

Remarks on Capitalist Realism

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Markus Lehner takes a critical look at the concept of capitalist realism in his reivew of Mark Fisher?s book (2009).

Near the end¹ of Capitalist Realism, Mark Fisher poses the issue that makes the book politically relevant: with the crisis of 2008, there was a widespread belief on the left that the prevailing consciousness that ?there is no alternative to capitalism? would be severely shaken, allowing a much bigger, mass impact for anti-capitalist organisation. However, it quickly became clear that this was not going to be the case and Fisher develops his concept of ?capitalist realism? to explain the ongoing passivity in much of the imperialist heartlands. The term itself is meant to convey a totalitarian form of a ?mental parallax?, that is a systematically distorted perception of reality.²

This approach has echoes of Georg Lukács? epochal book History and Class Consciousness (1922), in which he tried to explain why the hopes for revolutionary overthrows throughout Europe after 1917 were dashed by the continuing loyalty of the working class masses to social democracy and its defence of the capitalist order. In that explanation, Lukács used the concept of ?reification?, deduced from Marx?s analysis of the fetishisation of the commodity form. He concluded that it was these forms that dominated the working class, insofar as it was objectively a part of bourgeois society, and that let workers accept capitalism as a kind of ?second nature? ? that is, an unchangeable reality.

The question today is does Fisher?s analysis add anything new to that of Lukács? Even if, as I think, this is not the case, it might still be worthwhile tackling the new cultural and political means by which these structures of domination are internalised by the ruled in contemporary class society. All the same, it is not only analysis that counts: for Lukács, the situation was never static or closed ? there was always a potential for the working class to break out from the totalitarianism of capitalist realism. To put it in its most generalised form, this meant taking the class standpoint of the proletariat in its self-conscious organised form.

It was exactly this counter-position that was later eliminated from the analysis by his ?pupils? such as Theodor Adorno in his Negative Dialectics. For example, in Dialectics of Enlightenment (1947) we are confronted with an increasingly totalitarian rule of reified consciousness and a withering away of the possible seeds of a subjectivity that opposes capitalism in its totality. This kind of negative dialectics set the tone for a whole stream of left intellectuals, including those who are now vaguely called ?postmodernist?. Fisher is unclear in his positioning here, but obviously does not try to base oppositional subjectivity on anything like an elaboration of the standpoint of the self-conscious proletariat. So, in the end, the only prospect for the building of a subject that opposes the totalitarianism of capitalist realism is some kind of mystical hope for ?glimmers of alternatives? (very similar to Adorno, by the way).

Capitalist realist concept

'Capitalist realism' is defined by Fisher as 'the widespread sense that not only is capitalism the only viable political and economic system, but also that it is now impossible even to imagine a coherent alternative to it'³. In this sense, it is not important to be something that people explicitly believe. They just have to behave as if they have these beliefs. They don't have to believe that money is some kind of natural force; they just have to use money in exchange as if they believed this.

How can capitalism cause this kind of structural mind-set? In part, Fisher interprets this as an effect of capitalism's 'system of equivalents', that is, the forcefulness of being able to subsume everything 'real' under the commodity-form, making everything equivalent to some measurement of exchange value. In this way, Fisher states, it is 'not a particular kind of realism; it is more like realism in itself'⁴.

It is this kind of realism that Lukács characterised as 'reification', that is, in capitalist society, in the end, social relationships, beliefs, cultural expressions, etc are transformed into things 'commodities' and what were previously relations between human beings appear again as relations between these things, that is, in their equivalent relationships as commodities.

Or, as Marx put it in his analysis of 'commodity fetishism', 'the social character' of human activity is reflected back as a seemingly 'social nature of things'⁵. That is, a kind of 'second nature' of social things is created, that seems to be dominated by unchangeable 'natural laws'. By integration into commodity exchange and wage labour the subjects in this world, people, including the working class, also implicitly take over the adaptation to this second nature, and the belief in its eternal, unchangeable existence.

