



Dignified rage, insubordination and militant optimism

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abstract

This paper seeks to shed light on the Greek uprising of December 2008 by providing an analysis of the events and their significance. It suggests that the Greek revolt was an explosion of anger, sensitivity and indignation: an expression of dignified rage. The insurgents stood on the side of human dignity and insubordination. The paper argues that one of the most considerable successes of the uprising was the active solidarity between the participants and the development of a community of struggle against capital and its state. The Greek insurrection also challenged traditional notions of organisation and defended the unity between the forms of organisation and their content. The paper goes on to argue that the Greek revolt was also significant in terms of understanding movements for social emancipation and readdressing issues of the state, political parties and revolutionary violence. It concludes by suggesting that the insurrection was a 'fire-alarm' for the political and social elites all over the world, and that its effects could be contagious. Yet the hope that it will spread cannot blossom without our everyday radical struggle for social emancipation.

Introduction

Due to Anglo-American intervention, the Greek liberation from Nazi occupation did not entail a period of peace, social stability and economic development. Unlike other European countries, for Greece the end of the Second World War constituted a new period of crises, conflicts, and the first phase of the events which led up to the outbreak of the Greek civil war (1946-1949). Churchill's policy, in combination with the provocations of the Greek right-wing establishment, led to the armed conflict of December 1944, the so-called 'Dekembriana' ('the December events'). On December 3 1944, the Greek Police opened fire on a mass demonstration organized by the leftist movement, killing more than 28 people and injuring 148. The leftist fighters attacked police stations to get small arms and ammunition. Over a month's fighting was set off between the forces of the Greek Communist resistance fighters and the forces of the Greek Government and the British Army. The Greek leftist movement was defeated militarily and, on February 12 1945, a peace agreement ('Varkiza Peace Agreement') was signed between the Greek right-wing government and the 'National Liberation Front/National People's Liberation Army' (EAM/ELAS). The 'Varkiza Agreement' led to the disarmament of the leftist fighters and signalled a period of uncontrolled violence and atrocities against the civilian population and the Greek leftist movement.

64 years later, graffiti on the buildings of Athens read: 'Varkiza Agreement is dead. We are at war again'. Athens – a city of a country which is a member of the European Union – again looked like a 'war zone', according to the mainstream media. On December 6 2008, a policeman shot and killed 15-year-old Alexis Grigoropoulos in cold blood. After the killing of the boy, spontaneous protests began in Athens and within days the insurrection had spread all over the country. The social explosion was a dialectical coincidence of the multilateral crisis of neo-liberalism, the struggle against capital and its state, and the young people's identification with the murdered boy. The Greek unrest brought to the fore the complete failure of neo-liberalism and its severe crisis. The implementation of neo-liberal policies after the demise of the Soviet-type societies resulted in social dislocation and the destruction of social relations. It caused a political, social, moral and cultural degeneration which is without precedent in modern Greek history. The neo-liberal crisis, however, has been caused by the social and political struggles developed over the last 20 years. It is the outcome of a growing opposition and refusal of those who live from the sale of their labour-power to submit passively to the neo-liberal misery and injustice. The struggles against neo-liberal globalization, the emergence of the anti-war movement, the militant mobilizations of workers and farmers, the anti-racist campaigns and solidarity with immigrants, the everyday visible and invisible struggles to develop alternative social relations, to create autonomous spaces or reclaim public spaces, the occupation of state buildings, the student movement and resistance against the privatization of universities and the insurrection in Greek prisons, all of which preceded the December revolt, played an important role in this disintegration of political and economic neo-liberalism. All these movements of struggle and resistance not only undermined the power of capital but also broadened the radical political experience and formed militant political capital which was transmitted to the new generation. As Walter Benjamin (2003a: 390) would say, there was an activist and radical past tradition, which carried with it 'a secret index' and led up to the social explosion.

In a parallel way, the Greek revolt disclosed the fragility of the neo-liberal norms as a means of social cohesion and integration. The young people identified themselves with the young murdered boy and not with the dominant neo-liberal order, and a 'hidden world of insubordination' (Holloway, 2005: 157) arose. They reached 'the zero point' of rage, anger and resentment and this 'zero point' at last became 'the dialectical point of change' (Bloch, 1995: 1358). A confluence of interwoven and interdependent reasons took the form of rejection and confrontation with the established order which caused Alexis Grigoropoulos's death. It was a rejection that was expressed both as 'process of thought as well as of action' (Marcuse, 1978: 446). And the action of the young people of Greece was prompt, explosive and subversive. This paper reflects on the Greek unrest and argues that the Greek unrest was a carnival of the oppressed, a struggle against capital and its state, a struggle for humanity and dignity. It concludes that this struggle contains seeds of the 'new', promotes the project of social autonomy, and allows us to have a militant optimism.

