

# The Structural Crisis and the Centrality of Social Classes

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**Abstract:** At no time in contemporary history has there been such broad recognition that we are experiencing an unprecedented general crisis. There has been a substantive shift in the history of the cyclical crises of the capitalist system in relation to the structural crises, whether in their dire effects for humanity, or in the possibilities created for overcoming this situation. The objective of this article is to present the contributions of Mészáros, following the analysis formulated by Marx, about the foundations of the current crisis in relation to the cyclical crises of the capitalist past, and how social classes are located in this context, particularly that which produces wealth and suffers from social ills.

**Keywords:** Structural crisis of capital. Social Classes. Socialism. Social question.

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## Introduction

At no time in contemporary history has there been such broad recognition that we are experiencing an unprecedented general crisis. The word “crisis” has become part of the daily vocabulary of all classes and generations even if its meaning is grasped in different ways, varying according to class perspective, the position which each country occupies in the social division of labor, by generational experiences and other factors.<sup>1</sup>

The volatility of the measures for resolving the crisis proposed by managers of global capitalism until now have provoked the continuous invention and substitution of economic policies that result in adjustments of political conduct in the interests of capital in the developed countries, in the deepening of the centralization of capital seen in the global ranking of large companies, in the redefinition of relations of economic dependence between the Northern and Southern hemispheres, in the reduction of opportunities for social existence for large human contingents throughout the planet, and in the steering of capital towards a dead-end, maintaining the current trends that are active in the global system.

The character of these measures, which serve more to postpone than overcome the limits faced by the growing accumulation of total social capital, have caused a succession of short and multiple cycles of instability, whose phenomenal expression has been concentrated in the financial sphere, highlighting the determining structure of the crisis. In this way, many analysts of capital have become prisoners of what they call the Global Financial Crisis, looking for the key to the crisis by examining and characterizing its various stages. One economic editor of *The Guardian* (ELLIOTT, 2011) identified the “five key stages” of the global financial crisis, between 2007-2011 with the dates: August 9, 2007, September 15, 2008, April 2, 2009, March 9, 2010 and August 5, 2011. Beginning with the subprime crisis and continuing to the public debt crisis, he affirms that the “five stages” of the “most serious global economic crisis since the Great Depression can be found on these dates.” The systemic crisis, according to this editor, has thus entered a “new dangerous phase” that does not foretell better conditions, given that austerity plans continue to dominate, with no intention to change them, to seek a strategy that favors growth.

The danger of the persistence of the crisis has been analyzed by another analyst from Forbes Magazine, John Kotkin (2011), as stemming from a threatening “class war” provoked by the “growing global abyss between classes, that threatens to weaken capitalism itself.” The old liberal paradigm based on the system of “work and reward” that promised to guarantee opportunities for social progression for all workers has been placed in check. Mature capitalism, now in crisis according to Kotkin, to the contrary, is characterized by provoking a “descent on the social scale even for those who work.”

After more than 40 years of neoliberalism, during which the principle of austerity predominated over social spending and the use of public funds to save the businesses of capital, the results are ominous and terrifying, as they expose the inability of the system to maintain its legitimacy and guarantee human-social reproduction. After all, as Kotkin (2011) warns: “To be credible and socially sustainable, economic systems must provide results to the broad majority of citizens. If capitalism cannot do this, more episodes of violence and greater political alienation can be expected.”

Given the revolt of youth and workers against the perverse effects of the crisis and its management by capitalist states throughout the world, the fear of social unrest has led to a growing use of violence and repression against spontaneous or organized social movements, which has provoked a growing concern of managers of the system to find alternatives to the strategies used until now to combat the crisis. Some understand that it is time to focus on growth, as a new strategy to revitalize capitalism, to substitute the austerity policies that have predominated in recent decades. In reality, this does not involve a substantive change in goals, because all the other neoliberal policies remain active. The discourse changes without changing the foundations.

