

Crisis, movements, counter-hegemony: in search of the new¹

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Abstract

This article argues that humanity's prospects in the 21st century hinge on the creation of a counter-hegemonic historical bloc within which practices and social visions capable of fashioning a post-capitalist economic democracy begin to flourish. The organic crisis of neoliberal capitalism creates openings for such a breakthrough; the deepening ecological crisis renders such a breakthrough an urgent necessity. The analytical challenge pursued here is to discern, in the contemporary conjuncture, elements of practice that might weld the present to an alternative future. How can new movement practices and sensibilities be pulled into a historical bloc – an ensemble of social relations and human agency for democratic socialism; how might that bloc move on the terrain of civil society, and vis-à-vis states, opening spaces for practices that prefigure a post-capitalist world? These questions are too big for a single paper; the objective here is to show how a Gramscian problematic furnishes us with an analytical and strategic lens that can illuminate practical answers.

Introduction

Since the global financial meltdown of 2008 and the failure of the 2009 Copenhagen Conference on Climate Change (COP15) to reach a meaningful accord, it has become increasingly clear that a profound economic and ecological crisis is facing humanity. Crisis, as the ancient Chinese proverb says, presents a combination of threat and opportunity. It is a time of danger yet also of new possibilities, as received wisdoms and unreflective practices become open to challenge. The question for activists is how to mitigate the danger while seizing

¹ This article has benefited enormously from critical comments by Laurence Cox and Peter Waterman, who bear no responsibility for any remaining weaknesses.

upon the openings. This is a matter both of ends – of articulating an alternative in which human beings and ecosystems might thrive – and of identifying practical means to those ends. Amid the crisis, we hope to find, within the present, elements of a more hopeful future, and to forge alliances that can leverage neoliberal capitalism's failure into a different kind of world.

This paper brings a Gramscian problematic to these efforts. It draws upon recent activist and academic insights regarding crisis, movements and counter-hegemony, in order to discern criteria for making choices in current struggles – choices capable of effectively challenging power relations and bringing about not simply a different, but a better future.

At the outset, a word of clarification is needed. I will be employing 'counter-hegemony' in the neo-Gramscian sense, referring to broad transformative strategies and practices for replacing the rule of capital with a democratic socialist way of life. This project is distinct from two rival approaches on the left, namely social-democratic electoralism and anarchistic anti-hegemony. Viewed from a Gramscian vantage point, the former relies too heavily on the liberal democratic state as an instrument of change, and underplays the importance of struggles within civil society and vis-à-vis the means of production (Pontusson 1980). The latter (as in Day 2006, 2007) retreats from creative engagement with state-centred politics altogether, substituting a lifestyle politics of 'living differently' (Carroll 2006; McKay 2009). The objective here is not to debate these different visions and strategies for the left, but to demonstrate the value of neo-Gramscian thinking for activists and movements in the early 21st century.

In search of the new

In the most general terms and at the highest level of abstraction, the question of counter-hegemony evokes the dialectic of bringing the new into existence, against the sedimented practices and relations that, as Marx (1852) wrote, weigh 'like a nightmare on the brains of the living.' Yet it is from existing practices and relations that the new is fabricated, which is to say that the future is already contained as potential within the present. 'Fermenting in the process of the real itself' is what Ernst Bloch called 'the concrete forward dream: anticipating elements are a component of reality itself' (1986:197).

Counter-hegemony, as distinct from defensive forms of subaltern resistance, strives to shape those 'anticipating elements', so that they may become lasting features of social life. For counter-hegemony, the challenge is to seek out in the present the preconditions for a post-capitalist future and to develop political strategy based on

an analysis of those immanent possibilities (Ollman 2003). Gramsci captured this dialectic with the metaphor of welding the present to the future:

How can the present be welded to the future, so that while satisfying the urgent necessities of the one we may work effectively to create and 'anticipate' the other (1977: 65)?

The new is no mere 'fashion', the latter being a preferred trope of modernity (Blumer 1969), closely integrated with consumer-capitalist accumulation strategies, and thus with reproducing the status quo. Often the new reworks the old, with radical effects. Viewed dialectically, the new preserves yet transforms extant reality, as in the incorporation of indigenous ways as alternatives to neoliberal practices that have grown decidedly old (cf. Bahn 2009).

This dialectic between what already exists and what might be constructed out of that is integral to any project of purposeful socio-political change. Movements, as Melucci (1989) has emphasized, are laboratories for social invention. They are carriers of the 'new means and values, new practices, new relationships and kinds of relationships' that Williams (1977: 123) identified with cultural emergence; 'emergent publics' that create possibilities for a more democratic way of life (Angus 2001). Movements succeed in creating change when political and cultural opportunity structures open up (Tarrow 1998). But which movements, which practices and which alignments of movements and practices, in short which 'new combinations' (Dyer-Witheford 2001) might already carry the new – and under what contemporary conditions might they have efficacy? These are more concrete questions of counter-hegemony. Theorists of agency and structure note that, although social structures are sustained solely through the practices that reproduce them, such practices, precisely because they are structurally reproductive, do not produce much that is new; only transformative practices have that capacity (Bhaskar 1989; Fraser 1995). Indeed, a well-established hegemonic structure naturalizes social cleavages and contradictions, securing the active, agentic consent of subalterns to their subordination (De Leon, Desai and Tuğal 2009: 216; Joseph 2002).

Organic crisis

Gramsci, following Marx and anticipating Bourdieu, recognized crisis as a necessary condition for undoing the doxa that is perhaps the most salient feature of well-entrenched hegemony. In Gramsci's formulation, *organic crisis* is a crucial element in creating the new. In this kind of crisis, the structures and practices that constitute and reproduce a hegemonic order fall into chronic and visible disrepair,

creating a new terrain of political and cultural contention, and the possibility (but only the possibility) of social transformation. Such a situation entails a crisis of authority:

If the ruling class has lost its consensus, i.e., is no longer 'leading' but only 'dominant', exercising coercive force alone, this means precisely that the great masses have become detached from their traditional ideologies.... The crisis consists precisely in the fact that the old is dying and the new cannot be born; in this interregnum a great variety of morbid symptoms appear (1971: 275-6).

Gramsci asks whether the interregnum will 'be resolved in favour of a restoration of the old' (276), as in an elite-engineered passive revolution that reconstitutes social relations within new forms of a continuing capitalist order (Morton 2007: 150-1). For him, the key instance was the *Risorgimento* that brought to Italy a deeply problematic political unification, over the heads of the masses. In our time, neoliberalism played a similar role in the crisis of Fordism and the welfare state which by the late 1970s registered in falling rates of profit and rising state deficits. What was 'new' in neoliberalism – a vision reaching back to the late 18th century liberal utopia of perfect competition overseen by a night watchman state – was, historically speaking, archaic. The market-centred practices of neoliberalism did not create the rational, self-equilibrating social order celebrated by neoclassical economics. Capitalism's tendencies toward uneven development – temporally, sectorally, spatially – and toward polarized incomes were exacerbated by deregulation. In the 1980s, neoliberal austerity succeeded in boosting rates of profit, but by the mid-1990s it was only through financialization and other forms of accumulation by dispossession that high profits demanded by shareholder capitalism could be sustained. Yet these very measures set the table for global crisis.

