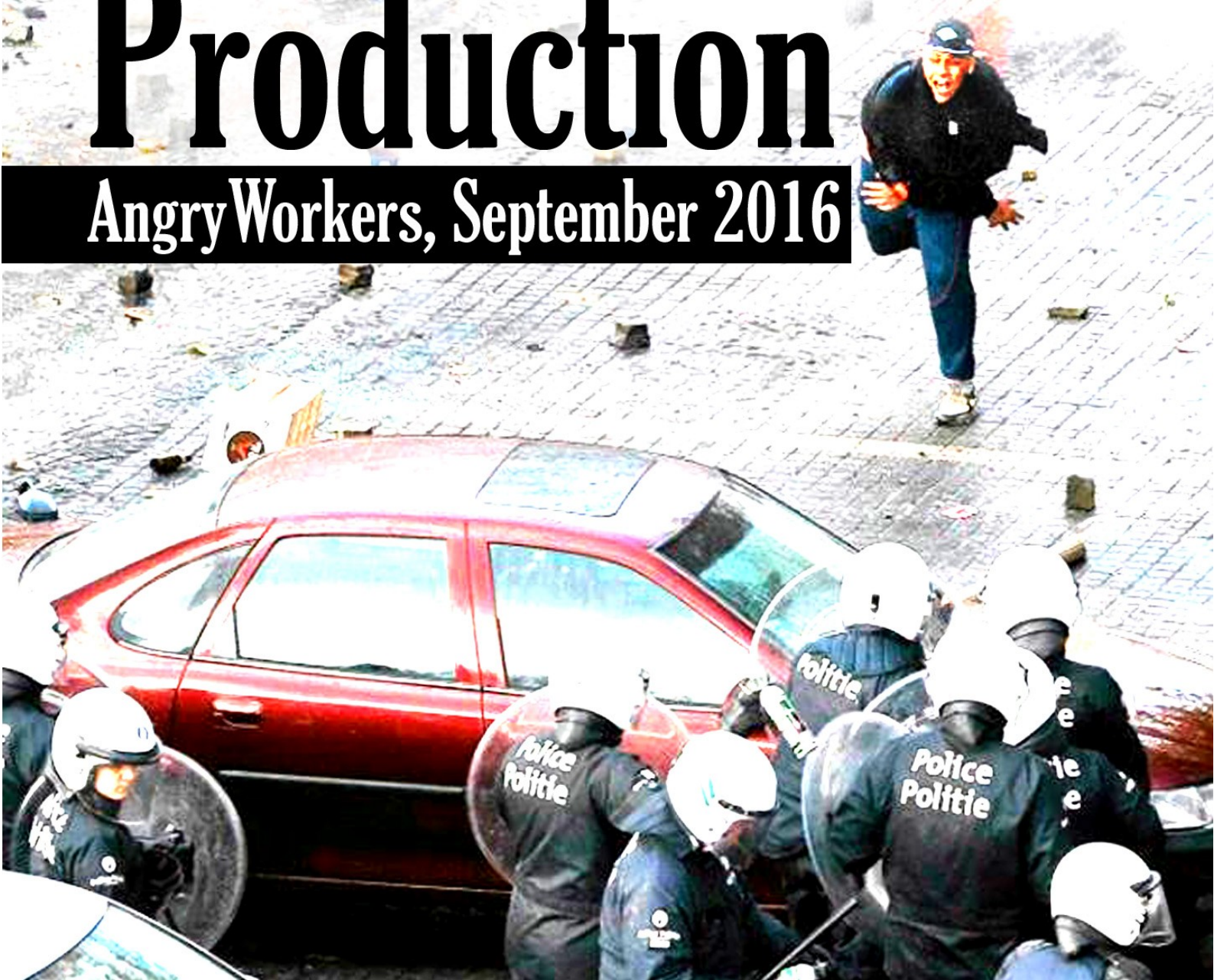




Insurrection & Production

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An empirically heavy mind-game for the debate on working class strategy:

First steps in a six-month revolutionary transition period in the UK region

Dear fellow travellers,

We've written a few texts on 'revolutionary strategy' before, focusing on the relationship between workers' existence within the social production process, experiences of day-to-day struggles and the possibility of a wider working class movement – termed by others as a 'social strike'. [1] While we maintain that we will only be able to make fruitful organisational proposals through an analysis of the concrete day-to-day struggles of our class, we think that it can't do any harm to discuss what we think a revolutionary situation in the 21st century could look like. Thinking about tomorrow might make clearer our view on today.

We are not alone in this. Since the uprisings in 2010/11 ('Arab Spring' etc.) and the general upsurge in social movements and global strike waves in the last ten years or so, the radical and not so radical left have had a lot of discussions about transitions, post-capitalism, social strikes or the era of riots and coming insurrections. In this text we will briefly engage with some of the main ideas that have been put forward in these recent analyses of revolution and fundamental social change. We do this to point out some limitations to these theories, as well as to draw out their political implications. The two main camps we look at here are, unsurprisingly, given the title, that of those in the radical milieu who

favour an insurrectionist approach to political action (riots on the streets, spontaneous proletarian action, or that done by those on the margins, the so-called 'surplus population') and those that tend to concentrate on workers at the point of production and their collective power but who maybe don't relate this to a wider view on general proletarian impoverishment and other areas of life and struggle. We put forward our perspective that tries to move beyond the traditional insurrectionist and syndicalist approaches to think in less abstract ways about what a communist revolution would actually entail. To this end, the main part of the text consists of an empirical study of what we term the 'essential industries' in the UK region, which comprise roughly 13 million workers. We think this will be the backbone of our strength in the revolutionary transition period in order to reproduce ourselves while the counter-revolutionary forces try and crush us. While this seems like a bit of a flight into the idealistic, unknown future, we think that reconsidering the relationship between proletarian violence, insurrection and production on the level of 21st century class composition will help ground our current practical political orientation. This at a time of general political disorientation (of which we see Corbyn-mania as an obvious sign!) in the wake of defeats and

containment of the upsurges we have experienced and witnessed around the world in recent years. In short, we hope that in the course of the following text we put some basic assumptions about a communist revolution into a more concrete context. We try and do this in seven steps by looking at:

a) the reality of recent struggles with a brief review of the 2010/11 uprisings from a revolutionary perspective

b) the revolutionary essence of capitalism: short remarks on the debate about 'surplus population' (riots) vs. 'global working class' (global production) to tackle the question of what capitalism's main revolutionary contradictions are

c) the material (regional) divisions within the working class: some thoughts on the impact of uneven development on how workers experience impoverishment and their productive power differently

d) the regional backbone of insurrection: empirical material about the structure of essential industries in the UK region

e) whether anyone can say 'communism?': brief conclusions on revolutionary transition

f) the basic steps of organising revolution: what would a working class revolution have to achieve within the first months of its existence

g) revolutionary organisation. Here we propose that this perspective on 'revolution tomorrow' does not leave us untouched today, for it asks for certain organisational efforts in the here and now. We sketch out what those could be.

a) The reality of struggle: a brief review of the 2010/11 uprisings from a revolutionary perspective

The 2010/2011 struggles put the question of the relation between uprisings and strikes in a revolutionary situation back on the agenda, without which the following thoughts would seem even more abstract than they are. We have to discuss political theses on revolution such as outlined above and empirical research of industrial structures and working class composition in relation to the actual struggles and their limitations. Here we refer to square occupations, street battles and strikes, in their most advanced form in Egypt, but also in Greece, Spain, and Turkey. From a revolutionary perspective – in terms of a being a threat to state power and appropriation of the means of production – the uprisings had two main limitations, which informed and determined each other:

a) the 'political' focus of the movement was the governmental structure; people gathered in the public sphere, experienced mass participation and confronted the state forces. At a certain point it became difficult to sustain the occupation and movement both in terms of repressive violence and material reproduction;

b) the strikes largely remained confined to the 'economic' sphere of wage struggles and became political only in so far as to challenge management connected to the governmental structures. While the strikes exercised crucial economic pressure, e.g. the strikes of railway workers or Suez port workers in Egypt, they did not develop an alternative of social appropriation and re-organisation of production – thereby

leaving the street protests in a political vacuum.

We faced a similar situation during the uprising in Argentina in 2001. Piqueteros and demonstrations were able to topple government after government, but the focus remained on the government buildings as symbols of power. While companies were partially taken over, the take-overs were determined by the economic condition of the companies (bankruptcy), rather than their social significance. Market relations remained, which meant that the meat industry kept on working and exporting while infantile starvation deaths and malnutrition re-emerged in South America's most developed nation.

Although the uprisings of 2010/11 were defeated, they resulted in the left – and not only the left – discussing ‘social transformation’ again. Some people explained the limitations of the movement by the limited outlook of its participants, e.g. the ‘democracy fetish’ of the square occupiers or the ‘trade union consciousness’ of the strikers, which, to us, seems a bit superficial. Others applied a more deterministic view when pointing out that the uprisings did not emerge out of a crisis of capitalism as such, but out of a neoliberal decline which revealed the corrupt character of the political elite. This position claims that the uprisings were therefore necessarily limited to a criticism of a particular form of governance and distribution of wealth. Although we agree that this crisis of ‘neoliberal regimes’ can partially explain the regional and geographical focus and limits of the uprisings, we also maintain that there won't

be a crisis of capitalism in a ‘pure form’ that will mechanically impose the aim of ‘communism’ on the movement as its counterpart. The struggles themselves, under the general global condition of industrial poverty, will have to put this aim on the agenda.

