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european network for alternative thinking and political dialogue

eBook

commons issue #1

Socialisation and Commons in Europe

Constructing an Alternative Project

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Constructing an Alternative Project

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Contents

Introduction
Socialisation and Commons in Europe
Constructing an Alternative Project

Chantal Delmas

This transform! eBook is a reiteration of the essential discussions held during a European seminar organised by transform!, the Association pour l'Autogestion, the Workers' Control Network, Espaces Marx, Copernic, Omos under the theme *Socialisation and Commons in Europe: How to Construct an Alternative Project*.

The seminar brought together around 50 actors and researchers from the social and political movement from nine different countries. Among other things, its aim was to bring into the dialogue different experiences of the commons, cooperatives and public services and start creating a coherent narrative in order to decipher what these different experiences can contribute to constructing an alternative project.

A number of issues were debated:

- What relations need to exist between the struggles and the institutions to make these new experiences permanent?
- What can we change here and now by using what already exists?
- What is the public-private link and how does it relate to the commons?
- Do state-owned entities currently act in the interests of the people or of money?
- How does the state relate to constructing commons based on its politics?
- Commons institutions do not exist; the right of ownership alone is legally valid in our society. How can we change this situation that is paralysing the dynamism, actions and creations of the peoples involved in struggles?

Through this eBook, we will try to answer some of these questions by sharing and analysing concrete experiences and will then look at the

initial reflections of the researchers on these issues.

This eBook is the first in a series on this issue, in which *transform! europe* will look in greater depth at the challenges for an alternative project – through European seminars and world social forums, as it is closely involved with the networks addressing these issues.

Part 1
Practice

Cooperativism and Self-management in Italy

Roberto Musacchio

The discussion and the movement underway around the issue of the commons – common goods is the term used in Italy – benefits from knowing something of its prehistory. This is particularly true for our country. Indeed, if in Italy, too, the organisational model of the left was based on the primacy of the party and of politics, it is no less true that there was a wide array of experience in cooperativism, involvement in associations, and volunteering, stretching across almost three centuries, from the 19th century to today. Although the model of the German labour movement structured on state forms – and not the cooperativist model of the earlier labour movement – prevailed in Italy, the social practices based on conscientisation and the organising of the protagonists in Italy have been and are very vast.

There are various major factors in this development. First, the heritage of the city states, of the crafts and guilds that created an extraordinary Renaissance after the feudal epoch and which, in the difficult process of building a unified state, survives today, animating experiences of artisanal work through cooperatives and of civic localism based on the principle of mutualism. Then there is the religious factor originating in the medieval confraternities, which survives today mainly through the kind of democratic Catholicism that Don Milani did so much to develop. Then, unquestionably, there is Gramsci who indicated a path for a party that is inside society, that lives the life of the subjects to whom it relates and promotes their self-organisation and the improvement of their conditions of existence. Togliatti's new mass party, however, draws a great deal on this Gramscian inspiration, although it is built on its own primacy and that of political action. It is no coincidence then that it was a party with millions of members that contributed to the creation and sustenance of very many forms of social organisation that operated in all social sectors and all spheres of life. Mass organisations were created in a wide variety of forms and in all spheres – the economy, services, culture, sports, and around issues of gender, peace, youth, and environmentalism.

These experiences, naturally, involved different historic phases ever since their ancient origins. Moreover, there is a legislative background that in some cases is situated in a still older history, with some legal definitions of common goods based on Roman law, for example 'usi civici', which are a very old form of access to common goods such as those arising from natural and civil contexts.

In terms of the nexus between common goods and labour, the creation of alternative forms of labour occupies an important place in the history of Italian cooperativism and its historical precedents of artisanal labour, besides offering an alternative approach to industrialisation. Italy's cooperative movement has involved, and still involves, millions of people in many spheres – production, distribution, housing, and services. If its regression is obvious to all and it is increasingly becoming just another part of market society, we still cannot erase its existence nor refrain from reflecting on its trajectories and on what it might yet be able to express. Indeed, still today, and particularly in new areas, such as in services of a social character, there are important experiences with great subjective value.

Cooperativism was originally conceived as an emancipation of labour, as a form of organisation that would result in more justice and a different way of producing, and so we have to ask why it was defeated.

In recent decades, however, new forms have grown. As mentioned, there has been a socially-oriented cooperativism, based specifically on issues such as democratic psychiatry and the struggle against discrimination and with the phenomenon of social centres that have interwoven the reappropriation of spaces, cultural practices, and promoted forms of self-income. In terms of self-income, the practice of 'co-working' has emerged. The transition to an increasingly multi-ethnic society has engendered multiple forms of intervention to support integration, for example in teaching the Italian language and in the area of schools more generally with a great deal of voluntary

activity in schools and beyond, originating from various worlds – that of the left, youth, Catholicism, and other spheres.

Confronting crisis and de-industrialisation, we have had a substantial legislative history going back to the 1970s. This involves the so-called Marcora Law, called after the minister who introduced it, which has allowed a significant number of workers to take over their own factories during the crisis and manage them in a cooperative form. A law full of limits and compromises, to be sure, but it now applies to about 1,500 workers. Then, in the wake of what has happened particularly in Latin America, we have the first examples of salvaged and self-managed factories that point to a radical change of the overall paradigm – of the mode of working, producing, relating to the region, and of emancipation from the institutions themselves. Italy's is thus a long and complex history, which deserves to be reconstructed in concert with the real protagonists of these experiences and requires a careful assessment of the mistakes, defeats, and potential.

Only today, finally, is a clear connection being drawn between self-management and the idea of common goods, which has in part been made possible by the unhappy outcome of the older experiences. But it is all the more important to pose the problem of how this new phase can have the mass dimension that the older experiences had. There is truly much work ahead of us.

-- Translated by Eric Canepa and originally published in the transform! yearbook 2016 --

Self-management as an antagonistic force: Commons-based responses to the Greek structural adjustment

Theodoros Karyotis

It is evident today that the Greek population is experiencing an unprecedented attack on its social, economic and political rights. Using the sovereign debt crisis as an excuse, a series of neoliberal governments have followed the prescriptions of the troika to promote the dismantling of the public health and education systems, to push down wages and pensions, to rob the majority of the population of the little they had through debt and taxation, and, most importantly, to sell off everything that constituted the public wealth of the people to multinational corporations. This is not the first case of a structural adjustment that damages the lives of millions; it is, however, the first violent adjustment to take place in the Southern European periphery.

The Greek parliamentary left has so far been unable to slow down this offensive, in part due to the strategy of the powerful to divide and rule by setting every social group against each other through powerful propaganda, and in part because a new reality renders our traditional means of struggle obsolete: the reality that social consensus is no longer necessary for the exercise of power, since a permanent state of exception makes every extreme measure justifiable and allows the state to systematically repress, criminalise, manipulate and lie. The victims of such repression are systematically presented as perpetrators.

Reactions on the part of the population to this rapid disappearance of all that was familiar and normative in our country range from reactionary, chauvinist and violent postures, such as the rise of the neo-Nazi Golden Dawn, to resignation and individualist efforts to save oneself, whatever the cost. But fortunately, we are also witnessing an unprecedented level of activity and creativity within social movements. There is widespread realisation that the oppressed social strata can no longer merely entrust their salvation to representational

structures or institutions such as trade unions and political parties, but that constant grassroots involvement and political participation is imperative.

Greece is probably a peculiar case within Europe in that the state never had a positive role of economic redistribution and the welfare mechanisms were rudimentary even when they existed in the 'good days' before the crisis severely hit. This is probably why, within social movements, there are presently many voices that are not only anti-austerity or anti-neoliberal, but envision a whole new path that leads us away from state-sponsored capitalism.

What follows is the presentation of three movements which revolve around the following core values: *resistance, horizontality, participation, solidarity* and *defence of the commons* through practices that challenge the dominant discourse and promote popular education and self-initiative.

When the sale of Thessaloniki's water company was announced in 2011 as part of the Troika's conditions, citizens promoting direct democracy and cooperativism met with the water workers' trade union in the occupied squares of the Greek '*indignados*'. There, they drew up a proposal for a viable alternative to both corporate privatisation and state administration of water services. They formed a new movement called *Initiative 136*, based on the simple premise that if 136 euros were provided by each household in the city, the citizens could raise the amount needed to buy the water company, protect it from corporate greed and manage it through local cooperatives in a non-profit manner, thus ensuring democratic participation, social justice and access to this vital good for everyone. After securing funding from cooperative banks, Initiative 136 presented its bid in the public tender for the privatisation of the water company. Its bid was rejected by the institution carrying out the privatisation with no sufficient justification, and so Initiative 136 started a legal battle to overturn this decision, parallel to the process of organising the community and applying political pressure against privatisation.

In May 2014, Initiative 136 was one of the main promoters of a grassroots referendum where 98% of voters rejected water privatisation. Massive popular opposition and a Supreme Court decision have since obliged the government to freeze the privatisation process. This, however, is only a partial victory; Initiative 136 continues fighting to make social control of water a reality.

Another recent example is the occupation, and subsequent operation under workers' self-management, of the Vio.Me. construction materials factory in Thessaloniki. In February 2013, two years after employers abandoned the factory, the 40 members of the Vio.Me. workers' union, organised through assembly and horizontal decision-making and with the support of a wide solidarity movement, restarted production in the occupied factory. At the same time, they switched production towards environmentally-friendly cleaning products that are distributed through solidarity channels, especially the structures of the booming social and solidarity economy that is rapidly growing around Greece. The workers of Vio.Me face the hostility of the Greek state, which refuses to create a legal framework that allows the normal operation of the factory and coordinates with the ex-owners against this new endeavour. But there is also resistance from a large sector of the communist left, which accuses the workers of aiming to become 'small capitalists'. According to the traditional left's mode of thinking, whatever is not state-owned is private: society cannot have any self-determined and independent existence outside the dominant institutions of the state and the market.

Despite such a hostile environment, Vio.Me has had significant success in sustaining the three workers' families. It has created a considerable international solidarity movement. In April 2014, after overcoming several legal and bureaucratic hurdles, the workers formed a cooperative, based on the very principles that had been guiding their endeavour since the beginning: collective decision-making through the workers' assembly, collective ownership of the means of production, and non-profit operation, as any surpluses will be given to the wider community.

The third movement I would like to mention here is *Thessaloniki's social solidarity clinic*. It is one of the oldest and biggest in a network of clinics around Greece that are run by volunteer health professionals. They are providing free healthcare services to a target population of approximately three million Greeks and immigrants who have no social security coverage at present. They operate remarkably efficiently through horizontal decision-making, they finance their activities only through individual donations, barring companies and governmental institutions, and they try to engage the community and the patients themselves in their processes of self-management. At the same time, they are part of a wider movement in Greece that demands universal healthcare by engaging in direct action, applying political pressure and trying to create public awareness. At great personal risk, solidarity clinic volunteers who work as physicians and nurses in the public health system, honour their oath by 'smuggling' uninsured patients who need treatment or examinations that the solidarity clinic cannot provide into public hospitals.

At the beginning of this article I wrote that the political, economic and social rights of the Greek population are under attack, but what I have presented here has not been about big crowds protesting and demanding that their rights be respected. Rather, I chose to present examples where groups of people organised from below and just tried to take back what had been robbed from them: water, healthcare, livelihood. They have fallen out of trust with political and governmental institutions. They envision a different world and, at the same time, they create the instruments to move towards it – new instruments that are autonomous from existing structures of power, that work outside of the spaces of representational democracy which are so consistently co-opted, undermined or appeased by the traditional holders of power.

These movements seek not only to create new spaces of political participation and debate, but to operate on a different set of principles: solidarity, cooperation, self-management, participation, community

involvement and defence of the commons. In short: they organise prefigurative arrangements of political governance from below rather than wait for social or economic rights to be granted by an omnipotent instance of power.

This is not to say that social movements and organisations should stop demanding the enforcement of negotiated rights. Rather, we have to be aware of the limits of the rights discourse and the individualisation it produces in front of instances of power, and be ready to overcome it when it helps perpetuate asymmetrical power relations by legitimating the domination of those who 'grant' rights over those who 'claim' them. We have already seen how Thessaloniki's social solidarity clinic is a defender of universal healthcare as a right, but also a promoter of community healthcare as a commons. Self-managed initiatives do not reject the idea of rights altogether, but they renegotiate those rights within the context of the community and they challenge the role of the state as an enforcer and guarantor of those rights, promoting instead the collective empowerment of the rights holders themselves.

Capitalism is going through a structural crisis. It has reached its energetic, environmental and social limits. Can the practices of commoning, of solidarity, of the gift and sharing economy, through their questioning of capitalism's core values – private property, methodological individualism, political representation – offer us a brief glimpse of a new economic and political configuration? Or do we run the chance of offering capitalism a way out of its problems by helping alleviate the social reproduction crisis that neoliberal policies have created?

To get out of its dead-end, capitalism is trying to get what Massimo DeAngelis calls "a commons fix": it tries to utilise commons-based alternatives, especially solidarity structures and cooperatives, as a cheap and easy way to provide welfare support, healthcare, income, protection from unemployment, etc. Through a discursive shift from the Thatcherite "There is no such thing as society." to the official U.K. state policy of 'the big society', the people are left to fend for

themselves while the state pulls the welfare rug from under their feet. This is why the creation of 'tame' and co-optable versions of commons practices (disguised as 'social entrepreneurship', NGOs, solidarity networks, etc.) is now an institutionally sanctioned practice in a hyper-neoliberal European Union in crisis: they are providing cheap alternatives to the rapidly privatised and dismantled public welfare system for the reproduction of the workforce and preservation of social peace.

In this light, merely building commons alternatives is hardly enough from the point of view of social emancipation. What is needed is an articulation of radical and dynamic commons endeavours that seek not to complement state and capital, but to foreshadow their substitution with a new set of social practices and institutions that can guarantee a future for the next generations. While capitalism will keep on trying to disrupt, co-opt and utilise the flow of social cooperation, commons initiatives have to be articulated in a diverse and militant constitutive process that will extend commons practices and institutions to ever more areas of social life, thus leaving gradually less and less of people's lives in the hands of the state and the market.

In this respect, the existing experiments in social appropriation and self-management of workplaces, public utilities and services around Europe can light the way.

Contemporary commoning: A diverse economies perspective

Peter North[1]

Processes of 'working in common' are more widespread than might be thought in more pessimistic analyses of processes of neoliberalisation, privatisation and the destruction of the planet. In this paper I examine examples of 'commoning' as active processes whereby subaltern organisations and groups of people identify and take control of a variety of resources and manage them in common, i.e. democratically and collectively, not privately or in an exploitative manner. I argue that what we call 'commoning' needs to be guided by how those engaged in this process want to live well, by the resources they have at hand, and by the limits of the planet to absorb wastes.

This paper is inspired by the work of cultural economic geographers such as JK Gibson-Graham (2006a,b) who argue that totalising conceptions of one monolithic exploitative 'Capitalism' creates a monster that we feel inadequate to confront such that many of us can more easily envisage the end of the world as a result of the climate crisis than the end of capitalism. To counter this, Gibson-Graham argue for a process of resubjectification, for a proactive project of thinking through the diversity of ways in which people make ethical choices about how to interact with each other to make a living within the limits of the planet to sustain those choices, irrespective of formal conceptions of rational profit maximisation as the driver of economic decision-making. Can we identify social and solidaristic economic practices that put meeting human need, thinking about how we want to live with others and to what end, and how we might live sustainability before conceptions of profitability, efficiency and how to engage with global economic circuits of production? We need to create new visions of how we might live, and engage in the patient work of building and creating alternatives through our economic

[1] Thanks to Molly Scott Cato, Dario Azellini, Kathy Gibson and Alan Southern, amongst others, for the discussions in many places, but especially in Liverpool, Buenos Aires and Paris, that have inspired this thought piece.

practices, seeing problems not as insurmountable barriers, but as issues to grapple with. We need to think more about 'how', and suggest that 'not yet' does not mean 'never' (Gibson-Graham 2006a). We need to work more on developing our power to act, and focus less on what constrains us, a focus that can too easily lead to passivity and powerlessness or to an assumption that unless commoning practices challenge some fundamental bedrock of capitalism, they are ephemera, perhaps undertaken by illegitimately privileged middle class actors, that can *never* amount to a realistic social change strategy, doomed to reinforce existing inequalities.

Gibson-Graham and their collaborators argue for the development of an 'economic ethics for the Anthropocene': that period in geological time that we currently inhabit, one where humans have changed the physical nature of the planet to such an extent that the atmosphere is heating and vital ecosystems are being depleted to such a degree that the viability of humanity in high numbers across large swathes of the planet's surface is under threat. How can we live, work, use land and create dignified, vibrant and convivial livelihoods for ourselves in ways that do not destroy the capacity of the planet to maintain life? In developing this, we need to recognise that although in making livelihoods individuals are subject to structural forces and the action of Keynes' animal spirits beyond their control, economies are also produced and performed through ethical decisions by millions of actors making consumption and production choices. To produce and perform an economic ethics for the Anthropocene, we need to create post capitalist economic subjects who consciously make decisions on how we can produce what we need, distribute surpluses and maintain a commons in ways that respect the rights of other humans and non-humans. In doing this, we need to ask ourselves:

- How do we survive well?
- How shall we produce what we need?
- What will we do with any surplus?
- How shall we share and encounter others?
- What do we consume?
- How do we create a world worth living in, and invest in the future?

