

“RACES” AND THE WORKING CLASS IN THE USA

IN THE USA, AS EVERYWHERE ELSE, RACIAL DISCRIMINATION MUST BE POSED AND UNDERSTOOD IN THE FRAMEWORK OF THE PROLETARIAN CONDITION. IT MUST BE FOUGHT WITH THE MEANS OF CLASS STRUGGLE AGAINST CAPITALISM AND ITS STATE

“And most important of all! Every industrial and commercial centre in England now possesses a working class divided into two hostile camps, English proletarians and Irish proletarians. The ordinary English worker hates the Irish worker as a competitor who lowers his standard of life. In relation to the Irish worker, he regards himself as a member of the ruling nation and consequently he becomes a tool of the English aristocrats and capitalists against Ireland, thus strengthening their domination over himself. He cherishes religious, social, and national prejudices against the Irish worker. His attitude towards him is much the same as that of the “poor whites” to the Negroes in the former slave states of the USA. The Irishman pays him back with interest in his own money. He sees in the English worker both the accomplice and the stupid tool of the English rulers in Ireland.”^a – Karl Marx, Letter to Siegfried Mayer and August Vogt, 1870.

The movement of rebellion against police brutality in the spring of 2020 in the US, dishonestly annexed by the nebulous Black Lives Matter (BLM), has again posed the question of the place occupied today by racial discrimination against Blacks. This text tries to determine if the specific oppression suffered by this segment of the population is one of the decisive factors in the domination of capital in the most capitalistically advanced country on the planet. To pose the question in these terms does not mean to say that American civil society and the American state are no longer “racist”, because anti-Black racism – and racism in general – have always certainly been present in the USA, as elsewhere. Indeed, while capital, in its movement of accumulation systematically expands the ranks of wage labourers, its only source of new value, irrespective of distinctions of sex, place of origin, religion and skin colour, it regularly makes use of these distinctions when they can be transformed into divisions which weaken the perspective of an autonomous revolutionary politics of the class of value producers, which is the proletariat.

To return to today’s United States, racial discrimination towards Blacks² is not, in our view, a central element of the exercise of capitalist domination and even less one of the present foundations of civil society and the state in that country. It was, however, like that until the 1970s, before being swept away by the formidable civil rights movement of the 1960s, which succeeded in eliminating the

¹ Letter to Siegfried Mayer and August Vogt in New York, 9 April 1870.

https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1870/letters/70_04_09.htm

² We are painfully aware that the racial categories commonly used in the US (like racial categories everywhere) are socially constructed. We could put all of them in inverted commas, but we don’t, purely for the sake of readability. At the same time, care should be taken when dealing with statistics relating to “race” in American society. Racists, anti-racist activists, corporate Chief Diversity Officers, and the United States Census Bureau don’t always use the same categories. For example, the Census Bureau doesn’t classify “Latino” (or “Latinx”) as a race, it just sees “Hispanic” as an “origin”. It also defines Black as meaning “A person having origins in any of the Black racial groups of Africa.”, without making any reference to the “one drop rule” inherited from slavery – a person can have mostly European ancestry but still be seen as Black if they have a “drop” of African “blood”. The same is true for Native Americans. For the first time, in the 2000 Census, individuals were presented with the option to self-identify as more than one race. And “An individual’s response to the race question is based upon self-identification. The Census Bureau does not tell individuals which boxes to mark or what heritage to write in”. <https://www.census.gov/topics/population/race/about.html>

racial segregation laws rooted in the slave regime of the previous century. Certainly, communists know very well that it is not enough to withdraw laws to change things and that competition within the proletariat maintained by capitalism ceaselessly regenerates antagonisms – of which racial discrimination is a part – between the components it is made up of.

But it is there, precisely, in the permanent competition between proletarians fed by exploitation, where we need to look for the origin of attitudes and actions against Black people today. If that is true, racial discrimination like all other expressions of this competition within the subordinate classes (discriminations on the basis of sex, origin, religion etc.) must be fought by the means of class struggle which aim to constitute the proletariat into an independent class, antagonistic to capital.

This text proposes that the discrimination which hits the Blacks does not target them because of their skin colour but because they are “over-represented” among the poorest. The Blacks who suffer the harshest racism are those from “seedy”, “dangerous” neighbourhoods, those who have done time in prison, those who are “scruffy”, those with a poor level of education, those who resist the discipline of work etc. This type of rejection, of deliberate exclusion, of social segregation, doesn’t only apply to the Blacks. Far from it. It exists all over the world and affects all skin colours, all religious affiliations, all cultural or geographic origins, and particularly all women.

This text also explains that **today** capital in the US likes to think of itself as “antiracist” because, very simply, the systematic exercise of racial discrimination towards Blacks constitutes a barrier to its process of valorisation and realisation of value. Black proletarians are indispensable to production and are a significant element of consumers.

An antiracist movement against the police but in defence of the state

Police excesses are frequent in the US. Since the long revolt of 1965-1968, they have given rise to sporadic confrontations which have not turned into riots, with only a few exceptions: April-May 1992, which followed the acquittal of the cops who beat up Rodney King, in March 1991, in Los Angeles³; the killing of Oscar Grant by a guard from the transit company, BART, on 1 January 2009, in Oakland⁴; the killing of Michael Brown in Ferguson in August 2014⁵. The killing of George Floyd, on 25 May 2020 in Minneapolis, unleashed a movement against police brutality, the police and the racism that has continued to lead to new murders of Black people⁶. The movement lasted, after its high point June, until October and counted, in total, 5,750 demonstrations across the whole US territory and in cities of all sizes. The day of 31 May saw 450,000 people take to the streets and 6 June saw 500,000⁷. An important characteristic of these collective actions that we want to stress has been the massive participation of Whites and Latinos (and Asians in some places). The great majority of marches passed off without notable incidents. This movement was therefore on a scale unseen since the 1960s, in terms of its duration and territorial scope. Nevertheless, it gradually subsided. Its participants demanded more “justice” and an end to police brutality.

³ http://mouvement-communiste.com/documents/MC/Reviews/rmc_4_los_angeles_1.pdf (not available in English).

⁴ <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2010/jul/09/oakland-riots-oscar-grant-shooting-verdict>

⁵ An appendix on the Ferguson events is available here:

<http://mouvement-communiste.com/documents/MC/Letters/Ferguson%20vFEN.pdf>

⁶ Atlanta, Kenosha, Waukegan or even Philadelphia.

⁷ <https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2020/07/03/us/george-floyd-protests-crowd-size.html>

This article does not have precise lists of demonstrations nor the number of protesters by day. This is more useful:

<https://acleddata.com/2020/09/03/demonstrations-political-violence-in-america-new-data-for-summer-2020/>

In a few big cities (Minneapolis, Seattle, Portland etc.) protesters have adopted the slogan “*Defund the police*” (abolish or reduce the police budget). It is a demand which explains in itself the political perimeter in which the movement is situated. Most of the activists chose to remain in the framework of the democratic dialectic of the state, without expressing political practices of autonomous organisation, capable of sketching the first lines of a social order other than that of capital.

Democratic movements which are not capable of over-growing and abandoning in their development bourgeois democratic illusions, of concretely building through combat against the forces of conservation and order spaces of individual and collective freedom are devoting themselves definitively to a subordinate role with the risk of integration into various intermediate bodies of the state, political, associative or trade union. The only freedom movements which have a chance of maintaining their independence are those which demand nothing from the state, which know how to impose their own demands and which recognise in the proletariat the actor in any true revolutionary transformation of society.

In addition, to demand the removal of the police from poor neighbourhoods, to demand the sacking of the most violent cops etc., is not a solution for the impoverished who live in such degraded zones. To make their existence more bearable, it would also be necessary to neutralise in turn the informal police (drug dealers, gangs of all sorts) who subject these neighbourhoods to periodic culling and who rival the militias of the state in anti-proletarian violence and barbarism. On the contrary, there is the real risk (as is already the case in a good number of “at-risk” neighbourhoods in the metropolises of capital around the world) that large sections of the poorest populations crowded into concentrated habitats will turn towards the “official” defenders of existing law and order, towards the police and their legal auxiliaries. Some recent examples (Seattle, Minneapolis and Portland⁸) show that the retreat of the latter from “sensitive” areas ends up with the growth of assaults on the inhabitants. Being particularly affected, shopkeepers call for private security guards, thus reinforcing the militarisation of these territories. Only large and militant proletarian organisation can break this vicious circle by installing another order, devoted to the defence of proletarians against all kinds of enemy troops, from cops to gangs along with private militias.