Revolt is the festival of the oppressed

Fear the Wrath of the dead. (Elytis, 1974:42)

The ‘interpretation’ of the Greek youth uprising should not constitute an effort to deal with it as an ‘*object* of social scientific inquiry’. To think of the Greek insurgents as an *object*, as something apart from us, would mean ‘doing violence’ to them, ‘refusing to listen to them’. The Greek young people are not a ‘they’ but a ‘we’ (Holloway, 2002b: 156). It is the revolt of our conscience and sensitivity, our struggle for humanity and dignity. It is our great effort to ‘learn what we already know’, to ‘become what we already are’, to escape our conformism, subordination and compromise by ‘thrusting them into our dreams’ through practice, through revolutionary *praxis* (Vaneigem, 1983: 7). Until the uprising of December, it appeared from the media and the established order that the vast majority of us, the world of the oppressed, had ‘reconciled itself to bitterness’ (Elytis, 1997: 15), to misery, to the loss of its humanity. Given this, not surprisingly capital considers and treats us as commodities, as things, as rootless and baseless ‘quantities’.

In reality, capital draws upon our activity and creativity and at the same time attempts to dehumanize, to reify us. But, ‘reification...can never be wholly realized’ (Castoriadis, 2005: 16). This incomplete reification and the fact that the people in capitalism have been alienated go hand in hand with their struggle against this reification, against their reduction into objects. This imperfect reification constitutes the driving force and at the same time indicates the fragility, the vulnerability and the ultimate contradiction of capitalism. This struggle in and against reification is the decisive characteristic of capitalist society and not the action of economic laws which could lead capitalism to an unavoidable collapse.¹ For capital, we are fragmented, alone, miserable and unchanged. We are conceived as objects, we are a ‘nothing’. Yet, unfortunately for it, ‘a nothing we were, are, shall remain, flowering’ (Celan, 1980a: 142-3).² A nothing which is flowering: perhaps in Celan’s verse we can find the most pertinent description of our struggle against fetishistic ‘thing-ification’. And this ‘blooming’ appears in full in the revolutionary moments, the moments of uprising and revolt which are ‘carnivals in which the individual life celebrates its unification with a regenerated society’ (Vaneigem, 1983: 82). Capital believes that it can control and calculate everything. But it cannot calculate and destroy unpredictable passion, rage and anger. Man is Man because he/she is unpredictable. As Heraclitus put it, ‘one would never discover the limits of soul, should one traverse every road — so deep a measure does it possess’ (Heraclitus, 1987: 33).

After Alexis Grigoropoulos was shot dead by a special guard on Saturday December 6th, spontaneous protests began in Athens and later on the same night in Thessalonica and in

1 On this issue, see the brilliant analyses made by John Holloway (1997: 146-9; 2002d: 27-40; 2002a; 2005: 43-105).

2 ‘Ein Nichts
waren wir, sind wir, werden
wir bleiben, blühend’
Celan P. (1980a: 142-3).

many other big cities. On Monday December 8th, in an outpouring of rage, thousands of high school and university students marched spontaneously and the insurrection took on nationwide dimensions. Thousands of young people, many of them hooded or masked, joined the marches and became involved in a 'battle' with the police. They carried metal bars, stones, petrol bombs, and Molotov cocktails. Protesters confronted the police violently and police cars were overturned and damaged. They attacked police stations all over the country throwing stones, eggs, paint bombs, bottle of waters, fruits, coins, and in some cases they attacked police with flares and Molotov cocktails. Over the following two weeks, young people set up burning barricades across downtown streets and hundreds of banks, shops, big stores and government buildings were attacked, smashed, looted and burned down. Protesters mostly targeted symbols of capitalism, burnt vehicles and smashed windows of luxury hotels and shops, and occupied town halls and ministries. Approximately 600 high schools and over 150 university faculties were also occupied and open, public and popular assemblies were held by the insurgents. Radical actions were carried out in theatres during performances, the studios of state television and even at the Acropolis of Athens. The Greek unrest was distinctive in terms of its mass character, radicalism, explosiveness and rapid spread across the country. Protests and demonstrations, occupations and clashes with the police took place all over the country, even in the more remote and politically conservative areas. It was an indication that 'revolt is inherent in our existence in an oppressive society' (Holloway, 2002c: 199).

