

## **The cement of ideology. Facing the nihilism of the society of the spectacle**

**El cemento de la ideología. Ante el nihilismo de la sociedad del espectáculo**

**O cimento da ideologia. Contra o niilismo da sociedade do espectáculo**

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### **Abstract**

A communist, libertarian, peaceful and respectful society with nature, that we owe ourselves, through a writing that wishes to extend the path we walk in the desire for others to see its necessity, putting our bodies in the middle for its existence. As committed materialists, we write to unveil the false, for the world is made of falsehoods. We engage in this ritual of the gift without expecting anything in return. We open paths, only to abandon them again, stirred by the possibility of new passages — because what matters is that the path walks itself, and that this walking may express itself as an expansion and a joy of the body and the soul, far from the sad passions, far from those who live suspended between fear and hope. Our task is to linger at the edges of a world that does not yet exist —but ought to.

**Keywords:** Ideology, philosophy, thought, critical thinking, politics, sociology.

### **Resumen**

Este trabajo de escritura quiere extender el camino que andamos en el afán de que otros vean su necesidad, anteponiendo nuestros cuerpos para que exista, para hacer, de este gesto que apenas existe, el mundo entero donde construir la sociedad comunista, libertaria, pacífica y respetuosa con la naturaleza que nos debemos. Como convencidos materialistas escribimos, desvelamos lo falso porque sobre lo falso se organiza el mundo, practicamos esta forma de ritual del don sin esperar nada a cambio, abrimos sendas, las abandonamos sacudidos por la posibilidad de nuevos pasajes, porque lo importante es que el camino se ande a sí mismo, y que ese andar pueda expresarse como expansión y alegría del cuerpo y del alma, lejos pues de las pasiones tristes, de los que se mueven entre el temor y la esperanza. Nuestra tarea es merodear por un mundo que no existe pero que debería existir.

**Palabras clave:** Ideología, filosofía, pensamiento, pensamiento crítico, política, sociología.

## Resumo

Este texto pretende alargar o caminho que percorremos no esforço de fazer com que os outros vejam a sua necessidade, colocando os nossos corpos em primeiro lugar para que ele exista, para fazer, a partir deste gesto que mal existe, o mundo inteiro no qual construir a sociedade comunista, libertária, pacífica e respeitadora da natureza que devemos a nós próprios. Como materialistas convictos escrevemos, revelando o falso porque o mundo se organiza sobre o falso, praticamos essa forma de ritual de dar sem esperar nada em troca, abrimos caminhos, abandonamos-os abalados pela possibilidade de novas passagens, porque o importante é que o caminho se percorra por si mesmo, e que esse caminhar possa expressar-se como expansão e alegria do corpo e da alma, longe das paixões tristes, daqueles que se movem entre o medo e a esperança. A nossa tarefa é vaguear por um mundo que não existe, mas que deveria existir.

**Palavras-chave:** Ideologia, filosofia, pensamento, pensamento crítico, política, sociologia.

## Introduction

In *The Future Lasts a Long Time*, Althusser wrote that an idealist is a man who not only knows which station a train is departing from, but also knows its destination —he knows it in advance, and when he boards the train, he knows exactly where he is going, because the train takes him there. A materialist, by contrast, is someone who jumps onto a moving train without knowing where it comes from or where it is headed (Althusser, 1993; Farrán, 2022).

We are well aware that we face formidable enemies —first and foremost, ourselves: trapped in the poisonous tyrannies we have internalised, numbed to the only truly essential task, that of shared fraternity. Then, all those who live within the certainties of the illusions that capitalism has conjured about itself —fictions that invite us to consume simulations of experience while real experience steadily shrinks and degrade. Fables that speak of a world without violence simply because, under capitalism, violence has become structural and thus endured without being recognised as such. Myths that claim money brings happiness, when we all know that what truly defines quality of life -for each individual and in relation to others- is leisure, health, play, aesthetic pleasure, cooperation, care, connection, affection, love, personal fulfilment, and the joy found in small things. These immaterial goods, unrelated to consumption, are the true wealth of life.