Parameters of hegemony

This article is mainly about movements from below and counter-hegemony, but these are internally related to movements from above, and hegemony. To view structure as the contingent sedimentation of past practice implies that movements move not in relation to some permanent fixture, as in a reified conception of the state, but in relation to each other (Magnusson 1997). 'Social movements emanate from and are grounded in the collective skilled activity of both dominant and subaltern groups' (Nilsen 2009: 115). A movement from above strives to maintain or modify a dominant structure in ways that reproduce and/or extend the power of dominant groups and their hegemonic position within the social formation (ibid

115), and in this sense, neoliberalism has been as much movement as policy paradigm. Across three and a half decades, the neoliberal movement has been expertly assembled and led by organic intellectuals that include in their ranks politicians, academics, journalists and business leaders, through densely networked movement organizations both global (e.g., the Mont Pelerin Society, the World Economic Forum) and local (e.g., the Atlantic Institute for Market Studies; cf Carroll and Shaw 2001; Carroll 2007; Carroll and Sapinski 2010). This is what Stephen Gill (1995) means when he refers to neoliberalism's transnational historical bloc.

Elsewhere (Carroll 2006), I have specified some parameters of hegemony that are central to early 21st century capitalism. At a deep level of the social formation, and most saliently in the global North, these include

- *postmodern fragmentation*: the commodification of everyday life fragments collective identities and inculcates a de-politicizing fascination with style and spectacle;
- *the neoliberalization of political-economic relations*: deregulation of markets insulates a protected economic realm from popular will while accumulation by dispossession privatizes the public interest and promotes possessive individualism;
- *capitalist globalization*: the densification of transnational economic relations augments the structural power of capital (Gill and Law 1989) and promotes a project of global governance within a neoliberal framework.

John Agnew has identified a parameter of hegemony in this era that includes elements of the first and last of these, namely *the globalization of Americanism* as a way of life. In Agnew's formulation (which is inspired by Gramsci's essay on Americanism and Fordism), the hegemony of marketplace society, achieved within the United States in the first two thirds of the 20th century, has been projected into the world at large setting the political basis for a globalization that has had two salient aspects (2005: 100).

On the one hand, US-based institutions have had the power to enact globally a dominant vision of 'the good society.' On the other hand, this vision has been one of ever-increasing mass consumption. The hegemony of marketplace society is therefore what lies at the center of contemporary world society (2005: 8).

As a parameter of hegemony, globalization of Americanism is distinct from notions of American hegemony that centre upon the imperial American state. It is the American way of life, not the fading lustre of American state power, that gained global hegemony in the late 20th century.

The current crisis

Although these economic, political and cultural forms have provided a basis for an emergent, transnational hegemony in the post-Cold War era, the hegemony on offer has been a troubled one -- fragile and tentative, thin on the ground as it were, in great part because the neoliberal historical bloc is far less inclusive than its Fordist-Keynesian predecessor (Cox 1987). We can understand the current organic crisis as a cumulative decline in the capacity of hegemonic forms to promote accumulation and secure popular consent. In the case of American hegemony, ever-increasing mass consumption on a global scale requires Americanism's epicentre to borrow funds and import vast quantities of goods to fuel domestic spending, in a pattern of asymmetrical accumulation that is probably unsustainable (Agnew 2005: 192-218). In economic terms, as David McNally (2009) has shown, neoliberalism's crisis was already evident in the Asian financial meltdown of 1997. The ensuing decade inflated a bubble economy that burst in the autumn of 2008, putting deregulatory logic into question and also questioning basic premises of Americanism, as endlessly expanding, credit-driven consumption came unstuck in global capitalism's heartland. But this organic crisis has involved more than economic failings and associated crisis management strategies such as the corporate bail-outs and stimulus spending packages of 2008-2010. Integral to it have been the challenges from below, from the Zapatistas' declaration of war against neoliberalism in 1994 through the 1999 Battle of Seattle and the various incarnations of Social Forums to recent general strikes in southern Europe in resistance to the new wave of austerity – in each instance, a critical, collective response to the privations and indignities that are neoliberalism's legacy. Such campaigns and 'wars of position' challenge the hegemony of neoliberal globalization, but they also work against the ideological effects of the commodification of everyday life, gesturing however incompletely to another possible world.

Crucially, the economic crisis of neoliberal globalization has been accompanied and amplified by a deepening ecological crisis. In the 20th century, capitalism 'scaled up' from a network of local economies centred in a few regions of the global north (articulated via colonialism with precapitalist modes of production on the periphery) to a system of transnational production and consumption in which most of the world's burgeoning population is ensnared. So did the ecological externalities of accumulation, so that by the late 20th century capitalism's footprint, evident in species extinction, the thinning of the ozone layer, and global warming, was outgrowing the biosphere. What James O'Connor (1990) has called the second contradiction of capitalism sharpened, as capitalist appropriation of nature cumulatively eroded capital's own conditions for expanded reproduction (cf Kovel

2006). The economic and ecological moments of crisis are interconnected, but they do not follow a unitary logic. As John Foster (2010) reminds us, in contrast to ecological crisis, economic crises are of their nature cyclical. Short of an exit from capitalism, economic crises eventually resolve themselves, on the backs of workers and other subordinates, as conditions for robust accumulation are re-established or invented; a case in point being neoliberalism's own success in disassembling many of the impediments to accumulation that Fordist regulation and the Keynesian welfare state eventually presented. The deepening ecological crisis, on the other hand, has no bottom, in the sense of an anticipated 'recovery'. Without timely and radical intervention, ecological overshoot portends only a downward spiral, giving new meaning to the choice Rosa Luxemburg posed between humanity's exit from capitalism and its likely descent into barbarism (Angus 2010). The global character of ecological crisis, and the growing consciousness of that global character, add a new element to the organic crisis, and to the project of counter-hegemony.

Indeed, the organic crisis of our time needs to be understood as an assemblage of economic, ecological, and socio-political moments. It has both a political-economic face and a political-ecological one. But it is the ecological race against time that makes this crisis unprecedented in its challenges and in the morbidity of its symptoms.

