

# GLOBAL DIALOGUE

6.1

4 issues a year in 16 languages

## The Politics of Climate Change

Herbert Docena

## South Africa's Violent Democracy

Karl von Holdt

## The Solidarity Economy

Paul Singer

### **The Cooperative Alternative**

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- > The Mondragon Cooperatives
- > The Greek Anti-Middleman Movement
- > Argentina's Recuperated Enterprises
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- > Vladimir Yadov, 1929-2015

MAGAZINE



International  
Sociological  
Association



VOLUME 6 / ISSUE 1 / MARCH 2016  
[www.isa-sociology.org/global-dialogue/](http://www.isa-sociology.org/global-dialogue/)

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# > Editorial

## The Environment and Violent Democracy

**W**hen scientists discuss climate change they do so with dire warnings of the catastrophic consequences of climbing temperatures of the earth's atmosphere – the floods, the tycoons, the melting glaciers, and the wholesale destruction of the communities. When they have paid attention to the politics of climate change scientists have focused on climate change deniers and their powerful supporters or on the failure of popular movements. But the struggles among global elites are too often overlooked. For the past four years Herbert Docena has been reporting for *Global Dialogue* on the annual UN Framework Convention on Climate Change. Writing from the most recent meeting in Paris (November 30 to December 11, 2015), he points to changing alliances as elite reformers gave up trying to moderate the conservative powers dominating the conference halls. Instead they sought out potential allies among the radicals assembled in the streets. Still, apart from pious promises, there are few signs from Paris of any serious advances toward saving the world.

In this issue we feature an interview with Karl von Holdt – veteran of the anti-apartheid movement and leading sociologist. He describes to Alf Nilsen his research on South Africa's "violent democracy" and the township struggles it engenders around service delivery. This is followed by accounts of another sort of violence. Maristella Svampa and her colleagues describe the new extractivist economy that is devastating Latin America. Mega-projects from mining and oil to agribusiness' soy production – stimulated by the insatiable appetite of China's expanding economy – are carried out by multinationals thirsty for profits, and encouraged by states starved of funds. Reports from Argentina, Mexico, and Ecuador show how these projects have met with the intense opposition of social movements seeking to protect their land, water, and air.

We also publish six articles on cooperatives from India, Greece, Spain, and Argentina – how they survive and at what costs. Are coops an alternative to capitalism or, as Leslie Sklair argues, an adaptation to capitalism? Undoubtedly, one of the great theorists and practitioners of the cooperative movement is the remarkable Paul Singer, National Secretary for the Solidarity Economy in Brazil's government. As is evident from the interview conducted for *Global Dialogue*, Singer is no starry-eyed prophet – for him cooperatives are a means of sustaining a livelihood for the poor.

Finally, we have five tributes to Vladimir Yadov, who died last year – one of the courageous pioneers of Soviet sociology who deftly pushed the limits of the Soviet order. Yadov remained a key player in debates about postSoviet sociology. Throughout his career he has been a keen internationalist, serving as ISA Vice-President, 1990-94. Much beloved by students and colleagues, his departure is deeply mourned.

With this issue Juan Piovani will take over direction of the Spanish translation of *Global Dialogue* from María José Álvarez. We welcome Juan and thank Majó and her team for four years of dedicated service.

> **Global Dialogue can be found in 16 languages at the [ISA website](#)**

> **Submissions should be sent to [burawoy@berkeley.edu](mailto:burawoy@berkeley.edu)**



**Herbert Docena**, close observer of climate change negotiations, analyzes the changing political global alliances at the Paris summit.



**Karl von Holdt**, scholar and activist, offers an analysis of the political dynamics of protest in South Africa.



**Paul Singer**, scholar, politician, and public intellectual, recounts the pioneering history of the theory and practice of the Solidarity Economy in Brazil.



**Global Dialogue** is made possible by a generous grant from **SAGE Publications**.

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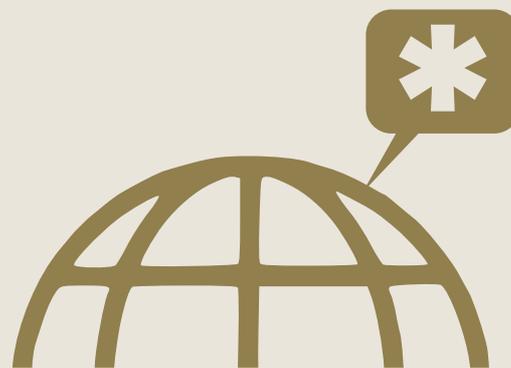
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# > The Politics of Climate Change

by **Herbert Docena**, University of California, Berkeley, USA, and member of ISA Research Committee on Labour Movements (RC44)



Protest in the streets at the Paris Climate Change Summit. Photo by Herbert Docena.

**F**or some in the climate justice movement, the battle line in the global fight around climate change runs along the walls of the heavily fortified UN climate change summit venues: Outside, “the movement” or “the people” from different countries marching on the streets demanding “System Change Not Climate Change!”; inside, the officials of states and corporations, fighting to keep the system unchanged. Thus, veteran activist Rebecca Solnit, writing on the eve of the latest UN climate change summit, divides “the people in the streets of Paris” from “the people in the conference rooms of Le Bourget.” She suggests that it is the former who now have “the power to change the world.”

Drawing such frontiers between “the conference rooms” and “the streets,” echoed by many others inside and outside the movement, is fundamental to understanding the

tendencies in climate change politics. But it also obscures the changing and increasingly complex battle lines within both sides and prevents us from seeing how some “people in the conference rooms” try to win over “people in the streets” by proposing to change the system in order to keep it the same.

## > The Struggle in the Conference Rooms

Many if not most of the state officials, business executives, experts and other actors in the conference rooms have indeed been mobilizing to prevent the system from changing. Defending only their country’s competitiveness or their company’s profitability, they have constantly opposed regulating global capitalism to address climate change, and much of what they have done could indeed be considered mere “green-washing” or disaster profiteering.

But not all those in the corridors of power have necessarily been as shortsighted. Indeed, beginning in the

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1970s and 1980s, one particular section of the world's elites has actually been mobilizing to try to "change the system" – but in order to keep its capitalist essence intact. Driven to counter radical intellectuals, scientists, writers or organizers who were gaining an increasing number of adherents with their call for radical system change, or for the abolition of capitalism to solve global ecological problems, a loose and by no means unified network of elites from both developed and developing countries began assembling a coalition to advance enhanced global regulation, or reforms and concessions, to at least manage capitalism's ecological contradictions and provide some assistance to those most affected by global warming.

In proposing "system-preserving system change", however, these reformist elites and those they drew to their project from the classes below them, also began driving their more conservative fellow elites to counter-organize and to block their proposed reforms and concessions. Starting in the 1980s, divisions among reformists consequently began to deepen.

Faced with a more organized and more intransigent conservative opposition, some reformers, we can call them populist reformers – such as Environmental Defense Fund's (EDF) Fred Krupp or Senator Al Gore from the US and many other like-minded officials, executives, foundation heads, experts, or activists in other developed and developing countries – took the view that they could only secure their proposed reforms and concessions by appeasing their fellow elites and building alliances with them. To forge these alliances, they began to champion domestic and global regulatory measures that yielded to conservative demands. On the world stage, they began championing international agreements that imposed lower emissions reductions targets for developed countries, gave them more "flexibility" in achieving those targets through carbon trading and other market mechanisms, and freed them from obligations to provide significant financial and technology transfers to less developed countries.

When these concessions still failed to appease conservative resistance, they advocated giving even more concessions by pushing for the even weaker pledge-what-you-want "bottom-up" agreement in Copenhagen in 2009 – essentially the same kind of agreement that conservatives were proposing in the early 1990s and essentially the same agreement that, with a few minor modifications, governments just approved in Paris.

But other "insiders" were always – or have progressively become – more skeptical of this strategy. Frustrated that they have not made headway in their attempts to change the system, such progressive officials or members of developed- and developing-country governments, foundations, and environmentalist organizations have increasingly taken the view that they can only salvage the reformist

project by allying not with conservative elites but with "the grassroots" or with "the people in the streets."

In an open letter written in 2010 after conservatives again defeated the compromise climate legislation pushed by groups like EDF, 1Sky director (and later 350.org founder) Bill McKibben argued:

*We need to redouble our investment in grassroots movement building [...] We feel strongly that a long-standing and damaging underinvestment in grassroots organizing severely crippled our ability to move policy forward [...] Of course this is not work that can be completed overnight – it requires years of work and deep, patient investments of time and resources.*

Such arguments have become ever more resonant in reformist circles. In a widely-circulated 2013 study commissioned by the Rockefeller Family Fund to diagnose why environmentalists keep failing to pass their proposals, prominent sociologist Theda Skocpol essentially echoed McKibben and others' criticism of "insider politics" pursued by such groups as EDF. Skocpol endorsed the recommendation to instead build "a broad popular movement."

### > Reformers in the Streets

In line with this strategy, since at least the late 2000s, populist reformers have been "redoubling" their "investment" in "grassroots movement building" by spending more energy, attention, and resources on mobilizing more or less the same groups that radicals have been organizing behind their radical project.

To win over these groups, these reformers threw their weight behind concessions that radicals have long been pushing for as part of their "minimum" program. Thus, though they do not necessarily object in principle to market-based regulatory options like carbon trading, McKibben and other like-minded activists at Greenpeace and other environmentalist organizations have supported more direct, "non-market" regulations such as outright bans on fossil-fuel production that would directly benefit local fossil-fuel damaged communities – a proposal to "keep it [oil, coal, gas] in the ground" first popularized by radical anti-capitalists.

Generally, they have called for bolder, more ambitious international agreements with higher emissions reductions targets for developed countries, for doing away with carbon trading altogether or by tightening the rules governing it, and for significant financial and technology transfers to subordinate groups. Consequently, they have generally opposed the 2009 Copenhagen pledge-what-you-want "bottom-up" agreement and have been more critical than other reformists of the new Copenhagen-like agreement that was just signed in Paris.

But convinced that such bolder agreements or regulations will not be achieved by “partnering” with, or by “lobbying” corporations or governments to take “climate action,” they have broken with moderate reformists in devoting more attention towards organizing and partnering with various “outsiders” – students, workers, rural communities, and others that have been excluded from (or have excluded themselves) from insider circles – to take more confrontational action against corporations and governments.

Though he himself eschews taking anti-capitalist positions, McKibben invited a famous anti-neoliberal author and a long-time revolutionary anti-capitalist to be part of 350.org’s board. Local 350.org activists have been reaching out to and supporting community-based struggles against coal power and other dirty-energy projects not just in the North but even in countries like the Philippines.

In Paris, McKibben and other 350.org activists even organized an imitation “people’s tribunal” where they “prosecuted” giant oil corporation Exxon for funding “climate skeptics” and politicians opposed to climate action. And they collaborated closely with anarchist or anti-capitalist direct action groups in pushing, organizing, and contributing resources for a massive civil disobedience action on the last day of the summit that other more moderate reformist groups either explicitly opposed or just quietly refused to invest in.

But while they go farther than other reformers in pushing for more radical reforms, allying with radical groups, and taking more confrontational actions, populist reformers still constantly pull back from going beyond their anti-corporate/neoliberal stance towards a more explicitly anti-capitalist stance. So while McKibben and company condemned Exxon in their “people’s tribunal,” they refrained from following other activists who also organized their own “people’s tribunal” in indicting not just Exxon but all corporations and governments that contribute to “climate change” by perpetuating capitalism.

Similarly, 350.org members helped spearhead the mass civil disobedience action during the last day of the Paris summit. But, while other organizers explicitly told participants that the ones they would be confronting were the states and capitalists represented by the Arc de Triomphe and La Défense business district, the materials circulated by 350.org suggested that the principal, if not the only, targets were the fossil-fuel companies or the “bad capitalists.” And while, on the day of action itself, the relatively under-staffed and under-funded members of anarchist

and other anti-capitalist groups brought and held their own small, do-it-yourself placards saying, “Unf\*ck the system” or “Capitalism: c’est has been,” the better-funded members of 350.org unfurled giant 2x200 meter banners that read “Stop Climate Crimes” and “Keep it in the ground” – both of which dwarfed all other placards and banners in the action, including the central “System Change Not Climate Change!” banner in front.

### > The Streets Divided

Such attempts by a section of the reformist bloc to call for more antagonistic actions against conservative elites, without going so far as to actually challenge the system, have had the effect of deepening divisions among radicals. With conservatives blocking simple reforms that might ameliorate conditions in communities affected by global warming and with the populist reformers appearing to stand up to them to defend those reforms, radical networks and organizations have been split between two poles. Thus, some have chosen to forge alliances with reformers in general, or with populist reformers in particular, to at least defend or advance even just the limited reforms and concessions that conservatives have been blocking. They have since gone on to amplify the reformist discourse by echoing their lines that the climate crisis is primarily caused by the lack of global regulation of capitalism; that it can be solved by enhancing such regulation; and that the “enemies” are primarily, if not only, the fossil fuel companies or the “bad capitalists” and the “bad elites” opposing global regulation. Others have chosen to reject such alliances in the hope of defending or advancing more fundamental changes. Without completely dismissing the benefits from reformist system change, they have insisted on going beyond the reformist discourse by declaring the lack of global regulation to be itself rooted in the contradictions of capitalism; that while enhanced regulation will be an advance, only the abolition of capitalism itself will begin to solve the problem; and that the “enemies” include even the so-called “good capitalists” and “good elites” – those who are trying to “change the system” in order to keep it the same.

