

REVOLUTION

DESTRUCTION
SPRING
ARAB

NEOFASCISM
(not populism)

renewal
revolutionary thought

SCATTERED TO UNDER THE SITUATION

EXTINCT/ING

1968

COLONIALISM
MORNING

LITERATURE

WHOSE HISTORY?

MUSEUMS
APPROXISM

DECOLONIZATION

Kurdish movement
artistic strategy

DEMOCRATIZE

SUBJECT TIME

WHEN
gender
gender

REFR
MOD

WE MUST TAKE TIME

REQUIRE THE MUSEUM

CHALLENGE THE 1960S

survival of the colonial subject
less narrative

ANTHROPOLOGICAL POSITION

ETHNICITY IN DISCUSSION

RACISM

PLURAL

CHARITAL PROBLEMS

PUBLIC

MAY YOU LIVE IN INTEREST

PROLOGUE TO **RED DISCUSSION 2**
PAVILION OF THE REPUBLIC OF NORTH MACEDONIA
AT THE 58TH INTERNATIONAL ART EXHIBITION
- LA BIENNALE DI VENEZIA

**FROM THE CORE TO THE PERIPHERY:
ON THE AESTHETIC FORM OF WORKERS**
ESSAY BY
ARTAN SADIKU

The ideological separation in Europe that came as a result of the rupture that emerged in the 'Eastern part', which enabled a break with the continuity of bourgeois politics, culture and social organization, represented a proper political terrain for a multitude of various contestations. The most significant difference between these two blocs, which is also a conceptual reference, was present in the aesthetic form that determined the social/political domain. Western liberal capitalist societies continued to 'progress' within the political frames set up by bourgeois movements, several centuries ago. It was the concept of the citizen and parliamentary representative democracy around which the political life oscillated, without any contestation of the pertinent mode of production and modes of ownership. In the Eastern bloc, we experienced the most genuine attempt at substituting the inherited political model with a new social reorganization of politics, which would address that which determines it in the last instance – the mode of production. Because it is always the work of the labor that produces, the economy is a necessary manifestation of the labor-time relation, and the appearance of these new political formations in the East, structuring the politics around the working class as its immediate social reference. Thus, the aesthetic form of the social/political in the Eastern countries, made an attempt at being determined by the plane of consistency, which belonged to the workers.

The appearance of workers on the historical stage as the dominant visible part of what we call the social, represents the first major attempt in the history of humankind at structuring its collectives in the form of a model that constantly evades the terrain of capitalist production – a socialist model. Being absolutely aware of the setbacks that the socialist models experienced in the previous century – mostly relating to the fact that they lapsed and remained within the framework of the state capitalist model – the aesthetic of the social/political was, however, one that was a beneficial setting for moving beyond the capitalist mode. When we use the concept of *aesthetics* to describe the differences between the social/political of the former East and West, we do so in the way in which Rancière describes the presence of aesthetics at the core of politics. Namely, he describes it as a "delimitation of spaces and times, of the visible and the invisible, of speech and noise, that simultaneously determines the place and the stakes of politics as a form of experience" (Rancière, 2013: 8). Therefore, the place and the stakes of politics in the socialist countries took the form of the workers' experience, their visibility and speech. In the countries of the Western bloc, politics was continually shaping itself in a form that excluded the workers' experience, their visibility and speech.

The transition process in the 'East' was aimed at structurally transforming society through a dismantling of the structures that resembled the aesthetics of the social/political of the socialist period. This process was carried out under the guise of a universal promise of freedom, a freedom that was allegedly repressed by the socialist state apparatuses, and which was about to be realized primarily through the implementation of the free market principle, which, as the main societal drive of development, would generate and disseminate freedom throughout society. This promise of freedom performed the substantial ideological exercise of interpellation for individuals who found themselves not only embracing a new ideology, but also representing the apparatuses of its reproduction. The trouble with the use of the term ideology, with which the Balkan societies were quite overwhelmed, was solved through the employment of the already invented vision of the post-ideological societies and world, which, on the other hand, represents the most sublime ideological claim (Žižek 1989: 27-31). The main political ideal in the undertaking of the transition in the 'East', embarked on the Fukuyaman claim of the end of history, thus providing itself with a universal legitimacy as a result of

the prevailing neoliberal ideology across the globe. Thus, a tension was inscribed in the midst of the inherited aesthetic form of the social/political, a tension that aims to remove workers from the social/political domain as a historical plane. This was the main aesthetic performance of the ideology of the end – the end of workers' visibility and speech.

