The postmodern has abandoned class. Class theory is no longer 'chic', to say nothing of class politics. The dominant social theories now accept as fact what democratic theory once treated as fiction: an individualised 'civil society' where social inequalities are seen not so much a problem as a structural necessity and as providing the basic incentive to compete in a society primarily oriented to 'success' in the global market. The prevailing academic interpretations of our era certainly contradict the reality of a capitalism in which national and international inequalities become ever more conspicuous, in which neo-liberal strategies of crisis management have not only deepened existing forms of exploitation but generated new ones through 'rationalisation' and 'structural adjustment', and in which the pressure of international accumulation increasingly works its unmediated effects on national political and social processes (Hirsch 1995).

The removal of class from academic discourse, just when globalisation is so palpably restructuring social relations and international conflict in the context of economic dependency and exploitation, has certainly got something to do with the state of class theory itself, not least with its traditional focus on class and class conflict within the arena of the nation-state. The widespread diminution of class themes in postwar theoretical discourse had a lot to do with the political-economic structure of 'Fordist' capitalism, which was distinguished by its strong focus on domestic markets, the development of widely inclusive mass production and consumption, the expanded domain of national state regulation, sustained economic growth, a system of progressive social security provision and finally, the institutionalisation of class conflict. The vision of a state interventionist, egalitarian and politically integrated society appeared to have obviated the question of
class struggle as a pressing social problem. It is clear today that this was nothing more than an short episode in the history of capitalism. Nevertheless, social transitions, crises and the conditions for social reproduction have changed so much that class theory needs new categories and perspectives. While Marx in *The Eighteenth Brumaire* long ago identified decisive contradictions in the relationship between the class structure and institutional forms of liberal democratic politics, these appeared in some way to be resolved by the socially co-operative arrangements of Fordism. The revolutionary and reforming struggle of the working class, from which Fordism emerged, may be understood as society’s reaction to self-destructive tendencies inherent to capital, as Polanyi (1990) suggested. This illustrates the paradoxical situation whereby the class struggle, as it were, ‘rescued’ capitalism. Today, the problem of social continuity in reaction to the self-destructiveness of capitalist market economies is posed in renewed and sharper form, following the crisis of Fordism, global capitalist restructuring, and the withering of traditional labour movements.

The existence of liberal democratic institutions and procedures at the level of the nation-state was an essential precondition for the labour movement’s ‘reformist’ struggles. A relatively closed and secure national society also became an unspoken basis for most liberal democratic theory. It made the notion of a clear relationship between those governing and those governed - voters and their representatives - conceivable, lending significance to concepts such as ‘participation’ and ‘democratic legitimation’ (Held 1991). A democratic process which can empower citizens and ensure popular control over political institutions is, in principle, possible only when social and political membership is clearly defined and only when a democratic government possesses the capacity of a sovereign entity. The cornerstone of all legal, political and democratic theory, the concept of a social contract, had its decisive justification and foundation in the correspondence between a ‘people’ and a ‘government’. Of course, the reality of this supposed unity of governed and governing has never fully materialised. It has always been true that many of those living within a state’s boundaries never had more than formal access to civil rights, that the possibilities for political co-operation were limited by social irregularities and relations of economic control and that the scope for state action was restricted by economic power structures. Moreover, as the politics of each nation-state had consequences beyond their borders, internal social transitions were also determined by international power relations.
But the liberal democratic assumption of a system of nation-states is clearly undermined when subjects cannot vote on political decisions because they do not have rights of citizenship; when people live outside state borders; or when the relevant decisions do not fall within the institutional remit of the nation-state. It would appear that the process of economic globalisation and the concomitant structural transformation of the nation-state have finally put an end to what was at all credible in liberal democratic theory. Categories such as ‘the people’, ‘the electorate’, ‘responsibility’, ‘participation’ become deeply problematic (Held 1991: 197). ‘Membership’ - whether it is within a powerful interest group, a security enclave, the richest segments of society, or even a community club or cultural grouping - becomes increasingly indeterminate at both national and international levels.