As Fisher states, capitalism does not 'depend on any sort of subjectively assumed belief'⁶. We can distance ourselves from 'capitalist realism' personally without that having any effect on our practical behaviour as consumers and workers. To some extent, this disavowal at the level of 'personal beliefs' is an element of making the practical acceptance of capitalist realism bearable for the individuals: 'We are able to fetishise money in our actions only because we have already taken an ironic distance towards money in our heads.'⁷

This kind of characterisation of capitalism is summed up by Fisher as: 'Capitalism is what is left when beliefs have collapsed at the level of ritual or symbolic elaboration, and all that is left is the consumer-spectator.'⁸ That is, social 'ideological' forms of belief are split up into the practical 'realism' of the consumer and, on the other hand, 'purely private beliefs'.

What has to be remarked already at this stage of the analysis is that Fisher, in his analysis of the commodity form and its ideological consequences, misses out one essential element: the work process. Capitalism is not just a system of commodity exchange; it can be that only because it essentially affects the social character of the work process, or rather appears to destroy its traditional social character. It is the process of abstract labour (that is, 'labour as such', stripped of all its concrete content) becoming immediately social labour (successful exchange determines *ex post festum* the social connection of all the partial work processes) that produces the commodity form, and it is this in turn that reflects the social relationships of the work process into the seemingly social relationship of the products of work. It is this alienation of the work product from the producer that is the basis for the apparently independent, uncontrollable world of social things.

Analysing the process of reification only at the level of consumption (in the sphere of circulation) does, indeed, let capitalism appear as a mystical abstract structure that will work as long as we behave like consumers. From the standpoint of the consumer, capitalist totalitarianism can never be overcome, except by the end of consumption, dying. However, within the work process, there is to be found the root cause

not only of this totalitarianism but also the means of overcoming capitalist reification. That is where the central contradiction, that capitalist production has always at the same time to be both a valorisation process (that is, organising the whole process on the basis of capital controlling abstract labour) and a concrete production process (that is, as a process of real workers interacting socially) is to be found.

There cannot be surplus value production, that is, capital, without exploiting real, concrete social labour. Reducing work to totally controlled mechanical/instinctive behaviour also destroys the source of surplus value. Human labour, therefore, is an absolute barrier to the totalitarianism of reification (as the late Lukács argued against Adorno et al). Not only is it a barrier, the fact that capitalist reality is produced in the work process also makes it the place where the 'thing in itself', behind its reified reflection, can be grasped and real social relationships can be established against domination by the relationships of things/work-products.

Fisher deals with the work process only when arguing why the 'traditional workers' movement' might not be able to be the necessary revolutionary subject opposing capitalist realism. He argues this while analysing the changes in the production process in the terms of the well-known 'post-Fordist' paradigm. However, by failing to root the whole genesis of the 'commodity fetishism / capitalist realism' complex centrally in the production process, he develops a shallow, tangential analysis of the modern production process as well as missing the potential contradictions in it for the oppositional subjectivity he pretends to be looking for. I will come back to this later in treating Fisher's post-Fordism chapter.

On the whole, while he talks a lot about 'capitalist realism?', 'late capitalism?', 'postmodern capitalism?', 'consumer capitalism?', Fisher's analysis of contemporary capitalism itself is very unclear. It is more like a picture of an absurd, Kafkaesque structure that pretends to work effectively but is essentially dysfunctional and over-bureaucratic. This lack of analysis even leads to some strange tendencies in regard to the theory of value: in the chapter on 'market Stalinism?', we learn that 'in capitalism all that is solid melts into PR'⁹, and, 'the way value is generated on the stock exchange'¹⁰ is essentially managed by PR, not by what the companies actually do. We should be well aware that there is a tendency in 'postmodern Marxism' (especially well known in Germany) to decouple value theory from the production process (and to denounce 'essentialist value theory?') and to establish the rule of 'fictitious value?', as if the whole construction of capitalist reality were nothing more than a system of fictions ('Schein?', as they call it in German).

