

Of the Constitutive Principles of a Post-Capitalist Economy

The celebrated playwright Bertolt Brecht expressed in clear words that which describes the times we live in: “A crisis is produced when the Old doesn’t finish to die, and the New doesn’t end to be born.” Capitalism does not finish to die, and the alternative does not end to be born. Capitalism seems to have reached its ultimate deadline, but yet the ludicrous process of hoarding continues at a global scale. The alternative sits in a *status nascendi* since the middle of the 19th century, but actually-existing Socialism is nearly collapsed.

The times we are living are times of crisis. It is not a crisis in terms of GDP growth rate crashdowns, but rather a crisis of another kind. It goes beyond the recurring recessions which have taken place in countries belonging to the core of the world’s system. This is a multidimensional crisis that has a global effect, unprecedented in the History of mankind.

Millions of people who have no jobs and those who have junk jobs suffer the everyday anxiety of not having enough to make a living. In one of their testimonies: “If you’ve got a job is fine; but if you don’t then you may die of starvation.” The International Labour Organization (ILO) estimates in 200 million the number of people who are totally unemployed and in 900 million the number of workers who earn less than 2 dollars a day; not only in countries to the South, but also in countries with higher income levels. As if this scenario were not desolate enough, in its *Global Employment Trends 2012* report, the ILO warns that in order to “prevent a major unemployment crisis” we must face the “urgent challenge” of generating 400 million new job positions during the next decade as to absorb the growth of labor force. In the present, food crisis persists although is not seen on the papers’ headlines. According to FAO’s records, about 870 million people on the planet suffer of hunger at some moment of today’s day.

But this increasing social exclusion goes hand in hand with the progressive exploitation of nature. Almost half the forests and rain-forests around the world have been felled. Rain-forests of a size as big as the territory of Belgium disappear every year. Almost half the 500 rivers on the globe are drastically running dry. “In some cases they have been reduced to streams, and the United Nations (UN) warns us that it is an ‘ongoing disaster’.” As to biodiversity, it is esteemed that today one hundred species are exterminated every single day at a rate of four each hour. As a matter of fact, we are living in the sixth greatest catastrophe in this category. Besides, 60 percent of the ecosystems are damaged. Of course, *global warming* also contributes to this extreme environmental crisis.

Today, even though is not the trending *hot topic* when concerning nature, the crisis of the limits to growth endures. The actual scarcity or complete depletion of some natural resources, among which oil is on top of the list, is now a reality. According to specialists, we are at the world's *oil peak*. All in all, this is the first warning at the face of the incoming *peak everything* catastrophe, as Richard Heinberg has pointed out.

This is multidimensional global crisis that gathers strength as it destructively feeds on each one of the crises it is comprised of. It is a gathering strength that already represents a serious menace to nature and human life: *tipping point* figures in connection with global warming have been put already on the discussion table; nevertheless, there are points there that are points of no return in connection with unemployment issues and hunger which derive in social uproars; and there are points of no return when it comes to the exhaustion of natural resources that result in resource-grab wars; points of no return from which the uttermost collapse of life as we know it has no further mending. It is thus that today this set of crises is regarded together as a great civilizatory crisis.

Still, such crises do not explain the civilizatory crisis: they are dimensions of it. What is behind this global multidimensional crisis is the also global-reaching capital amassing system. Of course, the high unemployment rates all over the world are not due to the meddling of unions or the State, but rather due to the capitalist race for the sake of profitability; starvation is not ascribable to a veritable scarcity of food, but to financial speculation in the food markets; the environmental collapse is not accountable to geological or astrophysical reasons, but to the devastating process of capitalist production; the limits to growth are accountable to the same predatory dynamic. Marx expressed his logic with clarity: "Capitalist production, therefore, only develops the technique and the combination of the social process at the same time exhausting the two sources of wealth: land and labor." The civilizatory crisis that we now experience is in effect the manifest ravaging of both nature and human beings which is provoked by the capitalist dynamics. A ravaging that does not seem to revert itself, but rather to become more ferocious as the neoliberal capitalist globalization continues to endure.

All in all, the civilizatory crisis that we live today exists because "the Old does not finish to die and "the new does not end to be born". The capitalist system, cause and effect of social and environmental crises, has not entered yet into an unsolvable crisis. The evidence on the tendency of capital gains rates dropping down has already been acknowledged, so that there is no doubt that capitalism reflects a dying man under intensive care who is gripping artificially to life by means of financial rescues, big packages of tax incentives, financial bubbles, credits, cheap energy resources,

and of the exploitation of labor. Nevertheless, the process of accumulation of capital continues. We can read on the papers about the increasing big fortunes and the soaring of stock markets. In a phrase: *business is good*. As a matter of fact, the multiple-crisis we are facing is the evidence that shows that the capitalist dynamic is still standing. The irrationality of the rationalized is proof of it. The alternative of capitalism “does not end to be born”, not even when there are clear signs of a moving forward under welfare state policies as the ones undergoing in Bolivia and Ecuador. In essence, speaking in ontological terms, capitalism “does not finish to die” because the principles that comprise it still prevail, and the alternative “does not end to be born” because the principles that must comprise it are not yet thoroughly defined. That is the reason why we are in crisis.