We live in a time of denial, conformity, submission, fear, alienation, and widespread brutalisation. The cruel reversals in labour and social rights have been accepted without protest. As Agustín Morán ironically observed (2006, 2007), capitalist economics proposes that we be workers without work, consumers without purchasing power, and citizens with fictional rights. The neoliberal imaginary -

imposed despite all reason and evidence- has convinced us that we are one-person companies, entrepreneurs fighting against all others, drifting individualists with no collective project beyond the continued deepening of our own catastrophe: the normalisation of capitalism's inferno, of life itself reduced to market and commodity.

Hitler won the war. State socialism did not die with the fall of the Berlin Wall (Cruz, 2019). Both are historical experiments -extreme variants of capitalism in its evolutionary path- mutations through which economic and social systems tested their means of reproduction. The outcomes have been assimilated into capitalism's current form. Total war economies proved absurd when extended across the planet, but highly profitable when restricted to two and a half continents —and so it was done. Centralised economic planning became disastrous, but the techniques of control, domination, and mass identification with an exploitative, biocidal, castrating, and repugnant system -one presented as a sublime reflection of the people themselves- were deemed worth preserving, expanding, and perfecting... so, they were.

The same has occurred with the functions of social control and the containment of revolt, all in the name of private property, and with the role of "correcting" the voracity of speculative capital —ever ready to inject liquidity when the deregulated financial market collapses under its own unchecked speculation. Remnants of those structures of statist, interventionist, and vigilant marxism, upon which today many more things rest apart from the discourse of our most savage ultra-liberals.

### **Capitalism is very much alive...**

If capitalism enjoys ironclad health -despite its periodic collapses into deep crises from which it must be rescued from bankruptcy and ruin- it is thanks to the transfers and recapitalisations carried out by that infamous institution known as the state, which neoliberals claim to despise. The success of capitalism lies not in its economic essence but in state intervention; without it, capitalism would have disappeared long ago. During the most recent crisis, states transferred trillions of dollars not only to support the speculative financial sector but also to sustain other productive sectors (automotive, transport, construction, etc.) and those that reproduce the status quo (official trade unions, media outlets, law enforcement). Outrageous amounts that they would never invest in the health of their citizens or the improvement of their environment. All this public pillaging was presented to citizens as a necessary effort to preserve the so-called welfare state, that invention of social democracy which, far from benefitting those at the bottom, served to dismantle a conscious, combative, and organised labour movement, while justifying in the name of the common good the state's rise as the primary exploiter of the working class.

It is clear to all that it is the working class that bears the weight of the entire structure of direct and indirect taxation that sustains the state, because the wealthy have never paid taxes —nor will they

ever. The much-lauded rule of law serves only to fill prisons with the poor (Armendáriz, 2016). The law is tailor-made for the wealthy: it protects them, but it does not hold them to account. The law applies only to those below, against whom it is written, while the rich and their assets have always existed outside the law, in a zone of inviolability —a fiscal and legal paradise. What name does this entire system go by? None other than constitutional order and parliamentary democracy, but we know well who governs that order and who legislates from within the parliaments: multinational corporations and banks (Samour, 2024).

For as long as the state allowed it, workers' organisations -especially those with anarcho-sindicalist roots- dedicated themselves to building their own world within the system, with the aim of one day exceeding it. To that end, they established mutual aid societies, founded combative unions, and gave rise to autonomous cultural movements grounded in their own knowledge and aesthetics. Workers' societies, athenaeums, consumer cooperatives, theatre groups, hiking clubs, schools, libraries, publishing houses, newspapers, and more provided their members with protection, security, credit, food, health care, culture, affection, and working-class pride. This dense network of support and mutual aid made the worker not someone stripped of everything except their labour power, but a person proud to participate in a rich communal life sustained by work, effort, union struggle, responsibility, and both human and intellectual dignity (Freán, 2016; Mintz, 2022).

The state was not confronted by a helpless society or isolated, degraded individuals, but by a counter-society willing to organise social life around principles alien to capitalism and statist forms of power (Ovejero, 2017). Its strength and power of attraction were so great that only a war of extermination could put an end to it —burying the Ideal in a mass grave of forgetting, of erasure, of what “never happened.” What followed was the state's appropriation of proletarian initiative. From then on, the conditions of working-class life would no longer be determined by workers themselves, but imposed by the state. It would decide how workers should associate, what education they should receive, what culture was appropriate for them, and at what prices they should purchase their food. The state and capital would then extend their dominion over every aspect of social life —dismantling associative bonds, prohibiting class expressions, until the proletariat faded and dissolved into the promise of consumer society's shelves. Today, just as we expect nothing from the proletariat, we expect everything from state institutions (Salinas, 2024).

