

## Anti-Capital for the XXIst Century

(on the metacrisis of capitalism and the prospects for radical politics)

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Summary: Using the temperate nature of recent social protest as its entry point, this analysis investigates the current state of liberal democracies as one in which the purported crisis of capitalism has entered a crisis of its own – a social condition of *metacrisis*, marked by the absence of utopian energies and prospects for a revolution, even as society experiences itself in perpetual crisis. This inquiry then discerns the potential for radical change in terms of *subverting* capitalism (rather than *overthrowing* or resisting it) through practices that counteract the very constitutive dynamic of capitalism – the production of profit.

### Social Protest's Unbearable Lightness

“Very dear bourgeois, sorry to disturb you, could we, please, all live in dignity?” – pleaded a slogan of the Yellow Vests, the grassroots movement for economic justice that began in France in October 2018 protesting against a planned increase in fuel prices. It quickly spread, to become the longest-lasting and most intense protest movement in western democracies in the early twenty-first century. The Spanish Indignados, a movement that mobilized some 8 million people in the spring of 2011, raised a similar plea for decent politics in a protest against the imposition of austerity policies following the financial meltdown of 2007-2009 and the ensuing

sovereign wealth crisis. Aggrieved by high unemployment rates, welfare cuts, and the bank bailout that devoured the national budget, the young Spaniards remonstrated, “We are not against the system, the system is against us!”

In the past decade, social protest has been widespread, witty, and ... weak. Even as the insurgencies on the streets and squares gave voice to ubiquitous social frustration, they also revealed the remarkably unradical nature of these popular protests, which have mainly sought to recover the relative equality of prosperity that marked the golden years of the Welfare State.<sup>1</sup> While the immediate aftermath of the financial crisis generated some talk about a terminal crisis of capitalism (the *Financial Times* ran a ‘Capitalism in Crisis’ series of articles in early 2012), discourses of systemic crisis were quickly replaced by complaints about rising inequality and calls to tax the rich – a substantially more timid request than overturning a system that inflicts multifaceted harm on individuals, their communities, and their natural environment. The taciturn nature of contemporary protest politics is suggestive of a peculiar condition in which liberal democracies currently find themselves, a state I will proceed to describe as the *metacrisis* of democratic capitalism.

### The Scandal of Democracy and the Zombie State of Neoliberalism

The eruption of anti-establishment protests in the decade following the economic crisis of 2008-2009 has effectively disrupted the neoliberal order, provoking the search for alternatives. It put an end to neoliberal hegemony in the sense that it eliminated the certainty with which the neoliberal policy mix of free-markets and open economies has been perceived to be the

singularly reasonable, the only thinkable, policy formula. In the last two decades of the twentieth century, this hegemony had been obtained through an ideological accommodation between the center-left and center-right political elites. The center-left accepted free market capitalism, while the center-right adopted the New Left agenda of non-discrimination, identity recognition, and ecological concerns. This deal forged what Nancy Fraser has called ‘progressive neoliberalism’ – not in the sense that this form of capitalism is inherently and undoubtedly progressive, but that it incorporated elements of progressive politics exactly to achieve a hegemonic status through broad support among the dominant political forces (Fraser 2017a, 2017b).

The anti-establishment protests of the past decade, which have wrongly been labeled as populism (Azmanova 2018a, 2019), have rekindled partisan conflict and subsequently lifted the veil of inevitability that had enabled the neoliberal hegemony. These protests opened what Chantal Mouffe and Ernesto Laclau have called a ‘space of indeterminacy’ – the possibility for change without a distinct telos, without a pre-set direction. Will progressive political forces be able to harness the brewing social discontent and give it direction?