Counter-hegemony in theory

Against this backdrop of organic crisis, I want to consider the *political challenge for counter-hegemony*, first in a rather formulaic manner, then more concretely. Let us begin with Gramsci's own formulation of how power works, which recognizes that within advanced capitalism the combination of force and persuasion that comprises hegemonic rule entails a panoply of relations both within the state and throughout civil society that serve to organize subaltern consent. Consent is never total or seamless. Subalternity typically involves episodic, fragmented resistance and a contradictory consciousness whose common sense includes elements of 'good sense', and of the new. However, the lack of coherence among various oppressed and subordinated groups enables bourgeois ideology to dominate (Ives 2004: 24). From this general diagnosis of subalternity, which I believe is fully relevant today, Gramsci envisages the constitution of a collective will encompassing a wide range of identities and democratic aspirations, posing an alternative social vision, a socialist way of life – what we now call counter-hegemony. A cultural-material formation of this sort is comprised of several facets:

- The coming-into-being of a collective will requires a process of *catharsis* in which 'structure ceases to be an external force which crushes man, assimilates him to itself and makes him passive; and is transformed into a

means of freedom, an instrument to create a new ethico-political form and a source of new initiatives' (Gramsci 1971: 367). This remarkable passage describes the transition from an economic-corporate phase in which subordinates define their interests narrowly and in immediately instrumental terms, to an ethico-political project that can bring formerly disparate identities onto common ground. As Ives (2004: 107) and Sousa Santos (2006) have argued, this involves the work of translation across various cultural domains and contexts, involving organic intellectuals – activists, organizers, 'permanent persuaders' (Gramsci 1971: 10) whose practice is rooted in subordinate experiences and resistances.²

- Importantly, a counter-hegemonic formation includes both *class forces* directly articulated with the process of accumulation and *popular-democratic currents* -- movements and identities that arise through practices centred in civil society (Urry 1981).³ Without the former, and in particular, broad elements of the working class, a radical challenge to capitalism is strategically unsustainable; without the latter, the collective will fails to encompass the diversity of needs and aspirations that partially constitute Bloch's 'concrete forward dream'. The welding together of disparate class and popular-democratic interests is not a mechanical assemblage of convenience; rather, 'the process of coming together to form a specifically *hegemonic* force involves each group being partly transformed', as it takes on elements of the identity and agenda of other groups and comes to adopt the interest of others as its own (Purcell 2009: 296-7). The famous slogan from Seattle 1999, 'Teamsters and turtles, united at last!' exemplifies this reciprocal process in forming a counter-hegemonic collective will.
- *war of position/war of manoeuvre*: in capitalist societies, civil society comprises a strategically important 'arena in which capitalist hegemony is secured but also where subaltern classes forge alliances and articulate alternative hegemonic projects' (Munck 2006: 330). Through a war of position, which does not exclude struggles directed at the state (Simon

² To construct a general will, to raise consciousness and transform ideas into a material force, 'movements must continuously form new organic intellectuals' (Karriem 2009: 318); hence the process of translation is not top-down but an active and reciprocal 'educative relationship' (Gramsci 1971: 350).

³ Here I am using 'civil society' in the contemporary sense of that which is neither state nor economy. Gramsci's use of the term is complex, in some contexts contrasting state with a civil society that includes economic relations; in other contexts contrasting capitalist economic relations with an 'integral state' ('State = political society + civil society, in other words hegemony protected by the armour of coercion' (Gramsci 1971: 263)). See Anderson's (1976) classic discussion, for a critical take.

1982: 75), the balance of power in civil society can be shifted and space won for radical alternatives, unifying dissenting groups into a system of alliances capable of contesting bourgeois hegemony. This prepares subordinate groups for self-governance by creating post-capitalist sensibilities and values, practical democratic capacities, and a belief in the possibility of a radically transformed future (Carroll and Ratner 2010). As Staggenborg and Lecomte (2009) found recently, within particular social movements wars of position and of manoeuvre can be mutually reinforcing processes: in the Montreal women's movement community, winning space for an alternative community has created capacity for successful collective campaigns, and vice versa.

- The *national and the inter/transnational*. For Gramsci (1971: 240), writing in the 1930s, 'the line of development is towards internationalism, but the point of departure is "national".' Since mid-20th century, capitalist globalization has created more extensive bases for both hegemonic and counter-hegemonic movements to contend within a global civil society that is itself constantly constructed as contested terrain by diverse social groupings (Munck 2006: 330; Carroll 2007). Nevertheless, one should not impute a 'singularly transnational logic' to contemporary struggles for hegemony; national, regional and local dynamics continue to shape the conduct of these struggles (Morton 2007: 199).
- Welding the present to the future. *Prefiguration* was central to Gramsci's conception of counter-hegemonic politics.⁴ For Gramsci, inspired by the factory councils' movement to democratize workplaces, prefiguration 'meant that politics would be integrated into the everyday social existence of people struggling to change the world, so that the elitism, authoritarianism, and impersonal style typical of bureaucracy could be more effectively combated' (Boggs, 1976: 100). Indeed, a war of position includes a process of moral and intellectual reform that not only renovates common sense into good sense, but incrementally erodes the distinctions between leaders and led, creating the basis for participatory democracy in a widening sphere of activities (Simon 1982).
- Catharsis, prefiguration, and the articulation of class and popular-democratic forces, of the national and the international, and of wars of position and manoeuvre, add up to the construction of a *historical bloc*, around a counter-hegemonic project. Such a bloc combines leadership in

⁴ Basing himself on Marx's 6th Thesis on Feuerbach, that human 'essence' is the *ensemble* of human relations, he identified political activity with the dialectical production of new relations and new subjects: 'to transform the external world, the general system of relations, is to potentiate oneself and to develop oneself' (1971: 360).

civil society with 'leadership in the sphere of production' (Simon, 1982: 86). Its development expresses movement from subalternity to a counter-hegemonic collective will.

This schematic account gives us a normative-strategic template for considering emergent themes and practices in movement politics and their implication for counter-hegemony today. How might contemporary developments in counter-hegemony yield insights on welding present to future in our times? In the space at hand, I will telegraph seven interrelated themes that stand out in recent work by movement theorists, intellectual historians and social researchers. In reflecting on these themes we can gain perspective on how new sensibilities and practices – often reworked from old sensibilities and practices – provide *resources of hope* (Williams 1989) for counter-hegemonic politics, and 21st century socialism.

Counter-hegemony in practice: what's new?

Increased transnationality

Just as hegemony has been increasingly organized on a transnational basis – through the globalization of Americanism, the construction of global governance institutions, the emergence of a transnational capitalist class and so on (Soederberg 2006; Carroll 2010) – counter-hegemony has also taken on transnational features that go beyond the classic organization of left parties into internationals. What Sousa Santos (2006) terms the rise of a global left is evident in specific movement-based campaigns, such as the successful international effort in 1998 to defeat the Multilateral Agreement on Investment (MAI); in initiatives such as the World Social Forum, to contest the terrain of global civil society; and in the growth of transnational movement organizations and of a 'democratic globalization network', counterpoised to neoliberalism's transnational historical bloc, that address issues of North-South solidarity and coordination (Smith 2008:24).

