II

The Challenge for Communists Today

Much has changed in the world since 1848. However, contrary to what one might imagine, these changes have not rendered communism an outdated idea. Much like a glacier that, upon melting, reveals a creature preserved in the ice, the increasingly blatant realization that industrial progress does not level the social terrain — nor prepares the worker for revolutionary struggle — slowly dissolves some of the most enduring political beliefs of modernity. And as the illusion of progressivism fades, the need resurfaces to once more develop our own collective capacity to investigate, construct, and articulate the common interests of different proletarian struggles, since we now know that such convergence will not occur spontaneously.

Over the past two centuries, capitalism has not only become a more complex and multifaceted social system — proving capable of integrating the most intense social conflicts, economic crises, and natural catastrophes into its operations — but has also rooted itself in unprecedented ways into the fabric of the planet. At the same time, many of the social tendencies associated with industrialization and the expansion of capitalist sociability — those said to "equalize" the conditions of the global proletariat — have shown their limits. Instead of abolishing or replacing "pre-capitalist" social relations, capitalism has learned to reinvent them. Instead of bringing workers' experiences closer together, it has learned to manipulate these material and cultural differences. It invented new forms of slavery, reappropriated gendered violence and personal domination for the impersonal aims of capital, and turned even the planet's metabolic stability — on which it itself depends — into new frontiers for financial speculation. The expectation that "industrial progress" would prepare the ground for growing proletarian association and politicization has not been fulfilled.

The main effect of this divorce between industrial progress and proletarian modernization is visible on the margins of the capitalist system. Today, the peripheral countries of global capitalism —

formerly called the "third world" — no longer represent a "backward" or "undeveloped" phase of capitalism. On the contrary, it is precisely from the point of view of the periphery that we can most clearly see how the mixture of the advanced and the archaic, technological progress and political reaction, democratic institutions and dictatorship in the favelas, financialization and extractivism... all conspire to produce increasingly sophisticated forms of capital accumulation. One of capitalism's most astonishing social transformations has been its ability to increasingly unify the circuits of value and commodities without needing to unify workers' experiences and living conditions — indeed, the fragmentation of the world of labor has become a condition for maintaining its domination.

This new historical dynamic — in which social fractures and conflicts do not obstruct but rather fuel capitalism — runs counter to the analysis presented in the *Manifesto*. This does not mean that, in 1848 Europe, there were no valid reasons for the conclusions drawn there. What hindsight reveals as problematic is treating that specific historical situation as if it pointed to a universal tendency that revolutionary movements everywhere could count on strategically.

Moreover, faith in this supposed tendency led many communists to abandon their primary task. Instead of investigating all the concrete struggles moving against capitalism to identify their points of convergence, many communist currents focused only on those struggles that appeared to carry the "progressive germ" of capital itself, focusing on the organization of wage-labor assuming they would be capable of transforming industrial and cultural progress into weapons against capitalists. This excluded a vast political tradition of different peoples — a diversity of struggles that, throughout capitalism's history, have resisted the transformation of people and communities into waged labor — as well as struggles that occur beneath the surface of the formal workplace: in the sphere of social reproduction, care, domestic labor, etc. Even when such struggles were acknowledged, the analysis in the *Manifesto* was often used as a metric to determine which of these conflicts should be prioritized in strategic considerations. In other words, instead of identifying common interests from the real diversity of proletarian struggle, communists increasingly judged which struggles counted as real and important based on a few pre-identified traits presumed to represent capitalism's inherent revolutionary tendencies.

If contemporary capitalist transformations render obsolete any hope that capital might prepare the ground for its own supersession, this does not mean the communist horizon has been lost. On the contrary: it is precisely now — as the fantasy of capital's self-sundering loses its historical grounding — that the *Manifesto*'s definition of a communist becomes more comprehensible and relevant. More than that, only in this context can the practical content specific to communism really be formulated, once we abandon the illusion that the convergence and articulation of anti-capitalist struggles could be delegated to capitalism itself. Yet this belief is difficult to let go of, and it often reappears in various forms in the strategic and theoretical horizon of revolutionaries.

It is not our goal to critique this or that radical political current. As we have seen, communists are not supposed to offer an alternative revolutionary theory that competes with others, nor to immediately disqualify any strategic vision arising from contemporary political struggles. What interests us is to point out how a belief in a spontaneous process of convergence can remain active even in radical political orientations that explicitly seek to respond to the recent transformations of capitalism. In its raw form, this belief delegates to the social world the task of unifying the many fronts of resistance against it — but this can take different shapes, producing entirely different political visions.

For instance, one way to preserve this belief is to accept that contemporary capitalism does not prepare the working class to become an international revolutionary force, but to claim instead that another quality — shared across struggles — still exists and can be relied on to ensure convergence. One way to assert this is by appealing to abstract ideas about the essence of political processes and social dissatisfaction. If all political struggle is ultimately a demand raised by a portion of the population in response to something lacking, and if what people lack — such as better living conditions — only exists for them as ideas, words, or images, then political unity could be forged through language and symbols. Here, the spontaneous convergence of struggles is underwritten by the popularity of shared demands: “the people” would be a political subject formed by various groups whose demands find unity through a leader, a narrative, or a slogan capable of aggregating them. This argument abandons the expectation that capitalism will unify workers’ experiences, but replaces it with the belief that the very nature of political demands makes them converge eventually

under a broad enough discourse — no need for actual organizing, just the skill to stitch these political demands into a coherent political vision.