The social structure of ‘post-Fordism’ is marked by the link between growing social division at the national level and the expanding movements of refugees and emigration internationally (Narr/Schubert 1994: 74ff). As a consequence, the notion of a unitary national society is increasingly invalidated. More than ever, claims for nationhood and community cannot conceal the extent to which their own material bases have come into question. These developments appear to the indefatigable positivists of mainstream sociology as some autonomous process of ‘individualisation’, ‘multiculturalism’ or a ‘pluralisation of lifestyles’. In contrast, a critical perspective requires an appreciation that these developments are rooted not so much in the self-defining behaviour of individuals, or in a generalisation of postmodern values, as in the dynamic process of global accumulation and the massive restructuring that is bound up with it.

The transformation of working relations is crucial. The process of rationalisation set in motion to bring order to the crisis of Fordism resulted, in most advanced capitalist countries, in a degree of structural long-term unemployment which would earlier have been ruled out as destabilising of the liberal democratic political system. The reason for this development lies in the fact that the traditional Keynesian mechanisms for global regulation no longer hold. A policy concerned principally with increasing the value of capital assets and securing international competitiveness must consciously and strategically factor in mass unemployment in spite of all rhetorical assurances to the contrary. Ultimately, it serves to break resistance to the widespread restructuring of the production process. However, the greater the growth in unemployment and the loosening of the social security system, the less likely it is that social provision will be able to shelter the so-called
‘victims of modernisation’ who have been left out of work. Marginal work and unemployment become ever more associated with material deprivation. The permanent split between employed and unemployed has become as striking a feature of society as the division between privileged elite employees and marginalised casual workers.

‘Deregulation’ is the antidote widely proposed by economic ‘experts’. What is intended is the loosening or dismantling of tariffs and legal restraints, the direct abolition of standardised work practices in addition to an indirect deregulation of employment relations by means of a growing disparity in pay and increased pressure for mobility. This strategy aims to boost profits through a marked decrease in average net income and the intensification of work; in other words, a fundamental redistribution of social wealth. Whatever the ‘success’ of this restructuring, its recognised consequence in every case is the expansion of the industrial reserve army and intensification of social divisions.

The effects of rationalisation and deregulation set by the world market are manifest in an industrial ‘human resource’ strategy less concerned with a stable core workforce than with an ever more mobile and easily serviceable ‘flexible core labour reserve’, which may be supplemented by short or part-time employees, by subcontracted firms or by personnel supplied by employment agencies. Drawing on labour from companies operating in low wage areas reinforces this trend. Recourse to ‘just-in-time’ production methods - involving economically dependent service and supply subcontractors operating with tight cost margins - increases the numbers of poorly paid and socially uninsured workers. The difference in the level of security enjoyed by the marginalised, mass workforce dependent on low pay, and the relatively privileged core of workers, in regular employment, is gradually being eroded. The heavily regulated and relatively secure employment status enjoyed by so many qualified males during the Fordist phase of metropolitan capitalism has been steadily disappearing. All workers stand in an increasingly comparable relation to a ‘productivity’ and ‘quality’ dynamic which is underpinned by enforced pressure for loyalty, service and conformity (Elam 1994; Tomaney 1994).

Evidence of marginalisation may be seen, for example, in the rapid increase in the numbers of German workers without employment guarantees or social security provisions. The phenomenon of the ‘new self-sufficiency’, i.e. a shift from formal salaried work to self-employment brought on by the pressure of rationalisation and mass unemployment, must be added to the picture. This self-employment is
associated not only with demanding performance and mobility requirements, but also with an increasing frequency of employment-related injuries. Income for almost half of those self-employed is, moreover, below the national average in Germany.

The worsening economic, social and political inequalities of post-Fordist accumulation, and the greater dependency, pauperisation and political repression which correspond to these conditions, intensify the pressures of enforced emigration and refugee movements. Despite increased control mechanisms, much of this migration flows into expanding cities and provides the market there with cheap, possibly illegal labour, deprived of adequate political and social rights (Castells 1994). The fact that international capital was always founded on ‘combined’ forms of production, control and exploitation (Balibar/Wallerstein 1992: 215ff) becomes even more apparent in the urban centres in the wake of globalisation.