The battle lines therefore do not, and never did, just run between those “inside” and those “outside” the UN climate change summits; they also run across and within the conference rooms and the streets. Whether and how the “people in the streets” will build the “power to change the world” and prevail over “the people in conference rooms” will likely depend on who wins in the streets. ■

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# > South Africa's Violent Democracy

## An Interview with Karl von Holdt

1993: Karl von Holdt participating in an ANC Alliance march during South Africa's contested transition. Photo by William Matlala.



**Karl von Holdt** has had a long and distinguished history of political engagement and scholarship. He was editor of the *South African Labor Bulletin*, at a time when labor was dictating the movement of South African society. He has worked for NALEDI, the policy institute of COSATU (Congress of South African Trade Unions), and served as coordinator of COSATU's Commission on the Future of Trade Unions (1996-7). Most recently he served as labor's representative on the National Planning Commission of South Africa. He is now Director of the Society, Work, and Development Institute at the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg. His many publications include *Transition From Below: Forging Trade Unionism and Workplace Change in South Africa*, one of the most important analyses of South Africa's transition to democracy. With Michael Burawoy he co-authored *Conversations with Bourdieu: The Johannesburg Moment* (2012). His current research includes the functioning of state institutions, collective violence and associational life, violent democracy, citizenship and civil society. Von Holdt is a member of ISA Research Committee on Labour Movements (RC44). He is interviewed by Alf Gunvald Nilsen of the University of Bergen. A longer version of this interview can be found in Norwegian in the newsletter of the Norwegian Sociological Association.

**W**hen South Africa emerged from apartheid to democracy in 1994, decades of popular struggle seemed to have yielded a resounding victory, brimming with hope. “Out of the experience of an extraordinary human disaster that lasted too long,” newly-elected President Nelson Mandela announced, “must be born a society of which all humanity must be proud.” Some twenty years on, social realities in South Africa complicate the picture: despite new political freedoms, entrenched racialized inequality and poverty persist. In the “rainbow nation,” discontent fostered by enduring inequalities has resulted in a series of xenophobic attacks on migrants from other African countries. How does a sociologist make sense of this complex and contradictory scenario?

### > South Africa’s Violent Democracy

“There’s a lot that is paradoxical and perplexing,” says Karl von Holdt, Associate Professor and Director of the Society, Work and Development Institute at the University of the Witwatersrand. Von Holdt speaks not only as a sociologist, but also as someone who has moved between activism and academia since the early 1980s.

Von Holdt acknowledges the significance of apartheid’s fall. “The kind of world we lived in – the racial domination, the oppression, the daily institutionalized brutality of the system, and the denial of rights – the weight of that has gone.” At the same time, an underlying and seemingly intractable structure of exclusion persists. According to von Holdt, however, it would be wrong to suggest that little has changed. Rather, the changes unfolding in South Africa today defy easy conceptualization. “Both politically and sociologically, there’s a tyranny of certain conceptions of how the state should work and how social orders should be organized, which originates in the crucible of western modernity. When we look at ourselves through these concepts, it’s easy to conclude that we don’t have democracy because our society is so violent, leading to despair at our shortcomings. However, I believe that we have to look at things differently – both in terms of how those concepts originate in Western history, and in terms of how they are deployed in the South African context.”

This attempt to look at things differently leads von Holdt to describe South Africa as a violent democracy. Violence and democracy are not mutually exclusive, he notes – a claim that is as true of European state formation as it is of contemporary South Africa. “In a European context, it is easy to think of modernity as a centuries-long process of pacifying populations and establishing peaceful ways of managing conflict. But if we think in more global terms, it becomes evident that these processes were all coeval with colonial conquest and domination, which were integral to European development. In South Africa, our historical experience of modernity is of an exceedingly violent process; we’ve experienced violence for four centuries!”

For von Holdt, today’s violence is closely linked to the important changes unfolding in South Africa – especially, the formation of black elites, played out through struggles on the terrain of the state. South Africa’s political settlement, he notes, “enshrined both socioeconomic and human rights. But it also protected property rights. Now, the distribution of property rights in South Africa has been shaped by 360 years of colonial dispossession and apartheid and is consequently grossly racialized.” Because the constitution limits prospects for systematic redistribution, the state’s role in the country’s economy assumes great significance. “The state is by far the biggest employer in South Africa and also has substantial budgets for contracts of various kinds. Huge resources are locked up in these processes, and accessing those resources becomes crucial for elite formation,” he argues. “To get into power and to remain in power, you need supporters, allies and networks of patronage. Having access to wealth and resources that can be distributed at all these levels is a way to build political capital. Conversely, to be successful as an entrepreneur, you need political connections. In this way, wealth and politics are closely bound up with each other.” Power struggles assume an increasingly violent character as different factions and rivals try to immobilize each other: “That’s where the battles are, and they are vicious.”

South Africa’s violent democracy is also marked by protests in poor communities. Such protests – often related to discontent over the delivery of public services – are often described as an autonomous expression of resistance by the poor, but von Holdt argues that protests also arise from “the dynamic of elite formation, generated by organizing patronage, accessing resources, and forming factional ties into networks among the poor.” As von Holdt and a team of researchers investigated community protests in Mpumalanga and Gauteng provinces, he says, “we realized that there was an intimate relation between leading figures in the protests and political networks within the ANC. The people leading the protests were often part of a particular faction of the local ANC, who aimed to gain power within the local ANC branch and the local council.” However, von Holdt does not suggest that poor people are simply manipulated by local political elites. “There are real grievances within the community. If local political leaders want to become elites, they have to tap into the discontent of the poor. And in this way, poor people also use leaders to gain voice and to access scarce resources. So patronage is not simply something that is dispensed by elites; it is also something that the poor lay claim to.”

Still, changes in the South African political landscape may prove significant – including changes dating from 16 August, 2012, when police forces killed 34 striking mine-workers at Marikana. Emblematic of South Africa’s violent democracy, the Marikana massacre also set off organizational ruptures, weakening the ANC’s hold over the country’s trade unions. In late 2014, the United Front, a broad



2014: Karl von Holdt, the sociologist, in a community protest in the township called Trouble. Photo by William Matlala.

coalition of progressive social movements, was formed in an effort to rejuvenate left politics, while the Economic Freedom Fighters, a political breakaway from the ANC espousing a program of militant nationalism and radical redistribution, has rocked the ANC's base. "The hegemony of the ANC is eroding" von Holdt says, but he cautions, "the future is uncertain. Despite evidence of a fracturing hegemony, the ANC still dominates the local, the communities; it remains a very powerful organization."

### > Bourdieu, Fanon, and the Sociology of Violence

Von Holdt's diagnosis of South Africa's violent democracy is closely related to an effort to conceptualize violence in more general terms. In a compelling article in *Current Sociology*, he explores the high levels of violence associated with South Africa's contentious politics, drawing on collaborative work with Michael Burawoy, published as *Conversations with Bourdieu: The Johannesburg Moment* (Wits University Press, 2012). "My contribution to that book," von Holdt explains, "revolved around trying to read Bourdieu through South Africa – to identify gaps and silences in his contributions. At the same time, it was interesting to look at South Africa through Bourdieu, because his work concentrates on a finely-tuned sense of order and how order reproduces itself."

In his article, von Holdt explores the dissonances and resonances between Bourdieu's conception of symbolic violence and Fanon's account of colonial violence. "In the

colonial situation, symbolic violence doesn't work in the way that Bourdieu suggests; it isn't sufficient to explain order. As Fanon shows, real violence is needed as well. But at the same time, the concept of symbolic violence helps us to understand that what Fanon is talking about as the racism and violence of the colonial order isn't simply physical and material; it is also symbolic."

"What's interesting about these two thinkers is that Fanon, especially in his mature work, engaged on the terrain of the colonial and postcolonial order, where violence and modernity go hand in hand; it's a terrain where the modern is unequivocally violent. But Bourdieu – if you bracket his early experiences in Algeria – emerges entirely in the western context of a pacified society. What I find interesting is to turn back to Bourdieu, and ask whether western modernity works in the way that he proposes. I'm not so sure it does. Especially in the context of the current crisis in the west, these assumptions are starting to break apart. What happens to Bourdieu's notion of symbolic violence in a context of mass unemployment? Where the state withdraws benefits? Where banks and corporations are dominant? It starts to break down."

Does this reading resemble Jean and John Comaroff's claim that the global South offers privileged insights into the workings of the modern world? Von Holdt demurs. "I'm a bit skeptical about that, because the North has always managed to preserve its exceptionalism. The fundamental issue remains how the North is able to dominate knowledge production and wealth extraction. That relation of

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dominance is not about to be superseded. It's not as if the South is about to start dominating the North." Nevertheless, von Holdt insists on the need for radical rethinking. "Certain analytical insights and conceptual innovations that one can develop in and for the South also involve rethinking the whole conceptual apparatus of the North, including its relation to Northern realities."

Is it parallel to Raewyn Connell's call for Southern theory? "I prefer to think of theory-making in the South. I find it difficult to imagine a wholly alternative way of thinking because our own thinking is already so western. How and from where do you recover an alternative knowledge?" The fact that South African sociology has been developed by individuals tied by language and history to the metropolis of the world-system, he suggests, has significant ramifications for knowledge production. "I'm one of the offspring of the white settler elite, so that's the ground that I work on. We're so bound together with western forms of knowledge that we have to think through and against them; however, others may explore the recovery of indigenous thought, which could lead to important interactions."

### > **Public Sociology in Post-Apartheid South Africa**

From the limits of western sociology, our conversation turns to the challenges of public sociology in the perplexing and paradoxical context of post-apartheid South Africa. Von Holdt, whose career has swung between academia and activism, insists that public sociology cannot be a purely oppositional activity. "The progressive sociologist often imagines himself or herself as engaging with subaltern movements; that's the force privileged by progressive sociological analysis, and through which sociology can achieve political significance." Von Holdt's research unit, SWOP,

was founded on this vision, in close dialogue with COSA-TU's militant unions in the 1980s. But with the transition to democracy, SWOP started collaborating with progressive government ministries. This experience leads von Holdt to question the utility of a sharp distinction between policy research and public sociology. "Policy sociology is thought of as a dirty business where you're paid to produce results that people in power want to see. Effectively, it bolsters the status quo rather than being aligned with forces for change. When you work with unions, you often operate on the terrain of critique, but at the end of the day, what unions really want is policy-relevant knowledge because they need to negotiate. They need possible solutions to given problems, and that's a policy question. So for me, the notion that public sociology is somehow a pure progressive form of knowledge – and conversely, that policy sociology is somehow tainted and corrupted – doesn't work. There's an interplay between the world of rebellion and the world of governance."

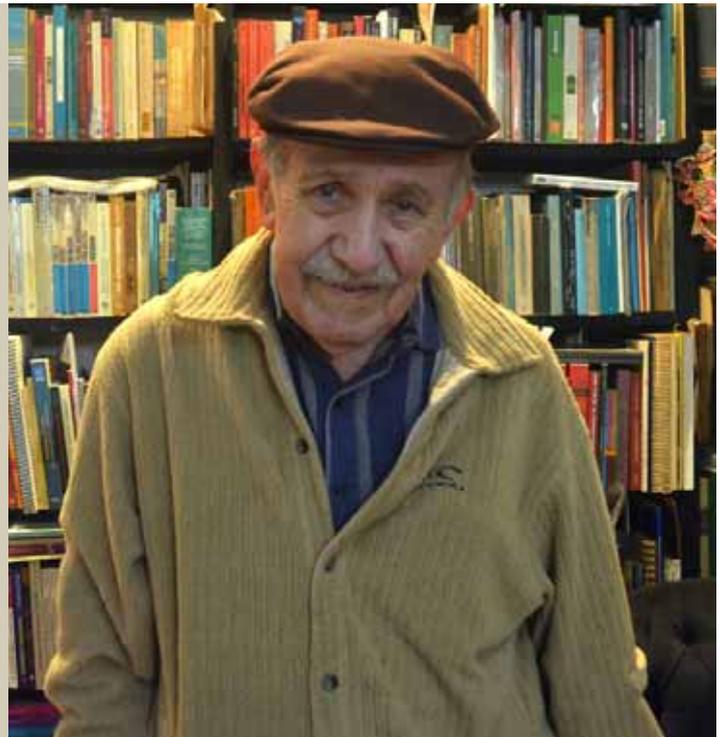
In today's South Africa, speaking truth to power has become ever more necessary. "We find ourselves shifting again. The practices and principles we forged in relation to unions don't work anymore because of emerging divisions within them. The old rules don't work, so our practices of public sociology shift all the time." But for von Holdt, this doesn't necessarily require reversion to a purely oppositional public sociology. "Whether you want to engage in a way that could make a difference to the way resistance is conducted, or to the way a society is governed, you're in a constant compromise with power. And that is always uncomfortable. Some people, of course, are more comfortable with simply adopting a critical stance. However, conceptual innovation comes from grappling with a reality that challenges you all the time." ■

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# > The Solidarity Economy

## An Interview with Paul Singer

**Paul Singer** is one of the most distinguished intellectuals of the Solidarity Economy in Brazil and in the world. His publications include: *Desenvolvimento e Crise* [Development and Crisis] (1968), *Desenvolvimento Econômico e Evolução Urbana* [Economic Development and Urban Evolution] (1969), *Dinâmica Populacional e Desenvolvimento* [Population Dynamics and Development] (1970), *Dominação e desigualdade: estrutura de classes e repartição de renda no Brasil* [Domination and Inequality: Class Structure and the Distribution of Income in Brazil] (1981) and *Introdução à Economia Solidária* [Introduction to the Solidarity Economy] (2002). He was born in Vienna, Austria, and moved to Brazil in 1940. In 1953, at the age of 21, Singer was a militant of São Paulo's Steelworkers Union and a leader of a historical strike that lasted for over a month. In the 1960s he merged his militant and intellectual activities, starting his career as professor of Sociology and Economics at the University of São Paulo, also studying Demography at Princeton University. At the end of that decade his political rights were revoked by the military dictatorship and he helped found the well-known think tank *Centro Brasileiro de Análise e Planejamento* (CEBRAP). After his return to teaching, Singer helped launch the Worker's Party (PT) and then became São Paulo's Municipal Secretary of Planning and later the National Secretary of Solidarity Economy. Here he describes his experiences with the Solidarity Economy and how such initiatives can contribute to a more equal world. Paul Singer is interviewed by Gustavo Taniguti, a postdoctoral fellow at the University of São Paulo and Renan Dias de Oliveira, a professor at the Fundação Santo André, Brazil.



| Paul Singer.

