologies (in the U.S. we find Homeland Security, the Patriot Act, legalised torture...) and its invisible and ubiquitous pressure over living labour.
3. Cracking down on migration as a way to regulate the whole of labour force.
4. Indirect and effective pressure of "military employment" (Blackwater and private firms, the U.S. professional army) over civilian labour relations and conditions, including the densification of controlling mechanisms and devices inside and outside of workplaces and public and private spaces.
5. Legalisation and trivialisation of torture, from Guantanamo and Iraq to Taser guns.
6. Proliferation of controls to tightly reining daily life, such as identity-control devices, private security guards, hidden cameras, recordings and an arsenal of laws and regulations legalising such state of affairs.

Within these coordinates there is also an increasing density of potential violence (of which current violence, visibly exercised, is always only a small percentage). A new relationship between self-regulated markets and self-regulated violence (and consequently turned autonomous), starts to loom on the horizon. The conversion of violence into the very field of accumulation (namely war industry and services, private security contractors, or the institutionalisation of the exercise of violence as a private business, as happens today in Iraq, Afghanistan and other hot points of the planet) is yet another symptom of these tendencies.

### ❖ *Within the Universal Deluge and beyond*

Seen from the earliest historical times rather than from merely economics or politics, globalisation appears to be the updating, only infinitely more complex and sophisticated, of the multiple and centuries-old violence accompanying capitalist modernity: violence against other civilising matrixes, against nature, against living labour; violence between competing capitals, violence as a field for accumulation; and implicit violence –whether potential or actual violence- in the never-ending struggle for planetary monopoly of physical coercion.

Destitution, migrations of biblical proportions, the comeback of child labour, racial exclusion and humiliation, the destruction of cultural heritages, global warming, environmental disasters, famines and a customary violence turned pandemic are just some of the images characterising this change of epoch.

On the other hand, we must also take note that within the new coordinates imposed by the masterdom of capital, the opposing, active and negating side of this process, living labour, acquires new and as yet not revealed potentialities, by

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33 In a 1962 essay aimed at establishing a scholarly precedent in Marxist thought, in the sociology of work and in the Italian workers' movement, Raniero Panzieri noted: *The capitalist technological development, through the various stages of rationalisation, through forms ever more refined of integration, etc., brings about the increasing expansion of capitalist control. The primary factor in this process is the growing expansion of constant capital vis-à-vis variable capital.* (Raniero Panzieri, "Sull'uso capitalistic delle macchine", Quaderni Rossi, Turin, 1962, N°1.

simultaneously condensing in its daily existence the possibilities for full enjoyment contained in technological novelty as well as in the richness and diversity anchored in life, history and cultural heritage and wisdom; the intangible legacy inherited to us by past generations.

Moreover, living labour goes on acquiring and accumulating a new impelling subtlety for the creation and overhauling of the forms of solidarity and rebellion. As in each previous stage of the capital connection, living labour, namely the worker both as a collective subject and as an individual, is gradually taking ownership of the innovations to imagine, create and organise new forms of self assertion and confrontation with capital; of rebellion in the extended production process, and of solidarity that is so predisposed to be world-embracing as capitalism and its inextricable corollary –the dispute between divergent capitals– are globalising.

This is a protracted process that follows the previous one. Nevertheless, it is also necessary, reliable and inescapable, just as much as the expanded existence and reproduction of living labour in the multiple and enriched realms of life.

The old conflict is still open in the daily history of present times, because the world of capital can only exist by nourishing itself from those realms of life who in their own existence and reproduction endeavour to resist it and deny it.<sup>34</sup>

At any rate, the organisation of labour, the physical community of universal labour and its spiritual distillate, solidarity, needs to be pondered, nowadays as before, particularly parting from that now omnipresent point where objectified labour and living labour, past labour and present labour, capital and labour, meet, confront each other and combine.

The essence of subversion clearly consists of subordinating objectified labour to live work, universalised and solidary; or, according to ancient wisdom, to expropriating the expropriators.

### ❖ **Afterword**

Jorge Luis Borges once wrote: *we ignore the universe's plan, but we know that reasoning lucidly and acting justly lead to helping such plan, which will not be revealed to us.*

In today's world, lucid reasoning and acting with justice lead to indignation, fervour and anger, there where the spirits of revolt are nourished. The present state of the world is intolerable. Thus, if history has taught us anything, it is that, in due time, it will no longer be tolerated.

Mexico City, 5 September 2008

Translated by Marisol Cervantes Ramírez



34. E.P. Thompson, *Customs in Common*, The New Press, New York, 1993, chapter 1, "Introduction: Custom and Culture", pp. 1-15. (In Spanish, *Costumbres en común*, Crítica, Barcelona, 2004.)

**Useful links:**

- <http://www.jussempor.org>
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❖ **About Jus Semper:** The Living Wages North and South Initiative (TLWNSI) constitutes the sole program of The Jus Semper Global Alliance (TJSGA). TLWNSI is a long-term program developed to contribute to social justice in the world by achieving fair labour endowments for the workers of all the countries immersed in the global market system. It is applied through its program of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) and it focuses on gradual wage equalisation, for real democracy, the rule of law and living wages are the three fundamental elements in a community's quest for social justice.

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