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BROAD
DAYLIGHT**



Power in the Era of Post-Humanity

PENGUIN BOOKS

LIKE A THIEF IN BROAD DAYLIGHT

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SLAVOJ ŽIŽEK

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Penguin
Random House
UK

First published by Allen Lane 2018

Published in Penguin Books 2019

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Set in 9.26/12.4 pt Sabon LT Std

Typeset by Jouve (UK), Milton Keynes

Printed and bound in Great Britain by Clays Ltd, Elcograf S.p.A.

A CIP catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

ISBN: 978-0-141-98919-8

www.greenpenguin.co.uk



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To Jela, with l—!

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Introduction: First the Bad News, Then the Good News . . . Which May Be Even Worse

Alain Badiou's *The True Life*¹ opens with the provocative claim that, from Socrates onwards, the function of philosophy is to corrupt the youth, to alienate (or, rather, 'extraneate' in the sense of Brecht's *verfremden*) them from the predominant ideologico-political order, to sow radical doubts and enable them to think autonomously. The young undergo the educational process in order to be integrated into the hegemonic social order, which is why their education plays a pivotal role in the reproduction of the ruling ideology. No wonder that Socrates, the 'first philosopher', was also its first victim, ordered by the democratic court of Athens to drink poison. And is this prodding not another name for evil – evil in the sense of disturbing the established way of life? All philosophers prodded: Plato submitted ancient customs and myths to ruthless rational examination, Descartes undermined the medieval harmonious universe, Spinoza ended up being excommunicated, Hegel unleashed the all-destructive power of negativity, Nietzsche demystified the very basis of our morality . . . even if they sometimes appeared almost as state-philosophers, the establishment was never really at ease with them. We should also consider their counterparts, the 'normalizing' philosophers who tried to restore the lost balance and reconcile philosophy with the established order: Aristotle with regard to Plato, Thomas Aquinas with regard to effervescent early Christianity, post-Leibnizian rational theology with regard to Cartesianism, neo-Kantianism with regard to post-Hegelian chaos . . .

Is the pairing of Jürgen Habermas and Peter Sloterdijk not the latest incarnation of this tension between prodding and normalization, shown in their reaction to the shattering impact of modern

sciences, especially brain sciences and biogenetics? The progress of today's sciences destroys the basic presuppositions of our everyday notion of reality.

There are four main attitudes one can adopt towards this breakthrough. The first one is simply to insist on radical naturalism, i.e. to heroically pursue the logic of the scientific 'disenchantment of reality' whatever the cost, even if the very fundamental coordinates of our horizon of meaningful experience are thereby shattered. (In brain sciences, Patricia and Paul Churchland most radically opt for this attitude.) The second is to make a desperate attempt to move beneath or beyond the scientific approach into some presumably more original and authentic reading of the world (religion or other kinds of spirituality are the main candidates here) – as, ultimately, Heidegger does. The third and most hopeless approach is to try to forge some kind of New Age 'synthesis' between scientific Truth and the premodern world of Meaning: the claim is that new scientific results themselves (quantum physics, say) compel us to abandon materialism and point towards some new (Gnostic or Eastern) spirituality. Here is a standard version of this idea:

The central event of the twentieth century is the overthrow of matter. In technology, economics, and the politics of nations, wealth in the form of physical resources is steadily declining in value and significance. The powers of mind are everywhere ascendant over the brute force of things.²

This line of reasoning stands for ideology at its worst. The re-inscription of proper scientific problematics (the role of waves and oscillations in quantum physics, for example) into the ideological field of 'mind versus brute things' obfuscates the truly paradoxical result of the notorious 'disappearance of matter' in modern physics: how the very 'immaterial' processes lose their spiritual character and became a legitimate topic of natural sciences.

None of these three options is adequate for the establishment, which basically wants to have its cake and eat it: it needs science as the foundation of economic productivity, but it simultaneously wants to keep the ethico-political foundations of society free from science. In this way, we arrive at the fourth option, a neo-Kantian state philosophy whose exemplary case today is Habermas (but there are others, like

Luc Ferry in France). It is a rather sad spectacle to see Habermas trying to control the explosive results of biogenetics and curtail its philosophical consequences – his entire endeavour betrays the fear that something will happen, that a new dimension of the ‘human’ will emerge, that the old image of human dignity and autonomy will survive unscathed. Over-reaction is common here, such as the ridiculous response to Sloterdijk’s Elmau speech on biogenetics and Heidegger,³ discerning the echoes of Nazi eugenics in the (quite reasonable) proposal that biogenetics compels us to formulate new rules of ethics. Techno-scientific progress is perceived as a temptation that can lead us into ‘going too far’ – entering the forbidden territory of biogenetic manipulations and so on, and thus endangering the very core of our humanity.