The first obstacle to the project of progressive politics is the fact that the rupturing of neoliberal hegemony has not altogether uprooted neoliberal capitalism. Despite much political rhetoric about change, most of the policies that triggered the financial meltdown ten years ago are still in place. This is the case because the policy rationale and political mentality of neoliberalism remain intact. The *policy rationale* of neoliberalism is the pursuit of national competitiveness in the global economy as a top policy priority (trumping, say, growth or employment), which entails the further deregulation of the domestic economy. The

liberalisation of product- and labor- markets persists, even as trade wars are being launched. Apart from efforts to raise the minimum wage, there have not been endeavors to curtail the reign of the free market in national economies, as it is believed that this would damage these economies' competitiveness in the global marketplace. The *political mentality* of neoliberalism consists absolving the state of social responsibility by offloading that responsibility (e.g. for our becoming employable and remaining employed, or for safeguarding the environment) onto individuals and communities. This devolution of responsibility also plays out in calls for more democracy. Thus, democracy, to draw on Jodi Dean's analysis of our contemporary, 'communicative' capitalism, becomes a neoliberal fantasy.<sup>2</sup>

Far from an unobtainable fancy, democracy has become an efficient instrument for enacting neoliberal capitalism. The mechanism of democratic elections gives political existence, in the form of ruling coalitions with a democratic mandate, to the powerful capital-labor alliance advocating those very policies of national competitiveness (e.g. deregulation of labor markets, reliance on cheap fossil fuels) that undercut policy commitments to social and environmental justice. As the social safety net has been continuously reduced, individuals' reliance on employment as a source of livelihood has increased. As a result, the policy agenda for jobs and growth has come to supply the political commonsense through which capital and labor unite in support of neoliberal hegemony.<sup>3</sup> Thus, even at the nadir of the financial meltdown, the democratic vote tended to go either to the center-right, that was the main author of those policies which inaugurated the neoliberal transition in the 1980s (privatization of public assets and deregulation of the economy), or to the far-right, which does not pose a serious challenge to neoliberalism. The far-right transforms the conflict between capital's

imperatives for growth and society's imperative for integration into a conflict between 'our' national capitalism (our jobs, our growth) and 'their' global, capitalism. These economic tensions are further politicised as cultural ones (fear of immigrants who deprive us of our jobs while eroding our cultural cohesion) into a novel phenomenon I have discussed as 'economic xenophobia' (Azmanova 2011a).

Throughout this process, the institutions of democratic participation are not just weakened; they are effectively used to foment support for the very economic policies causing the social malaise through precarious employment and slashing social insurance and budgets for public services. We thus face what we might call the 'scandal of democracy' (akin to Immanuel Kant's notion of 'the scandal of reason')<sup>4</sup> – much as we rely on democracy to save us from capitalism's most nefarious effects, democratic politics, be it inadvertently, becomes the mechanism that enacts capitalism's logic. That is why, within the framework of capitalist democracy, progressive political forces will always face the dilemma of either serving the short-term interests of their electorate in perpetuating the dynamics of capital accumulation upon which the fortunes of the 'little man' depend, or serving the longer-term societal interest in protecting human beings and the natural environment from those very dynamics.

As a consequence of the perpetuation of the very policies that cause the experience of crisis, neoliberalism is not dead. It is neither fully recovered nor is it being replaced by an alternative model. It is in a zombie state.

## The Missing Crisis of Capitalism

One of the peculiarities of zombie neoliberalism is the perpetuation of the discourse of crisis. We have been stuck in a narrative of crisis for over a decade now. On the left, there is the anticipation and celebration of an impending terminal crisis of capitalism. On the right, this takes the shape of a narrative about the unwelcome disorder of an economic mechanism that is essential for societies' wellbeing – something worth saving through the competence and will of the ruling elites set on a noble mission to heal the engine of prosperity. We have thus entered the realm of what French philosopher Jacques Derrida has named 'crisis of crisis' – even as the word crisis has deserted our vocabulary, the idea that the present world is in crisis persists (Derrida 1983:71). I would refer to this rare condition of a crisis entering its own crisis with the term 'metacrisis.' I fashion this notion after the concept of a 'metastable state' of an entity, which is used in physics and chemistry to describe a particular energy state of a system that has a shorter lifetime than the lowest (ground) energy level, but a longer lifetime than the ordinary energy state.<sup>5</sup> This intermediary state of agitation would be akin to an organism being in a state of a low fever or persistent anxiety – which is indeed how our societies find themselves a decade after the financial collapse of 2007-2009: the energies of the initial experience of social crisis have been dissipated, yet society has not recovered its sense of normalcy, of stable wellbeing. It is beset by chronic inflammation; it is in *stasis* – a term with which Thucydides depicted the pervasive civil strife that blocked the normal flow of democratic politics in the Greek polis (Price 2001).