The dissension is found among the very defenders of capital: austerity or growth. Some allege that it involves a conjunctural crisis of neoliberalism that requires reforms, and a return to state intervention as the motor of growth. An appeal is revived to Keynesian strategy, which supposes that the issue involves a simple financial crisis, and that better regulation would place capitalism on the path of growth and a distribution of wealth, as occurred in the “glorious” past of the Welfare State.

Without understanding what is capital, and therefore the foundations of the crisis of the system as a whole, any intervention or strategy planned, whether in defense of the revitalization of the system or to make a criticism of it seeking to overcome it, will do little to change the course of the trends that constitute the circular self-reproduction of value and the expanded accumulation of capital.

To acquire the capacity to intervene at this peculiar historic moment and take from it emancipatory advantages for the working class, reverting the course towards social disaster announced by the painful conditions of social existence caused by chronic unemployment and the lack of opportunities for survival (or social progress)

for thousands of young people throughout the world, requires a radical deepening of the understanding of the determinants of the crisis and its social repercussions.

The objective of this article is to present the contributions of Mészáros, using an analysis previously formulated by Marx, about the foundations of the current crisis in relation to the cyclical crises of the capitalist past and how social classes are situated in this context.

## 1 The situation of classes in the social maelstrom provoked by the structural crisis

Capitalism is a mode of production that triggered great social and economic transformations in the past. It overwhelmed production based on self-sufficiency and the natural economy, liberated the individual from feudal restrictions, promoted the predominance of human abilities and capacities over the hereditary order and feudal social rigidity based on the possession of landed wealth, and broke down all the traditional barriers that impeded the full development of the productive forces.

Nevertheless, despite the great advance realized in the sphere of political emancipation of individuals, the new mode of production was based upon the constitution of a new society of classes. The individuals emancipated from feudalism came to be submitted to a new social relation, subordinated to a new hierarchy of class, determined by ownership, or not, of the means of the production of wealth expressed in money: capitalists and workers.

Throughout the historic development of capitalism, the condition of class would determine the portion of socially produced wealth that each class could enjoy. This was fundamentally due to the fact that capital is a social relation, and can only be reproduced through the exploitation of salaried work, reserving to the owners of the means of production the “right” to appropriate the surplus labor produced by workers. Workers obtain what is necessary for their reproduction as a working class, and capitalists accumulate their capital in a continuous and expanded manner, so they can remain capitalists and once again purchase labor power – the vital source of social wealth. Therefore, the quality and quantity of the division of wealth to be established is based on the place that each individual occupies in the capitalist productive structure. The determination of class operates both in times of ascension and in times of decline and capitalist crisis.

We can see this antagonistic dependence between the two essential classes, in just a few illustrative indications of the effects of the crisis on workers and capitalists, even if we cannot detail here the different implications that occur intraclasses.

With the crisis of capital, since the early 1970s, there has been a trend towards increased competition in global markets as a means of guaranteeing the accumulation of capital, threatened by a drop in profitability on a global scale. Through countless measures and policies to reorganize the reproduction of total social capital, under neoliberal orientation, a new and brutal concentration and centralization of capital was promoted,<sup>2</sup> as well as a perverse distribution of the burden of the crisis through chronic unemployment and the devaluation and increased precariousness of labor power, which are opposing manifestations of this same movement.

A study published in Switzerland in the summer of 2011, revealed, according to Du Roy (2011, p. 1),<sup>3</sup> that “a group of economic actors – financial companies or industrial groups – dominate the majority of the capital of tens of thousands of the world’s companies.” Of the 43,000 multinational companies listed by the OECD, there is a select group of 737 “‘entities’: banks, insurance companies or large industrial groups,” that account for 80% of the total economic and financial value of the multinationals in the entire world. The authors of the study “raise the problem of the grave consequences of this concentration. That a handful of investment funds and detainers of capital, situated at the heart of these interconnections, decide, at the general shareholder assemblies or by their presence on the boards of directors, to impose restructurings in the companies that they control...and the effects can be devastating.”

