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## **5.9 John Holloway**

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### **The Fourth World War and How to Win it A Tribute to the Kurds and Zapatistas**

John Holloway

I

A wonderful honour, a wonderful excitement. I am learning so much about the Kurdish freedom movement. But it is more than the Kurdish movement isn't it? There is an overflowing, an overflowing from Kurdistan, and we are that overflowing, We who are here not just to learn about Them, but because they are part of us as we are part of them. We who are constantly being attacked and are desperate to find a way out. We are here not just to support them, but because in them we see a hope for ourselves. We who are trying to weave a different world against and beyond this world of destruction and death and do not know how to do it, and that is why we walk asking, asking we walk, learning we walk, hugging we walk.

We are being attacked more and more aggressively, so aggressively that sometimes it seems like a black night with no dawn. The Fourth World War is what the Zapatistas call it, but the name doesn't

matter. Capital's war against humanity is the term we've been hearing in the last couple of days. Ayotzinapa is the name that resounds now in the ears of those of us who live in Mexico and far beyond, but there are many, many images of the horror of capitalist aggression: Guantánamo, the drowning of the 300 migrants in the Mediterranean just a few weeks ago, ISIS and the seemingly unending horror of war in the middle east, the damage inflicted by austerity policies in the whole of Europe and Greece in particular, the constant attacks on critical thought in the universities of the world. And so on, and so on. All symbols of the violent obscenity of a world in which Money is lord and master. Fourth World War, then, not as consciously controlled attack, but as the logically coherent and constantly renewed assault of Money against humanity.

## II

The Fourth World War: capitalist crisis, capital desperate to survive, capital fighting by every means possible to ensure the survival of a system that makes no sense, that has no meaning beyond its own reproduction.

The very existence of capital is an aggression. It is an aggression that says to us each and every day, "you must shape your activity in a certain way, the only activity that is valid in this society is activity that contributes to the profits of capital, in other words labour." That is the labour theory of value, the theory that has been so much maligned in the last two days.

Marx's labour theory of value is of fundamental importance for three reasons. Firstly, it tells us that capital depends on the conversion of

our daily activity into labour (what Marx calls abstract or alienated labour), into that peculiar activity that creates value and ultimately profit for capital. This announces the weakness of capital, that it depends on us. Secondly it tells us that this conversion of our activity into labour is a totalising process that subordinates us to a unifying logic of profit. This already tells us that revolution must be an unravelling of this process of totalisation, a movement of detotalisation (or autonomisation), a creation of a world of many worlds, as the Zapatistas put it. And thirdly, it tells us that this drive to convert our activity (or doing) has a dynamic: this derives from the fact that the magnitude of value is determined by the quantity of socially necessary labour time required to produce a commodity and the fact that this is constantly falling. Capital's weakness is not only that it depends on our converting our activity into labour, but that it depends upon being able to make us labour faster and faster: the inherent weakness becomes a tendency to crisis. Marx's theory of labour is a scream, a scream of pain and fury against the obscenity of such a way of organising our creative doing, but it is also a cry of hope that this system that is destroying us has a fatal weakness, the fact that it depends upon us.

It is important to say this because a lot of what was being said yesterday seemed to suggest that Marx approved of a society based on labour when what he says is precisely the contrary. If you haven't read *Capital*, please read it; if you have read it, then please read it again. This request is addressed to all of you: especially to the anarchists among you, even more especially to the Marxists among you, and to you, David Graeber, and to you, David Harvey, and, if there is some way that my words can reach you in your island prison, to you Abdullah Ocalan.

Labour is the production of meaninglessness. David Graeber said it very well yesterday, but Marx also said it 150 years ago. But it is more than that: labour is the destruction of human and non-human forms of life.

III

Capital is aggression and in its crisis there is an intensification of that aggression. In the present crisis capital comes up against the limits of its ability to impose the logic of profit, the logic of the meaningless faster-faster-faster, upon human life. We are the crisis of capital.

It tries to find a solution in two ways. Firstly by pushing harder, becoming more authoritarian, pushing out of the way all who stand as an obstacle to its ambitions: Ayotzinapa, fifty political prisoners in the state of Puebla, where I live. And secondly, by playing a great game of make-believe: if we can't exploit you the way we need to, let's pretend that we can, let's expand credit/ debt: hence the enormous expansion of capital in the money form. But the crisis of 2008 announces clearly the limits of the game of let's-pretend and forces capital to become even more authoritarian. Fourth World War, war against humanity.