The ideology of 'the end' established itself as a form of obstacle to collective social progress in two ways. Firstly, it introduced the model of individuated subjectivity through reinstalling the concept of the citizen – the bearer of the politics of kitsch, a politics of variations within simulated interests, without a delimited space for any collective. Secondly, it killed every possibility for further imagining and rethinking politics from the domain of capitalist subjugation – the short-lived experiment, reverted back to the old model. One is undoubtedly troubled by the almost unanimous acceptance in the 'East' of the new neoliberal ideology against the previous socialist idea, a fact that immediately signals two subjective possibilities. Firstly, that a proper subject in Althusserian terms had occurred as a result of the socialist ideology, but the political subject was restricted from expressing its free political will at the moment of the collapse of the socialist regime. The second possibility is that the communist ideology had failed to produce the socialist ideological subject, and therefore the system had to rely heavily on repression in order to ensure its proper functioning. This would mean that the socialist subject was already interpellated through the neoliberal ideology, and it is precisely as a result of its ideological reproduction of the subjects, that it resulted in the failure of the system. The Althusserian concept of interpellation, which I use to describe the subject as a product of ideology, describes the process through which ideology addresses the abstract, pre-ideological subject, by what it effectively produces as a subject proper.

From "economic necessity" to workers' invisibility

Several surveys carried out in Macedonia between 2010 and 2015 showed that 64 percent of the interviewed citizens preferred living in the previous system, over the current one. The outcome of this survey indicates that the post-socialist subject is also not a (new) subject proper of the neoliberal ideology, since it does not embrace the new society of the free market and keeps alive its social sensibility inherited from the previous system, even though it has lost its aesthetic form within the social/political. The failure of the previous socialist systems can be located in the aesthetic tension that existed between the workers' plane determining the social/political and the increasing divergence from this setting of the nomenclature that started to resemble the Western capitalist political elites. Thus, the system was dislocating itself from the very aesthetics of the form that brought it into being. The workers who were politically subjectivized through the socialist/communist ideology, were still the main plane of the social/political, but the system was increasingly oriented against it. It is precisely because of this tension that the workers in the 'East' requested a political change in the late 1980's. It was the elite of the socialist nomenclature that fabricated this political move through conflicts and crises, in order to destroy the existing aesthetics of the form of the workers' plane in the social/political - which had now become their enemy - thereby restoring capitalism, at its base.

Once the 'East' was successfully reintegrated into the European chains of capitalist production, kitsch aesthetics came to dominate the social/political domain. Labor is confined to its invisibility, it has no speech and does not delimitate any place or stake in the politics of the neoliberal regime. But at the core of the economic system, the

labor-time relation remains the kernel of its production processes within the social (Postone, 1993:25). So, as long as the workers' experience, which embodies this relation in their physical and psychological existence, does not take the aesthetic form determinant of the social/political, the overall system is bound to experience a perpetual crisis. These crises are the inevitable manifestation of the tension that arises from the lack of an aesthetic form in the social/political for the process that takes place at its core - the process of economic production. The continued repression of this form – the aesthetics of the workers' plane in the social/political can never destroy the basic relation of labor-time, but it can intensify the crises that are currently being manifested throughout Europe as genuine crises of the democratic model, liberal values and even the enlightenment heritage. So intertwined are the current European elites with the interests of capital, that they would rather destroy the mechanism on which they exist, than allow workers to re-appear as the collective plane within the social/political.

Under the dominant regime of the capitalist market in Europe, workers are being equally repressed in all corners of the continent. After the economic crisis of 2008, the '*economic necessity*' suppressed all other political content, becoming the main conceptual reference of almost all political action, thus affecting the whole of the social/political objectivity. The main gesture of politics, under an act of economic repression, is reduced to merely serving the capital. Badiou defines the necessity of today's politics as being tied to a universally dominant denominator – the economy (Badiou: 2001, 30). The most blatant example of the draining of even formal democratic mechanisms under the pressure of the spectacle of the economy, took place during the first year of the economic crisis of 2008. In Greece and Italy, the European Troika, as the most prominent agent of the interests of capital in Europe, appointed technical governments in these two countries, in disregard of the popular will.