### **The All-Powerful state**

The state has claimed for itself the authority to decide what kinds of bonds may or may not be formed between people. It defines the general interest, absorbs social functions, and promotes a narrow form of individualism —one that, just as it establishes the citizen's duties toward the state, frees the citizen from any duty toward their fellow human beings. There is nothing left for us to do for one another,

because that is “the state’s job”. The logical consequence of internalising this mandate is the prevailing indifference toward the suffering of others.

The primary function of the state is to prevent those below from organising to overcome the social and economic isolation in which they are kept (Cisneros, 2015). While the dominant classes organise politically around it, the state -relentlessly working for the political disorganisation of the popular classes- can continue to present itself as the only reliable actor, one that abides by the rules of the democratic game, a game whose rules are written by those same dominant classes. Within that game, the people below remain politically excluded, economically dominated, and ideologically controlled.

The state does not simply require subjects willing to repress others through its legal, police, military, educational, healthcare, and media apparatuses. It also requires subjects who desire their own repression. Individuals willing to trade freedom and autonomy for the promise of security, in exchange for crumbs of food, tolerance, and recognition, all managed by the state as tools to divide us further, to rank identities, to organise desire, to erode any sign of solidarity or communal life, and to facilitate the exploitation of all. If there is such a thing as micro-politics, it is the one the state fabricates for all of us, with each of us in mind.

We are only summoned as a collective unity -from the perspective of the dominant classes- under the figure of the people-nation: in times of war, during tax collection campaigns, or at the polls, where the politically organised elite legitimises itself through the votes of the dominated. Even when the state intervenes “on behalf” of the dominated classes, it does so because such intervention ultimately benefits the ruling class —it modernises, regenerates, and revitalises it.

Consider how the social measures of the New Deal -unemployment subsidies, wage increases, public works programmes, agrarian reforms, etc.- were not gifts from the ruling class. This was achieved through mass strikes, factory occupations, protests, looting, and all manner of unrest. In the end, these measures most benefited the political and economic oligarchy that ruled the country, as they helped defuse a revolutionary ferment that threatened the existing order and that class itself (McInnis, 2019). The privileged know well that the greatest danger lies in the self-organisation of the people below. That is why it is essential to organise them from above —to quickly find (or manufacture) spokespersons with whom to negotiate if needed, leaders who can be tasked with securing social peace in exchange for political and economic concessions.

Even in this scenario, the people below may still exploit their own disorganisation -their fertile anonymity- to generate enough fear to push those concessions beyond what the privileged would ever willingly offer. Rarely have peaceful, civilised demands triggered structural reform. That is why parties, unions, and even the organised radical left, ultimately serve to discipline the masses: offering themselves as representatives and containing popular anger within the bounds of legal institutional

politics.

Take, for example, how the institutionalisation of unionism has not destroyed capitalism but instead dissolved class consciousness, and facilitated the integration and submission of workers. In Spain, in 1976 -before unions were legalised-, twenty million workdays were lost to labour conflicts. In 2016, the number was under 800,000. Unionism ceased to be a tool of workers' struggle the moment it accepted that the goal of economic activity was private profit.

Until World War II, the ultimate aim of unionism had been the appropriation and workers' control of the means of production. In 1945, fascism was defeated —but only to impose much of its social agenda. Vertical unionism persisted, surviving the end of the dictatorship through the Moncloa Pacts, which reproduced a bipartisan model by institutionalising two major trade union centres. Since then, these have been officially authorised -under democracy- to continue doing capitalism's dirty work, with thousands of full-time union officials tasked with channelling demands, neutralising self-organised union sections, and even holding back their own colleagues if they try to fight. The overwhelming lack of legitimacy of this union model (Arnal, 2022) has been offset by the absence of viable alternatives, and by a circular, self-justifying discourse: that nothing can be done through the unions because “people don't get involved” —and since people see that nothing is being done, they do not get involved either.

