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The commons are a world apart from capitalism. They are a source of livelihood that people share. Before the spread of capitalism, most of the planet was commons. Cultures that treated the commons as a gift from nature that had to be treated with respect, tended to have the most bountiful commons and therefore the fewest problems of survival. Cultures that treated the commons as property or an exploitable resource generally exhausted them, and either brought about their own collapse or had to resort to warfare and conquest to survive. Some of these cultures would eventually form capitalism.

Capitalism theorizes and creates scarcity. Capitalism has thrived by destroying or privatizing the commons wherever they arise. As long as people have access to the commons, they can enjoy a measure of self-sufficiency and cannot be forced to sell their labor to the wealthy in order to survive. For common people, capitalism is a blackmail: work or starve. The commons offer another option: self-sufficiency by harvesting the gifts of nature. Because the basis of the commons is the spontaneous gift, people who live in or of the commons often recreate the gift economy; sharing, cooperat-

ing, and helping each other out in order to attain a high standard of living. Also for this reason, the commons are the enemy of capitalism.

Primitive accumulation—privatizing land or seizing wealth to fuel investment, industry, and, in a word, capitalism—is not only an early phase of capitalism, as theorized by Adam Smith or Karl Marx. Privatization, legalized theft, slavery, and the imposition of labor discipline are constant activities in every moment of capitalism, from the 15th to the 21st centuries.

Likewise, the commons are not an ancient and outdated reality but an ever present possibility that repeatedly erupts into our daily lives, contradicting capitalism's myth of scarcity. After arable land was privatized and enclosed—in Europe from the 15th to the 17th centuries, in India and other colonies in the 18th and 19th centuries, and in parts of Africa today—forests, woodlands, marshes, and pastures became the principal commons because capitalism was still unable to exploit those areas effectively. In these commons, people gathered fruits, nuts, medicinal plants, fuel and construction materials, they grazed livestock, hunted, and fished. They may not have been able to get their daily bread from the forests and pastures, but they could meet most of their other needs.

Nowadays, in order to function, capitalism must base itself on an exaggerated and imprecise mass production. This creates a huge amount of garbage that capitalism is still unable to exploit effectively. This garbage is the new commons: millions of people around the world scavenge the garbage in order to gather food, clothing, construction materials, or items that can be scrapped and sold for money. Many of the people who live in this way develop cooperative cultures based on sharing and mutual aid, relating through solidarity rather than through commercialized relations.

Skills, culture, and traditional wisdom also constitute a commons. They constitute tools that help people relate with their environment, gain their livelihood, and improve their quality of life. In the past, these tools were shared within society. For about a cen-

be reconstituted in a different form in every different part of the world, at the hands of those people who are closest to the available matter and memory that can be transformed into the basis for collective survival. Commoning is the task of those who will become part of each new commons.

Capitalism created classes, and these classes will not destroy capitalism. Building on the material of the feudal castes, those who could wield a military and economic advantage constituted themselves as the owning class, and forcibly constituted the proletariat as those who only owned their labor power and their ability to reproduce. The same property relationship that enclosed the commons forced those who could not resist these enclosures to become the working class. Class society and capital will be abolished by those who win the force to be able to see themselves in relation to the commons and not in relation to property.

The enemy who constantly scatters this force and tramples the commons wherever they pop up is the State. Our struggle must aim for the destruction of the State, to open up the new spaces where the commons can flourish. Commoning itself is not the property of any party or theory, but the shared potential that makes any communication possible. Anarchy is a prerequisite for the commons. The stronger the State, the narrower the margin on which new commons may arise. And the more bountiful our commons, the stronger and more sustained our attacks against the State. Whether the State is destroyed by anarchists is unimportant, except for those anarchists who share with the communists a need to author the plan that will be foisted on the new world.

What is important is that our dreams again take root in the commons, that our theories take aim on the State, and that our struggles create new commons and revitalize the old ones.

could be easy to argue that growing food in cities is not the best idea anyway. But there is no natural connection between cities and cars. In fact, cities function far more efficiently without car traffic, using instead public transportation and bicycles.

But a focus on efficiency ignores the historically important fact that the State prefers to subsidize and implement those technologies that foster dependency, erode the commons, and create new opportunities for professionalized management (particularly within a paradigm of security or protection). Trains create new common spaces and can be self-organized by their operators. Car traffic, on the contrary, is so atomized it requires state intervention in order to be directed and organized. It creates new dangers the State must protect its citizens against, with an absurdly high number of traffic fatalities even in societies where the governments effectively manage car traffic. Last but not least, it creates the possibility—for the first time in history—of a crowd of thousands of people who are side by side, when stuck in traffic, yet totally isolated from one another and without immanent possibilies of collective action.

In sum, the commons hold a central place of importance in the struggle against capitalism. The commons can be constituted by land, wilderness, skills and experiences, scavenged goods, or public spaces. They do not only exist in peripheral societies that can still claim to be traditional; the commons are an ever present possibility in every fold of human existence, from the most developed countries to the least.

