



**PRIVATE
PROPERTY,**

SCARCITY

&

DEMOCRACY

Humanaesfera / June 2014

This article was originally written as a response to "libertarians" who see scarcity as a natural, objective and eternal consecration of private property and the market. It also describes a perspective concerning the limitations of democracy in relation to the transformation of the material conditions of existence.

"No one votes; neither the majority nor the minority ever makes the law. If a proposition can gather enough workers to put it into operation, whether they be in the majority or the minority, it is carried out, so long as it accords with the will of those who adhere to it."
Description of a free association within communism by Joseph Déjacque (*Le Humanisphère*, 1857).

Only one condition underlies the demand for democracy (including direct democracy): scarcity. The claim for democracy only makes sense on the very ground on which private property flourishes - inaccessibility, deprivation, tyranny. The vote and profit are two poles of the same deprivation of access for people to their conditions of existence. Both poles presuppose the state - that is, violence. At one pole; policing in order to ensure by force the monopolisation which establishes scarcity (private property, prices, the free market, the "invisible hand"). At the other pole; policing in order to compensate for monopolisation (equitable distribution, voting, boring assemblies and meetings, distribution of rations and handouts of "social welfare"). These are the two poles of legitimisation of the same status quo.

What underpins the two poles is the private mode of production, capitalism. Only that which can be monopolised has a price: scarcity is the very condition of existence of the market, the very definition of **private** property. The value of goods is proportional to the difficulty ("work") of access to its production. Thus, its mode of producing is mere labour, an activity devoid of any intrinsic value and only of worth for something else (reward, retribution, merit, salary, money, profit) - therefore an activity which is always abstract and servile. The machines replace the work, but in the private mode of production its function is solely to punish the workers with unemployment so they "offer" to work even more for even less. To overcome the material basis of all this, we need to tear away this straightjacket, private property, and to free global productive forces to make them freely accessible practical conditions for anyone who wants to satisfy his inclinations, needs, desires and develop his faculties, abilities and passions - as activities worthy in themselves.

From this perspective, even the most radical democratic claim for self-management ("factory to the workers!", "land to the peasants!") is inherently confined within private property and therefore the state (i.e. its violence), even confined within nationalist mythology ("the nation to nationals"). Self-management of enterprises are today clearly untenable, because if there are enterprises (whether self-managed or not), then the conditions of existence of the population remain private for them; that is, the workers are still coerced into selling themselves in the labour market in return for survival (wages). It is only possible for this deprivation (private property) to be abolished by abolishing the enterprise (whether individual, co-operative or state ...), as well as by abolishing the national borders, liberating the productive forces worldwide in order to interconnect them to

a network of immanent flows which surpasses the exchange for equivalents (by ending the reduction of production to an external law; for example, market, profit or hierarchy). Thereafter, the means of production can no longer belong to anybody because it will have become, in itself, the actual worldwide material community of individuals in free association.

Once the enterprise is abolished, it will no longer make sense to talk about employees or unemployed*, but only about individuals who associate freely through their many passions, needs, projects, desires, inclinations ... whose free expression will be itself production, activity (but no longer subject to any equivalent, as it has dismantled the basis of domination which is the system of rewards and punishments). This will mean that, with nothing to force anybody to sell themselves in the labour market to survive, no one will be forced to buy - which makes the market completely obsolete. (Probably as a free hobby the market will still exist - but never as a mandatory social link). The material basis for the flourishing of free individuality is communism, because it is the overcoming of the terrain of the universal equivalent that is the coercion called competition (market, nations, hierarchy...).

It is true that, either for natural reasons or due to technical insufficiency, some (or probably much) production will inevitably continue of items rare, scarce and not easily accessible; and will therefore still be subject either to democracy (voting to decide a criteria: raffle, equal distribution, distribution according to specific "work" done, or for those people in most urgent need...) or to direct private appropriation. But the capacity to overcome capitalism by communism will be the greater the more its material basis, which is free production, prevails over democratic production; that is, the more that wealth is enjoyed as free creativity in the global human community. In contrast, if the democratic aspect predominates, it means the ground upon which capital and state (whether as democracy or dictatorship) spring from was unsurpassed and that they will probably return in one way or another (starting with the "black market" and the survival of the state and the mythology of nation), as the most appropriate social form ("legitimate", they'll say) for scarcity, for monopoly, for private property, for tyranny.