**GT&RO:** *In 1969, together with Fernando Henrique Cardoso, Octávio Ianni, José Arthur Giannotti, Juarez Brandão Lopes and Francisco de Oliveira, you founded the Centro Brasileiro de Análise e Planejamento (CEBRAP). It was a group of intellectuals who had a critical perspective during the most repressive years of the military regime. What was the importance of this initiative to discuss poverty in Brazil?*

**PS:** We did research on poverty at that time because we realized that it was the country's real big problem, but we did not know the other side of the coin – prosperity, wealth, or whatever you want to call it. So we were not able to measure inequality as we can today, we did not have access to all the information we needed. At that time, I would say that the main social problem in Brazil – at least for us at CEBRAP – was exclusion. And exclusion is almost always the result of poverty.

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**GT&RO: After almost ten years of political persecution, in 1979 you returned to academic activities after the military regime forced you into mandatory retirement; and in 1980 you participated in launching the Partido dos Trabalhadores (Workers' Party). At that time, what prompted the discussion of the Solidarity Economy and cooperatives? How did you engage this issue?**

**PS:** Nobody at CEBRAP actually had contact with Solidarity Economy at that time, I think it was an unknown issue. Much later, I found out that Solidarity Economy was inspired by the Catholic Church. The term Solidarity Economy was created by a Chilean economist, Luiz Razeto. He wrote several books about it. He is now retired, but still writes on this subject frequently. The founding of the Workers' Party in 1980, soon after the 1979 amnesty, was not connected to the debate on Solidarity Economy. My interest in the subject came from an individual initiative. Like many other people, I was deeply impressed by the sudden disappearance of the so-called "real socialism." Very quickly after the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989, political regimes from many countries collapsed one after the other. Within the Workers' Party, the fall of so-called "real socialism" provoked an ideological crisis. It was a big challenge for us, as we were a socialist party who wanted to build a different society in Brazil. I spent a lot of time and energy to bring about something we called "democratic socialism."

In the 1990s Brazil faced a tremendous crisis, which particularly affected the country's employment system: 60 million jobs simply disappeared during that crisis. I felt deeply concerned about it because before then, Brazil had never experienced an unemployment rate like that. Then, suddenly, millions of industrial workers were losing their jobs, houses, and incomes. It was a real social tragedy, and because of that I was invited by the Church to visit some of the cooperatives that were being created in Brazil at that time. *Caritas*, which can be considered as the social arm of the Catholic Church, created over 1,000 workers' cooperatives, mainly made up of unemployed people. And visiting many of these cooperatives I discovered the answer to the hard question of what social democracy meant. Because those cooperatives were founded by the unemployed, they had no bosses, no hierarchies. Everything was made in a collective way, equally. I wrote a few articles at *Folha de S.Paulo* newspaper, including one called "Solidarity Economy: A Weapon Against Unemployment." I was not creating a new movement. Actually, I was only discovering it.

**GT&RO: Still in that context, what were your theoretical orientations in the debate on Solidarity Economy?**

**PS:** I would say that the main reference point was the history of socialism, beginning with the utopian socialists. It is curious because I used to read a lot of Marx, Rosa Luxemburg and other Marxist authors, but not the utopian social-

ists. In one of my classes in a university here in São Paulo, when students asked me to tell them more about those authors, I began to read Robert Owen's work. I thought it was admirable and I adopted it as a point of reference.

**GT&RO: When you became São Paulo's Secretary of Planning, during Mayor Luiza Erundina's tenure (1989-1993), were the city's anti-poverty policies related to Solidarity Economy? If so, how?**

**PS:** Initially no, but it developed later. São Paulo is the largest city in Latin America, an enormous sprawling and unequal metropolis, and that government was the first left-wing one to rule the city, the first one with a woman as mayor. More than that, Luiza Erundina came from a poor family from a state in northeastern Brazil, Paraíba. She joined the Workers' Party and became a leader very quickly. Of course, in her government, poverty was our main target since we had to overcome the 1980s crisis. I remember that the mayor, the workers' unions and myself debated how to reduce unemployment rates. Later Lula said to me that the unions could not support the unemployed, because they did not know what to do with them. In his view, the unions could only support active members of cooperatives. It was very objective. The employers in their turn offered help in exchange for tax reduction, which was impossible because it would have affected the budget of basic services, such as education and health.

So it was a very difficult context. First we created a task force to carry out the first census of homeless people in order just to save them from starving! Later we created recyclable material waste-picker's cooperatives. This was the beginning of the Solidarity Economy. Particularly with help from *Caritas* we found out what Solidarity Economy was all about. We decided to adopt 100 percent of the principles of cooperativism, and by 1996 I was convinced that it was an expression of democratic socialism.

**GT&RO: In the 2000s, two important spaces to debate and plan the Solidarity Economy were created: the Fórum Brasileiro de Economia Solidária (Brazilian Solidarity Economy Forum) and the Secretaria Nacional de Economia Solidária (Solidarity Economy National Secretariat, an organ from the Ministry of Labor and Employment). Could you tell us about the political context in which they were created? How do they assist Solidarity Economy at the national, state, and municipal levels?**

**PS:** It was a context of high unemployment rates, though not as severe as those we had had in the 1980s. Cardoso's government was strongly neoliberal in many ways. The most important thing for him was the fight against inflation, which he did by increasing interest rates, resulting in unemployment – which leaves workers with little bargaining power.

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When Lula was elected in 2002, he was already sure that the Solidarity Economy would be included in his government program. The Workers' Party adopted the Solidarity Economy, and it is still included in the party platform. As Lula began his term as President, the Solidarity Economy movements started to hold national meetings, pushing for the creation of a secretariat at the Ministry of Labor and Employment. This happened very quickly, in 2003, after Lula took office. We spent some months getting the approval from Parliament, but in June of that year the *Solidarity Economy National Secretariat* was finally created. *The Brazilian Solidarity Economy Forum* was linked to the Secretariat because logically we would not introduce any policy without social movements. It would not make any sense. With the Forum, all policies result from an interaction with social movements, which provide live reports of the Solidarity Economy's problems, claims, and demands.

Today, Solidarity Economy crosses the whole country, from the Amazon to the South. It is not as big as we would like, but it is not a small movement anymore. Besides the Secretariat, the same law created a National Council, most of whose participants come from the Forum.

The Secretariat uses its budget to promote and assist Solidarity Economy cooperatives. We did this especially during Rousseff's first term, participating in the *Brasil sem Miséria* program. Five or six ministries were part of that program; the Secretariat was responsible for productive inclusion in urban areas, bringing opportunities to create cooperatives to whoever might be interested. Our estimate is that this policy helped bring around half million families out of poverty. But we were not the first country to have an official institutional support for Solidarity Economy. France was first. In 2001, at the First Social Forum, we met the French Minister of Solidarity Economy.

**GT&RO: Could you explain how the university-based incubators started?**

**PS:** Incubators were started originally in the United States. They are important to the extent that they stimulate students and professors to create enterprises in the university environment. And they work very well. The Federal University of Rio de Janeiro had the first incubator for the Solidarity Economy in 1994. Our incubators are different in that they are not devoted to science, but are mainly interested in social issues. After a few years we saw popular cooperatives being reproduced in Rio's shantytowns, and now in Brazil many public universities have their own incubators, support-

ed by the Secretariat. At present we have 110 incubators in Brazilian universities. These popular incubators also have a big impact on universities because the students who work there come from different areas: economics, geography, social sciences, and engineering. But they are mostly middle-class students who have contact with and are finding ways to assist the poorest communities for the first time in their lives. It has a positive impact on the campus.

**GT&RO: In your view, what are the virtues of economic organization ruled by workers' associations? And what are the challenges faced by the Solidarity Economy in Brazil today?**

**PS:** I would say that the biggest virtue is democracy. People work together, respecting each other, without competition. Our Solidarity Economy map shows that in Brazil we have about 30.000 active cooperatives, involving around three million people. And we have support from important parts of society, such as the Catholic Church, the *Central Única dos Trabalhadores* (CUT), and the universities. It is a very new and stimulating social experience.

Among the challenges to the Solidarity Economy in Brazil, the most important one is that the Solidarity Economy enterprises are somewhat fragile. Many of them disappear in five years. Generally, small enterprises have a short life. But, of course, not all of them are small. For example, we have the *Fábricas Recuperadas* (Recovered Factories), when a bankrupted factory is recreated and replaced by a cooperative. In Brazil we have 67 *Fábricas Recuperadas* and in Argentina you will find many more.

**GT&RO: How do you see the Solidarity Economy in Brazil compared to other experiences in Latin America and around the globe?**

**PS:** I am still learning more about Solidarity Economy almost every day. At the local level, dealing with the fragility of enterprises is a big challenge, and the cultural element is also very important. Internal conflicts and disagreements between groups can be decisive in the success or failure of an enterprise. We must know how to avoid conflicts – and more than that, how to solve them. I am not sure how central the cultural factor is for the Solidarity Economy around the globe, but surely a comparison with other countries such as South Africa, Philippines, South Korea – and many others from Europe and Latin America – would be important to building a democratic work environment. We must learn from them. ■

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# > Uralungal, India's Oldest Worker Cooperative

by **Michelle Williams**, University of the Witwatersrand, South Africa, and member of ISA Research Committee on Labour Movements (RC44)



*Delicate construction at Uralungal, India's oldest worker cooperative.*

**I**n Kerala, India, a remarkable worker cooperative has defied the predictions of mainstream economists for over 90 years. Uralungal Labour Contract Cooperative Society (ULCCS), a 2000 member-strong worker-owned construction cooperative, builds large infrastructure projects such as roads, bridges, and building complexes. Named after the Uralungal hamlet in northern Kerala's Malabar region, the Uralungal Cooperative has pioneered local-level alternative production, epitomizing qualities of the solidarity economy such as democracy, equity, solidarity, reciprocity, and integrative networks. These principles are encoded in the fabric of the cooperative through its members' ethos, as well as through cooperative bylaws which describe the cooperative's primary objective as serving members

– that is, the workers of the cooperative – by ensuring secure, rewarding, and well-remunerated work. To do this it has pioneered democratic workplace organization and egalitarian redistribution, even in the context of a highly competitive sector dominated by large, profit-seeking (and often corrupt) contractors.

ULCCS's commitment to democratic and egalitarian principles harks back to its founding years in the early twentieth century. In the 1930s and 1940s, Uralungal was at the vortex of political turbulence, when powerful peasant and workers' movements sprang up in Malabar, the nationalist movement took a radical turn, and the Communist Party emerged as a hegemonic force in the area. In the cooperative's formative years,

this radicalization of Malabar helped shape the ethos of an alternative economy based on democratic decision making, surplus subordinated to social goals, ecological sustainability, and collective production. Over the years, the cooperative has used its democratic organization, collective decision making, and alternative ethos of people before profits to creatively overcome each new challenge.

Mainstream economists often predict that even if worker cooperatives emerge, survive and prosper, they will soon degenerate into a typical capitalist firm, losing any lofty principles of worker control and worker ownership. Against these arguments, the actual performance of worker cooperatives such as ULCCS stands out as beacons for inspiration and as expe-

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periences offering valuable lessons for future practice.

At the center of ULCCS's success is its commitment to participatory and direct democracy within the cooperative. In the remaining section of this article, I will focus on the role of participatory democracy in that success.

### > **Decision Making and Worker Democracy**

How do cooperatives ensure strict coordination and efficient production without the typical capitalist techniques of discipline and incentives? How do they ensure that worker ownership does not undermine the powers of supervisors or lead to workers shirking their responsibilities? More specifically, how did ULCCS succeed in creating a judicious blend of hierarchy and participation? To answer these questions, we must look at ULCCS's experiences in developing a labor process that is both efficient and participatory.

In ULCCS, workers elect the board of directors at an annual general meeting, and discuss a detailed report on the cooperative's past year. This general meeting is not a formality, and the re-election of the board of directors is not a foregone conclusion. Once the board of directors is elected, however, they are granted autonomy to procure contracts, choose technology, allocate workers to different worksites, and other routine decisions. Thus, the directors are the managers of the cooperative, which means that management is elected by the workers – in sharp contrast to capitalist corporations, where managers are appointed by an unelected leadership.

