

sasha k

Thirteen Notes on Class Struggle for Discussion

2004

1. Classes have existed since the beginning of civilization. Civilization has always been a class society.
2. Class is not just an economic category, it is social. Class relations structure and discipline the whole of society, not just the economy.
3. Class social relations have always been linked to a series of other oppressions such as patriarchal social relations and different forms of racism.
4. Classes are one of the primary structures organizing all societies since the beginning of civilization, although the form of class has changed through the development of civilization. This development of class society and social relations has always been intimately linked to the development of technology (thus I call society a "socio-technological regime"). As class society develops so too does social specialization and its technologies. A deep critique of society should always include a critique of class social relations and their links to the dominant material culture of that society, including the technologies that it both makes possible and that make it possible.
5. Class struggle has existed since classes have existed.
6. Class struggle exists even when people don't recognize that they are taking part in it. It exists throughout daily life. One of the ways revolutionaries can intervene in class struggle, therefore, is to help people recognize that that is what they are doing. There are many ways to do this and we need to be creative.
7. When revolutionary, the dispossessed class struggles to end the existence of all classes, although often leftist managers of revolt attempt to channel class struggle to recuperate it to capitalist ends in order to put themselves into power over others and into a position to benefit materially. For true revolutionaries those who really attempt to end the rule over life by the state, capitalism and all commodity relations, the discipline of work, patriarchy and the socio-technological regime the auto-destruction of the proletariat/dispossessed as a class is the goal, not for one class (the dispossessed/proletariat) to take over the position of another class (the capitalist or ruling class).
 The point of class struggle is not to claim workers are better people than capitalists, to morally judge each class, or to celebrate one class over another, but to destroy the social institution of classes as a whole. Class struggle originates in the contradiction between our desires and the way class structures limit, control, exclude and exploit our life. Our struggle begins with our desires to live in a different way, to break out of class society's disciplining control. Yet the recuperation of class struggle will continue in various guises as long as class relations exist, but this should not make us give up on class struggle, it should make us more careful in our analysis and more creative in the fight for our lives.

8. Class struggle is always global as is capitalism, but it is often recuperated by nationalist forms. We need to find where the revolutionary content of class struggle pushes to break from the nationalist form and put our force behind such a move. Thus it is not simply a matter of ignoring national liberation movements nor certainly of celebrating them but of critical and revolutionary solidarity with the force of class struggle that pushes for the complete destruction of class relations.
9. The root of class struggle is not to be found in economics. Production is not just economic either: it doesn't only take place in factories, but spreads over society as a process of social production and reproduction that includes the control and discipline of workers as well as all other members of society. It is this whole social factory which produces social roles, relations and subjectivities, disciplines our bodies and our minds, and transforms and controls life itself that we aim to destroy.
 The would-be leftist managers of class struggle usually try to transform class struggle into an economic struggle, a struggle for greater economic power, for a bigger piece of the pie, for a slight reorganization of the economy. This is the basis for the creation of the leftist bureaucracies, parties and unions this is their lifeblood. Yet since classes aren't economic as much as social in character, for class struggle to be truly radical, for it to move towards the ending of classes as such, it must break away from economic goals and from the leftist managers that push them.
 The synthesis of all struggle under one organization makes struggle particularly susceptible to control by leftist managers. Thus for class struggle to maintain its radical force it must remain autonomous, self-managed and self-organized, it must become uncontrolled and uncontrollable, and it must spread and deepen socially. The goal of the dispossessed's revolution is never economic it is anti-economic, it pushes to break out of and destroy economy, all commodity exchange, and the mediation of relationships by all forms of money, ideology and morality.
10. Work is a disciplined behavior within economy. As an activity, it is separated from other aspects of life and into the sphere of economy. As class society has developed and transformed, work has been further and further alienated from our life and our desires. It becomes an activity that disciplines and oppresses us, an activity that we can't control, that instead controls us. The revolutionary class struggle of the dispossessed fights to break all the separations imposed upon us by class society: the separation between ourselves and our activity, between work and play, and between ourselves and those with whom we interact.

11. Within the transforming capitalist system, different regimes of accumulation have organized how the capitalist class accumulates capital through the exploitation of the labor and energy of the exploited, excluded and dispossessed. Regimes of accumulation are different forms of capitalist labor discipline and organization. In the US and much of Europe, most of the 20th century operated under the Fordist regime of accumulation (this is named after Ford's model of production and its ideology was Keynesianism). Beginning in the 1970s, that regime was replaced by the regime of flexible accumulation (temping, no unions, flexible hours, no guaranteed employment or retirement, outsourcing, the end of welfare, no controls on the movement of capital across borders, the increase in importance of global trade and of technologies of communication, surveillance and control, etc.; its reigning ideology is neo-liberalism and it is often referred to as "globalization").
Many other countries are being pushed to take on the cast off Fordist jobs without the Fordist guarantees for workers (this is true of much of the third-world, for example). But the death of Fordism in some countries does not mean the death of class struggle, only its continued global transformation. This means we need to analyze such transformations and our responses, not that we simply give up on class struggle as some within the anti-civilization milieu seem to be suggesting. The regime of flexible accumulation has been accompanied by an increased financialization and privatization of all forms of social life and the increased commodification of life itself as well as a new looting of the third-world. This has shaped the character of present day class struggle. This transformation of capitalism and class relations should point out new targets for intervention (social, material, technological, etc.) and new contradictions of class society to exploit.
12. As anarchists or revolutionaries, it is not up to us to invent, produce or manage class struggle. Class struggle will continue to occur whether we acknowledge it or not. We can intervene in class struggle, but we don't make it up in entirety. The question, therefore, is not whether we should recognize class struggle or not, but always, how do we intervene in class struggle which will continue whether we intervene or not.
13. Since civilization through all its transformations has always been a class society, the destruction of classes as such through the revolutionary class struggle of the dispossessed will always be a central goal of anti-civilization anarchism. This is one aspect that separates revolutionary activity from the bland leftist managers of revolt who often hang around revolutionary movements hoping to discipline and channel the force of class struggle to their own ends, saving capitalism and all its separations and alienations in the process.

Editors' Note: Capital co-opts and so does the Left. Which is not to say that sasha k is even so very leftist. And yet his "Thirteen Notes" express a curious, if predictable, attempt to incorporate what is emerging as a general anti-civ outlook.

Sasha's approach says, in effect, that one can be opposed to civilization without departing from, say, classical anarchism. Basically, he declares that "true revolutionaries" are against the state and capitalism and therefore are anti-civ. But defining civilization in this limited way could also mean that syndicalists, anti-state communists, etc. are likewise against civilization. And they are not. "Thirteen Notes", while sufficiently and clearly expressing some important dynamics of class society, avoids mention of some basic institutions (viz. specialization, and domestication/subjugation of nature) which inaugurate class society and drive it forward on its lethal course. To define civilization so as to omit what seem to be its core features and logic doesn't quite get to the heart of it. But now that green anarchy/anarcho-primitivism is an ascendant vision within anarchist circles, it isn't difficult to imagine some folks wanting to appear anti-civ without having to move from older, less adequate conceptions. Our maybe we're being too picky. What do you think?

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