This trend towards the concentration of capital, and therefore, of the socially produced wealth, also expands to the periphery of the global market, producing new billionaires in the Southern hemisphere in a proportion never seen before. An article in the *Folha de São Paulo*, entitled *Clube do Bilhão* [Billionaires Club], presents the following information about Brazil: “The number of Brazilians in the billionaires club of the U.S. magazine *Forbes*, doubled in four years: there are already 36 of these fortunate ones” (BARBOSA, 2012, p. 4).

These billionaires are concentrated in the financial sector. Seven of the “afortunado” billionaires are heirs to the original family owners of Brazil’s Itaú and Unibanco banks. Known as an “emergent” country, Brazil occupies a quite privileged position in the world ranking. According to Barbosa (2012, p. 4), “Brazil already has more billionaires than the United Kingdom, France or Japan.” But it is behind other “emergents” because Russia and China “have 90 and 82 billionaires respectively. India has 45.” Strangely, there are no equally positive social indicators for the working populations of these countries and for the rest of the world.

How does the rest of humanity live, those who produce the wealth distributed in this way?

Some indicators from recent studies expose, from the other side of the society of classes, the situation to which the majority of the world's population is submitted. Jean Ziegler (2011), sociology professor in Geneva and the Sorbonne, and a special UN rapporteur about food rights, warns of the existence of "a silent genocide in the world."<sup>4</sup>

Capitalism in crisis had more victims in 2010 than World War II, if all the "evils of development" are combined such as: "hunger, epidemics, and wars induced by multinationals." The data he reported show that "there was a total of more than 58 million victims, according to UN criteria. Two million more than the total number of victims of World War II, which lasted 6 years (ZIEGLER, 2011, p. 1).

The system of opportunities self-regulated by the market and its invisibly benevolent hand, according to the (neo)liberal saying, appears to reserve the opportunity to live for an increasingly reduced portion of society. The historic productive potential of capital has a clear class content and a finality that is quite distant from meeting the social needs most vital to human-social reproduction. The beneficial association between productive progress and generic human development affirmed by the dominant ideology is revealed to be an enormous myth.

According to Ziegler (2011, p. 1), there are 900 million undernourished people in the world, or that is, "nearly one sixth of humanity does not have enough to eat." A significant contributor to this situation is the "dictatorship of financial capital," given that it "creates a world of total inequality, of immense wealth in the hands of some oligarchies who are detainers of this global financial capital, which generates very large wealth for some and immense and progressive misery for the majority.

The food producing capacity of capitalism demystifies any allegation that a scarcity of resources is an impediment to the reversal of this disastrous and inhuman situation. Planetary food production, according to Ziegler (2011), based on data from a UN organization specialized in agriculture, reveals that "global agriculture can now feed 12 billion people," providing "each individual 2,600 calories per day." We can thus feed twice the world's population (6 billion inhabitants). For this reason he questions if the death of someone due to hunger makes that person "a victim of murder and not an unavoidable fatality."

Even those who find means of subsistence through salaried work, and struggle to achieve a better opportunity for living and of access to consumer goods, have not been able to pay the bills by the end of the month with their earnings, staying very close to the line of absolute poverty. In the United States, new terminology has been used to designate the new "working poor". In the words of Castel (1995), a man is poor because he works and not because he is incapable of taking advantage of the opportunities offered by the market. The liberal promise made since Adam Smith that everyone will find happiness in capitalism, has not become a reality, and the worst takes place: in the case of those who "fail," the dominant ideology winds up holding individuals responsible for their miserable situations in life and makes them believe this idea.