The construction sites are led by site leaders chosen from among the workers, in a process through which only workers with proven managerial ability and who enjoy widespread respect and trust are selected. Workers and site leaders continually discuss the di-

vision of labor and procedures at worksites – for example, over a collective lunch (prepared by the cooperative). While there is a great deal of inclusive deliberation, once a decision is made, everyone must abide by it. Disobeying site leaders' instructions, dereliction of duty, financial irregularities or deliberate lapses in performance can lead to disciplinary action – although such action is rarely needed.

Democratic processes are maintained through regular communication within the cooperative. Site leaders attend daily meetings with the board of directors. All site leaders, board members, and technical staff attend weekly meetings, and all worker members participate in monthly meetings where new developments are reported, and where members can raise criticisms. Full financial statements are discussed at annual general meetings. While so many meetings involve time and energy, it also produces a sense of collective ownership, solidarity, and common mission, enhancing productivity.

### > **Participation and Market Competitiveness**

The major challenge for ULCCS in competing with private contractors is that the cooperative cannot cut costs by curtailing workers' benefits or cheating on materials or specifications. The cooperative has always considered adherence to contract specifications a sacrosanct principle, which has contributed to its impressive reputation. Since India's public works projects are notorious for corruption and manipulation, these limits create a very serious handicap.

The cooperative's competitive edge comes from high labor productivity, stemming from both the effective use of technology and workers' diligence and skill – a vital asset in the labor-intensive construction process. For example, the quality and cost of an ordinary macadam road depend on the thickness of

different layers, the effectiveness of red earth binding, the evenness in the mixing of the tar, and its timely application on the metal layer. Each step requires skill, diligence, and commitment from workers. In construction, concreting similarly requires close cooperation among many workers. Moreover, workers motivated to maintain a schedule and avoid unnecessary waste are critical to the cooperative's successful completion of projects on time. Thus, the skill and commitment of workers – not simply supervisors or managers – are the cooperatives' major assets. ULCCS has prioritized active participation in decision making, while maintaining generous remuneration packages and positive working conditions.

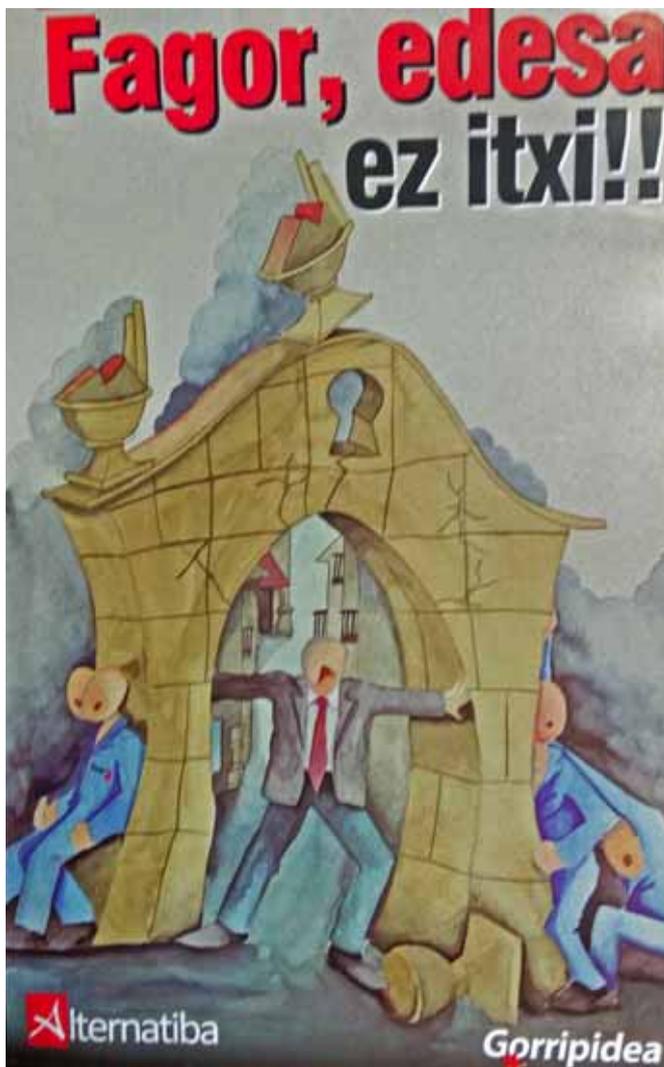
Mechanization has transformed worksites, and many of the jobs involved in construction have become unnecessary or deskilled. Further, the shift in pace linked to mechanization could alter workers' sense of involvement and bonds of solidarity. Aware of these potential dangers, the cooperative has responded by deepening democracy in three ways, with a deeper commitment to transparent, open deliberation; reprioritizing workers' feedback; and improving its skills development programs.

Another lurking danger is the erosion of commitment among contemporary workers. Until recently, most members were relatives of the pioneering generation, but today many new workers lack kinship or local ties. Many participants worry about the quality of deliberations at the annual general meetings, and the willingness of workers to do extra work has weakened. There is no easy solution to this trend other than continued education about the cooperative's history, its traditions of commitment and sacrifice, and the principles that have made the ULCCS what it is today. Thus, the survival of ULCCS as a genuine cooperative is political. It must generate values of cooperation in a society dominated by market values. ■

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# > The Mondragon Cooperatives: Successes and Challenges

by **Sharryn Kasmir**, Hofstra University, USA



*Bankruptcy of Mondragon's flagship enterprise, the huge appliance maker Fagor.*

Frequently, Mondragon in the Spanish Basque region – widely considered the most successful worker-owned cooperative enterprise in the world – is discussed as a model. Started in the 1950s as a Catholic Action project, today, the Mondragon group includes 257 financial, industrial, retail, and research and development concerns, employing approximately 74,000 people. The coops manufacture everything from commercial kitchen equipment (under the flagship Fagor brand) to industrial robots; the retail giant Eroski boasts 2,000 outlets throughout Europe; and the bank Caja Laboral and social security coop provide financial services to members and affiliated businesses. The coops are not unionized, and they have no outside stockholders. Instead, each worker or manager invests as a member in the firm, and has one vote in its general assembly. Each coop is represented at the Cooperative Congress, where system-wide plans and business decisions are made.

Size and success make Mondragon unique among cooperative experiments, and there is a great deal more that is admirable. The coops have retained members' jobs in Spain's Basque country even during economic crises. Manifesting an ethos of solidarity, members accept salary cuts, invest additional funds, and transfer between coops when necessary. Mondragon limits its highest managerial salary to about nine times the pay of its lowest-paid members, a remarkably flat scale compared to Spain's overall ratio of about 127:1. Mondragon's core principle, the sovereignty of labor over capital, is visible in the distribution of surplus to members' capital accounts in the Caja Laboral, where they are held as private savings but made available for investment in the coop group.

But while Mondragon is often a starting point for those who want a real world alternative to capitalism, critical questions about the cooperatives' rank-and-file workers, working conditions, and class are too often sidelined.

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**I**n the wake of financial crisis and anti-austerity uprisings, there is growing interest in the US and Europe in nurturing non-capitalist social relations and solidarity economies: academics and advocates argue that worker-owned coops secure jobs, give workers control, and encourage solidarity. These transformations, they suggest, sow seeds of socialism, or at least a more democratic and just capitalism – a welcome message after decades of virulent neoliberalism.

Although its coops are concentrated in the Basque region, Mondragon went global in 1990, and now controls some 100 foreign subsidiaries and joint ventures – mainly in developing and post-socialist countries, with low wages or expanding markets. These firms are not worker-owned, and employees do not enjoy the same rights or privileges given coop members. Instead, they are wage laborers. Even in the Basque country and Spain, industrial and retail coops employ significant numbers of temporary workers on short-term contracts. Today, only about one-half of Mondragon's businesses are cooperatives, and only one-third of its employees are members.

In 2013, Fagor Electrodomésticos (the home appliance division) declared bankruptcy, a victim of the 2008 financial crisis that shocked the Spanish housing market and home appliance sector. The Mondragon group bankrolled Fagor for years, but the brand's investments in eighteen plants across six countries became ever-more burdensome, until the affiliated Mondragon coops were no longer willing to save Fagor. The bankruptcy threatened 5,600 jobs (down from 11,000 before the bubble.)

With a population of 25,000, this hit the city of Mondragón hard. Fagor members in Mondragón and nearby towns took early retirement or transferred to other coops, but local contract workers and 3,500 employees of Fagor subsidiaries were not similarly protected. Their fate, and the conditions of employees in other coop subsidiaries, are as much a part of the Mondragon story as are coop principles, democratic structures, and the distribution of surplus to members.

In Wroclaw, Poland, a 2008 strike over low pay and anti-union repression raised questions about Fagor's three-tier labor force, with coop members in the Basque country, temporary workers throughout Spain, and wage laborers in subsidiaries. Does job security, decent pay, and workplace participation in the Basque country rest upon exploitation elsewhere?

A study of Mondragon subsidiaries in China comparing coop-owned factories with foreign-owned capitalist firms found that pay was low, hours long, and conditions harsh. Just like their capitalist competitors, Mondragon coops invested in China to manufacture labor-intensive goods cheaply and to be near emerging markets – a strategy

coop members accepted when they voted to pursue an international strategy.

Can subsidiaries be converted into coops? Distinct national legal frameworks make this difficult, although the 2003 Cooperative Congress called for “social expansion” to extend participation and democracy. Mondragon's non-profit organization is hoping to strengthen a global social economy network, helping the United Steel Workers to develop unionized coops in the US, and working with a recently-launched commercial laundry in Pittsburgh. Nevertheless, Mondragon's subsidiaries still operate like standard firms, even though their aim is not to maximize profit for stockholders but to preserve coops and jobs in the Basque country.

Many analysts trust the Mondragon group to treat non-member employees well, pointing to efforts to educate workers in Mexico and the coop conversion of a private enterprise in Galicia, Spain. Others, however, argue that Mondragon's global strategy proves cooperatives cannot survive in a capitalist sea: facing competition, coops either degenerate into capitalist firms, or founder.

These problems have a longer history, however. In the late 1980s, I found that shop-floor conditions, rank-and-file participation in decision making, and workers' identification in a Fagor coop were no better than at a neighboring capitalist factory with a unionized workforce. Furthermore, coop members showed little solidarity with the Basque labor movement – at the time, part of an activist leftist coalition. As an institution, Mondragon steered clear of these politics, and coop members stayed on the job while local metal-sector workers went on strike.

Mondragon may appear a haven of non-capitalism, but there are important lessons in its lived experiences, particularly if we put workers – members, contract workers, wage laborers – and working-class movements at the center. What is the role of coops in building a broad-based labor and social movement, and how might Mondragon's egalitarian impulses strengthen a wider political vision? Mondragon offers a starting point for thinking about non-capitalism – but its example is as valuable for the hard questions it poses about class and power as for the alternative business model it embodies. ■

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# > The Anti-Middleman Movement in Greece

by **Theodoros Rakopoulos**, University of Bergen, Norway<sup>1</sup>



| Marketing potatoes in Thessaloniki.

perienced vivid examples of informal cooperativization, especially between 2011 and 2014.

In Thessaloniki (Greece's second biggest city) many residents of the city center and some popular suburbs benefitted from the "anti-middleman" movement. Unpaid participants coordinated grassroots cooperatives to distribute food, helping agricultural producers to sell food directly to consumers, in open, makeshift farmers' markets. In 2012-13, as many as 80 such groups operated in Greece; in Thessaloniki alone, at the heyday of the movement, and during earlier fieldwork in the latter half of 2013, there were around ten such "flash" markets that took place every Sunday, with thousands attending.

This anti-middleman movement was organized around informal cooperatives that manage the distribution of foodstuff. Urban-based activists organized farmers' markets in poor and middle-class neighborhoods, squatting in squares, parking lots or parks. These impromptu markets were arranged in order to avoid market middlemen. Eliminating the brokers' charges made fresh produce affordable. Activists contacted farmers in nearby rural areas, inviting them to markets they set, and liaised with them for long-term collaborations. The activists set up in a regular, if informal, fashion; farmers sold fresh produce for as little as half the usual retail price. These relations were formalized in contracts stipulating that the farmers would not vote Golden Dawn (a neo-Nazi party, currently third in Parliament seats) or support racist policies.

**C**oops have often been a grassroots response to economic crises of the sort Greece has been facing for the past six years, offering a safety net for workers, salvaging jobs in times of transition or recession, from the American depression of the 1930s, to Eastern Europe's post-socialist predicament in the early 1990s, to the crisis that hit Argentina in 2001. As Greece has faced an ongoing recession – with unemployment rates rising above 27% in 2015 – a series of mobilizations has nurtured a highly-politicized network of informal cooperatives, drawing on the social arrangements of everyday life in crisis as well as a vocal political sphere. Grassroots groups dispersed across Greece expressed a new wave of radicalization by constructing a reciprocity-based social economy, sometimes called a "solidarity" or "alternative" economy.

For the past five years, the development of this informal network of grassroots groups was closely tied to the Greek Left's increasing popularity, and the gradual ascent to power of Syriza (the Coalition of the Radical Left). However, this overlap has now produced a dilemma for activists: with Syriza's electoral victories, and the party's recent decision to accept new austerity measures, the activists of the solidarity economy face new challenges.