The commons are both a structure and a practice. Commoning is one of the most popular and subversive forms of action against capitalism. It is not the provenance of professional revolutionaries but an activity undertaken instinctively by people around the world.

Because commoning is instinctual, communism is a fraud. The attempt to abstract the commons or to mediate the practice of commoning through an ideology rends it from the unique conditions of daily life that give it breath and substance. The commons will

tury, capitalism has been increasingly trying to privatize knowledge and culture. Many people are resisting the privatization of the intellectual and cultural commons. Some people destroy fields of genetically modified crops owned by companies seeking to patent life itself, some indigenous communities keep out anthropologists, biologists and other researches trying to catalogue and patent their traditional music, folk medicine, or heirloom seeds, and some people share their music and art through “creative commons” licenses rather than copyrights.

While the original pirates liberated goods that had been exploited in the massive process of primitive accumulation known as colonialism (freeing slaves, stealing gold and silver mined with slave labor, seizing rum and sugar that came from the plantations), one of the major forms of modern piracy is the liberation of so-called intellectual property (such as movies and music) using new tools on the internet.

The scarcity on which capitalism is based never arises naturally. Sometimes it is the result of the bad choices of a society, destroying its soil, overfishing or overhunting, not balancing its population. Frequently scarcity is directly and intentionally imposed by the State. During the Irish potato famine, Ireland was forced to produce food for export by the British military occupation. The Great Famine in Ukraine was caused by the Soviet government, forcibly changing the traditional mode of agriculture. The US government killed off the seemingly endless herds of bison so that the Lakota and Cheyenne of the Great Plains (who had defeated the US in an important war) would lose their food source. Governments around the world have stopped at nothing, killing millions of people, in order to make self-sufficiency impossible. If we can take care of ourselves, we don’t need government, and we don’t need to work for the rich people that government exists to protect.

A related function of the State is to destroy the commons wherever they arise. The first modern legal codes in Europe served to criminalize the traditional use of the commons. A major applica-

tion of the death penalty in 18th century England was to punish hunting, foraging, and other traditional uses of the forests that previously had been legal, and were even protected in Magna Carta. Today, the World Bank and IMF force debtor countries to change their laws and criminalize traditional uses of the commons, allowing them to be privatized by transnational corporations. In 1994, the NAFTA agreement with the US and Canada forced Mexico to change its Constitution and remove the protection of communal land tenure. Another major point of collaboration between world governments involves cracking down on piracy or sharing of the creative commons, so-called intellectual property. More generally, the US and other leading governments want to tame the internet entirely so it is no longer a space of sharing and anonymity—a commons—but rather a commercialized space easily controled by the police and exploited by corporations. This is similar to how the forests and marshlands were cleared and drained for economic reasons and for military reasons simultaneously. Due to their opacity and defensive advantages, these spaces were off limits to commercial development and they were also where rebels, bandits, and revolutionaries often hid out.

Generally, the State claims to be protecting us when they destroy the commons or clear wilderness, which are often the only spaces where we can still be free. In 2008, a shipwreck off the coast of England left thousands of tons of wooden beams washed up on shore. The wood could no longer be sold to major buyers, because it had seawater stains, but it was still perfectly usable for fuel or building. The shipwreck had brought a new commons into being, and quickly people came to collect wood. The government jumped into action and prohibited the scavenging of wood, in the name of a national emergency. Their reasoning? People could get splinters, therefore collecting the wood was dangerous.

As for the widespread commons of garbage, several governments around the world are working to criminalize and suppress it. In the US, several cities have arrested people for sharing free dumpstered food. In Spain, where bakers traditionally give away unsold loaves at the end of the day, chain bakeries have started to count all their loaves of bread, returning and destroying (or selling to livestock and other industries) every loaf that hasn't been paid for. In many cities in the Netherlands, new trash containers store the garbage underground, making it impossible to access. Once again, they prefer that people starve instead of being able to get anything for free.

With urban gardens and the planting of fruit and nut trees, many cities could come close to food self-sufficiency. The anarchist scientist Kropotkin wrote about this emerging possibility a century ago, using Paris as his model, but since then governments and urban planners have made sure to prevent this new commons. Sometimes, urban gardens are evicted and bulldozed, as in Los Angeles. In general, cities avoid planting edible plants in the urban green spaces. Athens or Barcelona, for example, are graced with thousands of orange trees, but the variety the city governments choose to plant only produce an inedible kind of orange.

One notable exception to this rule can be found in Seattle. During several months of the summer, one can harvest a variety of edible, delicious fruits and berries from trees and bushes growing in the city. However, most people have lost the traditional skills and knowledge to carry out this simple task, or to even realize that food comes from the earth and not from the supermarket. People are so alienated that most of the fruits and berries go to waste.

This sad fact demonstrates the connection between knowledge and material. Intellectual or cultural commons and commons of land or resources are inseparably related. If the State can seize the land, the know-how to live from it eventually disappears. If the State can alienate people from their traditional knowledge, they will not know how to use common land or resources even if they are right next door.

Another interesting fact about cities is that food grown in them will be contaminated by automobile pollution. For this reason it