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SPECIAL ISSUE: COMMONS, CLASS STRUGGLE AND THE WORLD

Introduction

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The 'commons' has become one of the keywords in the global class struggle against neoliberal capitalism. The term shares etymological kinship with word such as 'community', 'communism', and 'communal'—all of which have been variously expropriated by enclosing powers from above and re-appropriated by movements from below. It invokes the language and customs of pre-capitalist social formations, implicitly negating the stadial concept of history. However, just as the 'commons' historically did not mean a singular, static practice but was redefined constantly by what commoners did in their subsistence economy, the future of 'commons' will be determined by the content and vector of our struggles, as we define who and what kind of class we will constitute, as the forces arrayed against us will attempt to do the same for their own ends. This collection aims to expand and diversify the discussion around the ongoing historical process of the 'commons', provoking new ways of looking at this age-old non-capitalist practice of sharing, subsistence, survival.

The last twenty-three years since the collapse of the state-socialist/capitalist regimes of Eastern Europe have shown repeatedly the intractable universality of commons and class struggle in defining our history. Against the juggernaut of neoliberal accumulation, which proceeded rapidly to enclose the ruins of the failed Soviet state, the most signal forms of class struggle emerged as a defense and reinvention of the commons, from the 1994 Zapatista indigenous rebellion in Chiapas, Mexico to the multiplicity of anti-capitalist commoning activities which find spontaneous expressions in post-disaster mutual aid, urban community avant-gardening, workers' occupation and direct control of abandoned factories.

E.P. Thompson and his Warwick School of History have produced the *locus classicus* in the English social history of the commons, offering a much-needed long-term perspective on what has become a fiercely contested terrain of ideological class strife: the commons today encompass virtually all fields of social life and reproduction, from the traditional indigenous commons and cyber-commons to public access to education and healthcare. But various global capitalist institutions are also seeking to co-opt these movements into a vehicle for restructuring themselves, as a means to shore up the failures of the neoliberal strategy. Prior to the historical commencement of the English commoners' struggle against enclosures and privatizing innovations of the market in the eighteenth century, the commons served traditionally as an essential integument in binding the feudal class structure. Over a decade into the twenty-first century, we are at a historical conjuncture that has made us confront again with the epochal necessity to reconstitute the very meaning and ramification of this 'pre-modern' term, which stands so starkly against the grain of capitalist modernity.

This collection aims to capture some of the essential features and challenges of this class struggle over the commons and its historical roots. Peter Linebaugh, social historian of the revolutionary Atlantic, reveals how the theory of stadial time came to be expropriated from the miners' knowledge of the earth in the eighteenth century, while Edward and Catherine Despard and other organic figures of the trans-Atlantic class struggle sought to restore the non-teleological, sacred time of the revolutionary commons. If the trope of equating the earth to the machine is at least as old as the origin of geological science (James Hutton, William 'Strata' Smith), as Linebaugh shows, we may be facing a world-historical moment of catastrophic capitalism when an alternative re-grounding of the earth from below is urgently needed. This is exactly what Sabu Kohso, translator of English-Japanese radical thought (David Graeber, Kojin Karatani), argues in the wake of the Great Eastern Japanese Earthquake ('3/11') of 2011, namely the necessity of grounding the abstraction of the 'world' (of international politics, to say nothing of history and revolution) in the 'planetary machine' that is the earth. Kohso implies that this may lead to revolutionary renovation in how we conceive labor and value, commons and class struggle, as this process of rethinking displaces the centrality of abstract humanity that has defined both the classical bourgeois project and that of its supposed state socialist antagonist.

It is not only the ecological ground and the social forces seeking its reconstitution which are under intense pressure but also political economy and the discursive terrain of the commons. Massimo De Angelis, the critical political economist who wrote *The Beginning of History: Value Struggle and Global Capital* (Pluto Press, 2007) and edits the web journal *The Commoner*, provides an overview of the depth and extent of the current economic, social, and ecological crises as they redefine the nature of the commons and its revolutionary prospects for the movement. De Angelis superimposes the paradox of capitalist economic growth over the potential split

developing between the movement of anti-neoliberal protest and movement of the commons. George Caffentzis, radical philosopher of money, dissects the discursive enclosure that the 'commons' faces today, especially in the work of what he terms 'neo-Hardinian' (after Garret Harding, the primary theorist of the anti-commons) scholars and policymakers who in his view are attempting to redefine the 'commons' as a means of repairing the failure of the neoliberal capitalist project.