## > The movement in action

Configured around mostly informal cooperative groups, these experiments – barter markets and time-banks, as well as cooperatively-organized social welfare provision, such as social clinics or pharmacies – have offered alternatives to austerity. Working-class and lower-middle-class districts in Greece's cities have ex-

## > The movement in (relative) hibernation

Today, many local households' basic needs are served by this informal agrarian distribution. However, after peaking in late 2013, the movement's scope, practice and even its identity have fluctuated. Several anti-middleman groups are currently dormant, meeting less frequently or abandoning market activities entirely.

The main problem of the anti-middleman movement stems from an unfriendly context. Cooperationists faced police prosecution when they failed to obtain licenses for their squat-markets, and some farmers have faced fines for "illicit squatting in public space" – a legal charge usually activated by the Association of the Open Markets of Thessaloniki, a middleman lobby group. Personal exhaustion has also played a role: many activists were disappointed by the farmers' reluctance to take a leading role in organizing the markets.

A second problem is more complicated, related to activists' concern about whether these informal operations could guarantee resilience. Many activists discussed formal cooperativization, but this would have required a progressive political and legal framework.

Of course, such efforts would have been helped by a progressive government. In early January 2015, in the months before Syriza entered government, the movement started to enter a stage of hibernation. Having faced state coercion and unable to fully convince farmers to engage more directly in the movement, activists hoped for more favorable conditions for their "solidarity economy." Expecting a shift in government, activists withdrew from efforts to strengthen informal cooperatives. Some participants

in group assemblies raised concerns about "cooptation," but most solidarity economy activists expected a very different climate "once the Left leads the state," as one activist put it. In fact, many group meetings revolved around the idea that "we are doing what the state should be doing," and a leading activist suggested in an assembly meeting that "the movement could easily turn into a farmers' mobilization assisted by a social state." Especially as Syriza members started participating (or "infiltrating" the groups, as one activist told me half-jokingly), there was a clear sense that Syriza would solidify a "new era for the social economy."

## > Syriza in Power

Anticipating its election, the party created an umbrella organization meant to strengthen the nodes among groups and between informal groups and the state. This offered some important international publicity for the solidarity economy, echoing the popularity of Syriza itself. But the party's platform has not targeted the development of the movement on the grassroots level. Instead, we have witnessed a complex situation in which various activists became more engaged with Syriza, while others removed themselves from the movement altogether.

Meanwhile, the food solidarity economy has gradually diminished in both numbers and appeal, although some progressive municipalities have begun to organize their own anti-middleman markets. Most original grassroots groups today remain in a limbo, oscillating between what some activists called "co-optation" and others called "solidification." Describing this partial transformation of the movement in the embrace of the state, some activists use the popular concept "*anathesi*", roughly translated as *conferring*,

and its practice as *conferral politics*, reflecting the idea that grassroots movements can confer their energy and potential to established politics, thus dampening their activity.

Paradoxically, as the cooperative social economy on the ground has articulated with the progressive politics of a radical left-wing government, Syriza in power has proved an unexpected obstacle to the solidarity economy's development, a reality that is located in the links between party and informal groups, and, most importantly, in the anticipation that the Left would support the solidarity economy. (Tellingly, the main maxim in January elections was "the hope is coming.")

Political mobilization, the blood of the solidarity movement, has receded, yet an important footprint of the anti-middleman movement is still visible in the civil and political landscape of Thessaloniki. Social clinics and pharmacies remain active and are relatively formalized, while a cooperative food shop set up by the anti-middleman movement has been very successful. Meanwhile, Syriza's dismal failure in halting austerity – indeed the party's introduction of a new bailout and austerity package – has delegitimized the institutional Left in the eyes of many solidarity economy participants, perhaps widening the gap between grassroots groups and the government. In light of the new looming of austerity, the government will not have leeway to craft a legal framework that fully endorses and promotes cooperatives and the solidarity economy. Could this shift revitalize a movement that, in the words of one activist, "sprang out of material necessity and emotional rage"? It remains to be seen whether these new dynamics might reinvigorate the solidarity movement or reshape participants' uncomfortable relation with Left institutional politics. ■

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<sup>1</sup> This article is based on fieldwork funded by the Wenner-Gren Foundation for anthropological research, Grant Number 8856.

# > Recuperated Enterprises in Argentina

by **Julián Rebón**, University of Buenos Aires, Argentina



Zanon ceramics factory, taken over by workers in 2001, is one of the most prominent recuperated factories in Argentina.

**I**t's the morning of August 11, 2014 in the Garín district of Buenos Aires: 400 workers at Donnelley Graphic find a notice on the factory's front door, announcing that the multinational company has closed its business in Argentina. Workers gather in an assembly, taking over the plant. Organized as a cooperative, they soon restart production.

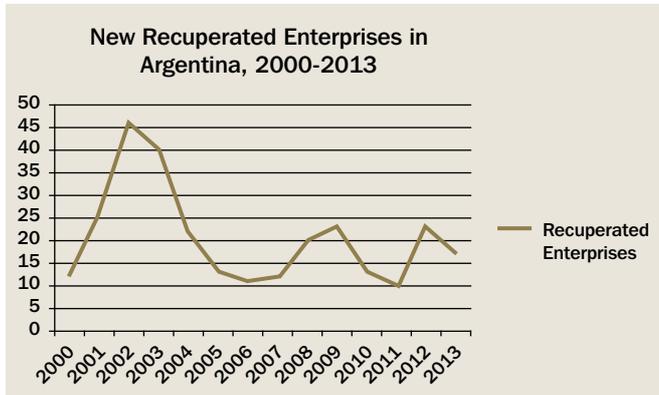
The Donnelley workers relied on a strategy that has been deployed by over 300 companies in Argentina since 2000: recuperated enterprises. Workers of companies in crisis often organize as worker cooperatives to run production themselves and defend their work. These defense strategies embody the main attributes of cooperativism – democracy, voluntary association, and collective ownership – creating companies that are more democratic and just than they were before the takeover.

Workers began to “recuperate” enterprises in Argentina in the late 1990s, especially after the general crisis of 2001. Neoliberal reforms from the 1990s brought the economy to an impasse, but Argentina's general crisis favored the spread of worker-recuperated enterprises in

two ways. First, multiple factories closed or went bankrupt during this period, leading to unprecedented levels of unemployment and job instability. Second, this acute political crisis triggered unprecedented processes of social unrest and struggle, a context in which worker-recuperated enterprises became a *social movement*. For a society so strongly marked by a culture of work, to protest against unemployment became a widespread and legitimate project.<sup>1</sup>

As the socio-economic and political crisis subsided, some scholars assumed that worker-recuperated enterprises would disappear, but this did not happen. The figure below shows that although the number of new worker-recuperated factories peaked in 2002, takeovers continued even as the economy improved and unemployment rates declined. Workers had a new socially-recognized tool, which they continued to deploy in new contexts. The expansion was also favored by unemployment rates that, although declining, remained significant (around 7% over the past few years) and political conditions (at least at a federal level) that were not adverse to these processes.

Worker-recuperated enterprises seem to be here to stay. According to the *Programa Facultad Abierta* of the University of Buenos Aires, 311 worker-recuperated enterprises employed 13,642 workers in Argentina in 2013. Although half of these companies are located in the Buenos Aires Metropolitan Area, 21 out of the country's 24 districts have worker-recuperated factories. These are mostly small and medium companies in the metal, graphic, textile, and food sectors.



Source: Elaborated by the author with data from the *Programa Facultad Abierta*, University of Buenos Aires.

Recuperated enterprises have managed to keep and create new jobs, with only a few of them shutting down.

Nevertheless, they face diverse challenges and tensions. For example, under current law, workers who take over a factory are considered autonomous workers, which reduces retirement, health insurance, and family benefits. Worker cooperatives are currently demanding that the state specifically recognize worker management, legally granting them the same social benefits as employees. Worker-run enterprises also face the challenge of determining workers' lawful possession of productive units. Workers have relied on local public usage and expropriation laws to obtain lawful possession of factories, but in some cases, these have been insufficient to resolve property rights, so outcomes have depended on the support of local authorities and judges.

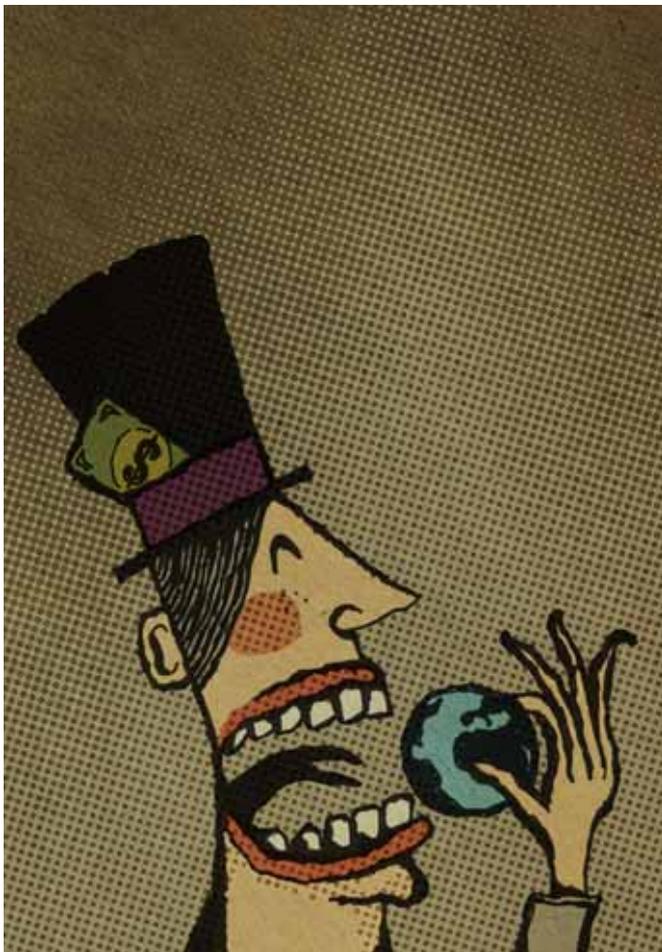
In 2011, the Law of Bankruptcy or *Ley de Concursos y Quiebras* was amended so that in case of bankruptcy, workers organized in cooperatives may use labor credits (*acreencias laborales*) to purchase a bankrupt company. Nevertheless, this law does not apply in all cases and it is only beginning to be used. In this context of undefined property rights, workers run the risk of eviction. As I was finishing this article, the police were evicting workers at the recently recuperated restaurant La Robla, while workers at the recuperated Hotel Bauen were also facing an order of eviction. Although recuperated enterprises are socially legitimate, they are not yet fully recognized by law. ■

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<sup>1</sup> In 2012, the Gino Germani Institute at the University of Buenos Aires carried out a survey in the Buenos Aires Metropolitan Area. Results indicated that 73% of the population was aware of the existence of recuperated enterprises and that 93% of them considered this a positive development.

# > The End of the World or the End of Capitalism?

by **Leslie Sklair**, London School of Economics, United Kingdom



| Illustration by Arbu.

very long-term process of negating, avoiding, and eventually consigning to the dustbin of history global capitalism, social democracy, and the state forms they have created.

Why is capitalist globalization bound to fail to bring prosperity, happiness and peace to all humanity? Capitalism's two fatal flaws are the crises of class polarization (the rich get richer, the very poor are always with us, and the middle class is increasingly insecure) and of ecological unsustainability (an inevitable consequence of both capitalist and socialist dogmas of growth promoted relentlessly by the culture-ideology of consumerism). These crises can be directly attributed to the transnational capitalist class (consisting of corporate, political, professional, and consumerist fractions) and its dominant value system, the culture-ideology of consumerism.<sup>1</sup>

Here, I simply want to point toward key elements of a progressive non-capitalist transition. The first is size. Huge transnational corporations and huge corporate states, serviced by huge professional and huge consumer goods and services organizations, dominate the lives of people everywhere, so it seems obvious that smaller scale structures might work better and enable people to live more fulfilling lives. This is not the fantasy of cellular localism; my vision of an alternative, radical, progressive globalization envisages networks of small producer-consumer cooperatives (PCC) cooperating at a variety of levels, primarily to ensure a decent standard of living for everyone on the planet.

How could PCCs be organized to release the emancipatory potential of generic globalization in a non-capitalist world? The simple and encouraging answer is that they would work, in the early stages of transformation at least, much as millions of small-scale cooperative groups work at present in enclaves all over the world. The other essays in

“It is easier to imagine the end of the world,” it has been said, “than to imagine the end of capitalism” – a profound truth about the era of capitalist globalization. Far more has been written about the evils of capitalism, than about what a non-capitalist world might look like, especially in the context of the so-called socialisms and communisms of the recent past. To go beyond this, we have to begin again. My argument is that prospects for progressive change are best seen as a

this symposium document inspiring stories of progressive activism and consciousness-raising but, unsurprisingly, they are all problematic. Sharryn Kasmir shows that Mondragon – once the greatest hope of the cooperative movement – seems inevitably compromised within the framework of a global capitalist system. In her case study of the Uralungal Labour Contract Cooperative Society in Kerala, Michelle Williams reveals the necessary conditions for genuine workers' control, but her conclusions suggest that its future is not secure. In the interview with Paul Singer the evolution of the Solidarity Economy in Brazil offers encouraging results in bringing people out of poverty, but it remains an enormous task, and it is unclear how the society as a whole could be changed. Julián Rebón's analysis of worker-run factories in Argentina provokes questions about why a capitalist state would make it easy for them to prosper or even survive, as does Theodoros Rakopoulos' research on anti-middleman markets in Greece, where leftist "seizure" of the state by Syriza appears to inhibit rather than support the movement.