In this spirit, I examine commoning money and enterprises.

Commoning Money

How can money can be 'commoned', i.e. changed from something 'out there', created by banks and governments perhaps from or as a fiat proxy of natural resources like gold, to something that is created and used by subaltern groups to facilitate bringing the economy into democratic, common ownership and control (North 2007)? Can we identify examples of the common ownership of capital that are seen as multiple and socially constructed, appropriate and useful at some times and places, not others, rather than being universal, state sanctioned and enforced?

Elsewhere I have identified a range of examples of the communing of capital in the form of alternative, grassroots-created forms of currencies: networks based primarily on exchange using community-created currencies that are not convertible with state sanctioned money, for example Local Exchange Trading (or LETS) schemes; systems of exchange based explicitly on time such as time banks or Ithaca Hours; and community-created paper-based exchange systems relying on reserve currencies for their credibility and convertible with them (the most well-known being the Transition currencies [see North 2010] or the *Chiemgauer* – [see North and Weber 2013]). Furthermore, I also provide an account of the possibilities and limits of the role of alternative, grassroots-generated finance in building convivial solidarity economies through which environmentally-minded, anti-globalisation and anti-capitalist activists create models of community-generated and managed money as a critique of globalised capitalism. This money, activists hope, prefigures and helps finance the creation of the sort of sustainable, convivial, egalitarian commons-based economy in which more goods and services are produced locally and for use, not exchange – a factor that activists normatively value and which they would like to see existing in more robust forms in the future. For example: an area is rich in wood but produces no furniture, which is instead imported from places with low labour and environmental standards with the concomitant emissions of avoidable

greenhouse gasses. Can local currencies, or local banks and communities help develop new locally-owned and managed enterprises that meet local needs where none existed before? Or is money to be left as one of the prime enforcers of capitalist discipline, to be produced by private banks and lent out at interest as one of the fundamental drivers of unsustainable growth?

Commoning profit, work and enterprises

How profit should be generated, shared and used in the first place is also a key element of commoning. For some time, working people have become subjected to precarious working conditions in increasingly precarious and deskilled employment. This has been taking place in a world where restructuring manufacturing has created a workshop for the world in Eastern Asia with the result that, in the global North, the industrial working class is largely surplus to requirements. Even formerly secure groups like university graduates can be part of the new 'precariat'. Commoning work in this context means the emancipation of labour from wage slavery and its replacement with democratic control over the labour and production process in a commons of work-sharing.

Across Latin America, activists have shown that 'another production is possible' by developing a sector of horizontally self-managed enterprises through what are called processes of *auto-gestion. Auto-gestion* literally means self-management, but has a deeper meaning which nods more towards collective self-generation or autonomous creation. The UK has a similar tradition of 'worker-managed firms' which is part of the wider co-operative movement. In co-operatively managed workplaces, those who carry out the various productive tasks take the important decisions about everyday working conditions in common. This can mean prosaic decisions about what clothes can or cannot be worn, when lunch and refreshment breaks should be taken, what music should be played or what decoration should adorn the workplace, how people should be spoken to, as well as higher level decisions about strategy and finance. What shall we produce? How hard shall we work? How much will we sell it for? How will we

organise our enterprise? Collectively, with everyone taking every decision (Latin Americans would say horizontally), or with a supervisor or management committee elected to take those decisions? Will we make a profit, and if so, what will we do with it? What will we forgo in favour of future investment? How do we pass on this investment to future generations? How do we create and maintain that which we need to share in common: clean environments, an infrastructure, a socially cohesive society?

Enterprises run collectively or co-operatively can arise in a number of different ways and this can have important implications for their future trajectory. In the UK during the 1970s, some 200 enterprises were occupied by their workers (Coates 2003, Sherry, 2010:119-128). More recently in the global South, workers have responded to restructuring by occupying and running 130 recovered enterprises themselves (Lavaca Collective, 2004; Ness and Azzellini, 2011; Ruggeri, 2013). Sometimes, as in the case of most of the recovered factories of Latin America and with most of the 'phoenix' co-operatives in the UK in the 1970s, formally profitable capitalist firms become bankrupt, giving employees the opportunity to acquire their assets. After their liberation, they still faced the same difficult market conditions that had caused the failure of the capitalist firm and many struggled to become successful co-operative businesses, not least through a failure to access necessary finance capital in difficult economic circumstances and the inexperience of the workers in terms of managing the enterprise.

Phoenix, endowed and ideological co-operatives are all examples of workers coming together to gain control of their working life in common. Co-operators take decisions collectively about how they wish to work, how much profit they will make, and what they will do with it. Their experience counters what the left has often discounted as what one set of socialists in the 1970s condemned as "misguided attempts to find ways to employ ourselves rather than overthrowing the oppressive system itself" (see the proposals from Forbundet Kommunist [1979] and Albury's [1979] scathing reply). A contemporary

version of this argument comes from the British Marxist newspaper *Socialist Worker*: Molineux (1994) argued that it is not possible under capitalism to create permanent havens of alternative ways of living.

> "It could not be done by Robert Owen and the utopian socialists of the 19th Century. It could not be done by the hippy communes in the 60s or by workers' cooperatives in the 70s. ... Such alternative communities are never a practicable option for a large majority of working class people, and even for the minority who join them they are seldom viable in the long term. The pressures of the capitalist economy are too strong, too pervasive and too insidious to be resisted indefinitely this way"

I would cite Marx and Engels against this pessimistic reading. Marx and Engels lauded the utopian Robert Owen and the wider co-operative movement

> "as one of the great transforming forces of the present society based on class antagonisms. Its great merit is to practically show, that the present pauperising and despotic system of the subordination of labour to capital can be superseded by the republican and beneficent system of the association of free and equal producers."

Perhaps an openness to diverse examples of commoning is seen as an incomplete process within a diverse economies conception of the economic which looks for openness and refuses to presume closure might open up a wider terrain of engagement with processes through which more elements of the economy can be bought under common, democratic and public ownership as alternatives to either private or centralised state control. 'Money' is not always just 'capital', work is not always wage slavery, profit is not automatically reserved for the entrepreneur but can be a common treasury to be distributed, markets can be driven by ethical considerations as well as by profit and loss, and 'entrepreneurs' – people who put the factors of production together in new ways – are not only capitalists. Focusing on ways we can widen spaces for economic democracy and developing our power to act in the here and now as we wish to may mean that we do not have to either wait for a fundamental transition of society in total (perhaps always a modernist aporia) or accept closure and domination under pre-ascribed metanarratives of capitalism. This is important as protests in squares from Wall Street to the *Plaça Catalunya* have projected arguments that something is seriously wrong with neoliberal

capitalism into the world's consciousness. As Žižek put it in a speech to Occupy Wall Street in 2011:

> "Carnivals come cheap – the true test of their worth is what remains the day after, how our normal daily life will be changed. The protesters should fall in love with hard and patient work – they are the beginning, not the end. Their basic message is: the taboo is broken; we do not live in the best possible world; we are allowed, obliged even, to think about alternatives."2

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The Story of RiMaflow
A factory reclaimed by its workers in Milan

Gigi Malabarba

When our factory supplying motor vehicle components closed down in 2012 and relocated to Poland, we did not allow ourselves to be defeated. A group of workers occupied the factory, intending to get production going again through self-management.

We were prevented from getting production underway immediately due to a union agreement that required the factory machines to be removed before the final remaining eighty workers could be given their redundancy pay. In any case, our objective is and still remains a conversion to greener production practices, either because of the objective impossibility of remaining in the automobile sector, or due to our choice to move away from productivism.

We rejected the idea of investing all of our personal assets into purchasing machines (the traditional cooperative model), relying instead on reclaiming some of the fixed capital, i.e. the hangars and 30 thousand square metres of land. We consider this to be our social compensation for redundancy.
We already consider it a victory to have occupied it for 20 months, given the fact that we have already saved around 800 thousand euros in rent.

We have a variety of activities underway: a second-hand market, a market and logistics for the agricultural sector, the self-production of food, accommodation, a restaurant, a gymnasium, classes, cultural events, craft workshops and a facility for recycling electronic appliances and devices. We have called all of this *Cittadella dell'altraeconomia* (Alternative Economy Citadel), which has hired around a hundred unemployed people on top of the 20 members who make up the cooperative. These activities have enabled us to build up the initial investment capital needed to revive industrial production in the recycling and reuse industry. This will take the form of either the

recovery of raw materials from electronic appliances and devices (the medium- to long-term plan), or, more probably, timber salvage (the short-term project currently in progress).

We are dealing with Unicredit, one of the biggest banks in Italy, to settle our legal position concerning the ownership of the land. We knew that Unicredit would have trouble selling or renting out land in an industrial zone as it is less subject to real-estate speculation. We are aiming to obtain a free licence to use the land (at least temporarily), banking on the balance of power that has been created by the political and social impact of this initiative – it has been recognised even in fairly distant political spheres.

We, alongside the *Communia* network (born of *RiMaflow*'s experience) have defined our approach as "contentious self-management". This is because it is impossible to ensure the success of an "off-market" project *except* for when it is carried out within a supportive social network in which exchange is based at least partially on different criteria to those of the Market, and especially within the context of more general social and class conflict.

How can we bring about legislation allowing us to use the land without the social power relations needed to impose it? How can we fight the risk of self-exploitation – into which much of the cooperative system fell years ago, by contributing to the destruction of workers' rights through downward competition – if we do not have a strong and contentious political leadership?

In our opinion, any network of solidarity or common goods *that wishes to differentiate itself from a private or state-run one* must be considered a form of resistance in the context of class struggle, a valuable lesson in running an alternative society – so, nothing is simple.
It is true that there is a lot more scope for this kind of thing in countries with weak governments (or no government, such as in Argentina in 2001-2002) or in those with progressive governments (such as

Venezuela or Bolivia). There is much less room for manoeuvre with the current power balance that exists in European countries – at least for the present moment.
But this crisis is providing an opportunity to go down the route of reclaiming land and we are currently working to provide a sounder legal framework for the free use licence, which we have not yet obtained but without which we cannot carry out any regular production activity, as well as to ensure that our workers have rights.

Our main objective is to extend social reclamation experiments and to coordinate them, both within themselves and with networks, in order to defend the commons.

The NHS in the UK: The Struggle over Health in Common

Alan Tuckman

This article develops the links between the nature and change in the provision of public health care in the UK through the National Health Service (NHS), protest about the resources allocated by the state to this provision, and the protests concerning hospital cuts and closures in the 1970s and 1980s that involved a lengthy work-in at the Elizabeth Anderson Hospital (EGA) for Women in London which became a beacon for other similar protests in the years that followed. Central is the founding ethos of the NHS, which has become the root of a counter hegemony to neo-liberalism, the creation of a common in the objective of universal health provision which is free at the point of need.

The NHS was established in the UK in 1948 as part of wide-ranging measures (in welfare and state education as well as health care) creating the 'welfare state' – linked to Keynesian economic management – as the foundation of a post-war political consensus. While the state provided health and education free at the point of need, funded through taxation or compulsory national insurance payments from employees and employers, there remained a relatively small private sector provision in health and education. Importantly, the NHS also became a major customer for private pharmaceutical companies through its enormous drug budget. The early introduction of patient payment for prescription drugs, as well as dental care and spectacles, justified by the unexpectedly high cost of the new services, led to the resignation of key Government Minsters, including Harold Wilson, who was to become a 'modernising' Labour Prime Minster in the 1960s and 1970s. On the other hand, alongside the huge running cost of the health service, the stock of hospitals drawn in – previously largely charitable, contributory, and under poor law provision – was increasingly antiquated and unsuitable for modern medical needs.

In the 1960s government plans were formulated, supported by both

Labour and Conservatives and following 'modernist' orthodoxy of the period, which proposed the centralisation of hospital services into district general hospitals. These were intended to provide comprehensive care for a designated geographical/administrative area while closing the remaining small scale provision, which was often community based. By the time these district hospitals began to be opened in the early 1970s, not only was there a considerable overspend but this was at the time when the UK, as well as the global economy, was increasingly falling into economic crisis.

The labour movement in the UK had strengthened during the post-war period of full employment with an emergent, and often militant, workplace organisation. While one of the bedrocks of the consensus was the maintenance of full employment, unemployment steadily increased in the often state sponsored rationalisation of public sector manufacturing. There was inevitably a challenge from organised labour to the escalating number of redundancies – especially in the wake of the occupation of factories in France in 1968 – which finally came with the work-in at the Upper Clyde Shipbuilders, itself created by a state sponsored merger of small yards when state support was withdrawn by the incoming Conservative Government in its own initial attempt to resolve the economic crisis through a move to a neo-liberal policy or 'no support for lame duck industries.' After more than eighteen months, the Conservative Government made a 'U-turn' in policy, abandoning its neo-liberalism and allowing extensive intervention to support private industry. Like the similar work-in at Lip in France, the UCS work-in – even before its final success in keeping four of the yards open – proved the inspiration for a wave of factory occupations in the UK. By the mid-1970s these seemed to be gaining state sanction when Tony Benn, as Secretary of State for Industry in the Labour Government, gave three groups of workers in occupations against closure and redundancy support to become workers' co-operatives.[3] A problem with some of these worker occupations was that they appeared to be defending production which may be morally

[3] See Ken Coates, ed., The New Worker Co-operatives (Nottingham, 1976).

unacceptable – such as warships in the case of UCS – or a redundant technology, as in the case of the portable typewriter produced at Imperial Typewriters, which was occupied by its workers in 1975 following the announcement of closure.[4] The report by the shop stewards at Lucas Aerospace, emerging out of their struggle against rationalisation and plant closures, became an influential statement of a shift to socially useful production.[5]

Especially after the dire UK financial crisis of 1976, when the Labour Government sought loans from the IMF, the restructuring of hospitals in the NHS, with the closure of small local or specialist hospitals, was seen as part of a more general cut back in public sector spending. The announcement of the closure of the EGA Hospital for Women, which coincided with the request to the IMF and cuts in public sector funding, led to the mobilisation of a wide-ranging campaign against the closure that incorporated hospital staff, trade unions, local community organisations and individuals, as well as the nascent 'second wave' women's movement, all of whom supported the major hospital, a place where women patients were assured treatment by female staff. When there was suspicion that the Health Authority was moving to close the hospital and move out the patients, the staff declared their control of the hospital and started a work-in which was to remain until 1979.[6] The EGA work-in, similar to UCS, proved inspirational for increasingly militant workers in the NHS, where about 20 further hospitals were occupied to challenge substantial cutbacks or closure[7]. To keep these hospitals open, with health care organised and provided

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[4] IWC, Why Imperial Typewriters Must Not Close: A Preliminary Social Audit By the Union Action Committee (Nottingham, 1975).

[5] See H. Wainwright and D. Elliott, The Lucas plan: a new trade unionism in the making? (London, 1982).

[6] A short account of the work-in, along with a contemporary television documentary filmed within the hospital, can be found at http://www.workerscontrol.net/geographical/elizabeth-garrett-anderson-hospital-work

[7] See cohse-union, Hospital Occupations in Britain http://cohse-union.blogspot.co.uk/2010/10/hayes-cottage-hospital-occupation-25th.

by the staff, required the cooperation of local doctors to continue referrals, as well as ambulances and a range of other services.

While subsequent neo-liberal Governments in the UK – from that of Margaret Thatcher onwards – have all claimed that the NHS was 'safe in their hands', there has been increased encroachment of market ideology and practice. Since the 1980s, while popular support for health provision 'in common' has been strong amongst the UK populous, there has been increased utilisation of private providers with the NHS itself increasingly presented as a 'brand', the majority of whose service is being provided by private sector contractors. Subsequent protest, resulting from the closure of provision particularly in emergency medicine – like the Accident and Emergency Department at Lewisham Hospital – has been met with anger. Articulating a strategy and an alternative, the protesters draw directly on the protests of the 1970s, and particularly the work-in at the EGA hospital, not only to present health as a common right rather than a commodity, but to highlight the ability of health workers of all types to collectively organise their provision free from the market and free from bureaucratic relations.

The Self-Organizational Seeds Planted by the Occupy Movement

Marina Sitrin

Around the world there has been a move from the occupation of large plazas to the creation of neighborhood assemblies, weaving assemblies and actions into the fabric of everyday life. The movements have left the large public plazas to root themselves in workplaces and schools. In Greece, the refusal to pay the new electricity tax is organized through local neighborhood assemblies. Then, when the electricity is cut, it is also the neighborhood assembly that reconnects it. Sometimes the assembly breaks into the records office of the electric company and destroys records of debt. This is all done through local assemblies coordinating on regional levels. Similar actions are also taking place with regard to increased costs to basic health care. Again the neighborhood assemblies block the cashiers in the hospitals so that people do not have to pay. They are simultaneously opening free health care clinics, and as of the national assembly in November of 2014 there were 60 such clinics, not only providing health care, but a different vision of health and care.

Throughout the United States, in large cities and small towns, people inspired by the politics and tactics of Occupy have, since 2012, been organizing to defend people from evictions, from the neighborhood of Bernal Heights in San Francisco and urban centers of Chicago to suburbs in Midwestern Minnesota and Iowa. The form is the same. Neighbors come together, sometimes going door to door, sometimes meeting in a person's home, and discuss who is at risk of foreclosure and what to do about it, often physically defending homes from eviction as well as petitioning for new terms for living in the home with the bank. Anyone who has been to one of these home defenses, or even looked at the photos, will quickly get a sense of what this means: teenagers in sports jackets, mothers holding children, grandparents and neighbors and activists, all together gather to prevent an eviction or foreclosure from taking place. In most cases they win, forcing the banks to allow people to keep their homes instead of being cast out on

the street.