Apart from these rather crude idealistic and deterministic interpretations there are other positions, which try to relate the character of the uprisings to actual material changes:

*** the role of precarious graduate urban youth and/or creative class (Paul Mason etc.)

*** the poor surplus population (communisation theory, insurrectionism)

*** the workers integrated in a larger production process or wave of migration (Beverly Silver, Immanuel Ness etc.) [2]

When it comes to the role of the ‘precarious graduate youth’, we over-focus here on Paul Mason for a reason. His essay ‘Why is it kicking off everywhere?’ [3] on the 2010/11 uprisings made bigger inroads into the radical left. He spoke at the Anarchist Bookfair in London, comrades from the autonomist left based further research on his work. [4] His initial essay emphasised the role of the ‘creative class’ and the ‘precarious graduates’ during the uprisings in Egypt and elsewhere. This went down well with a certain segment of the radical left that had bid their farewell to the ‘traditional working class’. We think there is a certain logical cohesion between Mason's focus on the graduate precarious youth, his belief in their ‘creative, democratic potential’ and his position that in the end it will depend on an alliance between this segment and the ‘social

democratic/technocratic' state to overcome the domination of 'monopoly capitalism and finance':

"History shows innovation happens best when the state shapes it. During the second world war, the US decreed that companies could only profit from making and selling their military technologies – any attempt to derive immediate profit from monopolised intellectual property stood against the public good. Once they knew the American state was trying to achieve an anti-aircraft fire control system first, and a number-crunching static computer later, the greatest innovators alive set to work on making a gun predict the ideas in a fighter pilot's head. Mainframes – and other technologies – followed, and reaped high profits for the corporations that pioneered them. But it was the state that forced the take-off point to happen." [5]

Paul Mason's latest nationalist post-Brexit positions and his earlier 'Why is it kicking off everywhere?' seem miles apart, but they are connected by a basic elitist assumption: the creative class needs strong allies, the working class is not a viable agent, so in the end the state remains the focus. But the state is a national institution and statist attempts to reign in capital inevitably end up endorsing nationalist protectionism:

"If you wanted to give the East End set designers a route to high-skilled, high-paid work, you would need a different kind of private sector. You would need to restrict the supply of cross-border low-skilled labour, so that on leaving the local branch of B&Q you are not confronted by crowds of men begging for cash-in-hand labour. You would need to expand the supply of

low-rent housing, so that young people didn't have to spend more than half their wages on rent." [6]

"If it were possible to conclude a deal within the European Economic Area I would favour that. But the baseline has to be a new policy on migration designed for the moment free movement ceases to apply. It should be humane, generous, and led by the needs of employers, local communities and universities – and being an EU member should get you a lot of points. But – and this is the final mindset shift we in Labour must make – free movement is over. Free movement was a core principle of the EU, developed over time. We are no longer part of that, and to reconnect with our voting base – I don't mean the racists but the thousands of ordinary Labour voters, including black and Asian people – we have to design a migration policy that works for them, and not for rip-off construction bosses or slavedrivers on the farms of East Anglia". [7]

As we have seen in Spain and Greece more recently, the promotion of a middle-class 'revolutionary' vanguard has resulted in the aspirational, precarious, professional class managing to win government positions for themselves and turning against their former poor allies. And that is even when at many points in the last few years, they have struggled shoulder-to-shoulder with more lower sections of the working class, which has not been the case in Britain. Similar to Paul Mason, the new 'left governments', first of all in Greece, quickly had to realise how state power can not be yielded freely, but is confined by its national character – and they bowed to it...

b) The revolutionary essence of capitalism: short remarks on the debate about ‘surplus population’ (riots) vs. ‘global working class’ (global production) to tackle the question of what capitalism’s main revolutionary contradictions are

In terms of more serious attempts to understand the revolutionary subjectivity and limitations of the uprisings, what is left is an unproductive separation of analysis: some people emphasise the increasing numbers of proletarians expelled from the immediate production process (surplus population, unemployed) and others focus on the productive collective power of workers in the emerging global supply chains (global working class debate). Some discovered the ‘era of riots’ [8], while others proclaimed the ‘global strike wave’ [9]. Both sides are able to provide ample sociological proof for their position – figures about slum dwellers or the global integration of production.

We can ask ourselves why this separation of political focus has emerged. While it has something to do with the social position, regional location, and political preferences of those who analyse, the main material reason will be the real separation within working class existence: how workers experience impoverishment and productive power is structured and diversified regionally, sectorially, in terms of gender etc. In that sense most theoretical analysis and their one-sided focus only mirrors reality, without questioning it.

Before engaging further in more empirical analysis, let’s take a step back and ask a

fundamental political question that is hidden behind the championing of either the ‘surplus proletariat’ or the ‘productive global working class’: what is the revolutionary tendency within capitalism? We acknowledge that class societies have always been fragile and that struggle against exploitation and oppression is their main contradiction, but what is actually specific about capitalism? We claim that capitalism has two internal revolutionary dynamics:

1) Increasing productivity leads to greater inequality and relative mass impoverishment

Poverty in capitalism does not exist because there is a lack of something as such or because the exploiters merely take away a bigger share of the produced wealth. Capitalism depends on the expansion of production, although an increase in social productivity results in growing relative poverty for the large mass of proletarians. The application of new technology or knowledge often results in job cuts and an increase in unemployment, mainly through proletarianisation of former artisans/individual producers and peasants. In the industries workers are either over-worked or under-employed. This contradiction becomes visible mainly as an objective fact, as a result of the production process: over-production and over-capacities (closing factories etc.) on one side, the development of a ‘surplus population’ or ‘working poor’ population on the other. The increase in poverty results in more of the surplus product being spent on the repressive apparatus. It shows that the potential to create a better future is objectively given.

2) Effects of increasing productivity on workers' co-operation and undermining the power of capital

Whereas the first level of the contradiction appears more as an objectified result of the production process, the second side impacts on the material form of how the production process is organised. In other words, capital has to increase productivity, last but not least also to appease workers by giving them a few more crumbs of a growing cake. The main way to increase productivity is a concentration of labour and machinery (big industry) based on a close cooperation of workers involved. Historically this leads to working class collectivity and unrest, not only about the crumbs on offer, but about control of the production process as such. The closer workers cooperate, the less capital (and its representatives in the form of management) is able to appear as a precondition and necessary organiser of social production. This appearance of the necessary organiser of production is the main social legitimacy and power of capital – not its armed forces, not its media manipulation, not its jails. Capital is therefore forced to divide the production process ‘politically’ (through outsourcing or relocation of companies, through separation of intellectual labour from the production process, through the reproduction of the division between production and domestic sphere etc.), which then ends up undermining social productivity. To workers, this segmentation appears at first as an illogical act of ‘bad management practice’ or bureaucracy; “they want us to cooperate, but they don’t let us” or as a neutral market operation (“small economic units are more

efficient” etc.). This contradiction sits at the core of what capital is: the inversion of our social cooperation, whose product seems to have an independent power over us; or to put it positively: the ability of workers to discover their global cooperation and to use it to fight and create a better world.

This main contradiction of capital appears both as an internal character of production (separated cooperation) and its result (relative impoverishment). The championing of either ‘surplus population’ or ‘workers’ productive power’ separate these two dynamics instead of analysing how, in reality, the experiences of ‘impoverishment’ and ‘collective productivity’ coincide or are segregated within the global working class. The separation also leads to a different understanding of revolution and consequently of one’s own role. If we focus merely on the first aspect of the contradiction – the creation of an impoverished surplus population – we will mainly perceive the social process as a kind of automatic tendency: capital accumulates itself and churns out a growing numbers of discontented unemployed. While this results in a quite deterministic view on social developments on one side – which we can just observe and which has little to do with the agency of the exploited – it also results in a pretty superficial and mechanical view of revolution as insurrection and rupture: at some point there are just too many poor people to be controlled. Instead we should analyse how the experience of cooperation and collective productivity and struggle of workers relates to the experience of impoverishment.

