

# Anti-Globalisation: the socialism of the imbeciles

*“Communists despise hiding their ideas and aims”*

Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels

What is the real nature of global capitalism for the hundreds of millions of proletarians who, across the planet, from Rio de Janeiro to Shanghai, from Seattle to Johannesburg, from Seoul to Paris, are unemployed, working and struggling? Do they suffer from the dictatorship of “finance”, that “bad side of capital” (the money markets, stock exchanges etc.) to which we can oppose the “good side”, industrial or possibly commercial capital which creates jobs? Doesn’t the capitalist social relation rather constitute an indivisible and united totality? Doesn’t the fact of isolating one sector to put it at the centre of critique mean taking up an ultra-simplistic political economy?

To these questions, the anti-globalists give mystifying answers, concentrating the fire of critique on one particular form of capital, finance capital, **the better to blot out the critique of capital as a whole.**

## Putting critique back on its feet

For revolutionary communists the critique of capital is based on the identification of the exploitation of wage labourers by capital as the producer of surplus value, and not on finance capital which only valorises itself on the basis of levies (interest) raised on the social surplus value which comes from the productive sphere. Logically therefore, for those obsessed by the struggle against finance, the strangling of this “diabolic” sphere must begin with the destruction of industrial capital. But the fact is that most “anti-globalists” defend the production of commodities (when it is not “multi-national” and, preferably, when it is carried out in the framework of nationalised industry and/or small units of artisanal production, cooperatives, etc.).

The left and the fascists have always been the professionals when it comes to unequivocally denouncing the variable geometry of capitalism. In France during the Popular Front the left tried to divert the anger of proletarians into denouncing the “200 families”. After 1960, the Stalinists made a speciality of defending the small traders and bosses against “big monopoly capital”. The fascists, for their part, in the 1930s attacked “anonymous” and “vagabond” finance and channelled popular resentment into anti-Semitism, the “socialism of the imbeciles” of that time.<sup>1</sup>

The “anti-globalisation” movement is not a break from these dire traditions.

But who are the anti-globalists?

They are all those who for the last few years, from the big social-democratic and Stalinist parties to various kinds of leftists, have taken up the new battle standard: anti-globalisation. This movement has its heroes, the clown José Bové and the masked socialite Marcos; its press, for the francophones, *Le Monde diplomatique*; its sacred places, Porto Alegre, San José in Chiapas and Millau; its economist, Tobin; its great grandfather, J. M. Keynes; its “glorious” military achievements, Seattle, Nice, Davos and Naples; its newspeak, “neoliberalism”, “social forum”, “participatory budget”, “citizen’s economy”; its Great Satans, the WTO, the World Bank and the IMF. Briefly, all the ideological paraphernalia necessary to mobilise the battalions of critical false consciousness.

The ideology of anti-globalisation sets out to denounce :

- a fraction of capital designated under the generic term “financial markets” which is parasitic and evil ;
- the commoditisation of certain “sacred” sectors of productive activity : “culture”, agriculture, water... but avoids, in the end, the critique of the foundation and the *raison d’être* of capitalism, wage labour and the productive consumption of the commodity labour power ;
- the relocation of production to the lower wage countries by the famous “multinationals”.

The solutions put forward by the anti-globalists are the following :

- the introduction of the Tobin tax (at a rate of 0.1% of the total) on financial movements, the so-called “0.1% socialism” (although it’s far less than for “share trading capital gains” which are subject to a “tax withholding with full discharge” of 26%);
- the introduction of new customs barriers to protect national production ;
- the participation of citizens in city affairs, for example, the municipal self-management of Porto Alegre.

Behind this apparently innovative and trendy discourse we can find the most hackneyed themes of reformism. What, in fact, is the sad pantomime of Porto Alegre if not “municipal socialism” in a modern guise?

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<sup>1</sup> Quoted from A. Bebel (1840–1913) in “*Antisemitism, the socialism of imbeciles*”

What is the march on Mexico City of the EZLN – organised jointly by the Mexican state and Marcos – if not a “modern” application of the old social-democratic reformism from the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, which explained that the objective of the proletarian movement was no longer the violent taking of political power but its gradual and peaceful conquest?<sup>2</sup>

How is it possible to imagine fighting an adversary without understanding its functioning and by only attacking one aspect of its domination? Capital, confronting the proletariat, is a dynamic interdependent totality.