The resultant splintering of the social structure is such that the existing models of class and strata no longer have any great explanatory efficacy. Faced with the divisions between multinational and local companies, pioneering high-tech firms and dependent suppliers, specialist service providers and traditional branches of industry threatened with extinction, it is ever more difficult to speak of capital ownership itself as giving rise to a single class. At the same time, marginalised workers in their varying forms, together with the apparently ‘self-employed’, are growing in numbers even as a relatively privileged stratum of highly qualified and remunerated employees, working internationally in the high-tech, finance and management sectors, comes into being. Such a large chasm has opened between those core employees in international management, communications, financial and service sectors, on the one hand, and the rest of the traditional workforce, the semi-sufficient and self-employed, those farmers not already ruined by agricultural big business, those on low-pay, part-time and job-share schemes and the world of immigrants and black labour, on the other, that the difference between working-class and middle-class has become more tenuous.

This does not, of course, mean that collectivities which have defined themselves through similarities in their everyday activities, lifestyle and perceptions of the world will disappear. In some social science research, particularly in the field of voting behaviour and consumer trends, it has become conventional to distinguish between different social ‘milieux’ instead of classes or strata. Bourdieu’s notion of ‘habitus’ is one example: the method and style by which people understand and
form their social existence in a way which, though not wholly independent from material circumstances, is actively constructed by specific socio-cultural conditions. Interestingly, the concept of milieu can be traced back to work carried out by the commercial market research agency (SINUS) which distinguished working milieus according to the following categories: ‘new’, ‘distinguished conservative’, ‘technocratic liberal’, ‘alternative’, ‘lower middle class’, a milieu ‘of social mobility’, a ‘hedonistic milieu’, a ‘traditional’ and, finally, a milieu ‘without traditions’. In contrast another research group led by Michael Vester divided society into a different typology of milieus: ‘progressive, successfully modern’, ‘the classless modern’, ‘the sceptical modern employee’ and a ‘contented established conservative centre’ - a group which corresponds to roughly a quarter of the population (Vester 1993; compare Schulze 1992). Both these investigations come to the conclusion that society is polarising towards the top and the bottom, permitting the emergence of a wide range in the middle which is highly diverse in its social practices and conditions.

It is questionable whether such analyses possess any validity beyond their principal aim - providing statistics about group-specific consumption and voting patterns (compare Ritsert 1988a). Motivated by the objective of generating commercially applicable data about social and political behaviour, researchers cannot avoid distilling out relatively stable ‘milieux’. The question arises, however, whether these milieus are not mere intellectual constructs which only superficially describe the real fragmentation of society. This is suggested by the fact that immigrant and refugee populations, who are neither entitled to vote nor offer strong consumer profiles, are as a rule excluded from such investigations. And just how little can be understood about contemporary social patterns from these conceptualisations is indicated by the increasing unreliability of their election forecasts.

Nevertheless the basic observation of such research - that the social structure is becoming ever more differentiated due to economic shifts without, however, being simply defined by an abstract concept of ‘individualisation’ - remains correct. Objective disparities in socio-economic conditions, though expressed in different ways socio-culturally, remain decisive for understanding and social positioning. In view of the growing commercialisation of lifestyles, social differentiation theory - the attempt to demonstrate social belonging and differentiation by means of objective consumption - appears ever more important. Wearing particular brand names becomes an expensive passport to social inclusion.
Social milieux which come into being like this, however, are not independent of their underlying class structure - in the sense of 'objective' material conditions and possibilities - although they are less and less defined by these alone. This is why the concept of a 'pluralistic class society' describes social reality more adequately than talk of an 'individualised' society 'beyond class and social rank' (Beck 1986). Nevertheless, between socially advanced 'boutique bourgeois' workers, on the one hand, and exploited low-cost workers or refugees forced into the underground economy (whether self-employed or officially remunerated) on the other, there still exists an important cultural and social divide.

The notion of a 'two thirds society' describes a situation in which an impoverished and socially excluded 'third' of society stands in contrast to the comfortable majority which politically dictates crucial social developments on the basis of its numerical supremacy. This description is misleading not only because it still posits the existence of relatively homogenous social groups but also because it misrepresents the ratios involved. What Robert Reich sees as a split in US society between an elite twenty percent and a downwardly mobile, or already marginalized, eighty percent, is probably closer to reality (Reich, 1991).