The crisis of the capitalist system does not affect everyone equally. It has a clear class significance, going beyond all the barriers and resistance placed by workers in defense of previously conquered rights. The logic inherent to this form of production and distribution of wealth imposes fetishized priorities in which the value of goods automatically increase enormously, while there is an underestimation of social needs, and all production is steered toward the expanded realization of profit. These profits can only be obtained and accumulated through an increase in the appropriation of surplus-value extracted from workers. In this way, all the transformations in productive processes and relations are guided by these objectives. Even when there is an increase in productivity, with the growing development of the productive forces and the intensified exploitation of labor, increasingly less of this productivity returns to workers, as increased salary is offered only in tiny "particles." Another even more perverse effect must be considered: the growth of productivity and the consequent increase of unemployment.<sup>5</sup>

Added to this is the deterioration in working conditions, a condition necessary for increasing productivity and profit, in the context of the crisis of capital. The illusion that the anti-crisis measures taken until now have favored an escape for capital, which will allow it to regain legitimacy based on the slogan "work and compensation" which is so dear to liberalism and the bourgeois order, is quickly unraveled when we see the situation of workers in Germany – the country with the best economic situation in the European Union.

The "miracle of employment" (*jobwunder*), in Germany, which has the lowest level of unemployment in 20 years (6.7%) is sustained by an increase in precarious labor, which has generated a new designation, the so-called "minijobs," or "marginal jobs" (VILA-NOVA, 2012). These jobs are characterized by low salaries, and those who hold them have no right to unemployment insurance, health insurance or pensions. Statistics prove, according to the Hans Bockler Foundation, cited in the same article, that 7.4 million had mini-jobs in Germany in December 2011, "in a universe of nearly 40 million in the labor market," and of these, 51% "depend only on part-time work to survive."

In the past 10 years, according to a study by the German Institute of Economic Research, in the same article, part time jobs have expanded 40% while there was a drop of 700 thousand full time jobs. Although there

was an increase of 1.6 million jobs, the volume of work did not grow, because the average number of hours worked is the same as in the year 2000.

The growth in part time jobs also “occurs around Europe, although at a lower pace.” The German Institute for Economic Research affirmed that “this type of labor increased in the European Union 26% from 2000 – 2010, while full time jobs decreased in this period” (VILA-NOVA, 2012).

If the precariousness of labor, low salaries and social risk are imposed on the survival of thousands of workers in Europe is not enough, another anti-crisis measure has directly attacked workers rights as a stimulus to the recovery of profitability: this is the flexibilization of labor legislation, seeking the reduction of labor “costs” and the facilitation of layoffs for “economic reasons” (RUSSO, 2012). The inevitable result of this policy is: “more layoffs, more short term contracts and lower salaries.” Therefore, “raising the profit of employers,” through these measures, the article concludes, “winds up harming them later on, to the degree that families have less available income (THE GUARDIAN, 2012, p. 18)

This is the vicious circle from which capital has not found an escape, but a deepening of the contradictions of the system as a whole. This is the state of the crisis in which it has been confined for more than 40 years. These are the results of neoliberalism, harmful to the working class, ineffective at meeting the vital needs for the expansion and growing accumulation of capital.

## 2 The cyclical crisis and the structural crisis, according to Mészáros

Since the early 19th century capitalism has undergone countless periodic crises, which expose its incapacity to resolve in a long-lasting way the imbalance between production and consumption, given that this form of production tends to produce much more than can be realized in the sphere of consumption. The reasons for this imbalance vary according to the phase of capitalism in which the crises occur, but they are all characterized as crises of abundance and not of scarcity, as occurred in previous historic periods, due to natural disasters, poor harvests epidemics or war.

Since what motivates capitalist production is the accumulation of capital, whose measure of efficiency and the indication that its strategy is correct is growing profits, social needs become merely a means for the realization of accumulation, and are no longer the ends guiding the use of natural, human and technological resources allocated to capitalist production. The social objective of the transformation of nature, seeking to serve generic human reproduction, is substituted by “the abstract imperative of the ‘realization’ of capital” (MÉSZÁROS, 2002, p. 677). Inter-capitalist competition in global market is what guides and determines the “ideal” scale and productivity of production in individual capitalist units, subordinating to their interests any social goal or objective.