The spread and radicalism of the uprising took the right-wing government by surprise. Both government and parliamentary parties — with the exception of the 'Coalition of the Radical Left (SYRIZA)', which took a sympathetic attitude towards the unrest, albeit acting within the framework of state institutions and with certain tendencies within the coalition being hostile towards the uprising — began to panic as the unrest escaped their control. On the other hand, and despite their sectarianism and fragmentation, anarchists, anti-authoritarians, libertarian communists and autonomists joined the revolt and wholeheartedly supported it. As for the extra-parliamentary and anti-capitalist political groups, some of them were sympathetic towards the unrest and members of their rank and file tried to play an active role within the insurrection. Other minor Leninist, Trotskyist and orthodox Marxist groups, however, adopted an ambivalent and contradictory attitude towards the Greek revolt. They were greatly surprised by the dynamism and radicalism of the insurgents. Their major objections had to do with the violent radicalism and spontaneity of the revolt and its apparent lack of political demands. For this reason, while thousands of young people were building barricades against the police and were fighting against capital and the state, these minor leftist groups attempted to give the unrest an 'explicitly political tone' by making a number of 'concrete proposals', such as calling for the resignation of the government and the disarmament of the police.

Yet the most hostile and conservative attitude towards the uprising was taken by the Greek Communist Party (KKE). A mere shadow of its former militant self, it could be labeled as Communist or Marxist only very loosely. As Marx (1991a: 113) put it, 'in historical struggles one must... distinguish the language and the imaginary aspirations of parties from their real organism and their real interests, their conception of themselves from their reality'. In practice, the Greek Communist Party has been

reduced to a Stalinist-Leninist Party, a completely reactionary and repressive organization. In its political program, not only does it defend the Stalinist period but also considers the abandonment of the Stalinist model as the fundamental reason for the collapse of the Soviet Union. On a theoretical level, the Greek Communist Party has recently completed the publication of Stalin's *Collected Works*, while significant texts by Marx are lacking or have been published by other political currents and publishers. There is also a notable absence of publications of other important Marxist writers such as Lukács, Luxembourg, Korsch and Gramsci. In view of this, unsurprisingly, the Greek Stalinists not only supported the Greek right-wing government with their policy, but they stated through their general secretary, Al Pappariga, that 'the molotov cocktails (fire-bombs) and looting of the hooded individuals' are 'linked with the state secret services and centers abroad' and it is a conspiracy of foreign agents acting as provocateurs to undermine the Greek labour movement.³ According to the leader of the Greek Stalinists, 'what some parties call a "popular uprising" is the ridiculing and vulgarisation of popular uprisings. A real uprising will have as its starting point the workers, wage-earners and youth. Not even one window will be smashed. It will have demands and goals, it will have a political purpose, it will not merely be indignation.'⁴ She went on to say that a genuine popular uprising does not want to destroy capitalist banks, machines and enterprises but to transform them into popular property. Stalinists attacked the 'blind violence of the hooded persons' and argued that the 'the core of the so-called "anti-power" forces' aims to 'defame the organised struggle and movement and appear as a painless substitute for class struggle'. Finally, Greek Stalinists argued that they struggle 'without a mask' and came to conclude that 'we know very well that many of these youths will come to be mature and think calmly'.⁵

The stance taken by the Greek Stalinists is indicative of the tragic outcome of vulgar 'Marxism' and epitomizes the role that orthodox Marxism has played in the history of the labour and radical movement as an enemy of critical thought and revolutionary practice: 'Masked and hooded individuals linked with the state secret services and centers abroad'; 'in a real uprising...not even one window will be smashed'; and most importantly, we have 'to be mature and think calmly'. Not surprisingly, conservative newspapers wrote that, if the right-wing government proved to be unable to quell social disorder, then the Greek Communist Party had to be called on to impose some order on the chaos of the whole country.⁶ Meanwhile, the Greek government was thinking of

3 Interview with KKE leader Pappariga, <http://www.ana-mpa.gr/anaweb/user/showplain?maindoc=7126121&maindocimg=7124323&service=102>.

4 See her speech issued in Rizospastis, the Party's newspaper, on 23/12/2008 <http://www1.rizospastis.gr/page.do?publDate=23/12/2008&id=10466&pageNo=6&direction=1>.

5 'Speech of the General Secretary of KKE, comrade Al Pappariga, delivered at the big rally organised by KKE in Athens on 8th December, after the murder of Alexandros Grigoropoulos by the police', Available at <http://inter.kke.gr/News/2008news/speech-aleka>.