The latest ethical ‘crisis’ apropos biogenetics effectively creates the need for what one is fully justified in calling a ‘state philosophy’: a philosophy that would, on the one hand, promote scientific research and technical progress and, on the other, contain its full socio-symbolic impact, i.e. prevent it from posing a threat to the existing theologico-ethical constellation. No wonder those who come closest to meeting these demands are neo-Kantians: Kant himself was focused on the problem of how, while fully taking Newtonian science into account, one can guarantee that ethical responsibility can be exempted from the reach of science – as he himself put it, he limited the scope of knowledge to create the space for faith and morality. And are today’s state philosophers not facing the same task? Are their efforts not focused on how, through different versions of transcendental reflection, to restrict science to its preordained horizon of meaning and thus denounce as ‘illegitimate’ its consequences for the ethico-religious sphere? In this sense, Habermas is effectively the ultimate philosopher of (re)normalization, desperately working to prevent the collapse of our established ethico-political order:

Could it be that Jurgen Habermas’ corpus will be one day of the first in which simply nothing at all prodding can be found any more? Heidegger, Wittgenstein, Adorno, Sartre, Arendt, Derrida, Nancy, Badiou, even Gadamer, everywhere one stumbles upon dissonances. Normalization takes hold. The philosophy of the future – integration brought to completion.⁴

The reason for this Habermasian aversion to Sloterdijk is thus clear: Sloterdijk is the ultimate ‘prodger’, the one who is not afraid to ‘think dangerously’ and to question the presuppositions of human freedom and dignity, of our liberal welfare state, etc. One should not be afraid to call this orientation ‘evil’ – if one understands ‘evil’ in the elementary sense outlined by Heidegger: ‘The evil and therefore most acute danger is thinking itself, insofar as it has to think against itself, yet can seldom do so.’³⁵ One should push Heidegger a step further here: it is not just that thinking is evil insofar as it fails to think against itself, against the accustomed way of thinking; thinking, insofar as its innermost potential is to think freely and ‘against itself’, is what, from the standpoint of conventional thinking, cannot but appear as ‘evil’. It is crucial to persist in this ambiguity, as well as to resist the temptation to find an easy way out by defining some kind of ‘proper measure’ between the two extremes of normalization and the abyss of freedom.

Does this mean that we should simply choose our side in this opposition – ‘corrupting the youth’ or guaranteeing meaningful stability? The problem is that, today, simple opposition gets complicated: our global-capitalist reality, impregnated as it is by sciences, is itself ‘prodding’, challenging our innermost presuppositions in a much more shocking way than the wildest philosophical speculations, so that the task of a philosopher is no longer to undermine the hierarchical symbolic edifice that grounds social stability but – to return to Badiou – to make the young perceive the dangers of the growing nihilist order that presents itself as the domain of new freedoms. We live in an extraordinary era in which there is no tradition on which we can base our identity, no frame of meaningful universe which might enable us to lead a life beyond hedonist reproduction. Today’s nihilism – the reign of cynical opportunism accompanied by permanent anxiety – legitimizes itself as the liberation from the old constraints: we are free to constantly re-invent our sexual identities, to change not only our job or our professional trajectory but even our innermost subjective features like our sexual orientation. However, the scope of these freedoms is strictly prescribed by the coordinates of the existing system, and also by the way consumerist freedom effectively functions: the possibility to choose and consume

imperceptibly turns into a superego *obligation* to choose. The nihilist dimension of this space of freedoms can only function in a permanently accelerated way – the moment it slows down, we become aware of the meaninglessness of the entire movement. This New World Disorder, this gradually emerging world-less civilization, exemplarily affects the young, who oscillate between the intensity of fully burning out (sexual enjoyment, drugs, alcohol, even violence), and the endeavour to succeed (study, make a career, earn money . . . within the existing capitalist order). Permanent transgression thus becomes the norm – consider the deadlock of sexuality or art today: is there anything more dull, opportunistic or sterile than to succumb to the superego injunction to incessantly invent new artistic transgressions and provocations (the performance artist masturbating on stage or masochistically cutting himself, the sculptor displaying decaying animal corpses or human excrement), or to the parallel injunction to engage in more and more ‘daring’ forms of sexuality?