In this sense, Fisher makes a sharp distinction between capitalist 'reality?' and 'the Real'¹¹, which constantly come into conflict. This is illustrated in the capitalist service sector where call centres constantly produce senseless audit and supervision procedures, organising representations of work instead of improving anything. In the end, one can only wonder that anything in this 'late capitalism?' really can work, and why there is not a constant crisis. In fact, contemporary capitalism could not exist for long without most of the time being able to bring about extended reproduction with some degree of effectiveness. However, combined with this there is a tendency to crisis and breakdown of this reproduction precisely because, for example, the mounting contradictions between fictitious values (like those emerging in financial markets and institutions) and real values cannot be upheld anymore (at some point PR cannot hide real losses anymore).

So it is precisely the work process that makes it possible to go beyond the contradictions between 'capitalist reality?' and 'the Real?' whether that is in the intrinsic, brutal way of a crisis, or in the possibility of taking over control of the production of this reality. Fisher's examples about the work process in the education sector show exactly this point: the contradiction between the fictitious representations of the work process in commodity terms and the knowledge of the people working in that sector about real

improvement needs is an imperative for action. In that sense, Lukács developed the point that only the standpoint of the proletariat, with its ability to grasp the totality of the production process, can go beyond reified bourgeois consciousness.

Capitalist realism and 'postmodernism'?

Fisher does not use 'capitalist realism' in the more general sense of a reified consciousness that is valid for capitalism in general, but describes it as something specific that has developed in recent decades. In this respect, he even differentiates this concept from the concept of 'postmodernism' as developed by Fredric Jameson.

For Jameson, the intrinsic unthinkability of any alternative to capitalism is also a feature specifically produced in 'late' or 'consumer' capitalism but, for Fisher, even this is now superseded by the development of 'capitalist realism'. He gives three reasons for this.¹²

First, postmodernism still had at least the memory of a political and economic alternative to capitalism that broke down with the end of Stalinism. Also, strategic defeats, such as that of the miners in Britain, signalled the collapse of the traditional workers' movement. Second, postmodernism still defined itself against the demands of modernism and its promises of progress. While postmodernism had to relativise or deconstruct these demands, capitalist realism has no need to do so and it can integrate modernism as well as postmodernism as required. Third, there are no independent zones, or niches, that cannot be colonised and integrated by the capitalist metabolism. Whatever cultural expressions of rebellion may appear, they are recognised as an event that can be used for the mechanisms of cultural commodity production.

This seems to me an overestimation of the specific totalitarian character of today's capitalism, an overestimation especially in regard to past expressions of capitalist rule and reified consciousness. On the one hand, it is an idealisation of the 'traditional workers' movement'. In fact, social democratic, reformist domination of the working class remains one of the most effective ways by which 'capitalist realism', based on a reified consciousness, is stabilised within the oppressed strata of capitalist societies and transformed into practical politics. Far from being out of date, social democracy and its trade union counterparts were essential during the days of crisis in 2008/2009 and, given the essential problems of a stabilisation based on purely neoliberal policies, social democracy will get more chances again.

It is also a very weak point to argue that 'while capitalism can proceed' without propaganda, this would not be true of fascism¹³ (!). Fascism is the highest, that is, the most extreme, expression of capitalist totalitarianism and it is a fundamental underestimation of it to assert that it organised its social base solely by means of propaganda and force. This also underestimates the danger that new forms of capitalist realist fascism could (re-)emerge during the rescue operations for capitalism in crisis. (By the way, did he not explain in the same book that in capitalism everything melts down to PR? But now he also insists that propaganda is unimportant; the book is full of such obvious contradictions.)

Moreover, when comparing the cultural mechanisms of domination, it is impossible to see how a society dominated solely by centralised bourgeois mass media in the 1970s/80s would have been so much less totalitarian than in a situation where the massive spread of the internet has created many more decentralised sources of information and communication. Added to this, the fading away of Stalinism and of social democracy's total control of the trade unions or social movements in general, cannot be portrayed just as a kind of strengthening of capitalist realism. No one who ever experienced the harsh rule of anti-communist trade union bureaucrats could ever accept such an idea. On the contrary, in a lot of countries, this weakening of old reformist bureaucracies has opened up opportunities for new anti-capitalist organisational processes time and again in the period since 1990.