6 For example, on December 10th 2009, the newspaper *Αδέσμευτος Τύπος* had its front page covered by the photograph of the General Secretary of KKE, Al Pappariga, and her statements according to which the harsh hooded young people act on the commands of Greek or foreign para-state centres. In the same vein, the newspaper *Αυριανή* on December 15th praised the Greek Communist Party as it was the only organized political force which had the nerve to publicly denounce the hooded and came into conflict with these provocateurs, who aimed at the destabilization of the country. Taking a step further, the same newspaper on its front page on December 19th wrote that if the government

declaring ‘a state of emergency’ while the police brutality against the insurgents took on unprecedented dimensions. More than 270 people were arrested and the last prisoner was released at the end of August 2009. At least 70 immigrants who were arrested during the uprising got 18 months imprisonment and are being deported, while in the city of Larissa 19 people, among them students aged between 14 and 16 years old, are being prosecuted under anti-terrorist law.⁷ On Monday 22nd December, Konstantina Kouneva, immigrant and trade unionist, the secretary of the Greek Trade Union of Cleaners and Housekeepers, was attacked with sulphuric acid because of her unionist action and was hospitalized in a critical condition, continuing to fight for her life. Assassinations, brutal state violence, state terrorism, prosecutions, imprisonments and deportations: ‘the tradition of the oppressed teaches us that the “state of emergency” in which we live is not the exception but the rule’ (Benjamin, 2003a: 392).

And the thousands of hooded and masked individuals who joined the uprising en masse? Who were they? Where did they come from? Where did they go after the insurrection? Orthodox Marxists spend much of their time in an attempt to define the revolutionary subject of the forthcoming revolution and they are unable and unwilling to understand that the revolutionary subject is formed through a continuous struggle against capital and its state, and that ‘the social composition of this subject will depend on those who stand on the side of human emancipation’ (Bonefeld, 2004). The revolutionary subject, the ‘material reality of anti-power’ (Holloway, 2005: 155) was ‘there’, in the Greek revolt, was present in the battles against capital and the capitalist state. The arrests made by the police showed that the people who ‘were not mature and did not think calmly’ during the insurrection were ‘ordinary people, that is to say, rebels’ (Holloway, 2005: 158): working men and women, unemployed people, migrants, high school and university students, football fans and Romanies. We were those who are ‘invisible’ to the world of capital, those whose struggle ‘is the struggle of those without face’, those who ‘cover our face so that we can be seen’. As Zapatistas put it, ‘behind the balaclava are the we that are you’.⁸ We are the ‘stifled’, ‘silent volcano’, the ‘hidden world of insubordination’ (Holloway, 2005: 156, 157) who are both subordinate to capital and insubordinate against it, who reinforce capitalism and negate it. As one of the slogans of the insurgents put it, ‘We are here’, our sensitivity is here, our dignity is still alive and we know that we must scream, we must resist and refuse in order to affirm our humanity. And it is this ‘substratum of resistance that exists in any oppressive society’, this ‘substratum of negativity which, though generally invisible, can flare up in moments of acute social tension. This substratum of negativity is the stuff that social volcanoes are made of. This layer of inarticulate non-subordination, without face, without voice, so often despised by the “Left” is the materiality of anti-power, the basis of hope’ (Holloway, 2005: 159-60).

Throughout the Greek uprising, the violence perpetrated by the capitalist state against those who resist and negate capital was extreme and brutal to an unprecedented extent. Not accidentally, one of the most popular graffiti and chants during the protests was

and police are incompetent, then the Greek Communist Party has to restore order and guard democracy.

7 See newspaper *Ελευθεροτυπία*, 29/01/2009.

8 Quoted in John Holloway (2002b: 160).

‘cops, pigs, murderers’. As Marx vividly put it, ‘the civilization and justice of bourgeois order comes out in its lurid light whenever the slaves and drudges of that order rise against their masters. Then this civilization and justice stand forth as undisguised savagery and lawless revenge’ (Marx, 1991b: 288). Against the capitalist violence of suppression, the insurgents had no respect for the bourgeois law or property, but for what is right. They did not serve the capitalist state, but they serve humanity with their conscience.⁹ And as Thoreau argued, ‘action from principle, the perception and the performance of right, changes things and relations; it is essentially revolutionary’ (Thoreau, 1960: 242). Capital exercises violence on every aspect of this society; it is responsible for the deaths of thousands of people on a global scale and at the same time, as Marx would say, ‘is convulsed by horror at the desecration of bricks and mortar!’ (Marx, 1991b: 289) ‘Administrative violence’ (Benjamin, 2003b: 252), that is to say, the bourgeoisie’s violence of suppression, ‘is bloody power over mere life for its own life’; on the other hand, the violence of the protesters was ‘pure power over all life for the sake of the living’ (Benjamin, 2003b: 250).