The model of consumption typical of Fordism is placed under severe pressure by these developments. Increased differentiations in wealth, enforced by conspicuous displays of social difference, impact upon consumption patterns. Mass consumption is nevertheless a notable feature of post-Fordist capitalism. Consumption patterns and lifestyles become increasingly differentiated as a result of material inequality and a marketing strategy which seeks to overcome market saturation by individualising and pluralising the products on offer. This differentiation is made possible by means of flexible post-Fordist mass production, which puts the producer in a position to reproduce the same product in a virtually infinite variety of styles. Consumption shifts its focus, in the main, towards profitable capitalist goods and services, videos and computers, electronic communications, clothing, fast food and cars, whilst collective consumer interests such as housing, health, culture and education, the environment and so forth become more restricted and uneconomic thanks to the dismantling of state social provision. Car ownership can easily become bound up with broader living conditions, so that the attempt to escape poorer conditions results in congestion and pollution. Amongst an apparently endless variety of products, a new form of social deprivation is spreading - the lack of collective goods - which obviously affects most
of all those who do not have sufficient income to purchase products and services in the market.

The cycle of consumption remains unbroken; it follows a logic which means ever more work in order to buy ever less useful, and also ever more damaging, goods (of which the private car is the symbol par excellence). However, a contradiction arises as a growing portion of society come to exist at the fringes of this hi-tech consumer world as a result of their low pay and unemployment. Whilst one group works longer and more intensively, in order to consume more post-Fordist products of conspicuous consumption, the other works less and less to buy post-Fordist mass products. Italian designer clothing labels and their Hong Kong or Chinese imitations exemplify this difference.

II

Capitalist society is fundamentally determined by the contradictory interrelation of classes and a market-based society. In effect, this means that social status is still decided as much by the individual’s objective position in the production process as by his or her standing as a free and equal subject of the market. Under the conditions of post-Fordist restructuring, this relationship takes on a particular dynamic. The transition to a service sector society means a further push in the direction of an all-embracing capitalism. As the class compromises brokered by the trade unions and the ‘people’s parties’ (Volksparteien) continue to disintegrate and as the socioeconomic layers of society drift further apart, the dominance of the market has become more apparent. The market value of an individual’s labour is becoming increasingly decisive, and without private access to capital, important products of high consumerism and thus social recognition remain out of reach. The tendency is for each individual to become an entrepreneur, even if only as a purveyor of his or her own labour. Whoever fails to provide the market with the required achievements is threatened by social marginalisation or descent into one of the many and diverse subcultural milieux.

The prevailing sociological term used to describe this process is individualisation (see especially Beck 1986 and 1993). As we have already established, this does not mean that collective social groupings no longer exist. Rather, the term implies that these groupings are subject to increasing differentiation. This development is not new; it was actually a fundamental characteristic of Fordist capitalism. Indeed, it is rather undergoing a certain degree of accentuation and modifi-
cation. The dismantling of welfare-state security, the increasing commercialisation of social relations and the fragmentation of society combine with intensified economic pressure and ever greater social inequality. Seen in abstract terms, individualisation determines the life of a single female computer specialist just as much as that of an illegal immigrant who sells flowers and newspapers to pub customers at night. However, their respective social opportunities differ tremendously. Yet even the possibilities opened by gaining professional qualifications appear in a different light when certificates offer no more than an entrance ticket to a precarious job market. These prospects look just as poor for a taxi-driving sociologist as for an academically qualified cleaner. The motorcycle messenger, seemingly the very embodiment of mobility and freedom, is not merely working in an extremely unhealthy, rather dangerous and modestly paid job, but is also exposed to enormous risks in old age and in the case of sickness.