### **Global capital against the international proletariat**

Contrary to what the anti-globalists say (Cf. *Le Monde diplomatique*), globalisation didn't begin with the fall of the Berlin Wall. Since the XVI<sup>th</sup> Century, with the centralisation by finance and commercial capital of the gigantic masses of value which allowed the rapid development of industrial capital, the social relation based on exploitation set out from old Europe, to the Americas, to invade the planet.

This irresistible movement was described in 1848 by Marx and Engels in the *Communist Manifesto*:

*“The bourgeoisie has, through its exploitation of the world market, given a cosmopolitan character to production and consumption in every country. (...) All old-established national industries have been destroyed or are daily being destroyed. They are dislodged by new industries, whose introduction becomes a life and death question for all civilized nations, by industries that no longer work up indigenous raw material, but raw material drawn from the remotest zones; industries whose products are consumed, not only at home, but in every quarter of the globe. (...) In place of the old local and national seclusion and self-sufficiency, we have intercourse in every direction, universal inter-dependence of nations.”*

At that time the revolutionaries understood that, despite the enormous suffering and atrocities that it implied, this movement created the objective bases of a superior mode of production, *communism*, carried by a working class always more numerous in every part of the world. Marx and Engels, as well, lambasted the “despair of the reactionaries” of all stripes who, following the example of the anti-globalists of today, longed for the good old days - yesterday the corporations and the immutable order of feudal society, today the benevolent national state and the “Keynesian” capitalism of the 1960s.

These gentlemen see in misery only misery, without discerning the revolutionary potentialities.

Since 1848, the internationalisation of capital has never stopped deepening. Innumerable new poles of accumulation have emerged, thus reinforcing the world proletariat and enlarging the objective basis of its revolutionary consciousness. The workers' movement and radical workers' struggles are no longer the prerogative of white and European proletarians. For the last twenty years South Korea, South Africa, Mexico, Brazil, China and many other countries have known class confrontations. These have involved millions of proletarians and have enrolled themselves clearly in the historic war against exploitation.

These struggles contribute to the recreation of the foundations of a real proletarian internationalism, a more and more vital necessity for the exploited, including for carrying out their defensive struggles well.

While the trade unionists of the CGT in France and the AFL-CIO in the US moan about relocation and the international division of labour and defend “French” and “American” production, revolutionaries set out the urgency of the international development of the class struggle. This is the case right now at Danone, which delocalised part of its biscuit making activities from Western Europe to Eastern Europe. The same goes for immigration, used to increase the pressure on the wages of “native” workers. Is it necessary to respond to this by pronouncing in favour of closing the frontiers, adopting the policy of quotas, or by defending the free circulation of the exploited so as to work for their growing unity?

Today there are two types of response to the deepening of the planetary domination of capital. The first response – of the reformist type – aims at regulating the impetuous course of the circulation of value by setting up crazy pseudo guarantees (the Tobin tax, protectionism, more secure frontiers, local democracy etc.) against some of its excesses. The second response – the revolutionary communist one – far from lamenting so-called “globalisation”, salutes the potential which it unleashes for the struggle of the world proletariat and, far from the reactionary withdrawal into the nation, the region or Roquefort cheese, works for the international unity of the exploited for the abolition of wage labour and the disappearance of value.

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*But, in general, the protective system of our day is conservative, while the free trade system is destructive. It breaks up old nationalities and pushes the antagonism of the proletariat and the bourgeoisie to the extreme point. In a word, the free trade system hastens the social revolution. It is in this revolutionary sense alone, gentlemen, that I vote in favour of free trade.* Karl Marx, *On the Question of Free Trade* (1848)

<sup>2</sup> We should note in passing that the nobody Marcos falls short of this ideology, in that social democracy, at least in its discourse, insists on the pursuit of the realisation of socialism whereas Marcos speaks of the constitution of local micro-powers and of the reform of consciousness.