Workers in the Exploitation Union

The analysis of the dynamics of capital in Europe inevitably reveals a core-periphery relation of economic exploitation. But in the realm of workers all around Europe, this relation plays no role at all. It is so because the whole economic relation between the core and the periphery is established in a domain where the aesthetic form of the plane of workers is lacking in the social/political domain. Thus, workers remain the continual resource for equal exploitation, regardless of their country, upon which other unequal relations among countries are built. Being the core country of capital, Germany is always rightfully treated as the main troublemaker in the countries of the European periphery, due to its exporting crises and instability. But in order to do so, the German state had previously, by the year 2003, secured the competitiveness of its industry with the adoption of the "Agenda 2010 Reforms", which included a wage freeze for workers, a reduction of pensions, slashing of medical benefits and a range of other labor market flexibilization measures. It was precisely the German worker that felt the first serious repression in the European continent at a time when the economic crisis was six years ahead. A whole decade after the year 2000, the wages of German workers increased at a slower rate than the European average. It is precisely because of the wage repression and reduction in labor costs, that the German economy became more competitive and its trade surplus grew to become the world champion, relative to the size of its economy. On the other hand, wage growth in the countries of the European south (termed as the periphery in capitalist terms of their relation to the core) put their economies in a tremendously disadvantageous situation compared to the German one. The predatory power of German capital in Europe was made possible only due to the wage repression

imposed on the German worker. In an economic space which is not determined by the aesthetic form of the plane of workers, it is due to their centrality in the economic production process - contained in the labor-time relation - that they rotate in the position of the repressed, never in that of the privileged. The relation of the core and the periphery always remains one of capital, not of workers.

The higher level of labor organization and the heritage of labor struggles in the countries of the European south had secured a better wage growth and a better living standard for the workers of this region. But when their economies faced the rising deficits due to the increased presence of German capital, which relied on the spending in these countries (while the spending inside Germany was weaker due to the wage repression), it was the turn of the southern workers to pay the price the German ones had paid earlier. Thus, there ensued austerity measures, wage cuts and reduction of benefits and pensions throughout Greece, Italy, Portugal and Spain. Here, the importance of the aesthetic form of the plane of workers in the midst of the social/political, becomes the crucial conceptual tool for developing a sustained critique of the trade unionist, social-democratic, legal and regulatory policies aimed at protecting a decent living standard for workers. Under the operations of capital, we never have a workers' paradigm pushing for improvement, but on the contrary, we will always see a reversion towards lower standards - we will see the disciplining of the southern worker according to the model of the German worker. If the economy is organized in a domain which is not of a form molded on its basic kernel - that of the labor-time relation - the workers who embody this relation will never be able to avoid the degradation of their life, precisely because of the lack of their aesthetic plane, which is their one and only line of simultaneous action and defense. When we lack the aesthetic form of the plane of workers in the social/political, the concept of the citizen - around which the current politics is organized - becomes the totalizing and dictatorial operative word through which the capitalist economic necessity is played out as the political proper. Citizens, in their individuated political role, are the instance through which various models of core-periphery relations are played out, but it is on the backbone of workers that these relations are universally made possible.

The (re)invention of the cheap Balkan worker

One particular problem in the core-periphery relation, which is quite evident in the Balkans, is the exploitation of cheap labor force by foreign investment factories in these countries. And here we should ask the crucial question of what cheap labor actually is. Namely, it represents a localized effect of the repression of the workers' aesthetic plane towards invisibility: the stronger the repression, the cheaper the labor. Legal research conducted in 2010 by Lenka, the Movement for Social Justice in Macedonia, shows that of all the revisions of the labor legislation made over a period of two decades, not a single one was towards improving the status of workers.¹ All that the new neoliberal-transitional state did was to erode the position of workers in relation to the needs and interests of capital. If the neoliberal state is doing the same thing throughout Europe, why it is that in the Balkan countries we have a cheaper labor force than elsewhere? Given the socialist past of these countries, where their societies were defined by the aesthetic form of the workers' plane, the attack on the workers' structures was much more in-

¹ Saveski, Zdravko and Apasiev, Dimitar and Kovachevski, Aleksandar and Vasilev, Kire (2010), *Обезвреднување на трудот - Анализа на трудово-правната легислатива во периодот на транзицијата*. "Protection and promotion of workers' rights". The Movement for Social Justice - "Lenka", Skopje, the Republic of Macedonia. ISBN 978-608-65134-0-5. Available at: http://lenka.mk/wp-content/uploads/2012/10/obezbrednuvanje_na_trudot.pdf.