A final clarification: all ideas presented here boil down to classic positions of the proletariat held since at least the eighteenth century (see bibliography below). And since none of these minimum needs has yet been met - and have instead been repressed almost to the point of becoming unconscious - and as the extent and intensity of proletarianisation today is the greatest in history, communism remains more urgent than ever.

- Humanaesfera, July 2014

(Translated to English by humanaesfera, with revision by Red Marriott. The original article in Portuguese: "Propriedade privada, escassez e democracia")

Notes:

* In the absence of jobs and unemployment, the division of labour will be supplanted by a division of tasks resulting from an explicit and conscious co-ordination of diverse actions aimed at specific purposes that a free association of participants decide to perform (by themselves, since class society will be abolished) through the worldwide network of means of production freely accessible to anyone. It is exactly this immanent flow of the world's productive forces and of human capacities, abolishing the division of labour, which makes obsolete the exchange of equivalents, the market ... and work itself.

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Against the metaphysics of scarcity, for practical copiousness

A reply to the following objection: "The abundance (overcoming scarcity) is impossible since we live in a world with limited resources, not only economically, but physically, so overcoming scarcity is a metaphysical, absurd demand, which requires a complete automation of the infinite universe to deliver to each individual, raised to the status of a god, every whim and arbitrariness."

The text "*Private property, scarcity and democracy*" raised everywhere the following objection:

"The abundance (overcoming scarcity) is impossible since we live in a world with limited resources, not only economically, but physically, so overcoming scarcity is a metaphysical, absurd demand, which requires a complete automation of the infinite universe to deliver to each individual, raised to the status of a god, every whim and arbitrariness."

This objection interprets "abundance" as a metaphysical, solipsistic, theogonic, psycho-totalitarian category. It's like talking about "freedom" abstracting from material, specific, social and historical relations, taking "freedom" as an entity that exists only in a transcendent world and identifying it in our world with nonsense, impossibilities and aporias. It's as if in practice it was always a name to disguise slavery (logically, the conclusion is *realism*: the slaves must seek freedom by continuing to obey the master because freedom is not a nonsense only in a metaphysical universe that has nothing to do with slavery).

But just as freedom, scarcity and abundance - out of the metaphysical reveries - are radically concrete things and social relations.

So let's see: if you and someone else needs something specific, and there is enough for all of you, then there is an abundance. If there is not enough, there is a shortage. Abundance and scarcity are always of something specific, material, and not metaphysical universals.

But what matters it is not things found already ready because it makes no sense to automate for the sake of automation; after all, production is nothing more than creativity, multilateral human expression in the world (poetic, rational, playful, culinary, passionate, mathematics, artistic, landscaping...). What matters is to *abolish work*: do away with any activity that is so repulsive, annoying and boring that nobody imagines performing it unless in exchange for rewards (salary, money, position, "merit" ...) and under threat of punishment (dismissal, prison ...), that is, under the power of a ruling class (whether bourgeois, such as the particular entrepreneurs in the US and Brazil, or bureaucratic, such as the state entrepreneurs in Cuba and the USSR).

Thus, in a libertarian world (where global productive forces are no longer private property, but freely accessible to anyone in the world who wishes to associate autonomously with anyone to seek to satisfy their desires, needs, passions, projects...), there are people who want something specific, something that may not even exist yet. They make a *proposition* to the world (something today more than ever doable with telecommunications, information technology, internet ...). Worldwide, the proposition may (or may not) awaken in others the desire to contribute to accomplish it according productive activities to which they are *passionate* (and not out of fear or blackmail, as in class society and, in particular, the tyranny called enterprise, whether state or particular). They communicate and coordinate their activities to carry around the world the necessary materials, produce and distribute this production to those who need (all this is today very simple: [supply chains](#)).

The resulting production may or may not be sufficient for all who need it. If it is enough, there is nothing to discuss: it is enjoyed freely, without complications. However, If it is not enough, there is the tricky question of "justice": Who has priority?

