

Democracy

*Les Amis de 4 Millions de Jeunes Travailleurs
1975-1976*

A section of the book 'A World Without Money' ('Un Monde Sans Argent: Le Communisme'), written in French in 1975-1976 and originally translated and posted online at <https://web.archive.org/web/20091027060018/https://www.geocities.com/~johngray/monde603.htm>. Another translation of this section, with slightly different wording, is also available on red texts as part of the full 'A World Without Money.'

Democracy

What is more beautiful than democracy: the sovereign power of the people? As much as the term capitalism can be embarrassing, to the same extent the term democracy arouses support. Everyone is for democracy, whether it is royal or republican, bourgeois or popular. To reproach their adversaries people will call them insufficiently democratic.

Anyone who sets themselves against democracy will at best be seen as nostalgic for absolute monarchy. In general people prefer to label them as fascists. The keenest to do so are often the marxists and marxist-leninists who forget what the founding fathers said about democracy, and who are anxious to conceal their own taste for power and dictatorship. Hypocritically, some of those who are still guiltily nostalgic for stalinism will reproach us for being stalinists.

Democracy appears as the antithesis of capitalist despotism. Here where it is well known that a minority is in charge, one claims to oppose to them the remaining power of universal suffrage.

In reality capitalism and democracy are partly linked. Democracy is the fig leaf of capital. Democratic values, far from being subversive, are the idealised expression of the real and less noble tendencies of capitalist society. Communists no more claim to realise the trilogy "liberty, equality, fraternity" than they do "work, family, fatherland".

If democracy is the consort of capital, how is it that dictatorship and capitalism so often coexist? How is it that the majority of mankind live under authoritarian regimes? How does it come about that even in democratic countries the operation of democracy is constantly hindered?

Democratic values and aspirations are the consequence of the solvent character of capital. They correspond to the ending of the insertion of the individual within a community and a network of fixed relations. They also correspond to the need to maintain an idealised community, to regulate conflicts, and to limit quarrels for the good of all. The minority yields to the decisions of the majority.

Democracy is neither a simple lie nor a vulgar illusion. It draws its content from a shattered social reality for which it seems to be a reunification. Within the democratic

aspiration there is a search for community, a will to respect others. But the basis on which it takes root and seeks to develop prevents this from succeeding.

Democracy is often still too dangerous for capital or at least for certain interests in power. That is why they constantly seek to impose limits to it. With few exceptions these limits and even simple dictatorship are presented as victories of democracy itself. What tyrant doesn't claim to govern, if not by the people, then at least for the people?

Democracy, which can seem to be an excellent means of absorbing workers' struggles during periods of calm, sees itself abandoned without shame as soon as the defence of capital requires this. There are always a few intellectuals and politicians who are most surprised to find themselves so easily sacrificed on the altar of the interests of the powerful.

Democracy and dictatorship are opposed but not unrelated forms. Since it implies the submission of the minority to the majority, democracy is a form of dictatorship. While a junta of dictators may well have to resort to democratic mechanisms.

It is sometimes forgotten that fascism, nazism and stalinism were involved in imposing on themselves both terrorist processes and regular elections. They liked to oppose the broad masses and popular justice to the handfuls of "traitors", the "unpatriotic" and those who were "anti-party".

Communism is not the enemy of democracy because it will be the friend of dictatorship and fascism. It is the enemy of democracy because it is the enemy of politics. That said, communists are not indifferent to the regime under which they live. They prefer to fall asleep quietly in the evening without wondering whether tonight someone will come to take them from their beds and convey them to prison.

The critique of the state must not be substituted for the critique of politics. Some take on the machinery of the state but only the better to save politics. Just as certain educationalists criticise schools in order to generalise education into all forms of social relation. For Leninists everything is political. Behind every manifestation of capital, they see an intention, a design. Capital becomes the instrument of a political project to which it is necessary to oppose another political project.

Politics is seen as the domain of liberty, action and manoeuvre as compared to economic fate. Economy, the domain of the production of goods is dominated by necessity. Economic evolution and crises appear as natural phenomena which escape human influence.

The left is accustomed to stressing the possibilities of politics, the right is accustomed to stress the needs of the economy. It's a false debate.

More and more politics appears as the carbon copy of economic life. During a certain period it could play a role of compromise and alliance between social layers.

Today the importance of politics as an intervention in the economy has increased. But at the same time the political sphere has lost its autonomy. There is only a single politics of capital which compels both left and right regardless of the specific interests of their social bases.

While the state appears to be a more or less definable institution, politics is born and reborn from all the pores of society. Although it finds its expression in the action of a particular layer of militants and politicians, it is supported by, and finds an echo in, the behaviour of everybody. This is what gives it its strength and conveys the impression that all social solutions must be political.

Politics follow from, and are supported, by the dissociation between decision and action, and by the separations which set individuals against one another. Politics first

appear as the permanent search for power which animates men in capitalist society. Democracy and despotism seem to be the only ways of regulating problems between people. The introduction of democracy into families or couples passes for a new stage in human progress. Above all this expresses, in perhaps the least worst way, the loss of the deep unity which can unite human beings.

Communism does not separate decision and execution. There will no longer be a division between two groups or even between two distinct moments organised into a hierarchy. People will do what they must or what they have decided to do without posing the question of whether they are a minority or a majority. These are notions which presuppose the existence of a formal community.

The principle of unanimity reigns in the sense that those who do something will be in agreement from the start, and that the agreement provides the basis and possibility of common action. The group does not exist independently of, or prior to, the action. It is not split apart in voting to then be reunified by the submission of one part to the other. It is constituted in and by the action, and by the capacity of people to identify with and understand the point of view of others.

It is not a matter of systematically rejecting all voting and any submission of a minority to a majority. But then these are just technical forms to which one cannot give an absolute value. It may be that the minority possesses the truth. It may be that a majority yields to a minority considering the importance of what is at stake for that minority.

Is communism the advent of liberty? Yes, if one understands by this that mankind will have more choice than now, that they will be able to live in agreement with their tastes.

What we challenge is the philosophy which opposes free-will and determinism. This separation reflects the opposition of man and the world, individual and society. It expresses the rootlessness of the individual and his inability to understand his own needs in order to satisfy them. He can choose between a thousand types of work, a thousand forms of leisure, a thousand loves and be influenced in a thousand ways because nothing truly affects him. No certainty lives within him. He doubts everything and first of all himself. In doing this he is ready to support everything and often believes he has chosen it. Liberty presents itself as the philosophical garb of misery. Doubt as the expression of freedom of thought when really it signifies loss, the inability of man to situate himself in his world.

In the course of the revolution man loses his chains but finally becomes linked simultaneously to his desires and to the necessities of the moment. He becomes passionate once again and begins to understand himself. The extraordinary climate of joy and tension within insurrections is linked to the feeling that everything is possible and at the same time that what one does must be done urgently. That one must no longer hesitate and be blown back and forth between petty tasks. Subjective and objective constraints merge together.