Constitutive Principles of Post Capitalism

If we want to live on, we must overcome the times of crisis that we live in. In order to do that, **the Old must finish to die and the New must end to be born**. The Old must not die because it is old, but because it causes the crises that jeopardize human lives and the environment. The New must be born not because it is new, but because we need to overcome these times of crisis. But for the Old to finally die, the New must finish to be born. The ultimate downfall of capitalism is the last instance that depends of a plan moderately defined of a post capitalist economy. The commander Hugo Chavez, inspired in Marxist ideals but criticized for his orthodoxy, expressed it on the following terms: “Socialism will not take place as something inevitable. That is not written. Determinism...well, that is not determined. Capitalism took place just like that: nobody designed it. Socialism requires to be designed.”

Here, a plan action or a scheme can mean no other thing but to elicit the principles that together will give birth to a post capitalist economy. But these are not moral principles or well-intentioned procedural ones that lead us to nowhere if only to fantasize on alternatives to capitalism. These are principles that require to be elicited if we want to survive the present times of crisis. To put it simple, these are principles out of need and not out of fancy. These are principles out of need and awareness: what is indispensable and useful join together in one and the same. Hence, is the acknowledgment of the necessity to overcome global crises, and not historical materialism or sheer good will what places us at the threshold of post capitalism. Therefore, the principles that shall comprise the plan of a post capitalist economy are **principles of need turned into awareness**.

Yet, these principles of need turned into awareness are both **normative and constitutive** principles at one time. They shall establish norms, one at a time, on human actions and financial institutions, and at the same time they shall comprise together the whole set of the post capitalist economy. For example, regarding the consumption of wealth in post capitalism, each person has a limit in reference to the benefits and services he/she may have. As a concrete norm, each person should consume in a balanced, moderate manner. But this principle that shall establish norms for the consumption habits of millions of people is at the same time a constitutive principle of the post capitalist economy as a whole. The establishing of norms that part from *human praxis* is one and the same with the economic system's constitutive.

Then, if we may shall on, **we require a plan comprised of the normative principles as the products of need turned into awareness to be constitutive of a new post capitalist economic system.**

All in all, the set of constitutive principles of the post capitalist economy that I am only eliciting in this document give birth to a concrete utopia which *a posteriori* unlikeliness is nevertheless useful for letting us know what is possible.

Of course, to understand a concrete utopia for what it is, not a mere speculation, idealization or transcendental reflection and thus, impossible and unrealistic; but a one that parts from a critique of that that exists, not without acknowledging the existing limits of the prevailing system and the life conditions of both human being and nature, results an affirmation of what the grounds of a possible post capitalist economy can be. The principles of post capitalism, *conditio sine qua non*, are 1) **the production must be oriented towards meeting human necessities**, and not for the sake of profit; 2) **the distribution of wealth must be determined on a “to each according to his need” basis**, and not according to job positions or titles; 3) **the exchange must be taken to effect according to a plan action based on technical and scientific criteria**, a commodities market with supportive prices, not one that fosters the voracious competition of the market; and 4) **consumption must be restrained according to the planet's biophysical boundaries**, and not an ostentatious one that induces necessities for the sake of profit. Together, these principles unmistakably give birth to a utopia, because there is not a single national or regional economy in the world today that operates on the ground of such principles, whether these can be found partially and intertwined within capitalism. In other words, it is a concrete utopia which unlikeliness is not *a priori*, but *a posteriori* (an unlikeliness regarded as “not yet possible”), and is due to the obsolete structures of illegitimate powers and its different relations that favor the *status quo*.

Nevertheless, being quite impossible to pragmatically organize *a posteriori* a post capitalist economy comprising the principles aforementioned does not imply that the eliciting of such principles is a dull and useless endeavor: if we do not challenge what is impossible in appearance (designing a post capitalist economy), we shall never know if it is plausible. The German philosopher Ernst Bloch expressed it in such words: "...to overshoot the mark in order to hit it."

In this way, such principles that comprise the concrete utopia of a post capitalist economy conform together the initial approach of an impossible alternative; *ergo* a contribution to the *gnosis* that a post capitalist economy is and will be possible.

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