We have to win this war: to lose it is to accept the possible or probable annihilation of human life. By winning the war I mean not stringing the bankers and politicians up from the lampposts (however attractive that may be), but by breaking the dynamic of destruction that is capital. Stop making capital, stop labouring. Let's do something sensible instead, something meaningful, let us lay down the bases of a different way of living.

The strategy of trying to get rid of capital by reproducing capital, albeit on a less aggressive basis, does not work, however well-intentioned it might be and however real some of its beneficial effects. Look at Bolivia, look at Venezuela, look now at Greece: there is no such thing as a gentle capitalism. Greece is showing us now day by day that the apparently realistic strategy of creating a different sort of society through the state is absolutely unrealistic.

It makes no sense to think that we can stop making capital by going through the state because the state is a form of social relations that derives its existence from capital. We have to go a different way, different ways, where the only paths that exist are those we make by walking on them. And it is our responsibility, a responsibility that cannot be delegated. It cannot be delegated to the politicians, but also it cannot be delegated to the Kurdish Freedom Movement or to the Zapatistas. The struggle is ours, here-now in Hamburg or wherever we live – wherever we live and not just where we were born, or indeed where our parents were born, although of course the where we were born and have lived is part of the place where we live now.

We are in the centre, this We that we started with: a self-contradictory We, a We who walk asking, walk dreaming. Above all a We who walk weaving. Practically, we create the bases of a different society by weaving it in a movement that goes against and beyond the capitalist binding of our activity into totalising, meaningless labour. This is not just a project, it is something that we are already doing, and that has always been at the centre of all anti-capitalist struggles. We push against capital by doing against labour, that is by weaving a world of many worlds that

push towards self-determination. All these weavings are contradictory, all have to face the extremely complex problem of the interface with the world ruled by money, by value: that is why they cannot really be understood as autonomies, but at best as autonomisings, as cracks or crackings in the texture of domination.

There is a poetry in this approach: not in the language necessarily, but in the very movement of struggle. We live now a world that does not yet exist, hoping that we can create it by living it. We live a world that exists potentially, we live in the subjunctive rather than the indicative. This is no future revolution, this is not an after-capitalism that we are creating, it is an in-against-and-beyond capitalism here and now. We break the homogeneity of time, we break the boundaries of space. For the Zapatistas, dignity is the central concept, the dignity of those in struggle, the dignity of all who live in-against-and-beyond a world built on the negation of dignity. The poetry that is so evident in the communiqués written by the person who was Subcomandante Marcos (now Galeano) is not the poetry of a person, but the poetry of a movement, and it is not a decorative addition to the movement: it is the core of the movement itself. This is the poetry not just of the Zapatistas but of the tradition of critical thought that runs through Marx, Bloch, Adorno, Benjamin, Marcuse, Vaneigem and far beyond. This is a poetry that has been so present in many of the presentations over the last two days.

#### IV

This approach is very attractive. There is a beauty in it, and also an ethical core. It brings ethics and revolutionary politics into line: the world we create is the world we think should exist. But is it realistic? In these

times of war, in these times of acute capitalist aggression, is the prefiguration of the world we want to create a realistic approach? It is not enough to be morally right or poetically exciting: we actually want to win the Fourth World War by bringing it to an end, by creating a world free of capitalism.

We do not know. We know that the first approach (the apparently realistic one) does not work, but that does not mean that the second approach does work. We know too that the second approach is inevitably contradictory, that there is no purity here. We fight by weaving a different world, in many different ways. These are weavings that are taking place in all the world, weavings that are constantly threatened by capital, frequently crushed by capital, constantly taken up again by us. The weaving in this AudiMax over the last three days is one small, but I hope significant example. There is no model, there are no rules as to how it should be done. But there are outstanding examples, examples that light up the dark, depressing sky, examples that inspire us with their strength and beauty. The Zapatista struggle is one glorious example of this. The Kurdish struggle, with all its creative beauty that we have been hearing about, is another.