Consider also the lack of political will to pursue tax fraud in Spain, where institutional advertising proudly proclaims “We are all the tax office.” The result is an annual loss of eighty billion euros (Plataforma por la Justicia Fiscal, 2022) —a sum that, if collected, could provide a basic income of €20,000 per year to four million unemployed people. What interest do the dominant classes have in taxing themselves? What incentive could they possibly have to help four million people escape the cycle of fear, anxiety, and poverty that they themselves manage? Why do we spend eight times more on weapons than on education? The dominant ideology obscures the fact that, at least in Spain, Montesquieu has yet to be born —and Franco has yet to die.

### **The Cement of Ideology**

How is everything we have read so far in this paper possible? Because the cement of dominant class ideology seeps through every floor of the social edifice, binding it together through representations, values, beliefs, and so forth —elements that perpetuate class domination. Poverty is not merely a material condition; under dominant ideology, it also becomes a matter of injustice -as the inability to demand justice- and lack of freedom —as the inability to even imagine one's own submission. Even when the lower classes demand employment, it stems from this fundamental dispossession: they have been taught that, beyond work, there is nothing else for them to do. Long ago, capitalism stripped us of our autonomy as producers and pushed us into working under others in inhumane conditions. Long

ago, capital's ideology amputated our spirit of resistance with promises of perfect futures and cheap trinkets manufactured in distant lands by those even more unfortunate than ourselves —fetishes that sink us ever deeper into a network of false needs and unspoken obedience.

In recent decades, capitalism no longer guarantees even survival for those in the so-called first world. It now haggles and negotiates downward every right, every contract, every wage —in short, exploitation itself. It dissolves the extortion of surplus value beneath an invisible veil, disguised by the seemingly innocent yet deeply immoral appearance of goods and markets. The proletariat today is a class alienated from itself —absent where it is present, and present where it is absent. In both cases, particular interest takes its place, confusing it with its antagonistic class. Servitude has become simple complicity. Master and slave roles are now interchangeable, courtesy of consumption, sustained by the monolithic worldview imposed by the bourgeoisie.

In its latest contortion, capitalism has even lost interest in us as individuals. It no longer desires to own our bodies for eight or more hours of work. Now, capital merely purchases fragments of time — disconnected, abstracted from their occasional and interchangeable human carriers. In this final acrobatic turn, capitalism depersonalises working time, and it is this depersonalised time that becomes the true agent of labour's valorisation. Depersonalised time has no rights; it cannot make demands.

If capitalism no longer needs us as people, why should its democracy need us as citizens? In fact, terms such as democracy, citizenship, social harmony, civility, or consensus have long ceased to mean anything concrete. They are now little more than empty abstractions, ideological superstitions brandished by politicians during election season—words that attract ever less allegiance. These are words that the welfare state might have once imbued with meaning, but that neoliberalism has exploded, leaving behind a withered middle class that can barely identify with the virtuous civic and labouring image that the elites have constructed for it —an image those same elites have never followed themselves.

More significantly, this collapse has produced a massive population of precarious workers -easily replaced- and a diffuse human periphery composed of the unemployed, hustlers, the socially excluded, immigrants, and enforcers. The new faces of poverty and social fragility in a system that grows ever harder to defend as democratic, as it shows only its punitive face to those below while remaining wholly submissive to the will of economic and political elites.

This is the triumph of the punk nihilism of the 1970s —except that it was not radicalised masses who brought it about, but the orderly elites defending financial capitalism who implemented it with ruthless precision.

We live, as Federico Urales foresaw (2018), in a society that, by guaranteeing life to no one, leaves us



with no choice but to spend our time figuring out how to deceive and exploit one another. In liberalism, then, there is no morality but evil —because evil becomes the only activity that can guarantee one's own good.

Meanwhile, politicians long ago became mere public relations agents for the pressure groups they serve (Tijeras, 2018), soothing the public with the idea that, amidst apocalypse, they are doing “the only thing that can be done”: destroying social rights as the only way to preserve them; promoting the myth of free competition as the sole path to progress in an unjust and unequal society; restricting liberties in the name of defending democracy; and continually avoiding the ecological crisis and resource collapse on a finite planet with the delusional narrative of limitless wealth in the absolutist horizon of capitalism.