Towards a real state of emergency: being immature and thinking insubordinately

The analysis of the Greek youth revolt made by the bourgeoisie, media and political parties in terms of its meaning and importance constitutes an effort to rewrite its history, to falsify its struggle and to distort the meaning of events. They attempt to present the uprising as an isolated and unpleasant incident, as a temporary episode. Thus they intentionally refuse to accept that the Greek revolt belongs to the revolutionary tradition of the oppressed and it is part of this ‘discontinuous series of rare moments in which the chain of domination has been broken’ (Löwy, 2005: 106). They do not want to see that it continues a great Greek revolutionary tradition which started at the beginning of the last century, passing through the heroic Greek Resistance (1941-44), the Greek Civil War (1946-49), the youth and student movement during the 1960s, the uprising against the military dictatorship (1973), and is still kept alive. The Greek revolt was not spontaneous since ‘no historical action is “spontaneous” in the sense of arising in a vacuum, of being totally unrelated to its conditions, its environment, its past’ (Castoriadis, 1993: 257). At the same time, the Greek revolt was spontaneous in the sense that, as radical historical action, it was ‘creation — and this means emergence of that which is not already contained in its “causes”, “conditions,”...which is not repetition, neither *stricto sensu* nor in the sense of a “variant” of the already given, but position of new forms and figures and of new meanings— that is, *self-institution*’ (Castoriadis, 1993: 257). By extension and paraphrasing Marx, one would say that the greatest significance of the Greek revolt was its own existence.¹⁰ The insurgents need now to be aware of what they have already done, to become conscious of the achievements of their uprising which are their own work.¹¹

9 On the difference between ‘law’ and ‘right’, see Henry David Thoreau (1960: 236, 237).

10 Marx wrote of the Commune that ‘the great social measure of the Commune was its own working existence’. (Marx, 1991b: 280).

11 See a similar point on May ’68 in France in René Viénet, (1992:100).

In this respect, one of the most considerable successes of the unrest was the active solidarity among high school and university students, migrants, professionals and workers. As a result, the participants went through a remarkable process of resocialization, anti-sectarianism and openness. When all these different social groups demonstrated together on the streets of Athens and assembled to make collective decisions, the most important outcome of their struggles is what Holloway describes as ‘the development of a community of struggle, a collective doing characterised by its opposition to capitalist forms of social relations’ and these moments of struggle organized through events are ‘flashes against fetishism, festivals of the non-subordinate, carnivals of the oppressed’ (Holloway, 2005: 208, 215). At these moments against fetishism, people struggle to overcome their fragmentation, to defeat their perverted social relations and to find ways of self-determination. With their initiatives, radical actions and autonomous activity the insurgents broke the monotonous continuity of their everyday life, the endless reiteration of the same and unchanged situations and connected themselves with the demands and objectives of the past struggles of the oppressed and exploited.

This process of re-socialization and openness was particularly evident in the critical and active solidarity developed between Marxists and anarchists during the social unrest. Hitherto, the polemic between the two currents has become synonymous with ideological monolithism, intolerance, and exclusiveness. Having lost a large part of their radical or revolutionary character, both sides are imbued with sectarianism, overemphasizing their ‘unbridgeable differences’. Most of the time they seek their points of reference and their ‘reasons for being’ not in what they have in common but in what distinguishes and differentiates them. The uprising showed that the prevailing way of perceiving this conflict should not be accepted unthinkingly and from mere habit. The hostility between Marxism and anarchism should not be interpreted as natural, immutable, and eternal. Through their participation in the uprising, both rank and file Marxists and anarchists marked out an area of discussion, united action, tolerance, critical solidarity, and even synthesis between the two opposing currents. And they both did this without necessarily always aware of it. This solidarity between Marxists and Anarchists and the development of a community of struggle was also clearly and decisively expressed through common actions to support, defend and release the 270 people who were arrested during the revolt. The last example of solidarity and collective action between Marxists and anarchists was the common struggle aimed at securing the release of the last prisoner of December’s revolt, Thodoris Iliopoulos, who was on hunger strike for 48 days until the end of August 2009. Both Marxists and anarchists organized solidarity campaigns, such as protests or concerts, and contributed in a determined way to his release.

The social unrest also posed the question regarding the forms of organization in an emancipatory movement and the means-end relationship. Indeed, another moment of struggle against fetishism, fragmentation and sectarianism was the formation of ‘*open popular assemblies*’ during the revolt. It is true that in many cases these assemblies were not large-scale and remained marginal. In some of them, the situation was chaotic and debates were confused, protracted and redundant. Orthodox Marxists, Marxist-Leninists, Trotskyists and radical leftists who participated in them repeatedly expressed their views on the need for a revolutionary party as an organized vanguard of the

working class. Or they questioned the political orientation of the uprising and the non-participation (according to them) of the working class. On most occasions, the defect of these Orthodox Marxists and Leftist individuals and groups who participated in them was, as René Viénet (1992: 105) would say, 'to draw their proud experience from past working-class defeats, and never from the new conditions and new style of the struggle which they ignored on principle. They repeated their usual *ideology* in the same boring tone that they had used during one or two decades of inactivity. They seemed to perceive nothing new... They had seen it all before'. On the other hand, many anarchist and anti-authoritarian individuals and groups remained hostage to their fragmentation and sectarianism. In many cases, they fetishized violence and promoted life-style anarchism. However, both Marxists and anarchists with their participation in open assemblies unconsciously criticized and rejected in practice the traditional organizational forms that usually characterize the radical movement.