tense than in other European countries, where these continued their struggles and never faced a total assault from the political forces organized around the neoliberal state. This is the reason why this year in Germany the IG Metall union managed to secure a 28-hour working week, a success that workers in the Balkans cannot even dream of. The intensity of the instruments that had to carry out the ideological waterboarding of the workers in the post-socialist countries was much harsher and cruder, simply because it had to erase any remnant of the aesthetic form of the workers' presence within their plane of visibility. The resulting effect of the increased intensity of this repression is the decreased value of the labor. The less visible it is, the less valued it gets. So, even when Balkan countries attract foreign investors, such as the infamous Draxelmeier² in Serbia and Macedonia, the gains of these investments never end up in the workers' pockets, due to their underprivileged social/political position. The income that the workers receive in these factories still keeps them below the poverty line. Due to these operations of capital in Europe, Balkan countries have become waste dumps of bad investments, which exploit not only the workers but also the environment and the infrastructure, receiving tax releases and even state subsidies. In the cases where the production lines are dependent on a particular location (eg, the infrastructure, railways, supply and output of materials), capital uses the mechanisms of the European Union to import cheap labor from the Balkans to locations where their work is required. Thus, the dislocation of labor from one country to another contributes to the tearing apart of the very material for the building of the aesthetic form of the workers' plane. In the countries where this labor is "imported", the 'native' workers see the ones from the Balkan countries as a toxic presence, threatening their wage standards. In the year 2017 alone, companies from Slovenia, using the A1 forms (work permits) issued by the state of Slovenia, were able to import 46,000 workers from Balkan countries into the European Union. These companies, and in the final analysis the Slovene state, both profited largely on the basis of them being the biggest exporter of foreign workers to the West. The profit of construction companies in Germany from these "imported" workers is between 30 and 50 percent. The ones who were settled as cheap labor in Slovenia were not considered to be workers for the purpose of integrating them into the processes of building the workers' plane, but were dehumanized instead through their victimhood.³

Perversely, the core-periphery relation is not one of the core states against the periphery ones, but rather a relation of corporations from the core states with the countries of the periphery. The exploiting of labor is what capital does, but it prefers cheaper labor, and this is where the governments of Balkan countries come to the service of these corporations. If they did not devalue their labor, they would face an increasing unemployment rate, which is always worse than low wages. By the transfer of 'German' jobs to the periphery and the Balkans, capital gains terrain in its 'host' country (Germany, taken as a signifier of 'Western' capital) to discipline its labor to accept lower standards. Thus,

² Draxelmeier is a German company operating in both Macedonia (2012) and Serbia (2008) through factories that produce wiring systems for the automotive industry intended to supply manufacturers such as Audi, BMW, Cadillac, Jaguar, Land Rover, Maserati, Mercedes-Benz, Porsche and Volkswagen. Several strikes of workers have been repressed by the company, which has also been sued for the bad working conditions of its workers.

For further reading, follow these links: http://solidarnost.mk/wp-content/uploads/2014/09/Research-Dr%C3%A4xlmaier-Kavadarci_updated1.pdf; <http://www.isshs.edu.mk/the-real-price-of-the-cheap-labor-force-3/>; http://www.rosalux.rs/sites/default/files/publications/6_Radenkovic_engl_web.pdf.

³ For more on the process of constructing the Balkan worker as a helpless victim instead of the key element in the productive process, refer to: Vezovnik, Andreja (2015). Balkan Immigrant Workers as Slovenian Victimized Heroes. *Slavic Review* 74(2), 244-264.

we see that, in the relations between the core and the periphery, the only crisis that is experienced is the crisis in the domain of labor. Without the resolution of the tension between the basic relation and the lack of its manifested form – the aesthetic form of the workers’ plane in the social/political – the crisis will remain a perpetual process. It will only oscillate in its manifestations from the housing market to the lack of demand, failing interest rates, lack of capital mobility, loss of gains and the general instability of the economic indicators. As long as this tension is not resolved, the economy will remain more unpredictable than the weather.

From the form of the state towards the form of workers

The persistence of the crisis calls for a simultaneous action of labor throughout Europe. In the periphery, we need more thinking and experimenting with organizing production through the benefits of the technological access and shared knowledge in order to counter the predatorial operations of the corporations from the core of capital in the continent. In the core countries, we need an increased demand on the part of the workers, so that the labor base of these corporations increases the domestic costs and thus decreases their international competitiveness. It is only through organized action on the part of labor that capital can be disciplined, in the first phase to a lower level of profit, and not vice versa. But the action of labor without resolving the tension of the basic relation of labor-time and the current social/political form, cannot achieve anything significant in the long run. It is only through the resolution of this tension and the appearance of the workers’ plane in the social/political, that the basic relation can be transformed towards the devaluing of time. Time, in the capitalist model of production and reproduction, increases its value exponentially, thus putting more and more pressure on labor. In a process of constant devaluation of time, a process that can be pursued only in a social/political model determined by the aesthetic form of the workers’ plane, labor is constantly being released from the time pressure, thus increasing its freedom from exploitation. In early Marx, we find everywhere his analysis of the determining role of the mode of production in all that is social, its consciousness and its structure. In order to move to a different mode of production, we need to go through the establishing of the workers’ plane, which simultaneously revolutionises the mode of production. In such a process, these two correlate and provide new solutions, which avoid the double risk of falling into political dogmatism or economic speculation.