None of these initiatives indicates a way out of capitalist exploitation or ecological unsustainability, and none of them really problematizes the role of the state – whether leftist, rightist or centrist – nor how these initiatives work with the capitalist consumerist market. I conclude that all states end up being hierarchical, and that only in small-scale communities like PCCs, locally or globally linked via the Internet, can we avoid this inevitable slippery slope.

In his *Prison Notebooks*, Gramsci said that in periods of crisis the old is dying and the new is not yet born. While Gramsci drew attention to the morbid symptoms of such a situation (in 1930) our crisis is different, and I want to draw attention to more hopeful symptoms (waiting to be born) of our present crisis of capitalist hegemony.

The viability of initiatives trying to avoid competition with the market and escape from the hierarchic state rests on many untested assumptions. The first assumption is that those who do essential day-to-day tasks would continue to do their jobs in a PCC in preference to large corporations and their local affiliates: a multitude of people who now work in private or public sectors, directly or indirectly, establishing PCCs in their local communities producing food, organizing transport, setting up places of learning and transmission of skills, providing healthcare, running power systems, and so on. PCCs already do this all over the world on a small scale but such initiatives struggle within capitalist markets. Community-Supported Agriculture schemes in various parts of the world represent a first step on a long and difficult road to self-sufficiency in this sphere.

Neoliberal ideologues argue that there is no alternative to capitalist globalization. If we refuse to believe them and

start creating alternatives and these alternatives prove to be successful in their own terms then the logic of the market can be refuted, undermined, or simply ignored. As I write this, I can see the smiles of those who would like to believe it but find it unbelievable. One hundred years ago suggestions that human organs could be successfully transplanted, that we would be able to witness events unfolding live in any part of the world, that we could walk on the moon, that intercontinental travel could be achieved within hours and visual communication almost instantaneously, would also have been dismissed as unbelievable. As the rallying call of the World Social Forum has it: "Another world is possible."

With very few exceptions, sociology is silent on such matters; even to raise them draws the uncomfortable threat of professional ridicule from the Weberian value-free gatekeepers. It is not surprising that graduate schools and funding bodies are generally reluctant to support research along non-capitalist lines. The irony is that there is, of course, a large volume of research that is critical of many facets of capitalist society but practically none of it calls capitalism itself into question or raises issues around non-capitalist society; even a thinker as advanced and progressive as E.O. Wright more or less comes to this conclusion in his widely acclaimed *Envisioning Real Utopias*.

But the time is ripe for a new radical progressive sociology to begin to face up to this challenge of theory and research on non-capitalist society. This would involve challenging the dogma of ever-increasing growth, the mainstay of capitalist globalization, social democracy, and orthodox Marxism. This is already being discussed through the idea of convivial degrowth. It would certainly mean that the richer would become less rich and the poorer would become richer in material possessions, though all would benefit in non-material riches. The culture-ideology of consumerism would be replaced by a culture-ideology of human rights and responsibilities, prime among which would be a serious commitment to a decent, sustainable standard of living for all.

Only by ignoring the market can we escape the inevitable catastrophic consequences of capitalist globalization. Admittedly this sounds totally unrealistic, but only if we fail to acknowledge the Achilles heel of global consumerist capitalism: it is based on consumer sovereignty, and consumers cannot be forced to consume junk food and drink, junk culture, junk addictions. The power of capitalist marketing, advertising, and the ideological corporate-state apparatuses is formidable, but if parents can be brought to full awareness of how the market damages them and their children, there is still hope for the planet and all those who live on it. However difficult it is to start to imagine the end of capitalism and the hierarchic state, and the necessity of degrowth, the longer we leave it the more difficult it will be to bring it about. ■

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<sup>1</sup> I have written about these matters in *The transnational Capitalist Class* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2001) and *Globalization: Capitalism and its Alternatives* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002).

# > Contesting Neo-Extractive Accumulation in Latin America

by **Maristella Svampa**, National University of La Plata, Argentina



Mapuche protest against mining in Argentina.

investments (mega ventures), threatening negative impact to territories and ecosystems – neo-extractivism encompasses open-pit mega-mining, hydrocarbon exploitation, large hydroelectric dams (for extraction), expanding fishing and deforestation, and, of course, agribusiness (transgenic crops such as soy, oil palm and biofuels).

I have termed this current phase of capital accumulation “*commodity consensus*” (Svampa, 2011, 2013), recognizing that in contrast to the 1990s, Latin American economies today have been favored by a boom in international commodity prices. Latin American governments have responded by highlighting the advantages and downplaying new inequalities, as well as the environmental, economic, and social asymmetries produced by the international division of labor and territory. Most states assert a productivist vision of development, dismissing critiques around any negative impacts and ignoring social protests.

**A**cross Latin America, activists and intellectuals are questioning the dynamics of capital accumulation and models of development, and debating categories such as neo-extractivism, *buen vivir* or the right to a good life, common goods, and the rights of nature. Questioning the sustainability of contemporary development models, these critics simultaneously suggest other possible relations between society, economy, and nature. These debates have been especially heated in Ecuador and Bolivia, where popularly-elected governments in the early 21st cen-

tury seemed poised to pursue alternative development paths.

But these debates have become increasingly complex. As governments have expanded the exploitation of natural resources, a critique of neo-extractivism began to take shape. “Neo-extractivism,” referring to an accumulation pattern based on the over-exploitation of natural resources, has become a key term in the political grammar of socio-territorial movements, indigenous, and peasant organizations. Characterized by the large-scale export of primary goods (commodities) – often through large

Commodity Consensus highlights the region's broad return to primary extraction activities, a process aggravated by the increasingly important role played by the People's Republic of China, Latin America's main commodity consumer. In 2013, China was the main destination for Chilean and Brazilian exports; it was the second most important destination for exports from Argentina, Peru, Colombia and Cuba; and third for Mexico, Uruguay and Venezuela (Slipak, 2014).

### > Phases of Commodity Consensus

Commodity Consensus has gone through several phases. Its origins lie in the neoliberal globalization and the Washington Consensus of the 1990s, which produced profound transformations in Latin American societies and economies, as states favored multinational firms and new laws paved the way for extractive activities like mega-mining, oil extraction, and the cultivation of transgenic crops.

In the late 1990s, intense anti-neoliberal social movements emerged in Bolivia, Ecuador, Argentina, among other countries. But progressive governments which emerged through these processes confronted severe limitations and conflicts. When international prices for primary goods boomed in 2003, Commodity Consensus took off, combining high profitability and comparative advantages. This first phase was characterized by the repression of conflicts associated with extraction activities, while most states developed close new associations with private multinational capi-

tal. Despite nationalist rhetoric, over the decade that followed, extraction projects increased, and large transnational corporations gained a more central place in national economies.

From 2009-2010, a second phase was characterized by further expansion in extraction projects: in the case of Brazil, the Growth Acceleration Program foresees multiple dams in the Amazon; in Bolivia, the *gran salto industrial* or great industrial leap, promises multiple extraction projects (gas, lithium, iron, agribusiness); for Ecuador, mega-mining will be developed; Venezuela's Strategic Plan will expand oil extraction into the Orinoco Belt; Argentina's Agri-food Strategic Plan 2010-2020 foresees a 60% increase in soy production, as well as fracking and mega-mining.

Mega-mining has given rise to great socio-environmental tension. According to the Observatory of Mining Conflicts in Latin America, there were 120 conflicts in Latin America in 2010 affecting some 150 communities. In 2012, 161 conflicts involved 173 projects affecting 212 communities, while in 2014, the number of conflicts rose to 198 involving 207 projects in 296 communities. By April 2015, 208 documented conflicts involved 218 projects and 312 affected communities. Mexico was ranked highest, with 36 conflicts, followed by Peru with 35; Chile with 34; Argentina with 26; Brazil with 20; Colombia with 13; Bolivia with 9; and Ecuador with 7 (<http://www.conflictosmineros.net/>).

In the current phase, some socio-environmental and territorial struggles

transcend local politics, acquiring national visibility. These include efforts to protect Bolivia's Isiboro Sécure National Park and Indigenous Territory (TIPNIS), where the local population opposes the construction of a highway; efforts to block a mega-dam in Belo Monte, Brazil; resistance against mega-mining in several provinces of Argentina; and in 2013, the final suspension of the Yasuní-ITT Initiative and militarization of the Intag area in Ecuador, an area of pioneering resistance to mega-mining. Unrest is also present in countries with neoliberal or conservative governments. In Peru, resistance to a mining project in the Conga between 2011 and 2013 led to 25 deaths; and in Mexico, protests against mega-mining and dam construction have continued despite increased repression and violence.

Most governments support extractive activities, criminalizing and repressing protests, and limiting political participation on the part of local and native populations. Capital's expanding exploitation of natural resources, goods, and territories has placed serious limitations on collective and environmental rights, crushing the emancipatory narratives that created such hope in countries like Bolivia and Ecuador. An increased gap between discourse and practice, and the criminalization of protests against extractive activities, point to a democratic retreat: a shift of progressive or popular governments towards more traditional regimes of domination based on classic populist and national-development models. ■

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# > Extractivism vs. *Buen Vivir* in Ecuador

by **William Sacher** and **Michelle Báez**, FLACSO (Latin American Institute for the Social Sciences), Ecuador



Constructing the camp of the future Mirador open-pit copper mine in Tundayme, Zamora-Chinchipe, Ecuador. Photo by Omar Ordoñez.

**I**n 2007, President Rafael Correa sparked great regional and international interest with his pioneering political project, *La Revolución Ciudadana* [Citizen's Revolution]. In 2008, a Constituent Assembly approved a new Constitution which promoted the rights of nature, and in 2009, the government's first development plan (*Plan Nacional para el Buen Vivir*, National Plan for a Good Living) reversed the dominant development paradigm, recognizing the "impossibility of continuing the devastating extractivist route for countries in the South." Moreover, the pioneering Yasuní-ITT Initiative, calling for the suspension of oil extraction in the Ecuadorian Amazon

in exchange for donations from the international community, promised a radical shift towards a post-extractivist Ecuador. After seven years of implementation of the so-called *Revolución Ciudadana* political project, what is the effect of Correa's policies on mining and oil industries? What is left from these initial proposals and the hope they embodied?

## > The Expansion of the Extractive Fronts

Over the last few years, President Correa has continually favored the expansion of extractive frontiers. In the oil sector, new concessions opened more than three million hectares

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of the Amazon for drilling during the last two rounds of oil bidding. In 2013, Ecuador abandoned the ITT Initiative, signaling that parts of the Yasuní National Park – home of several indigenous groups, among them people in voluntary isolation – were open for extraction. Similarly, since 2009, the government has supported numerous mining megaprojects, many of them launched during the neoliberal period with the goal of transforming Ecuador into a mining country. Today, a dozen copper and gold mining projects continue, located in highly sensitive areas including indigenous territories, and areas of high biological diversity and water deposits.

The most important of these mining projects are owned by transnational companies: Chile's state-owned company Codelco, which owns the Lurimagua project in the Intag area; Canadian junior mining companies such as Lundin Mining, Cornerstone, and Dynasty Metals, which continue to develop their Ecuadorian assets from a "legal haven" in Canada; and the Chinese state-owned Tongling and China Railways. Despite the creation of a state-owned mining company, ENAMI (*Empresa Nacional Minera*), Ecuador has no control over its future mining production.

In the oil sector, the new government successfully increased state revenues from oil by renegotiating contracts and increasing the participation of state companies. Nevertheless, new drilling areas are mostly destined for foreign companies. Moreover, and significantly, Ecuador received over \$10 billion in loans from Chinese banks over the past five years, which has led to a permanent diversion of Ecuadorian oil production, as this debt is repaid in oil barrels to Chinese companies. Therefore, today, 90% of Ecuador's oil production is expected to go towards this debt.

### > Accumulation by Dispossession

In the oil and mining territories, companies and state agencies use the legal framework created by the *Revolución Ciudadana* to dispossess people of their lands and take machinery away from medium-sized mining companies to establish the material conditions required for the implementation of large-scale extractive activities.

These processes – clear examples of David Harvey's "accumulation by dispossession" – have led to the (re) constitution of countless anti-extraction movements, who fear for the future environmental and social disasters such as the ones that occurred over the last 40 years of oil exploitation in the Ecuadorian Amazon. These social movements include peasant and indigenous communities of the Amazon such as the Sarayaku and the Shuar and Mestizo peoples of the *Cordillera del Condor*; the populations living in the Intag and Pacto humid forests; people of the páramo areas; and urban organizations such as *Yasunidos*, which demanded a popular referendum on the decision to exploit the Yasuní National Park – a referendum that was not approved by the Electoral National Council.

### > Marginalization, Repression and the Criminalization of Social Protest

The government has dismissed these movement critiques of extraction policies. Both in government press releases and President Correa's Saturday broadcasts (*Sabatinas*), the state-run media call those opposing the extraction model "childish," describing extraction as the only route for "development" and "progress."

Criminal law has been used to imprison anti-extraction resisters (especially through the use of categories like "terrorism" and "sabotage"). Other legal tools (such as the *código 16*) have been used to close NGOs like Pachamama, known for its support of Amazon peoples in their struggles against oil companies.