The only radical alternative to this madness appears to be the even worse madness of religious fundamentalism, a violent retreat into some artificially resuscitated tradition. The supreme irony is that a brutal return to an orthodox tradition (an invented one, of course) appears as the ultimate ‘prodding’ – are the young suicide bombers not the most radical form of corrupted youth? The great task of thinking today is to discern the precise contours of this deadlock and find the way out of it. A recent incident illustrates perfectly the paradoxical coincidence of opposites that underlies the retreat from fidelity to tradition into transgressive ‘prodding’. In a hotel in Skopje, Macedonia, where I recently stayed, my companion enquired whether smoking was permitted in our room, and the answer she got from the receptionist was priceless: ‘Of course not, it is prohibited by the law. But you have ashtrays in the room, so this is not a problem.’ The contradiction between prohibition and permission was openly assumed and thereby cancelled, treated as non-existent: the message was, ‘It’s prohibited, and here is how you do it.’ This incident perhaps provides the best metaphor for our ideological predicament today.

How did we reach this point? One of the greatest contributions of American culture to dialectical thinking is the series of rather

vulgar doctor's jokes of the type, 'first-the-bad-news-then-the-good-news', like: 'The bad news is that you have terminal cancer and will die in a month. The good news is that we also discovered you have severe Alzheimer's, so you will already have forgotten the bad news when you get home.' Maybe we should adopt a similar approach to radical politics. After so much 'bad news' – seeing so many hopes brutally crushed in the space of radical action, spread between the two extremes of Maduro in Venezuela and Tsipras in Greece – it is easy to succumb to the temptation to claim that such action never really had a chance, that it was doomed from the very beginning, that the hope of a real and effective change for the better was a mere illusion. What we should do is not search for alternative 'good news' but discern the good news in the bad news, by way of changing our standpoint and seeing it in a new way. Take the prospect of automatization of production, which will – so people fear – radically diminish the need for workers and thus make unemployment explode. But why fear this prospect? Does it not open up the possibility of a new society in which we all have to work much less? In what kind of society do we live, where good news is automatically turned into bad news? Or, to take another example of bad/good news: is the basic lesson of the recent public disclosure of the so-called Paradise Papers not the simple fact that the ultra-rich live in their special zones where they are not bound by common laws?

New areas of emancipatory activity are emerging, such as those cities run by a mayor or city-council imposing progressive agendas that run counter to larger state or federal regulations. Examples abound here, from single cities (Barcelona, Newark, New York, even) to a network of cities – recently, many local authorities in the US decided to continue to honour commitments to fight ecological threats that were cancelled by the Trump administration. The important fact here is that local authorities proved to be more sensitive to global issues than higher state authorities. This is why we should not reduce this new phenomenon to the struggle of local communities against state regulations: local administrative authorities are concerned with issues that are simultaneously local and global, putting pressure on the state from two directions. For example, the mayor of

Barcelona insists on opening up the city to refugees, while she opposes the excessive invasion of tourists into the city.

Another emancipatory step is that women are coming out *en masse* about male sexual violence. The media coverage of this development should not distract us from what is really going on: nothing less than an epochal change, a great awakening, a new chapter in the history of equality. For thousands of years, relations between the sexes were regulated and arranged; all this is now being questioned and undermined. And now the protesters are not an LGBT+ minority but a majority – women. What is emerging is something we have been aware of all along but were just not able (willing, ready) to address openly: the hundreds of ways in which women are exploited sexually. Women are now drawing attention to the dark underside of our official claims of equality and mutual respect, and what we are discovering is, among other things, how hypocritical and one-sided our fashionable critique of women's oppression in Muslim countries is: we must confront the reality of our own forms of oppression and exploitation.

As in every revolutionary upheaval, there will be numerous 'injustices', ironies, and so on. (For example, I doubt that the American comedian Louis CK's acts, deplorable and lewd as they are, could be put on the same level as direct sexual violence.) But, again, none of this should distract us; rather, we should focus on the problems that lie ahead. Although some countries are already experiencing a new post-patriarchal sexual culture (look at Iceland, where two thirds of children are born out of a wedlock, and where women occupy more posts in public institutions than men), one of the most urgent tasks is to explore what we are gaining and losing in the upheaval of traditional courtship procedures. New rules will have to be established in order to avoid a sterile culture of fear and uncertainty – plus, of course, we must make sure that this awakening does not turn into just another case where political legitimization is based on the subject's victimhood status.