Without doubt, the progressive implementation and expansion of market-based society and the dissolution of tightly defined classes and social affiliations are raising individual opportunities and freedom of choice, when combined with a dose of good fortune and the ability to achieve. At least in developed urban areas, relative prosperity and the welfare security won by past struggles have allowed the struggle for sheer survival and the battle against material want to recede into the background of society's general consciousness. At the same time, conventional socio-cultural commitments have been weakened by accelerated capitalist modernisation and this has contributed to the process. The observation that subjective lifestyle shaping, self-styling and 'experience orientation' are becoming more important is certainly not totally misguided. Nevertheless, the catchword 'experience society' ('Erlebnisgesellschaft', Schulze 1992) is misleading, and not just because it obfuscates the underlying economic processes. If shaping one's individual lifestyle is becoming more important, this is not achieved, today at least, in the spirit of creative self-determination, but rather as a result of a passive response to an ever more differentiated and aggressively marketed capitalist supply of goods and services which flexible specialised production has generated. The subjective 'aestheticisation of everyday life' (Schulze 1992) shows clear signs of a 'totalising aesthetic of the product'. 'Experience' is above all consumption, empirical investigations have shown. Thus the individualisation and pluralisation of society not only remain entrenched within capitalist one-dimensionality, but this one-dimensionality actually appears to be strengthened by it. The pluralisation or individualisation of society
must not be understood in the final instance as an objective trend, but must instead be seen to have arisen out of changed societal perceptions, where the individual's power to shape his or her own destiny appears to be enhanced despite the persistence of social inequality and traditional socio-cultural affiliations falling by the wayside. It is not least the consequence of political and ideological developments in which the capitalist unravelling of institutionalised class compromises plays just as big a role as the critique launched by the social protest movements against bureaucratic and standardised mass consumer society. The existence of a neoliberal hegemony since the collapse of the Fordist social project is pivotal, in which capitalist restructuring and social critique have both played an important role. This complex of economic, political and ideological processes and struggles contributes considerably to the legitimation of current societal upheaval.

Real freedom always presupposes a certain degree of equality and security which can be translated into a materially founded common community. At the same time it includes the right to and the possibility of difference, for example in relations between the sexes or through the expression of different cultural orientations and ways of living. The contradictory relationship between freedom, equality and difference is becoming ever more critical in the process of radical escalation towards an entirely market-based society (Balibar 1993: 99ff). The creation of nationally bound, and thus relatively homogeneous, societies was an important prerequisite for capitalist development. Now it is becoming apparent that the growth of a global capitalist economy is beginning to reverse this process, i.e. money relations are not only undermining their own natural foundations, but also the social prerequisites which have existed until now. The disappearance of a 'community' - which under prevailing economic conditions has to discipline and 'normalise' its members through the application of force - can indeed be greeted as a movement towards liberation. The irony, however, is that those who are driving the restructuring process with such determination are precisely those who consider this development to signal at the same time a dangerous erosion of values.

The relationship between political democracy and economic class structure thereby takes on a new and explosive character. If one assumes that capitalist society derives its staying power from the fact that political and social forms are developed by society to preserve itself and its ecological foundations against the threat posed by commodification, and this presupposes, in turn, the existence of minimal democ-
ratic structures and meaningful participation, then the consequences of globalisation are somewhat alarming. They point above all to the undermining of democracy at its very foundations: at the level of the nation-state. The danger of societal self-destruction at the hands of society's own economic dynamic is ever present today - catastrophe after catastrophe, global environmental disaster, mass poverty, military conflict and latent or open civil war are all evidence of this fact.

III

The burning question remains that of finding a foundation for an emancipatory, democratic social movement, whose horizons extend beyond factional and defensive warfare. This assumes, of course, that opposition from the exploited and oppressed within a globalised capitalism will continue to be characterised by partial, isolated forms of resistance, which often pit groups in struggle against one another. Chances seem slim that such struggles could be unified into a common front against international capital. To conceive of liberation in terms of an heroic final battle between opposing classes would certainly be to repeat a mistake. Real revolutionary processes have little to do with masses united under a General staff, or with the expression of simple antagonisms, but are rather produced when contradictions and conflicts are distilled: they come about when varied interests and oppositions disregard existing differences to form a movement. This does not take the form of an idealized process of unification, but is an historical process in which people reflect on their different experiences, build understandings with others, and make difficult compromises. Central to this process is that people struggle, that a rebellious consciousness is sustained and prevented from regressing into nationalism or sexism.