Finally, increased police and military presence in mining and oil extraction areas have spread terror among local populations and even resulted in several deaths. Intimidation has silenced critical activists and civil society more broadly, rendering impossible a public debate on the pertinence of the extractivist model.

In other work (Sacher, 2010) we have called states that put their apparatus in service of capital accumulation in mega-mining or oil extraction as "mineral-states" or "petro-states." With the implementation of the *Revolución Ciudadana* political project, the Ecuadorian state now creates the material and social conditions necessary to develop these activities. Over the last few years, Rafael Correa has transformed Ecuador's previous neoliberal state – which barely existed in many of the country's territories – into a mineral- and petro-state.

### > What is left of "Buen Vivir"?

Correa and his government's extractivist policies are at odds with their official rhetoric. Official statements denounce "development" models and economic growth, the exploitation of human beings and nature, demanding the end of extractivism. Yet the government's actual practices fail to embody the spirit of the Constitution of 2008. The government argues that mining and oil companies will carry out "responsible" exploitation of natural resources and that extractivism today is a necessary step for its abandonment tomorrow. But as Ecuadorian philosopher David Cortez has put it, Correa's "*Sumak Kawsay*" (*Buen Vivir*) has not provided a new developmental paradigm, but a tool to legitimize policies of aggressive *extractivismo*, and even a new tactic of power. ■

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# > Struggles for the Commons in Mexico

by **Mina Lorena Navarro**, Benemérita Universidad Autónoma de Puebla, Mexico



*Dead fish in the River Santiago, Mexico.*

**O**ver the past fifteen years there has been a rise in environmental struggles in Mexico against what Maristella Svampa (2013) calls “Commodity Consensus” – conflicts over the access, control, and management of common natural resources. At the heart of the struggles is a type of extractivism that commodifies social wealth for the accumulation of capital involving three processes (Navarro, 2015):

- The development of a new agro-industrial transnational food sector, which excludes small rural producers and undermines peasant economies;

- The expansion of highways, ports, airports, railroads and touristic megaprojects linked to the new extractivism;
- And the fragmentation of the social fabric resulting from major infrastructure projects and urban expansion that threaten cultivated and protected areas.

These changes have been boosted by both national and transnational capital in alliance with different levels of government and organized crime. Juridical strategies, involving cooptation, disciplining and dividing communities support these new spheres of exploitation and marketing.

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Accordingly, there has been a distressing increase in detentions and violence against participants in these struggles for the defense of the commons. The *Mexican Center of Environmental Law* (CEMDA) reported 44 killings of environmentalists between 2005 and 2013; in the same period there were 16 cases of criminalization, 14 cases of illegal use of force and 64 illegal detentions. Despite this oppression resistance movements have continued to emerge throughout Mexico, led, principally, by indigenous and peasant communities and, lately, by urban autonomist groups. Rural communities have launched strategic offensives to boycott the construction of hydroelectric dams that threaten them with displacement and thus endanger access to their subsistence. In Guerrero, the Council of Ejidos and Communities (CECOP) has become renowned for its successful twelve-year campaign to block the building of the Parota dam.

At the same time, within the past fifteen years, the Mexican government has given 24,000 concessions to promote open-air mining and fracking for the extraction of shale gas. The spread of Genetically Modified Organisms is yet another arena where there has been persistent resistance of peasant and indigenous communities. The determination of these movements recently won a trial to freeze the permits allowing corporations to grow genetically modified corn. Other struggles target highway, railroad, port and airport infrastructural projects that aim to reduce the cost of transporting raw materials. The People's Front in Defense of the Land in Atenco, Estado de Mexico, has, once more – as in 2001 – opposed the construction of the New International Airport of Mexico City. Touristic megaprojects have threatened communities of peasants and fishermen as well as rich biodiverse zones. The struggle of the Cabo Pulmo community has become symbolically important for its blocking a devastating megaproject that threatened one of the most important coral reefs in the world.

In cities such as Mexico City and Puebla, dozens of movements seek to prevent infrastructure projects in areas that are protected or used for agriculture. Many neighborhoods are affected by open-air landfills and toxic waste dumps as well as by polluted rivers and waterways. There have been huge spills of toxic substance caused by open-air extractivism such as the 40 million liters of copper sulfate that spilled into the Sonora River in northern Mexico, affecting some 23,000 inhabitants who are now organized as the United Front against Grupo México. In addition, there have been explosions and large spills from the extraction operations of PEMEX, the state-owned petroleum company.

Even if communities have not always succeeded in defending their territories, they have been able to delay and in some cases stop megaprojects. This has been possible through unprecedented collective self-organization and building on traditional forms of government. For instance, the indigenous communities of Cherán in Michoacán have managed to contain the destruction of their forests, defending their communities from both tree-cutters and organized crime.

Undoubtedly, these struggles have been educative with regard to the dangers of capitalist development as well as pointing to possible alternatives that might protect the reproduction of human and non-human life. The *struggles for the commons* have a political horizon with two objectives: first, the re-appropriation of the political to re-shape our own communities and second, the re-appropriation of capacities and conditions for an autonomous symbolic and material reproduction of life. The regeneration and protection of common goods is the basis of human existence but whether communities will be allowed to regulate access to and use of these common goods is a central question in the contemporary crisis of human civilization. ■

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# > Argentina's New Extractivism

by **Marian Sola Álvarez**, Universidad Nacional de General Sarmiento, Argentina



Protest against mining in Mendoza, Argentina.

**A**rgentina is an emblematic case of expanding extractive activities – agribusiness, mega-mining, and, more recently, the exploitation of unconventional hydrocarbons through fracking – which have given rise to multiple struggles and anti-extraction movements.

As agribusiness emerged and was consolidated as an agricultural model, Argentina entered the global market as one of the world's largest producers of transgenic soy. Booming prices for primary products, among other factors, greatly increased land destined for large-scale soy cultivation, from 370,000 hectares in 1996 to more than 20.5 million hectares in 2014-15. Although the massive production of soy and corn, mostly destined for export, accelerated the concentration of land in foreign hands, farming is nonetheless perceived as rooted in national agricultural traditions – a perception which limits debate around the advantages

and disadvantages of the agribusiness model.

However, several types of resistance have emerged in response to the soy model. Civic and neighborhood groups, under the slogan *Parente Fumigar* (“Stop Fumigating”), have condemned the effects of fumigating inhabited areas; several groups have organized protests against soy monoculture, criticizing its impact on native lands and local biodiversity; and peasant and indigenous communities have tried to stop displacement, demanding the enforcement of the National Forest Law.

Mining became increasingly relevant in the 1990s. By the 2000s, open-pit mining had grown exponentially in Argentina. Metals, especially gold and copper, became the second fastest-growing export sector in Argentina, following soy. According to the National Mining Ministry, mining exports grew 434%, while the number of projects grew 3,311%. Local

authorities offered multiple mining concessions in protected rural areas as well as in towns and cities.

Clearly, Argentina's neoliberal policies have encouraged large-scale mineral extraction, with only a few minor changes since 2007. The country's legal framework has contributed to the expansion of the neo-extractive model by guaranteeing “legal security” and high profits. The federal organization of the Argentinean state and the country's 1994 constitutional reforms gave subnational territories a central role in establishing megaprojects. As a result, mega-mining varies according to the role played by subnational governments, the presence of local economic actors pushing for or against the development of a given sector, and local political, economic and cultural dynamics.

Organized resistance against new mining projects and their effects is widespread in Argentina. Numerous movements have emerged in areas

with mining projects, often led by *asambleas de autoconvocados* or “self-constituted assemblies.” However, these groups have limited avenues for expressing public opposition to extraction, as provincial governments censor and criminalize social and environmental protests. Moreover, these groups have difficulty accessing public information and navigating state environmental agencies.

Neoliberal policies not only helped expand soy production and new mega-mining projects, they also paved the way for unconventional hydrocarbon extraction through hydraulic fracturing (fracking), a complex and controversial activity with serious social and environmental risks. Although this experimental technique has been carried out by large transnational corporations, the government has advanced unconventional hydrocarbons and energy sovereignty through its national firm YPF – a move that is effective, at least in

symbolical terms, since the national firm at least holds the promise of recovering energy self-sufficiency.

In 2013, an agreement between YPF, Chevron and the Neuquén province marked the beginning of large-scale fracking in Argentina. Since then, the discovery of shale deposits in Vaca Muerta, along with the stigmatization of fracking opponents and the silencing of accidents, have reduced the space available for dissident voices. Nevertheless, resistance has grown in the provinces, especially in Patagonia, where assemblies, multi-sector organizations and indigenous communities have engaged in struggles over water and territories. In several provinces, including Buenos Aires and Entre Ríos, local laws were enacted prohibiting further exploitation of natural resources.

The expansion of extractive activities is also connected to the construction and reactivation of large centralized

hydroelectric and nuclear plants, as well as large infrastructure projects to support agribusiness, large-scale mining and unconventional hydrocarbon extraction. Specific politico-institutional arrangements, favorable for the commodification and extraction of natural resources, were pushed by several hegemonic actors, giving transnational firms the power to shape life in these territories.

We face multiple challenges when questioning the neo-extractivist model, yet it also offers us an opportunity to debate the kind of society we want. Despite asymmetries, community involvement in debates over issues which deeply affect human, social, territorial, and environmental rights is vital if we are to construct more democratic societies. ■

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# > A Life Devoted to an Open Sociology

by **Mikhail Chernysh**, Russian Academy of Sciences, Moscow, Russia, and member of the ISA Research Committee on Social Classes and Social Movements (RC47) and Thematic Group on Human Rights and Social Justice (TG03)



| Vladimir Yadov.

**V**ladimir Yadov belonged to the generation of Russians born before the Great War (WWII) but came of age after it. He was born in Leningrad – a city where every stone harbors memories of bravery, self-sacrifice and tragedy, the cruelty of Stalin’s purges, and the trauma of the 900 Day Siege. It is the scene of amazing feats of creative spirit, linked

to such names as Akhmatova, Shostakovich and Brodsky.

In 1945 Yadov was sixteen and dreaming of becoming a pilot. As a young high-school graduate he enrolled in a training course for military pilots but could not pursue this. They gave preference to the physically strong, and he was too thin and emaciated. He changed course, but kept

his dream of going beyond the horizon and seeing what the sun looks like over the clouds. He enrolled in the philosophical department of Leningrad State University, graduated cum laude and continued as a graduate student. In the early fifties he defended his dissertation on “Ideology as a Form of Spiritual Activity.” After a meeting with Igor Kon he turned towards sociology, a new field of re-

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search that had just opened in the atmosphere of the post-Stalinist thaw.

In those days sociology was not officially recognized in the Soviet Union. The authorities regarded it as a dangerous encroachment on the domain of scientific communism that was supposed to provide perfect explanatory tools for whatever happened in the Soviet society. Yadov was, therefore, on shaky ground when he made the decision to conduct one of the first empirical studies in Soviet history. The topic was truly challenging: the study set out to test the Marxist hypothesis that the new Soviet conditions give birth to a New Man, a new kind of individual that is ready to sacrifice his own comforts for the common good. The study resulted in a book that marked a breakthrough in Russian sociology: *Man and His Work*.

In those days attitudes to socialism varied between extremes. Its proponents extolled the new system as the most advanced society in the history of mankind. Its critics described it as an “evil empire” that strengthened the worst sides of human nature. Yadov showed that the Soviet Man was no different from men and women

in other countries. The Soviet Man wanted Russia to be prosperous, but he also charted his own private trajectory, pursued the dream of personal happiness and advancement. From then on Yadov never concealed his strong opposition to essentialism. He came out strongly against all attempts to devise “an indigenous sociology” that can grow only inside national boundaries. There cannot be a Kenyan bicycle, he argued, all bicycles have a lot in common. He stood strongly for the integration of Russian sociology into the world community of social scientists, for pooling resources to explore modernity in whatever form.

Yadov was only one of the group of scientists who challenged the primacy of Soviet ideology. Igor Kon, Tatyana Zaslavskaya, Boris Grushin, Andrei Zdravomyslov, Vladimir Shubkin were part of a loose network of Soviet sociologists who promoted honesty, freedom of discussion, and openness to the world. Vladimir Yadov upheld the traditions of the group by laboring at the methodology of social science and its strategies to comprehend social change. Hence his bias towards activist sociology and multi-paradigm schemes

to explain ongoing transformations.

In 1988 Perestroika led him to become Director of the Institute of Sociology of the Russian Academy of Sciences. Yadov and his friends used the opportunity to make sociology a legitimate branch of social science, to open sociology departments and schools, to send young graduate students abroad to improve their skills and get a new vision of their own society.

The post-Soviet years belied many hopes and expectations, but Yadov remained an optimist to the end of his days. And to the end of his days he wanted to continue working for the Russian and international sociological community. He braved his weakness, continued to travel, kept communication lines open for Russia to be part of the world sociological community. He continued to send a message to the young: we sociologists must be the ones who seek to understand and share our understanding with others. On July 2, 2015 Professor Yadov passed away. Those who knew him will retain memories of his smile, his ideas, his unquestionable loyalty to sociology that he did so much to promote. ■

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# > Scholar and Humanist

by **Andrei Alekseev**, St. Petersburg, Russia



| *Yadov speaking in the shadow of Lenin.*

**S**ix years ago we celebrated Vladimir Alexandrovich's 80th birthday. Yadov passed away in his 87th year on the night of July 2, 2015. One might say: "as a result of a lengthy and incurable disease." However, until the last minute his mind was sharp as ever and he even retained his ability to work.