Is the basic characteristic of today's subjectivity not the weird combination of the free subject who experiences himself as being ultimately responsible for his fate, and the subject who grounds the authority of his speech on his status as a victim of circumstances beyond his control? Every contact with another human being is

experienced as a potential threat – if the other smokes, or if he casts a covetous glance at me, he already hurts me. This logic of victimization is today universalized, reaching well beyond the standard cases of sexual or racist harassment – recall, for example, the growing financial industry of paying damages, from the tobacco companies’ deal in the USA and the financial claims of the Holocaust victims and forced labourers in Nazi Germany, to the idea that the USA should pay African-Americans hundreds of billions of dollars for all they were deprived of due to slavery. This notion of the subject as an irresponsible victim is driven by an extreme narcissistic perspective in which every encounter with the Other appears as a potential threat to the subject’s precarious imaginary balance; as such, it is not the opposite of, but rather the inherent supplement to, the liberal free subject. In today’s predominant form of individuality, the self-centered assertion of the psychological subject paradoxically overlaps with the perception of oneself as a victim of circumstances.

To return to the ashtray: the danger is that, in a homologous way, in the ongoing awakening, the ideology of personal freedom could silently merge with the logic of victimhood (freedom being reduced to the freedom to bring out one’s victimhood). A radical, emancipatory politicization of the awakening will then be superfluous and the women’s fight will become one in a series of protests – against global capitalism, ecological threats, racism, for a different democracy, and so on.

So how will radical social transformation happen? Definitely not as a triumphant victory or even in the sort of catastrophe widely debated and predicted in the media, but ‘as a thief in the night’: ‘For yourselves know perfectly that the day of the Lord so cometh as a thief in the night. For when they shall say, Peace and safety; then sudden destruction cometh upon them, as travail upon a woman with child; and they shall not escape’ (Paul, 1 Thessalonians 5:2–3). Is this not already happening in our society, obsessed as it is with ‘peace and security’? On a closer look, however, we see that the change is already happening in broad daylight: capitalism is openly disintegrating and changing into something else. We do not perceive this ongoing transformation because of our deep immersion in ideology.

The same holds for psychoanalytic treatment, where resolution

also comes ‘as a thief in broad daylight’, as an unexpected by-product, never as the achievement of a posited goal. This is why psychoanalytic practice is something that is possible only because of its own impossibility – a statement which many would instantly proclaim a typical piece of postmodern jargon. However, did Freud himself not point in this direction when he wrote that the ideal conditions for psychoanalytic treatment would be those in which psychoanalysis is no longer needed? This is the reason why Freud listed the practice of psychoanalysis among the impossible professions. After psychoanalytic treatment begins, the patient resists it by (among other ways) deploying transferences, and the treatment progresses through the analysis of transference and other forms of resistance. There can be no direct, ‘smooth’ treatment: in a treatment, we immediately stumble upon obstacles by way of working through these obstacles.

And, back to politics: doesn’t exactly the same hold for every revolution and every process of radical emancipation? Revolutions are only possible against the background of their own impossibility: the existing global-capitalist order can immediately counter all attempts to subvert it, and anti-capitalist struggle can only be effective if it deals with these countermeasures, if it turns into its weapon the very instruments of its defeat. There is no point in waiting for the right moment when a smooth change might be possible; this moment will never arrive, history will never provide us with such an opportunity. One has to take the risk and intervene, even if reaching the goal appears (and is, in some sense) impossible – only by doing this can one change the situation so that the impossible becomes possible, in a way that can never be predicted.

Although it may appear that we are hopelessly at the mercy of media manipulation,⁶ miracles can happen, the fake universe of manipulation can all of a sudden crumble and undo itself. In the campaign that preceded the 2017 UK General Election, Jeremy Corbyn was the target of a well-planned character assassination by the conservative media, which portrayed him as undecided, incompetent, non-electable, and so on. So how did he emerge so well out of it? It is not enough to say that he successfully resisted the smears with his display of simple honesty, decency and concern for the worries of

ordinary people. He did well precisely because of the attempted character assassination: without it he would probably remain a slightly boring and uncharismatic leader lacking a clear vision, merely a representative of the old Labour Party. It was in his reaction to the ruthless campaign against him that his ordinariness emerged as a positive asset, as something that attracted voters disgusted by the vulgar attacks on him, and this shift was unpredictable: it was impossible to determine in advance how the negative campaign would work. This undecidability (to use a once-fashionable word) is a feature of symbolic determination which cannot be accounted for in terms of simple linear determinism: it is not a question of insufficient data, of some arguments being stronger than others, but one of how the same arguments can work *for* or *against*. A character trait – Corbyn’s accentuated ordinary decency – may be an argument for him (for the voters tired of the Conservative media blitz) or an argument against him (for those who think that a leader should be strong and charismatic). The added *je ne sais quoi* which decides how events will play out is what escapes the well-prepared propaganda.