Unfortunately, so far most attempts to overcome this separation of analysis (wage/industrial workers vs. other forms of proletarian existence) end up being pluralistic in a bad sense e.g. the ‘Global Labour History’ discussion, which avoids talking about revolutionary tendencies in favour of sewing together an ‘inter-related patchwork’ of industrial labour/wage labour and small scale production/ non-wage labour. [10] In order to avoid deterministic views on capitalist development and struggle, they give up looking for tendencies which weaken the command of capital and point beyond it. In this sense it won’t be enough to just address this separation empirically by proving to the ‘surplus’-faction that slum-dwellers are integrated in global production or by demonstrating to the ‘supply-chain’-gang how socially dominating the rural hinterland or ghetto economy in many regions actually is. A serious attempt to paint a picture of global working class existence in its various forms – not as a mere collage, but with the question of tendencies towards social transformation in mind – has been made by our comrades from the group, ‘wildcat’, in their article ‘Global Working Class’. [11] We encourage reading and debating the text, developing it further regarding these main questions:

- * the impact of uneven development within the working class and its’ political implications: the relation of immediate experience (e.g. being part of social cooperation in the big industries vs. relying on odd jobs and benefits) and political segmentation or generalisation within class struggle

- * the specific role of the ‘productive working class’ to develop a social program under the pressure exercised by ‘marginalised’ proletarians
- * the question of revolutionary transition, the relation between uprising (overthrow of the state) and appropriation (taking over of means of production)
- * in relation to the three previous questions: the role of political class organisations

c) The material (regional) divisions within the working class: some thoughts on the impact of uneven development on how workers experience impoverishment and their productive power differently

The following paragraph is more of an excursion for future exploration. Although we didn’t have the time to go deeper into the subject at this point, we think that we need to bear in mind the fact that regional differences in development forms the necessary background to the empirical part on ‘essential industries and insurrection’ in the UK region. It will become apparent that working class composition in the UK region is very specific, e.g. the separation of workers in the centre of social production and marginalised sections of the proletariat is less pronounced than in most other parts of the globe. It also raises the issue of how a former imperial centre that underwent a certain process of de-industrialisation relates to the conditions e.g. in regions in the so-called global south.

We have to admit that we know pretty little about the theory of ‘uneven/combined development’, or if it can even be called a

theory. What we know is that the debate has addressed very similar questions of revolutionary strategy to those which we are facing today: a global working class revolution has to deal with regional differences of development; these differences cannot be conceptualised in 'national' terms as such, though nation states play an important role in framing and mediating them.

Around the time of the turn of the 19th and 20th century, the question was how capitalist dynamics in developed capitalist countries with bourgeois states relate to regions with strong 'unfree labour' or peasantry aspects and monarchistic/non-bourgeois state forms. In order to exemplify we quote from a previous wildcat article:

"Marx himself focused on the revolutionary potential of the rapidly growing, visible and struggling working class for a long time, but after the defeats of 1848 and 1871 had destroyed the hope for a quick victory, the centre of his analysis shifted towards finding out what made capitalism 'unstable and stable' at the same time. Once more he had a close look at what was happening in the world. In the exchange of letters with Vera Zasulich he wrote about a 'specific historical opportunity': When the crisis of the 'Asiatic form of production' in Russia coincides with the crisis of capitalism in the countries of western Europe there is a chance that the struggles of the workers come together with those of the rural population. As a result of this, something revolutionary and 'new' could develop. Marx had elaborated the 'inherent dualism' of the Russian village community: collective property and private production.

A revolution in Russia could be able to stop the demise of the village community, and once the collective moments in the given 'historical surroundings' (the crisis of the western capitalism) come together with the 'workers' revolution' they might become the starting point of a new form of communisation [Vergemeinschaftung].

Usually these letters are taken as evidence that Marx did not have a 'deterministic view of history' after all or that he wanted to propagate the 'direct leap' out of the pre-capitalistic communities [Gemeinwesen]. However, more important is the way how Marx approached these concerns. Marx tackled the question through notions of 'global recomposition' – however, today we are able to, and must, debate this question in a different manner, e.g. today it will be less about 'the coming together of the best of two different worlds...' [12]

Decades later Trotsky pointed out that under certain circumstances the 'under-development' in backward regions is reproduced and fortified in exchange with the developed capitalist nations (e.g. the material backing up of despotism in Poland/Russia through agrarian trade or industrial investment). The same should be valid for struggles: there is a specific interplay between struggles in the centres and in the 'backward' regions. While necessarily schematic, the concept was not static: not 'every country has to go through stages' (as proposed by social democracy), but there is an interaction between different stages. The revolutionary character of the concept was that it was not 'pluralistic', meaning, instead of merely describing the existence of different conditions it asked: how is

uneven development reproduced, e.g. how does modern capitalism and the world market strengthen 'archaic modes of production'? How can an industrial working class provide a revolutionary attraction and program beyond its reach? And how can struggles under 'pre-capitalist' conditions (village commons, against police state conditions etc.) inform struggles in the centre?

"The law of combined development of backward countries – in the sense of a peculiar mixture of backward elements with the most modern factors – here rises before us in its most finished form, and offers a key to the fundamental riddle of the Russian revolution. If the agrarian problem, as a heritage from the barbarism of the old Russian history, had been solved by the bourgeoisie, if it could have been solved by them, the Russian proletariat could not possibly have come to power in 1917. In order to realise the Soviet state, there was required a drawing together and mutual penetration of two factors belonging to completely different historic species: a peasant war – that is, a movement characteristic of the dawn of bourgeois development – and a proletarian insurrection, the movement signalling its decline. That is the essence of 1917." (Trotsky) [13]

Maybe because of the generalisation of the 'proletarian condition' of being wage dependent and of the generalisation of 'parliamentary democracy' across the globe it now seems obsolete to talk about the impact of uneven development. Everything appears at the same time so similar (global village) and so different, once we look into

details. The problem is that we clearly see the effect of regional differences on global class struggle, but:

a) we tend to explain these differences geopolitically or out of 'national economies' or even ethnically (oil producing nations, BRIC states, Arab Spring);

b) we celebrate a crude pluralism ('patchwork of free and unfree labour; all sorts of proletarian income etc.);

c) we don't develop revolutionary strategies of how regional struggles or struggles within certain stages of development relate to others.

We won't be able to just copy the broad categorisations from the past debate (industrial, democratic centres vs. agrarian, feudal regions). Instead we have to analyse the main tendencies and material forces which separate, counteract or overdetermine/override the two mentioned general proletarian experiences (impoverishment and power/productive cooperation). The map drawn by the 'global working class'- debate points at some general and global experiences, which can become a basis for global organisation:

* experiences of migrant labour undermine the national existence of the workers' movement, but not without reinforcing 'national/protectionist sentiments' amongst the local working classes; the 'national status' of proletarians becomes the focal point, the state the main mediator between different stages of development and access to territory;

* global supply-chains connect individual workplaces and sectors and question trade union / industrial union form of containment. But there is a limit as to what extent 'productive cooperation' can actually be experienced in terms of creating direct bonds between workers (it is difficult to imagine cooperating with workers from supplying factories or ports if a whole Ocean lies in-between);

* proletarianisation / being expelled from the means of subsistence is a global phenomena, creating a similar social experience for peasants in India or Bolivia. But this only results in the fact that news from the other end of the globe can be understood more easily, the condition itself does not create material links as such.

While we can visualise this as something like a 'material backbone' for international working class organising, we can also easily see that apart from language issues etc., there are various tendencies and material forces which in their immediacy override these experiences. To say it in simpler terms: proletarians around the globe experience a deterioration of conditions, similar management and state austerity strategies and they sometimes are exploited by the same corporations or in the same supply-chain. Nevertheless, these immediate experiences are often overlaid by conditions which seem to impact on workers' interests more immediately: primarily, national conflicts and war. In order to make these various conditions more debatable for the development of some kind of global strategy, perhaps we have to be more schematic. Would it be possible to categorise six, seven main

'proletarian conditions' / stages of accumulation under which the working class currently exists and to analyse what specific kind of material power and political limitations struggles under these respective conditions develop? And how they could possibly relate to each other? How are these 'regions' criss-crossed by the material backbone mentioned above (global industry, migration)? For example, we could distinguish between regions or rather the existence of:

* industrially combined labour under political conditions of a democratic state/access to national welfare

* regions where workers' struggle and struggle 'for democracy' are still more intertwined

* 'extraction economies', with a small share of (other) industrial labour and more coercive political forms

* regions dominated by semi-proletarianisation, crisis of peasantry and strong internal migration

* regions with a higher level of urban unemployment, informal labour relations, mafia economy and violent forms of political mediation

* regions of military (national, religious) disputes and/or 'failing states'

In each one of these 'regions' the role of, and relationship between, workers in industrial centres, urban and rural poor, students and other segments of the class will be different. Struggles in each region will relate differently to the question of capitalist wealth and its distribution or the question of state power. In order to avoid becoming too schematic such an analysis

would entail discussing all possible examples of working class organisation and movements which were able to bridge the gaps of immediate experience between, e.g. industrial workers and unemployed, local working class and migrants, proletarians of different nationalities during times of war etc. It would force us to re-consider past 'global movements', such as in 1968, where the relationship between struggles in the global north and south was less based on proletarian experiences, but on the fact that former colonial powers and imperialist centres were under attack in both centres and periphery. The political effort to conceptualise the connection between centre and periphery as an alliance of 'workers' and 'oppressed people' was already questionable at the time – but 50 years later we still grapple with the problem of understanding the commonalities and differences between workers, simplified in the picture of 'north and south' or subsumed under an outdated imperialism theory, which largely sees workers as poor citizens. An analysis from the point of view of different developmental stages, instead of nation states or 'north vs. south' will hopefully allow us to understand e.g. how far-reaching the attraction of workers' struggles in the new industrial centres (Pearl River Delta etc.) both regionally and globally actually is, and to what extent their experiences will have to be politically mediated by class organisation in order to reach the more marginalised segments.