Open assemblies were formed in almost every city and covered the whole country. The emergence of the organizational form of the assembly, which was hardly part of the militant tradition in Greece, entails a radical break with the Leninist tradition of the revolutionary party. It is a considerable contribution to our struggle for finding the appropriate means towards the goal of social emancipation. Assemblies were not hierarchical but based on direct democracy, giving everyone the opportunity to participate and discuss issues. There were neither leaders nor 'revolutionary professionals'. Thousands of young people joined and promoted vigorous debate. The existence, role and function of these assemblies not only defended the unity between the forms of organization and the content of social emancipation, but they also called for a critical reflection upon the means-end relationship. Undoubtedly, there is still a long way to go in this process of reconsidering the means-end relationship. The assemblies need to be expanded and adopted by other concrete collectivities. Most importantly, we still need to learn how to listen, how to talk and how to tolerate, think and reflect upon different views. Yet, despite the fact that the question of organization is not a simple one, open popular assemblies are one step towards a form of self-organizing movement that does not separate the end from the means, with the aim of moving from revolt to revolution.

New ways of organizing also impacted on the way the youths organized their marches and radical actions. The role of the internet in the interlinking of previously unrelated groups was immense and allowed the activists to self-organize in a very short period of time. The extensive use of the internet as the platform for what Harry Cleaver termed 'contro-informazione (counter-information)', for information that 'is opposed to the official reports of governments and commercial mass media' (Cleaver, 1998: 84), is a lesson that activists have learnt through their involvement in previous mobilizations, notably the struggles against neo-liberal globalization. The existing activist websites and blogs, along with mobile phones and cyber-environments such as Facebook, became the media through which the young people organized themselves. The Facebook group 'Alexandros Grigoropoulos', to take an example, was formed the day after he was killed and attracted thousands of members (over 130,000 by February 15th 2009). These means permitted the activists to self-organize in non-hierarchical networks and, together with open assemblies, a lesson was given to both Marxists and anarchists about how the negation of capital and the state has to be organized. The use of

electronic forms of organizations, however, did not replace physical actions and direct connection as most groups and individuals met in assemblies and occupied buildings, streets and squares.

On the street, the Greek youth opposed any political superstition and fetishism of the state and its role. Contrary to the orthodox Marxist critiques of the uprising, the anti-state practices of the movement were a useful reminder that, before developing his critique on political economy in *Capital*, Marx first did away with the foundations of the 'political superstition' and the 'fetishist' faith in the State. For Marx, the critique of the State precedes both logically and chronologically the critique of political economy. Greek orthodox Marxists tend to neglect or simply ignore Marx's anti-statist and libertarian aspects. As Maximilien Rubel wrote, in Marx's writings 'the critic of politics comes prior to the critic of political economy... In his theory, the negation of the state is prior to the negation of capital, anarchism prior to communism'.¹² In this sense, the Greek uprising and its anti-state tendencies forces anti-capitalists, radical leftists, Marxists and anarchists to reflect anew on the problem of state and extra-institutional opposition. For Marxists, the question concerns the reconsideration of the principle which argues that social emancipation can be achieved through the state and its institutions. The insurgents through their practical and autonomous activity, embodied in radical actions and new organizational forms, reaffirmed the need to struggle against capital outside of state institutions. On the other hand, the revolt brought to the fore the inadequate and dogmatic perception about the state espoused by anarchists. It showed how problematic the anarchist perception and confrontation with the state is, given the fact that it is seen by anarchists as a 'thing' and not as a historically specific form that expresses concrete social relations. For them, most of the time the state takes tangible forms and is personified in the face of policemen, police cars and police stations which should be attacked and smashed from outside by means of violence.

Likewise, the events of December made it obvious that the insurgents rejected and transcended hierarchical and repressive organizations such as political parties and trade unions. The uprising proved in practice, once again, that 'the very expression "revolutionary party" is a contradiction in terms' (Pannekoek, 1936). Lukács' words could very eloquently express both the views held and the role played by Greek Stalinists and orthodox Marxist groups throughout the revolt: 'To a vulgar Marxist, the foundations of bourgeois society are so unshakeable that, even when they are most visibly shaking, he only hopes and prays for a return to "normality", sees its crises as temporary episodes, and regards a struggle even at such times as an irrational and irresponsible rebellion against the ever-invincible capitalist system. To him, the fighters on the barricades are madmen' (Lukács, 1970: 11). These thousands of 'madmen', 'immature', 'irrational' and 'irresponsible' young people who fought on the barricades had become conscious that the 'Left', in all its parliamentary and extra-parliamentary versions, 'tolerate[s] spontaneity only as the result of [its] own power' (Horkheimer, 1978: 98), with the purpose of institutionalizing it or reaping electoral gains.

