

## Class Analysis: Twenty-first Century Challenges

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### The Times of Erik Olin Wright

It was a time when a glade in the sombre forest of capitalism became visible, opened up by the Vietnamese and other anti-colonial movements in the South and by the anti-colonial war movement in the North, by African-American rebellion and the Civil Rights movement, by the French quasi-revolution in May 1968, the Hot Autumn in Italy in 1969, by the Unidad Popular in Chile, the break-out of Feminism. This was the time of insurgent Marxism. Class analysis became a central part of it, searching for the social forces capable of carrying the world through the glade, beyond capitalism. Class cartography was developed in a number of countries, including Sweden, where I drew a couple of historical maps (before local collaborators of Erik added another one). In Europe, the most elaborate efforts were made in West Germany, by a Marxist collective calling themselves *Projekt Klassenanalyse*. Neo-Marxist class theory was first developed by the Greek-French political scientist Nicos Poulantzas, from the Althusserian milieu of novel Marxist theorizing, whose *Pouvoir politique et classes sociales* appeared during the May days in Paris. In his dedication he wrote, "The beginning of the end?"

This was the time when Erik "fell into Marxism", after his revolutionary chess film as a Harvard undergraduate. During his years as a graduate student of sociology at Berkeley in the 1970s he worked out the book, Class, Crisis, and the State (1978), which soon became the landmark of Marxist class analysis of the period. Ever since then, in contemporary Marxist class theory Erik's works have overtopped the field, progressing through explicitly autocritical revisions of his basically consistent line. (Classes 1985, Interrogating Inequality 1994, Class Counts 1997, Understanding Class 2015).

His major theoretical contribution was his analyses of the multidimensionality of class, through concepts of "contradictory class locations" and of different class "assets", property, authority, skills. It emerged as a solution to the "boundary problem" in Marxist class theory of the time, where to draw the line between the workingclass and other classes or strata of employees. A field of competing definitions, between a broad one of basically including almost all employees of capital, and a narrow one of manual workers in material production. Characteristically, Erik did not see this as an either-or problem to be decided by fiat, supported by one Marx quotation or the other, but as an empirical ambiguity to be sorted out analytically. He then distinguished positions with different amounts of control of the production process and of the labour of others (Class, Crisis and the State: 74ff).

He then came to recognize problems with his first version, with the imprecise contradictoriness of the class locations and with its central focus on domination, rather than exploitation (Classes 51ff) The outcome was a three-dimension conceptualization of class in terms of "assets", means of production and their ownership or not, amounts of "organizational assets" (organizational authority), and of skills/credentials assets (Classes 86ff).

Through his international series of surveys of class structure, relations and consciousness he also made the best, and largest, contribution to class cartography. For reasons which I never could bring myself to ask him about, he never published any kind of comparative overview of his sixteen-countries surveys, but he did publish a number of interesting, thought-provoking comparisons of US, Sweden, and Japan, and of US, Canada, Norway, and Sweden (in American Sociological Review, and reported in Class Counts). They included portraits of the different configurations of class consciousness in Japan, Sweden, and USA, and a original studies of the permeability of (asset-based) class boundaries, with respect to friendship, family formation, and intergenerational mobility.

Like many of his peers of the period, Erik wanted to contribute to the reconstruction of Marxism, not just be “drawing from the Marxist tradition” (Interrogating Inequality p 5). He started out from the Althusserian current in the 1970s, then from the mid-1980s drawn into the orbit of the so-called Analytical Marxism, around the philosopher G.A. Cohen and, important to Erik, the mathematical economist John Roemer. At the same time he wanted to establish himself as a Marxist theorist in the shape of a mainstream quantitative American sociologist, in which he succeeded eminently in his survey analyses, and in professional standing.