It might therefore also show that there is still a particular role of political working class organisations, which address the issue of regionally separated immediate experiences and interests within the class,

but also tackle the challenge of developing a revolutionary program of transition, relating to the class in its overall conditions. Going back to the uprisings in 2010/2011, while it is necessary to point out the material class composition which determined the limitations of the movements, addressing the lack of an organised force within the working class that was able to propose revolutionary measures beyond taking the squares cannot be discarded as voluntarism. While the industrial working class does not seem to have a social hegemony to propose a political/social program of councils (anymore), what is even more apparent is that riots and occupation of public spaces only goes so far and without touching the means of producing a different society these struggles are either buried under state repression or rely on a new political elite with links to funds (cross-class alliances). Conscious organisational links will be necessary.

d) The regional backbone of insurrection: empirical material about the structure of essential industries in the UK region

In the second part of this article we try to place the debate of insurrection and revolution and the question of regional development in a concrete context – the UK region and its industrial composition. What is the political aim of such a sociological exercise? It can act as a myth-buster amongst the largely middle-class left, whose ideology of revolutionary transition is based on assumptions that production is largely immaterial nowadays, or that everything is gonna be automatised or that

work or workplaces in general don't play a major role in proletarian socialisation. Thanks to the empirical exercise we can get a rough idea of numbers: how many people are engaged in securing our material survival? In contrast and more importantly, these figures can also serve as a basis for rough propaganda amongst the working class: how much can we reduce the social necessary labour time for everyone if everyone engages in socially necessary work? The empirical summary below outlines the material framework within which a regional insurrection and takeover of means of production would take place and the basic challenges the insurgent proletariat would encounter:

- * How much food is there to redistribute before the shit hits the fan and shortage-related carnage begins?
- * What would be immediately lacking if our region is cut off from wider trade or an external energy supply?
- * How many workers are employed in the essential industries and what is their composition?
- * Where are the essential industries concentrated geographically?
- * How numerous is the local middle class?
- * What is the class composition of local farming?
- * How does the army and police force reproduce itself materially?

(Just as a disclaimer: we are well aware that in this case the availability of bourgeois statistics (UK region) and perhaps a certain Brexit trauma determines the chosen framework. That is obviously dangerous – trigger warning! – but we will explain more about it later on).

** Total population in the UK region: 64 million*

Employed population: 31.58 million (23.12 million working full-time)

Unemployed: 1.69 million unemployed (official figures)

Workers in essential industries: approximately 13-16 million

Total amount of migrant (foreign born) population, largely working class and concentrated in bigger cities: 8 million

Population according to size of town (2011):

London: 8 million

Birmingham: 1 million

Number of Towns between 200,000 and 600,000: 25

Number of Towns between 100,000 and 200,000: 51

Number of Towns between 50,000 and 100,000: 108

Number of Towns between 10,000 and 50,000: 817

Numbers of Towns between 1,000 and 10,000: 522

Numbers of Towns under 1,000: 6,300

Built-up areas with a population of 10,000 or more usual residents are defined as urban. In 2011, 81.5 % (45.7 million) of the resident population of England and Wales lived in urban areas and 18.5 % (10.3 million) lived in rural areas. Residents of rural areas are also more likely to be born in the UK (94.9 % compared with 84.7 % for urban areas), to be of 'White British' ethnicity (95.0 % compared with 77.2 % for urban areas). To analyse the significance of the existence of over 6,300 small towns for an uprising will be a future challenge.

** Size of companies in the UK (2015):*

Total number of private businesses: 5.4 million

Total number of employees: 25.8 million

Companies with no employees: 4 million

Companies with 1 – 9 employees: 1 million (4 million employees)

Companies with 10 – 49 employees: 200,000 (4 million employees)

Companies with 50 – 250 employees: 32,555 (3.2 million employees)

Companies with 250 or more: 7,000 (10.2 million employees)

When we speak of 13 to 16 million workers employed in the essential industries we mean industries directly relevant for reproduction under circumstances of an uprising, for a prolonged period: what do we need for material survival and self-defence against the class enemy? To extrapolate these figures from capitalist statistics is a bit of guesswork. The number above excludes teachers and ‘local authority employees’, though this might exclude the public swimming pool staff – essential! It includes all kind of irrelevant industries, such as the arms and car industry – due to their significance for technological/knowledge transfer. Below more of a breakdown of this figure, with some sector-related peculiarities.

** Agriculture – 500,000 people*

Around 53% of food consumed in the UK is produced locally, the rest is imported. Fruit and vegetables account for the biggest share of imports (measured in monetary terms!); the leading foreign suppliers were the Netherlands (5.6%), Spain (5.1%), France (3.1%), Germany (3.1%) and Irish

Republic (3.0%). Three countries accounted for 90% of dairy product and egg supply (UK farms supplied 86% of total consumption). Three countries accounted for 90% of meat and meat preparation supply (UK supplied 84%). Twelve countries accounted for 90% of supply of cereals and cereal preparations (including rice). The UK supplied 56% of cereal. Import or export of staple food (potato, wheat, rice) is partly a question of market prices and not merely of production capability, e.g. in 2015 around 1,250,000 tonnes of wheat were imported from EU, but at the same time the UK exported 61,000 tons of locally produced wheat to the US. It's different with the 100g rice per head per week consumed in the UK: 30% is imported from the EU countries, the rest from the global south.

Twenty four countries accounted for 90% of fruit and vegetable supply (UK supplied 23%). So yes, if direct relations to Spanish and Netherland greenhouses cannot be established, it will be difficult to maintain the ‘five a day’ guidelines! But for a country that is said to be so ‘food-insecure’ in comparison, it does not look too harsh in terms of global dependency – at least not as bad as Egypt, where 60% of the consumed wheat has to be imported. The EU as a whole has a food production to supply ratio of around 90%.

What about the concentration of the industry? First of all it is interesting to notice that of the 2 million ton of wheat stocks (annual production around 15 million tons, 65% of all cereal crop) 38% of stocks were held on-farm and 62% at ports, coops and merchants – meaning it is stored

away from the individual owners. In comparison, globally the ratio between wheat stock to annual consumption is 30% and 20% for rice. In the UK, most of the on-farm wheat is for animal feed. Not only is the storage of wheat stocks concentrated, the flour mills are also quite monopolised: In 2011, 5 million tons of wheat were milled into flour in only 56 flour mills in the UK. The two largest companies account for approximately 40% of UK flour production.

What about the composition of the farms? These are arranged on almost 235,000 holdings whose average cultivable area is around 54 hectares (130 acres). About 70% of farms are owner-occupied and the remainder are rented to tenant farmers. Some 41,000 farms (around 14% of the total) are larger than 100 hectares and account for over 65% of the agricultural area. While 'cereal farms' tend to be more 'family-run', the meat industry is more corporate: Around 930 million meat chickens (broilers) were reared in the UK in 2012, on 2,500 farms and 30 slaughterhouses. Companies like Lower Farm produce over 1.3 million chicken a year. The UK poultry industry employs around 55,000 people in locations all over the country, on farms, in hatcheries, feed mills, processing and portioning plants and in transport operations.

Despite the capitalist nature of agriculture in the UK (the peasant question is out of the way), we can see that we have to deal with 200,000 'owner-run' enterprises, depending on seasonal labour, situated outside of the urban areas – meaning that this won't be a mere 'workers' takeover' but a more

complex social dynamic.

** Food processing, production – 2.2 million people*

Here the capitalist dynamic is blatant: of 2.2 million workers in the sector only 0.5 million work in food manufacturers, whereas 1.6 million work in 'non-residential catering', meaning canteens and restaurants. While not all restaurant work is socially superfluous, it is nevertheless largely catering to individual consumption patterns – but then the food has to be cooked and prepared and the production process in a restaurant will not be much more or less productive than a collective kitchen for a domestic unit of 200 to 250 people. Productivity rates of restaurants can't compare with those in factories, for example in four factories in Southall Noon Foods produces 2.4 million meals per week, employing roughly 3,000 workers including managers and admin staff and workers engaged in snack production. That equates to roughly 200 meals per worker per day. It is also interesting to note that these factories are not very mechanised but rather labour intensive.

For our insurrectionist, 'blocking the economy' and looting friends: out of personal experiences of working in the retail warehouse chain and in the food processing industry we can say that the average supermarket stock of groceries in London lasts for about 24 to 48 hours. The main warehouses are located outside of the city margins and might hold a maximum of two to five days of stock. Supply for the main food processing plants often comes from the agricultural hinterland (chicken farms, flour mills, potato farms) or from

abroad (fresh fruits). The communisation-fun might last three days max!

** Water supply/treatment and waste management and street cleansing / general cleaning: 166,500 and 145,000 and 480,000 people respectively*

The waste management numbers are not specified, e.g. how much of this is related to the big industry how much to individual consumption. Similarly, it is not clear how many of the 400,000 cleaners are employed in domestic set-ups, but one source stated that currently 6 million people in the UK employ a domestic cleaner!