Amid the insurrection, orthodox Marxists and Leftist parties remained both in theory and practice hostage to their Leninist, Maoist or Trotskyist perception of the world and

12 Quoted in Kevin Anderson (1997: 162).

understanding of anti-capitalist struggle. Incapable of interpreting the world of revolt, they appeared to be completely incompetent at dealing with the practical questions of the revolt and comprehending social human practice. Having been deeply immersed in their orthodox presuppositions and certainties, vulgar Marxists attempted to incorporate any social radicalism into their preconceived conceptions of class struggle and revolution. For this reason, young people are becoming increasingly aware of the fact that capital and the capitalist state have to fear the opposing left parties 'only as competitors' who 'would only replace the existing rulers' (Horkheimer, 1978: 103). The insurgents, working men and women, students and unemployed, 'have learned that they have nothing to expect from those who called them out from time to time, only to send them home again, but more of the same — even after a victory' (Horkheimer, 1978: 104). They are coming more and more to the point of understanding that the organization of their lives and struggles must be their own work and realizing that they have nothing to expect from all those Leftist politicians, bureaucrats and 'revolutionary professionals' who have become 'voyeurs of the working class, spectators of their own shelved potential' (Vaneigem, 1983: 215).

In contradistinction to 'mature' Leftist 'voyeurs' of the Greek revolt, the insurgents confirmed that 'clearly the weapon of criticism cannot replace the criticism of weapons' (Marx, 1992: 251). They re-affirmed what we already knew from the tradition of the oppressed and their heroic struggles, namely, that 'without the criticism of arms, the arms of criticism are but weapons of suicide' (Vaneigem, 1983: 214). The issue of revolutionary violence was located at the epicenter of the debates as it had widely become clear that 'preaching nonviolence on principle reproduces the existing institutionalized violence' (Marcuse, 1967). It challenged the orthodox Marxist and Leftist positions, which support the need to march peacefully through state institutions in order to bring about a radical social change. It also drew a sharp line with the fetishisation of violence from the side of anarchists. But the issue of the revolutionary violence was not the only one that came up during the revolt. One of its most considerable achievements was the vast movement of politicization and re-politicization that occurred and spread throughout large parts of Greek society. The unrest shifted the everyday agenda by provoking theoretical and political discussions, and recalled debates, concepts and 'words being crippled together'¹³ (Celan, 1980b: 150-1) with us: rebellion, solidarity, collectivity, comradeship, self-organization, councilist organization, dignity, insubordination, class struggle and revolution. The uprising 'interrupted the course of the world' (Benjamin, 2006: 145), it broke up the repetitious cycles of everyday life and practice, it ruptured the 'time of the state form', and it produced 'its own temporality', which is the time of dignity and insubordination (Tischler, 2005: 231). The Greek social unrest built up a social and historical

13 Ihr meine mit mir ver-
Krüppelnden Worte, ihr
Meine geraden
[You my words being crippled
together with me, you
my hale ones]
(Celan, 1980b: 150-1).

experience, which was based on the self-mobilization and self-activity of the people negating the established institutions of the neo-liberal society and breaking with the idea of professionalized politics. It also defended the 'unity of reason and conscience', and this unity contributed – albeit temporarily – to a destruction of capitalist mystifications and to a better 'understanding of the meanings of things, of man, and of reality' (Kosík, 1995b: 14, 15). It was an attempt to regain and bring the 'essential' back into our lives against the efforts made by capital to impose upon us 'the unessential and the accumulation of the unimportant' (Kosík, 1995a: 49).

What is distinctive about the Greek uprising, however, is the 'violence of the negative' (Viénet, 1992: 71), the power of rage, the power of refusal, of negative thinking and practice. The Greek civil unrest did not seek to improve the existing societal conditions by the seizure of political power. It did not have any reformist demands; it did not fight for better salaries or for improving the existing political system; it did not operate constructively; it did not contain itself within the limits of the capitalist system. But then, where was the positive? The positive is found in its negation of capital and the state, the negation of the commodity system and its political power. The Greek uprising was ignited by the explosive power of 'destructive critique' (Agnoli, 2003: 25-33), and the motto 'doubt everything' was omnipresent within the insurrection. The insurgents doubted the existing 'system of order' and demanded its destruction. They negated the established state of affairs, and therefore their negation was determinate. They fought against the imposition of neo-liberal values and their false morality. Their negation was a positive and destructive act, and 'a determinate negation is ultimately a political negation' (Marcuse, 1978: 449). Their critique operated outside the rules, norms and limitations of liberal parliamentary democracy in its attack on the capitalist status quo and all its structures of inequality, subordination and power. They acted extra-institutionally and without participating in state politics but within society. This is why the Greek revolt cannot be integrated within the system. The insurgents were neither defeated nor reconciled. The capitalist order now has great difficulties in understanding what happened, to comprehend the social explosion. Capital has got into a state of panic and fear: Radical social change has again been posed as a question. Happy New Fear!