His last book on class, Understanding Class, has an elegiac and conciliatory tone, a book at the end of his times. Instead of Marxist reconstruction, the time of the “Grand Battle of Paradigms” is over, and should be replaced with “pragmatic realism” and an oecumenical “integrated class analysis”, and after a formalization of possible workingclass-capitalist class compromise, a “quite dim” prospect, the book ends with a political chapter on “noncapitalist alternatives within the capitalist economy.” Darkness is falling, and the glade has disappeared. The last time I saw him, in Stockholm in spring 2017, he asked me whether Marxist class analysis makes any sense if there is no end to capitalism. I am convinced there is, but it will have to take a different track than we did in the 1960s, 1970s, 1980s.

There was a fatal *rendez-vous manqué* between Marxists in the 1960s-1970s, between a young generation, graduates of sociology and other social sciences, and an older, much thinner generation of great historians, with Eugene Genovese, Christopher Hill, Eric Hobsbawm, and Edward Thompson in the frontline in the English-speaking world, others in France and even in West Germany. We could have learnt a lot from each other. We did not, although several of us youngsters did read the old stars. The main reason was probably, and shamefully, disciplinary academic myopia. Only later have some of us understood the value of our historical legacy.

Erik actually studied for Christopher Hill at Oxford. As a good mid-Western academic Erik sincerely believed in theorizing for empirical research, but why he chose mainstream quant-sociology for the latter might also have had something to do with what he himself, with almost unique honesty, has called “grantsmanship” (Interrogating ... p. 11) While, at least in his books, he never referred to his history stint at Oxford in any concrete terms, he did write, already in the early 1990s that he “found nearly always that I learn more from good qualitative and historical research than from research from quanto-maniacs” (Interrogating p. 10).

#### The Return of Class and Inequality – and How to Approach it

The twenty-first century has so far seen an amazing return of class into public discourse, primarily in bitter lamentations – in the Global North – of the “squeeze”, decline or “end” of the middle class, and in florid celebrations of its rise and potency, in the Global South (See further below.). The workingclass has become a concern of New York Times editorialists (31.8-1.9. 2019)) Class has even become a sociological BBC entertainment (Savage 2015: Introduction)). This

surge of class does not entail any imminent transition out of capitalism. What it is showing is that class is an important vantage-point from which to understand 21<sup>st</sup> century world society.

If class, then, remains an answer, what is the question? It is one answer to two questions. First, why is there abundance and poverty, privilege and misery at the same time? Second, how, by what social forces can these conditions be disturbed and transformed? The first is the question of inequality, the second is the question of social change. Among the young Marxists of the 1960s-1970s Erik was one of the few who took an analytical interest in both questions. - Most of us others took the inequalities of capitalism as so obvious as to be self-evident, like colonial racism, in contrast to those of patriarchy and sexism, Feminism taught us, the intricate mechanisms of which had to be laid bare.

Erik produced a thorough class analysis of the US income distribution, Class and income determination (1979) Through long series of regression equations he demonstrated the relative explanatory strength of a simple and truncated class scheme – surveys available included small employers but not the big capitalists. Most interestingly, he showed that even so, class had more explanatory power than the conventional occupational status hierarchy – and that the occupational status groups were distributed across different classes, defined by property and managerial authority. Erik's analysis also dug into the inter-relations and interaction of, race and sex. - His 1994 book, Interrogating Inequality, on the other hand, was more a title, of a collection of Essays on Class Analysis, Socialism and Marxism, than a focused investigation.

After the quarter century of neoliberalism and market globalization from around 1980, both questions have returned with a vengeance, not only to polite mainstream discourse in media and academia. They have also become a worry of the intelligent part of the global economic elite, the World Bank, the IMF, and the World Economic Forum in Davos (since 2015). The work of Tomas Piketty and his associates has made inequality the hottest topic of academic economics, while in sociology the bland “stratification” paradigm is more slowly, gradually losing weight in relation to inequality studies.