For example, in the Bernal Heights neighborhood of San Francisco, a few neighbors came together first to help defend a longtime resident who was facing foreclosure. After a long battle, they were able to force the bank to renegotiate his mortgage to one that he could afford. From there, a number of women began a door knocking campaign where they went house to house asking if people were facing foreclosure and if they wanted to fight. As Molly, one of the first participants in Occupy Bernal explained,

> "Well, we've stopped a lot of auctions – that's kind of a last-ditch effort, once the home is getting auctioned off. We're trying to stop the foreclosures before that.[...] We feel like we're doing something for our neighbors at least. And one thing that I found out, once we started at who was in foreclosure – we found out who they were: they were almost all people of color. This is a very diverse neighborhood, but I would say most of the people who live here were white people; so that people of color were the ones who the bank targeted for these bad loans. So it feels to me like [...] the face of my neighborhood is getting changed every day by the banks, these big banks that made fraudulent loans to my neighbors.

Similar stories are being told throughout the U.S. It was and is the most basic thing to do – to speak with the person living next to you and organize together. In some places, the housing defense organizing has even led to the occupation of homes that had previously been foreclosed on, such as in Chicago, where homeless families together with people in the neighborhood where an empty home is identified come together and move the family in. This sort of direct action, facilitated by neighborhood assemblies, is part of what Occupy has helped inspire.

Assisting labor struggles

Another area where one sees the DNA of Occupy is in the reinvigorated labor movement – though not with the traditional forms of trade unions leading the struggles. The relationship of the Occupy movement to those involved in labor struggles began in the first days of the occupation of Zucotti Park in New York and continued in similar ways around the country. In New York we began with Occupy Labor to

support those workers in struggle around the city, often prioritizing those workers who, for various reasons, were not able to participate directly and openly in their struggle, and were generally without the support of a trade union.

Labor laws that threaten workers for taking action on the job have created such fear that there is often little fighting back within a workplace during business hours. However, there has been an increasing relationship with workers in struggle and movement participants.

For example, in my neighborhood in Kensington, Brooklyn, a local community group, together with the Occupy assembly in the neighborhood, began to support worker's efforts to organize a union. They were successful in keeping enough neighbors from shopping in the grocery store that the pressure forced the owners to negotiate and the workers eventually won their first agreement that included health care and back wages. Simultaneous with the struggle in Brooklyn was the successful campaign *Hot and Crusty*, a café where workers had been attempting to organize a union for almost a year. Workers from the café, with the support of the community and movements maintained pressure inside and outside the workplace. Once the workers were locked out by the café owner, they received movement participants' support in maintaining an ongoing action outside the café, handing out food and coffee on a donation basis, as well as educating the neighborhood as to what was taking place. Finally, due to the pressure, the owners agreed to reopen the café as a union shop.

In the years that followed, some of the same Occupy participants, and sometimes new people inspired by the forms of organizing with Occupy got involved in what became the largest national campaign to organize low wage service and retail workers, particularly in fast food restaurants and the mega store Walmart. While these last struggles were organized directly by those workers most affected themselves, the support and direct solidarity shown by Occupy and Occupy inspired participants was pivotal in the numbers of people attending

actions as well as reflected in the tactics and strategies chosen by the workers. One can witness Walmart workers "mic checking" (a term used for repeating words of a speaker as a human microphone) their managers and bosses as they hand them a list of demands, or using flash mobs inside stores and restaurants to educate shoppers as to the conditions under which they are working.

Not Just What, But How

More important than making a list of *what* is happening under the umbrella of Occupy is *how* it is all taking place. People are coming together in horizontal assemblies and deciding what to do. People are looking to one another and figuring it out together. It is not about asking but about doing. It is from a point of affirming our power together and not from a position of weakness.

Many people have discussed the importance that the "conversation changed," and we as a society now discuss class, inequality and power through the slogan of the 99% and concepts of corporate rule. But it is the meanings and actions behind these discussions that is what has constituted the most impactful change. People have a newfound dignity in being in the majority. And not only do we feel dignity, but we no longer feel shame. Instead of hiding the fact that one has debt it is becoming part of a movement – *Strike Debt!* – turning the issue on the banks and discussing refusal, instead of guilt and powerlessness.

Occupy has already been successful in so many ways – though of course there is still so much to do. When people begin to organize all over the country, they are doing so with assemblies, struggling against hierarchy, thinking about the question of leadership and power, and trying to create ways where all can be leaders. When people are organizing today it might not always be with the word Occupy, but the spirit of assemblies, direct action, and creating power together is there for sure.

Stuck in the past?

Catherine Samary

Rejecting state control and dictatorships run by single-party regimes in power in the name of workers must not fall into the trap of reducing "real socialism" to the gulag. Neither should bureaucratic relations be considered as "external" to the anti-capitalist movements and revolutions. Resistance to these relations has existed, in the name of socialist ideals, in - as well as against - "real socialism". The Yugoslav revolution, in particular, had a number of internal conflicts. The CPY's introduction of self-management rights at the beginning of the 1950s was carried out - appealing to Marx and the Paris Commune - opposing Stalin and state control, but it was done from the top. The subsequent reforms, which widened the scope of self-management rights, were also introduced from the top – without giving the people administering the self-management the opportunity to overcome conflicts and difficulties collectively and in reference to their own criteria. This is one of the challenges of managing the commons.

The failure of Yugoslavia can also be interpreted from this point of view. But that did not prevent significant progress. In the 1960s, the less strict single-party regime allowed social and intellectual movements that criticised the system and existed in the name of their own ideals. The Marxist left in Yugoslavia held that property could not be "social" from a legal or actual standpoint without democratic societal control over the ways in which it is produced and distributed. This was impossible because of both the planned state and the pseudo "socialist market". The self-management rights stemming from "social property" could not work if they remained the dominion of companies – even if workers had special rights.

Three propositions came together (which Tito's regime reworked "in its way" in the last Yugoslav Constitution, after all independent opposition was oppressed):

1) self-management communities linking up producers, users and representatives of public bodies, at different territorial levels,

focusing on what we refer to as “commons”; health, nursery, education and transport services connected with public money funded by specific “contributions”

2) self-management chambers, at the community, republic and federal level, alongside parliaments: this socialised the state and established a territorial political space where the different needs that had to be met could be aired
3) for the plan to be coherent, self-management planning had to be introduced at various levels, incorporating priorities and fundamental rights.

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Part 2
Definitions & Theory of the Commons

To Begin With, an Initial Attempt at Defining the Commons

Elisabetta Cangelosi

There is no doubt that the debate surrounding the commons has become increasingly relevant to current social and political discussions. However, what remains unclear – before even establishing the concept's legal basis, be it at a national, European or even international level – is how this term should be defined, which frame of reference should be used and whether an overall perspective can be universally or at least mutually agreed.

Furthermore, the theoretical points of reference vary widely and it is therefore crucial to have a discussion on the issue that incorporates political, social and economic aspects, and is not just clear in its meaning but also effective in terms of application in a practical context.

An additional sociolinguistic challenge exists with regard to those countries where the terms used comprise the ideas of both *bien* [good] and *commun* [common] – this being the case for the romance languages such as the French example I will write about here – as well as other countries where different structures may appear (occasionally, as in Germany, linked to a very particular legal tradition). One of the languages that offers a very clear and distinct description of the commons, and that appears to hold considerable sway over the discussion, is undoubtedly English. However, this does not mean that the distinct characteristics offered by this language are sufficient to shed light on the current debate.

Rather than tackling the linguistic argument, let us try to clarify what exactly the areas under debate are and to create a term for the commons that is clear by identifying, at the very least, the key elements that it comprises.

Regardless of the language used, our first concern is to distinguish between the current debate on the *biens communs* [common goods] and thoughts on the *bien commun* [common good] as a positive action for the community. The difference is subtle, especially as there is another concept of even greater relevance to the *biens communs* – the idea of commonwealth, the title of a book written by Negri and Hardt that describes the links that exist between the state and private property, introducing the concept of the "republic of property", as a way to describe modern states, as well as the concept of "altermodernity". Whilst the word 'commonwealth' first calls to mind a political structure, it also symbolises the idea of collective well-being (common wealth). Yet within this context the crucial point is the idea of something being 'common': *commun*. What we have is a (bio)political idea that offers an alternative to the state and the market, as well as to both the public and private sectors, just like the *biens communs* that exist (according to the definition given by Ostrom, see below) outside of both the state and the market.
One of the fundamental points in this debate is the fact that the *biens communs* are, from a contemporary viewpoint, closely linked to the concept of offering an alternative to the existing model.

It is equally important to distinguish between the *biens communs* and the *biens collectifs* [collective goods]. Even though the former can certainly be considered 'collective', the term does not imply that collective goods are automatically *biens communs*. Acharacteristic of the *biens collectifs* is the element of ownership (collective ownership); however, this is not the case with common goods as here more importance seems to be placed on the management style. Although this question of ownership plays a key role in western societies, its relevance is much less important within other cultural contexts.

One final question concerns the word *bien*. When referring to this word, we do not mean 'good' in the sense of moral values (*le Bien Commun*), but 'goods' in a purely material, economic sense. However, the issue is that the *biens communs* under discussion here can be both material and immaterial. This leads us to opt for the English word

'commons' (which is sometimes translated literally into other languages, *les communs* for example) in order to avoid using the word *biens*. In truth, English actually presents us with two options (*common goods* and *commons*) and both could imply an element of materiality. Artificial differences are constructed between the two, whereby both terms, *common goods* and *commons,* are contrasted at a theoretical level when, in principle, both terms are actually used synonymously in key literary works on the subject. Some speak of *common goods* referring only to material goods that exist and are clearly defined, whilst those who speak of *commons* do so in reference to a paradigm shift. This paradigm shift is a key element in defining the *biens communs*, and it is crucial that it be highlighted.

Let us thus return to the words in question. Considering that the *biens communs* are not to be understood as purely and exclusively material (due to their element of change and because the word also incorporates immaterial goods), we should in fact focus more closely on the word *commun,* without, however, allowing it to eclipse the existing connection. Of course we can continue to speak of the *biens communs* both in French and in other romance languages, whilst still trying to establish exactly what the word *commun* implies and what role it plays within a modern context.

Perhaps in order to answer these questions, we first need to examine the historical background.

Historical background

From a purely theoretical perspective, it is impossible to examine the *biens communs* without also looking at the works of Hardin (particularly his *Tragedy of the Commons*[8]) and Ostrom (and her work titled *Governing the Commons*[9]). Although the latter is the most referenced academic work in contemporary discussions, the book was

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[8] Hardin G., 'The Tragedy of the Commons', in Science, 162, 13 Dec., pp. 1243-ff. 1968

[9] Ostrom E., Governing the commons: the evolution of institutions for collective action, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge- New York, 1990

only translated into Italian and French (two countries where the debate on this issue is currently most developed) in 2006 and 2009 respectively. Furthermore, the translation of the title is also evidence of a slight confusion surrounding the subject matter: in Italian, the title became *Governare i beni collettivi* (here we see the words *collettivi*, which means *collective*, and not the word already in use, i.e. *comuni/ commons*); in French, however, the decision was made to keep the word 'common', but instead of using the verb *gérer [manage]* or *gouverner* [govern], the noun *gouvernance* [governance] is used: *La gouvernance des biens communs*.

Once again, the issue is not solely a linguistic one. Traditionally, Ostrom's research is seen as an imitation of Hardin's theory (immediately adopted by defenders of private property as the only viable economic model). It might have been possible to 'turn the page' on Hardin much earlier in 1975, when Ciriacy-Wantrup and Bishop wrote an article regarding collective property in natural resources management[10]. The two authors highlighted one point which led to confusion in Hardin's argument: by not distinguishing between common resources and those resources that do not belong to anyone, only the latter could precipitate a potential tragedy.
The distinction made by Ciriacy-Wantrup and Bishop defines those resources belonging to no specific person as *open access resources*, but this definition is entirely unrelated to the concept of *open access*, a concept concerning what we would call *digital commons*, given that the two researchers were focused on natural resources which are limited in terms of space and time.
Ostrom's work remains the most pivotal within this debate due to the scope and the considerable duration of her research, which analysed several real case studies on the communal management of resources. These case studies illustrate specific practices and a certain number of prerequisites that are required for the *biens communs* to be managed

[10] Ciriacy-Wantrup S.V., Bishop R.C., 'Common Property as a concept in natural resources policy', in Natural Resources Journal 15, pp.713-ff. 1975

effectively, including[11]: set limits, agreements, monitoring, a system of escalating sanctions as well as conflict resolution mechanisms. Above all, however, it requires shared responsibility.

Modern-day analysis of the *biens communs* is also turning to history in search of inspiration. Some scholars refer to the Middles Ages (Mattei[12]) and, in particular, management of collective property, such as woodland; others go back even further, to Roman times (Cangelosi[13]), revisiting the legal and social concept of *res communes*. These examples from the distant past could also go on to help shed some light on the overall context: regardless of the 'good' being discussed, the question of mutual responsibility and shared management remains at the heart of debate.

However, it is necessary to examine why and how these two aspects have become central to contemporary discussions.

Commonisation: between economics and politics

Despite the tendency to see the *bien communs* as an economic issue, they are in fact more relevant to the domains of politics and social science. Sociologist Olin Wright also establishes that a well-managed common good is much easier to define for a sociologist than it is for an economist[14]. Common goods undoubtedly feature specific economic characteristics, such as being free from the influence of both the state and the market, but they also present further facets[15]: they are not

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[11] Ostrom E., 'Neither market nor State: governance of common-pool resources in the twenty-first century', IFPRI Lecture Series, Lecture presented June 2 1994, International Food Policy Research Institute, Washington DC, 1994

[12] Mattei U., Beni Comuni. Un Manifesto, Laterza, Roma-Bari, 2011

[13] Cangelosi E., Publica e Communis, Acqua, mondo romano e beni comuni, Aracne, 2014

[14] Olin Wright E., 'Sociologist and economist on "the Commons"', in P. Bardhan and I. Ray, The Contested Commons, The Contested Commons: Conversations between Economists and Anthropologists Wiley-Blackwell, 2008

[15] The Ecologist, 'Whose common future: reclaiming the commons', vol. 6, No. 1, April 1994.

goods in a marketable sense; they are used collectively but the control of access may vary in relation to the community model; they are neither private nor public; and they adapt to the needs of society.
The reality of the *biens communs* is complex[16]. But this complexity is also a crucial component which brings added value.

We thus have a series of key concepts which can be used to define *biens communs*, and the change they embody: they are complex; they can be material goods, but this factor is neither essential nor should it be the sole condition; usage and availability form their fundamental aspects (much more so than ownership); and the manner in which they are managed is established by the community model.

All of this – immateriality being the only exception – can in fact be applied to any form of *common-pool resource* or *common* (as described by Ostrom), concepts which reappear in the *biens communs* of contemporary discussions and which define their uniqueness and allow the framework for their creation.
We might call this process *commonisation*.The process of commonisation does not necessarily have to be the result of an explicit choice to create a common good; it could also be the consequence, either directly or indirectly, of an act of resistance (or, as is more commonly said today, of *resilience*) to an economic and/or social crisis.

Responsibility, reciprocity and sharing
Responsibility, *reciprocity* and *sharing* can be considered the three necessary conditions for the process of commonisation. Furthermore, upon examination of its etymology, we see that these three elements are implicit in the word 'common' – the sharing of reciprocal tasks – whereby a certain responsibility is also implied.

Some highlight the importance of completely abandoning the idea of *biens* [goods] and utilising the word *communs* [commons], and indeed

[16] Illich I. , 'Silence is a Common', in The CoEvolution Quarterly (Winter 1983)

the word *commun* offers us some of the arguments crucial for debate. However, once the *biens communs* have been identified as being both goods (be they material or immaterial) and a rather theoretical paradigm shift, it does not matter too much what the chosen term is as it might still cause tensions arising from principles which are sometimes far removed from practical reality.

At its heart, the debate revolves around the fact that the *biens communs* are characterised by a greater level of complexity, a community model, ownership that is largely inconsequential, responsibility, reciprocity and sharing. And, above all, by the possibility of being able to be created thanks to a basic system of sharing: commonisation[17].

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[17] Of course, their relation to public goods, which is very important when trying to resist growing privatisation, also deserves attention.

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What is the Principle of the Common?

Christian Laval

The common (anything we consider as being common) is not dependent upon a consideration of the essence of humankind or the nature of the thing to be shared or managed in common. In this regard, we are separating ourselves from legal and economic issues, which base the common on the inherent characteristics of things in the tradition of Roman law. In our opinion, the common are not a thing or good, but instead everything that a community decides to share in common by redefining these things as "fundamental rights". The common is about action and instituting this common activity. Put another way, the common is not a given, or a substance, or a thing: it is the purpose of political activity as we understand it.

The common is not this kind of stock of goods that must be kept beyond the grip of the market or state ownership because they have inherent inappropriable characteristics, or because these goods are naturally common. The common must be *made* common through political action, an instituting act; it is not naturally common.