Such a protracted state of crisis defies the very definition of crisis as a brief moment of extreme challenge to an entity's existence that marks a turning point in its life. There are, in

principle, three possible exits from a crisis: death, restoring the 'pre-crisis' condition, or transitioning to a new state. We are in a very peculiar historical conjuncture -- none of these three options apply. Strategies for coping with the financial crisis have not solved the larger social crisis; short-term crisis management has become a new normal -- we are stuck in perpetual crisis management. The radicality of the crisis is avoided, but the crisis itself is not solved. The very crisis is in a crisis: we are stuck into a *metacrisis*.

One feature of a metastable state of a system (as the notion is used in physics) is particularly befitting the diagnosis of current-day liberal democracies as being in metacrisis. A metastable state is an *energy trap*, in which the entity does not have sufficient energy to transition into another state. This is evocative of the entrapment our societies have experienced during what has become known as the Great Recession -- the decade after the crisis of 2007-2009 when, even as the economy has returned to growth, a sense of unease is pervasive, but this unease fosters no attempts at radical transformation.

### The Deflation of Socialist Utopia

Why is it that no alternatives have emanated from the disruption of neoliberal hegemony? Why are we stuck in a metacrisis at a time when society is so roiled by discontent? One factor, that is not so much causing the metacrisis of capitalism as is constitutive of it, is the remarkable absence of utopias -- what Jurgen Habermas has discussed as the 'exhaustion of utopian energies' -- the vanishing of 'alternative life possibilities that are seen as inherent in the historical process itself' (Habermas 1991, 50). In his discussion of the crisis of the welfare state

in the 1980s, Habermas observes that, even as utopian projections of the present into a better future have not altogether disappeared, one particular utopia has come to an end – the socialist utopia centered on the emancipation of labor from alien control (ibid, 52-53). In recent years, however, the idea of Socialism has made a comeback. Membership in the Democratic Socialists of America has increased tenfold between 2016 and 2018 in the very bastion of capitalism – the United States, thanks largely to the phenomenon of socialist millennials.<sup>6</sup> Still, discredited by the experiments with autocratic socialism in the former Soviet Union and Eastern Europe, the socialist utopia has lost much of its capacity to unite the diverse strands of anti-capitalist resentment. For many, the idea of Socialism (with its post-1989 connotations) is a hindrance to giving their support to anti-capitalist policies. In this way, paradoxically, Socialism has currently become a liability to anti-capitalist mobilization.<sup>7</sup>

Amidst the economic crisis, the most successful (in terms of electoral gains and policy impact) political mobilizations have been guided not by aspirations for socialism but rather by notions of economic patriotism and even xenophobia. These collective mobilizations have been void of utopian ambitions. Even as the political families of the Left and the Right have maintained their leadership in electoral politics, the fault-line of conflict is no longer the familiar capital-vs-labor divide that has shaped the map of electoral competition since the industrial revolution in the nineteenth century. This cleavage was gradually erased under the capital-labor collaboration for growth, jobs and redistribution which was forged in the framework of the post-WWII welfare state. Recently, a new divide has emerged – one that reflects conflicting attitudes to the (perceived and anticipated) social impact of the new economy of open borders and technological upheaval. Those who celebrate the new economy

as inherently progressive congregate around an ‘opportunity’ pole; on the opposite side of the barricades, around a ‘risk’ pole gather those for whom the new economy translates as a loss of livelihoods, physical threats, and cultural disruption (Azmanova 2011b). There is no positive sense of direction (a utopia), in these two positions – nothing akin to the Socialist ideal that guided the eruptions of 1848 and 1917, the irreverent anti-consumerism of 1968, or the liberal communism (the redemption and renewal of communism) that motivated much of 1989. Neither the opportunities nor the risks of the new economy, even as they currently structure social conflict, can supply the material for powerful utopias that could guide the collective imagination in the search for a novel socio-economic order.