The turning-point were the cumulating crashes of neoliberal globalization, from the East Asian of 1998, via the South American ones in the first years of this century to the global financial crisis of 2008, and their dramatic social and political effects. From the fall of the bloody dictatorship in Indonesia and the shake-up of Thai politics, via the collapse in total discredit of South American neoliberal experiments from Venezuela to Argentina, to the rising of disturbing protest movements in the very core of capitalism, Occupy, *Indignados*, Populism. These movements had a composite and varied social constitution, but they had without doubt a deeply worrying workingclass component. The financial crash also highlighted the new gap between ordinary, small c conservative middle classes and the financial upper class, feeding an international wave of angry, sometimes apocalyptic middle class writing, with titles like “The end of the Western middle class” (Guilluy 2018) and “The end of the middle stratum”, (Goffart 2019).

How should class in our new century be approached, by Marxist and by all others seriously interested in equality and egalitarian social change? This is no longer a time for paradigm battles, as Erik presciently predicted, but nor for paradigmatic reconciliations and “integration”. Pigeonholing theorization is no longer relevant – at least for the time being. Class theory is not on the top of the agenda, neither politically nor academically. On the other hand, there are currently, both a wide international intellectual current of concern with economic inequality – which has not yet entered mainstream politics -, and broad and diverse international discussions of class, which have already entered into national political discourse in many countries. Hardly since the Papal

concern with the emerging industrial workingclass in Leo XIII's encyclica *Rerum novarum* [On new matters] of 1891 has there been such interest in presumably leftwing topics such as class and inequality.

I would suggest a two-pronged response from egalitarians to this moment of opportunity-cum challenge. One, emancipating inequality into a central topic of its own, subordinated neither to class nor to the intersectional victimology of class, race and gender – not so long ago a major research advance -, calling for further analytical development.

Second, taking class analysis into two practical, sub-theoretical directions. One direction, should be a focus on patterns of capital-labour relations, starting from a global perspective. Capital-labour relations are at the core of any social science of capitalism, and the salience of class conflict and class consciousness should be treated as crucial empirical questions. We need to get at the global basics of these relations before the fine grain of contradictory or multidimensional class locations. The other direction would be to recognize the social reality of discourse, implying that the current discourses of the “squeeze” (OECD) or “end” of the middle class in the North, and of its “rise” in the South are not to be dismissed as expressions of deficient class theories, but as significant symptoms of contemporary class relations, worthy of serious critical study.

#### The Ecological Inequality of Life

I have tried to make inequality analysis and studies a multidimensional topic of its own (Therborn 2014), focusing on its human dimensions, rather than on its range of assets or “capitals” (Bourdieu) or on its victims (intersectionality), and on its mechanisms, from distancing to exploitation, with their respective counterparts of equalization mechanisms. This entailed a distinction of three fundamental dimensions of human inequality, of life and health as living organisms (vital inequality), of recognition and respect as persons (existential inequality), and as actors with or without resources (income, wealth, education, social contacts or status, power).

What is in need of analytical development here are the ecological aspects of vital inequality. The inequality of vulnerability and risk, and of the inequality of responsibility for polluting and destroying the world. The recent advances in studies of income inequality, by Tomas Piketty and his associates, welcome as they are, increase the imperative of bringing forth the fundamental three-dimensionality of inequality. What Piketty and his associates have already done is to show the increasing class dimension of carbon emissions. Half of the world's carbon emitting inequality is now among the citizens inside countries, as compared to a third in 1998 (Chancel and Piketty 2015.) Laudable as it is, there s a nag here. The estimates are consumption-based, and the classes are incomers groups. But a major part of climate destroying carbon emissions are produced, by the owners and CEOs of mining, industrial, shipping, aviation corporations.