This act of "making something common" must be explicitly instituted. Wherever there is human, social or professional activity, we can observe that there are, objectively, phenomena of socially constructed cooperation, mutualisation and mutual obligation. Indeed, Proudhon and others have demonstrated this. Sociologists or occupational psychologists have returned to this intuition on the basis of empirical analysis. However, political issues are not the same thing as psycho-sociological assessments. Political action must create institutional forms based on a very simple idea which, for us, lies at the heart of democracy: that mutual activity and mutual participation in an activity requires a mutual decision-making process and engenders mutual obligation. The means used to achieve this mutual development, decision-making and obligation that regulate common resources can be highly variable.

The common as we normatively understand it is the principle of self-government applied to all types of activity, insofar as this activity falls under the category of joint action. The principle of the common requires the institution of commons (in the plural) in all domains – this means the creation of social, economic and cultural institutions organised around the principle of self-government and the fulfilment of fundamental rights.

Politics and the common

The common is a struggle; it is not about well-intentioned displays of morality. A political approach regarding the common practically responds to the question of how to "institute commons" in all areas and on all levels of society. This approach therefore consists of developing the principle of the common within a rationale of action and transition towards a possible and desirable model of society. Developing a political approach regarding the common does not mean outlining a programme like the one of a political party, but instead designating what we believe to be the battle lines and areas for action in which the fall of capitalism is played out.

The politics of the common must therefore begin with all of the struggles that enable the common nature of activity and utilisation to be recognised and instituted. Similarly, these politics must spring from those struggles that enable co-operation or co-production to be regulated in a manner that promotes justice and equality and that facilitates the institution of "the inappropriable", which was produced through common activity. This common must no more fall under the control of individual owners or state leaders, who would both believe themselves to possess it and would want to dispose of it as they do with public companies or retirement schemes, for example.

We must stop thinking of the political sphere as separate from the economic and social spheres. The politics of the common is a policy of radical transformation of the current situation in its entirety. The politics of the common is cross-cutting and so affects the economic, social and political spheres in equal measure.

Institution of the commons

Two proposals that are obviously tightly interlinked must be distinguished from one another. The common is not a given, but must be instituted. This is what we mean when we talk about the institution of the common (in the singular). But on the other hand, the common is only instituted through specific activities. This is what we will mean when we talk about the institution of commons (in the plural).

The politics of the common aims to institute commons or, as previously stated, the *democracy of commons*. The term commons in the plural will therefore be used to mean all differentiated and specific political, social and economic activities; that is to say, activities with a specific aim, category, level and purpose and which must all be reinstituted according to the dual logic of self-government and "inappropriability".

However, the commons in question are not homogenous and do not fall into the same category or level. The general principle of their institution does not mean that we should confuse them. This is what distinguishes the new problem of the common from the common described by Saint-Simon and Proudhon, which was based upon the termination of government and state involvement in the field of production. These opinions (which were at the core of historic socialism) led to the marginalisation of politicians themselves, incidentally in the name of an assimilation of politicians, power and the state.

Quite the reverse of this abolition of the *politician* as such, which has facilitated the totalitarian suppression of *politics*, it is important to consider the *institutional development* of commons. This institutional development of the commons is not an abstract issue or part of a utopic daydream. It is a practical issue concerning our struggles and their coordination. It is even the immediate strategic issue being discussed by relatively forward-thinking European political groups.

The institutional development of the commons is necessarily twofold.

On the one hand, two domains should be articulated: the government of territories and populations which must obey a principle of popular self-government, an active citizenship of the common. On the other, the "socio-economic" field, which falls within the area of specialised commons and which once again requires forms of self-government that are open-minded to the active citizenship of the common. This development cannot be achieved unless we assume that these two domains, although separated and separable both institutionally and by their level of generality, are not absolutely separate and that there is no pure political sphere, pure social sphere or pure economic sphere. This is undoubtedly Hannah Arendt's major error, which renders her political philosophy inapplicable. This means in actuality that the socio-economic sphere must be institutionally recognised as a political reality and that the political sphere, as a civic reality and in terms of the rights and powers of citizens to dispose of a certain amount of property, must be recognised as a dimension of socio-economic activity. In practice, this could translate into replacing an institution like the Senate with a federal assembly of socio-economic commons and nominating citizen representatives for positions on the Boards of Directors in companies and banks, alongside employees and service users.

Likewise, a point of convergence must be established between socio-economic commons themselves. To put it briefly, if we picture today's socio-economic institutions, they fall into three categories: trading companies, public establishments (administrations, public companies) and associations. A strategy of the common should not be based on the age-old assumption that the answer lies in the extension of the public sphere. Neither should it settle for an extension of the "tertiary sector", also known as the social and solidarity economy, nor even for a kind of encirclement of the commercial and state sphere through the more or less spontaneous development of associations which would alone become responsible for embodying the common, in a manner of speaking. On the contrary, a politics of the common is characterised by the *cross-cutting nature* of the implementation of the principle of the common. The new left, which has yet to invent itself, must find its

raison d'être in working to unite struggles for the common, for self-government and for inappropriability. We will only move forward by coordinating political and socio-economic struggles on one hand, and uniting struggles being fought in capitalist private companies, public services and associations on the other.

The task to be achieved by a political approach regarding the common is, therefore, to take the fight to both the political and socio-economic arenas. It is to fight on the one hand against the appropriation of democracy by professional politicians and against the appropriation of the fruits of collectively produced labour by proprietors (shareholders). It is to fight against the bureaucratic and oligarchic organisation of power and against the logic of ownership in the socio-economic sphere. We envisage that this will be the shape taken by this transformation, a transformation that we are calling the "democracy of the commons".

The issue is knowing how to achieve such a transformation. We must break with the rationale that parties must "represent" the people or masses, whatever the rhetoric adopted. The political organisation of the future must abandon the idea of "representing" as many people as possible through claiming a superior understanding of the meaning of History. Quite the opposite – it must work towards practically uniting resistance in various spheres of activity; that is to say, constructing a truly cross-cutting "common" based on mutual activity and participation. In this sense, the political organisation must not aspire to its own self-preservation in the wake of the revolution, but to dissolve into the democracy of the commons.

Any party driven by the "science of History" or by the more Platonist "communist idea" runs a very real risk of already being a state in its early stages of development and of reproducing the same conditions that resulted in the biggest catastrophes for emancipatory struggles in the twentieth century.

The common of commons

How should we envisage the construction of a "common of commons"? The expression inevitably evokes Montesquieu's famous "society of societies", which he uses to refer to federalism in the *Spirit of Laws*. Our starting point must be the failure of statist forms of communism so that we can truly understand the impasse caused by the general bureaucratisation of economic and social life. We can no longer think that the common of commons must take the form of the state, or at least not the state in its current form of centralised, bureacratic and verticalised politics. We need to move beyond the national state as it exists today, of which the communist and socialist regimes of the twentieth century have not managed to make a success.

The desire to develop political commons, namely those of the self-government of society and commons that produce specific goods and services, leads to a contemplation of a federal political structure on both a national and international scale. This would not take the shape of a federation of states promoted today by dominant federalist theory, but of a federation of commons, or more precisely, a dual federation of commons.[18] Proudhon's idea of a dual federation is interesting: a federation of territorial units of self-government (communes) and a federation of self-organised production units. The idea that we must distance ourselves from is that for him, the cross-cutting principle of the two federations is not the common, but mutuality, namely a principle of commercial equivalence.

We can also revive Hannah Arendt's extremely commendable idea that horizontality is what really defines a federation, that is to say not a principle of vertical integration but of alliances, mutual assistance and the sharing of resources between commons of the same level. Here we have federative principles of political reorganisation which we feel should be remembered, not because we would have to adopt them ourselves unaltered, but because they can feed the political imagination that we need.

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[18] In our book, Common: An Essay on Revolution in the Twenty-First Century, we take inspiration from the very last section of Proudhon's work, and particularly his work on The Federative Principle.

The most important thing is to end this confrontation between the market and the state, the idea that the only outcomes of the universalisation of commercial and proprietary logic would be either the restoration of national sovereignty or the establishment of a world state. The challenge for the new left all over the world is to reinvent a school of thought of "Another Possible World", which could potentially play a major role in demanding "real democracy". But this cannot be achieved unless the new left decides to consider the *institutional form* of this "Other Possible World", and not just be satisified with good intentions or calls for insurrection. This is what the collective work that we have undertaken here is all about.

Privatisation, public and commons

Dario Azzellini

Since the 1980s our societies have experienced fierce attacks on whatever we may call commons, collective use or collective property, and on public services. Neoliberalism, as a certain kind of capitalism and following its expansive logic, brought the commodification of everything to an extreme. It tried to penetrate every area and segment of our lives. This has been felt by people even more strongly since the crisis started in 2008. During the last few years, the southern EU-countries have been ruled by the "Troika," made up by the European Central Bank (ECB), the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the European Commission. Under German and Northern European command, the Troika imposes privatisation and austerity programs, destroying the affected economies and pushing Millions of people into unemployment, misery and despair.

The increasing commodification of everything has turned the defence of common and public goods from privatisation into a question of survival. However, current and past experiences with public goods have also shown that governments and public administrations cannot be trusted in maintaining the public as really public. Contrary to what many people believe, and what has been a widespread view on the left, public and private are not (anymore) opposed to each other but follow the same logic. Therefore, it is of great urgency to build an inalienable commons that forbids private appropriation[19]. This is reflected – at least as a tendency – by many of the struggles emerging from the crisis, with people fighting to keep commons and public services, and often questioning the way the public is handled and opening a debate on commons. We see struggles in different sectors throughout Europe, reclaiming access to fundamental resources – natural resources as well as human made goods and services – and fighting to administer their use, allocation and distribution through a

[19] Borrits, Benoit; Delmas, Chantal (2013). Social Appropriation: Paths to an Alternative Project, in: transform!, no. 12/2013.

directly democratic process.

We have seen high school and university students take to the streets in Italy, Greece, Spain, the UK, Germany and other countries. Similar protests took place regarding the health sector, which was hit by cuts and privatisation to a different extent throughout the continent. Protests, strikes and occupations occurred in different countries. A third element of concern for many people throughout Europe is the possibility of being evicted from one's own house, be it their own property through indebtedness, or a rental place. In Spain, the PAH (*Plataforma de Afectados por la Hipoteca*) has grown to be the biggest organised movement with over 300 local chapters. The PAH started self-organising people threatened by eviction to prevent the eviction from their homes with a range of practices ranging from legal actions to protests in banks and physically blocking evictions. As a next step the PAH started occupying empty houses and organising new homes for evicted and homeless families. In Catalonia, the PAH has also occupied entire blocks with hundreds of people.

The Spanish example inspired the creation of initiatives against eviction and foreclosure in other countries. Beginning in Berlin there are now about half a dozen initiatives in different cities that are active in organising resistance against evictions, mobilising up to a few hundred people to physically block evictions. At the end of 2014 the practice spread to Vienna, Austria. In Portugal, a new movement against foreclosure has also arisen. In Italy mass occupations by families, students and migrants have taken place in Naples, Turin, Milan, Rome and other cities.

Furthermore we can observe many struggles all over Europe to keep certain natural resources as commons or even bringing formerly privatised public resources into peoples' hands as commons. We see water struggles in Greece. In Italy in 2011, a 95% majority of voters rejected the privatisation of water and voted in favour of water as a public and common good (even if the government did not fully follow the obligatory referendum results and created communal water

suppliers following the old logic of public services). In Ireland, from 2014 onwards, a huge movement against water privatisation began, including protests with as many as 100,000 people. Mass media usually do not tell us about these protests. They did not write about the protest in Ireland before this demonstration, nor after it. We have to be constantly aware of the fact that mass media omits these struggles. Most people in Europe ignore the mere existence of this important struggle against water privatisation.

In Germany, Hamburg and Berlin, important struggles for the re-communalisation of the formerly privatised local power supplier have taken place. In Hamburg, a referendum in favour of re-communalisation was won. In Berlin, unfortunately the necessary electoral participation was missed by a few thousand votes. Nevertheless, the movement had pushed the local government to present a plan for re-communalisation even before the referendum. But the government proposal does not contain the participatory elements the proposal brought to referendum by the movement contains.

The matter of resources poses a simple question: Who decides on nature? Who decides what is done with nature? How natural resources are used? That means that the struggles against the indiscriminate exploitation of natural resources, as the struggles against mining in Romania or Greece, are to be considered a struggle for commons or at least bring up the question of the commons since the experience with public administration has not been in favour of the people. The same can be said about the different struggles against mega projects, which destroy the environment and destroy local people's means of subsistence by commodifying and privatising nature for private capitalist interests. Included in these struggles is the massive resistance against the fast track train TAV in Northern Italy, the struggle against the dam in the Valley of Tescou in South West France, where the 21-year-old student Rèmi Fraisse died after repressive police action in October 2014. More struggles are fought in other countries around similar issues.

After people experienced throughout Europe how the public has been willing to sell out their cities to the best bidder and to dispossess and displace masses from the inner city, creating a growing classist and racist segregation regarding housing, people commonly self-organise and oppose huge urban infrastructure projects and events, such as the Olympic Games, inner-city highways, airports and others. Information on these struggles rarely spreads beyond the local level, sometimes struggles get known at a national level, but almost never on an international level. This is even if they have much in common and could learn a lot from each other. The media also hides the victories these movements gain. This was for example the case regarding the former inner-city airport Tempelhof in Berlin. The airport, closed down several years ago, is the biggest inner city area without construction in the whole of Europe. The city – following the lead of speculators, bankers, real estate managers and the neoliberal tendency to turn inner city areas into upper class and upper middle class areas – wanted to build malls, offices and housing on the premises. The mayor hoped to convince everybody by promising "housing", nevertheless people did not believe him and experience has shown that new expensive apartments and houses do not have a positive effect on rents, rather the contrary. A movement against the city administration's plans started and campaigned for several years, achieving a referendum on the matter which was held in May 2014. The movement's demand of zero constructions on the whole former airport and to keep the former landing strip area as a park was accepted by 64.4% of voters.

For the first time in decades in Europe, we also saw takeovers of closed factories by workers in order to get them to produce under workers control again. This is something unknown in contemporary history in Europe, we know the practice from Latin America, especially Argentina, but no one imagined it could happen here in Europe. And now we have the *Fabrique du Sur* (Ex-Pilpa) and *Fralib* in Southern France, *Officine Zero* in Rome, *RiMaflow* in Milan, *Vio.Me.* in Thessaloniki, Greece and *Kazova* in Istanbul, Turkey. While factory occupations in the 1960s and 1970s used to be carried out by the

workers in a situation of a general workers' and people's offensive and in order to step up pressure on the owner to fulfil the workers' demands, contemporary occupations are an offensive action in a generally defensive situation. A closer look at the modalities of these takeovers shows that they have to be considered part of a broader struggle for commons – they also consider themselves part of a bigger struggle for re-appropriation. These recuperations envision different social relations, different power relations and different decision making structures than the ruling capitalist company model imposes. They also take into consideration ecological aspects, and in most of the companies the workers decided to engage in ecologically sustainable production, produce organic products or organise forms of recycling and reuse. All of this moves these struggles into the area of struggles for commons.

The crisis also led to workers' buyouts, meaning workers formed a cooperative and bought their former company which was about to be closed or had already been closed down. Several hundred companies in Spain, Italy and France were bought under these modalities. Furthermore, many new cooperatives also arose out of the movements opposing austerity and the rule of capital. It is important to connect these cooperatives to broader movements and build networks – otherwise, as experience has shown, cooperatives tend to give in to the pressure of the markets and transform into regular capitalist companies (only with more owners).

Last, but not least, we should not forget the struggles for one of the most basic commons: the right to live. The struggles of refugees all around Europe for their right to live, to choose where to live, to be here, is an important part of the struggles for commons, for democracy and a different society.

The challenge the left faces is how to bring all these struggles and initiatives – and many more which have not been mentioned here – together and give them visibility as alternatives to the capitalist system. How can we turn all these different struggles into a living

consciousness that, while all distinct, together stands for a society which points beyond the logic of capitalism? People taking part in these struggles have this feeling in each of their specific struggles, but it is often difficult to connect all of them together as one – the struggle for commons.

Mutualism Between Tradition and Modernity[20]

Alfonso Gianni

One of the most important trade-union and political leaders of the Italian labour movement, Vittorio Foa (1910–2008), explained the reason for his study on the birth of the labour movement, both Italian and European, at the turn of the 19th to the 20th century by 'the need for a calm and objective consideration, less burdened by daily tensions, and, if possible, outside current ideological confrontations'. For this reason, Foa sought to examine in depth, 'in a situation removed from ours in time and space, the relation between labour and power, between workers and capitalists, between the lived present and the imagined future'. When Foa wrote these words we were only at the beginnings of the great neoliberal counter-revolution that brought the European labour movement to its knees. Thirty years have passed since then, and the need Foa expressed seems even greater; going back to the beginnings of the labour and trade-union movement can be a great help in understanding the reasons for its enormous regression and its contemporary defeats.