### Precarity Capitalism

The reasons for the exhaustion of utopian energies and the weakness of emancipatory action that mark our particular historical moment concern the massive social destabilization that defines the current stage of capitalism – which I have described as ‘precarity capitalism’ (Azmanova 2020). Judith Butler (2004) has drawn the distinction between precariousness as a general human condition of vulnerability, rooted in our interdependence on each other, and precarity, which is socially generated. A series of scholars have further recorded and discussed the immiseration caused by persistent unemployment and precarious employment, the spreading of in-work poverty, and subsequently the formation of a new class, a ‘precariat’ (akin to the proletariat of the 19th century) whose wages are low, flexible and unpredictable (Standing 2011; Apostolidis 2018, Wright 2019).<sup>8</sup> So far, while the notion of precarity has been reserved only for the ‘losers’ in the distribution of economic resources, I have proposed seeing

this as an over-arching social condition also afflicting the purported winners in the game of profit-production. The active offloading of social risk to society, which public authority has actively undertaken over the past forty years, has created a condition of generalized social precarity from which the labor-market insiders— skilled workers with well-paying jobs as well as owners of capital —are not sheltered. While labor-market deregulation has translated for many into long-term unemployment or insecure and poorly paid jobs, for others it has become the source of more stressful jobs with longer working hours, impaired work-life balance, and damaged mental health. Thus, the increased competitive pressures of globally integrated capitalism have created not just a precarious class, but a precarious multitude: precarity is what is ailing the 99% (Azmanova 2020: 137-168).

The condition of generalized precarity has formidable consequences for the prospects of progressive social change. Economic instability, especially in the absence of motivational utopias, nurtures conservative and often reactionary instincts – a socio-psychological attitude Erich Fromm (1941) has discussed as ‘fear of freedom’. Although the economic crisis of 2007-2009 roused hopes on the left for the radicalization of protest into an anti-capitalist upheaval, as we noted, the democratic vote over the past decade has gone consistently to the right, giving expression not to desires for radical change but rather the opposite – a longing for safety and security. The anti-precarity agenda of social concerns with physical insecurity (terrorism), political order, cultural estrangement, and economic insecurity that has emerged on the far-right margins of the political spectrum at the turn of the century has been, in recent years, absorbed in the positions of center-right and even some center-left parties.<sup>9</sup>

Within this context, the Left has re-engaged in social criticism and political mobilization along two trajectories. On the one hand, a revival of class politics takes shape through a fight against inequality (the rich being cast as the class enemy). On the other hand, calls for saving democracy serve as an over-arching platform for progressive forces. In the remainder of this analysis, I will contend that these two trajectories of mobilization will not lead to an emancipatory political project because they are derived from incorrect diagnoses of the current historical juncture and are therefore inadequate responses to the social emergencies of our times.

Let me first address the project of saving and/or radicalizing democracy. In her latest analysis, Chantal Mouffe (2018:41) observes that “the main targets of the ‘movement of the squares’ were the shortcomings of the political system and the democratic institutions and that they did not call for ‘socialism’ but for a ‘real democracy.’”<sup>10</sup> Indeed, the political and economic oligarchies that emerged over the past thirty years, and the intensified assault on liberal values by proto-fascist movements, has done terrible damage to our democracies. Urgent action is necessary. However, the political infrastructure of democracy – from competitive elections to street protests, as we noted, are also giving political expression to a powerful capital-labor alliance in support of growth and jobs – an alliance that systematically blocks or undermines environmental policy commitments. If we are to obtain both social and environmental justice (the ambitions of the Green New Deal), it would not suffice to radicalize democracy as such radicalization is only likely to enhance the political power of the capital-labor alliance against the environment.