The new climate endangerment awareness will hopefully bring the inequality of life and death into the limelight, and vice versa vital inequality will bring issues of inequality, of conflicting , and ecological injustice into the climate movement. The global ecological injustice is fairly widely known: the poor contributed little or nothing to our current planetary condition, but they are the most vulnerable to disastrous climate changes. Both to the occurrence of cyclones, flooding, landslides, drought, and earthquakes, and to death from them. (Brecht et al. 2013; Oxfam 2015; Environment and Development Economics, special issue 2018).

Therefore, it is worth while underlining a couple of the relatively few studies of ecological inequality in rich countries. For instance, Martinich et al. found that people's poverty is the

main explanation to vulnerability to natural disasters in the four coastal regions of the United States. The heat waves of Chicago in 1995 and in Europe in 2003 both killed primarily the poor, the old, and isolated and, in Chicago, of course, African Americans. Five-hundred people killed directly in Chicago, another 700 premature deaths. In France, there was a de facto massacre, though hardly received as such.. Fourteen thousand eight to nine hundred died in two weeks, in Europe as a whole an estimated 70,000. (Tschabert 2016: 10, 25-36).

### The Variegated World of Capital and Labour

A global approach to class may do well in starting out from an expectation of its widely varying salience. First of all there is history, the very different pathways to modern states and societies. There were four major routes, and some important hybrids of combined paths. (Therborn 2011:54ff). Only the European was centred on class in a broad sense, pitting the “Third Estate” of commoners, in Britain soon a “Middle class”, and from mid-19th century on also a workingclass against the aristocracy and the prince. In the European settler countries of the Americas, independence was won against the Fatherland, and settler modernity asserted against Natives and (ex-)slaves. The third route was colonial emancipation, in Asia and Africa, carried by national, not class, movements. Japan managed to find a fourth route, keeping the rapacious colonial empires at bay by a skilful Reactive Modernization from above, by a mutated gentry transforming the imperial realm.

Europe is the only continent where autonomous trade unions have ever organized more than half of the workforce. And the only continent, together with the two specific settler countries of Australia and New Zealand, on which explicit labour parties have ever gained an electoral parliamentary majority.

The class character of Europe was enhanced by its economic development, by its extensive industrial capitalism. In all the major European countries and in most of the total, industrial employment became the dominant trisector employment, ranging between 40 and 52 (UK) per cent of employment. This relative predominance to agricultural and services employment never happened in the US or Japan (Therborn 1995:69).

Industrial capitalism is a major pivot both of class and of (in)equality. It developed dialectically, as Marx predicted. Its development included the growth, concentration, and organization of the industrial workingclass. This class development reached its peak in the 1970s, in most advanced capitalist countries, and constituted a decisive force of the equalization from 1945 to 1980. It seems that there was also a technological aspect to the relative equalization of advanced industrial capitalism, long after its origins in the “dark satanic mills” of the beginning industrial revolutions. The productivity of the assembly line, for instance, could carry decent wages for its little skilled, non-credentialed workers, once labour market and socio-political contexts made it possible for workers to claim a decent wage.

Now, Europe is a declining force in the world, economically as well as demographically. Is its developed industrial capitalist society, with its possibilities of widespread equalization, to be followed anywhere? `In terms of economic history, the answer is no. Contingent socio-political opportunities remain open.

The world as a whole is still far from completing the process of proletarianization into wage-labour, but in a new, much more rugged terrain.

While the world of capital is getting increasingly interwoven and similar, by criss-crossing investments, shared methods of accumulation – digital technology, finance, and real estate – , a global executive labour market, and a common lifestyle of exuberance, the world of labour remains very differentiated. On a world scale, employees and employers together only make up 57 per cent of the world's economically active population, 54 per cent employees and 3 per cent employers. On third of the world's workforce are own account workers, of whom the 30-31 per cent living outside the “high income” countries are typically street vendors or casual labourers. Ten per cent are family helpers. In the high income countries, employees amount to 86 per cent of the economically active, in Sub-Saharan Africa and in South Asia 25-26 per cent. In Southeast Asia, employees are about half of the economically active population, in Latin America and East Asia about two thirds. (ILOSTAT 2018)