[Note: in capitalist society this is not a question. Those who have more money to pay have priority. Namely, those who have more command over the creative capacities alienated (sold) of the population, whom the moneyed (capitalist) tyrannize to work as free of charge as possible for them (surplus labour: longest time at maximum intensity and the minimum wage possible) in order to generate maximum profits for them (surplus value). This population is the proletariat, the class of those who are deprived of all property (thanks to private property, maintained by the state, concentration of armed violence of the owning class), find themselves forced, by the simple need to survive, to sell the only thing they still have - their lives, by offering on the labour market their own human capacities (labour power) as object of consumption, whose use value are the capacities to do whatever the buyer (the owning class) command. Work: exchange of life for survival. But let's leave briefly to talk about the current tyranny to return to speak of a truly libertarian world, that is communist.]

Since *justice* is not a supernatural eternal Platonic form ready to bring from a metaphysical realm to apply it here, there is no way to resolve the issue, but with a material democracy on which those involved decide for themselves a criterion of what is just and to prevent someone monopolising what is scarce to force others through threats and promises based on deprivation of others of these scarce goods (making private property reappear) to work for them (i.e., to buy from them) and restore class society.

Therefore, it is necessary that those involved vote to decide on some *criteria* which are fairer about what to do with something scarce: raffle, equal distribution, distribution according to the most needy, or according to participation in some specific activity that they consider necessary for all, or even store to support some period of difficulty... (Note: information technology that already exists makes it very easy to provide worldwide ways to vote and debate for the involved people).

The ideal, of course, is that we overcome the scarcity of each product, so that there is enough for everyone who needs it and so that it is not necessary that democratic complication between work and enjoyment. Probably, as no one wants to be in need (and the complications that scarcity involves are boring), there will always be propositions to overcome the scarcity of each product, and those around the world who are passionate about the means of production, science, machinery, computer, robotics, means of communication ... may be attracted by the proposition, helping create and develop the material conditions for it.

The question about not destroying the *natural environment* in which we live can only be raised and taken by those involved, from what they themselves consider (by knowledge, science, ethics, technique ...) necessary to do and capable to do. Since there is no "superior" reference point (as the mythological/theological fantasy of a providence called "nature", "Gaia") outside the needs and capabilities of human beings to decide their lives and actions themselves.

Despite what it may seem, this matter is not a futuristic speculation, but a necessity of the proletariat today worldwide. Their old methods of struggle (strikes, demonstrations, occupations, etc.) are today more than domesticated by entrepreneurs/bureaucrats. The latter lose more and more the *fear of social revolution* and therefore already are for 30 years by removing all the "democratic rights" that states and enterprises have been forced to adopt to prevent communism and anarchy during the previous 50 years (1920 to 1970).

Hence, that perspective is a practical necessity here and now: "the *overcoming of the strike* by a tactic to continue production, but as a free production (gratuitous) for and by the people, suppressing the division employment / unemployment at this time (abolition of the enterprise). Beginning in a city, the diffusion of this experience will be just as passionate (unstoppable), that quickly, in a day or two, will spread through the main cities in the world. The mapping of the interconnection of stocks and flows of world production, becoming increasingly more complete, will allow people to figure out what productions are not suitable for himself, disabling them, and modifying others. Governments and repressive forces had no time to study and coordinate an attack and no longer exist conditions for that, since the production that sustains this condition is in the hands of the population. The soldiers, fraternising, give weapons to the population and join them. Those who resist have their conditions of existence halted until surrender. In less than a week, the whole world will be under the associated mode of production, communism. Otherwise, the more the global diffusion is delayed, reaching only part of the world, the more the stock is turning over, the more unsustainable (materially speaking and in terms of repression) becomes the communist mode of production. Since more we are deprived of the material that the other part of the world not yet transformed has as private property (state or individual), being forced to exchange (buy / sell) with it to replenish stocks. In other words, the more it is forced, in order to buy from them, to work for them - being forced internally to reproduce the same capitalist mode of production, with the risk of communism becoming mere ideological cover of a new variety of capitalist exploitation." ([Breve crítica à ideia de economia paralela anticapitalista](#)).

- January 2016

(Translated to English by humanaesfera, with revision by Steven. and Khawaga. The original article in Portuguese: [Contra a metafísica da escassez, copiosidade prática](#))

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