So, the only point on which I would agree with Fisher in this respect is his criticism of postmodernist relativism. It is correct to denounce postmodernism as a historically specific means of freeing capitalist realism from the heavy demands of modernist progressivism. In the end, one of its main purposes, and this is even more true with regard to 'poststructuralism', is to make bourgeois ideology immune from any critique based on the contradictions between its claims and the real world. Or, as Fisher puts it: 'Against the postmodernist suspicion of grand narratives, we need to reassert that, far from being isolated, contingent problems, these are all the effects of a single systemic cause: capitalism'¹⁴.

Capitalist realism and anticapitalism

One of the best parts of Fisher's book is certainly the chapter on the relationship of anticapitalism and capitalist realism. This develops the point already made that a 'personal' belief in opposition to this whole system is entirely compatible with actually acting in conformity with it, indeed, a certain critical distance is even an advantage for making the absurdities of the system sustainable. As long as the anticapitalist position does not develop into a clear, coherent and socially forceful form of an alternative to capitalism, this kind of critique necessarily becomes integrated into capitalism itself and is thus transformed into a means of further sophistication of capitalist realism.

Fisher correctly says of the 'anticapitalist movement' after the millennium that 'since it was unable to posit a coherent alternative political-economic model to capitalism, the suspicion was that the actual aim was not to replace capitalism but to mitigate its worst effects; and, since the form of its activities tended to be staging of protests rather than political organisation, there was a sense that the anti-capitalist movement consisted of making a series of hysterical demands which it didn't expect to be met. Protests have formed a kind of carnivalesque background noise to capitalist realism.'¹⁵ In this way, the Live 8 event, with its totally capitalist realist set-up, was just a logical corner stone in this whole degeneration.

In a similar way, Lukács¹⁶ described the mechanisms by which social democratic ideology was integrated into the structure of reified consciousness, while still using 'Marxist' terminology. Lukács' method can be seen here as a clear counter position to Gramsci's hegemony-concept: any kind of 'counter-hegemony' that obscures the programmatic clarity of posing a clear and coherent alternative to capitalism will not really be an advanced trench against the other side, but will necessarily end as a new fortress of capitalist realism. Sadly enough, Fisher seems to have forgotten this basic analysis when, at the end of his booklet, the question of a clear and coherent alternative is not developed and we are left with the hope for just 'glimmers of alternatives'¹⁷.

Post-Fordism

The analysis of post-Fordism is certainly the weakest part of Fisher's booklet.¹⁸ Instead of giving any clear analysis, Fisher starts his comparison of Fordism and Post-Fordism by counter posing classical mafia-films to postmodern, professional criminals in more recent films. On the one hand, the Fordist production is presented as a kind of caricature, as if in it the blue-collar workers were unable to communicate and everything was totally controlled, top-down, while the white-collar workers were working in strict bureaucratic hierarchies concentrating all the conceptual work denied to the blue-collar workers. In the post-Fordist conditions, on the other hand, it seems that the workers are freed of this oppressive system, only to be rendered isolated and insecure, deprived of the means for collective resistance in their flexible, outsourced, loosely-networked-capitalism. Since the 'traditional workers' movement' was linked to the Fordist factory, in post-Fordism it is out of the game.

This kind of description of changes of the production process was quite popular at the end of the 1980s. Since then it should have become clear that the process was much more complicated, even in Britain,

where de-industrialisation has been very far-reaching. First of all, it should be remembered that the capitalist factory did not start by being 'Fordist'. The introduction of Fordism and Taylorism was itself a means of depriving workers of many of the positions they could hold in the older, workshop-based systems. In its day, Fordism was also seen as something that would mean an end to the 'traditional workers' movement'. In fact, it was just another example of what Marx had already described in 'Das Kapital' as methods of relative surplus value production: techniques to shift more and more of the control-processes and work-related knowledge away from the immediate producers, leaving the more or less simplified work under the stricter control of capital itself. This is the iron law of the subsumption of labour under capital since the very beginning of capitalist production.