Looking back at the previous century’s experiments with socialism, we inevitably come to the problem of the state. Namely, the question is whether the state is compatible with the aesthetic form of the workers’ plane determining the social/political. The state capitalist models that existed created their own nomenclature, which performed the gesture of the current politically connected capitalist businessmen. If capital is state-owned, the representative of the state is the representative of that capital, even in a worker-driven political discourse and ideology. The competition for social reproduction between the workers’ plane and the state nomenclature pushes the state towards the repression of labor in order to secure its material base of existence. If such a model were to reappear in the whole European continent, we would see the same relations of the core-periphery being manifested among nation states, in the absence of private corporations. The aesthetic form of the workers’ plane gives birth to its own politics, which is not the politics of the form of the state, if not essentially a politics against the state. This politics is one of the workers and not for the workers. It cannot be considered a politics of a fairer taxation and redistribution model. Every radical political movement that attempted to serve the workers, such as Syriza in Greece, failed when it took the

form of the state. Its failure is inscribed into the very aim of the state to repress the aesthetic form of the workers’ plane, a form which cannot be represented. It can only present itself as a form - a form in contradiction to every other aesthetical form in the domain of the social/political. The workers’ aesthetic presence in their own plane, is an immanence on its own, therefore it reorganizes the whole of the social/political in which it is embedded. It is the way to avoid any utopian dogmatism of the state-planned economy and to place the workers’ plane in the center of the social/political, where, as an effect of this aesthetic movement, a new mode of thinking is made possible – a collective process that is also indifferent to individual proposals that stem from the current capitalist predicament. The aesthetic presence of the workers’ plane as a determining form of the social/political, evades any lapsing into reactionary models of nationalism, religion and, ultimately, fascism. The effect of the workers’ aesthetics is one of unity and uniformity, and not solidarity. Solidarity refers to identifying with ‘another’s’ struggles as common to one’s own. While the workers of Europe remain within the confines of the capitalist relations of the core and the periphery, they will always remain in the domain of having to solidarize with some ‘other’s’ struggle. And as long as there is an ‘other’, any sense of a *union* is essentially compromised. The European Union of the perpetual crisis - which produces the exploitation of workers everywhere and, through a series of political perversions, the rise of authoritarian political movements and a nationalist repression of its perceived liberal democratic values - can only survive if it resolves the basic tension that overrides its social/political form. The resolution of this tension resides in establishing the workers’ aesthetic form. The European Union is only possible as a union of workers through their form, determining the social/political of the whole continent.

For the development of the workers’ plane

No wonder that the process of establishing this aesthetic form of the worker’s plane in the social/political comes from the very means existing at hand in the given situation. All the workers’ structures, groups, projects, attempts and efforts can be reoriented to seek their effectuation outside the confines of the present economic-political model enforced by the state. In this undertaking, it is of crucial importance to understand that our collective efforts must be concentrated on making visible and struggling to maintain the workers’ plane. Understanding the various different causes that are in immediate need of action, such as feminist and environmental struggles, we must also understand that whatever victories we might achieve in these fields of contestation, they will be unsustainable if they remain within the confines of the present social/political model. That is so due to the fact that there will always be the next crisis, which, via its repression of politics, will always take revenge on these victories. In 2017, for example, in the course of the debate in the British parliament, the Labour Party urged for an immediate revision of the austerity measures according to a gender-sensitive model, since it was women that bore 86 percent of the austerity burden. The crisis in the US brought Trump into power, who then withdrew from the 2015 Paris Agreement on climate change mitigation. The maintaining in power of the current capitalist mode of production through the social/political model of the state, will always nullify whatever gains we make in the social fields which are not aesthetically determined by the form of the workers’ plane.