BLM, a stack of anti-worker ideas⁹

An expression of a healthy anger against the actions of the forces of repression, it is nevertheless a matter of an unusually politically weak democratic movement which is badly structured. It is a movement that the media has wanted to attribute exclusively to the nebulous BLM. Beyond its internal divergences, BLM claims to correct the excesses of the dictatorship of capital by defending American democracy by applying the Constitution. States, with their monopoly of violence, are never called into question. BLM has served the campaign of the Democratic candidate for the US presidency very well, along with the Democratic Party in general, while provoking the mobilisation of Trump supporters around the defence of “law and order”. The question of capitalist exploitation, of class belonging, has no significant place within BLM.

This conglomerate of very heterogenous local circles, despite having a centralised leadership, expresses one shared ideology: the refusal of the notion of class and, therefore, of class struggle. This

⁸ See the article “*Abolish the Police? Those Who Survived the Chaos in Seattle Aren't So Sure*”, 7 Aug 2020, *New York Times*. <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/08/07/us/defund-police-seattle-protests.html>

⁹ An appendix setting out the details of the practice and positions of the BLM conglomerate is available here: <http://mouvement-communiste.com/documents/MC/Letters/BLM%20VFEN.pdf>

rejection goes as far as stigmatising Black intellectuals who correctly put forward the class dimension in the condition of poor Blacks¹⁰. Blacks are presented by BLM as a homogenous group without any contradictions inside it, defined by a fundamental racial oppression, coming directly from the era of slavery. Grafted onto these basic elements are more sophisticated ideological developments elaborated around concepts such as “racial” capitalism, Whiteness and intersectionality. We will address this later¹¹.

“The Black Lives Matter movement demands that the country affirm the value of black life in practical and pragmatic ways, including addressing an increasing racial wealth gap, fixing public schools that are failing, combating issues of housing inequality and gentrification that continue to push people of color out of communities they have lived in for generations, and dismantling the prison industrial complex. None of this is about hatred for white life. It is about acknowledging that the system already treats white lives as if they have more value, as if they are more worthy of protection, safety, education, and a good quality of life than black lives are.” – “11 Major Misconceptions About the Black Lives Matter Movement”¹².

The basic idea is that the “system” deserts the Blacks in favour of the Whites in all areas of life. In his letter to W. Borgius on 25 January 1894, Friedrich Engels said: *“We regard the economic conditions as conditioning, in the last instance, historical development. But race is itself an economic factor”¹³*. But, as Amadeo Bordiga remarked in his *“Factors of race and nation in Marxist theory”¹⁴*, if *“race was a more decisive economic factor in prehistoric peoples”*, it is *“the nation, a much more complex entity, [which is] in the contemporary world”¹⁵*. The central question is thus from the start to know if the Blacks are “second class citizens”, if they are the only ones to suffer from discrimination and, from that, if the form of oppression which they are subjected to today is comparable to that of the epoch of modern slavery resulting from colonisation, and whether it is still functional to the capitalist mode of production in the North American region.

The present situation of Blacks in the USA

To support our comments, here we try to provide a snapshot of the situation of Blacks in the US today. We present a synthesis of their condition within administrations, intermediate bodies of the state, civil society, on the labour market, in workplaces etc.

Legalised segregation

The Federal state abolished the segregation laws, even if it took almost a century to do it. On 2 July 1964, President Lyndon B. Johnson signed the historic law on Civil Rights which officially abolished racial segregation and discriminatory practices. The struggles against racial discrimination in the 1960s, which aimed to destroy legalised discrimination, had succeeded. But the application of

¹⁰ *Le Monde*, 18 Sept 2020, “Thomas Chatterton Williams, Glenn Loury, Coleman Hughes... Les anticonformistes de l’antiracisme”.

¹¹ Another characteristic of BLM: the instrumentalisation of religion. According to an article in *The Conversation* (“Far from being anti-religious, faith and spirituality run deep in Black Lives Matter”), 14 Sept 2020:

<https://theconversation.com/far-from-being-anti-religious-faith-and-spirituality-run-deep-in-black-lives-matter-145610>

BLM baths in wellness, Buddhism, Animism, resilience. Quoted in the article, Erika Gault, scholar at the University of Arizona, observes that with BLM, “We are actually seeing more religion, not less” and stresses that “The Black church is not the only religious well from which Black movements have historically drawn”.

¹² <https://richmondpledge.org/wp-content/uploads/11-Major-Misconceptions-About-the-Black-Lives-Matter-Movement.pdf>

¹³ https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1894/letters/94_01_25a.htm

¹⁴ Published in 1953 in *Programma comunista* n°. 16, 17, 18, 19 et 20.

¹⁵ <http://www.sinistra.net/lib/bas/progra/vako/vakomfidif.htm>

the law by judges, cops etc. is another matter entirely. Even if they do not have legislative authority, counties can interpret the law as they see fit.

Thus, the Confederate States did not abolish their own segregationist laws systematically and in a synchronised way. For example, section 256¹⁶ of the Constitution of Alabama always said: “*Separate schools shall be provided for white and colored children, and a child of one race will not be allowed to attend the school of the other race*” – a statement contrary to Federal law¹⁷, until a juridical decision in 1954 by the Supreme Court (*Brown vs Board of Education*). Two attempts to overturn it, in 2004 et 2012, have failed¹⁸.

Segregation in the administrations

Blacks can access all types of jobs in state administration. Let’s remember the oft-cited example of Colin Powell, four-star general and a Republican, commander of the intervention force in Iraq. But this general is not an exception. Statistics show that Blacks in the Army are more represented than in the population, including amongst officers¹⁹. In the police, Blacks are more represented than in the population in general in several large cities such as Chicago, Washington, Atlanta and Los Angeles. But everywhere else, it is the Whites who are systematically over-represented in the police (on average 25% more than they are in the population concerned) and Asians who are systematically under-represented²⁰.

A segmented labour market

Statistics indicate lower wages for Blacks in all employment categories. The differential also exists for Black women even though they are lower down the scale. While in the US, women in general earn around 80 cents for each dollar earned by men, Black women are paid 62 cents, Native Americans 57 cents, and Latinos 54 cents. But we must not forget that almost a quarter of blacks are paid at the same level as their White equivalents (27.3% of Black families have a declared annual income of between \$25,000 and \$50,000, 15.2% of their households have annual revenues between \$50,000 and \$75,000, 7.6% between \$75,000 and \$100,000, and 9.4% more than \$100,000²¹. To put it another way, a third of Black households do *not* live in poverty and destitution.

In the new “non-unionised” car factories of the South (Mercedes in Alabama, BMW in South Carolina etc.), on the assembly lines the Black/White ratio is a fair representation of the local population, and there are quite a few women in the workshops.

On the MTA (the New York transit network), Blacks got access to specific hiring after 1970. While in the maintenance workshops, the foremen are mostly Black and the sub-contractors are of all colours. Today, Blacks make up 40% of the workforce of this important company²².

Local 10 of the ILWU (*International Longshore & Warehouse Union*), representing the port workers of San Francisco Bay, is mostly Black²³.

¹⁶ <https://law.justia.com/constitution/alabama/CA-245806.html>

¹⁷ This did not put an end to segregationist efforts in the school system. See for example the case of Jefferson County in 2013, also in Alabama:

<https://www.nytimes.com/2017/09/06/magazine/the-resegregation-of-jefferson-county.html>

¹⁸ <https://eji.org/news/history-racial-injustice-school-segregation-in-alabama/>

¹⁹ <https://www.cfr.org/backgrounder/demographics-us-military> and particularly:

<https://www.militaryonesource.mil/data-research-and-statistics/military-community-demographics/2018-demographics-profile/>

²⁰ <https://www.governing.com/archive/police-department-officer-demographics-minority-representation.html>

²¹ <https://www.census.gov/programs-surveys/decennial-census/decade.2010.html>

²² http://web.mta.info/mta/news/books/archive/190225_1530_Diversity.pdf

During the strike at GM, in September 2019, several videos from various factories in Ohio showed a racially mixed class composition with delegates of the UAW Locals split equally between Black and White²⁴. The UAW has a long history of integration of Black workers²⁵ and even has a new Black president²⁶.

Numerous Silicon Valley firms (Apple, Google, etc.) have adopted recruitment programmes for “people of color”, but struggle to find people with the right qualifications and experience for their needs.

The difference in employability between Whites, Blacks, Latinos, Asians etc., is in fact due more to the fact that education does not match the needs of the labour market. These are disparities in education directly attributable to the material conditions of existence of these various populations (high cost of education, environments unfavourable to studying in poor neighbourhoods, unemployment, single-parent families etc.) rather than racism targeting a particular group.