Closely bound up with this question of redefining knowledge and combating co-optation is the need to reorient our focus on the commons toward regions too often neglected by Anglophone activism and scholarship. The late Andre Gunder Frank reminded us of the need for such 'reorientation', pointing to the 'Orient' or 'Asia' as the fulcrum of a new world history. As such, two of the essays in this collection focus upon modern Turkey, crossroads of the geographical and ideological fissures that divide Asia and Europe, 'East' and 'West', medieval and modern. The issue of the ongoing 'Kurdish question', one of the most divisive issues in the formation of the Turkish state and indeed in contemporary Turkish society, is brought forth in full force by Barış Ünlü, editor of a volume (İletişim, 2010) celebrating the life and work of İsmail Beşikçi, the Turkish sociologist and 1987 candidate for the Nobel Peace Prize. Ünlü exposes the contradictions immanent in this national-statist project against the commons by showing the manner in which Kurds constitute an indigenous figure in the Turkish body politic, as its leading modernizers have promoted the dominant Kemalist ideology, which has invented the nationalist myth of 'Turkishness'—just as 'whiteness' was invented in the racialized class politics of U.S. capitalism—and consigned the Kurds into the historical dustbin of 'feudal remains and/or reactionary-Islamist ideas'. This raises the difficult question of how the commons in its traditional garb cannot be separated readily from the conception of ethnos, whose ambiguous role in the formation of nationalism and state-building is all too well-known, and how principled intellectuals might play an organic role in forging a counter-hegemonic discourse of the cosmopolitan commons. Turkey also offers an important case study in how the commons cannot be conceived exclusively as a rural phenomenon. Jeffrey Howison and Irmak Ertuna-Howison—historical sociologist of American conservatism and comparative literary theorist of technology and the avant-garde, respectively—analyze the massive urban developmentalist projects of the 'New Istanbul', emblemized ubiquitously in the proposed construction of the third bridge over the Bosphorus Strait and of 'Canal Istanbul' in the form of a second Bosphorus Strait. These projects will have profound social, financial, and ecological consequences, and represent a contemporary form of enclosure in which the conception and use of formerly public space in the urban commons becomes immediately the idiom of class struggle.

In order to struggle effectively against this capitalist project of reterritorialization, it is not only widening the scope of geographical imagination that is in order but nothing less than a radical

reconceptualization of social agency and historical stages. Jason Hribal, scholar of animal liberation and author of *Fear of the Animal Planet: The Hidden History of Animal Resistance* (AK Press, 2010), proposes such a reconceptualization in terms of animal-human relations, exposing the line of epistemological divide in this relationship to have arisen from the historical forces of primary accumulation at work in the conceptual expropriation of animals from the category of the working class. Animal-as-worker is a notion that Hribal shows to be already present in slave narratives and political economists antedating Marx, who appears here as a decisive culprit in promoting an anthropocentric theory of class. Comparative historian Manuel Yang rounds out our collection by bringing us back to the problematic of historical stages, differentiating Marx from Lewis Henry Morgan's Eurocentric stadialism and showing the degree to which the commons appears as an essential motif in the Old Moor's work.

This special issue sets out to sample some of the ongoing crucial debates and scholarship on the commons, as they are forged in the historical experience of class struggle and resistance to enclosure. Many other narratives and voices from below are possible and awaiting to be documented and argued over—we must do this in the trenches of wherever we find ourselves, whether Syntagma Square or Tahrir Square, Okinawa or Santiago, Kamagasaki slums or Skid Row L.A., Taiyan or Palestine. For class struggle and the commons are not a name of discipline or category of analysis—they are the defining experiences of how the world was made and is being made now.

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