As I have suggested elsewhere (Carroll 2007), an incipient war of position is at work here – a bloc of oppositional forces to neoliberal globalization encompassing a wide range of movements and identities and that is 'global in nature, transcending traditional national boundaries' (Butko 2006: 101). These moments of resistance and transborder activism do not yet combine to form a coherent historical bloc around a counter-hegemonic project. Rather, as Marie-Josée Massicotte suggests, 'we are witnessing the emergence and re-making of political imaginaries..., which often lead to valuable localized actions as well as greater transborder solidarity' (2009: 424). Indeed, Gramsci's adage that while the line of development is international, the origin point is national, still has currency. Much of the energy of anti-capitalist politics is centred within what Raymond Williams

(1989) called militant particularisms – localized struggles that, ‘left to themselves ... are easily dominated by the power of capital to coordinate accumulation across universal but fragmented space’ (Harvey 1996: 32). Catharsis, in this context, takes on a spatial character. The scaling up of militant particularisms requires ‘alliances across interrelated scales to unite a diverse range of social groupings and thereby spatialize a Gramscian war of position to the global scale’ (Karriem 2009: 324).

Such alliances, however, must be grounded in local conditions and aspirations. Eli Friedman’s (2009) case study of two affiliated movement organizations in Hong Kong and mainland China, respectively, illustrates the limits of transnational activism that radiates from advanced capitalism to exert external pressure on behalf of subalterns in the global South. Friedman recounts how a campaign by the Hong Kong-based group of Students and Scholars Against Corporate Misbehavior to empower Chinese mainland workers producing goods for Hong Kong Disneyland failed due to the lack of local mobilization by workers themselves. Yet the same group, through its support for its ally, the mainland-based migrant workers’ association, has helped facilitate self-organization on the shop floor. In the former case, well-intentioned practices of solidarity reproduced a paternalism that failed to inspire local collective action; in the latter, workers taking direct action on their own behalf, with external support, led to ‘psychological empowerment’ and movement mobilization (Friedman 2009: 212). As a rule, ‘the more such solidarity work involves grassroots initiatives and participation, the greater is the likelihood that workers from different countries will learn from each other’, enabling transnational counter-hegemony to gain a foothold (Rahmon and Langford 2010: 63).

The political ecology of counter-hegemony

In a context of biospheric crisis, the recent turn to Gramsci in political ecology has great pertinence to our analysis (Mann 2009; Kebede 2005). As a ‘new front’ in the analysis of hegemony and counter-hegemony, Gramscian political ecology understands the production of nature as a co-evolution of humans and their environments pointing to ‘the conditions of possibility for radical change that might emerge through interactions with nature’ (Ekers et al 2009: 288). From this perspective, bourgeois hegemony is achieved through the reification of particular spaces and natures (Wainwright 2005), as in the common sense of a consumerism founded upon industrialized agriculture, automobility and suburban sprawl, and north-south relations that displace ecological costs onto the periphery (Rice 2007). The turn to Gramsci enables us to see the environment as ‘a socio-natural entity ... a particular terrain over which hegemony is consolidated and contested’ (Ekers et al 2009: 289). In an era of deepening ecological crisis and of rising consciousness

of that crisis, social groups aspiring to hegemony must demonstrate their ability 'to pose solutions to a variety of issues related to nature and the environment' (Ekers et al 2009: 289).

This insight reconfigures the meaning of counter-hegemony around a vision of eco-socialism. To forge an alternative hegemony, counter-hegemonic movements must go beyond resisting the capitalist growth machine, *into prefiguration*: 'they have to develop alternative forms of production and reproduction or alternative conceptions of nature-society relations' (Karriem 2009: 318). Abdurazack Karriem's study of the Brazilian landless movement (MST) gives us a case in point. The war of position that MST has waged through a combination of land occupations and popular education has not only moved from local sites to transnational arenas; it has had a strong prefigurative thrust. Besides the ethico-political claim that food and food sovereignty are human rights, the MST has promoted ecological alternatives to corporate agriculture, in alliance with the environmental and indigenous movements – all aspects of 'a long, slow process of practical and ideological struggle for an alternative hegemony' (2009: 324) that refuses the regime of 'sustainable degradation' on offer from transnational neoliberalism (Luke 2006).

Reclaiming the Commons

MST exemplifies a third theme in contemporary counter-hegemonic politics. In response to neoliberalism's dynamic of accumulation by dispossession, multifarious movements and campaigns have arisen to protect and reclaim the commons from privatization and commodification (Harvey 2005b 166-172). Initially reactive and protective, harkening back to much earlier resistances to enclosure (Linebaugh 2008), indigenous struggles for land, agrarian struggles for seeds, crops and biodiversity, political campaigns against privatization and the like open a "political dynamic of social action across the whole spectrum of civil society" (Harvey, 2005b: 166, 168, 172) that often (as with MST) combines struggles for self-determination with ecological sustainability (Klein 2001: 88). In providing a communal way of regulating activity without the state or market, 'the commons' presents a rich counter-hegemonic template (Wall 2005), but raises challenges as to how it will articulate with 'whatever states also claim authority over the resource or territory in question' (McCarthy 2005: 24).

Notwithstanding such issues, the vision of a global commons 'defended by a multiplicity of state and non-state actors in the name of human survival' (Watts 2010:22) – visible beyond the cabal of hegemonic state, inter-state and NGO actors that dominated formal negotiations at the 2009 Copenhagen Conference on Climate Change (COP15) – offers a radical imaginary for emerging counter-hegemonic sensibilities worldwide. This strong image can be applied not only to

political-economic matters, but to ideological struggles against enclosure of the moral field within economic and legal-bureaucratic frameworks (Smith 1997). On matters ranging from biopiracy and intellectual property rights to the idea of a global commons, "the commons" can work as a unifying signifier – of resistance, community, collective action and common values' (Holder and Flessas 2008:299). Indeed, as Bakker (2007) shows in her study of struggles against water privatization in the global south, whereas human rights discourse frames issues individually and in ways compatible with commodification, the 'commons', in championing a collective property right creates space for radical strategies of ecological democracy to decommodify public services, resource management, etc. A contemporary reworking of a very old theme, anti-enclosure offers, in response to the 'dictatorship of no alternative' (Unger 2009), the germ of a left response to neoliberalism beyond 'narrow (and conservative) social democracy' (Watts 2010:24). The key is to find, or create, the 'organic link' between reclaiming the commons and opposing capital's domination of labour (Harvey 2005a:203), thereby connecting the struggle to decommodify land, intellectual property, public utilities and the like with the struggle to decommodify labour.