Access to education in retreat

According to the Civil Rights Project of Harvard University, run by Gary Oldfield, the real desegregation of state schools plateaued in 1988. Since then, schools have in fact become more segregated. In 2005, the proportion of Black pupils in schools which were mostly White is at a lower level than any year since 1968. *“In 15,000 establishments in the US, 75% of children, or more, are African-Americans or Latinos. These schools are in impoverished zones and, for the children, it is a multiple disadvantage” ... “According to the study by the GAO (US Government Accountability Office) – the body for audit, evaluation and investigation of the US Congress -, the proportion of very poor pupils, mostly Black and Latino, has soared since 2001. The number of Black and Latino pupils enrolled in state schools from nursery level until 12 years old, where resources are scarce, where 75% to 100% of pupils are entitled to subsidised lunch, has grown by 11% between 2001 and 2014”*²⁷ And finally, *“The four most segregated states for black students, ... are New York, Michigan, Illinois and California. In New York, only one black student in seven goes to a predominantly white school.”*²⁸ For the Universities, this phenomenon of retreat is the same. If, since 1964, more and more “white” universities have opened their doors to a growing number of Black students, this process has reversed since 1990²⁹.

Life expectancy improves but the health situation remains terrible

From 1950 to 2015, life expectancy increased for Blacks as well as Whites, for men (from 66.5 years to 76.6 for White men and from 59.1 to 72.2 for Black men) as for women (from 72.2 to 81.3 for White women and from 62.9 to 78.5 for Black women)³⁰. But let’s remember that citizens of the US have an average life expectancy of 78.7, in 2016, against 83.9 for Japan, 82.2 for France and 81.2 for the UK.

The health situation in majority Black neighbourhoods is well documented. Let’s take the case of the Federal Capital, Washington DC. What are the principal causes of death? *“Heart disease, hypertension, diabetes, tuberculosis, and HIV/AIDS, as well as the problem of infant mortality and low birth weight, which can*

²³ The ILWU organise the dockers in 29 ports on the West Coast of the US with a single contract guaranteeing the highest blue-collar workers’ wages in the US.

²⁴<https://www.bing.com/images/search?q=gm+strike+2019&qpv=GM+strike+2019&form=IQRML&first=1&scenario=ImageHoverTitle>

²⁵ <https://uaw.org/tag/black-history-month/>

²⁶ <https://atlantatribune.com/2019/11/05/uaw-makes-history-elects-first-black-president-rory-gamble/>

²⁷ https://fr.wikipedia.org/wiki/S%C3%A9gr%C3%A9gation_raciale_aux_%C3%89tats-Unis

²⁸ <https://www.thenation.com/article/archive/overcoming-apartheid>

²⁹ <https://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/govbeat/wp/2014/05/15/the-most-segregated-schools-may-not-be-in-the-states-you-d-expect-2/>

³⁰ *Carto* no. 62, November-December 2020, page 18 (a French magazine which explains world news through maps).

exacerbate health problems in adulthood. Impoverished African American residents of the city have literally embodied changing inequalities, as they suffer and die from these killer diseases in vastly disproportionate numbers compared to white residents. The District of Columbia poverty rate was 20 percent in the year 2000. Limited and inaccurate as the government-defined poverty line is, it still paints an alarming picture of poverty in the capital, especially when broken down by wards. In 2000, Ward 8 had the highest poverty rate: 36 percent, compared to 27 percent in 1990. Historical evidence is even more alarming, for it shows that while the poverty rate fell from 75 percent in 1949 to 30 percent in 1974, in the poorest wards poverty remained stuck at the rates of 1961, holding at 34 percent beginning in 1981 and continuing to grow deeper and more concentrated” What’s more: “African American women in their twenties can expect their health to deteriorate quickly over the course of their lives. For example, between the ages of fifteen and nineteen, African Americans and whites suffer similar rates of hypertension. But by the time they are twenty-five to twenty-nine, African Americans’ rates of anemia, pneumonia, and heart disease are six times those of whites.”³¹

Degraded conditions of health not only affect poor Blacks living in the big cities. They are also the lot of those who live in the countryside in Georgia, where half of them live below the poverty line³². Poverty and bad health walk hand in hand³³. Always, poor Whites are in the same boat as their Black peers. Poverty is thus the determining factor in bad health and not skin colour. To put it simply, the Blacks are over-represented in the most impoverished sections of the population.

Blacks have been proportionately hit three times harder than Whites by the Covid pandemic (along with Latinos and Native Americans³⁴). Living in unhealthy areas, cramped housing, lack of information, but also the high representation of Blacks among health workers are the causes of this.

The central question of housing

The ability to access property in housing is noticeably less among Blacks than among “non-Hispanic” Whites. More than four Black homes out of ten are owned by those living there (a slightly lower percentage than the one for Latinos), against around three out of four homes for Whites³⁵. Even if the population in general – and the working class population in particular – is more mobile³⁶ in the US than in Europe and even if new waves of immigration modify the “ethnic” composition of neighbourhoods in big cities and their suburbs, the level of mixing remains weak, above all in neighbourhoods traditionally inhabited by Blacks. The Whites tend to flee these areas, and this is notably above all because mixing in schools which young Blacks go to is associated with the idea of delinquency. Coming from poor neighbourhoods considered “sensitive” is often the cause of hiring discrimination against Blacks. But this problem does not only affect Blacks in the US. It concerns all countries. In France, for example, bosses are reluctant to employ residents of “*mal famés*” (disreputable) neighbourhoods such as Grande Borne in Grigny, in the Paris suburbs, and it doesn’t matter if they are called Adama, Mohammed or Francis.

³¹ See the essay “Deadly Inequalities: Race, Illness, and Poverty in Washington, D.C., since 1945” in *African American urban history since World War II*, Kenneth L. Kusmer and Joe W. Trotter (editors), The University of Chicago Press.

³² <https://news.uga.edu/exploring-health-risks-of-poverty-racial-discrimination/>

³³ <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC1470539/>

³⁴ <https://www.usnews.com/news/health-news/articles/2020-12-10/covid-mortality-twice-as-high-among-native-americans-than-whites>

³⁵ <https://www.census.gov/housing/hvs/files/currenthvspress.pdf>

³⁶ This does not mean that this mobility is equally widespread, including among the white working class. Joan C. Williams, in her book *White Working Class* (Harvard Business Review Press, 2017), states that, when they are victims of deindustrialisation, White workers remain where they are to benefit from networks of family and neighbourhood solidarity.

The police and criminality³⁷

Blacks are more exposed to police violence than Whites, Latinos or any other fractions “of color” of the population. If there are more Blacks murdered by the forces of repression, that *is* partly due to racism but also to their higher level of participation in economic activities deemed criminal, as is shown by the law enforcement statistics. The higher rate of participation of poor Blacks in this sector of activity is mostly explained by their condition: unemployment, poverty, territorial segregation, single-parent families, insufficient schooling. This condition feeds a certain “culture” of criminality which contributes to perpetuating the situation. Also, the violence that Blacks are subjected to³⁸ is greater from other Blacks (perpetrated within the family or by gangs) than from Whites or the police. This is shown by the figures for inter-racial murders³⁹, and for gun homicides, where the US holds first place in the world⁴⁰.

Criminal justice and discrimination

The majority of prisoners is made up of “people of color” with an over-representation of Blacks and Latinos⁴¹. Almost 70% of people incarcerated are inside for crimes linked to drug dealing. And behind bars we still find segregation. In February 2005, the Supreme Court, in the case of *Johnson v. California* (125 S. Ct. 1141), ruled that the informal practice of racial segregation of new prisoners during the reception period in the prisons of California was subject to judicial restriction.⁴² This was segregation that the prison authorities claimed was for the personal safety of prisoners – Californian gangs, like in the rest of the US, being usually organised along racial lines. Although the Court sent the case to a lower court, its decision had the effect of forcing California to change its policy on segregation and it was finally abolished in October 2014.⁴³ However, segregation in the name of preventing gang-related violence continues in various forms in prisons across the US, and prison culture itself is strongly racially segregated, expressing in a more extreme form the divisions seen in US civil society “outside”⁴⁴.

A civil society still scarred by racism

American civil society is still churned by anti-Black racism. “Mixed” marriages remain rare despite the abolition of “miscegenation” laws in the South in 1967⁴⁵. If the Blacks have somewhat progressed on the social scale and if racial discrimination is no longer formalised in law, civil society remains polarised⁴⁶ and identification by race remains strong. This is the paradox of the United States, where the population in general and proletarians in particular define themselves first of all in terms of race, despite the generalisation of wage labour and the fall of legal barriers to equality before the law.