The best known crisis of a cyclical nature is that of 1929-1933, triggered by the crash of the New York Stock Exchange, on Black Thursday October 24, 1929. This type of crisis is presented as a “large storm” and occurred, in the case of 1929, in a situation curiously disguised by the illusory phase of growth that preceded it. Despite the great economic and social disaster that this type of crisis provokes, with bankruptcies, unemployment, destruction of produced wealth, the lowering of salaries, etc, cyclical crises can be resolved, even if simply by delaying measures with temporary effect, within the referential mark of the capitalist system.

A cyclical crisis, like that of 1929, left “a large number of options open to the continued survival of capital, and to its recovery and reconstitution more strongly than ever on an economically healthier and broader basis” (MÉSZÁROS, 2002, p. 793). This period was followed by a new cycle of growth in the rate of profits and economic expansion of the system that was incomparable with previous phases, so that the 30 years that followed World War II came to be known as the golden years of capitalism.

What can be found historically is that the contradictions that appear at the critical moments of this type of crisis can, upon being shifted in a following moment, serve as “levers for exponentially increasing the apparently unlimited self-propelling power of capital” (MÉSZÁROS, 2002, p. 798). Nevertheless, this mechanism of shifting contradictions, because it does not confront the causes of the disequilibrium between production and consumption, but only temporarily manages the inhibitive effects of the accumulation of capital, will soon find a deeper reposition of the same structural problems, presented by the alienating reproductive logic that to expand it is necessary to “radically tear asunder the ‘structural limitations’ of use value as something subordinated to human need and to real consumption” (MÉSZÁROS, 2002, p. 678).

The realization of exchange value necessary to the society that is a producer of goods must go beyond the limits of real human capacity for consumption, creating artificial needs and wasteful consumption and production, intensified by planned obsolescence (reduction of the useful life of goods) thus leading to the depletion of non-renewable natural resources in the foreseeable future. It passes to a new phase of destructive

production of wealth and men, because added to this is the incessant search to increase productivity, technological innovation and the reduction and devaluation of labor power.

Instead of eliminating the historic contradictions of capital, found in its cycle of crises since the 19th century, they became deeper with the failure of the escape valves that the system had been able to use, and the decreasing attenuating effect of its more explosive structural aspects. Although it had achieved success in delaying the shift of the relative limits of the system, capitalism advanced to a new irreversible phase of structural crisis.

For this reason, “productivity itself has become an enormously questionable concept, given that it appears inseparable from a fatal destructivity.” New contradictions appear to be provoked by the “rate of decreasing use” of goods and of men, to the degree to which the structural identity of the worker and consumer has become irreconcilable “the always growing appetite of capital for “mass consumers” and “its always decreasing need for living labor “ (MÉSZÁROS, 2002, p. 527-673).

The abnormality of the crises of the past now comes to be the normality of “organized capitalism.” The peaks of the periodic crises can be substituted by “a linear standard of movement.” The capitalist system “appears to be capable of naturally coexisting with difficulties and emergencies of previously unimaginable magnitudes.” Nevertheless, the absence of disturbances does not mean that there is “healthy and sustained development.” The characteristic movement of the structural crisis is in the direction of a “depressive *continuum*,” and is essentially universal, “cumulative, endemic, more or less permanent and chronic, with a final perspective of an increasingly deeper and accentuated structural crisis” (MÉSZÁROS, 2002, p. 697-698).

The structural crisis, therefore, “affects the totality of a social complex in all its relations with its constituent parts or subcomplexes, as well as the other complexes to which it is articulated” (MÉSZÁROS, 2002, p. 797). Even if it appears in more explosive form in specific sectors, such as the financial crisis of 2008, this is not contrary to its universal nature, because the structural crisis has determined the course and finality of all the spheres of social, economic and political life.

The fact that the crisis acquires more tenuous contours in time and space, or even resolves some of its cyclical difficulties, does not mean that it has altered its essence as a structural crisis. Because the temporary overcoming of its limits and capacity to “turn ‘diffuse’” and defuse the contradictions” does not prevent “the limits of capital from being structurally nontranscendent and its contradictions fundamentally explosive” (MÉSZÁROS, 2002, p. 697).