The same logic can be followed to arrive at the opposite conclusion. One could argue that the working class as a revolutionary subject is in crisis, and that broad agendas and coalitions are part of the problem — a control mechanism that traps popular revolt in the state and its electoral processes. Referring to another abstract political philosophy, one might then argue that humans always need to cooperate and invent ways to survive collectively. This innate creative power would be the source both of rebellion and of spontaneous convergence: the people, once freed from capitalism and the state, would naturally unite and cooperate. Though different from the previous argument, this line also assumes a hidden homogenizing force, our social creativity, that will eventually lay the groundwork for political unity — without conscious effort.

If the two views above rely on philosophical generalizations about humanity to preserve the belief in convergence, there's a third approach that avoids abstraction: a political view that, while recognizing the crisis of progressivism, still bets on the unifying power of capitalism's own crisis. It accepts that capital no longer organizes workers, but asserts that this merely relocates the universalist potential of labor. Instead of seeing it in workers' struggles for better jobs or higher wages, this view locates it in struggles against work — protests with impossible demands, wildcat strikes, spontaneous uprisings — which express a deep rejection of the deadly spiral of labor and capital. These seemingly isolated acts would signal a shared refusal of the system, connecting them to a universal anti-systemic horizon. This line of thought seeks to extend the *Manifesto*'s original thesis, seeing a continuity between capitalist modernization and its current collapse: capitalism still prepares its own downfall — not by absorbing workers into a homogenizing logic, but by expelling more and more people, forming a global mass with nothing left to lose.

Another possible response to capitalism's crisis argues that the promise of social development tied to formal employment was always historically narrow. It finds the basis for radical unity in the global archive of the subaltern: enslaved Black people, survivors of Indigenous genocide, women under patriarchy, and all those who have lived — since the origins of capitalism — on the margins of formal labor and its "civilizational" promise. Trusting the shared potential of excluded peoples'

resistance, this perspective sees a common interest in the subversive traditions made invisible by capitalist modernity — a superposition of interests among those subjugated, exterminated, and oppressed to make European modernization possible. Like the previous position, it claims that the basis for a global radical alliance will come from outside formal labor and traditional mediations (parties, unions, etc.). But here, it's not only about disruptive acts: these forces have their own traditions, social structures, and ways of fighting, and these point to a shared horizon of post-capitalist life.

A final way to preserve the belief in spontaneous convergence — oddly similar to the *Manifesto*'s original argument — relies on the existence of a scientifically proven global climate crisis to unify the proletariat's common interests. Though it replaces the *Manifesto*'s focus on labor with a denunciation of planetary destruction, both invoke scientific evidence (political economy in one case, climate science in the other) as the shortcut from fragmented struggles to coordinated international front. Even strands of environmentalism hostile to Marxism often task science with revealing structural facts about capitalism and making visible the common stakes of global political action. A global climate crisis becomes a call for a global struggle, even recuperating class struggle logic, since its effects are distributed unequally along lines of class, race, and gender. Even the vanguardist role once assigned to communists appears again, now inhabited by climate scientists and academics — those with the "clear understanding" needed to lead us forward.

These arguments are rough sketches of possible ways to respond to the current crisis. No one likely identifies fully with any of them. But they show how easy, and common, it is to defer reckoning with the fact that we cannot rely on any structural tendency of capitalism — or of its crisis — to ensure the proliferation, articulation, or accumulation of proletarian struggles. The fragmentation of the left will not be resolved through a short-cut. It falls to all of us to stitch together this patchwork however we can.

Ironically, the existence of these conflicting strategies is itself an index of a paradoxical multiplicity — all interpretations opposing each other, yet all betting on a common shortcut to bridge the particular and the general. As noted earlier, our aim is not to critique the achievements or theoretical rigor of these propositions. Every movement that produces real political gains carries a

truth we must take seriously. Moreover, movements who think strategically in terms of such a spontaneous convergence nevertheless operate in the real world, which is not structured in that way. This means that, in practice, they likely already engage in the work of political "stitching", even if these practices are obscured by their professed belief on a converging horizon.

Still, taken together, these visions reveal a landscape as fragmented as contemporary capitalist society itself. In theory, each imagines itself as a new global vision for struggle. But in practice, they confirm that "the real relations arising from an existing class struggle" — that is, today's various proletarian fronts — produce different, sometimes antagonistic conceptions of our social totality. Thus, there is no other starting point for communist practice today than to begin from this multiplicity — from this "historical movement going on before our eyes" — and to reflect on what it means to construct, under present conditions, the perspective of the proletarian movement as a whole.