** Energy industry total: around 680,000 people*

Given the heavy lobbying in this sector (coal industry, but also renewable energy sector) the numbers might be less reliable:

Gas industry: 142,000

Power generation: 87,000

Coal: 6,000

Petroleum: 150,000 (around 50,000 workers are said to work off-shore in oil and gas production)

Nuclear power: 44,000 to 60,000

Renewable energy: 112,000

Rest maintenance of grid and admin

In 2014, total electricity production stood at 335 TWh (down from a peak of 385 TWh in 2005), generated from the following sources:

Gas: 30.2% (0.05% in 1990) – other sources say 54% in 2016

Coal: 29.1% (67% in 1990) – other sources say 6% in 2016

Nuclear: 19.0% (19% in 1990)

Wind: 9.4% (0% in 1990)

Bio-Energy: 6.8% (0% in 1990)

Hydroelectric: 1.8% (2.6% in 1990)

Solar: 1.2% (0% in 1990)

Oil and other: 2.5% (12% in 1990)

Imported: 7.69%

Bordiga's old question should be altered: Seize power or seize the factory ... or seize the power plant? This is probably one of the most concentrated sectors in terms of social importance and also one of the most safeguarded by the state. In the UK there are 10 nuclear power stations, 16 major coal power plants, 33 gas plants and 7 oil plants. The state will apply its military and ideological strong-hold over these workers and they are, to state the obvious, also not easily replaced. The recent 'strike-wave' in France in June 2016 showed the centrality of the sector. In the UK, as well, the number of refineries and larger oil and petrol depots has come down drastically: there are only six main oil refineries at the coast, connected by main pipelines, the United Kingdom Oil Pipeline (UKOP) – patrolled by helicopters.

It is interesting to note that together with wishy-washy people of the 'food-security' brigade, it is the 'climate change' left that is actually researching the production process in the energy sector – from an environmental transitional point of view, but at least they try to deal with the real stuff. The radical left largely has a trade union overview about job cuts in the sector.

** Transport total: 1.4 million people*

Some of this work will be of much less relevance (airports and ground services account for 433,000 jobs and airlines 200,000 jobs). Some means of production/transport are not so difficult to run (285,000 truck drivers), but a good

chunk still depends on very specialised cooperation and knowledge, e.g. in the railways, which employ around 200,000 – not including local trains and tube.

Equally port operations require sophisticated skills, in 2014 over 500 million tonnes were handled by UK ports, roughly 380 million tonnes unloaded and 180 million tons shipped. The UK ports sector is estimated to directly employ around 118,200 people. Over 95% of imports and exports by volume, and 75% by value still pass through sea ports.

Port traffic is highly concentrated, there are 51 major ports, which handle 98 % of the overall traffic, the biggest ten ports handled 340 million out of 500 million tonnes. Grimsby & Immingham in north east Lincolnshire has remained the UK's busiest port, handling 12 % of the UK market in 2014. The new 'London Gateway / Dubai Port' will shift a lot of traffic towards the east of London. Around 80 million tonnes were crude oil and oil products, 40 million tonnes in coal import. Another major share of dry bulk goods include biomass fuels, typically in the form of wood pellets or wood chips, for Drax and Lynemouth power stations in the North of England.

Ports are specialised: Milford Haven for liquid bulk, Grimsby for dry bulk, Felixstow for containers (41% of all container movements) and Dover for roll on and off (27% of total). In 2014, 204.1 million tonnes of traffic travelled between UK major ports and EU countries (42 % of major port traffic). In 2014 there were 54.8 million tonnes of freight which passed to and from the Netherlands, accounting for 14 % of all international traffic.

A fair share of cargo traffic is pretty useless, e.g. nearly a quarter (23 %) of international unitised (containers and other 'single units') traffic was by import and export of passenger cars. There were 4.1 million import/export motor vehicles moved through UK ports in 2014.

** Retail total – 2.7 million / Logistics total: 1.8 million / Warehouses total: 360,000*

This is less a question about how many people are employed to 'sell things', but more about how many people are employed to circulate goods. The total retail sector is 2.7 million, most of them shop workers, the total logistics sector is said to be 1.8 million, but this will include the truck drivers already counted in transport and some of the parcel delivery workers, as part of the postal services. Chill houses, central distribution centres and local storage will still be useful, with less specialised knowledge required by workers to run them.

** IT/Communication total: 1.2 million people*

Certainly a very unspecified figure. Other sources state that 280,000 people work in communications, from maintaining of communication hardware (internet cables) to admin work. Other sources say that there are 350,000 'software professionals', working in the UK, but that obviously includes programmers of train signal systems as much as programmers for online brokering. The main challenge will be to establish a intranet-communication system between domestic units and workplaces within the short-term, which cannot be easily shut down by the internet empire. We have too little technical knowledge in

understanding what kind of effort this would involve, but there is a fairly big and well organised alternative 'networking' scene. [14] We were not able to find out more reliable information about the material structure of internet connections within the UK, e.g. big server stations and nodes, though these will be crucial for both sides of any insurrection.

** Care Sector: 3.2 to 3.5 million people*

Although a lot of this work could be taken out of social isolation, back into bigger domestic units, the knowledge of the workers employed in the sector are essential and it will need time to transfer/socialise them.

Adult care: 1.55 million

Childcare: 426,500

NHS: 1.2 million to 1.5 million

In 2015, across Hospital and Community Healthcare Services (HCHS) and GP practices, the NHS employed 149,808 doctors, 314,966 qualified nursing staff and health visitors (HCHS), 25,418 midwives, 23,066 GP practice nurses, 146,792 qualified scientific, therapeutic and technical staff, 18,862 qualified ambulance staff and 30,952 managers, dealing with 1 million patients every 36 hours. (In 2010, across England, there were over 1000 NHS hospital sites with more than one bed. More than half were small community or mental health facilities with an average of 35 or 68 beds respectively. Just over seven in 10 hospital sites in 2010 had fewer than 100 beds. There are 7,800 GP practices).

** Construction: 1 to 2.1 million people*

Again the figures are unreliable, ranging from self-employed builders for kitchen extensions to engineering companies engaged in airport constructions. While the question might come up as to what extent construction will be relevant during a revolutionary period, we can envisage that short-term conversion of former office space into social housing or conversion of space for the domestic units will engage a significant number of skilled workers.

** Engineering/Manufacturing total: around 3 million people*

This includes all type of socially unnecessary labour, first of all the arms industry or passenger car manufacturing. Unfortunately it is often this type of industry that has the highest levels of productive collective knowledge and highest standards of technology, while, e.g. food processing, harvest work, garment industry etc. is characterised by cruel labour intensity. A technology and knowledge transfer can be started, also as a political measure to show that 'communism' is to come and that we can expect much less work once we get through the upheaval. Other manufacturing will be of more immediate necessity, from packaging material, machine tool production for spare parts, construction material, pharmaceuticals etc.

Automobile: 250,000 including supply-chain

Steel: 30,000

Aerospace: 111,000 direct / 120,000 indirect

Arms industry: 146,000

Electronics: 800,000 (Centerprise has one of the UK's largest PC manufacturing

plants in Wales; 10% of computers manufactured in the UK, no info on supply parts; there is a NXP semiconductor plant in Manchester)

Plastics: 300,000

Furniture: 115,000

Chemical/Pharmaceutical: 105,000 (Chemical) and 53,000 (Pharmaceutical)

direct jobs // 500,000 indirect jobs

Garment/Textile total: 150,000 to 300,000 (20,000 designers)

Maybe it is an accountant type of revolutionary mentality to assume that, for example, furniture manufacturing would have any social relevance within a six months period of upheaval, but then people struggle only so far without knowing how society will re-organise itself.

** Media – around 310,000 people*

In print-media around 167,000 people, in radio around 22,000 in television around 30,000 and in film industry around 70,000 – the BBC alone employs 35,000 people, including temps, short-term contracts. Most of their broadcasting, both TV and radio is done from their headquarter in Portland Place, London.

** Postal Service – 200,000 plus*

In 2015 the Royal Mail alone still employed 160,000 people. It is difficult to find figures of private parcel delivery companies, couriers etc. DHL employs 18,000. Again, this is not about individualised letter delivery, but revolutionary logistics.

** Public sector total: 5.1 million people*

We didn't include this in the total figure for essential industry, though amongst local government employees there are certainly

workers with important social knowledge, e.g. the 27,000 librarians. Also, not all of the bourgeois knowledge taught by 1.5 million people employed in public education is mere ideology, a lot of it might turn out to be useful.

Local government: 2.3 million

Central government: 2.9 million

Education: 1.5 million

Public administration: 1.1 million

Construction: 150,000

Police: 250,000

Fire Brigade: 45,000

** Army: 180,000 people*

We haven't had much time (and sources) to look deeper into the composition of the army: what are the main class divisions within the armed forces and how does the apparatus reproduce itself materially. At this point we can only provide two snapshots:

a) While nearly half of all officers were educated in private schools (only 10% of the total population is educated in elite schools), in 2009 of the 14,000 newly recruited soldiers 31% were under 18, which indicates that they come from working class conditions. The army largely recruits from 'disadvantaged schools'.
b) The army apparatus is largely maintained by 'private companies', meaning by workers who haven't got the conditions and job security like public sector employees. Companies like Sodexo or ESS (Compass) organise catering, retail and 'leisure activities' for army personnel, employing between 6,000 and 9,000 staff. Amey/Carillion organises the maintenance of 280 army bases and 49,000 army flats.

e) “Can anyone say ‘Communism?’”