This has not changed with Fordism or with post-Fordism. In fact, the mechanical parts of production have not changed very much with post-Fordism. Automation of specific parts of production, including central information control and distribution, is not in itself new for mechanical production (just look at the long history of C/NC-machines), even if the range of techniques has grown enormously in the last decades. This goes hand in hand with an explosion in the number of classical Fordist factories at world level. One only needs to make a trip to the deltas of the big rivers in China to see Fordism prospering.

What has really changed a lot in recent decades has been 'white-collar work', transformed by outsourcing strategies. Nonetheless, in essence, this is just a repetition of the law of the subsumption of the labour process under capital. As with Taylorism in the mechanical production process, white-collar work was analysed and modularised in order to define a huge range of differentiated (especially in regard to payment) job roles with their necessary and specific (and certifiable) qualification levels, coordinated together in standardised work flows. What was formerly highly qualified, and highly paid, work, can now be divided into 'core activities' and outsourced simpler activities, which might also soon be automated. So, in the end, this kind of fundamental restructuring of white-collar work could in fact be seen as a kind of extension of Fordism to sectors like services and R&D work. The arguments Fisher poses against the nonsense of modularising and controlling the specific activities of education workers or call centre agents sounds very similar to the complaints of old-style factory workers when Fordist conveyor-belt production was introduced, as recounted in Braverman's famous book on the introduction of Fordism.¹⁹

Indeed, as with the introduction of these enlarged modularisation and control systems at a factory level, a lot of productivity embodied in the former social work process is lost. However, maximising capitalist control is only one side of the story. There is also a kind of enlarged socialisation represented by these changes: shifting the knowledge and coordination of work processes away from their traditional embodiment in informal working arrangements, also allows them to be turned into forms of knowledge and potential coordination that are much more generally accessible and capable of socialisation than before, just as the dissolution of handicraft skills made technical knowledge, in principle, generally available.

As everyone knows, today, the internet makes huge amounts of knowledge available very quickly to a big public. This is just an everyday example of a general progress in the development of the underlying productive forces. This brings me to Fisher's caricature-like description of modern call centres²⁰ as the paradigm of nonsense-producing post-Fordism. It is certainly true that neoliberalism/post-Fordism has not brought an end to bureaucracy and bad service but, to take up the call-centres that Fisher cites: call-centre technology has evolved a lot during recent decades and allows a faster and faster connection between the service front-end and the information/deployment back-end resources. It is simply not true that today you get a far worse service from telecommunication companies than in the days of the old postal bureaucracies (some of us may remember the days when you had to wait a month even to get a phone, never mind the line to the office).

It is true that the neoliberal imperatives of cost cutting, the outsourcing of every possible aspect of a task

etc. undermine many of the potential advantages of technical progress and, from time to time, create the absurdities Fisher describes. In saying this, however, the important thing is that the growing discrepancy between the enhanced possibilities of social control and the capitalist forms that are increasingly an obstacle to the full realisation of those possibilities, points precisely to the question of the alternatives.

While fundamental techniques and data may be distributed practically for free, as free software or encyclopaedias demonstrate, big corporations do everything to defend their licence fees, patents and secret data. They use more and more ridiculously complicated techniques, building up networks far bigger than the public internet, defended by their 'demilitarised zones' and dozens of firewalls. As techniques of social networking and coordination become easier and easier to use, on the markets, corporations are 'coordinated' by absurd movements of market prices whose real content nobody understands. It becomes clear that the capitalist property relationship is coming more and more into contradiction with a development of productive forces that cries out for social control.