There is a limit to the ability of internal adjustments to the logic of the system to avoid the deepening and explosions of the contradictions inherent to the destructive self-reproduction of capital, which can lead it to its final structural disintegration. This, however, does not mean that from its remains will appear a possibility for the construction of a radical alternative to capital. Capital, without escape from the structural crisis, will inevitably lead humanity to a destructive conclusion that this system tends to provoke. A viable radical alternative demands the transcendence and substitution of the reproductive logic of capital which, by maintaining its continuous accumulation, has provoked the destruction of accumulated wealth, of men and of nature (MÉSZÁROS, 2002).

It is for this reason that the structural crisis “questions the very existence of the global complex involved, postulating its transcendence and substitution by some alternative complex.” There is a substantive turn in the history of cyclical crises of the capitalist system in relation to the structural crisis, whether in its dire effects for humanity, or in the opportunities for transcendence that it offers. The period of social reforms and expansive conquests of workers’ rights, in the period of ascendance of capital, was overcome by the determinants and necessities established by the structural crisis of capital. According to Mészáros (2002, p. 797), “the shift in contradictions is only possible while the crisis is partial, relative and interiorly manageable by the system, requiring only changes – even if important ones – in the interior of the relatively autonomous system itself.”

**The crisis of the capitalist system does not affect everyone equally. It has a clear class significance, going beyond all the barriers and resistance placed by workers in defense of previously conquered rights. The logic inherent to this form of production and distribution of wealth imposes fetishized priorities in which the value of goods automatically increase enormously ...**

The current developments that prove the aggravation of the foundations of the structural crisis, the inability of its managers to find a lasting solution that drives the system as a whole to a new level of accumulation, the social effects that have led to the unviability of the survival of a growing superfluous population, the devaluation of labor as a means for social existence or social ascension – as was believed to be possible in the past – create an irrefutable challenge to critical social theory and to the strategies of Social Service for fighting the inequality and misery inherent to the class society ruled by capital. The challenge is to construct a social alternative to the capitalist system.

### Final Considerations

As we have argued, the crisis of the capitalist system is structural because capital is not capable of controlling its destructive logic, of providing a solution to the growing social problems and of avoiding the de-stabilizing impacts of the contradictions of its expanded reproduction, propagated at the interior of the very capitalist order.

In the 20th century, the growing inequality cannot be detained by the extension of citizenship and by the liberal democracy that creates opportunities, nor can it be detained by the social conquests achieved by workers, because they were (and should be) absorbed by the state in favor of capital.

The development of the structural crisis since 1970 is what places the order of capital today on the front line of combat of any significant political and social struggle against the exploitation, devaluation and degradation of labor. The objective limits established by the crisis of capital unmasked the reformist illusion of the possibility for positive intervention of the capitalist state for progressive long-lasting and gradual attenuation of economic inequality between labor and capital, which only deepened during the 21st century. It no longer involves disputes only within the sphere of distribution of wealth, because to be limited to this sphere revealed itself to be insufficient for altering the relative position between capital and labor, leaving to the later an increasingly larger contribution to the production of surplus and to capital a larger appropriation and concentration of wealth, inevitable consequences of the expansionist demands of capital.

The recognition of the need to construct an alternative to the capitalist order requires that we are able to combine immediate struggles with more general objectives for the emancipation of labor, because only these can validate the advances or defeats of the workers' struggle. This involves advancing in the process of transition to a social order that overcomes capital.

The specific historic development of the transition is an open question. It depends on how the collective subjects will act in face of concrete historic situations, moved by emancipatory objectives of work, which lead to a sustainable radical alternative to the current state of things. We can foresee only some general orientations, yet essential ones, extracted from historic experiences of the class struggle from the past. What is certain is that reformist illusions about the progressive improvement of capitalism have run their course. The structural crisis exposes the decreasing efficiency of the attenuated administration of the contradictions inherent to the system that threaten the accumulation of global capital, which provoke the limiting of the space of negotiation of class and the loss of material gains of workers, immediate benefits that until now fed the social struggle under a reformist influence (MÉSZÁROS, 2002).