Before we try to envision the conditions for a working class uprising in the UK region based on the material regarding the industrial structure presented above, we want to draw some brief political conclusions. ‘Communism’ has become a fashionable term, used by an array of people with conflicting positions – so has ‘revolution’. We therefore agree to raise the question: ‘Can anyone say communism?’, as done by comrades around wildcat [15]. Based on our brief look at the limitations of the 2010/11 uprisings, our thoughts on the main revolutionary contradiction within capitalism and the empirical glimpse at the material structure of social production in the UK region, we state:

* As we saw in France in 1936 [16], Chile in 1973 [17] or Greece in 2014, parliamentary participation and nationalisation policies do not open up space for working class movements, but instead contain the revolutionary impetus inside ‘democratic’ frameworks that will always be rigged against us (or indeed, openly disregarded to maintain ruling class power). Nor does it prepare workers for the difficult task of taking over the means of production and defending them against the class enemy – it prevents them from doing so by creating illusions in a (gradual and often peaceful) reform process, which in the end gives the reactionary forces time to prepare their counter-attack.

* The hope that ‘automation’ (Accelerationists) [18] or other ‘technological progress’ (Negrists, Paul Mason disciples) [19] will create the material ground for ‘communism without

revolution’ or ‘revolution without the working class’ is mainly a bourgeois utopia based on elitism. Ultimately it relies heavily on the state as an ‘agent of transformation’ e.g. in the form of ‘guaranteed basic income’ demands or the hope that the state will implement ‘innovation’ against the reluctant ‘monopoly capitalists’.

* The idea of transitional or directional demands towards the state as a kind of consciousness-enhancing trick is deeply rooted within the ‘radical left’. Consciously or not they continue the old lefty formulas of transitional programmes as a patronising policy to “overcome the contradiction between the maturity of the objective revolutionary conditions and the immaturity of the proletariat and its vanguard” (Trotsky). For us transition means the time it takes to takeover the means of (re-)production and to transform them into means not only to satisfy material needs, but to break our social isolation, our condition as appendixes of machinery, our suburban or rural boredom, the spatial concentration and separation of essential infrastructure (universities to power plants) from the rest of society. This transformation takes time, it is not separate from struggle. It is not communism yet, but it is on the way. This transformation cannot take place under capitalist rule or under command of hierarchical structures like a state. No demand or decree prepares workers for this. No elitist insurrectionist can just take over infrastructure without the workers involved. [20] There is a qualitative shift and the only process towards that shift is the increasing experience and organisational abilities of the working class through their experience

of capitalist production and struggles.

* The flip-side of putting your political hope in some 'neutral technological progress' is the hope that the semi-automatic creation of a 'surplus population' (impoverished people who are dispelled or excluded from the production process) will provide the grounds for revolution as insurrection and rupture (vulgar communism theories) [21]. Any closer look at the current production process and working class will tell us that 'insurrection without production'-ideologies are mainly romantic wet dreams and have little to do with the possibility of communism.

* Analysing the global composition of the working class will also show that many traditional '(anarcho-)syndicalist' models of revolution (as a gradual expansion of organisation, general strike and take-over of the means of production) leave out questions of industry and labour market-based divisions within the working class, as well as the unpredictable fact of capitalist crisis and the predictable fact of state violence.

* Similarly, experiments with common spaces, transitional towns, self-management or attempts to abolish intellectual property are potentially fertile elements of class struggle, but once they are isolated from the question of social power they degenerate into capitalism's creative bubbles.

* We acknowledge the contribution of debates around reproductive labour and the so-called 'care revolution': any fundamental change must have the socialisation of domestic and care work at its centre. However, there is a danger of the debate falling back into a middle-class

eurocentric perspective if we don't take into account the produced materiality of care relations [22] e.g. who ploughs the fields, who builds the shelters, who makes our clothes etc.

* Last, but not least, we have to question our own premises of traditional Operaismo [23]: while the 'refusal of work' of assembly line workers in the 1960s and 1970s was the most radical expression of the working class at the time, the fetishisation of this expression has prevented us from discussing the challenge of how we can imagine a takeover and transformation of the means of production today.

f) The basic steps of organising revolution: what would a working class revolution have to achieve within the first months of its existence?

So what does revolution mean in the 21st century? We agree with our comrades from wildcat when they say that the day-to-day struggles and behaviour of the proletarian masses 'revolutionise' society constantly: "How do workers' struggles become revolutionary? Revolution evades derivation from objective conditions. If in a society characterised by patriarchal relations female workers fight collectively for the improvement of their living and working conditions, if they take risks in struggle, cross boundaries, discover new potentials and want to find out more about the world, then this process is probably 'revolutionary'." Nevertheless, we still have to face up to the question of what a qualitative rupture with capitalist social relations would mean.

In the text below we presuppose these struggles, the formation of a political workers' coordination on a substantial scale, which has been formed through struggle and is able through its rootedness to propose the leap. Their own struggles have brought society to the brink of collapse, they have seen how their cooperation under capital is structured through the results of their strikes and unrest. A 'plan' to takeover production is not just a good idea, but a necessary act for survival, both materially and in order to obtain social hegemony. We don't emphasise that the main character of transition has to be the creation of emancipated relationships, which is true. We set in at a point where global class struggle has tipped the control of capital and the state into crisis and the working class in certain regions will have to make the leap into the unknown, not having the privilege of waiting for the rest of the global class to take this step together with them. We don't presuppose that the working class in the UK region will be the first to make that step, nor that the region in question will be confined to these English-speaking islands. Relating to the problems lined out above – the (regional) disparity of productive power and impoverishment within the working class – this is neither a sketch of general 'principles of communist production and distribution' a la Group of International Communists [24] nor a left-communist essay about the 'relation between state, party, unions in the phase of proletarian dictatorship'. We appreciate previous efforts such as of Insurgent Notes to discuss an 'initial revolutionary program' [25], but we hope to be more concrete. In the end it is a slightly embarrassing attempt

to think about the relation of regional insurrection and taking over means of production within an initial six months or so period of proletarian revolution – it is about the bare bones.

We don't have a clear idea about what could cause a situation of revolutionary upheaval and we don't know what will happen once people take the streets. What we do know is how social production and reproduction is organised today and the composition of workers engaged in it. We know what keeps us apart, what creates the basis for professionalism or gender hierarchies. We can envisage something like a minimal material backbone of the revolution, something which the working class would have to achieve within a certain time-span in order to abolish the domination of the money economy, profit management and state control – and to undermine divisions between them. We might think that this is rather abstract or hypothetical, but then during the last few years people were willing to risk being killed by defending a square or storming parliament – the revolutionary will is not lacking – but in that moment it might need a social force with a) roots in the essential industries and amongst the poor and b) a concrete plan: these are the power stations, logistics hubs, flour mills, internet nodes which are central to an effort to fundamentally change things. Soldiers who shoot you as a 'rebellious mob on the street' might be less likely to shoot you when they know that you defend workers who know about production and who want to run the energy or food processing plant for everyone. So what are these bare necessities?

**** What are the potentials and challenges for an insurrection within the UK territory?*

Based on the reflections above we present twelve basic theses on the primary characteristics and requirements and initial steps of a working class revolution:

1) Regional challenge

An uprising will depend on the ability to sustain itself regionally. Although we speak of global revolution, the process won't necessarily be synchronous; we will have to deal with situations of regional insurrections which have to reproduce themselves over a certain period, temporarily and partially being cut off from world market supply.

2) Emancipation and hardship

It will furthermore depend on its capacity to improve overall conditions: a communist revolution has to be able to improve living conditions for the majority over a short timespan, guarantee material reproduction of the population at a high level, making time for re-organisation of society at the same time, dismantling hierarchies while still battling the battle. Its main attraction will be the more equal and liberating relationships created in struggle, but over a short-span of time material hardship would undermine these relationships, no matter how willing people are to bear the impact of scarcity.

3) Takeover of essential industries as productive insurrection

Large sections of the working class have to be prepared for an organised response to a spontaneous situation of crisis: this will largely depend on the collaboration of

workers employed in the essential industries with the organised violence of the wider proletarian class to takeover, defend and transform the essential industries. This take-over will not happen gradually, but will be led by an 'active minority/vanguard' of 30 to 40 % of the working class, formed in previous struggles. This takeover is the productive and material core of insurrection, the action that can swing the rest of the population, in particular if 'populist measures' (re-distribution of living space, health provisions etc.) are offered to the poor and they are included in practical refurbishment. As can be seen from the empirical bits and bobs, the initial core centre of production and circulation that has to be taken over and defended is significantly smaller (not all convenience stores, but the main bulk circulation; not the entire manufacturing industry, but mainly flexible machine shops for (spare) parts production and building material etc.)

4) Formation of larger domestic units

The uprising and takeover of essential industries has to go hand in hand with the formation of domestic units comprising 200 to 250 people: communal spaces (former hotels, schools, office blocks etc.) as central points for distribution, domestic work and local decision-making. The quick formation of such domestic units is as important as the takeover of the essential industries. Mainly in order to break the isolation of domestic work and gender hierarchies, but also to create a counter-dynamic to the centralisation in the essential industries: a decentralisation of certain social tasks and decision making. The domestic units and

their experience will shift the focus from 'production for production's sake' towards a situation where living together and creating the means of subsistence will be a less segregated process. 250 is a pretty random number, but it seems small enough to facilitate familiarity with people who we organise daily stuff with (childcare, cooking, washing clothes etc.) and big enough to make distribution of goods feasible. It will also create enough proximity in order to guarantee a certain revolutionary respect and commitment between individual members in case of disputes.