These contradictions make information technologies into a field of political and social conflict. The Anti-Counterfeiting Trade Agreement (ACTA) demonstrates how the pressure of enforcing capitalist property rights within the network threatens its basic functions, as well as stifling the innovative impulses of, for example, free software. The 'Golden Shield', the biggest internet filtering system in the world, operated by the Chinese ministry of security, is a paradigm for an increasing number of states, today about 40, to limit the free movement within the network.

On the other hand, protests against ACTA or other internet blocking measures, also show that network issues can be the source of new protest movements. Fisher repeats the analysis of reified consciousness in regard to social networks and their narcissistic, repetitive and conformity enforcing aspects. Indeed, all the possibilities of Web 2.0 can be used by the integrative powers of capitalist realism, just as free software is used by big corporations to 'crowd-source' their IT-projects, that is, replace wage labour by funding 'self-organised teams' outside contract work.

At the same time, however, Web 2.0 techniques that allow ordinary people without specialist training to get to their net-presence quickly, open up big possibilities for independent information sharing and organisation. The Arab revolutions and the Occupy movement have shown the possibilities for such mobilisation 'as well as the limits of organising masses this fast without developing the political content and alternative with the same velocity. Here, too, without a clear alternative, the network-managed movements will be overwhelmed by the integrative metabolism of capitalist realism.

It is clear that the workers in the outsourced and precarious new technology businesses have to find forms of organisation to defend their basic interests, just as the workers in the factories had to find them, when their work was transformed by Fordism. Additionally, one can see that the fragile structures of the new, globally connected, lines of production and transportation are highly vulnerable. This does not only pose a lot of military and security issues. It also means that relatively small groups of workers can exert high pressure in economic terms. In addition, free software has shown, that very complex, highly innovative, global work processes can be organised in fully self-organised and self-controlled ways. Facebook and the like would not have been possible without the basic innovations of the Apache free software projects. Why should organising these global workforces to fight for their basic interests be so much more difficult? In fact, examples of these global coordinations are growing.

Alternatives

Given that Fisher sees an enormous growth of capitalist realist totalitarianism in a post-Fordist capitalism that in his opinion leaves few possibilities for workplace resistance, it would be very surprising if he were

able to identify any social force that was capable of establishing a viable alternative to capitalism.

In fact, as already noted, Fisher does not develop such alternatives or forces based on an analysis of the contemporary production sphere. Instead, he concentrates on the contradictions between the claims of capitalist realism and its factual dysfunctionality in regard to real needs²¹. This is shown in three particular spheres: the imminent ecological threats of a capitalist realism that cannot handle the contradiction between capitalism's tendency to limitless expansion and the definite limitations of natural sustainable reproduction; growing psychological problems in a highly atomised and socially isolated, flexible world that leads to a spread of so called 'mental illnesses'; and in regard to the absurdities brought about by the commodification of the education sector.

In essence this means, that a highly dysfunctional capitalism brings about a multitude of untenable solutions for a dispersed set of affected 'consumers'. How a force for change, able to evade the integrative force of capitalist realism, could emerge out of this remains obscure. In his eclectic despair, the author does not even want to exclude the possibility that the 'traditional workers' movement' might play a role in this (with its reformist leadership!). But, centrally, he argues²² the need for a 'Marxist supernanny'(!).

Of course, it is true that, against libertarian beliefs in immediacy, it is necessary to assert the need for an organisation that can formulate objective interests even where those interests are not subjectively recognised, an organisation with a clear proposition of what is to be done to reach an alternative that works for those unconscious interests and formulates the 'general will' (as Fisher calls it). (Whether the ironic use of the term 'supernanny' helps in this, is questionable.) But, to pose such a supernanny-organisation without stressing the centrality of a self-organising force, the working class, that could really transform society, interacting with such an organisation, in fact sounds more like a super-Stalin 'taking over the state' to tell everybody what is 'the general will'.