The spectre of the Greek uprising is haunting capital and the political establishments of liberal countries all over the world and, in particular, the EU member states. Since the beginning of the insurrection, concerns and fears about the spread of the unrest have been intense among the economic and political elites. Anti-government street clashes have already occurred in Iceland, Latvia, Lithuania and Bulgaria. The French government expressed fears about the unrest extending into France. Nicolas Sarkozy, The French President, cancelled his planned educational reform because he was worried that the 'Greek syndrome' could spread across Europe. The social unrest in Guadalupe was reminiscent of the Greek revolt and confirmed the French establishment's worst fears. However, their fears are our hopes.

Until now, the political and economic elites seem unable to comprehend the changing world, to fully grasp the 'fire alarm' sent to them by the Greek uprising. By focusing on the existing and growing economic crisis, they appear not to perceive the multidimensional character of neo-liberal disintegration. They want to attribute social explosions or the current economic crisis to distorted applications of neo-liberal

policies. But neo-liberal economic policies, even when properly implemented, always result in the working classes living in a state of permanent crisis, poverty, insecurity, wretchedness and oppression. Global capital and its political representatives appear not to understand the depth and systemic character of the crisis and the end of the neo-liberal social and economic model. They do not want to see the outcomes of their policies, that is to say, the accumulation of oppression, rage, anger, misery and despair among the working classes. They refuse to notice the millions of silent volcanoes or to think about the massive spread of social, moral, and mental degradation or the mental diseases their policies have caused.

From a radical perspective, one could say that this is good news. When the rulers and the exploiters cannot comprehend the world and the exploited and the oppressed have started to disidentify themselves with the ruling ideas or when they start to realize the magnitude of the neo-liberal deception, then revolutionary situations could arise. The 'Greek syndrome' could spread across all of Europe, in Africa, in China, and in India. This is why right- and left-wing professional politicians try to pass over in silence what happened in Greece. They make an effort to defame the Greek insurrection, to conceal its radical character and to repress its significance. However, the most honorable recognition for the Greek revolt came from the Zapatistas through the words of Subcomandante Marcos: 'Comrade woman, comrade man. Revolted Greece. We, the smallest ones, from this side of world, salute you. Accept our respect and our admiration for what you think and do. From far away, we learn from you. We thank you.'¹⁴ But the respect and the admiration is deep and mutual! We all learnt from the Zapatistas' uprising. They opened the way and their revolt comes from the future and not from the 'left melancholy' that marked the close of the last century.

Revolts are contagious. Or better, they could be contagious. However, there is no certainty, no naïve optimism (Bloch, 1996: 16; Bonefeld, 2004). It depends on our struggles all over the world, whether or not the Greek revolt will be catching. It will depend on our social fights and our radical activity, our ability to produce a 'real state of emergency', to respond to the crisis of capital with a 'revolution from below' and not to allow a self-transformation of capital through a 'revolution from above'. The hope does not lie in Obama but in the radicalism of the Greek revolt. In this respect, the Greek unrest allows us to have a 'militant optimism' (Bloch, 1995: 1372). Yet this hope is not a certainty. In the words of Ernst Bloch, 'if it could not be disappointed, it would not be hope. That is part of it... Hope is critical and can be disappointed. However, hope still nails a flag on the mast, even in decline, in that the decline is not accepted, even when this decline is still strong' (Bloch, 1996: 16-17). The parents of the murdered boy, Alexis Grigoropoulos, engraved on their son's tombstone lines from *Hamlet*: 'Had I but time...oh I could tell you...I am dead, thou livest; report me and my cause aright to the unsatisfied'. For all those innocent young 'princes' who die murdered by capital and its

14 Subcomandante Marcos [EZLN], MENSAJE a Grecia rebelde: Compañera, compañero. Grecia rebelde. Nosotros, los mas pequeños, de esta rincon del mundo, te saludamos. Recibe nuestro respecto y nuestra admiración por lo que piensas y haces. Desde lejos aprendemos de ti. Gracias. *Subcomandante Marcos 1er FESTIVAL MUNDIAL DE LA DIGNA RABIA. Mexico, Diciembre 2008.*

state in battles which are not even given, murdered with their faces marked with weakness and woe,¹⁵ the Greek revolt nails a flag on the mast.

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15 The expression is taken from William Blake's poem 'London' from *Songs of Experience*.

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