5) Proletarianisation of the control over agricultural production

Larger numbers of the urban working class will have to go and convince the 'owner-run' farms of the agricultural sector to share their burden and trouble with working the soil and create direct, non-market related links between town and countryside. While urban workers move towards the rural agriculture areas, supporting their seasonal agricultural workers (most of them will go back and forth between town and agriculture anyway), some of the agriculture and equipment can be brought closer to town - here we might actually be able to learn something from Cuba (significant experience with urban gardening and rapid conversion from oil-based agriculture to a low fossil fuel one). These two movements from town to countryside and vice versa will be a first organic step towards a dissolution of the capitalist geographic division of labour. Engage in first steps to undermine the eroding nature of industrial farming by getting permaculture folks involved.

6) Participation of the marginalised proletarians

At the core of the takeover the essential industries have to be taken over both from within and from without. This will depend on the ability of the proletarians in less central sectors to enforce (mainly by participating in production and organising its military defence) the fact that workers in the essential industries socialise the production and free circulation of goods, as opposed to treating the former companies and products as their own property. Only the mass participation of poorer or more marginalised sections of the working class will make visible the entire scope of social needs. Their previous experiences with state violence and their knowledge about urban improvisation (from self-defence to economic networks) will be required. An immediate 'populist' program has to be launched addressing those segments of the proletariat which are at the margins of essential production – this segment might be called the 'urban poor', or surplus proletariat. This segment is not so significant in the UK, but surely in other countries. In order to drive a wedge between them and the middle-strata which has the financial clout to 'buy them over' there has to be a coordinated action of appropriation of living space. In this sense 'construction' might be essential even in an uprising: if construction workers and the 'urban poor' take over useless office space, empty hotels etc. and convert them together, this would create a bond in order to win people over to defend the rest of the essential industries under attack.

7) Participation of workers in the advanced industries

As outlined before, large parts of the most advanced industries in terms of concentration, knowledge and machinery are not necessarily essential in terms of material survival. Apart from being potential centres of collective struggles and emerging workers' organisations, the role of workers employed in the most advanced industries (automobile, machine engineering) is to make technology and knowledge available for an improvement of the essential industries and domestic units. Not the robots or artificial intelligence will liberate us from drudgery, but the collaboration between workers in the advanced and essential industries and domestic units will demonstrate how we can drastically reduce necessary labour-time.

8) Breaking the collusion of intellectual workers

A swift and coordinated appropriation will only be possible with the backing of a significant minority of 'technical staff' and intellectual workers (engineers, doctors etc.) employed in the centres of social production. It will depend on the collectively organised measures of the three main working class segments (essential industries, advanced sectors, marginalised) to break the collusion of 'intellectual workers' (engineers, certain segments of science) with capitalist management and the state apparatus and win a considerable section over on communist terms and conditions, i.e. the breaking down of division between intellectual and manual labour. In order to break the collusion the

struggling working class has to impress with organisational knowledge of production, with liberated human relationships and social responsibility towards the environment.

9) Establishing communist internet and productive database

The takeover needs social communication and an elaborate decision-making processes, facilitated by a parallel (IT) communication structure to the internet, which is able to link domestic units, essential industries, remaining workplaces and 'proletarian militias'. In terms of 'production' necessary during the insurrection, this will be a major one. It has to be a structure which guarantees communication between production and consumption, sturdy enough to fight off attacks. Connect this communication network to taken-over printing and film/TV media (neighbourhood/industry TV) and set up a parallel physical delegate structure in case of communication break-down.

10) Curbing the influence of the middle-class

In the UK the 'middle-class' block is still a considerable force – there are 4 million business owners with no employees (self-employed), most of which can be seen as disguised proletarians; there are at least 1.2 million 'bosses' (if we assume a single boss) employing between 1 and 50 people, which can be categorised as an exploiting middle class; 1.75 million people make money as landlords – a lot of them might as well belong to the former category; 1.1 million people still get good money through being employed in the financial services

sector (some of them might be data-entry typists and cleaners). There are 120,000 lawyers/solicitors in the UK, representing a professional section of the middle-class not tied into the social process of production. There are still around 50,000 local shops, the majority of which are run by individual owners, representing a lower section of the middle-class. These people have a political weight and a repressive apparatus. We are not talking about the mysterious 1%, but rather about a backbone of 15% of people who have not just money to lose, but social influence and prestige. The best way to minimise their influence is to cut them off from essential production and circulation and force them to realise that their privileged social position was largely unproductive – and that they are welcome to participate productively as equals.

11) Splitting the armed forces along class lines

Historically no revolution has been successful without a split within the army, in most cases as a result of previous war or civil war situations. The main chance for a communist revolution to split the army along class lines is therefore determined by objective conditions (soldiers not wanting to die for ‘their masters war’) and its subjective capacity to attract working class soldiers: the organised working class movement can free us from hierarchical relationships and knows how to feed, clothes, cares for everyone. Nevertheless, a revolution has to create its own material threat by weakening the military apparatus (non-cooperation, meaning, no supply of essential goods and services for the army) and by armed defence of essential

productive units. This includes the curbing of sabotage by (petty) bourgeoisie and lumpen elements (e.g. in Chile during the social turmoil in 1973 the owners of truck and bus fleets organised a ‘strike’ or rather boycott in order to create economic chaos).

12) Overcoming the regional isolation by using taken-over productive capacity

We have no illusions: no regional uprising will be able to sustain itself materially and ‘militarily’ over a prolonged period. We have seen the pitfalls of ‘Bolshevik foreign policies’ [26] and of anarchist regionalism. The challenge for any local working class is to discover its global dependencies and to engage in extra efforts not only to sustain itself, but to use the appeal of their experiences and appropriated means of production strategically in order to break through their geographic isolation. We don’t know what this will look like, apart from sending people and material out to explain their experiences of struggle. It will mean observing the global situation and perhaps sending proletarian militias with productive knowledge and means of production to support workers’ uprisings elsewhere – using the global logistics facilities that capitalism was forced to develop.

What will be the centres of coordination and debates to accomplish all this? In terms of social production and decision-making structures, a lot of unpredictable things will happen, people will discover new desires and knowledge of how to organise horizontally and all of that – but we think that in the phase of insurrection apart from ‘the streets and squares and barricades’ the

following three locations will be central during an uprising, both in terms of production and decision making:

a) the workplaces of the essential industries, in order to guarantee social production and establish the main body of social decision-making

b) the new domestic units, in order to socialise reproduction and establish the second main body of decision-making

c) the former workplaces in non-essential industries, in order to transfer knowledge and equipment.

Allocation of work takes place according to necessity and capacity of units of the essential industries and according to personal abilities, roughly as follows:

a) Four hours in the essential industries
That means a massive transfer of working-time and workforce to the essential industries in order to be able to reduce individual working hours while maintaining production levels – for a controlled winding down of excess. Participation of everyone (the former unemployed including unwaged domestic workers, but also former bankers and other former 'privileged') is essential, in order to socialise experiences and decision-making: 'councils' in the essential industries and domestic units being the main 'productive and political units'. Industry-internal hierarchies in terms of intellectual and manual labour have to be tackled immediately. Demand for numbers needed in the workforce has to be communicated to domestic units and remaining workplaces – the quicker and more transparent the requirements of the industries are communicated, the easier the

supply. Supply chains have to be restructured, depending on the (global) expansion of the uprising.

b) Three hours in the domestic unit and territory beyond

The counter-point is participation in the domestic units, setting up of food kitchens, social (care) space, 'communist intranet' and communicating new social needs to the decision-making bodies in the essential industries. Double participation in often centralised essential industries and decentralised domestic units is of major importance, so as to undermine social divisions of labour and (e.g. gender) hierarchies. Only through double participation and communication will we be able to figure out which elements of social production can be de-centralised within (combined) domestic units and which are better organised in a more centralised industrial set-up.

c) Two hours in former workplaces
Maintaining control over the 'non-essential' workplaces and keeping in touch with former colleagues is important. Social developments can be discussed and stock-taking can take place: what kind of knowledge and means of production are available? What were they used for so far? What could they be used for potentially? Who were former suppliers or who did the company/workplace cater to? This information has to be added to the general productive information pool. In particular the higher developed industries (arms, automobile) will have the responsibility of a technology and knowledge transfer.

We won't go into speculations whether

there will be additional regional councils or neighbourhood assemblies etc. We think that the main decisions should be taken not as 'citizens' or 'members of assemblies', but as members of a new social (re-)production process. Debates and decisions concerning issues beyond the immediate reach of the essential industries and domestic units (global situation, movements of the class enemy, questions of larger infrastructure etc.) should evolve from the new relationships created through day-to-day cooperation – not in a separate sphere of representation.