Fisher tells us²³ that 'the left' made the error of just aiming to take over state power, but that it should 'subordinate the state to the general will'(?). For communists, at least, the aim is to smash the repressive state apparatus and replace it by the rule of workers' councils; we are not latter day Jacobins posing as the representatives of the general will.

The booklet remains very shallow in its treatment of practical political/industrial actions that could bring forward struggles against capitalist realism. We are told that 'new forms of industrial actions need to be instituted against managerialism'²⁴, and the first thing that Fisher suggests here is that strikes may not be the right thing anymore. This is explained in relation to strikes in the education sector that would mainly hurt the pupils and of benefit of the bosses, who can cut wages for the strike time. Instead, one should hit where the managers are 'really worried' by boycotting their stupid audits and surveillance instruments.

To be honest, all this kind of whingeing about the managerial methods in white-collar work sounds very much like the complaints of handicraft workers against factory organisation, with their wish to return to the old system, instead of organising as a workforce under the given capitalist conditions. There have always been complaints from white-collar workers that strikes are not possible in their special sector. And always the reason is not that work stoppages cannot hit the sector, but that the scope of organisation and struggle is not big enough to hit capital economically.

It is true that outsourcing, the global dispersal of work and project organisation etc. make organisation and coordination of struggle more difficult. In fact, the whole 'post-Fordism' ideology always argued that it was now difficult to go on strike because of the changed capitalist regime. It provided a wonderful excuse for reformist bureaucies and badly organised work forces that together produce the self-fulfilling prophesy of 'post-Fordist' trade-union free workplaces.

Socialists take a very different position: it is mastering the use of the advanced productive forces for the workers' own coordination and self-organising that can create the productive force that can establish an alternative to capitalism: a globally connected, self-organised working class, consciously developing a production process that really is subordinated to the general will. Such a working class is the only social force that can step out of capitalist realism.

This also means that it is the state and development of the proletariat, its class consciousness and organisational conditions, that determine the prospect for posing a clear and powerful alternative to capitalism and, therefore, the prospect of countering capitalist realism. These conditions and development have a history that conditioned the experience of the workers' movement and weighs heavily on the shoulders of today's workers; who could deny the consequences of Stalinism or social democracy for any formulation of an alternative to capitalism? From this, it is clear that concern for history is not just an endless rehearsal of historic debates, its tendency to going over Kronstadt or the New Economic Policy?²⁵.

The problem of the state of the working class in regard to precarite or weakness in organising against the flexibilisation measures of contemporary capitalism has very much to do with the history of the workers' movement. It is not primarily any specific new work-place organisation/technology that has weakened the traditional workers movement?. It is the reformist leadership of this movement, that is only able, or even willing, to organise specific kinds of workers such as the aristocratic layers and that is ever more integrated into the neoliberal state as well as the corporate bureaucracies that make this kind of workers' movement? practically incapable of organising precarious workers or effectively opposing the flexibilisation measures they are co-managing.

Therefore, we should reject an argumentation that turns the crisis of leadership of the proletariat into a crisis of the proletariat itself. The task remains the building of a new leadership in a systematic fight to overcome reformist or centrist misleadership that is essential to regain a workers' movement that embodies a clear and powerful alternative to capitalism.

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2 See especially (in the German version): Georg Lukács, *Geschichte und Klassenbewusstsein*, (reprinted in 1968 by Luchterhand), p 170 'Verdinglichung und das Bewusstsein des Proletariats' (Reification and the consciousness of the proletariat)

3 CR, p 2

4 p 4

5 Karl Marx, *Das Kapital* (in the German MEW edition, volume 23), p 86, 'Der Fetischcharakter der Ware und sein Geheimnis?.'

6 CR, p 13

7 *Ibid*

8 CR, p 4

9 p 44

10 *Ibid*

11 CR, p 18

12 p 7

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14 p 77

15 p 14

16 Geschichte und Klassenbewusstsein, p 337

17 CR, p 80

18 p 31

19In German: Henry Braverman, Die Arbeit im modernen Produktionsprozess

20 CR, p 63

21 p 19

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23 p 77

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