### **Conclusions. The deception of democracy**

Despite its current loss of legitimacy, democracy still appears to us as a magical word, as if it had intrinsic value —democracy as a pretext to justify a specific form of social organisation: that of the capitalist “war-state.” What we call democracy is no longer a form of government but a form of state that orchestrates a permanent external war -against terrorists and for the appropriation of markets and resources that sustain our non-negotiable way of life-, and a permanent internal war for the control/self-control of bodies and minds. As a result, life itself becomes the battlefield from which we are summoned to mobilise, self-realise, integrate, and even pursue transcendence —by the very same institutions that manage our emotions and redirect our behaviours and perceptions toward sterile action and thought, toward the evacuation of the subject from the public sphere and from social conflict. In short, toward the suppression of the political subject, reduced to a mere consumer and amplifier of borrowed, empty discourses.

Knowledge gives way to entertainment, which mediates and shapes experience. In entertainment, everything becomes irrelevant, superficial, infantile —it is degraded, confused, rendered useless. The most terrifying aspect is that this becomes the collective consciousness, the model of coexistence, of behaviour, of social interaction, of political citizenship. These are the building blocks of a low-intensity fascism that has merged with our very skin, so that we reproduce its apolitical, consensual, and voluntary order. This low-intensity fascism binds us with images and slogans of social order, forceful cultural consensus, shared values —that is, free markets, private property, individualism, and even depoliticising, which is the purest expression of the totalitarian state that democracy now conceals. To transgress it -to politicise oneself- is to step into the domain of the war-state, which defines terrorism and constantly redefines who the terrorist is.

Indeed, we have been living in a totalitarian state for quite some time —only in our state, the dictator is missing as the central figure of the drama. Perhaps that is why we are endlessly bombarded with



Hitler, Stalin, or Kim Jong-un (Marquesán, 2023). Our entire lives are permeated by capitalism and shaped by it. It has been said that there is no outside to capitalism, but there is no inside either —no private life, no free consciousness. Those in power protect us from the “barbarians,” and also from ourselves: from the external threat of terrorism and the internal threat of free thought and free living — which could make us into terrorists simply for reflecting or acting outside their sanctioned bounds.

Individual freedom continues to shrink —through decrees, surveillance cameras, metal detectors, cable television (Sanchís, 2025), social media (Conde, 2024), satellites, induced fear, phantom terrorists. Almost no one resists, because we are all “decent” people —orderly and cautious, with “nothing to hide.” No one wants to be seen as outside society, rejected. So, we demonstrate our loyalty and innocence in every gesture, in our clothing, our habits, our behaviour. If the police arrest someone, they must have done something. With a single click, the police can know more about us than we know about ourselves. Power manages fear: fear of terrorists, and fear of the police who hunt them, fear of disgrace, of losing one’s job, of being betrayed, of difference, of thinking, of knowing.

These are the new names of the invisible dictator who governs the totalitarian state we live in —and that lives through us. Because before the state, we are guilty of life itself —of having a life, even if it is a broken, crushed, empty, mortgaged, precarious, meaningless life. A life for which we are made solely responsible. A life for which we must pay. One that is not meant to be lived freely, but must instead follow a life project, which the state monitors, regulates, and audits. And since politicising that life is now impossible, we turn instead to mental illness, to distress, to pathology, to suffering as a last resort —because we have failed to “manage” this dying, diminished, annihilated life that the totalitarian state has forced us to drag behind us.

More than seventy years ago, Bertolt Brecht captured this logic in *The Buddha’s Parable of the Burning House*. The Buddha sees the roof of a house in flames and, alarmed that people inside have not noticed, urges them to escape. But instead of fleeing, they calmly ask him about the weather, whether it is windy outside, and similar questions —as the flames begin licking their hair and clothes. The Buddha leaves without answering, for, as he concludes, “If the ground under their feet does not burn enough for them to want to move, what could one possibly say?” (Urso, 2015). Many people today, faced with an economic and social model hurtling toward the greatest human and ecological catastrophe in history, continue to ask what steps should be taken to prevent it, how we might fix this or that —when the only truly urgent priority is to get out of the burning house that is neoliberalism (Fisher, 2020).

How can we challenge this state of affairs? In *The Coming Community*, Agamben (2016) tells us that in the face of the nihilism of the society of the spectacle, resistance will not come -as it once did- from a class, a party, a union, a group, or a minority, but from any singularity that has awakened to solitude,

to separation, to incompleteness and emptiness —from which one might begin to seek out others: brothers, equals, affections, the fragile threads of memory and wonder at a different present, one worth struggling for. All while the masses continue not to fight against capital, but against the fact that capital no longer cares about them.

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