

This system is utter crap: organising anger and optimism for the future

It is not a question of waiting for a miraculous event or finding escape routes for a few on the system's margins but of charting the way towards an alternative society

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How can we not have anxiety if this system is utter crap?" shouted a 17-year-old girl in front of a rally of hundreds of students a few days ago in Madrid. On the posters, some of them handwritten, one could read: "Stop suicides", "If there is no mental health, there will be a revolution", "Strike for mental health". It may be striking that a student mobilisation

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is being organised on this issue. However, it is particularly relevant when suicide has become one of Spain's most important causes of death among young people.



Consumo Emocional

La Boca del Lobo

One thing the numbers tell us when we see the increase in emotional distress is that this is a social, structural problem. Just as the feminist movement pointed out at the time that "it's not an isolated case, it's called patriarchy", the same could be said of the pain, depression or anxiety that affect thousands of young people. If they are not isolated cases,

what do we call them? Uncertainty, the precariousness of life, multiple violence, machismo, racism, fierce competition, bullying, individualism and meritocracy, exploitation, and much more... it is called capitalism.

In his book "Sedated — How modern capitalism created the mental health crisis" (Captain Swing, 2022), James Davies points out that governments and the pharmaceutical industry promote an individualistic vision of mental illness. A depoliticisation and individuation of suffering, which is stripped of its multiple social determinants, to reduce it to a series of internal dysfunctions of individuals. The response is often "medicalised intervention". "We prefer to resort to medicalisation, which props up existing conditions with depoliticised interventions and interpretations," says Davies.

He also points out that the pathologisation of emotional problems often transforms them into a stigma for children and adults, increasing general anxiety. At the same time, such approaches to suffering tend to normalise the harsh social conditions that act 'behind the scenes' to fuel distress. In a world of precarity, frustrated consumerist cravings and demands for productive self-fulfilment, where there is never time for anything, emotional suffering is not uncommon, but it should be much more politicised.

In this regard, Davies cites studies on the rise of depression among peasants in India, while other research has focused on the case of workers in iPhone factories in China and Taiwan. Several academic papers indicate a correlation between these trends and rising unemployment in different countries and periods. Without denying the uniqueness of each life story, we are dealing with phenomena of great social significance.

And what role does public education play in this regard? "We are currently being taught in an education system that does not care about our wellbeing, nor our mental health. Far from wanting to train us to have a critical spirit in the face of reality, it is training us to be machines that do not question things and that serve the capitalist of the day who wants to exploit us. They are not preparing us to fail, they are preparing us to be ultra-productive, so that when something goes wrong, we don't know what to do with our lives". Leonor, a high school student, explained this in a TikTok video that has gone viral these days.

Are we facing a widespread way of feeling among young people? We must then ask ourselves what the conditions are for making this subjectivity possible and what the ways are to transform it. A few days ago, I read a letter from Nuria Alabao to the readers of CTXT, in which she stated that the way out is inevitably through struggle. I fully agree. The worst thing we could do is to normalise this kind of social sadness in thousands of young people and adults without confronting it. Because it is not just a matter of understanding that capitalism depresses and distresses, it is a matter of opposing it and responding to it blow by blow. Only in this way can a new creative subjectivity emerge.

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Politicising unease, organising rage

In 1846, the young Marx wrote an article entitled On Suicide. Marx rephrases a text by the archivist Jacques Peuchet on the subject, introducing his phrases in a kind of textual intervention. The text is based on the study of several cases of suicides in French Restoration society. Marx dwells on the stories of pain that lead several people to take their own lives, with particular attention to women, who endure situations of great oppression in family and social life. In agreement with the original author, he stresses that this is a social issue. Marx makes a sharp critique of patriarchal family relations and marriage as property, which is characteristic of the nascent capitalist society.

"What kind of society is this, in which one finds, in the midst of several million souls, the deepest loneliness; in which one can have the inexorable desire to kill oneself without any of us being able to sense it? *This society is not a society*; as Rousseau says, it is a wilderness, peopled by wild beasts." Marx, picking up on Peuchet, puts the focus on this interaction between the individual and the social, pointing out that, in this area, "apart from a total reform of the present social order, all attempts at change will be futile".

With great sensitivity to the inequalities and opprobrium that capitalism generates in everyday life, his question

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resonates today. What kind of society transforms what should be sources of pleasure and joy into pain and anguish? What kind of society is it that turns human labour's powers into destructive forces of humanity and nature? What kind of society puts the profit of a few

individuals above the lives of millions?

Imagining another future

The idea that capitalism is leading us towards global catastrophes is also increasingly widespread among young people. Even more so after the pandemic, it is taking shape in various geographies. Every four seconds, one person dies of hunger in the world - four seconds! It should be enough to set everything on fire. This perception of social catastrophe and climate crisis can trigger sadness into affront and rage into organising.

If Jameson's tragic formula pointed out that it is easier to imagine the end of the world than the end of capitalism, it is a matter of reversing the formula. Since we do not yearn for the end of humanity and the planet, it is urgent to awaken the imagination about a "beyond" capital. Only by arousing the desire for another society can a new optimism for the future take shape.

But how can we imagine another society? To begin with, by denaturalising everything that exists. Social relations are not set in stone. The irrationality of this system was shown in its purest form when the lives of millions were exposed to the speculation of big pharmaceuticals and private clinics. These are the same multinationals that make fortunes by medicalising individual suffering and the psychological consequences of inequalities.

In extraordinary situations, the workshops of capital take on visible contours. On the one hand, the essential one, is the workers without whom the world cannot move. They are the forces, together with women, migrants and youth, to turn

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everything upside down. The fact that in the United States, the cradle of the most extreme neoliberalism, the sympathies of the youth for socialism are growing is an auspicious sign of profound subjective changes. Of course, conservative forces and the extreme right also want to exploit the sad

passions heightened by inequality to transform them into hatred and resentment towards "others". That is why nothing is guaranteed. The struggle is necessary.

It is not a question of waiting for a miraculous event, nor of finding escape routes for a few on the margins of the system, but of charting the way to an alternative society. In my view, it is called socialism. A perspective that has nothing to do with the monstrous Stalinist experience but is based on social cooperation, self-organised and democratic from the bottom up. Of course, we must first be able to shatter the shackles of private property and capitalist accumulation.

These days, when the political conversation revolves around the far right, the energy crisis, war, inflation and the increasingly adaptive role of the institutional left, it is also important to reject the trappings of a new "lesser evil". For such complacency with the state of affairs can only consolidate demoralisation as a general mood. On the contrary, as the French philosopher Frederic Lordon asserts in a book I read these days: "Only an incredible display of political energy will succeed in preventing capitalism from pushing humanity to the edge of the limit, a display that usually goes by the name of revolution".

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- ❖ **About the authors: Josefina L. Martínez** is a journalist. Author of 'No somos esclavas' (2021).
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