However, neither would it be expedient to attempt to break the capital-labor alliance by reviving class conflict as it is currently being attempted through demands for wealth tax and collectivization of property. This is the case because only a very broad alliance of social forces would be able to simultaneously obtain social and environmental justice. This would require not breaking but *subverting* the existing capital-labor alliance – directing it towards a radical transformation of the manner in which society re-produces itself. Let me address this point in more detail.

### Subverting Capitalism

In his last book, the eminent Marxist sociologist Erik Olin Wright reviews five ways (or ‘strategic logics’) for anti-capitalist mobilization -- smashing, dismantling, taming, resisting, and escaping capitalism (Wright 2019). This taxonomy of anti-capitalist strategy is based on an understanding of capitalism as an *economic system* defined “by the combination of market exchange with private ownership of the means of production and the employment of wage earners recruited through a labor market” (ibid, l.886). Thus, the various anti-capitalist strategies Wright reviews target changes within these core structures of capitalism and/or neutralize harms produced by these structures. These strategies are carried out either through bottom-up, civil society-centered initiatives of resisting and escaping capitalism, or through top-down, state-centered strategies of taming and dismantling capitalism. Wright advocates a new strategic configuration – namely, eroding capitalism by persistently building more egalitarian, democratic and

participatory economic relations. This is to eventually displace capitalism from its dominant role in the system (ibid. I.871).

Wright's analysis of the attainable possibilities for transcending capitalism simultaneously advances the critique of capitalism and illustrates the limitations of currently prevailing forms of Marxism. While Marx discussed capitalism as a system of social relations organized around the commodity relation (that is, a system centered on the production, exchange and consumption of goods deliberately produced for the market in view of making profit), most contemporary discussions of capitalism reduce it to the institutions structuring these relations – namely, wage labor and the private property of the means of production. Such analyses see the ultimate overcoming of capitalism as a matter of socialized labor.<sup>11</sup>

However, this familiar scenario of progressive politics is inadequate to the exigencies of our historical moment. This is the case because, even if the currently most radical goals of the Left are achieved – the eradication of the private property of the means of production (the main structuring institution of capitalism), this would not automatically eliminate the extractive and destructive ways in which wealth is produced and consumed. The grave social injustices of our time – the generalized social precarity I discussed earlier, as well as the environmental devastation -- are outcomes not of the unequal distribution of wealth and the private nature of property holding (that is, of the structuring institutions of capitalism and their distributive outcomes), but of the very dynamics that constitute capitalism – the pursuit of profit. As the experiment with state socialism in East and central Europe made clear, societies in which the means of production are collectively held and resources are distributed relatively equally might

still be engaged in a competitive pursuit of profit with all its deleterious impact on human beings, our communities, and our natural environment. In view of the particular exigencies of our times, this means that neither the traditional social-democratic agenda of redistribution nor the Socialist agenda of elimination of private property posit the right targets. It is the elimination of the key operational dynamic of capitalism – the competitive pursuit of profit – that should be the central objective of radical emancipatory political action and social practice.

In order to alter the core dynamics of the social order – the way society produces its material conditions and values its members' achievements, and not simply remedy the unfair distributive outcomes (inequality) and eliminate the oppressive structuring institutions (private property), a very broad-based mobilization must take place against capitalism's constitutive dynamic -- the production of profit. The class struggle as a strategy of anti-capitalist mobilization which the Left is now reviving would be unable to achieve such a broad anti-capitalist front, and even might hinder its formation. We need an alternative strategy for radical politics, which I have named *subverting* capitalism from within – that is, taking the existing capital-labour alliance and directing it against the competitive pressures of profit of production.