In Italy today we are simultaneously faced with the question of constructing a new left political entity and a social coalition able to interpret and deal with the major transformations engineered by capitalist globalisation, which have fragmented the world of labour and put enormous obstacles in the way of any attempt at social recomposition. Thus the issues that Foa investigated while the major crises of the trade union and the left in Italy were in their early stages have great importance for us today. To understand how the labour movement emerged in Europe and in Italy, through what trade-union, political, and organisational forms it passed, is thus not only valuable from an academic or a generically cultural point of view but also from the political and practical standpoint. This history shows us that social

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20 This article is a reworking of the author's talk at the seminar 'L'autogestione in Europa' organised by transform! europe and transform! italia and held in Rome on 12 and 13 June 2015.

phenomena, especially when they are really major and lasting, cannot be mechanistically derived from the laws of the economy and the market, nor do they simply come out of the political input of organised forces. Instead, they emerge as a reaction to the former and precede the birth of the latter. In Italy and in other parts of Europe, the mutual and cooperative movement anticipated the emergence of labour unions and even more so of left political parties. We would do well to distinguish within the more general concept of mutuality the various forms it has assumed, at least at the beginning of its development.

Mutualism: the mutual aid societies and the cooperatives

These are essentially of two types: a) the 'mutual aid societies', whose purpose was to assist their members in dealing with unemployment, accidents, illnesses, and old age and death itself; in essence, they were a sort of rudimentary welfare state, without the state, based on the free capacity of organisations of the working classes; and b) 'cooperatives', those whose purpose was to defend the worker from high consumer prices (consumer cooperatives), and those which responded directly to the lack of jobs (production cooperatives). In the context of their historical development, at least in the case of Italy, we can now say that the mutual aid societies were absorbed and superseded by the welfare state, except for now, under the impact of the neoliberal offensive; while the cooperatives were adapted to the logic of the private market, even to its financial dimension. In both cases, we can understand why there is now talk again of these forms with the aim of updating them to fit the new conditions within the most serious crisis of European capitalism: the chronic reduction of employment and the privatisation of the welfare state.

They emerged because the industrial proletariat began to develop at the same time as the traditional forms of subsistence and protection characteristic of agrarian life dramatically weakened without new forms typical of industrial life having yet appeared. Moreover, the workers of the first industrial revolution lived and worked in places hardly in communication with the outside world, relatively far from the cities that we would today call, though with another meaning,

'industrial districts', spread throughout territories that were still prevalently agricultural. For this reason, historians agree that in its incipient stages mutualism answered to the need to face, through the mechanism of solidarity, the problems that arose more in the sphere of reproduction than in that of production. In this sense, from the start, mutualism was considered a movement *for*, rather than *against*.

The capital-labour antagonism influences the nature of mutualism
Nevertheless, the concrete evolution of the conflict between capital and labour prevented the distinction between *for* and *against* from appearing in as clear-cut a way in practice as it does in theory. The expectation on the part of the ruling classes that these institutions might function as a clearing house for a potential social conflict soon was disappointed, whether for objective reasons – the innate and ineradicable contradiction between capital and labour – or for subjective reasons of the political incapacity and primitiveness of the economic and political ruling classes. An example is the 1878 strikes of the textile workers in the historic production zone of Biella, which disconcerted the ruling classes to the point that they demanded a parliamentary inquest on labour unrest. The suspicion was that hidden behind the mutual aid society of the textile workers of Croce Mosso there was a hotbed of social subversiveness, if only through affiliation with the socialist First International.

Indeed, in general, the study of these examples of unrest leads us to the conclusion that resistance to the pervasiveness of capitalist organisation and the mutualism that emerged to deal with capitalism's historical shortcomings were coexisting elements from the outset, which mark a positive ambiguity of the emergent labour movement. A historical reconstruction that wants to establish a chronological succession in an evolutionary sense, going from mutualism through resistance and trade-unionism to the political representation of the world of labour through a party would be too abstract, completely misleading, and impede any deep understanding of the history of the subaltern classes and popular movements.

Moreover, this reading of history, with sharply contrasted stages, is responsible for an excessive rigidity in the albeit necessary distinction between trade-union and political party organisation, of and within the labour movement. This rigidity resulted in a hierarchical separation between trade-union and political functions. Rather than favouring the autonomy of the former from the latter – apart from certain happy moments in the history of the labour movement – and positively influencing the social conflict, this rigidity has led to a divergence between the represented and their representatives at both levels, that is, both at the social and political levels, with the creation of the 'economic functionary' and the 'political functionary' of the working class.

This separation has historically been clearly manifested in the contrast between the German model and the French model of organisation of the labour and trade union, a division that has mostly to do with the means employed to achieve results: either through the active involvement of the working masses or through the mediation and protagonism of left political forces. It was a contrast reproduced in various ways and forms throughout the last century and also today. Whenever there was an attempt to overcome it in a non-dialectical way, the result was trouble and defeat for the labour movement.

Management boards and factory councils in Italy

One need only recall the debate that took place in Italy's trade-union movement and Communist Party (PCI) in the crucial years following the hot autumn of 1969. The question turned around the role of the factory councils, which were new kinds of structures emerging from the class and social confrontation. Their main characteristic was that they gathered together and represented all workers, union members and non-members, regardless of which union. This structure provided very effective forms of direct democracy, combined with forms of representative democracy, modified however by effective and constant control on the part of the voters and by the possibility of revoking mandates. The councils therefore seemed to offer the concrete possibility of refounding the Italian trade union on a unified

basis. At the same time, the breadth of the issues they dealt with, which broadened the conflict and collective bargaining well beyond the wage issue, led them to call into question the productive targets and purposes of the company. In this sense, there was not only a potential process of refounding the union but also a politicisation of the social question and the possible launching of a constituent power counterposed to the constituted power.

Various aspects of this experience, not accidentally, recall the experience of management boards, post-war organisms characteristic of the early post-fascist years in Italy, in particular the late 1940s, lending substance to what the left called 'progressive democracy', that is, a form of democracy that not only overcame the pre-fascist form but which could have reached the point of overcoming capitalism itself. For this reason, it was indispensable to act at the point where the power of private property was generated, in other words, at the points of production and in the relations of production. For the same reason, this experience was incompatible with the strategic programmes of the Christian Democratic Party and of the USA, and with the division of the world agreed at Yalta. The management board experience was contained, repressed, and then expunged in a process that anticipated and then also imitated that of the expulsion of communists from the Italian government in spring 1947, as also happened in France.

The conditions under which the factory council experience evolved in the early 1970s were obviously completely different from the years of the management councils. However, even with the factory councils we see a capacity for protagonism on the part of the subaltern classes on the direct terrain of contesting the material organisation of production. But neither the union nor the PCI leaderships were able to use the potential of this movement, and it was defeated by the international counter-revolution of neoliberalism in the 1980s, preceded however by the 12-13 February 1978 trade-union conference called by Italy's

major unions, the CGIL, CISL, and UIL.[21] The event came to be known as the 'EUR turn' after the district in Rome where the conference was held. In it, the unions opted for the 'policy of sacrifices', extinguishing or marginalising every impulse towards, or project for, an economic, social, and political alternative.

The general trend that the history of Italy demonstrates, albeit with its own particularities, is that the issue of mutualism, cooperation, and self-management has continued throughout the long trajectory of the labour movement and is being taken up again today, though in a much more limited form[22] as defensive choices in the face of neoliberalism and the crisis. The 'state fetishism', of which some critics accuse the labour movement in general, has also involved the Italian labour movement, though it has never prevented the recurrent re-emergence of mutualistic and self-management issues and experience. But market fetishism has done more damage than state fetishism, as we see in the complete absorption of the great Lega delle Cooperative in the logic of markets and finance, practicing internal relations identical to those of classic capitalist companies.

The question of the 'commons'

In today's debate, the discussion has been enriched by a new element, that of the 'commons', or rather common goods, that is, the determination of things and spaces that can be defined as neither state nor private. It is an idea that is by now international, and it needs to be approached without prejudice or prematurely falling in love with it. First of all, for example, we have to avoid confusing the concept of public with that of state, not because in practice the two things cannot often coincide but because the first term ought above all to indicate the mode of operation and the goal, while the second focuses on ownership. If both terms exclude private property it is not true that all

[21] CGIL (Confederazione Generale Italiana del Lavoro), the largest and left-wing confederation; CISL (Confederazione Italiana Sindacati Lavoratori), the Catholic confederation; and UIL (Unione Italiana del Lavoro), the liberal confederation.

[22] Still, in Italy there are around 180 instances of company self-management underway.

that is state actually functions as public, while it is not necessarily so that what is public needs immediately to be inserted into a state dimension, especially when it appears as a space won through struggles and removed from private property or from the inertia of state bureaucracy.

In Italy, for example, the powerful Cassa Depositi e Prestiti (Deposits and Loans Fund) is a stock company of which 80 per cent is controlled by the Ministry of the Economy and Finance, and yet it acts within a logic of investments that is private and market-oriented, so much so that a mass campaign has been underway for some time to 'socialise' it, that is, to make it available for investments in innovative sectors of environmental value and public usefulness. In this way it could become an important financial lever for a job-creating and ecological transformation of the Italian economy.

Pierre Dardot and Christian Laval, two French scholars who have recently written on the 'commons', among other place in the present volume, are, to some extent, presenting a challenging and very stimulating argument. 'The theme of the *commons'*, they write, 'has absolutely no rights of citizenship in the conception of historical development elaborated by Marx, at least not in the greater part of his theoretical work'. In their view, this is because the communist revolution was conceived as having neither the time nor the desire to recover the common goods made obsolete by history, leading, mainly among Marx' follower, to the wish to actually suppress the commons. By contrast, the historical reconstruction undertaken by Karl Polanyi takes us in another direction. The great Hungarian sociologist and economist gives us a memorable description of the upheavals occurring throughout the 20th century as a reaction to the process of commodification of people and nature, in the form of a gigantic and organised resistance to the pervasiveness of capitalism.

But can we really pronounce such definitive judgement on Marx' work? A few lines later, it is true, the authors temper this accusation somewhat, remembering that in his later years Marx returned to the

question with different emphases. Actually, all of Marx' thought has its own evolution, at times even non-linear. The philosopher from Trier remained in constant contact with concrete reality throughout his life, studying it passionately up to his last days. His thinking did not give rise to closed theory but to one that is constantly expanded by new elements. Indeed, one of the worst things that can be done – and which unfortunately has been done, creating irreparable damage to the international labour movement – is to isolate one or another of Marx' concepts, and, worse, one or another of his phrases, and to absolutise it.

Marx and the Russian rural commune

Dardot and Laval do indeed note the exchange of letters Marx had with the Russian revolutionary Vera Zasulich over the Russian rural commune, the *obshchina*. Given the importance that the issue, in my opinion, has for the discussion around the question of common goods, a short historical digression may be in order. Obshchina (**община**) was a term used during the Russian Empire to refer to lands cultivated by peasants in common, in contrast to individual rural property (in Russian **ху́тор** – khutor). The word derives from the adjective obschchiy (**о́бщий**), common. This institution was partly scaled back after Stolypin's agrarian reform (1906–1911) and disappeared with the 1917 Russian Revolution and most especially with the following forced collectivisation of the countryside, one of the fatal errors in the construction of Soviet socialism.

The obshchina had survived the emancipation of the serfs and the abolition of that type of slavery, which occurred with the famous and very controversial reform launched, after much pressure, by Czar Alexander II in 1861. The Russian peasant in his daily work enjoyed little independence from the decisions taken by the obshchina through its governing body, the plenary assembly of the community (the mir – **мир**). Significantly, this word has a double meaning in Russian: 'world' and 'peace'. And it was in this assembly that disputes could be settled and peace made. Its decisions had to do with the control and redistribution of the common land and forests (if under its jurisdiction),

the induction of recruits for state military service (every community had to provide the army with a certain number of men) and the meting out of punishments for minor crimes. The obshchina also was liable for the tax payment of its individual members. Adjacent to the common lands were the individual noble holdings, on which the peasants, even when freed from servitude, were obliged to work without compensation (*corvée*). This practice is described by Leo Tolstoy in his last novel, *Resurrection*.

The obshchina is a unique factor in the panorama of 19th-century Europe, and it distinguishes Russia from other civilised nations. The so-called Slavophiles extolled it as the symbol of the cooperation between the classes of Russian society and their spiritual unity. Much more interesting, however, is the way in which the major representatives of Russian populism considered it as a pre-capitalist institution, seeing in it the basis for a possible liberation of the peasantry. In their view, this radical transformation could have come about even reconciling itself with the private ownership of a parcel of land within the rural commune itself and its structures of social government. In a 21 November 1863 letter to Giuseppe Garibaldi, Aleksandr Herzen wrote: 'The social religion of the Russian people consists of the inalienable right of every member of the obshchina to possess a specific section of land.' But the appeal 'To the Young Generation', distributed in St. Petersburg in the summer of 1861, shortly after the emancipation of the serfs, and which cost several of its authors lifelong banishment to Siberia, went even further: 'We want each commune to have its allotment, without the existence of private landowners; we do not want land to be sold like potatoes and cabbage.'[23] In other words, as we might say today, land is a common good.

Marx' clarification and rethinking

[23] Ed. note: See Mikhail K. Lemke, Politicheskie protsessy v Rossii 1860-kh gg., 2nd ed., Moscow: Gosizdat, 1923, pp. 63-64, 69, 70, 74-75 [1861 item], 508-10, 514-18 [1862 item]; reprinted: The Hague: Mouton, 1969. Full text of the proclamation at <http://www.sscnet.ucla.edu/history/franks/classes/131b/perm/radicalsdocuments.html>.

In response to Zasulich, Marx wrote that she had misunderstood his positions, attributing theories to him that he had never espoused. In fact, Marx said, '[...] the analysis in Capital therefore provides no reasons either for or against the vitality of the Russian commune. But the special study I have made of it, including a search for original source material, has convinced me that the commune is the fulcrum for social regeneration in Russia'.[24] Marx was certainly well aware of the dual character of the rural commune, in which the common ownership of land was counterposed to the exclusive dominion by the individual family over the home and the farmyard, but above all to the parcel cultivation of the soil and the private appropriation of its fruits. However, the outcome of this dualism is not given but is determined by the concrete unfolding of the events, by the historical condition in which it exists: 'either its element of private ownership prevails over its collective element, or the latter will prevail over the former', Marx wrote. In the preface to the Russian edition of the *Manifesto of the Communist Party*, written 21 January 1882, Marx is even more direct: '[...] can the Russian obshchina, though greatly undermined, yet a form of primeval common ownership of land, pass directly to the higher form of Communist common ownership? Or, on the contrary, must it first pass through the same process of dissolution such as constitutes the historical evolution of the West? The only answer to that possible today is this: If the Russian Revolution becomes the signal for a proletarian revolution in the West, so that both complement each other, the present Russian common ownership of land may serve as the starting point for a communist development.'

As we know, things did not turn out this way, either as regards the revolution in the West or the survival of the obshchina in the process of the agrarian reforms of the new Soviet power. But what needs to be noted here is the rejection of any kind of historical determinism in Marx – in contrast to many of his followers for whom history always

[24] Ed. note: Karl Marx, 'Reply to Vera Zasulich', 8 March 1881, Karl Marx, Late Marx and the Russian Road, Marx and the 'Peripheries of Capitalism', Theodor Shanin (ed.), New York: Monthy Review Press, 1983; full text at <https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1881/zasulich/index.htm>.

has to pass through specific phases – and thus his far from indifferent attitude towards the survival of forms of common ownership in a society dominated by state ownership of the means of production, an attitude no less present in the later reflections of Engels. Engels was to return to this question in the years after Marx' death, with considerably more doubt that the obshchina could play a positive role. He spoke negatively of an excess of 'faith in the miraculous powers of the agrarian commune, from which one believed one could expect a social palingenesis', an error for which he believed Herzen bore responsibility but also Chernychevsky, the author of *What Is To Be Done?*, whom he greatly appreciated and whose title Lenin was to 'lift' for his famous essay. Engels mainly insisted on the need for a Russian revolution, which in the mid-1890s still had not yet arrived on the scene, as well as the indispensable leading role of the western proletariat if the rural commune was to be salvaged within the process of a socialist transformation. But all of this appears to be more the result of disappointment determined by the shape of events than a rejection of Marx' late reflections on the obshchina.

By way of a conclusion

This voyage through the history of the labour movement is not nostalgic. The forms of productive and social organisation that existed before capitalism or, better, before its complete dominance of every angle of society, do not have to be considered mere relics or, worse, obstacles, on the path of a linear progression between different modes of production. By virtue of their resistance to this totalising dimension of the capitalist system, they can, if updated, also be, or come to be, effective forms of resilience and resistance to this system – on condition that we not think of reproducing them exactly as they were and are aware that the crisis of modern capitalism is incubating the possibilities both of its transformation – given its protean character – and its overcoming. To express metaphorically what Lewis Carroll wrote: Alice has to go through the looking-glass, not shatter it and then re-assemble it in her own image. And that is what the left has to do to come back into existence.

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Public services in the age of austerity

Pablo Sanchez

It's no secret, public services are under pressure. For the past 30 years we've heard that they're not effective, that the private sector is more efficient. I'm sure you know how it goes. Underpinning all this are the big multinationals and their political representatives, eager to get their hands on public funds and transfer the state to its shareholders.

After World War II, public services in the most economically developed countries (OECD members) developed as a result of an organised workers' movement and the need of the elite to create wealth redistribution policies to help market development. This meant that industries such as the electricity, water, gas and telephone industries were state-managed in France, Belgium, the United Kingdom and the United States. Public services were not created to benefit the majority of the population, or the workers. They were created to serve the interests of the states when they chose, in spite of fierce opposition from the workers' movement and a large swathe of society, to be privatised, liberalised or transformed to serve a minority, whilst remaining public property.