Those who follow obscure spiritual-cosmological speculations will be familiar with a popular idea: when three planets (usually Earth, its moon and the Sun) find themselves along the same axis, some big cataclysmic event takes place; the whole order of the universe is momentarily thrown out of sync and has to restore its balance (as was supposed to happen in 2012). Did something like this not hold for the year 2017, which was a triple anniversary: in 2017 we celebrated not only the centenary of the October Revolution but also the one hundred and fiftieth anniversary of the first edition of Marx’s *Capital* (1867), and the fiftieth anniversary of the so-called Shanghai Commune when, during the Cultural Revolution, the residents of Shanghai decided to follow literally Mao’s call and directly took power, overthrowing the rule of the Communist Party (which is why Mao quickly decided to restore order by sending the army to squash the Commune). Do these three events not mark the three stages of the Communist movement: Marx’s *Capital* outlined the theoretical foundations of the Communist revolution, the October Revolution was the first successful attempt to overthrow a bourgeois state and build a new social and

economic order, while the Shanghai Commune stands for the most radical attempt to realize the most daring aspect of the Communist vision, the abolition of state power and the imposition of direct people's power, organized as a network of local communes.

The lesson here is that, when we are considering the centenary of the October Revolution – the first case of a ‘liberated territory’ outside capitalism, of taking power and breaking the chain of capitalist states – we should always see it as the middle (mediating) stage between two extremes, the antinomic structure of the capitalist society (analysed in *Capital*), out of which the Communist movement grew, and the no less antinomic *péripéties* of Communist state power, which culminated in the *cul de sac* of the Chinese Cultural Revolution. After taking over, the new power confronts the immense task of organizing the new society. Remember the exchange between Lenin and Trotsky on the eve of the October Revolution: Lenin said, ‘What will happen to us if we fail?’ Trotsky replied: ‘And what will happen if we succeed?’

Today, we are stuck with this question. The present book deals with it in three tragic acts plus a fourth one, a sort of comic supplement. The book's premise is that today, more than ever, we should stick to the basic Marxist insight: Communism is not an ideal, a normative order, a kind of ethico-political ‘axiom’, but something that arises as a reaction to the ongoing historical process and its deadlocks. Back in 1985, Félix Guattari and Toni Negri published a short book in French called *Les nouveaux espaces de liberté*, whose title was changed for the English translation into *Communists Like Us* (Los Angeles: Semiotexte 1990)⁷ – in an unintended way, this title points to the forthcoming upper-middle-classization of the Communist idea, which made a modest return as a slogan for some well-to-do academics with no connection to the actual poor and exploited. The new Communists are ‘like us’, ordinary academic cultural Leftists; there is no radical subjective transformation involved. ‘Communism’ becomes an island to which one ‘subtracts’ oneself – a nice case of what one can call ‘principled opportunism’, i.e. sticking faithfully to abstract ‘radical’ notions as a way to remain ‘pure’, avoiding ‘compromises’ because one also avoids any engagement in actual politics.

So when we talk about the continuing relevance (or irrelevance,

for that matter) of the idea of Communism, we should not be thinking of a regulative idea in the Kantian sense but in the strict Hegelian sense – for Hegel, ‘idea’ is a concept which is not a mere Ought (*Sollen*) but also contains the power of its actualization. The question of the actuality of the idea of Communism is therefore that of discerning in our actuality tendencies which point towards it, otherwise it’s an idea not worth losing time with.

I

The State of Things

THE TOPSY-TURVY WORLD OF GLOBAL CAPITALISM

To really change things, one should accept that nothing can really be changed within the existing system. Jean-Luc Godard voiced the motto, 'Ne change rien pour que tout soit différent' ('Change nothing so that everything will be different'), a reversal of 'Some things must change so that everything remains the same'. In our late-capitalist consumerist dynamic we are bombarded by new products all the time, but this constant change is becoming increasingly monotonous. When only constant self-revolutionizing can maintain the system, those who refuse to change anything are effectively the agents of true change: a change to the very principle of change.

