

Introduction - Issue 06: Winter 2003

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In this issue we present two contributions on money and three contributions on neoliberal governance. What do money and neoliberal governance have in common? The Commoner suggests at least one thing: they are both different but complementary ways to organize our lives around the rat race of global competition.

In the first article, George Caffentzis writes about the power of money, the ideological underpinning of this power and, most poignantly, how without moments of force and violence, money would have remained a marginal aspect of human history. He also argues that “the cultivation of hostility, suspicion, competition and fear of scarcity (especially the scarcity of money)” are the means through which to enclose spaces for collective discussion and understanding of desires. In this way, money can appear as the only means left to create its own meaning of coincidence of desires.

To produce fear of scarcity in a world of plenty like ours, scarcity must be produced. Matthew Hampton’s paper explores capital’s production of scarcity through an investigation of the international organization of money after the collapse of Bretton Woods. Here, what many critics refer to as the irrational “casino economy” of massive speculative flows, it is shown to have its own perverse rationality in its link to the flesh and blood substance of capital’s accumulation: boundless work through competitive relations among people. Through the continuous allocation of risk, punishments and rewards, financial capital movements across the globe discipline the people of this planet to work harder and demand less, whether they are in homes, fields, factories, or offices. Matthew Hampton’s paper explores capital’s production of scarcity through an investigation of the international organization of money after the collapse of Bretton Woods. Here, what many critics refer to as the irrational “casino economy” of massive speculative flows, it is shown to have its own perverse rationality in its link to the flesh and blood substance of capital’s accumulation: boundless work through competitive relations among people. Through the continuous allocation of risk, punishments and rewards, financial capital movements across the globe discipline the people of this planet to work harder and demand less, whether they are in homes, fields, factories, or offices. The discipline of capital however has its own contradictions. A central one is the crisis of reproduction of our bodies and minds, our communities and our ecologies. In the last quarter of a century, the combined effects of neoliberal strategies of enclosures and reconfiguration of state provisions away from social welfare into corporate welfare, has coincided with the deepening of these crises and a consequent rapid development of diverse social movements across the globe. It has also created an archipelago of diverse organizations of what is called “civil society”. These organizations, in spite of differences, act in a multiplicity of ways to intervene and cope with the crises ^¾ whether through campaigns, education or directly intervening in the reorganization of reproduction where the market and the state left a desert.

The effect of this ferment has been to put back on the agenda of public debates the question of meeting the variety of needs of reproduction independent from the needs of the capitalist market. Left on its own devices, this ferment re-opens a space for the collective discussion and understanding of desires, and the definition of the ground for their coincidence independently from accumulation. What a shock for the neoliberal proponents of the pansee’ unique! One important strategy used by neoliberal capital to deal with these emergent demands is called, in the modern rhetoric, “governance”. Massimo De Angelis explores some of the intricacies of governance ^¾ or better neoliberal governance ^¾ and argues that it does not represent a paradigm shift away from neoliberalism. Rather it is a discursive practice that emerges as capital’s second line of defense vis-

à-vis struggles against enclosures. It is a space in which the needs of reproduction are acknowledged by capital, but commons are deterred or forestalled through the hijacking and entrapment of the values, the words and dreams of the commoners. In governance, the values of sustainability is turned into sustainable profit, social justice is turned into corporate compliance with pitiful minimum wage regulations, democracy and participation is turned into partnership among stakeholders who must accept competitive market norms as de facto unchangeable mode of human interaction.

A detailed example of how these governance strategies develop as a result of social opposition to policies, is studied by Les Levidow in the case of Genetically Modified Food. “The paper exemplifies governance as process management. For the trans-Atlantic governance of GM food, new procedures were managing conflicts among state and non-state actors, while potentially facilitating regulatory harmonisation of a controversial technological trajectory. Consumer NGOs did not welcome the advent of GM crops, yet their regulatory demands led their representatives into a political logic of governing these technological products. In that sense, governance provides a neoliberal means to manage socio-political conflicts by incorporating dissent into a collective problem-definition, while excluding other accounts of the problem. Yet it remains a difficult task of process management, whose outcome still depends upon political struggle.”

That governance discourse can be used to entrap social flows of desires and creativity into market values and accumulation is also clear in the contribution by Andrew Robinson and Simon Tormey. The authors discuss the recent UK labour government White Paper on higher education, heavily permeated by the language of “Third Way” and “partnership” and in which universities are portrayed and constructed as competitors within a global market and thus must learn to behave like corporations do. “Instead of academics working across international boundaries to improve knowledge and wellbeing”, note the authors, “academics need now to ask themselves not what is the value of their research, but rather what is the “exchange value” of their research? If research cannot be ‘spun-out’, ‘transferred’, used as an ‘incubator’ or in some other exploited by ‘local and regional partnerships’ then the clear message it is research that is not ‘worth’ anything, and should be stopped. The desire to make ‘breakthroughs’ is not itself a valid reason for undertaking research.” Hence, when Charles Clarke ³/₄ the education secretary ³/₄ says he wants to ‘mobiliz[e]... the imagination, creativity, skills and talents of all our people’ and ‘to help turn ideas into successful businesses’ . . . , it is clear that he is engaged in a logic of entrapment. Creative energies are to be harnessed, for a single goal: capitalist control” and the “reduction of the educational ‘commons’ to the status of vocational training for the needs of business”.