Mediatization and the struggle to democratize communication

Many of the issues at stake in the politics surrounding the form and content of communications media comprise a special instance of the struggle to reclaim the commons. The world of the early 21st century is densely networked by virtue of an unprecedented apparatus of communications, which has opened new possibilities both for bourgeois hegemony and for oppositional politics. Media now comprise a vast field of cultural struggle. In a media-saturated world, capitalist organization of communication creates a multifaceted *democratic deficit*, evident for instance in the failure of mainstream media to create a democratic public sphere, the centralization of power in media corporations, inequality in media access, homogenization of media content, the undermining of communities through commodification, and the corporate enclosure of knowledge. 'Media activism' can be read as a critical response that takes different forms depending on location in the media field. Media democrats struggle to limit corporate power and commercial logic, to democratize media workplaces and labour processes, to develop alternative media, and to foster more literate and critical readers of media texts. When we look at media activism 'on the ground' we find many of the rudiments of counter-hegemonic politics. Activists see the struggle to democratize communication as a multi-frontal war of position that needs to be waged in conjunction with other movements. Communicative democracy comprises a social vision in which the voices of citizens and communities carry into a vibrant and diverse public sphere. In pursuing this social vision on several fronts including those of state, corporate media and lifeworld, media democrats build a new nexus

among movements, a place where strategies might converge across issue areas and movement identities (Hackett and Carroll, 2006; Downing 2001).

As a political emergent, media activism underlines the importance to counter-hegemony of reclaiming or creating the means and forms of communication necessary for subaltern groups to find their voices and to organize, both locally and translocally. The formation of organic intellectuals is substantially caught up in this struggle to break the dominant class's monopoly within the intellectual field (Thomas 2009: 418-19). Here, the new includes a mediatized politics of everyday life, as in proliferation of alternative media (often via the internet; Atton 2009) and the diffusion of culture jamming and other practices of media literacy, yet also a politics, focused upon state and capital, that presses for limits upon corporate power and for an opening of access to the means of communication (Hackett and Carroll 2006). The politics of media democratization is necessarily multi-frontal and intersectional. All progressive-democratic movements have an stake in these struggles; the extent to which movements take up democratic communication as a general interest is a measure their catharsis from fractured subalternities (with their characteristic foci upon single issues and narrow constituencies) to an ethico-political collective will.

The question of autonomy

Autonomy from old-left parties and unions, and from overweening regulatory states, was cited by NSM theorists of the 1970s and 1980s as a criterial attribute of the emergent movements of late modernity. In Jean Cohen's (1985) classic, and rather Americanized treatment, these movements were viewed as practitioners of a 'self-limiting' identity politics that rejected large-scale projects. This stylization was never unproblematic as an empirical account, and several decades later, in the wake of neoliberalism's global triumph and in the midst of its global crisis, the appeal of self-limiting politics is embarrassingly limited. Yet autonomy remains a lasting legacy of the so-called NSMs.

Autonomy informs aspects of contemporary counter-hegemonic politics at the level of everyday life, as shown in Gwyn Williams's (2008) ethnography of alterglobalization activism in the Larzac plateau of southern France. Famous since their dismantling of a McDonald's restaurant in 1999 and for the slogan, 'the world is not a commodity,' these activists resist the hegemony of global market society 'by cultivating themselves as "autonomous" political subjects and organizing a movement considered to be an "autonomous" counter-power' (G. William 2008: 63). This has meant not only maintaining independence from political parties and functioning in a 'bottom-up' or 'horizontal' manner but cultivating in themselves and others an autonomy that partly frees them from neoliberal ideology and the power of consumer society. Here, prefiguration is grounded in a moral imperative

to 'become aware' and to act 'coherently' (2008:72) by living the ideals to which one aspires.⁵

Becoming aware is both an ongoing aspect of autonomous self-development and a movement-building praxis instantiated in a range of pedagogical activities – forums, information evenings and media actions – designed to provoke public debate and to persuade people join the cause (G. Williams 2008:72-3). Although activists can never be fully autonomous from the forms of power to which they are subject, the struggle for autonomy is a crucial element in challenging hegemony and in bringing into existence what Gramsci (1971: 327) called a 'new conception of the world ... which manifests itself in action.'⁶

As a sensibility that holds both visionary and strategic implications, autonomy has roots not only in NSM theory, but in historical materialism. Harry Cleaver, who introduced the notion of autonomist Marxism into English-language academia in the 1970s (Cleaver 2001; Wright 2008:113), predicated it on an agency-centred analysis of the working class, defining autonomy as

the ability of workers to define their own interests and to struggle for them – to go beyond mere reaction to exploitation, or to self defined 'leadership' and to take the offensive in ways that shape the class struggle and define the future (Cleaver 1993).

The key question is how autonomy and other emergent features of activism might figure in a counter-hegemonic historical bloc. Mark Purcell, drawing on Laclau and Mouffe (1985), suggests that relations between elements of such a formation be conceptualized in terms of *equivalence*, 'a concept that evokes relations of simultaneous interdependence and autonomy, obligation and freedom, unity and

⁵ Since domination dwells within one's own person, since each person's actions reproduce forms of domination, changing the world implies an ongoing process of 'work on oneself' that cultivates autonomy (G. Williams 2008:75). That activists are thoroughly embedded in the extended relations of global capitalism problematizes the achievement of coherence, yet by living relatively simply, in full respect of the environment and their fellow human beings, the activists of the Larzac 'distance themselves from the power of capitalism, consumer society and neoliberalism, they banish it from their lives and thereby partially fulfil their vocation as activists. To banish power is to create an autonomous space in which to live your life, itself an act of resistance. This is something that requires effort, and ongoing attention to the way you act in the world that is a part of the developmental process of becoming aware' (G. Williams 2008: 77).

⁶ Gramsci's own commitment to autonomous human development was deeply seated in his conception of counter-hegemony. 'Is it better to take part in a conception of the world mechanically imposed by the external environment; i.e. by one of the many social groups in which one is automatically involved from the moment of his entry into the conscious world...? Or, on the other hand, is it better to work out consciously and critically one's own conception of the world and thus, in connection with the labours of one's own brain, choose one's sphere of activity, take an active part in the creation of the history of the world, be one's own guide, refusing to accept passively and supinely from outside the moulding of one's personality?' (1971:323-4).

multiplicity, sameness and difference' (2009: 301). The movements and interests that comprise the bloc do not dissolve completely into it, but they move together and lean into one another.