As the grip of global capitalism tightens, posing new challenges to those seeking to beat an independent path in national politics and development, the prospects for struggles which confine themselves to the national arena dwindle. Precisely because capital is organized systemically on an international scale, emancipatory possibilities today require the cultivation of a new internationalism; an internationalism which, if only because the scope of state power is dwindling, must be based on organisational forms that are autonomous and capable of extending solidarity to overcome conditions of social and political fragmentation. Restricted to the national state level, social movements fail not merely because of this reduced sphere of action, but also
because a nationally oriented politics runs the risk of embroiling itself in spatial competition which threatens to deepen inequalities between regions.

Of course, objective commonalities such as exploitation and deprivation are a basic prerequisite for social movements and struggles. But experience of these social conditions is extremely diverse, particularly at the international level, and movements only become powerful once they succeed in developing convincing concrete utopias. If a new class politics is to emerge under these conditions it will develop on the basis, not so much of objectively given experiences, but rather, of a politically constructed vision and project. What is necessary, first and foremost, is a search for visions of a better world in which the bonds of dependency, instrumentalism and extra-human modes of coordination may be broken. Traditional models of social democracy offer no answer to this problem. It is no longer merely a question of material prosperity and distribution, but also one of freedom and human dignity. A new 'International' must therefore take the form of a radical movement for democracy and human rights. Such a movement can develop most quickly through a growing network of autonomously organised and internationally active organisations and groups of organisations. This has already been witnessed in certain fields, such as around ecological, women's, peace and human rights concerns (see Hirsch 1995a: 183ff and Hirsch 1995b). Whilst starting points for an international movement are already evident, they are still largely absent from trade union politics. Of vital importance to these new organisations and projects is their autonomy from the national state and party apparatus which is necessarily subject to the logic of the competition and commodification.

This new politics called for here demands a recognition of existing differences - diverse historical traditions and ways of living as well as divergence of material interests. Given increasing social inequality, stark disparities in material standards of living, and often conflicting political frameworks, a new internationalism will be possible only after dispelling the illusion of a common ground, so that diverse starting points and interests may be appreciated and respected. If interests and goals are not identical, critical engagement over differences and the building of compromise is required. The success of this dynamic process requires, finally, that struggles are conducted in the first instance locally. In sum, it should be underlined that the question of class theory and class politics has to be understood more than ever using the Gramscian concepts of politics and hegemony. A revolu-
tionary movement should be seen, not as a simple class movement, but as a process of building a new hegemony which embraces very different—and of course conflicting—interests and actors, which is rooted in concrete experiences in alternative social practices, and which aims at a thoroughly new and still unknown model of a truly free society. We cannot, of course, look to any narrowly defined proletarian party process—a notion that was in any case questioned from the start—as our model. What that means in concrete political and organizational terms remains open to further theoretical consideration and, above all, to a critical engagement with concrete movements in struggle around the world: from Mexican Zapatistas and Brazilian landless people, to French transport workers or airline pilots. A totally new conception of both the form and content of revolutionary politics is needed.

As social polarization has dramatically increased in the wake of capitalist crisis and restructuring, a reinstatement of class struggle to the central place it once held within critical theory is needed. A theory of society with critical and revolutionary aspirations must be capable of adapting to the changing historical circumstances it seeks to understand. Class politics in globalised capitalism cannot be expected to conform to models generated out of the historical experiences of the nineteenth and early twentieth century. The aim is no longer one of liberation from poverty through industrialisation and technical progress spawned by capitalist development. The problem is not the ‘fettering’, but rather, the catastrophic liberation, of productive forces. State power structures are characterised much less by the existence of opposing camps than by the increasing totalitarianism of neoliberal one-dimensionality. To this extent the ‘democratic question’ is more central now than ever before. Given the technical possibilities available to humanity, social emancipation today must refocus on the task of abolishing the conditions in which the individual exists as a wretched, degraded and servile being, to quote Marx once more. However, what this means practically is rather more complicated than Marx imagined.