³⁷ <https://mappingpoliceviolence.org/cities>

³⁸ <https://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/datasources/nvdrs/index.html> and <https://www.statista.com/statistics/251877/murder-victims-in-the-us-by-race-ethnicity-and-gender/>

³⁹ *Criminal Victimization, 2018: Full report* in <https://www.bjs.gov/index.cfm?ty=pbdetail&iid=6686>

⁴⁰ <https://everytownresearch.org/report/gun-violence-in-america/>

⁴¹ https://www.ussc.gov/sites/default/files/pdf/research-and-publications/quick-facts/BOP_June2020.pdf

⁴² <https://www.courtlistener.com/opinion/137748/johnson-v-california/>

⁴³ <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2014/oct/23/california-prisons-end-racial-segregation-policy>

⁴⁴ Some accounts from prisoners of what it’s like:

<https://www.themarshallproject.org/2017/08/24/prison-is-a-real-life-example-of-the-world-white-supremacists-want>

⁴⁵ White man/Black woman: 0.3% and Black man/White woman: 0.8%. See:

<https://www.census.gov/library/stories/2018/07/interracial-marriages.html>

Even if their number is rising, going from 167,000 in 1980, to 550,000 in 2009.

⁴⁶ <https://www.washingtonpost.com/graphics/2018/national/segregation-us-cities/>

Advanced “antiracist” capital

Capitalism in the US (as elsewhere) is neither racist, nor antiracist. It is quite simply capable of exploiting in turn all the various divisions and fractures existing within the dominated class to assure the valorisation of capital. Today, for the advanced sectors of capital, those with a high technical composition and active globally, racial discrimination is no longer useful. It is even judged counter-productive. The support of the giants of high-tech⁴⁷, particularly all those of GAFAM⁴⁸, for BLM is something which must not be forgotten.

“Apple CEO Tim Cook kicked off this year’s Worldwide Developers Conference addressing two major events affecting the world at the moment: the Black Lives Matter movement and the worldwide coronavirus pandemic.

Cook said Monday that it’s time for the US to “aim higher to build a future that lives up to our ideals” of equality – and to take action. He highlighted Apple’s Racial Equity and Justice Initiative, which will distribute \$100 million to “challenge systemic barriers that limit opportunity for communities of color in the critical areas of education, economic equality and criminal justice.” And he also talked about the company’s new developer entrepreneur camp for black developers.’⁴⁹

The Democrat Joe Biden, then the Presidential candidate, in his turn expressed himself in favour of the protests while condemning violence committed by the protesters. *“I will seek to heal the racial wounds that have long plagued this country - not use them for political gain”,* he notably stated on 2 June 2020⁵⁰. This did not fail to earn him the support of several BLM leaders, such as John Sloan III. *“Joe Biden was not my first choice. Not my second choice. He was not my third choice. But I’m also a pragmatic individual, and I think Biden is going to be better than the Trump administration for me.”⁵¹*

If we can therefore say that advanced capital is presently “antiracist”, it’s not the same for the less advanced sectors, in particular those where the quantity of labour involved means low wages, and therefore “illegal” immigrants, like industrial agriculture in California. These businesses are not exempt from discriminatory practices (wages which are lower and paid irregularly, almost non-existent workers’ rights, harder working conditions) against their employees “of color”. And this is aimed as much at Blacks as at other poor labourers from elsewhere.

In conclusion on the situation of the Blacks...

It has to be said that anti-Black racism still has many days ahead of it in the USA. And this is despite the fact that the dominant classes no longer need, these days, the division into races to assure their domination. Effectively, the important sectors of the capitalist mode of production in North America consider anti-Black racism and racism in general as an obstacle to their development, as a useless fracture in a civil society which they would like to fuse together around the dictatorship of the valorisation of capital. The overwhelming majority of Blacks are workers and also consumers... Advanced capital in the US could certainly change its position rapidly if Black proletarians found their place in the class struggle again or if the antiracist fight fused with that for the political autonomy of the working class. But today, it is not so. The segregation of the Blacks is no longer, since a long time, a constitutive economic factor of capitalism in this area. It certainly was at its beginnings, being well anchored in the slavery and colonial system which allowed the volcanic development of trans-Atlantic capitalism.

⁴⁷ <https://builtin.com/diversity-inclusion/companies-that-support-black-lives-matter-social-justice>

⁴⁸ Google (Alphabet), Apple, Facebook, Amazon, and Microsoft.

⁴⁹ <https://www.cnet.com/news/at-apple-wwdc-tim-cook-takes-a-moment-to-talk-about-black-lives-matter-and-cornavirus/>

⁵⁰ <https://www.businessinsider.fr/us/joe-biden-black-lives-matter-protests-speech-trump-video-2020-6>

⁵¹ https://www.washingtonpost.com/national/black-lives-matter-movement-at-a-crossroads-as-biden-prepares-to-take-office/2020/12/01/8ebb95ce-2f26-11eb-860d-f7999599cbc2_story.html

*“Slavery is an economic category like any other. Thus, it also has its two sides. Let us leave alone the bad side and talk about the good side of slavery. Needless to say, we are dealing only with direct slavery, with Negro slavery in Surinam, in Brazil, in the Southern States of North America. Direct slavery is just as much the pivot of bourgeois industry as machinery, credits, etc. Without slavery you have no cotton; without cotton you have no modern industry. It is slavery that gave the colonies their value; it is the colonies that created world trade, and it is world trade that is the precondition of large-scale industry. Thus, slavery is an economic category of the greatest importance. Without slavery North America, the most progressive of countries, would be transformed into a patriarchal country. Wipe North America off the map of the world, and you will have anarchy – the complete decay of modern commerce and civilization. Cause slavery to disappear and you will have wiped America off the map of nations. Thus slavery, because it is an economic category, has always existed among the institutions of the peoples. Modern nations have been able only to disguise slavery in their own countries, but they have imposed it without disguise upon the New World.”*⁵² – Karl Marx, *The Poverty of Philosophy*, 1847.

The modern slavery of the Blacks, described as “purely industrial” by Marx, was fundamental for the affirmation of the capitalist mode of production in the United States.

*“In the second type of colonies—plantations—where commercial speculations figure from the start and production is intended for the world market, the capitalist mode of production exists, although only in a formal sense, since the slavery of Negroes precludes free wage-labour, which is the basis of capitalist production. But the business in which slaves are used is conducted by capitalists. The method of production which they introduce has not arisen out of slavery but is grafted on to it. In this case the same person is capitalist and landowner.”*⁵³ – Karl Marx, *Theories of Surplus-Value*, 1861-3.

But in the end the capitalist system founded on slavery became “incompatible with the development of bourgeois society” and disappears with that development, added the founder of modern communism.

*“Negro slavery – a purely industrial slavery – which is, besides, incompatible with the development of bourgeois society and disappears with it, presupposes wage labour, and if other, free states with wage labour did not exist alongside it, if, instead, the Negro states were isolated, then all social conditions there would immediately turn into pre-civilized forms.”*⁵⁴ – Karl Marx *Grundrisse*, 1857.

How does this happen? Allow Marx to explain:

*“The only realistic solution of the slave question, which has recently again been the cause of such long and violent debate in the American Congress. American cotton production is based on slavery. As soon as the industry reaches a point where it cannot tolerate the United States' cotton monopoly any longer, cotton will be successfully mass-produced in other countries, and it is hardly possible to achieve this anywhere today except with free workers. But as soon as the free labour of other countries can deliver sufficient supplies of cotton to industry more cheaply than the slave labour of the United States, then American slavery will be broken together with the American cotton monopoly and the slaves will be emancipated, because they will have become useless as slaves. Wage labour will be abolished in Europe in just the same way, as soon as it becomes not only unnecessary for production, but in fact a hindrance to it.”*⁵⁵ – Karl Marx & Friedrich Engels, *Neue Rheinische Zeitung*, May-October 1850.

On its side, the international proletariat did not fail in its support for the struggle against slavery by one part of the dominant class in the US.

“While the workingmen, the true political powers of the North, allowed slavery to defile their own republic, while before the Negro, mastered and sold without his competition, they boasted it the highest prerogative of the white-skinned labourer to sell himself and choose his own master, they were unable to attain the true freedom of labour, or to

⁵² Chapter 2, “The Metaphysics of Political Economy”:

<https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1847/poverty-philosophy/ch02.htm>

⁵³ Chapter 12, “Tables of Differential Rent and Comment”:

<https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1863/theories-surplus-value/ch12.htm>

⁵⁴ “The Chapter on Money (continuation)”: <https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1857/grundrisse/ch04.htm>

⁵⁵ <https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1850/11/01.htm>

*support their European brethren in their struggle for emancipation; but this barrier to progress has been swept off by the red sea of civil war. The workingmen of Europe feel sure that, as the American War of Independence initiated a new era of ascendancy for the middle class, so the American Antislavery War will do for the working classes.*⁵⁶ – Karl Marx, *Address of the IWA to Abraham Lincoln, President of the United States*, 1865.

