

ANGELA DIMITRAKAKI

## Breaking the Vicious Circle of Defeat: The Common and the Revolutionary Practice in the Pandemics

To celebrate the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary of *Praktyka Teoretyczna* journal, we have invited our long-lasting collaborators and comrades to reflect once again on the concept of the common and its possible futures by posing the following questions: a) what is the most important aspect of the current struggles for the common?; b) what are the biggest challenges for the communist politics of the future?; and c) where in the ongoing struggles do you see a potential for scaling-up and spreading organisation based on the common? In her reply, Angela Dimitrakaki reflects on possible means of transition to the common as a radically different socio-economic paradigm.

Keywords: the common, social reproduction, the state, revolutionary practice

## 1. What is the most important aspect of the current struggles for the common?

There would be two interpretations of 'aspect' in the above question.

First, if by 'aspect' we mean the *site* that current struggles should be taking as their focus, I would say that land, energy, and the media are the three salient aspects to be territorialised as commons through the common as a political principle. Land and energy should be obvious references. The media less so, and yet the ownership of the newspapers and TV stations, as well as social media platforms, by capital is a serious impediment to any prospects for an ideological shift of large populations. Even a Netflix documentary such as *The Social Dilemma* (2020) can highlight how tech capital has moved to determining social 'types' on a behavioural level in ways that serve submission not just to the market but to capital as a social relation. Control of the formal avenues of information flow by capital (indeed, by the owners of the means of production) should be seen in relation to this. The two things taken together - mass media and social media - create a Gargantuan obstacle to any prospects of opposition to the logic of capital.

Second, if by 'aspect' we mean the *feature/characteristic* of current (as in *actually existing*) struggles of the common, then this is (a) the lamentable delinking of such struggles from what communism might be as a renewable idea, (b) the inability of agents to organise transnationally and transcontinentally such struggles as precisely 'grand narratives' of revolutionary potential, and, consequently, (c) the low expectations of such struggles. There is a persistent banalisation of struggles for the common as struggles for 'common kitchens' or for 'common gardens', or any other neighbourhood-level initiatives. The system's opposition to such issue-based struggles is not, of course, to be underplayed and underestimated. Yet, the carrying out of struggles of this kind in such a way lets the common as a political principle come to the service of the extant system by offering a politics of care in terms of ethics rather than politics - that is, in terms of pacifying power temporarily rather than claiming power. I think this is why such struggles have been seen to fill in the gaps of public provision and care generated by the withdrawing state of neoliberal governance.

## 2. What are the biggest challenges for the communist politics of the future?

Clearly, the biggest challenge is the prospect of a manufactured age of pandemics or, more broadly, 'states of exception' and how this prospect

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would fast-forward totalitarian techno-capitalism rather than the ‘communicative capitalism’, to use Jodi Dean’s important idea, we are used to.

We are used to associating commonist politics with actually getting together *physically*. In art, when the digital field was getting to be dominant in the 1990s, there was a notable turn to an art of social relations in physical space. Irrespective of the criticisms the institutional face of this art has received, the intention to make art ‘with lots of people’ (as an artist put it), or to have *on site* dialogic exchanges as art, was a deliberate, purposeful act of resistance against the social isolation - the atomisation, if you will - of the digital condition. I think that the attack, at the time of writing, of almost all capitalist governments to uprisings that involve taking to the streets, which may or may not be accompanied by serious efforts by the state to limit free speech on social media (spaces already compromised through tech-capital control), and overall, the formulation of an undeclared police state in many countries, speak volumes about where defenders of the *status quo* see the threat: the street.

To say that we can have commonist politics within activated police states is wishful thinking, because in such cases we don’t even have public space from which commonist politics would try to enact a commonist space. Writing from Athens, where on November 17, 2020, the right-wing government unleashed proper state terror to break the antifascist non-crowd (the demonstrators were very in few number, wearing medical masks, and moving at least two-meters apart from one another) that sought to honour, like every year, the student opposition to the junta in 1973, was indicative of broader tendencies - as is the new law in France that sends you to prison for a year and gives you a fine of 45,000 Euros if you photograph or identify police in action.

3. Where in the ongoing struggles do you see a potential for scaling up and spreading the organisation based on the common?

Given the severe limitations of our pandemic moment and all it brings, I think we need to render visibility to the social reproduction commons that is developing alongside the public health sector. But this must be done with political caution so as not to allow for a further withdrawal of the state from its responsibilities. You can’t have a state that controls science, and medical science, together with private capital, and see an empowering social reproduction commons by default.

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But, if I must be honest, spreading the organisation of the common, as a political principle, can only happen in the context of a contemporary revolutionary practice. We are however very far from that. We see that the uprisings tend not to be durational, tend to be issue-based. And also, we see that the state manipulates the people's fear for their own life to keep them off the streets: many people accept and welcome lockdowns rather than demanding the great expansion of public-sector health care and a re-organisation of production so as to contain the virus, and anything like the virus, which is guaranteed to appear in the future should the current production model continue.

We are at an extremely counter-revolutionary moment because capital controls both the media and the police - that is, both the means of ideological determination and the body that has the monopoly on actual violence. So, unless there is a mass realisation about where this is leading, I am not optimistic. Effectively, when we talk about the common we talk about a different socio-economic paradigm, and this cannot be embraced before there is some kind of consensus on the current paradigm being a disaster. Getting organised within anti-capitalist political parties is the one thing that can offer protection from the state and coordination, in my view. The parliamentary system of bourgeois democracy must be turned to our advantage, because it's all we've got. A political party can organise its members, bring them to the streets, offer legal fees in cases of arrest, and fight at the parliament, and have its own newspaper, etc. And if such political parties do not exist, they need to be set up - for there is extremely little popular support at the moment for anything looking like a revolutionary uprising. Political parties can coordinate political education towards that, and they can also spearhead alliances against the onslaught of the right wing.

It must be appreciated, then, that the party form is the one through which state power can be accessed - though we know that there are in place mechanisms that run deeper than the façade of the state. Nonetheless, I think we all know what capital can do, how far it can go to secure its reproduction, and I don't see any other way apart from forming a counter-power that can claim the state. Striving for change from below but 'without taking power' will always end in our defeat by power. This vicious circle must be broken.

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**Tytuł:** Przerwać zaklęty krąg porażek: To, co wspólne i praktyka rewolucyjna w czasach pandemii

**Abstrakt:** Z okazji 10 urodzin *Praktyki Teoretycznej* zaprosiliśmy naszych wieloletnich współpracowników i towarzyszy do wspólnego rozważenia przyszłości tego, co wspólne. Poprosiliśmy ich o zmierzenie się z następującymi pytaniami: a) co jest najważniejszym aspektem współczesnych walk o to, co wspólne?; b) jakie największe wyzwania stoją w przyszłości przed polityką tego, co wspólne?; c) gdzie w ramach toczonych walk wiedziecie potencjał na rozwijanie i poszerzanie organizacji opartej na tym, co wspólne? Mierząc się z powyższymi pytaniami Angela Dimitrakaki roz-

waża możliwości przejścia do porządku opartym na tym, co wspólne, rozumianego jako radykalnie różnym paradygmacie organizacji życia społeczno-gospodarczego.

**Słowa kluczowe:** to, co wspólne; społeczna reprodukcja, państwo, praktyka rewolucyjna