Or, to put it in a different way, true change is not just the overthrowing of the old order but, above all, the establishment of a new order. Louis Althusser once improvised a typology of revolutionary leaders worthy of Kierkegaard's classification of humans into officers, housemaids and chimney sweepers: those who quote proverbs, those who do not quote proverbs, and those who invent new proverbs. The first are scoundrels (Althusser thought of Stalin), and the second are great revolutionaries who are doomed to fail (Robespierre); only the third understand the true nature of a revolution and succeed (Lenin, Mao). This triad registers three different ways in which to relate to the big Other (the symbolic substance, the domain of unwritten customs and wisdoms best expressed in the stupidity of proverbs). Scoundrels simply reinscribe the revolution into the ideological tradition of their nation (for Stalin, the Soviet Union was the

last stage of the progressive development of Russia). Radical revolutionaries like Robespierre fail because they merely enact a break with the past without succeeding in their effort to enforce a new set of customs (recall the utmost failure of Robespierre's idea to replace religion with the new cult of a Supreme Being). Leaders like Lenin and Mao succeeded (for some time, at least) because they invented new proverbs, which means that they imposed new customs that regulated daily lives. One of the best Goldwynisms recounts how, after being told that critics had complained that there were too many old clichés in his films, Sam Goldwyn wrote a memo to his scenario department: 'We need more new clichés!' He was right, and this is a revolution's most difficult task – to create 'new clichés' for ordinary daily life.

One should take a step further here. The task of the Left is not just to propose a new order, but also to change the prospect of what appears possible. The paradox of our predicament is therefore that, while resistance to global capitalism seemingly fails again and again to halt its advance, it fails to recognize the many trends which clearly signal capitalism's progressive disintegration. It is as if the two tendencies (resistance and self-disintegration) move at different levels and cannot meet, so that we get futile protests at the same time as immanent decay and there is no way of bringing the two together in a coordinated attempt to emancipate the world from capitalism. How did it come to this? While most of the Left desperately try to protect workers' rights against the onslaught of global capitalism, it is almost exclusively the most 'progressive' capitalists themselves (from Elon Musk to Mark Zuckerberg) who talk about post-capitalism – as if the very concept of the passage from capitalism as we know it to a new post-capitalist order is being appropriated by capitalism itself.

In an interview for *The Atlantic* in November 2017, Bill Gates said that capitalism isn't working, and that socialism is our only hope in order to save the planet. His reasoning is based on a simple ecological calculation: the use of fossil fuels has to be radically reduced if we are to avoid a global catastrophe, and the private sector is too selfish to produce clean and economical alternatives, so humanity has to act outside market forces. Gates himself announced his intention to spend \$2 billion of his own money on green energy,

although there's no fortune to be made in it, and he called on fellow billionaires to help make the US fossil-free by 2050 with similar philanthropy.¹ From an orthodox Leftist position, it is easy to make fun of the naivety of Gates's proposal. Such reproaches might be right, but they raise the following question: where is the Left's realistic proposal as to what we should do? Words matter in public debates: even if what Gates is talking about is not 'true socialism', he does talk about the fateful limitation of capitalism – and, again, do today's self-proclaimed socialists have a serious vision of what socialism should be now?

The standard radical Leftist reproach to the Left's record in power is that, instead of effectively socializing production and deploying actual democracy, it remained within the constraints of conventional Leftist policies (nationalizing the means of production or tolerating capitalism in a social-democratic way, imposing an authoritarian dictatorship or playing the game of parliamentary democracy). Maybe the time has come to ask the brutal question: OK, but what should or could they have done? How would an authentic model of socialist democracy have looked in practice? Is this Holy Grail – a revolutionary power that avoids all the traps (Stalinism, Social Democracy) and develops an authentic people's democracy in terms of society and the economy – not a purely imaginary entity, one which by definition cannot be filled with actual content?

Hugo Chávez, President of Venezuela from 1999 to 2013, was not simply a populist throwing the oil money around. Largely ignored by the international media are the complex and often inconsistent efforts to overcome a capitalist economy by experimenting with new ways of organizing production, ones which endeavour to move beyond the alternatives of private or state-owned property: farmers' and workers' cooperatives, workers' participation, control and organization of production, different hybrid forms between private property and social control and organization, and so on. Factories not used by their owners might be given to the workers to run, say. There are many hits and misses on this path – for example, after several attempts, the plan to hand over nationalized factories to workers, distributing stocks among them, was abandoned. Although these are genuine efforts to integrate grass-roots initiatives with state