Once this essential battle for the workers' movement had been won, it had to then fight in the front line against the racial segregation which persisted, as indicated above, in the US until the 1960s. This struggle is no longer the alpha and omega of the class struggle in the United States, although it is still relevant. This is because of its eminently inter-classist character, now perfectly compatible with the economic and social formation of this country if it does not extend from the outset to the practical criticism of the consequences of the domination of capital over the proletariat: poverty, low wages, hard working conditions, territorial segregation, overcrowded housing, discrimination in access to healthcare, violence exercised by the state, militias and gangs on the weakest and, more generally, the whole of the conditions of life and work of the impoverished, whether they are a worker or not.

It is therefore not a question of Blacks in general being the first victims of discrimination but rather of subordinate classes in their totality, whatever their skin colour and place of origin, who bear the brunt of capitalist domination. If Black Americans have been or still are victims of racial discrimination, a significant part of them have been able to overcome it by education and participation in the labour market. Left on the side-lines is a big third of poor blacks, workers or not, whose interests are identical to those of other proletarians, irrespective of colour. On the other hand, their interests are incompatible with those of the well-off Blacks. Their destiny is more linked to the return of the class struggle rather than protest, certainly legitimate, against the racial discrimination which still survives in American civil society and, unfortunately, continues to divide the working classes. If racism has not disappeared, Blacks do not for all that constitute a sort of "people-class" but rather a false community composed of several social classes.

Right now, "race" belonging seems to take precedence over class. But it was not always like that. We don't even have to go back as far as the epoch of the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW), and the glorious example of Local 8 of the longshoremen (dockers) of Philadelphia which, from 1913 to 1922, organised workers equally between Black and Whites⁵⁷. The waves of strikes at the time of the New Deal (1935-1939) saw Blacks involved, often against the policies of certain unions. In the immediate post-war period (1945-1948) and again from 1968 to 1977, Black workers showed an exceptional combativity exemplified by the League of Revolutionary Black Workers (LRBW) of Detroit and its base unions present in several car factories⁵⁸. These proletarian organisations tried to link class struggle with the fight against racism, in and outside the factory.

More recently, in 2006, a movement of immigrants, notably illegal ones, succeeded in blocking the sectors of the US economy which made most use of their labour power. In that year, millions of proletarians participated in demonstrations to protest against a project to modify American immigration policy, law H.R. 4437. This increased penalties for illegal immigration and meant that foreigners with an irregular status would be treated as criminals, as would anybody who

⁵⁶ Presented to the American ambassador, Charles Francis Adams, 28 January 1865:

<https://www.marxists.org/history/international/iwma/documents/1864/lincoln-letter.htm>

⁵⁷ "100 Years Ago: the Philadelphia Dockers Strike and Local 8 of the IWW": <https://mouvement-communiste.com/documents/MC/Letters/LTMC1338%20ENvF.pdf>

⁵⁸ DRUM at Dodge, ELRUM, JARUM and MARUM at Chrysler. (RUM stands for *Revolutionary Union Movement*.) See:

"*Class, Race, and Worker Insurgency: The League of Revolutionary Black Workers*", James A. Geschwender, and "*Detroit: I do mind dying: A study in urban revolution*", Dan Georgakas and Marvin Surkin.

helped them to re-enter or remain in the US. These mobilisations on an exceptional scale were called by grassroots organisations (often religious) and were surprisingly determined.

Agitations began in Chicago, on 10 March 2006, with 100,000 protesters and were followed by others in the main cities of the country for eight weeks in a row. The biggest march, in numbers, took place on 25 March 2006 in the city-centre of Los Angeles. With 500,000 to one million participants, it interrupted most of the economic activities of the city. On 10 April 2006, demonstrations were held in 102 cities, including that of 350,000 to 500,000 people of all origins and “colours” in Dallas. It is not by chance that the proponents of antiracism and BLM (founded in 2013) ignore these movements because they have a class nature different from what they advocate. The days of action of 2006 provide concrete proof that proletarian victims of specific forms of oppression have the capacity to find in their position in capitalist production the element unifying their particular fights and, by that, the lever of their liberation.

Capital and imaginary communities

Capital, in its perpetual movement to revolutionise existing conditions, dissolves the previous classes by plunging them into the proletariat or swelling the ranks of the bourgeoisie and its rentiers. In this movement, it also destroys the economic base of former communities while conserving – and even developing – their ideological contributions, such as religion and racial identity, which are useful in dividing the subordinate classes. Communities thus reviewed and corrected by the valorisation of capital re-found themselves also as illusory communities, such as that of the Blacks.

*“If the conscious expression of the real relations of these individuals is illusory, if in their imagination they turn reality upside-down, then this in its turn is the result of their limited material mode of activity and their limited social relations arising from it.”*⁵⁹ – Marx, *The German Ideology*, 1845.

Capitalism needs commodities to be exchanged between free producers, separated from each other. This is why capitalist society, far more than any other society divided into distinct social classes which preceded it, actively works for the destruction of pre-existing social relations and communities which are a barrier to capital accumulation – a destruction which was never as irreversible or complete as in the case of slavery.

*“The system of wage labour is a system of slavery, and indeed of a slavery which becomes more severe in proportion as the social productive forces of labour develop, whether the worker receives better or worse payment.”*⁶⁰ – Karl Marx, *Critique of the Gotha Programme*, 1875.

Capital and its system “offer” to individuals the possibility of belonging to all kinds of imagined communities, all of them founded on obscuring the division of society into antagonistic classes. The individual torn apart into their multiple belongings to fictive communities goes so far as to forget the real place that they occupy in the society of capital. Contrary to the proletarian community in struggle against capitalism, the “national community”, like all other illusory communities (including so-called religious and racial ones), is founded on a fundamental mystification: the hiding of social relations, the negation (or relativisation, which amounts to the same thing) of the existence of classes with opposed interests. Every society divided into classes constructs its myths, its conception of history, of the world and individuals. In all circumstances, these societies founded on this antagonism aim to establish a link between the dominant and dominated classes.

⁵⁹ Part I: Feuerbach, “Ideology in General, German Ideology in Particular” [4. *The Essence of the Materialist Conception of History. Social Being and Social Consciousness*], <https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1845/german-ideology/ch01a.htm>

⁶⁰ <https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1875/gotha/ch02.htm>

Capitalism needs individuals isolated, ready to sell it their productive strength and docility. Docility, class collaboration, is reinforced by the division of proletarians, by their membership in all sorts of supposed communities, including particularly that of the nation, perfect for the exercise of democracy. These fictitious communities tend to erase the social determination of the exploited class.

*“An immediate consequence of the fact that man is estranged from the product of his labour, from his life activity, from his species-being, is the estrangement of man from man. When man confronts himself, he confronts the other man. What applies to a man’s relation to his work, to the product of his labour and to himself, also holds of a man’s relation to the other man, and to the other man’s labour and object of labour. In fact, the proposition that man’s species-nature is estranged from him means that one man is estranged from the other, as each of them is from man’s essential nature. The estrangement of man, and in fact every relationship in which man [stands] to himself, is realized and expressed only in the relationship in which a man stands to other men. Hence within the relationship of estranged labour each man views the other in accordance with the standard and the relationship in which he finds himself as a worker.”⁶¹ – Karl Marx, *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844*.*

Unfortunately, the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, right up until today in fact, have seen the proletariat in its turn trapped in the nets of illusory communities and, through that, divided, negated as a class when it defends “its” company, “its” country, “its” region, “its” “race”, “its” religion etc. The classes which dominate within the social relations of capital do not prove to be indifferent to social relations which are pre-existing and which eventually endure at the margins of the capitalist world. When these outdated social relations prove to be useless to the accumulation of capital, they do not hesitate to use them, to integrate them into their complex systems of domination. On the other hand, when they become an obstacle to the development of capital, the dominant classes and their states do not hesitate to break them. This was the case with slavery, which nevertheless still survives in forms compatibles with the existing order.

The NGO *Anti-slavery International* sets out these forms precisely⁶²:

“Modern slavery takes many forms. The most common are:

Human trafficking. The use of violence, threats or coercion to transport, recruit or harbour people in order to exploit them for purposes such as forced prostitution, labour, criminality, marriage or organ removal.

