

THE POLITICS OF SUBVERSION

by Antoni Negri

With Arthur & Marielouise Kroker's "Panic Encyclopedia" in mind, it is tempting to suggest that this book might have been titled "The Politics of Panic", describing an era whose end began with the Great Crash of 1929. Panic Money: the apocalypse has already happened. Invoking the Krokers again, capitalism is a dead star, shining brightest before it finally disintegrates altogether.

Antoni Negri describes a world in which capitalism is already dead, the proletariat is already intellectual, the socialized (intellectual) worker already has (potential) control of the means of communication, the actual existing world is an ecological system - 'second nature'. But as he says, the class struggle is far from over. It has to be fought hardest as capitalism, seeking to sustain the illusion of being still alive, attempts to introduce its 'pure form' in decentralisation and deregulation, to shore up the crumbling edifice of reformist capitalism, thus threatening to consolidate a dual society where capitalism has replaced the concept of 'exploitation' by that of 'exclusion' - of the poor, the unemployed, the immigrant - the Other.

"Behind the racist society it is possible to perceive that of the dual society, one of the most recent and ferocious products of the capitalist modes of domination. The dual society constitutes the end point towards which the racist society tends; it is an extension of the racist model. In each of the countries of advanced capitalism....a South Africa is taking root....The ideal of the modern-day capitalism is apartheid." "In constructing the dual society in opposition to proletarian unification of society, capital re-imports into the metropolitan countries instruments hitherto only used by imperialism and colonialism.... ..Thereby capital has induced - (as is only natural) - fear and panic."

This is a valuable theorisation of capitalism in the era of the nuclear state. The removal of all limits on the potential effects of the legal use of violence by the state, says Negri, renders it absurd to imagine that it is possible to submit such absolute power to the traditional liberal-democratic checks on the exercise of power. The zero-hour of human destruction is capitalism's last resort. It legitimises power on the basis of absolute threat on the one hand, and the exclusion of the newly dispossessed on the other.

Negri's book is largely based on a re-reading of Marx's "Grundrisse" and of the (unpublished) sixth and final chapter of "Capital", concerned primarily with the goal of proletarian struggle as being not in the emancipation of work, but rather in the liberation from work, a transition from the obligation to work (as control mechanism and social domination) to the right not to work. Important though this re-reading is, there is for us a nagging doubt about his analysis; it is the fear that here is another white intellectual living on vampire-value - the injection of new blood into Western philosophical discourse, in this case, Marxism.

If one of the main themes of "The Politics of Subversion" is that the implications of neo-capitalist (dead) power can always be used against itself, as another discourse of 'capitalism on the brink' however, given the current anti-intellectual and Eurocentric defensiveness of the Left, the secret destiny of this very important book could lie ironically in its very close reading by the Right.

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