To accomplish such subversion, we must seek to connect the multitude of grievances that cut across the capital-labour divide (a divide shaped in relation to the ownership and management of the means of production) by means of a common denominator. This common denominator would help build a singular 'chain of equivalences' (Mouffe and Laclau, 1985) among the various grievances. A logic of equivalence among the diverse experiences of social harm is now available in the phenomenon of generalized social precarity I discussed earlier. I

have noted that conflicting experiences of injustice (e.g. the chronic unemployment or insecure employment that afflicts low-skilled workers vs poor work-life balance for holders of good jobs) have a common root – they originate in the intensified pressures of the pursuit of profit in the framework of globally integrated markets. The dynamics of contemporary capitalism thus generate an over-arching opposition to the processes through which affluence is created, irrespectively of the particular distribution of that affluence or the forms of property ownership through which it is created.

Contemporary capitalism generates this broad opposition through two internal contradictions (antinomies). The first, which I have named ‘surplus employability’ consists in the simultaneous increase of the decommodification potential of modern societies and the increase of commodification pressures. The second contradiction – the ‘acute job dependency’ -- is generated by the tension between the decreased availability of good jobs and the increased reliance on a job as a source of livelihood. As these antinomies create a life of social precarity even for the winners in the unequal distribution of affluence, they supply the basis for a broad anti-capitalist alliance (Azmanova 2020: 147, 151).

The structuring institutions of capitalism – the forms of property ownership and job tenure – function as enabling conditions for the process of subverting capitalism. On the one hand, the capital-labor alliance that currently supports the policy agenda for growth and jobs (and thus undergirds capitalism) has been reinforced through the ‘democratization’ of property ownership – as owning equity in publicly listed companies has become not only broadly accessible but, through pension funds’ investments in such holdings, has become ubiquitous

and unavoidable. On the other hand, however, this has altered the balance between opportunities and risks the ownership structures create. In the context of 'classical' nineteenth century capitalism in which Marx was writing, the private property of the means of production afforded economic advantages to capital owners while sheltering them from the social risks that participation in the pursuit of profit entails. These risks accrued to wage labor (which did not profit from the protections of property ownership). Orthodox forms of Marxism still work with this ontology of capitalism, on the basis of which they prescribe the socialization of labor (i.e. elimination of the principle of private tenure of the means of production) as the appropriate solution.

In the current context however, the predominant formula of property ownership through holding equity in publicly listed companies exposes all participants to the risks of the competitive pursuit of profit without the protections that exclusive ownership supplies. This is among the strongest sources of the phenomenon of social precarity I discussed as a key feature of contemporary capitalism – the social risks generated in the course of the pursuit of profit (from poor mental health to environmental damage) surpass the benefits of this process (increase of affluence). This means that the main structuring institution of capitalism – that of the private property of the means of production, in its current form, could serve as a lever for building a capital-labor alliance against capitalism, for subverting capitalism.

Forging such an alliance of, indeed, strange bedfellows, against the very constitutive logic of capitalism – the competitive production of profit, would not necessitate a terminal crisis of capitalism. Neither would it require that participants embrace a positive utopia (e.g.

socialism or communism). Such an anti-capitalist venture would proceed not through stupendous political gestures of overthrowing a regime but would rather deploy the radical subversive pragmatism<sup>12</sup> of mundane practices and policies that go against the profit motive – from universal basic income to job sharing and public investment in scientific research. Opposing the operative dynamic of capitalism (profit production) rather than dismantling its structuring institutions (private property) is both a more radical course of action and a more realistic programme for transformative politics – one that is best suited to the exigencies of our historical moment.

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<sup>1</sup> The original list of 42 demands of the Yellow Vests included predominantly cost-of-living concerns (from lowering fuel taxes and minimum-wage increase, to free parking in city centers and indexing pensions for inflation): <https://www.opendemocracy.net/en/can-europe-make-it/demands-of-frances-yellow-vests-as-uploaded-by-france-bleu-november-29/> (accessed 14 January 2020).