Intersectionality

In sorting out the nuances of counter-hegemonic unity-in-diversity, what stands out as the complement to autonomy as a cultural emergent is the concern for intersectionality. Arriving in the 1990s as a way of rescuing feminism from the *cul-de-sac* of identity politics, intersectionality transformed feminist praxis itself. Beginning with the critique in the 1980s, by lesbian feminists and women of colour, of the exclusionary practices in bourgeois, white, heteronormative feminism, intersectional praxis has unfolded, roughly speaking, in stages. First, a group-centred framework recognized that a more inclusive politics must give voice to the qualitatively distinct experiences of subalternity arising from intersections of class, gender, sexuality, race and other social positionings (Choo and Ferree 2010). A process-centred approach then moved from positional categories to 'dynamic forces' – racialization, economic exploitation, gendering – and highlighted the distinctive operations of power across institutional fields (Choo and Ferree 2010: 134), as 'multiple relations and structures of power interact in context-specific ways' (Eschle 2004: 119; Walby 2009). In this formulation, intersectionality becomes an operating principle for building a historical bloc and conducting a multi-frontal war of position, guided by an understanding of intersecting relations of domination and subalternity and of the need for dialogical efforts to mediate a multiplicity of identities, communities, and contexts (Rice 2010).

Spike Peterson has recently brought post-structural insights to an intersectional perspective that recognizes gender as a governing code which, as it privileges *masculinity* – not necessarily men – also naturalizes the power relations that constitute multiple forms of exploitation and subordination (Peterson 2009). As a hegemonic code, gender interlinks and reifies diverse hierarchies by feminizing those who are subordinated – devaluing 'not only women but also sexually, racially, culturally, and economically marginalized men (e.g., "lazy migrants," "primitive natives," "effeminate gays")' (2009:35). The binary code is self-validating in practice, as 'common sense becomes a two-sided justification of hierarchy: not only are the subordinated devalorized by feminization but the qualities they lack are typically just what the dominating (masculinized) group has to offer' (ibid:36). Peterson's decisive break from identity politics, deepens our understanding of how hegemony works through a confluence of discourse and material relations. By implication, she clarifies an aspect of the cathartic passage from the economic-corporate to the ethico-political:

...we are not simply talking about male-female relations or promoting the status of 'women.' We are first addressing the exploitation of *all* whose identities, labor, and livelihoods are devalued by being feminized and, second, advancing the critical project of theorizing *intersections* of devalorization that link hierarchies of race/ethnicity, class, gender/sexuality, and nation (2009:38).

Intersectional analysis is a resource in the struggle for dignity that has been highlighted in Zapatismo and other autonomous struggles. Yet it presses toward a unity-in-diversity that challenges both postmodern fragmentation and the single-issue sectionalism prevalent in many social movements, including mainstream environmentalism. Recognizing the deep connections between environmental sustainability and social reproduction, intersectionality is a tool for political ecology. It asks how the 'intersection of specific economic, social, and environmental conditions' might disable an individual's or community's ability to survive (Di Chiro 2008:286) – a question that motivates the search for alternatives within which individuals, communities and ecosystems may thrive.

New organizational forms

A final theme in recent thinking calls attention to new organizational forms within which a historical bloc for a just and sustainable alternative to the current world order might take shape. Different projects 'imply different forms of organisation, which thus require different types of organic intellectuals, whose role it is to elaborate such organisation in both ideological and practical terms' (Thomas 2009: 416). The activists of the Larzac, struggling for autonomy both in everyday life and in publicly oriented actions, exemplify this relation between activism and organization. The same might be said of the Zapatistas, whose campaigns in Mexico and in cyberspace activated national and global civil society while constructing new forms of local autonomous governance that validate indigenous tradition and identity within a contemporary context (Morton 2007: 191; Bahn 2009: 551). Yet such autonomism, if pursued singularly, undercuts the possibilities for creating a counter-hegemonic unity in diversity. The Zapatista slogan 'one no, many yeses' creates a unity around a shared rejection of transnational neoliberal capitalism that resists

any fixed meaning of the collective subject that undertakes activism. The central dilemma for activist life becomes whether the "many yeses" arising in its wake can exert counter-hegemonic power in a long-term war of position (Gibson 2008: 256).

Beyond autonomy, beyond pluralism, but not in opposition to them, is the cathartic transition from the many, the sectional, to a 'political unity across cultural

differences' (Sanbonmatsu, 2004:130). The question is how to construct 'forms of political agency that allow for the necessary diversity of a global counter-hegemony while allowing for the necessary commonality of a global counter-hegemony' (Stephen 2009: 494).

Gramsci characterized the historical bloc that might issue from such formative efforts in terms of the 'modern prince' – 'the fusion of a new type of political party and oppositional culture that would gather together intellectuals (organisers) and the masses in a new political and intellectual practice, "organising the organisers"' (Thomas 2009: 437). In considering prospects for what Gill (2000) and Sanbonmatsu (2004) have termed a 'postmodern prince', adequate to the political task of exiting from today's globalized and crisis-ridden capitalism, the World Social Forum has been said to represent 'in organizational terms, the most consistent manifestation of counter-hegemonic globalization' (Sousa Santos 2008: 249). The WSF contests the claim that capitalism is here to stay while it provincializes conventional, northern-based left thinking through practices of intercultural dialogue. Convened first in 2001 and proliferating subsequently into regional and national social forums, the Forum has created an 'open space' for discussion and a transnational site for organizing concrete collective practices.

In its scale and breadth, the WSF is, indeed, new. Moreover, it has spurred a process of intellectual and moral reform that begins to provide a cultural infrastructure for global counter-hegemony. Within WSF discussions it has become clear that 'the global left is intercultural' (Sousa Santos 2008: 261); hence the importance of mutual translation, an emergent practice that preserves autonomy while creating common ground. A related contribution that the WSF has made to the global left is its horizontal, network politics, which enables the work of translation and is further elaborated through that work (ibid).

Yet the shape of the network is worth pondering, and on this question of form, the WSF's counter-hegemonic capacities to wage a war of position are doubtful (Gibson 2008; Stephen 2009; Worth and Buckley 2009).⁷ Gramsci's modern prince anticipated a relatively centralized network encompassing a dialectical relation between masses and leaders – rather distinct from the rhizomic networks, celebrated by the postmodern left (Deleuze and Guattari 1987; Hardt and Negri 2004), which lack any central basis for coordination. Organizationally, a certain degree of centrality is needed to ensure that 'the movement will be able to *move* when the time is right' (Purcell 2009: 304). Alternatively, it is difficult to know how a rhizomic movement 'will be able to move at all, much less take coordinated and strategic action that shifting political opportunities demand' (ibid 305). On this

⁷ On this issue, Worth and Buckley are especially caustic. The WSF 'has suffered from being a directionless series of events, whereby the working formula of "open space" has led to the creation of nothing more than a "talking shop", rather than any valid construction of counter-hegemony' (2009: 650).

point, Peter Evans is correct to claim that 'the eventual construction of counter-hegemonic globalization will almost certainly combine 'rhizomic' networks with traditional 'trees'" (2008: 291), the latter branching out authoritatively from well defined centres of decision-making.