Forced labour. Any work or services people are forced to do against their will under threat of punishment.

Debt bondage/bonded labour. The world’s most widespread form of slavery. People trapped in poverty borrow money and are forced to work to pay off the debt, losing control over both their employment conditions and the debt.

Descent-based slavery. Most traditional form, where people are treated as property, and their “slave” status was passed down the maternal line.

Slavery of children. When a child is exploited for someone else’s gain. This can include child trafficking, child soldiers, child marriage and child domestic slavery.

Forced and early marriage. When someone is married against their will and cannot leave. Most child marriages can be considered slavery.”

What’s more, slavery still reigns absolutely in the sphere of reproduction, within the modern family. We won’t dwell on this question here, however central it is to the critique of societies divided into classes, but it is worth remembering that:

*“The modern individual family is founded on the open or concealed domestic slavery of the wife, and modern society is a mass composed of these individual families as its molecules.”⁶³ – Engels, *Origins of the Family, Private Property, and the State*, 1884.*

⁶¹ <https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1844/manuscripts/labour.htm>

⁶² <https://www.antislavery.org/slavery-today/modern-slavery/>

Intersectionality, a counter-revolutionary instrument for dividing the proletariat

Where the concept comes from

Intersectionality came into being as both a model of analysis of social domination and as a political instrument to transform it. The term intersectionality was forged by the legal scholar Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw, active as a feminist and for civil rights, and appeared for the first time in 1991 in a law review. In its beginnings, intersectional theory was constituted as an appendix to bourgeois law with the aim of making recognised and allowing legal sanction against what was newly analysed as combined forms of discrimination, “intersectional” prejudices being previously kept separate⁶⁴.

Starting in 2010, intersectionality rose in influence, in Europe as well as the US, propelled by the renewal of the feminist movement and the recycling of Third Worldism in the “decolonisation” current. It is today frequently taken up by proponents of the fight against discriminations, of antiracism and “social justice”.

Principally, intersectionality manifests itself as a current of interdisciplinary thinking aiming to understand the complexity of dominations and social inequalities by an integrated approach to identities. The intersectional analysis refutes the compartmentalisation and hierarchisation of the big axes of social differentiation which are the categories of sex/gender, class, “race”, ethnicity, age, disability and sexual orientation. It intends to go beyond a simple recognition of the multiplicity of “systems of oppression” and postulates their interaction in the production and reproduction of oppressions.

Nevertheless, in practice and on the political plane, intersectional activists give almost all their priority to a particular situation of oppression and the population it relates to (which is never “class”), itself subdivisible into identity groups suffering a very specific oppression. Crenshaw, for example, shows a preference for the cause of African-American women, which she identifies herself as. She intends to “*testify to the everyday violence and humiliation which confronts all black women, whatever their color [sic], their age, their gender expression, sexuality or abilities*”⁶⁵. From the start, she wants to affirm the relevance of the intersectional category “black women” – a crossroads of a gender oppression and a racial oppression – to which can then be added supplementary categories (“older black women”, “black lesbians”, “disabled black women” etc.).

⁶³ <https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1884/origin-family/ch02d.htm>

⁶⁴ In October 2016, Crenshaw returned to the origin and sense of this notion. She explained that her reflection started from a court case, that of DeGraffenreid vs General Motors. In 1976, Emma DeGraffenreid and other African-American female workers brought a case against their ex-employer, the General Motors Assembly Division of Saint-Louis. They called into question the policies of hiring, seniority and redundancy of the automobile maker which, according to them, perpetuated discriminatory practices, already illegal, based on sex and race. But the particularity of this matter resides in the fact that the accusation referred to a specific form of discrimination associating both factors. This argument was rejected by the court: “*The plaintiffs allege that they are suing on behalf of black women, and that therefore this lawsuit attempts to combine two causes of action into a new special sub-category, namely, a combination of racial and sex-based discrimination. The Court notes that plaintiffs have failed to cite any decisions which have stated that black women are a special class to be protected from discrimination*”. For Crenshaw, this affair illustrates a double injustice, because the discrimination that these black women suffered added to their non-recognition by the law as a minority group “to protect”. From then on, she was determined to plug this “*legal failing*”. TEDWomen Conference: https://www.ted.com/speakers/kimberle_crenshaw

For the DeGraffenreid vs General Motors case, refer particularly to:

<https://law.justia.com/cases/federal/district-courts/FSupp/413/142/1660699/>

<https://www.casemine.com/judgement/us/59149490add7b049345bf04d>

⁶⁵ Conference TEDWomen, 2016, *op. cit.*

An ideology soaked in philosophical indifferentism

The rejection on principle of a hierarchisation of the axes of social differentiation, without really abolishing them, expresses and leads to a great confusion and several major theoretical errors. The first and most important one is the assimilation of objectively irreducible social phenomena by putting them into a forced equivalence, principally exploitation and oppression. It's an operation of levelling out of the real which has for its corollary ignorance, deliberate or not, of the relations of production. The "class" category of intersectional theories pits wealth against poverty, condemns material inequalities and economic exclusion, but does not take account of value, of profit or wage labour and denies, quite simply by hiding it, the relation of exploitation.

Exploitation, it is easy to admit, does not however have the same motivations or the same range as, for example, the repression of so-called minority sexualities or locking up the elderly. It is, moreover, fundamentally indifferent to them. Effectively, exploitation is the mechanism by which the capitalist mode of production (CMP) reproduces itself by extorting surplus value from the labour of proletarians. And if all societies divided into classes rest on antagonisms, specifically capitalist exploitation reflects the relation between the bourgeois class and the proletarian class, mediated by the wage. For what it's worth, in the wake of Marx of Engels, here is what we wrote on the subject of capitalist exploitation:

*"Capital is value which valorises itself only by consuming labour power. Its only interest is to be able to make use of the use value of this particular commodity the longest possible time at the lowest price to produce commodities which contain the maximum of unpaid labour – therefore value not paid for, surplus in relation to the value expressed in the wage – while individually possessing the smallest possible value. This surplus value is the specific product of the labour power of the workers employed in a capitalist manner. There is a separation of producers from their means of labour, that is to say that work is subsumed formally to capital, the aim of production becomes the extortion of surplus value. This latter is and remains the product of the surplus labour that the worker performs after having replaced the value represented by their wage. Its changes in form do not change this fact in any way, there is no form of surplus labour less painful than another, even if, in the case of absolute surplus value, the price of labour falls absolutely, while in the case of relative surplus value the price of labour can rise."*⁶⁶

The second theoretical error is the direct product of this conceptual indistinction. The various forms of oppression – postulated as equal and "intersectional" – eradicated from the relations of causality in which they appeared historically. Oppressions *sui generis*, racism or patriarchy, then pass for a product of themselves, rather than being presented as contingent expressions of the domination of man by man anchored in modes of production *founded on class antagonisms*, capitalist and precapitalist. Produced and/or reproduced by class relations, oppression (and what's more, in all its forms) is never in itself the main efficient cause of itself.

It is in this way that the intersectional approach is typical of philosophical indifferentism, which deliberately renounces exploring causal relationships and thus turns its back on Marxist determinism as summarised by Marx:

"The general conclusion at which I arrived and which, once reached, became the guiding principle of my studies can be summarised as follows. In the social production of their existence, men inevitably enter into definite relations, which are independent of their will, namely relations of production appropriate to a given stage in the development of their material forces of production. The totality of these relations of production constitutes the economic structure of society, the real foundation, on which arises a legal and political superstructure and to which correspond definite forms of social consciousness. The mode of production of material life conditions the general process of social, political and intellectual life. It is not the consciousness of men that determines their existence, but their social existence that determines their consciousness. At a certain stage of development, the material productive forces of society come into

⁶⁶ Mouvement Communiste, *Les Modalités de l'exploitation capitaliste* :

http://mouvement-communiste.com/documents/MC/WorkDocuments/dtmc_3_modalites_exploitation.pdf

conflict with the existing relations of production or – this merely expresses the same thing in legal terms – with the property relations within the framework of which they have operated hitherto. From forms of development of the productive forces these relations turn into their fetters. Then begins an era of social revolution. The changes in the economic foundation lead sooner or later to the transformation of the whole immense superstructure.

