Soyons realistes, demandons l´impossible. Alternative futures beyond ´peak capitalism´

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The fetish world of capitalism

Many more people can easily imagine climate collapse than the end of capitalism

People are “blind vis-à-vis the apocalypse” and are more afraid of losing their jobs today than of losing tomorrow’s existence and the world the day after

Günther Anders 1989, Antiquatedness of Man

“The daily, inevitable, inescapable transformation of all tangible values into intangible, interchangeable categories such as commodity, money, price and wage has changed the spiritual life of Man in capitalism completely”

Ernst Bornemann 1973, Psychoanalyse des Geldes. Eine kritische Untersuchung

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The double character of all economic processes in capitalism

**use values: the „true richness“ (K.Marx)**

- created by human labour + presented by nature
- determined by their benefit for the satisfaction of human needs
- involves a **qualitative transformation** of matter + energy
- **irreversible** consequences
- **kumulativ effects**

**exchange values: „the wealth of nations“ (A. Smith)**

- created by wage labour – with machinery mostly run by fossil energy + short-term exploitation and squandering of the power of the earth
- based on „commodification“ of everything + aim of profit making
- measured in monetary terms – criterium: **quantitative increase**
- **reversibility** of valorization: M-C-M’
- internal contradictions + **cyclical crisis**

Insurmountable limits of nature at the „input“- and „out-side“ of capitalism as a world economic and world-ecological system

Possible for capital to profit from ruthless extraction of natural riches indefinitely - but due ecological degradation human civilisation will likely no longer exist

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Limits of nature at the input-side: cheap raw materials and energy are becoming scarce

Figure 7: Oil production world summary

World phosphor production, see: Resilience.org
Limits of nature at the output-side: capitalist economies are “economies in the creation of waste” (Marx)

“pollutant management”: attempt to keep harmful substances away from humans

“recycling”: only occurs to the extent that it lowers production costs

“...no society can go on producing, in other words, no society can reproduce, unless it constantly reconverts a part of its products into means of production“ (Capital 1/Chapt.1)
At the output-side of capitalism: a collapse of the Earth systems is within reach...

From the perspective of natural scientists we are leaving already the “safe operating space” of planet Earth (see Rockström et al 2009)
...which will impact on the “tipping points” of the bio-physical systems
Unbound drive of capitalism for valorization erodes its own material conditions

- Logic of capitalist production for exchange rather than use drives the expansion to exploit natural forces (human labour and no-human nature) “for eternity”

- (only) the abstract side of value creation can grow without limits

Capitalism cannot arbitrarily subsume nature for the sake of its maximum valorization – without destroying on an expanding scale the fundamental material conditions for free human development

„Tipping points“ of development

within the system of use values

within the system of exchange value

in societies

collapse – revolution-transformation?

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The world at cross roads

**Geoengineering**
- reduction of GHGs, climate engineering, big projects in energy generation
- high technical efficiency
- solutions with uncertain success
- problem of reach and duration
- problems with international coordination
- role of powerful private actors
- conflicts between countries and new economic blocs – military dimensions

alternative mode of organizing production and reproduction: **Moral economy/ Economy of solidarity**
- radical and quick transition from fossil to solar energies
- leaving most of fossil fuels and minerals in the soil
- regionalisation/ localization
- deceleration and sufficiency
- cooperative forms of work and life
- creation of new forms of collective property
- new combination of market mechanisms and planning on all levels – but most importantly: on planetary scale
1. **Structural change** that respects socio-economic constrains on human action must establish some kind of “**dynamic equilibrium**” (instead of the growth dynamic) – but this is something that is simply not possible within the capitalist world system - so **what appears to be necessary within capitalism translates into a crisis of capitalism**

2. **The question of private property**: is still the most important lever for structural change – because the power with which the owner of great wealth enforce their private interests prevents us from changing some crucial things
   However, the socialization of means of production should not be understood as a one-off legal act, but rather as **a long-lasting process in which society gains real democratic control over its economic life**

3. **The necessary structural change is about the “commons”, the common goods** – in nature and on the Internet, about the “city for all”, production cooperatives and tenants’ associations that deprive the real estate markets of housing, about associations that take energy supply into their own hands and about a revival of “municipal socialism”, which provides education, health, public transport and energy for all.
   **But it is also clear that in order to realize public wealth in these forms private wealth has to be reduced drastically.**

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4. It is difficult the predict whether such a change would be possible without violent uprising – something we usually call a revolution.

Undoubtedly, there is the potential for a revolution in many countries because tensions are high and unjust inequality is growing.

But in Europe and in the US we are probably more concerned with the permanent counterrevolution of capitalism. We are closing our borders and hope that the other take care of the plight. This inevitably leads to disaster.

Rosa Luxemburgs statement on the eve of WW I that the choice is between socialism or barabarism today is even more true. Because today we have the choice between the very existence of future generations or to end “capitalism as we know it” (Elmar Altvater 2005)

“The true utopia is the belief that the existing global system can continue to reproduce itself infinitely; the only way to be realistic is to realize what seems to be simply impossible within the coordinates of this system” (Slavoj Zizek, in: DER STANDARD, 19. 5. 2008)