After 35 years of privatisations and a 25-year long ideological offensive against public ownership, we need to take stock of the situation of public services. Services are as old as civilisation. They are a social convention based on the needs of each society. Just as the state paid a number of boatmen to provide travel in the Middle Ages, and as judges were paid in the ancient kingdoms of Babylon and Anatolia, today there is a need to debate the role of public services. Not just in relation to the status of the services, but also how they are managed and by whom. People want public services owned by the state or local councils to function how multinationals do. When contesting the privatisation of water in Thessaloniki, on the opposite side two other state-owned companies, an Israeli company (Mekorot, 100% public capital) and Suez Environnement (almost 60% public capital), were bidding for ownership.

The current movement in Europe against privatisation and in favour of remunicipalisation will, as a matter of course, open a further debate on management style. A more open, democratic style is desirable, where companies actually serve society and where workers and users are not just a lone voice, but also have the power to veto.

The remunicipalisation process we are witnessing in many parts of Europe shows how the state-owned companies of the future must behave: leave behind commercial ideas and act in cooperation with other public entities.
And to show that they are better than the private sector, in addition to performance and efficacy criteria, social criteria must be introduced. A company that cuts its citizens' water off is a company that is not meeting its brief: this is not what they were created for.

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First Thoughts for a Phenomenology of the Commons

Ugo Mattei

The commons are not concessions. They are resources that belong to the people as a matter of life necessity. Everybody has a right of an equal share of the commons and must be empowered by law to claim equal and direct access to it. Everybody has equal responsibility to the commons and shares a direct responsibility to transfer its wealth to future generations. The commons radically oppose both the state and private property as shaped by market forces, and are powerful sources of emancipation and social justice. However, they have been buried by the dominant academic discourse grounded in scientific positivism. They need to be emancipated by an authentic shift in phenomenological perception in order to produce emancipation.

Social justice is pursued in Western democracies by the (currently declining) institutions of the welfare state. Access to social justice programs is usually understood as provided by "rights of second generation," which require a specific obligation of the state to respect and guarantee them.

This vision, which places the specific burden of satisfying social rights on the government, has been central to the evolution of Western jurisprudence. Since the scientific revolution and the reformation, social justice has been expelled from the core domain of private law. The scholastic notion of law in the 16th century – which was based on two concepts of justice, distributive justice and commutative justice – was abandoned at the outset of modern Western jurisprudence. Starting with Grotius in the 17th century, concerns over justice were equated to issues of fairness in contractual exchanges between individuals. Distribution was seen as applying to the whole society and not just to its parts, and was assumed as a social fact. Thus the concerns of distributive justice were expelled from legal science.

Another significant change occurred in the 17th century with the so-

called scientific revolution, which gave rise to the paradigm of positivism and the dominant wisdom of modernity (Capra 2009). According to this vision, facts must be separated from values, the world of the "is" being clearly different from that of the "ought to be." Economics, developed as an autonomous branch of knowledge in the 18th century, shares such a vision (Blaug 1962). Distribution is considered entirely in the domain of political values (ought to be) rather than measurable facts (is). Consequently, issues related to how resources should be distributed in a just society have been expelled not only from the law but also from the self-proclaimed scientific discourse of economics.

Distributive justice thus became a matter of politics to be dealt with (if at all) by state institutions of public law and by regulation. The birth of the welfare state in the early 20th century was considered as an exceptional intervention into the market order by regulation mainly through taxes, with the specific aim to guarantee some social justice to the weaker members of society. In the West, since then, social justice was never able to capture again the core of rights discourse, and consequently has remained at the mercy of fiscal crisis: no money, no social rights! (Mattei & Nicola 2006).

The concept of the commons can provide exactly the necessary tools, both legally and politically, to address the incremental marginalization of social justice. Being outside of the state/market duopoly, the commons, as an institutional framework, presents an alternative legal paradigm, providing for more equitable distribution of resources. If properly theorized and politically perceived, the commons can serve the crucial function of reintroducing social justice into the core of the legal and economic discourse by empowering the people to direct action.

Seeing the commons

The current vision presents the opposition between "the public" (the domain of the government) and "the private" (the domain of the market and of private property) as exhausting all the range of

possibilities in a sort of zero-sum game. This gridlocked opposition is a product of the modernist tradition still dominant today in law and in economics. It hides the commons from the public vision.

The commons provide services that are often taken for granted by their users: many of those who benefit from the commons do not take into account their intrinsic value, only acknowledging it once the commons are destroyed and substitutes need to be found. To some extent, the commons are similar to household work, never noticed when the work is being done. Only when no one is there to do the dishes, you notice its value. In other words, you don't miss something until it is gone. An example is the role served by mangroves in coastal regions. When making development decisions, people take their existence for granted and simply do not consider their important role in protecting coastal villages from tsunami waves. Only when a tsunami hits, destroying villages, does the value of such vegetation become apparent (Brown 2009). It would be highly expensive to build a similar, artificial barrier.

Seeing the commons and fully appreciating their role in the ecology of life on earth is politically crucial and an absolute necessity for any serious scholarly endeavour. The commons cannot be circumscribed for purposes of analysis; they claim a fully holistic approach. This is why dominant social sciences, having internalized the zero-sum vision of market and government, are ill-equipped to grapple with the issue.

It could be said that the commons disappear as a result of their structural incompatibility with the deepest aspects of the Western "legality," a legality that is founded on the universalizing combination of individualism with the state/private property dichotomy. Centuries before the birth of the modern state, in ancient Rome, the early clans routinely extended their landholdings by usurping the commons. Engels describes the privatization of the commons as the most fundamental economic pattern of European development. Thus Western law has served a very important role in destroying the commons, certainly not in protecting them. This still seems to be the

pattern of development in cognitive capitalism (Boyle 2003): think about prosecution of peer–to–peer exchange on the internet.

But it has always been problematic for commoners to find someone that would represent them in court, to sue those who try to seize the commons. Both historically and today, those who benefit most from the commons are not "owners" in the technical sense, but usually poor farmers (or today young internet surfers) with no means of accessing the court system. Let's remember how easily farmers in England fell victim to enclosures in the first, crucial phase of early capitalism, which provided the necessary proletarian workforce for the rising manufacturers. Enclosures and violent recruitment of dispossessed peasants to become a capitalist workforce would simply have been impossible without the fundamental alliance between private ownership and the state (Tigar 1977).

The dominant vision of the commons as a poorly theorized exception to *either* market *or* government is rooted at the very origins and in the very structure of the dominating Western vision of the law. That is how a social "fact" becomes real.

Piercing the veil of the market-state dichotomy

Private property and the state are the two major legal and political institutions that carry on the dominant view of the world. But the state vs. private property debate presents a false dichotomy, a distinction without a difference. The state is no longer the democratic representation of the aggregate of individuals, but instead a market actor among many. The collusion or merger of state and private interests, with the same actors (corporations) on both sides of the equation, leaves little room for a "commons" framework, no matter how convincing the evidence about the benefits may be.

Conventional wisdom presents the market and the state as radically conflicting. It assumes, in a cryptic way, that they have a zero-sum relationship: more state is equal to less market and less market is equal to more state. In this reductive scheme, the state and private property

become quintessential of public and private poles of opposition. Of course this picture is totally false on both historical and modern levels because the two entities, as social and living institutions, can only be structurally linked in a relationship of mutual symbiosis. The fabricated, clear-cut opposition between the two reflects the ideological choice of the individualistic tradition. This conflict emerged at the very origins of liberal individualism, as seen in Locke and Hobbes, the two champions, respectively, of private property and of state sovereignty.

This reduction hides a shared structure of property (market) and sovereignty (state) based on the concentration of power. Private structures (corporations) concentrate their decision-making and power of exclusion in the hands of one subject (the owner) or within a hierarchy (the CEO). Similarly, public structures (bureaucracies) concentrate power at the top of a sovereign hierarchy. Both archetypes are inserted into a fundamental structure: the rule of a subject (an individual, a company, the government) over an object (a private good, an organization, a territory). Such pretended opposition between two domains that share the same structure is the result of modern Cartesian reductionist, quantitative, and individualistic thought.

The individual subject left alone, narcissistic and wanting, finds in products, commodities, and external objects the satisfaction of its desires. This impoverished relational horizon, which has produced our alienation from nature ("we own it therefore we are not part of it") is scientifically constructed as "objective" and measured by a system of prices to be paid for the satisfaction of various increasingly complex "needs." The typical individualistic "fiction" of the liberal tradition, e.g., the myth of Robinson Crusoe, induces market needs by erasing consciousness of the communitarian experience. The more needs the lonely individual has, the more money can be collected to satisfy them. Thus the qualitative paradigm based on meaningful relationships submits to a quantitative one.

Unfortunately, ecology and "systemic" thinking – the paradigms that

could reveal the devastating impact of individualistic accumulation on community life – are notably absent in contemporary politics, in part because it looks to the "social sciences" (particularly microeconomics, political science and marketing) as its only repository of ideas. Contrary to microbiologist Garrett Hardin's famed phrase, the "tragedy of the commons" (Hardin 1968) – "a commons is a place of no law and therefore ruin" – state and market mechanisms that rely on the "individual" as its object are in fact the culprits of this ruin today (Feeney et al. 1990).

Two world views in conflict competition versus cooperation

Individual selfishness is the central assumption underpinning Hardin's analysis. Only the crude application of the model of *Homo economicus* explains the results (and academic success) of the so-called "tragedy of the commons." *Homo economicus* originated in the work of John Stuart Mill and was brought into mainstream political economy in the 18th century by Adam Smith and David Ricardo, both of whom focused on individuals as maximizers of short-term utility. Hardin's "tragedy" parable continued this tradition when it cast the commons as a place of no law. According to Hardin, a common resource, as freely appropriable, stimulates the opportunistic individual behaviour of accumulation and ultimately destructive and "inefficient" consumption. This reasoning conjures up the image of a person invited to a buffet where food is freely accessible, and rather than sharing the bounty with others, rushes to try to maximize the amount of calories that can be stored at the expense of others, efficiently consuming the largest possible amount of food in the least possible time.

The "tragedy of the commons" highlights two worldviews in conflict. The dominant worldview is substantially social Darwinism, which makes "competition," "struggle," and "emulation" between physical and legal persons the essence of reality. The recessive worldview, an ecological and holistic understanding of the world, is based on relationships, cooperation and community. This model, still present in the organization of communities in the "periphery," continues to suffer a merciless assault by the structural adjustment and comprehensive

"modernisation" and "development" plans of the World Bank and International Monetary Fund. Such efforts encourage the "commodification" of land, and of local knowledge, as well as cultural adjustments (imposition of human rights, rule of law, gender equality, etc.) that serve as a justifying rhetoric for continuity in plunder (Mattei & Nader 2008).

Elinor Ostrom and her team of social scientists successfully amassed an overwhelming amount of empirical evidence to show that cooperative property arrangements are in fact successful and that individuals do not necessarily destroy their common-pool resources. Ostrom's work undeniably marks a critical turning point in economic theory. It refuted Hardin's tragedy, but it failed to notice that corporations and states, if not individuals, behave in ways that nonetheless produce tragedy. Without consideration of the fierce historical, political, and legal struggle between commoners on the one hand and the unholy alliance between the state and private property (capital) on the other, Ostrom's findings remain limited in their applicability.

The so-called "original accumulation" described by Marx has been an institutional phenomenon carried on by an alliance between centralized state structures and a concentration of capital by private property and corporate structures. This process has victimized the ordinary ("non-institutional") human being, and has produced and ideologically justified a process of brutal institutional exploitation of the multitudes by the few. Such a phenomenon was by no means limited to the "enclosure" laws of England. The *terra nullius* doctrines endorsed by John Locke and other scholars during the period of colonial expansion overseas confirm the institutional nature of "tragedy-producing" behavior (Mattei and Nader 2008). Natives were all but denied human condition (were "reduced" to a natural state) because they did not adopt the civilizing institution of private property. In more recent times, the patterns of domination, institutional settings, and narratives of enclosure have taken on more subtle forms, but continue to enclose the commons.

Hardin's parable maintains tremendous predictive power despite Ostrom's critique and all its own intellectual shortcomings, e.g., that the common is a place of no law, precisely because as a rule "mere humans," acting outside of the institutional context of modernity, do respect the commons. Meanwhile, "institutional humans" operating via states and corporations continue to produce tragic outcomes. Thus the panoply of Ostrom's examples of flesh-and-blood individuals who cooperate rather than compete, seems impotent to undermine Hardin's argument. The examples do not take adequate account of the institutional realities and the actual power structures in which decision-making occurs. Indeed, Ostrom's critique of the tragedy of the commons risks shifting attention away from the problem and shielding powerful economic and political actors from responsibility for "tragedies."

Often, scholars accept the specious dichotomy between state and market, as discussed above, and so decline to develop a deeper phenomenological understanding of the commons that could make a radical break from the discourse of commodification. Understanding commons as commodities actually limits our understanding of the many types of commons (natural, social, cultural, knowledge-based, historical) and blunts their revolutionary potential and legitimate claims for a radical, egalitarian redistribution of resources. Much of the literature on the commons should be thoroughly and critically examined so as to avoid reproducing the traditional mechanistic view, the separation between object and subject, and resulting commodification (Rota 1991).

Rehabilitating the common sense

A phenomenological understanding of the commons forces us to move beyond the reductionist opposition of "subject-object," which produces the commodification of both. It helps us understand that, unlike private and public goods, commons are not commodities and cannot be reduced to the language of ownership. They express a qualitative relation. It would be reductive to say that we have a

common good. We should rather see to what extent we are the commons, in as much as we are part of an environment, an urban or rural ecosystem. Here, the subject is part of the object. For this reason commons are inseparably related and link individuals, communities, and the ecosystem itself.

This holistic revolution has ancient roots, from Aristotle's ontological investigations to later philosophers like Husserl and Heidegger, who employed concepts such as "fundierung" (Heidegger 1962) and "relevance" to signal the end of an "objective" world where subjects are separate from their objects of observation and individuals are separate from their very environment. New holistic attitudes have emerged, also, in the natural sciences through physics and systems biology, which are based on the qualitative mapping of relationships, rather than on quantitative measurements and the positivistic reductionism of Galileo, Descartes, and Newton (Capra 2004). Quantum mechanics in particular, and Einstein's relativity, have caused an epistemological revolution that disciplines such as cognitive science and consciousness studies are attempting to address. Despite the richness of the holistic revolution in these disciplines, this revolution has yet to be embraced in the social sciences.
The commons can be described only from a phenomenological and holistic perspective, which is incompatible with the above-mentioned reductionism and with the idea of individual autonomy as developed in the rights-based capitalistic tradition. In this respect, commons are an *ecological-qualitative* category based on inclusion, access and community duties, whereas property and state sovereignty are *economical-quantitative* categories based on exclusion (produced scarcity): a rhetoric of individual-centered rights and the violent concentration of power into a few hands.

These insights require the jurists to address the difficult and urgent task of constructing the foundations of a new legal order capable of transcending the dualisms (property/state, subject/object, public/private) inherent in the current order. The new order must overcome the dominance of private property, individualism, and competition,

and focus on the collective and the commons. The challenge is to create an institutional setting that can enable long-term sustainability and full inclusion of all global commoners, including the poorest and most vulnerable. To do so we need first an epistemic (and political) emancipation from the predatory appetites of both the state and private property, the two fundamental components of the dominant Western wisdom.

A political shift

Today we can see from examples all around us – from global warming to the economic collapse – that the commons offers us a fundamental and necessary shift in the perception of reality. In this context the commons help us reject the illusions of modern liberalism and rationalism. This is why we cannot settle for seeing the "commons" as a mere third way between private property and the state, as most of the current debate seems to suggest. The commons cannot be reduced to managing the leftovers of the Western historical banquet, which is the preoccupation of the contemporary political scene. To the contrary, we believe that the commons must be elevated as an institutional structure that genuinely questions the domains of private property, its ideological apparatuses and the state – not a third way but a challenge to the alliance between private property and the state.

The shift that we need to accomplish not only theoretically but also politically, is to change the dominant wisdom – from the absolute domination of the subject (as owner or state) over the object (territory or environment) – to a focus on the relationship of the two (subject-nature). We need a new common sense that recognizes that each individual's survival depends on his/her relationship with others, with the community, and with the environment. The first necessary shift to a holistic vision requires a reorientation away from quantity (a fundamental idea of the scientific revolution and of capitalist accumulation) to quality.

A legal system based on the commons must use the "ecosystem" as a model, where a community of individuals or social groups is horizontally linked and power is dispersed. It must generally reject the

idea of hierarchy in favour of a participatory and collaborative model, one that prevents the concentration of power and puts community interests at the center. Only in such a framework can social rights actually be satisfied. In this logic, a commons is not a mere resource (water, culture, the internet, land, education), but rather a shared conception of reality that radically challenges the seemingly unstoppable trend of enclosure and corporatisation.

Even today, despite the dramatic crisis of 2008, state intervention, dubbed Keynesian policy, has served to transfer massive amounts of public money to the private sector. The logic of plunder shared by both the private and the state sector could not be more open. What we need is rather a very large extension of the commons framework: "less government, less market, more commons." This is, I believe, the only way to resurrect an alternative narrative of social inclusion.

