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**Introduction: 'Enclosures, the Mirror Image of Alternatives'**



The articles collected in this second issue of *The Commoner* deal with some aspects of the multi faced reality of “enclosures”. The reality of enclosures, in the Marxist tradition also referred to as “primitive accumulation”, is of fundamental theoretical and political importance, as it not only defines the precondition of capital’s existence, but also helps to disclose the secret of alternatives to capitalism, or at least a substantial part of it.

In a moment when the global anti-capitalist movement is on the rise and the global economy is preparing for a new wave of restructuring (always associated with enclosures in one form or another) following the incoming recession, we thought that the debate over strategies and alternatives within the movement would benefit by a reflection on the hidden meaning of the capitalist strategies we are fighting against.

Conceptually, enclosures refer to the separation that results from commodification, the crazy separation between human life and the conditions of human life, between the doing and the deed, between creative freedom and socially created objects, between human condition and its natural context, between social cooperation and its products. These dichotomies must be reconciled to make human life possible. In presence of this separation, money and the capitalist market act as the impersonal things that transcend this separation to make social cooperation possible, but in a form  $\frac{3}{4}$  the capitalist “economy”  $\frac{3}{4}$  that bears the mark of, and reproduces, the violent separation of enclosures. In practice therefore, enclosures imply the creation of the rule of things over human beings, implying the rule of force by the state, as well as the elaboration of strategies by the capitalist apologists.

In the first of the contributions here proposed, Micheal Perelman explores the origin of the relation between enclosures and classical political economy (e.g. Adam Smith, David Ricardo, etc.). Alongside their work on pure economic theory promoting their laissez faire ideology, the classical political economists engaged on a parallel project: to promote the forcible reconstruction of society to remake it into their a purely market oriented society. Thus, the classical political economists actively advocated brutal measures to deprive people of any alternative to wage labor.

Two hundred years later, the same brutality is advocated by modern neoliberal economists and implemented by national governments under the constant vigilance of global economic institutions such as the IMF, the WB and the WTO among others. The article reprinted here from *Midnight Notes N. 10* (1990), posed the issue of “New Enclosures” in a time when neoliberalism did not meet the opposition it meets today. The article exposes the corrosive secret hidden in the gleaming idols of globalism, the end of the “cold war” blocs and Gaian ecological consciousness: the 1980s and, we add today, the 1990s have seen the largest Enclosure of the worldly Common in history. This article explains the meaning and importance of Enclosures, both Old and New, in the planetary struggle of classes.

An exemplification of today's enclosures is provided by Silvia Federici's contribution, appeared in 1990 in the same issue of *Midnight Notes*. Criticising both Right and Left positions in the controversy over the debt crisis, she argues that they both share the same assumption, namely that the debt crisis is an obstacle to capitalist development. Instead, focussing on Africa's Debt crisis, Silvia Federici points at the relation between debt and New Enclosures and argues that the debt crisis has been a productive crisis for the capitalist classes of both the debtor and the creditor nations in that it has been used by capital to shift the balance of forces to its side on both poles of the debt relation.

If two hundred years of capitalist development have not been sufficient to end enclosures, evidently the latter are endemic in the capitalist mode of production. This runs counter Marxist traditional interpretation that regarded primitive accumulation as the historical process that gave birth to the preconditions of a capitalist mode of production. Massimo De Angelis here argues that in Marx's theoretical framework, primitive accumulation is not just an event confined to a historical past, but a continuous aspect of capitalist production. The continuous character of the separation between people and means of production is due to the recurrent limits posed on capitalist accumulation by social struggles and the recurrent drive of capital to extend its sphere of domination over life. While De Angelis constructs the continuity argument focussing on strategies and power relations, Werner Bonefeld reaches the same conclusion by discussing primitive accumulation as the foundation of the capitalist social relations and thus the social constitution through which the exploitation of labour subsists. Since the divorce between means of production and people is the presupposition on which the capitalist exploitation of labour rests, then primitive accumulation it is the presupposition of capital and the result of its reproduction.

It goes without saying that these articles do not exhaust the theoretical and political issues concerning enclosures. One important question that this issue of *The Commoner* has left out, is how theoretically and historically enclosures are linked to the division between production of commodities and reproduction of labour power, and to the new sexual division of labour rooted upon it. In other words, the passage to capitalism has not only divorced producers from the means of production but, to the extent that production and reproduction were socially and sexually differentiated, it also separated production from reproduction, men from women, waged work from unwaged work. This is of course of paramount importance for at least three reasons. First, to understand the novel character of the functioning of the wage-form, defined and functioning not only as a way to accumulate waged labour, but also, as a means to accumulate and command unwaged labour. Second, to understand unwaged labour as structural to capitalist production, and providing therefore a novel meaning to the concept of "wage slavery". In this sense, slavery appears not as an aberrant strategy in relation to the regime of waged labour, but it constitutes its foundation. Third, to articulate the issues of the division of labour in terms of specialisation with those of the division within the proletariat in terms of access to social resources and wages. And of course, how and in what forms all this is relevant today, within the context of XXI century global capitalism, and in presence of new movements and new social practices?

Furthermore, there is then the question of the enclosure of the body, of the separation between passions and interests, reason and needs, economic calculus and desires. Linked to this, there is of course the process of subjectification analysed by Foucault, that is the multiplicity of micro strategies of power aimed at creating docile subjects, and therefore the basis of capitalist process of integration. How are they operating today in the framework of the global market? But above all, we

need to tackle the limits faced by this process of subjectification: to what extent micro and macro strategies of struggles are today challenging neoliberal integration? On the issues linking the question of enclosures with these and other relevant themes, we are planning another special issue of the Commoner to be published in the near future.

Despite its limitations, we believe the selection that The Commoner is proposing helps to frame the question of enclosures. All contributions share one thing: enclosures are a continuous feature of capitalist development. We believe this opens two crucial political questions. First, there is a common ground between different phenomenal forms of strategies of enclosures (read neoliberal policies), and therefore today peoples of the North, East and South are facing possibly phenomenally different but substantially similar strategies of separation from the means of existence. Second, enclosures are always enclosures of commons. Often, we may not like the ways these commons are administrated, or the bureaucratic layers people may be subjected to in gaining access to rights and entitlements. Certainly, the state, when forced to concede to popular pressures, has always tried to turn concessions into instruments of control. We cannot enter here in the details of the taxonomy of existing commons and their limitations and contradictions. But the point is that the struggles arising in defence of existing forms of commons against neoliberal policies are never just defensive struggles, they open a space for public debate and mutual reformulation of the meaning that we want to give to commons. Because enclosures are always enclosures of commons, the growing global anti-capitalist movement, which largely is a movement against enclosures and their effect, give us the opportunity to go to counter attack and pose the essential question of alternatives: the issue of the direct access of the means of existence, production and communication, the issue of what commons do we want and how we want to organise our sociality around them. It follows therefore that reflections on the forms and meaning of commons always imply correspondent reflection on the form and meaning of community.