For these forty per cent of the working world in what the ILO calls “vulnerable employment”, meaning non-wage labour, the door of an industrial exit is closing. Industrial employment – manufacturing, construction, mining – has stalled in the world, at a level between a fifth and a fourth of the global labour force, 22-23 per cent (ILOSTAT) . Manufacturing employment halted globally already in the 1990s, with a decline in East Asia (UNCTAD 2016). While industrial society in the US and Japan culminated at 36-37 per cent of total employment, in the UK and Germany around half of total employment , and in the least industrialized countries of Europe a third, in the rest of the world it will never reach that share. It will stop at between a fifth and fourth of employment, in China slightly higher but below 30 per cent (ILOSTAT 2019).

Instead of widening industrial formalization and standardization of work, working conditions, and workers' rights, the emergent economies of the twenty-first century are offering persistent “informality”, labour without rules and rights. In “Shining” India this informality comprises about ninety percent of the workforce. In Latin America informality still characterize about half of all work, and rising in several countries after the end of the more egalitarian development tendency of the first ten-fifteen years of this century. (World Bank 2019:19)

The post-industrial labour markets of advanced capitalism, where industrial employment is down to 18 per cent in the UK and manufacturing employment below ten, have experienced a general and rather well known polarization between skilled, highly paid jobs, and low skilled low-paid ones, usually so far with the conservative skewedness towards the former. They are also being informalized in their own way. Only a third of OECD workers are currently covered by collective agreements (OECD 2019:20).

In the 1980s, many German sociologists were concerned with an imminent end of job (*Krise der Arbeitsgesellschaft?* 1982), and in the current decade predictions and estimates of large job losses from automation and artificial intelligence have been made . An estimate by a group of Oxford experts of almost 47 per cent of US jobs being “at risk” of automation was widely interpreted as a prediction that half of all jobs in the US would disappear. But the estimates offered have kept varying widely, for the US ranging between 7 and 47 per cent, for Japan between 6 and 55 (World Bank 2019:22). The OECD, in its 2019 Employment Outlook thinks of a probably fourteen per cent of jobs at high risk of termination. The continuous increase of employment in the high income countries since 2000 (and the 1980s), - except for the employment destruction by the financial crash of 2008, which it took three years to repair -, indicates that the historical experience of the industrial

revolution is still valid (at least) for the first two decades of the twenty-first century: Technological innovations and advance, while ending many low productivity jobs, tend to lead to more jobs

What is more certain, and already here, is the impact of the new digital technology on the conditions of labour, more insecurity and more surveillance. The digital platform businesses are trying to do away with employment contracts and rights altogether. How far they will succeed is still an open question. On labour markets they are still a small niche phenomenon, but in China they are estimated to control 30 per cent of labour by 2028 (Liang Yucheng 2019). Constant digital monitoring and surveillance of employees is becoming standard, the Amazon warehouses often described as examples of horror.

On the side of capital we have to acknowledge a new vigour, with two main drivers, financialization and the digital technological revolution. Important here is that the two are intertwined. Financialization today does not mean the re-emergence of a rentier economy, foreboding a capitalism in decline, nor a divide between a sedate class of bankers and producing technical entrepreneurs, as in England between the City of London and the manufacturers of the North. Stock market capitalization connects financial gamblers and digital entrepreneurs. The world's six largest corporations by stock market value are all digital corporations, Apple, Amazon, Alphabet (Google i.a.), Microsoft, Facebook, and Alibaba. Five American and one Chinese. And the six wealthiest men of the world made their wealth on the stock market as digital entrepreneurs.