Although the WSF's rhizomic structure has limited its capacity to serve as much more than an open space for building cultural infrastructure and launching episodic campaigns, an even more formidable constraint resides in the neoliberal organization of global governance, in which a Westphalian state system coexists with international apparatuses like the World Trade Organization (WTO), in a context of globalizing capitalism. The debacle that was COP15 (December 2009) illustrates the toxicity of this combination, wherein the old system of state sovereignty is dying but a new global political order cannot yet be born. The Westphalian 'partitioning of political space along territorial lines insulates extra- and non-territorial powers from the reach of justice,' (Fraser 2005:81) offering increased scope to transnational capital.⁸ Progressive politics framed at the 'global' level are circumscribed by the lack of a global state that might be democratically transformed; hence they take the form of a cultural war of position within global civil society (eg, the WSF) punctuated by occasional defensive wars of maneuver against such threats as the MAI (defeated 1998), WTO (stalled in 1999) and Free Trade Area of the Americas (defeated in 2005). Instructively, defensive campaigns of this sort are successful only to the extent that the collective action of movements meshes with actions taken by progressive state actors. The WSF's open space and the defensive campaigns that have significantly sapped neoliberalism's momentum cannot in themselves create a global post-capitalist formation; they only gesture in that direction. Resplendent in its slogan that another world is possible, the WSF instantiates the not-yet, the concrete forward dream of a global left – a counter-hegemonic collective will – not yet the reality. For now, it is at the national level that system change is feasible (though inherently dependent on transnational alignments of movements and progressive state actors) -- confirming the continuing validity of Gramsci's adage that the 'point of departure' for radical, transformative politics is national.

The hotbed of such politics is contemporary Latin America, where Jerry Harris (2007: 1) has discerned a developing 'democratic dialectic' of state and civil society. Flowing strongly but not exclusively from the labouring classes, the new movements of the 21st century seek 'a novel relation to the formal political realm by

⁸ This problem is exacerbated by the highly uneven distribution of powers among intergovernmental institutions. Although the international agencies like the WTO that enforce the rule of global capital are invested with some degree of state power, other international bodies and sites – such as the Copenhagen conference, the ILO, and the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples lack state authority and exist only by the good graces of the states that selectively participate. See Clarkson (2010).

fundamentally reworking relations of power' (Stahler-Sholk et al 2007: 6). Across much of Latin America, the project is 'to reappropriate democracy from a restricted and statist form by means of an expanded and participatory model' (Harris 2007: 14). Many of these movements maintain autonomy from parties and governments, acting as a *counterbalance* that pressures the state to withstand the demands of global capitalism (ibid 15). Where the left has formed the government, particularly in Venezuela and Bolivia, radical forces within the state have united with social movements, giving the state-civil society dialectic 'a revolutionary character and expanded potential that is lacking in countries where autonomist power remains isolated from the government' (Harris 2007: 19).

This dialectic animates Marta Harnecker's (2010) recent analysis of Venezuela's Bolivarian revolution. Noting the transition within the left from workerism to an understanding that 'the new political instrument must respect the plurality of the new subject and take on the defense of all discriminated social sectors' (2010:5), she emphasizes that at the heart of the revolution, inscribed in Venezuela's constitution, is a conception of *protagonist democracy* – a commitment to popular participation in public affairs that brings with it individual and collective development (2010:37). Conjoined to protagonism in this counter-hegemonic project is a 'socialist conception of decentralization' that reworks Marx's (1871) comments on the Paris Commune – a decentralization 'imbued with a spirit of solidarity', which strengthens communities, deepens democracy, and collaborates with the central state as it coordinates society-wide plans (2010:51). These elements of autonomism and of the commons take concrete shape in Venezuela's co-operatives, now a key economic form for state decentralization and mass participation, and in Community Councils that enact democratic planning for human needs at the local level (Magdoff and Foster 2010; Spronk and Webber 2010). Here we find the 'organic link' mentioned earlier, between the emancipation of labour and reclaiming the commons: between building worker control in production and building communal control within places. In the historical bloc prefigured by these forms, activists become *producers* rather than protesters demanding more services, and their alternative economic activity produces new social relations that concretize a social vision of sustainable human development (Harris 2007: 22). Under these nationally-specific conditions, facilitated greatly by emergent intergovernmental alliances such as ALBA (Kellogg 2007), the prospects for 21st century socialism – though circumscribed by legacies of political cronyism and corruption, of charismatic populism as a form of leadership that may reinforce subalternity, and of ecologically problematic 'extractivism' as a means of generating wealth (Gudynas 2010) – are real.

The exemplars, however, are not restricted to Latin America. In her ethnographic account of building participatory democracy in Kerala, India, Michelle Williams observes many strikingly similar socio-political inventions. There, the Communist Party of India (Marxist) (CPI(M)) has developed a 'counter-hegemonic generative

politics that attempts to establish new institutions and practices that extend the role of civil society over the state and the economy' (2008:9). Operating both arborescently and rhizomically, partly through a succession of coalition governments but especially through organic ties to Kerala's vibrant popular sector, the CPI(M) has coordinated innovative initiatives in participatory democracy and decentralized, self-reliant development. The provisional result of this decades-long war of position is an empowered civil society that enjoys one of the highest levels of human development and quality of life in the majority world. As in Latin America, participatory democracy in Kerala confirms the viability of counter-hegemonic generative politics, but it also suggests that such politics requires 'a new type of political party, one that is not afraid to empower civil society' (M. Williams 2008:156).

It is these fragile prospects that have propelled the recent effort to create a 'Fifth Socialist International' – a space where 'socialist-oriented parties, movements and trends of thought' will be able to propose a common strategy for the struggle against imperialism, for transitioning from capitalism to socialism and for international economic integration within a framework of solidarity.⁹ Proposed in November 2009 by Hugo Chavez at a meeting of more than 50 parties and movement organizations from 31 countries, the Fifth International may yet grow to complement the World Social Forum, but as a tree-like, arborescent formation, whose project is more action-oriented and whose roots in organized parties and left governments enable coordinated action in a global field, something the WSF seems incapable of delivering. Significantly, and in contrast to the template for party-based internationals, Chavez's proposal emphasized the inclusion of both movement organizations and parties, and noted that a new international would have to function "without impositions" and would have to respect diversity (Janicke 2009). Subsequent elaboration of the idea (Albert 2010) and debate about its assumptions and entailments (Waterman 2010) help clarify the possibilities for such a new left formation, based in autonomist and intersectional practice and a thoroughgoing provincialization of Europe. Whether these possibilities will be actualized is at the time of writing entirely undecided.

