



Yes, anti-capitalism — and class politics!

A contribution to the debate, by activists in Workers' Liberty • 07775 763 750 • www.workersliberty.org

It's great that Occupy London is discussing capitalism and anti-capitalism. As activists within the movement, this is our contribution.

- For working-class anti-capitalism
- Organise with and as workers
- For collective ownership and social provision — take over the banks!
- Fight for a workers' government

1. What sort of anti-capitalism?

Some activists are reluctant to use terms like "anti-capitalist", "workers", "class". But if we do not try to understand the social relationships and structures we are dealing with, we will not be able to fight them, let alone replace them with something better. Like it or not, this system *is* capitalism. Its basic drive is to maximise production and profit, at the expense of human beings and the eco-system, even if that means crises, wars and environmental collapse. It can be checked, limited by struggles to impose demands for social provision, but it cannot be made benign or non-exploitative.

We say *exploitative* because capitalism functions by a minority, who own the "means of production" (factories, offices, warehouses, stations and so on), taking the wealth produced by the vast majority of non-owners who have no choice but to sell our ability to work if we want to live. Despite some elements of democracy we have won, like the right to vote, the capitalist minority dominates the government too. But the majority, the workers, are not just victims. The fact that we make society run — driving buses and trains, teaching kids, programming code, building homes and workplaces, treating the sick, making products — means our hands are on the wheels and levers of production. This gives us immense ability to get together, fight back and exercise power — if we get organised.

There is a constant tug-of-war over the division of surplus wealth in society, with the bosses pushing us to work harder and longer for less, and us resisting. This is what we mean by *class struggle*. Even when we are in retreat, in times of low-level workers' struggles, when workers' organisations such as trade unions are weak and bureaucratic — like now — it is the workers' movement which has the power to fight cuts and attacks. When workers go on the offensive, we can win big changes (that is how the welfare state and NHS came about). The flowering of workers' struggles in *Tunisia* and *Egypt* are good examples. And when working-class struggle reaches a high enough level, it can generate a much more radical form of democracy than Parliament (workplace and neighbourhood committees/councils) and impose social provision for need in place of profit as the guiding force of society. That should be our goal.

In other words, categories like "capitalist" and "worker" are not "labels" which capitalism simply imposes on us and which we should try to ignore out of existence. In fact the capitalists would rather we did not think in these terms! They are descriptions of the underlying reality of capitalist society, which we must organise around if we are to win liberation from capitalism.

2. Organise with and as workers!

One of the things the Occupation movement needs to do is *reach out and organise in the working class* — from workers in the shops and offices around our tents to workers elsewhere engaged in struggle

against cuts and austerity. Many people in the Occupations are workers; we should also be organising in our own workplaces and in our unions, including by raising the idea of workers occupying workplaces to stop cuts and job losses. The *30 November strike*, which could see three million workers refuse to work in protest at the government's attacks on pensions, is enormously important. We should be using the Occupy movement's voice and influence to link up with and promote this struggle. At the same time, the youthfulness, enthusiasm and creativity of our movement can help inspire workers who are seeking to challenge the sluggish, defeatist bureaucracy of their trade unions.

We can learn from the example of elements of the Indignant movement in Greece, who have made important links with workers in struggle. The moves undertaken in the 23 October general assembly to initiate outreach to workers are a good start; but we need to step it up, and *make workers' struggle central to our whole movement*.

3. Collective ownership — not "independent regulators". Take over the banks!

Consistent social provision for need implies *collective ownership* of the means of producing wealth, just as the exploitation and chaos of capitalism demands private ownership. Our guiding aim should be collective ownership of industries and services by society and democratic control by workers, service-users and communities, not the mirage of "independent regulation".

Full-scale collective ownership and production for need requires a revolution to overthrow the capitalists. We are not there yet, obviously! But that should not stop us from putting forward more immediate demands to expropriate, ie take over, particular industries essential to society. When the government semi-nationalised the banks but left them under capitalist control, we should have demanded loudly they be fully taken over, merged and reorganised under democratic control so their vast wealth could be used not for profits and bonuses, but for jobs, services and homes for all.

In this context, the Occupation movement should be saying loud and clear: *Take over the banks!* Run them democratically and use their wealth for social goals!

4. Fight for a workers' government

With determined struggle, we can stop the worst of what this government is trying to do; we can win changes for the better. But clearly Cameron and Clegg will not take on the power of their friends in the banks and giant corporations — and nor will the current leadership of the Labour Party. Nevertheless, a program to transform society is inescapably a program for *government* — a program for the movement from below to take power and use that power to carry out its goals.

If ideas like class struggle, collective ownership and production for need are going to have any grip, they need to be linked to the goal of a fundamentally different kind of government - a *workers' government*, based on a revived mass workers' and social protest movement, with representatives stripped of privileges and accountable to mass organisations and democratic assemblies, and acting in the interests of the majority. We would like activists to consider and discuss this idea.

What is Workers' Liberty?

Workers' Liberty is a group of socialist activists who have been involved in Occupy London. We are also active in the trade union movement, the student movement, the women's movement and many other struggles, seeking to tie them together into a coherent fight against capitalism and for working-class self-liberation.

If you like what we have to say, or want to discuss with us, get in touch!
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