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Part 3
Strategies and Challenges for the Future

Towards new ways of collective appropriation

Marie-Christine Vergiat

In its current form competition, free trade and commerce seem to make up for everything in Europe. Austerity policies are a heavy burden for its people, particularly the most fragile groups. Public services are constantly being dismantled, privatised at every turn, even though public services were created as a safety net for the most fragile members of society. In this context, the issue of common property beyond the issue of state-owned goods alone, offers new perspectives and creates an opportunity for making changes. If the majority of common property is property that belongs to everyone and therefore cannot be privatised, water and air cannot be appropriated, not even by the state.

Beyond that, the notion of the "commons" can be seen in the communal goods of the old system, or in the phenomenon of privatisation and grabbing of collective agricultural land in the countries of the South. These notions involve a number of "rights" that some people believe are intangible, such are property.

By building on struggles in Europe and elsewhere (e.g. in Italy), but also in South American countries and Africa, we can invent different ways of social organisation, production, consumption and social democracy if we use need as a starting point. The classic forms of social economy (cooperatives, collectives and associations) can serve as a model, but they have their limits. Comparisons between countries are not always easy because, for example, Italian social cooperatives are more similar to what we call "associations" in French. A number of contradictions could be overcome by taking a global view on the status of a partnership in Europe, totally unconnected with the status of a stock company, unlike what was done for European cooperative companies.

It's also a question of opening the door to new methods of collective and social appropriation, by which consumers, users and, more generally, the public would be able to give their input. It's a question of

taking a different approach to separating private and public, trade-centric and non-trade-centric, lucrative and non-lucrative both in relation to private companies and state-owned companies, which too often have come to think and act like purely commercial entities. European legislation, as deadly as some of it may be, can also open up new perspectives that respect the principal of subsidiarity and therefore of the autonomy of member states and territorial collectives. But the member states need to want to take advantage of this.

These are the reflections that should guide the European Parliament intergroup on the commons that the GUE/NGL has made one of its priorities.

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Co-operative ownership and Common

Benoît Borrits

Company transformations into co-operatives are often presented as construction of Commons, as the various stakeholders – workers and users – are involved in the process of preserving and developing a resource. However, even though the co-operative form departs from the traditional rules of capital, it still remains essentially private in nature, which leads to frequent capitalist drifts when the co-operative is successful. What changes to the co-operative form would permit a better construction of the commons?

While a Common is made by a co-activity between a number of stakeholders managing a resource[25], co-operative ownership remains private in nature. Not all stakeholders can be represented in a co-operative and similarly, every person who participates in the life of the co-operative is not necessarily a member of it, as membership applications can sometimes be rejected. Likewise, what makes you a member of a co-operative is the purchase of an initial share. This is an investment, albeit often minimal[26], and this constitutes ownership. In addition, co-operative shares cannot be freely transferred; they are generally bought back by the co-operative itself[27]. Although all these elements are obvious deviations from traditional private ownership of a capitalist nature, it is still true that co-operative shares remain private as they belong to a clearly defined natural or legal person.

The third co-operative principle[28] is that the company's reserves are

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25 Commun, Essai sur la révolution au XXe siècle, [Commons, an essay on the revolution of the 20th century] Pierre Dardot and Christian Laval, Editions La Découverte, 2014

26 Which is not always the case of worker co-operative, in particular those in the Mondragón group in Spain.

27 This is why they are variable capital companies.

28 http://ica.coop/en/whats-co-op/co-operative-identity-values-principles

indivisible. When a company makes a profit that is not distributed as salaries or dividends, it is accounted for as reserves which increase the value of the company's equity[29]. In the classic regime of a capital company, shareholders have a right to the equity commensurate with their holdings. This means that the sales price of a share always includes this portion of the reserves. In co-operative law, due to the limited remuneration of the contributions, the profits made cannot be distributed to members and therefore become indivisible, which means that they belong exclusively to the co-operative and not to its members. This is why transactions are always done at the nominal value of the share. Do these indivisible reserves prefigure the construction of a common? This is far from certain.

Reserves build up as soon as the company turns a profit. In the competitive environment of today's economies, these reserves, like the price of members' shares, are a force driving the development of the company. Just like any capitalist shareholder, co-operative members do not want to see their shares depreciate. Nor do they want to divest themselves of reserves, once built up, as they represent both a security net for their shares and a way of developing the co-operative further. When a co-operative grows economically, it can often be observed that the co-operative spirit that powered the organisation at the beginning gives way to typically capitalist behaviour. One of the most obvious examples of this is the co-operative group Mondragón.

At the peak of its growth, the group was made up of 125 co-operatives linked through second level co-operatives and the governing body elected by a group assembly made up of representatives of the various co-operatives. Mainly comprising industrial co-operatives, the group had to face the issue of globalisation after Spain joined the European Union in 1996. To do so it introduced a policy of acquiring foreign companies which remained subsidiaries of Mondragón co-operatives and were not turned into new co-operatives. The workers of these subsidiaries kept the status of employees, reporting to the company

29 Reserves are defined, among other things, as being the difference between the assets and liabilities.

management and did not become members like their counterparts in Spain. So the question is, why didn't these employees become members? A number of different explanations have been mooted (legal difficulties, membership reserved to the Basque Country, etc.) which remain unconvincing. There is, however, another reason which is far more prosaic.

At the end of 2012, the group's equity amounted to €3.95 billion, composed of 2.05 billion of shares and 1.9 of billion indivisible reserves. Unlike French worker co-operatives (SCOPs), the shares in Mondragón co-operatives are revalued. One might think that this fact would facilitate the entry of new members as they join the co-operatives on the basis of a share that is revalued every year. But it is not a full revaluation, as we can see from the existence of indivisible reserves which almost equal the number of shares. Even if these indivisible reserves do not belong to Mondragón members individually, they do represent a safety net for them and the potential for investment and development. So it is easy to understand that they are attached to them and want to keep them. From a strictly financial point of view, a new member of a Mondragón co-operative benefits from a discount of approximately 50% to access the group's equity simply due to the build-up of these reserves. There is no doubt that current members are happy to introduce new people gradually, but doing so on a large scale and integrating employees of the subsidiaries bought is another problem entirely.

In other words, although the indivisible reserves are indisputably collective property, it is still private from the point of view of people outside of the co-operative. The reserves are indivisible due to the third pillar of co-operatives: limited remuneration of the capital. This does not resolve the issue of ownership linked to the existence of equity. A new approach could be tested, that of an equity-free company that is financed by debt alone. This would be an unprecedented political revolution that would pursue the idea of creating Common: power would no longer be determined by holding company shares, but one's place in relation to the production unit. Co-

activity would grant the power to decide. Workers would manage production and users would be able to have their say on the direction and quality of production. But is this credible? Is equity really avoidable?

The world of finance justifies the existence of equity by stating that lenders need to see that owners have more to lose than lenders do: a loan entails a commitment to repay, regardless of how the company performs financially. It is, however, the shareholders who suffer first from a fall in activity or shrinking margin, provided that the capital is significant and the shareholders have something to lose. This is why financiers always check the amount of equity in the company before granting any credit to a capital company, often of the opinion that a ratio of one to one is reasonable. In the world of worker co-operatives, however, we can see that the approaches are much more aggressive.

We can refer here to the example of the Ceralep worker co-operative (SCOP), based in Saint Vallier in the French department of Drôme. A manufacturer of very high tension electrical insulators, this company was liquidated in 2004 by its owner, an American group. The employees put together a plan to turn the company into a co-operative in order to save jobs. Funding of €900,000 was needed. All the banks, with the exception of Crédit coopératif, refused to finance the project. The co-operative movement – risk capital organisms from the SCOP movement and the Crédit coopératif – put up €800,000 in loans and quasi equity funding (shares). The employees were asked to contribute €100,000 which they did not have. In the end, they contributed €51,000 and the rest came from subscriptions from locals in support of employment. This enterprise has just celebrated its 10 year anniversary, during which the enterprise has increased salaries while still taking on additional staff, all this with an initial contribution of just 5.67% of the necessary operating costs, a ratio which is absolutely unimaginable in classic finance.

More recently a tech company was turned into a SCOP by its employees: SET. The company, which belonged to a bankrupt Swedish

start-up, had been put up for sale. An American-Singaporean group, K&S, put in a bid. The staff, fearing they were going to lose the technology they had developed over a number of years[30], wanted to put in a takeover bid. With only limited funds at their disposal (€160,000), they did not manage to find classic financial partners. Although they had not intended to turn the company into a SCOP, it was the co-operative movement that found the solution by issuing quasi-equity securities[31] to build up equity so that the enterprise could borrow from the banks Crédit coopératif and CIC (a subsidiary of Crédit Mutuel). Out of a total €2 million, the staff only contributed 8% of this amount. After two years of being in business, the company is doing very well and continues to innovate and increase turnover.

These two examples – we could look at hundreds of others – show us that the co-operative movement and the world of finance have different approaches. It is not the equity that serves as a guarantee but the desire of workers to keep their jobs. In fact, if the legal form of the co-operative did not require members and therefore shares, co-operatives could work just as well without any financing from workers. If this can often be established (without claiming that this is *always* the case) can enterprise in practice work with debt as the only method of funding?

Debt financing means that workers are not doing any self-financing[32] and that they therefore get the full market value for whatever they produce[33]. At a first glance this looks tricky as equity is subject to discussion and applying different accounting standards results in

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30 The SET was set up in 1975. It was then bought out by a German electronics group and then by the Swedish start-up which saw the technology developed by SET as an asset to its own expansion.

31 These quasi-equity securites (*titres participatifs*) are participative loans which could only be reimbursed at the co-operative will.

32 Which would lead to the creation of equity.

33 By disregarding the regulatory mechanisms of redistribution of the wealth produced such as social security contributions.

different equity evaluations. The difficulty is evaluating the assets[34]. But rather than trying to give them a value, shouldn't we accept that *all* assets, whether tangible or intangible, must be financed? This is already the case for long-term tangible investments. A company that wants to invest in a piece of equipment that will be used for 20 years would, for example, finance the purchase by means of a bank loan for the same length of time[35]. The same should be done for any intangible asset such as research and development or a publicity campaign. A research and development programme must first be quantified and would be funded on a risk capital basis with variable rates depending on the business outcomes of the research. Similarly, a marketing campaign must be funded in advance for the period of time over which the company hopes to see results, probably with a repayment schedule that would quickly repay the bulk of the campaign then with smaller repayments corresponding to the staggered publicity achieved during the campaign. Finally, a large part of assets rely on short-term elements such as stocks, client receivables less short-term debts. This is a classic assessment of the working capital requirement. The idea is therefore that banks give companies lines of credit commensurate with this working capital requirement, which will be continuously re-evaluated based on each accounting statement.

Debt financing socialised enterprises is therefore technically possible. It would allow the creation of enterprises without equity that would not belong to anyone specifically but would be at the disposal of its users, workers and clients alike. Under this format, and unlike co-operatives that only differ from the capitalist way of thinking partly, the entity would not accumulate profits for itself. This means that workers would be remunerated at the exact market value of their work, perhaps enhanced or adjusted by subsidies or deductions. This presupposes the existence of a socialised banking and financial

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34 Although debts are relatively easy to quantify, as they are sums of money that must be repaid, the lack of certainty in relation to evaluating equity is due to the assets, as the liabilities are always equal to the assets.

35 Or sometimes leasing. In this case, the equipment does not even belong to the company and is not listed as an asset.

services sector that would permit collective ownership of manufacturing means at different levels and represent Commons at higher levels in the company. In this context, investment decisions would be taken jointly by the company's workers and users and a socialised credit agency that would agree to a funding proposal, thereby heralding an instance of Commons held by them with a view to creating a federation of Commons.

Self-management, Social Reappropriation and the Commons

Pierre Dardot

I would like to start by examining the latter of these three notions, first exploring its meaning in the singular sense. The 'common' should be understood as a political principle whereby there is no shared accountability without co-participation in the same activity: simply being a member of a specific group (be it a family, a nation, a certain ethnicity, etc.) is not enough. It is this very principle that inspired the backlash against representative democracy seen amongst movements in recent history that have occupied squares (the *Indignés* movement as well as the Gezi Park and Taksim Square protests, to name but a few). These kinds of movements create a link between the demands of a 'real democracy' and those of self-governed 'commons' (notably turning urban spaces into living spaces).

On a broader scale, 'commons' do not refer to the resources taken in their own right but to the ongoing link that exists between a thing (a natural resource, knowledge, a cultural space) and the activity carried out by the community in charge of managing, maintaining and protecting it. The commons thus allow a space – one that exists beyond the notion of state or private property – to be created that is reserved for collective use and that cannot be appropriated: in this sense, the Common is instituted with a view to being used as such, to the extent that the space itself and the purpose for which it is used should both be removed from all notions of ownership, regardless of its form.

If the political principle that is the commons is to be implemented as part of the governing process for all commons, it is necessary to set 'socio-professional' commons apart from commons that are strictly political. While the latter are normally instituted on a purely territorial basis (within a municipality, a region, a country, etc.), socio-professional commons are influenced by the object or place that they take responsibility of. However, regardless of the situation, they are

always invariably *socio*-professional and never purely professional. Strictly professional commons cannot exist due to the implications of the commons' very existence: the act of pooling resources must incorporate all those who, in one way or another, are affected by the preservation and protection of the object or resource at hand, regardless of strict professional boundaries. A common does not need to operate in the same way as a trade union; it needs to integrate its own link to the 'society' (of which it is an integral part) into its organisational structure.

This particularly applies to the institution of businesses. Civil law only defines 'society' as a 'common enterprise'. The time has come to turn this latter notion into action: business itself needs to become part of the commons. To this end, we need to enforce two inseparable requirements: the first is the creation of a democratic element within the business and the second is to forge a relationship between the business and the rest of society.

With regard to the first notion, it is important to set down a general rule: no work task will be executed without the equal participation of everyone in the decision-making process. This rule is nothing but a simple translation of the commons principle into a corporate setting, applying it to the realm of production. Placing added focus on the importance of collective decision-making brings us back to the requirement for a business's self-governance. Here 'self-government' is favoured over 'self-management' insofar as 'self-management' can imply that effective management is in the hands of people other than those tasked with 'managing'.

In terms of the second notion, it is necessary to take into account all of a business's social interactions in such a way as to integrate the effects (both direct and indirect) production has on the rest of society into decision-making processes. It is thus necessary to go beyond the only salaried employees and encourage all members of society who have an interest (in whatever capacity) in the business's activity (clients, users, environmental protection associations) to participate in its

governing process. In this respect, the idea of 'social property' is ambivalent in the sense that it may suggest a closed community of paid workers or producers who alone are responsible for making all decisions. Here it would be better to speak of a 'social appropriation' to indicate the determination of all those actors involved in propelling the business towards a more social model.

Social Protection: It's up to Us! Redefining Social Protection through 'Social Commons'

Francine Mestrum

Neoliberal policies are having a disastrous impact on systems of social protection all over the world. They are taking away people's economic and social rights, privatising public services and even attacking countries' existing employment laws.

Whilst the levels of protection differ widely between the North and the South, and even if policies may seem contradictory at first glance (promotion of social protection in the South, dismantling of welfare states in the North), the exact same singular logic is at work in both regions: the introduction of a new neoliberal social paradigm.

We are already familiar with the characteristics of this 'new' form of social policy: it operates at the behest of the economy and the market, creates new markets in sectors such as healthcare and education, focuses on the poorest instead of applying a universal model, creates growth in the charitable and philanthropic sectors and encourages small-scale monetary transfers. If social security systems remain in place, they are no longer considered part of the state's remit: those who wish to use their services can purchase them on the market. Social protection becomes, first and foremost, a modest redistribution mechanism – a by-product of the state and of the economy as well as of national budgets.

Within the European Union, these policies are aggravated by specific recommendations made by the Commission and by its proposals for 'social investments' and 'social innovation' measures. Within the context of austerity, and even if the EU does not possess the capabilities to deliver social security, this reinforces the search for economic productivity and stability through empowering local communities and individual families.

It is also important to mention the draft free-trade treaties that directly threaten public authorities' power to offer citizens non-commercial public services away from international competition.

Until now, the resistance to this evolution has been restrained. Trade unions have been on the defensive and are only able to defend the status quo, i.e. rights that have already been acquired. Their legitimacy is placed under scrutiny every single day, whilst arguments for a process of de-unionisation are gaining momentum. Of course, the situation differs from country to country, but the overall trend is undeniable.

Add to this a noted apathy among the young, influenced by a neoliberal ideology or by a libertarian school of thought, and we see a system of social protection that is very much under threat.

It is within this type of environment that we see a resurgence in calls for a 'basic income' or 'universal benefits' that would put an end to the structural, horizontal solidarity that characterises social protection as we now know it. It may seem like a good idea at first, but this proposal would in fact further aggravate existing inequalities (as achieving equality would require different measures for individuals' specific circumstances), reduce payroll costs for employers and accelerate the privatisation of public services. This is because everyone would be given a fixed sum and be left to choose their own insurance policies and the services they desire on the market.

It is true that certain criticisms with regard to systems of social protection are justified, for example, the lack of individualisation of rights, the substantial division of the different systems and sectors and the insufficient provision of benefits. Our welfare states are the result of concessions made by and large after the Second World War. Since then, our economies and our societies have changed: women now make up a greater percentage of the workforce, there is a higher number of single-parent households, workers are more mobile and migration is a factor as is an increased demand for flexibility on the

part of the workforce, and so on. The needs of the market have changed and our current systems are not adequately meeting these new demands.