With Yadov an entire epoch in our discipline has ended. He lived longer than the rest of his cohort. Other founders of the post-war Soviet/Russian sociology – Grushin, Levada,

Zaslavskaya, Zdravomyslov, Shubkin – all departed before him. I have read dozens obituaries and comments on his death. Obituaries are filled with data from his professional career and evidence of his international recognition (yet he was never elected to be a Member of the Russian Academy of Sciences, due to this institution's political biases). Individual memorial accounts mostly describe his personal qualities and tell appealing stories about his life.

That is the way it probably should be, considering that his academ-

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ic contributions and his personal charm, scholarly talent and charisma are reflected in those tributes. Yadov was an intellectual, to be sure, but he also belonged to the intelligentsia. These two terms are far from being synonymous. Yet Yadov exemplified the merger of both.

I would like to highlight one unique quality of Yadov – he was a broad-minded person with an amazing ability to cross boundaries. For instance, in his scholarly work and throughout his entire academic life, Yadov strove to bring together various theoretical paradigms. Yadov was not an orthodox Marxist. Although back in the 1960s Yadov was a sincere advocate of Historical Materialism as “a general sociological theory,” he also defended the relative autonomy of “specific sociological theories.” Yadov was not a devotee of positivism either, although several editions of his textbook, *Strategies of Sociological Research* integrated examples of empirical sociology from all over the world – examples that were based primarily on a positivist paradigm.

Yadov introduced the term “poly-paradigmatic” into the discourse of Russian sociology. He considered that the choice of one or another framework depended on the em-

pirical task at hand. He had a broad vision of sociology. Thus, his *Predictions of the Social Behavior of Personality* might be considered to be more psychology than sociology. For Yadov disciplinary walls simply did not exist.

Yadov was as strong a publicist as he was an academic sociologist. He had unmatched skills in presenting complex scholarly materials to lay audiences in language easy to understand, while also bringing a fresh stream of “real life” into his academic presentations. Yadov was very tolerant of his academic opponents and theoretical rivals. He was “forgiving” and yet also used every occasion to ridicule them. This also applied to the authorities and even to himself (irony and self-irony). Although Yadov never was part of the open opposition to the regime, his search for scientific truth often put him in an oppositional stance.

Yadov was broad-minded and generous. I never asked him – and I do not think he would have been able to answer – how many “godchildren” he had (those who wrote dissertations under his supervision, or those for whom he was an “opponent” in their dissertation defense, or those whom he inspired to be a social research-

er). My guess is that over his long academic life this number amounts to several hundred.

I recall one dramatic event. The Scientific Council, which Yadov chaired, “suddenly” rejected the dissertation of a young scholar who expressed his thoughts in a style rather hard to understand, “bird” language as they called it. The rejection was accomplished through secret ballot without there having been any prior public criticism. As always, Yadov suggested a surprising way out – he wrote an article interpreting the student’s most incomprehensible terms in a conventional academic style. As a result he saved a young ambitious and talented author as well as the reputation of the Scientific Council.

The caliber of individuals is measured by their influence both in their immediate social circle and on the distant social environment, and in this particular case his influence extended to the entire discipline. Yadov was a pioneer and a founder. Those who follow him will not be able to replace him. They have no choice but to remember him with gratitude and, to the best of their abilities, try to emulate his approach to science, people, and the world. ■

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# > Mentor, Colleague and Friend

by **Tatyana Protasenko**, Institute of Sociology, Russian Academy of Sciences, St. Petersburg, Russia



| *Yadov enjoying life at the dacha.*

**T**he first time I met Vladimir Alexandrovich Yadov was during the department meeting at the Philosophy Faculty of the Leningrad State University, where I worked as a stenographer at the same time as being a student. As I recall it was at the beginning of 1965. Vladimir Yadov had just returned from his academic training in England and was giving a presentation to the faculty. This presentation was so informal and entertaining that, accustomed to monotonous incomprehensible talks of our philosophers, I became an immediate convert to sociology. I applied and was admitted to the Philosophy Faculty, hoping that eventually it would lead to specialization in sociology. At that time Historical Materialism reigned in the discipline.

Although I was O.I. Skaratan's graduate student, Yadov became a mentor, close colleague, a friend, and an example to follow. Later, he would become an excellent boss, very easy to work with.

Truly, he was a sociologist blessed by God. He was a public sociologist who easily communicated with any hu-

man being – no matter whether a high-rank official, even a President, or an ordinary person from our surveys. He was never arrogant, always sticking together with his colleagues during conferences and informal parties. As his contribution to collective labor, he would regularly visit the state farm, Lensovetovski, where he would weed and pick cauliflower and turnips – something our other administrators rarely did. The female farmers adored Yadov, expectantly awaiting his arrival. The brigadier would warmly lecture him: “Hey, Professor, why are you picking vegetables of only one type? You need to sort out the turnips that are for the people from those that go to feed livestock.” Yadov would instantly reply with a joke, and proceed to raise questions about the working conditions, lives and families of the farmers.

Together we went through the hardest and murkiest times. But he managed to keep his chin up. He betrayed no one, while helping many. Indeed, it could be said that he saved people. I received his support in very difficult times in my life. It was he who suggested that I take up the position of Party Secretary in our sociology department

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in order to keep an eye on things and defend ourselves against attacks. After all, the Communist Party was the most common public space for polemics and debates about sociology.

At the same time we never stopped doing research, conducting surveys, but we also loved reading detective stories. Yadov was devoted to this genre because, so he believed, these stories developed the intellect, logical thinking, and provided knowledge of day-to-day life as well. After Yadov was fired from his job, either he or Ludmila Nikolaevna (his wife) would call me inquiring about new detective stories. At that time my women friends kept private book collections, containing unauthorized translations of detective stories and novels of famous foreign writers. They also had friends and relatives abroad, who would smuggle books into Russia. Then, those, like me, who were fast typists made copies on a typewriter. I still have copies of *samizdat* detective novels.

Yadov's favorite song was "We were buried somewhere around Narva" by Alexander Galitch. We sang that song at almost every party where there was a guitar or an enthusiastic gathering. Yadov always emphasized certain lines of the song:

*If Russia is calling for her dead sons it means it is in trouble  
However, we see that it was a mistake – and what a waste  
In the fields where our battalion was slaughtered in 1943  
for nothing  
Today the hunting party enjoys the killing and huntsmen  
blow their horns.*

Once I asked him why he liked that particular song and he replied that it was because the song was about victims of meaningless sacrifices made for the sake of a common goal – something that took place throughout

Russian history, no matter whether it was during times of war or peace.

I remember at the 50-year anniversary celebration of the Institute of Socio-Economic Research, we presented him with a barrel of wine. He was very happy and asked to be sent home sitting on the barrel. "Imagine," he said, "Ljuka [his wife's name] opens the door and there I am, sitting right in front of her on the barrel with no one around." That was Yadov.

I also remember him bringing water-resistant pants from Budapest for my six-month-old son. They turned out to be too small. He complained: "You feed your boy too much." Nonetheless, he managed to exchange the pants for the right size's ones through his friends. That was Yadov – very human, close, understanding, and very intelligent. At times his way of thinking was incomprehensible – capable of binding together weird things.

My last and very personal memory is about Yadov two years ago. Oleg Bozkov and myself were visiting him at his home in Estonia. Alexei Semenov, one of Yadov's favorite students and a long-time resident in Estonia drove us there. At that time Semenov was planning to run for a seat in Tallinn's legislature. He and his wife Larisa provided the most tender care for Yadov. Frankly speaking, those were one of the happiest and most cheerful times in my life. We were browsing through our memories, telling jokes, drinking martini and red wine. We also discussed the role and place of sociology today, what sociologists should do and how they should respond to the challenges of present times, especially when strangled by the authorities. We will all remember him for his humanity, his inexhaustible interest in life and for his totally unexpected conjectures, inferences, and subjects for research. ■

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# > Personal Memories

by **Valentina Uzunova**, *Kunstkamera*, Russian Academy of Sciences, St. Petersburg, Russia



| *Yadov partying in the Institute.*

**V**ladimir Alexandrovich Yadov once gave a course on “Applied Sociological Research” at the Faculty of Philosophy. He was so involved in his lecture that he suddenly fell off the platform. It turned out that the blackboard was longer than the stage on which he was moving while writing with the chalk. We held our breath but Yadov was instantly back on his feet proceeding with the lecture and writing on the board. He did not miss a beat. How different from the young maths professor who, fearing the same accident, stood in one place, even though he was supposed to cover the blackboard with equations!

Vladimir Alexandrovich recruited me to Sociology in 1967 on the fly. We were going through the stenographer’s notes of his doctoral defense. Needless to say the presentation was a roaring success. A sense of expectation filled the large room at the History Faculty where the public defense took place, especially as the rivalry between the groups of Yadov’s proponents and opponents became more intense. It was hard to take notes for this event since people shouted out comments from all over the audience. I felt Yadov’s agitation – he was hardly visible behind the high podium. It seemed to me that he was forcing himself to read the pre-rehearsed text according to the protocol but he would have preferred to convince the audience with oratory and polemics.

In sharp contrast to his propensity to dispute was the meticulous scholarship contained in the gigantic pile of

documents and papers he had to submit to VAK (the National Accreditation Commission). As we worked together on these dull papers, he suddenly asked me what I thought about the prospect of studying at the Philosophy Faculty. He believed that the future belonged to sociology and to be a sociologist was the most interesting job with many possibilities. I entirely trusted him and have not been disappointed by my choice.

The following is a story from the 1970s. The Komsomol Sociologists of Leningrad (members of the Communist Youth League) did not demonstrate the appropriate degree of support for the opinion of the Bureau of the Communist Party regarding the emigration of two of our colleagues and friends. One of them had married a foreigner; another one had emigrated to follow his family. Opinions recorded at our meeting did not endorse the decision stipulated in the official recommendations. Our collective position was that “departure is a private matter and an individual has the right to choose what country to live in.” Our solidarity and openness alarmed the overseeing government bodies: “They speak too openly, there must be someone who is behind this...” ricocheted from the walls in the offices. Consequences came later. The bosses finally determined the list of those who were responsible for the cultivation of such a free spirit, those who stood behind us. Our teachers became outcasts: Vladimir Alexandrovich was number one on the list. This was Yadov – never compromising his core values. ■

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# > An Iconic Figure of Soviet and PostSoviet Sociology

by **Gevorg Poghosyan**, Director of the Institute of Philosophy, Sociology and Law of the Armenian National Academy of Sciences, President of the Armenian Sociological Association, and member of ISA Research Committees on Migration (RC31) and Disasters (RC39)

**T**here are scientists whose names are associated with the formation of a school of thought or even of an entire scientific discipline. Professor Yadov was one of these – a pioneer during the Soviet era, whose scholarly work and research efforts decisively shaped Soviet sociology. Since the 1960s Yadov’s scholarly works have had a formative influence on several generations of Armenian and Soviet sociologists. His three famous monographs *Man and his Work* (1967, in collaboration with A.G. Zdravomyslov and V.P. Rozhin), *Sociological Research: Methodology, Program, Methods* (1972) and the co-authored *Self-regulation and Prediction of Social Behavior* (1979) became reference books for Soviet sociologists. For many young people his books paved the way for sociology as a scholarly discipline.

Due to his canonical works, Yadov became a living icon of Soviet sociology. Those few Armenian sociologists who were fortunate enough to communicate with him, to listen to his lectures and speeches, or even to debate and discuss various research problems with him, came away “infected” for a long time, if not forever, by his special attitude to his work and to sociology. He was always open to other people regardless of their age, academic degrees and titles, ethnicity or ideological views. He always strove to show respect to his interlocutor’s views without necessarily trying to reach any agreement. He left a deep impression with his words: “The highest pleasure comes when you succeed in understanding something new, and when you subsequently communicate that to others.”

While working at the Leningrad Institute of Social and Economic Problems, Yadov managed to pick and consolidate a creative team of talented sociologists. An atmosphere of free and critical thinking reigned in stark contrast to the blinkered atmosphere of other Soviet institutions that were conducting research in the humanities and social sciences. Everyone who imbibed that special atmosphere would soon be inspired by



Yadov lecturing at a conference.

its spirit of free inquiry and creative thought. At least here in Armenia, we were on the lookout for even the subtlest wind of change and a breath of fresh ideas emanating from Yadov’s research laboratory. Astute and demanding in research, he had a special personal charm, which attracted young scholars from all the republics of the former Soviet Union. Devoted to scholarship, he put high value on the creativity and originality of young scholars, and maintained a critical stance toward orthodoxy.

Perhaps even unaware of it himself, Yadov first established and then became a central pillar of a huge and invisible college, a virtual community, or even a kind of “spiritual brotherhood” defined by a similar worldview. Especially in the last years of his life, he believed that sociologists should strive to influence “the movement of social planets,” as he put it in one of his last interviews with Boris Doctorov. Yadov, whose monographs laid the foundation for the formation and development of a new field of scholarly studies, insisted: “If we sociologists will limit ourselves to writing books, we will not fulfill our civic duty.” This idea can be regarded as Yadov’s scholarly “last testament.” We, the Armenian sociologists, will miss him greatly. ■

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