The establishing of the aesthetic form of the workers’ plane in the social/political domain requires the actions and movements present in the process of delivering any

other aesthetic change. That is, the piece-by-piece setting up of the infrastructure of the workers' plane, molding their pieces together through a social and political practice that allows them to hold on together and pile up more elements. In doing so, we must fight for the perseverance of every individual element, until the general aesthetics starts to take its autonomous form of presence. The practice of the workers from the Dita factory in Bosnia and Herzegovina is one that deviates from the neoliberal mode of ownership and production, and it is one that needs to be replicated and multiplied towards form's shaping as the main form of the factory. In Albania, the population has managed to create a significant space for its own economy – termed the gray economy under neoliberal conditions, only because it evades control and unequal redistribution. This part, separated from the neoliberal state in Albania, constitutes around 60 percent of the total economy of the country. Thus, the evasion of the formal sector of a significant part of the economic activity of the Albanian population, is a practice that restricts the state when it comes to accessing more funds through taxation - funds which would, in the last instance, end up in the hands of big capital in the country. At this point, it is relevant to ask a crucial question, that of the relation of the market and the state under the dominant neoliberal dogma. The Albanian case, with its 60 percent of gray economy, shows that the economy which evades the state, runs against the interests of the business and political elites. The free market, in terms of neoliberalism, can only exist under the auspices of the state, which redistributes the wealth from the lower to the higher social classes. Having a 'bigger state' under the dominant relations of power in late capitalism, does not result in redistribution favoring the poorer parts of society. Thus, the reversal of power relations, must go hand in hand with the withdrawal from the domain of the formal economy into everyday life as well as with the mobilization for taking over as much as possible of the state power by democratic workers' forces. This process has to be expanded and must rely on the increasing visibility of the workers' plane, which with the weakening of the state due to the withdrawal effect, will lose its repressive power on the social/political.

Through the replication, dissemination and sustainment of these practices of workers that evade the market-dominated models of capitalist production, on the one hand, and the organization of the exchange in such a way as to restrict the state's power to control the wealth of the workers, we can see the first lines of the workers' plane taking shape as an aesthetic form within the social/political. Thus, politically, we shall experience a radical change in the mode of manifesting of the people within the social/political. In maintaining Rancière's claim that people manifest themselves in different modes through various instances in history, we can claim that in the move from the current model of the social/political to the one determined by the workers' plane, we shall see the move from the manifesting of people as citizens to their manifesting as workers. This is the final and decisive move towards the resolution of the tension between the basic relation of labor-time and the concrete manifestation of this relation in the social/political, through the aesthetic form of the workers' plane.

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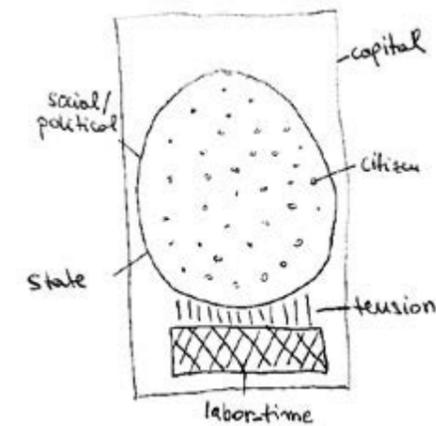


Diagram 1: Capitalism with a liberal state

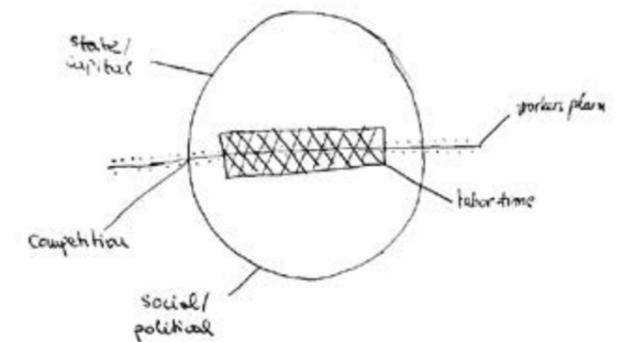


Diagram 2: State capitalism / Socialism

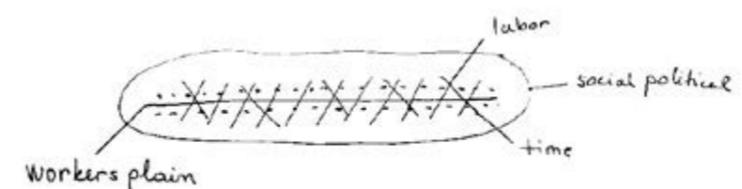


Diagram 3: Workers' social/political without the state





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