<sup>2</sup> In Dean's account, our 'communicative capitalism' is ripe with ideals of inclusion and participation and plenty of high-tech logistics make it easier than ever to have one's voice heard. However, not only that democratic participation leaves intact capitalism, but capitalism engages democracy in its reproduction (Dean 2009).

<sup>3</sup> Telling in this regard is the role German trade-unions played in enacting the Hartz Plan of 2002 for labour-market liberalisation, accepting longer working hours and lower pay for the sake of keeping jobs (Odendahl 2017). This complicity between labour and capital precedes the Hartz reforms and is not restrained to Germany (See Streeck 1984, Rhodes 2001). This is a perfect illustration of the process of

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generating what Michel Foucault has described as ‘governmentality’ – power produces the befitting subjects for its rule.

<sup>4</sup> Kant observed that because of “the scandal of ostensible contradiction of reason with itself”, even as the human mind is incapable of certain and verifiable knowledge, we are invariably compelled to seek such knowledge (Kant 2007 [1787], 31– 32, 34; 1967, 252). I have discussed the effects of the scandal of reason in the sense that much as we count on reason to achieve emancipation, it is reason that leads us astray either into dogma or into uncertainty (Azmanova, 2012).

<sup>5</sup> See ‘metastable state’ in *Encyclopedia Britannica*. <https://www.britannica.com/science/metastable-state> (accessed 10 Jan 2020). I am grateful to Victor Elgersma for pointing out the similarity between the notion of ‘crisis of crisis’ I have used in previous analyses of capitalism and the notion of a metastable state as used in physics.

<sup>6</sup> According to a 2019 YouGov poll, 70% of millennials said they’d be somewhat or extremely likely to vote for a socialist candidate at the 2020 Presidential elections (<https://www.victimsofcommunism.org/2019-annual-poll>; accessed 10 January 2020).

<sup>7</sup> I write this with regret. Many of the East European dissidents who fought autocratic socialism did so in the name of liberal communism – a position I still espouse. However, the object of my analysis here is the current historical situation and the potential it contains for an anti-capitalist transformation.

<sup>8</sup> Guy Standing (2011, Ch.3) observes that everybody can enter the precariat, by inadvertent circumstances or personal choice. Paul Apostolidis (2018, 3) has noted that the features of precarious lives he records in his study of Latino day laborers are spreading well above the bottom class strata: “If precarity names the special plight of the world’s most virulently oppressed human beings, it also denotes a near-universal complex of unfreedom.” For a comprehensive overview of the concept see dela Porta et al. 2015.

<sup>9</sup> We might recall, for instance, that the slogan ‘British jobs for British workers’ was coined by the leadership of the British Labour Party.

<sup>10</sup> In December 2018 a broad citizen initiative launched a “Manifesto for the democratisation of Europe” – known as the “Piketty Plan” – which includes a Democratization Treaty for Europe. (*Le Monde*, 10 Dec. 2018: <https://www.lemonde.fr/blog/piketty/2018/12/10/manifesto-for-the-democratisation-of-europe> (accessed 14 Jan. 2020)

<sup>11</sup> In my work, I have effected a shift in the focus of analysis from these structuring institutions to the dynamics of competitive production of profit, which I deem are constitutive of capitalism and can be enacted even without the structuring institutions (Azmanova, 2014, 2018b, 2020). I treat capitalism as a system of social relations with (1) a constitutive dynamic: the competitive production of profit, (2) structuring institutions: e.g. the private property and management of the means of production, and (3) and distributive effects. While an emancipatory struggle should target all three dimensions along which injustice occurs, radical practice consists of countering the constitutive dynamic (Azmanova 2020, Ch2).

<sup>12</sup> I am grateful to Claus Offe for his apt labelling of my position as ‘radical subversive pragmatism’ (see Azmanova 2020, back cover).