Given the structural crisis of capital and the enormous challenge to revert the perverse social situation resulting from five centuries of capitalism, simple criticisms or a critical clinging to a democratic illusion do not serve anti-capitalist forces.

These principles have led us to repeated failures and disheartening setbacks. There is also no room for sticking to the defense of outdated revolutionary projects, in the new historic circumstances, as if nothing has changed.

A theory of transition to a society without classes, without a state and without capital, requires the revising of the revolutionary project to the new historic conditions of the operation of capital. Many prognoses about the collapse of capitalism have been made since the 19th century, implying a forecasting error by Marx,<sup>6</sup> which often serves an authorization for the repetition of old theoretical schemes, as occurred at the III Communist International (CLAUDÍN, 1985).

Mature capitalism found, since the 19th century, new forms for revitalizing its forces and of intensifying the exploitation of the workforce, distributing through the planet various combined forms of extraction of absolute and relative surplus value. Mészáros (2002, p. 534) points to the fact that in this movement, capitalism provoked “an undeniable shift of the objective historic trends of the ‘classic model’.” This “places in discussion, with a certain urgency, the complications of any transition to socialism, raising with this the need to elaborate specific theories of transition, according to the new modalities of crisis and the changing configuration of the socio-economic conditions and historic circumstances.”

In this light, it is an inevitable prerogative of the social struggle, if we want to radically revert the tendency toward the decline of the material conditions of the working class, that we become capable of understanding these historic determinants of contemporary capitalism and of reconstituting the socialist perspective from the perspective of the times of structural crisis, before it's too late.

The rebellion of youths throughout the world do not leave us many alternatives except to take a position immediately aimed at the radical transformation of the current state of things, which implies overcoming capital. The structural crisis is profoundly damaging to workers, on the other hand, it has “accelerated in an extraordinary manner the intervention of the masses. To the cry “you’ve taken too much from us, now we want everything” European youth” are awaking (HENKEL, 2011).

What side will we be on in an historic moment that makes explicit an inevitable radical class confrontation? The concepts of citizenship and of formal democracy, and the implicit dilution of the concept of class, are being insistently questioned by the current challenges placed before the working class by the structural crisis. Where and how should we invest our energies in the struggle against inequality and poverty? The historic moment requires that we confront not only the expressions of the social question, but that we come to confront with the same determination the cause of economic inequality, which is, the logic of capital and its production and distribution alienated from social wealth.

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## Notas

- 1 This article was the basis for a communication presented at the 13th Enpess held at the Universidade Federal de Juiz de Fora, in 2012.
- 2 These are phenomenon particular to the development of the capitalist system, as presented in *O Capital*, chapter XXIII (MARX, 1984).
- 3 Based on the study *The Network of Global Corporate Control*, by Stefano Battiston, James B. Glattfelder and Stefania Vitali, researchers of the Instituto Federal de Tecnologia de Zurique.???
- 4 In 2013, a Portuguese translation became available of Ziegler’s extensive study in which he looks in depth at the fundamental theses about world hunger. The title of the book is revealing of its dramatic content: *Mass Destruction: the geopolitics of hunger*.
- 5 A study by the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) conducted by Erik Brynjolfsson and Andrew McAfee, found, according to Roman (2013, p. 15), that in the United States, since 2000, “productivity continues to grow but the creation of jobs is weakening.” The allegation that

unemployment caused by increased productivity would only be “momentary unemployment”, because it would be reabsorbed by growth, is no longer sustainable. The result of this phenomenon is the increase of social inequality. The “study shows that, since 1975, the average income of U.S. families grew at a much lower proportion than the GNP. Since 2000, this process has become more visible.”

- 6 According to Mészáros (2002, p. 534) analysis, “as elements of the general perspectives of socialist transformation without a scale of time, Marx’s guiding principles [...] maintain their essential validity until today. The dilemmas arise in the context of temporal changes. They arise in relation to the evaluation of specific socio-economic and political events and of development trends.”

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