In studying such transformations, it is always necessary to distinguish between the material transformation of the economic conditions of production, which can be determined with the precision of natural science, and the legal, political, religious, artistic or philosophic – in short, ideological forms in which men become conscious of this conflict and fight it out. Just as one does not judge an individual by what he thinks about himself, so one cannot judge such a period of transformation by its consciousness, but, on the contrary, this consciousness must be explained from the contradictions of material life, from the conflict existing between the social forces of production and the relations of production. No social order is ever destroyed before all the productive forces for which it is sufficient have been developed, and new superior relations of production never replace older ones before the material conditions for their existence have matured within the framework of the old society.

Mankind thus inevitably sets itself only such tasks as it is able to solve, since closer examination will always show that the problem itself arises only when the material conditions for its solution are already present or at least in the course of formation. In broad outline, the Asiatic, ancient,^[4] feudal and modern bourgeois modes of production may be designated as epochs marking progress in the economic development of society. The bourgeois mode of production is the last antagonistic form of the social process of production – antagonistic not in the sense of individual antagonism but of an antagonism that emanates from the individuals' social conditions of existence – but the productive forces developing within bourgeois society create also the material conditions for a solution of this antagonism. The prehistory of human society accordingly closes with this social formation.”⁶⁷ – Karl Marx, *Preface to a Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*, 1859.

Intersectionality and the politics of identity

Intersectionality presents itself as an attempt at the theoretical articulation of a new sort of politics, appearing first of all, in the US, at the same time in the social laboratories that are universities and activist scenes: “identity politics”. This also proposes a total redefinition that summarises social relations, crushing along the way the antagonisms of class-divided societies, in particular those proper to the capitalist mode of production.

It proclaims that “identities” (of sex/gender, “race”, sexual orientation etc.) and their intersections rule human behaviours, ordain relations of power and therefore determine social positions. Far from removing barriers to the realisation of the social nature of individuals, identity politics reduces and even assigns them to their supposed belongings, exalting separations and celebrating the authenticity of differences – with pride and suffering at the same time.

More precisely, as the essayist Laurent Dubreuil wrote, the politics of identity rest on a “determinist vision of individual identity which, relating the latter to a collective social being which is predefined and referential, uses it as an argument for a possible modification of domination. According to this approach, every identity is necessarily political, because politics knows no limits. In order to change oppression, it is necessary to recognise, express, and protect the pain and sorrow that make up minority identities. Since it is almost impossible to change your ontological place, the description of the suffering and experience that founds your self aims above all at designating who is part of what, at verbally confirming the subjects in what they are, at shaming their enemies, at censoring words or forms that would contravene the establishment of the identity paradigm and the victory of specific demands.”⁶⁸ – Laurent Dubreuil, *La Dictature des identités*, 2019.

Identity (any identity) is established as politics from the moment it becomes the seat of specific interests, here of the communitarian type, based on demands responding to so many wounds relating to a population which is oppressed, or perceived as such. Everything, or almost everything,

⁶⁷ <https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1859/critique-pol-economy/preface.htm>

⁶⁸ *La Dictature des identités*, Gallimard, coll. “Le Débat”, p. 14, our translation.

in the vast field of social experience can provide a pretext for the recognition of an identity. Every dimension, or almost every dimension, of individuality can be attached to an identity and absorbed by it.

These identities are fixed (they are sociotypes) and multiple, and they can interlock to form new identities at their "intersections". At the crossroads of the black, feminine and lesbian identities, for example, exists a particular and relevant identity, that of the black lesbian, and it can boast of enduring unique humiliations of its kind – their incommensurability places them very high on the scale of identitarian sufferings. Yet the suffering experienced in one's identity opens up rights, as well as a kind of dignity, to be listened to, accepted, respected, and celebrated *as a representative of an oppressed population*.

This particular suffering is incommunicable in that it is an essential property that it afflicts, containing a political project of a separatist nature. The oppressed identity can only be found within itself and is fully supportable only in *safe spaces* which are exclusively reserved for them. It is its own end. It tends towards an interstitial counter-society, without the interference of alien identities, and if it goes out into society, it is to negotiate its rightful place, to claim its due (its quotas, its airtime...) and not to mix with it and merge with it, even less go beyond it.

Its custodians are particularly invested with the mission of defending their heritage against any despoliation, any "cultural appropriation". This last notion is revealing of the profoundly reactionary implications of identity politics, going ever further down the road of essentialisation of practices and knowledge, of the reduction of the social individual to a single (or a few) of its dimensions. In tendency, the entirety of the fruits of industry and the human mind are exposed to the claim of identity. They are likely to be banned from circulation, confined to a reserved area, taken out of universal culture. Segregation even as far as ideas is the ultimate horizon of identity politics.

Intersectionality and antiracism: a pillar of racialisation

Among the products that intersectional ideology puts on display, there is one more pernicious than the others: its partisans call it "political antiracism", and its opponents, including us, "racialism". It seemed to be accepted, in Europe and elsewhere, that the notion of race, which was dominant and taken as objective for a long time, was definitively discredited. It belonged to a shameful past or, in the present, to the ideological arsenal of the racist extreme right. But in the last few years, "race" has returned with a vengeance to the intellectual and activist scene. It is found at the heart of a new paradigm which could become the majority view in the Left and Extreme Left of numerous countries⁶⁹ and which sees itself as a movement of "awakening" (*wokeness*) intending to replace the supposedly outmoded conceptions of a universalist antiracism challenging the division of humanity into races⁷⁰.

⁶⁹ It's a paradigm which nevertheless arouses a growing opposition, notably in France, where it serves as a scarecrow for various bourgeois political forces stretching from the Socialist Party to the Extreme Right, via the Centrist ruling party. On the theoretical level, its particularist and essentialist character is contrary to the "universal" pretensions of the Republic *which makes no distinction between its children*. It is without doubt one of the reasons for which its implantation in France is harder than in the US, to the great displeasure of the American press. The *New York Times* of 9 February 2021 asked: "*Do American ideas threaten French cohesion?*". It was an occasion to state that "*these theories are tools helping to illuminate the blind spots of a more and more diverse nation which is still afraid to mention race, which has still not confronted its colonial past and which often associates the aspirations of minorities with identity politics*".

See: <https://www.nytimes.com/fr/2021/02/09/world/europe/France-universites-decolonialisme-woke.html>

⁷⁰ See, for example: www.lemonde.fr/societe/article/2020/06/18/l-antiracisme-en-france-de-l-ideal-universaliste-aux-luttes-categorielles_6043332_3224.html and https://www.liberation.fr/debats/2019/06/16/misere-de-l-antiracisme-politique_1734167/

Because society is supposedly composed of Whites and the “racialised”, and racial identities will distribute positions in social relations to favour a “systemic racism” – there is a racism which is almost ontological, a racism intrinsic to European and American societies due to the slave trade and colonisation, a racism indifferent to the opinions and choices of individuals and/or collectives, and finally a racism inaccessible to the consciousness of the “dominant” (the Whites)⁷¹. Racism can even be constitutive of a “whiteness” of which it is an irreducible characteristic. Even though, in 2020 Kimberlé Crenshaw herself commented on the evolution of the usage of intersectionality: “*there has been distortion [of the concept]. It’s not identity politics on steroids. It is not a mechanism to turn white men into the new pariahs*”.⁷²

“Race” is elevated to the status of a superior principle of social organisation and, in the same breath, praised as the very future of antiracism. And the “social races”⁷³, bearers of political interests, are therefore situated in opposition. The political product of intersectionality therefore presents itself, and above all, in the negation of the fight of the proletariat by the White workers, because the Whites are all like members of the bourgeoisie, are racist in a “structural” way by virtue of their “racially privileged belonging” as the racialist “antiracists” assert.

To speak of racialism means therefore to accuse those who revive the notion of race and grant it validity. If there are sincere anti-racist activists among them who believe that their struggle can succeed through these means, it is high time that they gave up their illusions and, at the very least, clearly dissociate themselves from the ongoing racialising enterprise. Racism is an ideology which with the emergence of nationalism created illusory communities (“races” for one, nations for the other), that can be considered as devoid of material foundations. Yet, at the risk of repeating ourselves, these ideologies acquired a real material force. The history of the last two centuries has amply demonstrated what we can expect from them.

*“In proportion as the exploitation of one individual by another will also be put an end to, the exploitation of one nation by another will also be put an end to. In proportion as the antagonism between classes within the nation vanishes, the hostility of one nation to another will come to an end.”*⁷⁴ Marx, Engels, *Manifesto of the Communist Party*, 1848.