Conclusions

⁹ 'Commitment of Caracas'. <http://www.psuve.org/ve/files/tcdocumentos/commitment.caracas.pdf>, accessed 7 March 2010. See also 'The Venezuelan Call for A New International Organization of the Left,' *The Bullet*, No. 312, Feb 15, 2010, <http://www.socialistproject.ca/bullet/312.php>.

Our point of departure was a meditation on the new, and the problem of welding present to future. Counter-hegemony, however, requires more than a cataloguing of what is new; welding the present to the future has an indelibly *programmatically* aspect, registered in such notions as war of position and historical bloc. As an instrument of transformative politics, the 'programmatically imagination' marks a direction and defines the next steps in taking up that trajectory (Unger 2009:xxi). Marking a direction sketches the contours of a counter-hegemonic project – a possible alternative – but it is the choice of next steps that enables motion. In this respect, 'the possible that counts is not the fanciful horizon of possibilities but the *adjacent possible*: what is accessible with the materials at hand, deployed in the pursuit of movement in the desired direction' (Unger 2009:xxi; emphasis added). The emergent themes and practices discussed above help mark a direction: toward a post-capitalist way of life that is broadly eco-socialist, that subordinates the state to an empowered civil society structured around practices of participatory democracy, dialogical communicative relations, and autonomous governance of the commons, both physical and informational; that combines, within an ethico-political framework, the autonomy of individuals with an abiding appreciation of the intersecting relations that implicate us in each other's lives. This direction implies a process of democratic globalization that reaches beyond the Westphalian division of humanity into (potentially) warring factions – and well beyond the current state of the world.

The elements of the new I have sketched also illuminate the next steps, toward the adjacent possible. Transnational networks and campaigns, new media and new communicative struggles, initiatives to reclaim the commons, and quotidian practices of becoming aware and acting coherently all mark a cathartic shift from protest to *generative politics*, to *production* of sustainable agriculture, of communications and culture, of collective property, of new social relations and subjectivities. For such generative politics to take root 'a synergistic relation between political parties and civil society must be forged in order to ensure that the necessary institutional spaces are created and the capacity for civil society participation is developed' (M. Williams 2008:156). As for the national and transnational, what seems adjacently possible is an 'institutionalization of multilevel contestation', combining rhizomic networks and 'traditional' trees, reaching from the local to the global, and including as allies progressive state actors, in 'virtuous circles' that strengthen both movements and initiatives by state leaders at the global level (Evans 2008). These politics must be substantially rooted in local and national contexts: local self-empowerment is a requirement of democratic mobilization, and winning state power is indispensable to transformation at a global level. Counter-hegemonic globalization is sustained by the transnational cultural infrastructures and activist networks that shape global civil society, but also by arborescent formations such as new democratic left parties in Europe (Rao 2009 Solty 2008), the intergovernmental organizations developing within the Bolivarian process and what may be an emerging Fifth International inclusive of

parties and movements. The movement of movements will walk on both legs, creating new relations, practices and subjectivities both on the cultural terrain of civil society and within/against the state, globally and in national and local contexts – or else it will stumble.

These developments portend a global left, a counter-hegemonic historical bloc organized around a project of sustainable human development and participatory democracy, whose constituents recognize in the intersections of power and oppression an emancipatory collective interest. This project faces great challenges, when placed in the context of the ecological race against time and the continuing hegemony of consumer capitalism. Indeed, in North America, where the marketplace society and postmodern fragmentation discussed earlier are most entrenched – where the left's marginality contributes to a doxic condition of 'dreamlessness', as Bloch put it¹⁰ – it is unlikely that transformative politics will gain traction until consumerism as a way of life that contains its own self-reproducing end values is rejected by (or becomes unviable for) great numbers of people. In practising sustainable consumption in the North, the autonomist politics of the Larzac plateau is exemplary.¹¹ To break from the hegemony of marketplace society is to endeavour 'in the here and now to create in the interstices of the system a new social metabolism rooted in egalitarianism, community, and a sustainable relation to the earth' (Magdoff and Foster 2010).

Globally, pressure for change may arise most urgently from a growing "environmental proletariat" (Foster 2010: 15) in areas of failing habitability, and leadership in counter-hegemonic globalization can be expected to emanate from the South. Yet achieving the global *contraction* in greenhouse gas emissions and *convergence* in emissions per capita necessary to avert the worst ecological scenarios will require a strong ethico-political solidarity of North with South – quite the reverse of what was on display at COP15 in Copenhagen in December 2009, and presently a distant possibility.

It is, nevertheless, steps taken in that direction that, cumulatively, might open an exit hatch from capitalism. Such a global transition would require that ecological

¹⁰ In contrast to the concrete forward dream that informs prefigurative practice, dreamlessness 'which is associated with standing still or with a realism which only appears to be such, even in a state of resignation, is actually the ruling state of mind of many thinking though unperceptive people in a society without perspectives (and with an abundance of inaccuracy)' (Bloch 1971: 31).

¹¹ As Magdoff and Foster (2010) point out, a post-capitalist future generalizable to humanity in its entirety implies a radical shift from the unsustainable consumerism that middle-income North Americans take for granted. 'An economic system that is democratic, reasonably egalitarian, and able to set limits on consumption will undoubtedly mean that people will live at a significantly lower level of consumption than what is sometimes referred to in the wealthy countries as a "middle class" lifestyle (which has never been universalized even in these societies). A simpler way of life, though "poorer" in gadgets and ultra-large luxury homes, can be richer culturally and in reconnecting with other people and nature, with people working the shorter hours needed to provide life's essentials.'

and social revolutions in the South 'be accompanied by, or inspire, universal revolts against imperialism, the destruction of the planet, and the treadmill of accumulation' (Foster 2010: 15). What is particularly *new* in this organic crisis is the entwinement of human survival with democratic socialist construction, the twin exigencies of our time.

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About the author

Bill Carroll became concerned about issues of global justice in the 1970s, and was active in the Marxist Institute, a Toronto-based left-wing educational collective from 1977 to 1981, when he moved to Victoria, British Columbia. In the 1980s he was involved in the Solidarity Coalition, a movements-unions alliance, and in the Committee on Alternatives for British Columbia, a group of academics that published two books critiquing neo-liberal policy and advocating democratic alternatives. More recently, he has been active in VIDEA (<http://www.vida.ca>) and has created a series of political music-videos, at <http://www.youtube.com/profile?user=wcarroll52#p/u/0/4li0MzzRXMU>.

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