

To Go Forward: First, Stand

The way is blocked; all ways forward seem blocked. Capitalism is killing us and yet what can Stand against it?

Capitalism infects our minds and souls, its poison pollutes the ways in which we think and feel. The capital system deforms us as individuals and makes society not, as it ought to be, the foundation of our mutual flourishing, but the very framework of our oppression.

More: the capital system now threatens all bases of life on this planet. Left unchecked capitalism's endless, reckless expansionism must end in extinction: first of human civilization, then of humanity itself. If climate change doesn't doom us directly the resource wars it engenders surely will.

There can be no salvation within capitalism. Endless growth is the fundament of the system, but unchecked expansion is an impossibility in the face of the physical limits of this one Earth.

Capitalism must be deracinated; it cannot merely be cut back. If it is not eradicated—and soon—we shall all be damned.

If the problem is clear, so too is the solution. We must renounce capitalism's credo of “every man for himself” and embrace the ethic proposed by Marx: “From each according to ability, to each according to need.” Call it socialism or communism as you will—Marx came to use the terms interchangeably—we need a world governed by the imperative of mutual aid, not private greed; a world premised on the richness of human capacity, not the poverty that comes of an insatiable lust for profit.

By definition, an alteration of such magnitude requires a revolution. What that means, first of all, is that the needed change cannot be accomplished through means sanctioned by the current politico-economic regime. No amount of piecemeal reform can transform capitalism into communism; no electable administration will make Canada socialist. All such ways are blocked.

Yet, if revolution necessarily entails the use of methods proscribed by the system it seeks to overthrow, the use of such methods is not in itself sufficient to produce true revolution. In the words of William Morris: “[M]en fight and lose the battle, and the thing that they fought for comes about in spite of their defeat, and when it comes turns out not to be what they meant, and other men have to fight for what they meant under another name.” History is littered with examples of the seizure of state power by those who proclaim noble ideals (with greater or lesser sincerity) but in the end fail to bring about the thoroughgoing change they had promised.

Rosa Luxemburg warned: “Socialism will not and cannot be created by decrees; nor can it be established by any government, however socialistic. Socialism must be created by the masses.” For Istvan Meszaros it is nonsense to suppose that this alternative social order could be made to last without the “full participation of the associated producers in decision-making at all levels of political, cultural, and economic control.”

Central to the thought of both these writers is the insight that true socialism is not a gift bestowed on the people by some vanguard but must necessarily be a cooperative endeavour of the many. Yet if Luxemburg and Meszaros tell us something of how capitalism might be overcome, and something of how socialism needs to be built, what chance is there for either at this present day? The way is blocked, it seems.

Some argue that capitalism is in a terminal crisis. No doubt this is true but it may be correct only in the sense that the final working out of its logic is the destruction of human society, if not the species itself. There is no certainty that such a catastrophe can be averted. It is not fatalistic to say this: fatalism lies not in a realistic assessment of our situation—however dire we may determine that to be—but in turning our faces from what the intellect tells us to be true and so to act in ways we know to be futile.

Gramsci counselled “pessimism of the intellect” alongside “optimism of the will.” It will not do to shut our minds to the desperateness of our situation but we can and must counter the resulting tendency to despair. This we can do through a conscious resolution to pursue the course we recognize as correct, eschewing the false hope that political action within the confines of capitalism could ever be sufficient to bring about the world we want; the world, indeed, that humanity needs if it is to survive.

The upshot of all this is that we must build for the future and watch for our chances. As Marx famously remarked, “Man makes his own history but he does not make it just as he pleases.”

Such advice may be sound enough, but more must still be said. What, one may ask, is entailed in “building for the future?” Does watching for our chances indicate no more than passive waiting for salvation?

With Stand we wish to build for the future in different senses—including the most literal one. We seek to establish a network of working class people who share a common, fundamental political understanding that will inform all of our actions and ensure that we remain focussed on our goal: the revolutionary overthrow of capitalism and the creation of genuine socialism.

Rosa Luxemburg described the mass strike as “not an isolated act but a whole period of the class struggle,” and cautioned that therefore “the mass strike cannot be called at will.” She considered further that nothing could be “as idle and profitless and absurd” as making the mass strike or revolution the “object of methodical agitation” and “house-to-house canvassing.”

Yet, she did believe that it was crucial for socialists to organize themselves in advance of any insurgent activity so as to be in a position to provide critical analyses during the period of intensified class struggle that she called “the mass strike.” For while only force is needed to break the hold of an oppressor, doing away with a system of oppression—and replacing it with a truly liberatory mode of human interrelation—requires mindfulness, insight and compassion.

Stand is intended, above all, as a way to engage in Marxist praxis: a means for people to transform themselves through political struggle, to become the new, more humane, more human persons that are essential to the task of building true socialism. One of the ways we propose to do this is by striving to meet real human needs, here and now, without recourse and in explicit opposition to capitalism. As foreshadowed above, this might involve actual construction projects to create shelter or social/cultural spaces—but on reclaimed land, setting at defiance all our politico-economic system's attempts to box us in and fence us out.

There will be other dimensions to Stand's work. We will serve as a means of defence for the working class in current confrontations with the agents of the capital system such as employers, landlords and the police. We will organize in workplaces and at the community level. We will strive continuously to educate ourselves and others about events both in our neighbourhoods and globally.

Stand may begin as a single Local but our purpose is to unite with potential comrades throughout this region. We envision Stand as supporting the autonomous actions of branches while also offering a

way for members from all over the East Coast to come together to coordinate efforts and to constantly sift through ideas to arrive at a collective understanding of each political moment.

Stand represents a new vision of organizing. We are unequivocal in our belief that humanity's hope rests on communism superseding capitalism, and that this can only be accomplished through revolution. We believe further that the only way in which we can contribute meaningfully to this process is by building an ever-expanding network of autonomous but linked groups that share our analysis. We categorically reject so-called democratic centralism and insist on real participatory democracy as the basis of our movement.

We are in this for the long haul. With Stand we acknowledge the scope of the challenge and the uncertainty of the outcome. Exercising optimism of the will, we resolve to help prepare the one way forward that, we trust, history will yet show can be unblocked.