⁷¹ The racialists have nevertheless elaborated simple propositions, not to say injunctions, aimed at their “allies” of the pitiful “white left”: be conscious of their supposed privileges – by a striking process of reversal, not being discriminated against because of your skin colour is effectively a privilege and not something to be demanded for all – and to renounce them, without really knowing how... In this regard, the French philosopher and activist Pierre Tevanian has spoken of the battles to be waged by the “anti-racist left”. Since “*White is effectively not a racial category but a social category*”, then “*The final solution is to stand as much as possible with the discriminated against, the undocumented, the girls in headscarves excluded from school, the imprisoned rioters, all those who fight against police impunity – to be, in short, wherever non-Whites gather to fight White domination*” in Sylvie Laurent and Thierry Leclère (editors), *De quelle couleur sont les blancs?* (“What colour are the Whites”), La Découverte, 2013 (our translation)

⁷² <https://time.com/5786710/kimberle-crenshaw-intersectionality/>

⁷³ As is stressed by the authors of one of the first texts directed against this “new paradigm”, “*to decide the criteria which will be meaningful to separate and hierarchise groups and sub-groups comes back to instituting a collection of norms. For human beings for example, skin colour is found instituted as the presiding criterion in the separation into groups. In other words, the validity of such a classification proceeds only from its own presuppositions: to find “races”, you must first consider that they really exist.*” They add, in regard to the expression “social races” used by the “political antiracists”, that “*in any case, there have never been other “races” than “social races”, in every case constructed socially, even when race was disguised by science. This is why the demarcation “social”, that distinction that the neo-racialists wish to make from the racialism of the nineteenth century, has no place, unless we recognise ‘races’ as biologically scientific.*” The “*La race comme si vous y étiez! Une soirée de printemps chez les racialistes*” (“Race as if you were there! A spring evening with the racialists”) collective, 2016, 236 p. Available as a PDF from: www.fichier-pdf.fr/2017/07/01/juliette-race/ (our translation)

⁷⁴ Part II, “Proletarians and Communists”:

<https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1848/communist-manifesto/ch02.htm>

A counter-revolutionary impasse

Without doubt the most anti-worker aspect of intersectionality, in the racist camp, is the substitution of “race”⁷⁵ for class with the corollary of the overestimation of its impact in the organisation of social relations. With class belonging and the class antagonism proper to the society of capital emptied of its substance, intersectionality is nothing other than a new inter-classist ideology, more or less sophisticated depending on the authors involved. It defends, at its core, that Whites, whatever their position in terms of social relations, constitute the “systemic” oppressors of the Blacks. This means *de facto* dividing the working class on the basis of colour, and it aims at preventing Black, White etc. workers from fighting together for their class interests.

Not only does intersectionality act to dilute class consciousness, to promote inter-classism and fragmentation of the proletariat, but it channels any vague attempts at political radicality towards expressions compatible with the dictatorship of capital. In addition, entire sections of the bourgeoisie in the most developed countries “agitate” for societies which are “open, inclusive and diverse”⁷⁶, taking up some of the items on the intersectional agenda. However, the dominant classes know how to use it in other ways, and their representatives who today swear that “Black lives matter” could exchange this credo for a quite different one when they judge it appropriate. Any factor of separation within the exploited class can be useful to them as general political circumstances and confrontations internal to capital dictate, in one way or another. That identitarian polarisation is a powerful agent for diversion of the class struggle, whether it takes the form of BLM or MAGA, as has been demonstrated in the US over the last few years, and it does not lack interested sponsors in the bourgeois camp.

If the relations between capitalist exploitation and the various kinds of oppression can fluctuate and are marked with the stamp of opportunism, the capitalist mode of production provides a framework propitious for the perpetuation and renewal of oppression. In particular, the **oppression of women**, the heritage of precapitalist societies probably revived in the first stages of the division of societies into classes, still occupies a central, and unique, place in the present mode of production. It is rooted in the family, a place which is up until now irreplaceable for the reproduction of labour power, and of the species in general.

The revolutionary proletariat recognises in the movement of women against the family and domestic slavery an essential strategic ally in the fight for communism. Reciprocally, the real emancipation of women will not happen under the yoke of capital because the latter, in its movement which ceaselessly revolutionises civil society, certainly strains the bonds of the family but cannot go beyond the family as a unit of reproduction. The progress of the market socialisation of certain tasks of reproduction previously taken on by the family (deliveries, readymade meals, domestic appliances, domestic services, the industries of education and health etc.) do not fundamentally change this fact. The abolition of the family is not on the agenda for capital, it is

⁷⁵ Applying it to the study of France, Françoise Vergès wants to “consider racialisation as a structural element of oppression” (in “L’intersectionnalité et ses critiques”, *L’Observatoire*, 2020, p. 40-41). She states that “to deny the racialisation of French society, or to insist on the fact that discriminations have also affected so-called “white” groups (immigrant Italians, Poles, Spaniards...), contributes to the marginalisation of the role of the colony in the fabrication of the French identity and the existence of its fantasised colour” because “The end of colonial empires, new emergences, new forms of globalisation have not put an end to the racialised and sexed organisation of the world of work, nor the presence of the “colour bar” which cuts across the world of consumption and that of production. Yet, despite this cartography of colour, transnational and transcontinental solidarities have appeared, anti-slavery and anticolonialism testify to it. Exploitation has not always had a colour. This colour is fragile. It is necessary to regularly reinvest in and nourish illusions, representations, discourse which designates the party guilty of its own anxieties, of its own fears, a guilty party in which they can be incarnated”, in *De quelle couleur sont les blancs?* (our translation)

⁷⁶ This discourse is reproduced by associations and political groups, but also by big companies like SNCF, Nestlé, Apple, Nike etc.

decomposed and recomposed, but remains, until there is evidence to the contrary, at the centre of social reproduction.

It goes without saying that the intersectional “programme”, even in its maximum version, is not able to resolve the oppression of women, of attacking it at its roots. And this observation goes for the multiple specific causes which intersectionality theorises about and favours breaking up into illusory communities, and then calling for a “convergence of struggles” of identities with watertight divisions between them in the concrete absence of any class struggle.

The intersectional identitarian paradigm not only constitutes an obstacle to the “ever expanding union of the workers” (according to the expression in the *Manifesto*), but, in so far as “sectoral” struggles are concerned, it affirms what exists rather than attempting to go beyond them. It is in this way a conservative force, always confined to the dominant social relation in a posture of subordinate contestation.

The revolutionary fight of the proletarian class, dear to communists, and certainly far enough away from the preoccupations of the eulogists of intersectionality, is the exact opposite of a politics of identity. Proletarians, in their immense majority, do not cherish their condition of being exploited – the “class in itself”, the means of accumulation of capital created by it. On the contrary, they seek to extract themselves from it, whether in an isolated manner or in organising themselves collectively.

*“The combination of capital has created for this mass a common situation, common interests. This mass is thus already a class as against capital, but not yet for itself. In the struggle, of which we have noted only a few phases, this mass becomes united, and constitutes itself as a class for itself. The interests it defends become class interests. But the struggle of class against class is a political struggle.”*⁷⁷ - Karl Marx, *The Poverty of Philosophy*, 1847.

The constitution of the proletariat into a “class for itself” means nothing other than the process of unification of the class in the struggle to take power and, definitively, abolish the social relation of capital. The proletariat is therefore itself fated to disappear as a class coming from this very social relation.

Far from dwelling on its “identity”, the proletariat in movement creates by its autonomous political struggles the material bases to go beyond its position as a class of this society. In a word, the workers’ fight is the active negation of the workers’ condition. This is exactly the opposite of the identitarian proposition which mythologises this condition and worships the producer, in his strength, his simplicity, his decency, even his suffering, notably in the social-democratic and Stalinist traditions. Such myths and cults have fortunately been swept away, first of all by the mechanisation of labour proper to the real subsumption of the productive forces to capital, and then by the revolutionary assault of the collective worker in the 1960s and ‘70s. It was an assault which was incarnated in the struggles and autonomous political organisations of the exploited class massively expressing the “refusal of wage labour” by the assertion of workers’ power in the workshop, factory, working class neighbourhoods and more widely in the productive territories of the citadels of capital.

*“From the relationship of estranged labour to private property it follows further that the emancipation of society from private property, etc., from servitude, is expressed in the political form of the emancipation of the workers; not that their emancipation alone is at stake, but because the emancipation of the workers contains universal human emancipation – and it contains this because the whole of human servitude is involved in the relation of the worker to production, and all relations of servitude are but modifications and consequences of this relation.”*⁷⁸ – Karl Marx, *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844*, section entitled “Estranged Labour”

MC/KPK, 6 April 2021

⁷⁷ Chapter Two: The Metaphysics of Political Economy, “Strikes and Combinations of Workers”:
<https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1847/poverty-philosophy/ch02e.htm>

⁷⁸ <https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1844/manuscripts/labour.htm>