**** How does the UK region differ from and relate to the wider global situation, referring back to the question of uneven development?*

It would be necessary to analyse similar empirical material for other regions of the globe, but it is fairly clear that within the UK/western European region, an insurrection would not face problems as challenging as in many other regions of the globe, such as an extended rural hinterland with only fragile ties to industrial or urban centres; more desperate poverty level on a mass scale which leaves less scope and time between appropriation of resources and takeover of means of production; warlord or mafia structures that are more integrated in the lives and reproduction of the proletariat; significant numbers of medium peasantry or small trader class that are less likely to identify with a working class revolution; lack of essential energy resources – just to mention a few. It is pretty certain that no insurrection in the UK region would take place if the entire globe wasn't in turmoil – in this sense the basic

connection between regional and worldwide revolution is obvious. At this point we can only envisage some general connections:

* Struggles around the globe are taking place in more and more similar industrial and social situations – meaning that the major influence of the global character of the working class will be through exchange of experience and inspirations, in particular through the channels of labour migration: migrant workers in the UK are in touch with their regions of origin and will be able to communicate experiences, in particular in the major cities. We have seen the influence of the so-called Arab Spring on migrant workers in the logistics sector in Italy or the impact of struggles in South America on the class confidence of Hispanic workers in the US. These are only glimpses of how the class will be able to communicate and learn from their global struggles.

* Seen from a regional point of view the lack of some basic goods in case of isolation is apparent, in particular when it comes to food supply, but probably also for certain raw materials for electronics manufacturing etc. Here the workers in the essential industries will have to restructure their supply chains 'politically', analysing the global struggles, emerging workers' organisations around the globe, which could help re-establish supply. Again, migrant workers will play a significant role in assessing the situation and establishing direct links.

* The latter point is not a one-way street: the UK and large parts of western Europe are said to be 'de-industrialised', but as

capitalist centres they still hold significant manufacturing capacities compared to many regions in the global south. The transfer of production capacities will be part of the expansion of the uprising: support of workers'/proletarian struggles and organisations in other regions through supply with excess means of production – relying on support of global transport workers. While the 'economic' side of such a transfer might be common sense (evening out of regional disparities, "we get rice, they get water pump spare parts"), the 'political' aspect is of importance and will potentially be more controversial: temporary productive efforts beyond the immediate local needs are necessary to support the success of uprisings elsewhere. The transfer of means of production (or rather the means to create them) will be one of the main weapons to break the stronghold of reactionary forces in less developed regions.

**g) The revolutionary organisation:
finally we propose that this
perspective on revolution tomorrow
does not leave us untouched today, it
asks for certain organisational
efforts in the here and now**

We can understand anyone who now raises doubts: "But how does this imaginary insurrection relate to the current situation in any way?! Will you go around in the streets, stopping random people, telling them where the next strategic power plant, army barracks or flour mill is located?!" We agree, at the current stage this text will mainly – hopefully! – contribute to a

discussion within the milieu about what a revolutionary moment might look like, or rather, what general material framework for a social transformation we are confronted with. We think that the basic propositions sketched out in this text inform our political focus today: do we perceive 'workers' or 'work' as yet another identity category? Can participation in parliamentary politics be a gradual step towards transformation or does it potentially distract proletarians from the real challenges they are facing? Is there a role for political workers' organisations, now and in the process of revolution, and if so, what does it consist of? We think there are certain continuities of workers' organisation, leading from here and now to a potential situation of insurgency – which doesn't mean that the insurgency or its success will necessarily depend on that organisation. It is us who ask the question of how we can contribute to this process – open for discussion and collaboration.

***** *Current Stage***

* Historical clarity: More important than empirical exercises such as outlined above are historical reflections on previous moments of insurrection and the relation between revolutionary workers and the state in particular. From the general strike in Seattle in 1919 [27], to the Spanish Civil War in 1936 [28], to Oaxaca in 2006 [29] to Rojava in 2016.

* Current understanding of class composition: Instead of lazy assumptions ('everything will be automated' or 'we are all precarious now') we need more precise analyses of certain processes within production, currently ideologised as 'full

automation’ or ‘immaterial labour’ or ‘general intellect’. This means an analysis of the current division and hierarchy of intellectual and manual labour in the essential industries (‘what does the common worker know?’), as well as analyses of actual forms of global supply chains, agro-industry etc., taking into account the question of potential working class control.

* Establishing roots amongst the workers in the essential industries, the ‘engineering sector’ and amongst the ‘poor’. We are talking about political focus here, not of exclusiveness! Within the day-to-day conflicts we should reconsider forms of ‘knowledge transfer’, such as e.g. the type of teaching-material of the old IWW that they used to explain ‘engineering knowledge’ of a certain industry to the common labourer employed in it.

* Referring back to the problem of uneven development: we have to try to understand different proletarian stages and segments of class composition and relate them to each other; e.g. the Revolutionary Black Workers in the US in the late 1960s/early 1970s managed to have roots in the poor areas (anti-police violence, racist school policies, sexual health), amongst students, within the major car factories, in the ‘community’ (hospitals, housing) – and tried to relate these to experiences of ‘Third World’ migrants in their area (‘Arabs in Detroit’). Given the general social situation they were able not merely to create ‘alliances’ between these different segments, but forms of organisation which encompassed the entirety of proletarian life.

* Creating networks of struggle-experienced workers: While supporting strikes and struggles actively we should also look out for workers who developed the desire and capacity to engage in political activities beyond the individual conflict – not as recruiting material, but as rooted comrades. Together we could already experiment with hinting at the necessity of a social takeover of the means of production in a more concrete way during day-to-day struggles. This will require a new and more concrete language.

* Keeping up to date with other forms of ‘cooperative’ efforts or experiences of self-management (from ‘workers’ control’ to ‘urban gardening’ to ‘transition towns’ to ‘alternative medicine gatherings’ to ‘critique of science’) and encourage engagement with the wider class struggle. Create experience exchange between ‘workers’ self-management’ and strikes [30], between care cooperatives and struggles against hospital closures.

* Documenting your efforts and experiences for others. We encourage local groups who feel affinity towards the prospect of insurrection and at the same time try to get rooted in their working class area (from workplaces to universities to groups around proletarian issues) to make their point of view and experiences debatable by others, without having to feel defensive about their particular organisation. Based on that exchange and discussion steps should be taken to enable more coordinated efforts.

*** *Revolutionary Stage*

* Developing within a network of workers – formed through various cycles of struggles and their common reflection – a clear program for the advanced moment of uprising: what are the central facilities? How to coordinate a ‘populist’ process of appropriation? How to address working class segments within army? This has to be formulated in realistic terms, convincing more through knowledge of industrial organisation and concrete contacts, rather than through rousing political statements.

* An organisation of workers will also have to play a role in putting forward a ‘class perspective’ against the tendency of ‘workers’ control’ after takeover of individual companies. The workforce of bigger industries might try to use their position for their own privilege; experienced workers militias might use their collective strength against a more common interest. An organisation of workers should be prepared to undermine possible regionalism (of naturally richer regions, more fertile soil, nicer beaches etc.)

* Against the background of more prolonged exchange and a wider political perspective a workers’ organisation should encourage the use of access machinery/production and patents/company-specific knowledge for support of workers struggle ‘abroad’; encourage extra-labour above the locally required levels if necessary; defend this position against ‘localist’ tendencies within the working class. This internationalist perspective cannot be enforced through a political program or as an armed force

(workers’ state), but through being rooted amongst and winning over of workers in the global supply chains and through facilitating direct exchange – pointing out the global interdependence.

After various longer discussions with workmates and neighbours about the question of ‘what is the character of the current system’ and ‘is a different society possible?’ we want to write a series in our workers’ paper, WorkersWildWest [31], in which we will also try to use some of the material and thoughts presented above. It will be a challenge to make things short and precise, we are curious to see if such articles contribute to our daily interactions.

We are also curious to hear your thoughts!

- *AngryWorkers*, September 2016

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Footnotes:

[1] AngryWorkers

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[2] Beverly Silver: Forces of Labor

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[12] Wildcat on the Peasant Question:

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[13] Trotsky on Combined Development:

<https://www.marxists.org/archive/trotsky/1930/hrr/>

[14] Example of Experiments with

Alternative Communication Networks:

<http://awmn.net/content.php?r=288-AWMN&s=c5217ebf903e411769286b4cef b4b80c>

[15] Can anyone say communism?

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[16] On the Popular Front in France, 1936:

<https://libcom.org/library/1914-1946-third-camp-internationalists-france-during-world-war-ii>

[17] On Chile, 1973: The Battle of Chile:

Part 1, The Insurrection of the Bourgeoisie

<https://youtu.be/b5GeEzBKGsQ>

[18] On Inventing the Future and Critique of Universal Basic Income:

In November 2015, Verso Books sent a copy of Inventing the Future by Nick Srnicek and Alex Williams to every member of the UK's Labour Shadow Cabinet, appealing to the helping hand of the state to accelerate the technological progress:

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“What follows in conclusion, then, is a program for the “first hundred days” of a successful proletarian revolution in key countries, and hopefully throughout the world in short order. It is intended to illustrate the potential for a rapid dismantling of “value” production in Marx's sense.”

[The Historical Moment That Produced Us](#)

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[31] WorkersWildWest:

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Subversion press

subversionpress.wordpress.com