There are thus a number of reasons why we would want to rethink social protection – the threat of neoliberalism, apathy among the young, new demands that need to be met – and to modernise it while preserving its basic principles that remain as pertinent as ever.

The social commons

Social protection belongs to us. This crucial statement should be emphasised all throughout the debate that we will need to have in order to redesign the system. This is not something that simply landed in our laps or is organised by the state; one of the places where its roots lie is in workers' self-organisation. There is a need to strengthen and expand the scope of this principle. Until now, workers have been the ones who have paid towards the welfare state through social security contributions and citizens have been paying for public services and social benefits through their taxes.

What does the concept of 'social commons' actually mean?

As a matter of fact, 'commons' are always 'social' by their very definition: they would not exist without the direct involvement of citizens. Here the adjective 'social' is only added to indicate that we are speaking of a different approach to social protection.

The use of the term 'common' first shows that the task of redefining the concept will be done in a manner that is both democratic and participative. At this point it is useful to mention the definition given by Dardot and Laval[36] that outlines that only those things that are defined as 'commons' in a demonstration of co-activity are actually commons. It is the construction of a political community – regardless of the level at which it is created – and the igniting of a debate on the rules of access, management and the control over those items being defined as

[36] Dardot, P. and Laval, C., Commun, Paris, La Découverte, 2014.

'commons'. The 'commons' can therefore be taken to mean both those people/groups involved in the exercise as well as the exercise itself. Furthermore, these commons provide a conceptual framework for rethinking how we respect economic and social rights.

Understanding social protection as a common seems obvious: what could be more logical than organising the public debate around social needs that range from pensions to benefits, from healthcare to wages, from unemployment benefits to child benefits? All of these things belong to and are intended for the citizens.

This approach brings with it a number of significant advantages.

1) the fact that it shows society taking back what it already owns: the protection that it provides for itself and that it needs.
2) through this task of deliberation and negotiation or, in other words, the creation or consolidation of a political community – at whichever level – society is able to protect its status as a society. Neoliberalism ignores societies in favour of the emergence of atomised individuals. This collective dimension to the social commons is therefore key.
3) it will be possible to expand and strengthen economic and social rights where the need lies. By this I mean time credits or flexible conditions that favour workers to name just two examples.
4) it should be possible to expand social protection to include 'environmental' rights, such as the right to water or the right to land for farmers.

It would also be useful to consider the substantial division of rights as well as of the sub-sectors/systems that exist as part of social protection in order to create a system with greater coherency that is also more effective. In any case, now that large groups of the disadvantaged, migrants and refugees have become willing to accept any type of work at any given wage and the fight against poverty has become impossible because the job market has turned into an incessant driver of economic hardship, it is no longer viable to uphold the immovable dividing line that exists between the right to work and the fight against poverty.

It will also be necessary to rethink the role of the state. It is clear that with the current system of contributions, taxes, insurance and redistribution, the public sector will have a role to play, most importantly in the safeguarding of citizens' rights. This state will be different and act differently to the one that exists today. For now, let us refer to it as a 'partner state'.

Placing care at the heart of our mission

We already know that taking the required environmental policies into consideration would invariably bring about a range of economic issues that would need to be resolved: how can we protect the environment if petroleum companies are polluting the Amazon or if the chemical industry is producing dangerous pesticides and genetically modified organisms?

This same reasoning also applies to social policies: how can preventative treatments be encouraged if multinational food corporations flood the market with products that contain extremely high levels of sugar or fat?

This means that the current state of affairs would not only enable these two movements – the movement for climate justice and the movement for social justice – to come together but, in addition to that, it would also mean that these two movements have enormous potential when it comes to effectively tackling our current economic system.

This approach can be further substantiated by examining feminist economic theories. Indeed, care has always been (in a similar way to the environment) seen as separate from the dominant school of economic thought. Today we need to integrate the two concepts and to also rethink our economic approach.

By focusing more on 'care', we come to the conclusion that our economic system should produce everything that people need – from

computers to trains and food – and that environmental policy should ensure the environment is protected, whilst social policies need to take care of the social needs of the people. This triad of policies represents what is needed to preserve life and to protect not only individuals but society and the environment.

Don't wait for the economy to change: this is a job for progressive forces

It is impossible to put a halt to climate change within a capitalist system, so they keep telling us. Whilst this may be true, does this ultimately mean that we have to wait for an economic shift to occur for the environmental policies required to be put in place?

Equally, social justice is not possible within a capitalist system, but perhaps we could start dealing with the social aspects as a means to tackling the economic model?

Politics are, above all, a question of power distribution. The left is currently rather weak more or less all over Europe and throughout the rest of the world. However, the demands are considerable when it comes to our social needs.

It seems to me that by preparing a programme of 'social commons', by drawing up a viable plan for an improved and strengthened concept of social protection, it should be possible to convince the general public of the pertinence and the importance of progressive ideas. Of course, as the 'commons' should be defined through a democratic and participative process, it is not possible to put forward a predefined model. However, it is clear that this exercise would only serve to improve the quality of life for the population. That is precisely what progressive forces need to start doing in order to change the balance of power and form new majorities.

Essentially, public authorities can protect the population in two different ways: it can use the army or the police to protect the physical integrity of the people, or it can use economic and social rights to

improve the quality of life. In recent decades, we have witnessed a further entrenching of the first type of protection but the price we have paid is an erosion of the second. However, all of us, everywhere and at all times, need social protection, healthcare, education, a home, etc. It is time to buck the trend and to once again put the focus back on the need for social protection. It is the pathway to peace and justice.

By adopting an approach in terms of 'social commons', a long-term project that could begin today, it will be a matter of 'bread and roses', of material needs and the immaterial needs of coexistence.
Of course, many questions still remain and they will be the subject of further research, particularly in order to establish the exact relationship between human rights and the commons, or to establish a legal framework for the commons and the status of property. However, what immediately seems clear is that this new perspective will allow us to put an end to many outdated dichotomies.
This approach gives us an opportunity to extend a hand to movements for climate justice and to boost our own position as movements that are striving for the emancipation of societies and individuals.

For Further Reference:
www.globalsocialjustice.eu
www.socialcommons.eu

A Political Vision for the Commons

Benoît Borrits & Chantal Delmas

The concept of common good has been increasingly present in class struggles. Could this reference to the concept of "the commons" lay the groundwork for a political project that surpasses ownership? One could think so given the many discussion seminars currently taking place on the subject. The concept involves expanding the idea of commons to include employee-led company takeovers, as well as the protection and extension of public services whilst, in both cases, striving to surpass state- or privately-owned properties by focusing on the co-operation between workers and users. But such a programme will have to tackle the required wresting of power from the state, with the aim of its dismantling, whilst social movements will need to mobilise in order to build a federation of commons that will replace the state.

Today, the idea of an alternative political project based on the commons can be found in many movements. Often reduced to an adjective applied to the noun "good", we talk about common goods such as water, land and culture as if the commons could only consist of specific categories. Although "common" is used as an adjective in specific struggles, it significantly reduces its impact. Indeed, "common" is the antinomy of ownership. It only exists because it is a social construct, "a political principal that can be found in all community initiatives based on the will for self-governance and the refusal of exclusive ownership."[37] As well as these struggles for common "goods", we should also include reclaimed and self-managed businesses such as *SCOP TI* (previously *Fralib*) in France or *Vio.Me.* in Greece, and public services as long as they have the potential to become fully democratised, by which we mean managed by producers and users.

To be valid, the commons project must be able to create a social alliance that has the potential to surpass capitalism. As such, it needs

37 Christian Laval, L'Humanité, 17 November 2014

to be at the heart of society. For that reason, it is essential to take into consideration the employees' demands for new rights as they benefit businesses at both a social and environmental level. If we wish to discuss and combine experiences of self-management within the commons together with employees' acquisition of rights which reduce the power of capital, we could talk about an economic democracy as all these struggles aim at challenging the capitalist rights to ownership. Dialogue and teamwork between these various social experiments have become a crucial condition to achieving a paradigm shift.

"Right to use" versus "right to own"

In the 19th century, the legitimacy of people's right to the commons was fully discarded by the capitalist movement and solely replaced by the right to own property. The movement thus had no institution left to rely on in order to assert its legitimacy, which had, and continues to have, a dual effect:

- People who internalised the right to ownership as the sacrosanct norm feel alienated. For instance, when a company goes bankrupt, the first reaction has long been to find a new CEO rather than to consider that employees have a right to take over the company.
- When the struggle has been fruitful for the commons, as was the case for the supply of water, it is hard to find sustainable pathways for the commons that do not include a state-owned company or a multi-stakeholder co-operative that will not rule out any future "expropriation" of the commons.

For these two reasons, demanding a right to institutions of the commons is part of the class struggle and becomes involved in the capital expropriation process by replacing the right to own by the right to use.

Ambiguity of public services

After the war, we could have relied upon public services to create commons based on real democracy. However, both workers and

users were excluded from the decision-making process and, from the 1980s onwards, liberalism had no difficulty whatsoever privatising many public entities and faced no major resistance at the beginning of this process. Today, more profitable entities are given to the private sector and public services are expected to be run like capitalist companies on the basis of a limited staff turnover, using cost-effectiveness and profit as a compass rather than what benefits society as a whole. The previous model that served the "public good" and was based on solidarity and universal access to care, water and education is being steadily watered down.

This position, which has been adopted by the neoliberal state, poses a challenge to those fighting for an alternative. Although it is advisable to fight for the gains public services have already achieved, these benefits are also progressively becoming the tools of neoliberal capitalism – creating growing inequalities – whilst free and undistorted competition is becoming the rule. Resolving this contradiction through social struggles is not an easy task. Wanting to turn public services into commons managed by their communities (employees and users) instead of the state is one possible way to escape this contradiction when engaging in emancipation struggles. It is no coincidence that many struggles for the protection and the extension of all sorts of common goods stress the importance of the access and implication of stakeholders in the decision-making process, denying the supposed right of potential property owners and presaging a time when "ownership" is surpassed.

Unavoidable state power

However, to think that the proliferation of such initiatives that free themselves from state supervision will put an end to capitalism is merely wishful thinking. The state, as a body of order and violence, plays an essential role in retaining ownership. Even though it is possible to develop something intangible under a copyleft license, by and large this type of production still requires moneyed capital and is therefore subject to a copyright supposedly protected by the repressive state. What would be the point, in the long term, of the

proliferation of companies taken over by employees and turned into co-operatives if these remain limited to small units that are forced to act as subcontractors for multinationals? People are sometimes, as imagined in the past during the great movement of consumer co-operatives, willing to build their own alternative distribution networks. But today, in our internet world, a considerable part of distribution depends on huge investments that gorge invested capital. The idea of building a democratic alternative society that would progressively become a substitute for the market and the state existed in the 19th century and disappeared with the death of Charles Gide, who instigated the *École de Nîmes* co-operative movement[38]. No new technology or paradigm allows us to eliminate the need to intervene in institutional politics and to contemplate the wresting of state power with the aim of its ultimate decline.

Unemployment is another example of the unavoidable wresting of state power. A recurring phenomenon since the 1970s and the rise of neoliberalism, unemployment has reached unprecedented levels since the European debt crisis and the austerity measures that followed. Reducing working hours is an old demand made by the workers' movement and the reason behind the 1 May bank holiday[39]. It aims at a uniform reduction in working hours without reduction in pay whilst creating the jobs needed in order to reduce unemployment. This is a simple solution which is far more credible than the employers' claims that regressive social policies tend to drive investments and, indirectly, employment in order to contribute to economic growth. Some alternative methods offer a similar green-liberal view praising the employment growth made possible by the development of renewable energies. Here we do not wish to question the urgency of the energy transition. However, if the use of renewable energy creates jobs and therefore requires greater employment, it means that it is currently

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38 Marc Pénin, Charles Gide 1847-1932, L'esprit critique, L'Harmattan, 1998

39 The demand for an eight-hour day was the main reason for the strike which took place on 1 May 1886 in the McCormick factory in Chicago and ended four days later with 180 policemen charging at a pacifist crowd in Haymarket Square.

more expensive than fossil fuels and thus constitutes a vehicle for reduced productivity. who will pay this reduction? The capital or the working class? This is the fundamental question we all need to answer. We demand that a reduction in working hours and the energy transition should be charged to the capital and, by taking this stance, the substitution of joint stock companies with self-managed structures will be placed back on the agenda.

One of the basic requirements needed to ensure the flourishing of a full democracy is that every individual has a job and a wage. No serious progress can be made if 20% of the population is forced to survive on alternative sources of income and is excluded from any economic activity on a long-term basis. Equally, the fact that the majority of those employed live with the constant fear of being laid off undoubtedly has a negative impact on their sense of personal fulfilment. The reduction in working hours guarantees a job for everyone as well as extra time off, both of which are essential conditions for employees to take control of their production – which is a fundamental point in building the commons we are striving to create today.

However, this reduction in working hours cannot become effective without necessarily having a majority government committed to putting it into practice. Other social measures can also come with this demand, such as the reversal of various counter-reforms concerning retirement or the full extension of health-care coverage. But this majority will only be able to smoothly implement these reforms if surpassing joint stock companies becomes one of its goals.

Surpassing nationalisation

During most of this "short twentieth century"[40], the prospect of state decline disappeared from the horizons of both sovietism and authentic social democracy, and instead a diluted form of socialisation – one

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40 A term coined by historian Eric J. Hobsbawn, (The Age of Extremes: The Short Twentieth Century, Éditions Complexe, 1999) in reference to the period that begins with World War I and the Soviet Revolution and ends with the collapse of real socialisms at the end of the 1980s.

practically reduced to a nationalisation of the economy – was favoured. We now need to rebuild a political project based on the concept of commons. Tomorrow's socialisation, therefore, needs to be designed beyond the framework of ownership, and that also means state ownership. If implementing social demands can solely be done in conjunction with the overhaul of companies with share capital, production units managed by both workers and users would be the only possible outcome. The switch to co-operatives or nationalisation can only be seen as milestones along the way to developing an entirely new system. If socialisation can no longer be achieved through transfer of ownership, three additional lines of action can help us establish a direction for this project:

1) The socialisation of revenue via social contributions or taxation is already in place for about 50% of our output with broadly, half funding the non-market sector (free public services, funded organisations) and the other half comprising social benefits (pensions, sick pay, unemployment benefit, etc.). This socialisation of revenue already undermines property owners' rights to fully enjoy the returns of their capital. This socialisation needs to be increased by gradually disconnecting workers' revenue from the added value of their production unit. As such, this sharing of revenue becomes a topic of democratic debate among the population.
2) One of the limitations to establishing self-managed businesses is their need to support themselves in an environment where the banking system is monitored by a central bank which pursues only a small number of goals such as price stability (ECB) or economic growth (BoE, Federal Reserve, etc.). The creation of a socialised financial system dependent upon investment criteria defined by budgets that are allocated democratically will help provide these businesses with most of the funding for their assets, which could lead to the complete disappearance of equity capital as well as, as a consequence, the idea of production unit ownership.
3) In production units power should first and foremost be given to

the main actors, i.e. the workers, with a right of representation for users who will be able to, for example, have an influence on prices and their direction. These units will no longer be managed by owners but by the relevant stakeholders, depending on the activity in question. As a general rule, every production unit will then automatically become a public service.

Creating socialisation in this manner – through dividing powers between various stakeholders – results in investment-related decisions which are validated by a socialised financial sector as well as an increased socialisation of revenue leading to the idea of ownership being surpassed in favour of a logical creation of commons. But with this creation remains the difficulty of articulating the various levels within the commons, i.e. some relate to just a small number of people only, while others impact the whole of society.

Towards a federation of commons

Various avenues remain open to exploration, including federalism. However, here we do not mean state-to-state federalism, but rather a federation of commons. As Pierre Dardot and Christian Laval say, "The political principle of the commons draws the outline of a dual federation: a federation of social and economic commons created on a social and professional basis, and a federation of political commons created on a territorial basis. With this comes a democracy of commons."[41] This dual federation must ensure democracy- and ecology-based planning, which is one of the founding principles of the eco-socialist project.

"Democratic planning must be based on self-management at all levels. People manage their business on a local, national and supranational scale. We must combine direct democracy and delegative democracy through a referendum process. The fundamental idea of eco-socialism is that democracy must not be limited to administrative matters but extended to the economic sphere. Democracy is the only way towards

41 Pierre Dardot & Christian Laval, Commun, Essai sur la révolution au XXIe siècle, Éditions La Découverte, 2014

social and ecological rationality."[42]

The issue of the state, its decline and how a society of commons can be created are now the core concerns of the alternative project. However, this project will only be convincing if it offers government proposals (such as the reduction in working hours) combined with a political project whose founding principle is to surpass ownership through the creation of commons.

The real democratic process of commons or self-management movements will allow for the outline of a federation of commons to be gradually drawn out through experimentation, convergence and dialogues across all levels. From this point onwards, this task will fall to social and political movements and progressive researchers as this revolution will not be the result of the *Grand Soir* [term used to describe the day when a powerful social upheaval will result in the overthrow of capitalism] but rather it will stem from a continuous reflection on commons practices and their political implications.

-- Translation from French: Veronika Peterseil --

42 Michael Löwy, Écosocialisme, Paris, Éditions Mille et une nuits, 2011.