The utopia which was once called socialism or communism has disappeared just as much as its concrete historical manifestations. It must be recognised that social liberation does not mean the implementation of a ready-made social model. Social liberation must rather consist in creating space for the realisation of, not one, but a multiplicity of different life-plans and conceptions of society. Such objectives are not served by any traditional concept of a homogeneous class movement. They must be achieved through a multiplicity of social forms. It must be realised that capitalism, which is only now showing
its true colours, cannot be shaped, formed or harnessed to collective purposes. Democratic politics, if it is to earn its name, must aim not just to modify existing societal conditions, but actually to remove them. It is a matter of revolutionising economic, social and political relations in their entirety in a way which would transcend all traditional notions of a socialist revolution.

At the same time, conditions for such a revolution have never been so diverse. In the centres of capitalism at least, the option of a political revolution along traditional lines is neither plausible nor desirable. In contradistinction to many peripheral countries, it is not a question there of creating the economic and social preconditions for a reasonably functional liberal democracy. What is required instead is a revolution in life patterns, social relations, modes of consumption, ways of working and conceptions of progress. At the same time, capitalist state rule has become all-inclusive, pervading all aspects of life, and has thus become progressively 'totalitarian'. Precisely as a result of this, it has become technically and politically vulnerable to an extent never witnessed before. Elections to positions of state power do not have any of the revolutionary potential that mass acts of refusal do, actions which reject day-to-day conformity with the system, based on a practical awareness that not everything needs to be tolerated. It must be understood that capital is not constituted by objects or people, but is rather a set of social relations in which everyone is involved, and which everyone reproduces through their everyday practical behaviour. The state and political parties form part of these relations. Globalisation and neoliberalism are not simply imposed on us from outside. They are produced and stabilised by everyone through everyday practices, ways of living, modes of consumption, relations between the sexes and current value systems. As for effecting a radical change to this situation, the ruling engine of economic and political development can be derailed more readily, the more comprehensive and complicated its machinery becomes. And through this very process, new and genuinely democratic politics and institutions can be formed.

The contradiction inherent in talk of a 'class society without classes' is only an apparent one. Capitalism denotes a society in which exploitative material relations and their attendant social conflicts represent the motor of development and structural change. This is particularly evident in the crisis of Fordism and subsequent global restructuring. Analysis of capitalism must be class analysis (Ritsert, 1988b). At the same time, objective class conditions manifested in the process of production and appropriation of societal surplus are being
overlaid by a multiplicity of cultural, ethnic, racial, national, gender and social divisions and differences. This is a fundamental characteristic of capitalist society, but in the current process of restructuring, it is proving to have an even greater influence. This is why material socio-economic position provides ever fewer clues to social consciousness and political behaviour. In terms of the distribution of individual opportunities, class affiliation nevertheless does still have a profound effect. But increasingly cultural and political relations are superseding economic class position - exemplified by the impact of the consumer and media industries and the structure of the international political system - so that class is submerged ever more deeply beneath multiple layers of social relations and political consciousness, nearly beyond the point of recognition.

Seen in this light, an anti-capitalist revolution has perhaps never been as attractive an option as it is today, particularly if it seeks to incorporate broader social antagonisms such as relations between the sexes and between human beings and nature. The globally networked and technologically advanced capitalist system is not only always teetering on the edge of crisis, but is also more economically and politically vulnerable than ever before. But taking advantage of this vulnerability will require overcoming capital's cultural hegemony. Today, people appear less able than ever to look beyond their everyday bread-and-butter social obligations, to develop a sense of the opportunities of which they are continually stripped and to perceive the affront to human dignity experienced every day within the lives they are forced to lead. The ideological hegemony of the capitalist way of life has probably never been so anchored in our group consciousness as it is today. Increasing social fragmentation combined with growing inequalities at the national and international level do not necessarily act to counter this hegemony. Indeed, these factors can actually consolidate its power in direct proportion to the level of general acceptance that there is no alternative to current social relations.

A real revolution must therefore encompass more than social and the political transformation: it must be a cultural revolution as well. This cannot mean the same thing everywhere, but at the same time, much can be learned from the traditions and experiences of others. In this way, the diversity, decentralization and multiplicity of struggles should be seen as more than the unfortunate necessary result of diverse economic and political structures; rather they are potentially positive factors in the development of revolutionary theory through the practical struggles of our time.
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