The enormous, raw economic power concentrated in these corporations has been well illustrated by analyses of the cost structure of Apple's iPhone, analyses rather similar from the US business magazine Forbes to the Third World Tricontinental Research Center. The latest is from the latter, investigating into the cost structure of iPhone X: in every day language they are, components bought 37%, manufacturing (wages and profits) 2.5%, and profits for Apple designers and shareholders 60% (Tricontinental 2019). (The Forbes calculations for iPhone 7 were even more extreme).

#### The Fifteen Years of Fame of the Middle-Class

The middle class was mostly a non-class in Marxist class theory and class history, although its boundary to the workingclass was a concern, and Erik's contradictory locations and three-dimensional asset distributions were grappling with it. Marx himself saw it as a passing early-mid 19th century phenomenon. In the liberal master narrative, it was the permanent carrier of liberalism. The twentieth century was, in the Global North, the workingclass century, the social reference-point not only of the class-conscious labour movement but also of its critics and enemies, the Pope, Conservative writers like Ernst Jünger, the Fascists and the Nazis, whose party was the National Socialist German Workers Party.

In class terms, the twenty-first century is being announced as a middle-class century, or, alternatively, as a century of middle class preoccupation. However, the Middle Class arrives, not as a theoretical problem, but as a political issue. Around the latest turn of century a new, Middle Class era was announced in the Global South., most importantly in China and India, where it corresponded to a major shift of political economy.

The anonymous Preface of a major scholarly contribution from by the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences presented it's The Rising Middle Classes in China thus: "China's rapid economic growth has led to a rapidly growing middle class. Especially since the century of capitalism, the size and scale of China's middle class have clearly grown. .... In the socio-political sphere the middle class is constantly making its voice heard , and its stance will decide the direction of Chinese

society.” (Li 2012: i) The sociologists interested in the new class formation also had to defend its political usefulness against attacks in the aftermath of 1989. A middle class society was something very different from the Maoist “worker-peasant” society, and “a famous sociologist of the time pointed out ‘ Socialist China cannot allow a ‘middle class’ to appear’. .... Middle class theory exists in the West to cover up the issue of class conflict.’ “ (Li 2012:6) The most convincing argument in defence was that “in any society the middle class is the most important force for maintaining social stability” (Li Quang , quoted in Li 2012:8). By 2001 theoretical battle was won. In China, the middle class then soon became a central component of an egalitarian vision, in the midst of galloping inequality, of “ ‘an olive-shaped structure’ where the middle class is the main social group” (L 2012i: loc. cit.)

In India, the very influential early retired businessman turned bestseller writer Gurcharan Das exclaimed in 2000, “The most striking feature of contemporary India is the rise of a confident new middle class .... Whether India can deliver the goods depends a great deal on it.” Das is here quoted as a vignette to a perceptive analysis of the new middle class discourse in India by Leela Fernandes. Her central argument “is that the rise of the new Indian middle class represents the political construction of a social group that operates as a proponent of economic liberalization” (Fernandes 2006:xviii), which had a political breakthrough in India in 1991, with seeds from the 1980s.

In other parts of the Global South, the arriving new Middle Class was mainly conceived in consumption terms, as the emergence of discretionary consumers, and as such of new business markets. In 2011, the African Development Bank, the Asian Development Bank, and the UN Economic Commission for Latin America all published major reports on their respective continental middle classes.

The Southern literature was largely written against the background of the accelerating economic growth of the 1990s or the first decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The sombre Northern lamentations have mainly been composed in the shadow of the 2008 financial crash and its enduring effects middle class recession and accelerating inequality.

The OECD (2019) has put out grim overview of the middle class in the Global North, Under Pressure: The Squeezed Middle Class, It highlights the halt of upward mobility, the decline in population share of the income-earners between 75 and 200 per cent of the median, the growing gap between the median income and the average of the top ten, and that more than one of five middle income households spend more than they earn.

Several European authors focus on the disappearing of middle class society, as a sociological reality and as a cultural norm or model, viewed as an effect both of widening economic inequalities and, above all, by tendencies of cultural dissolution (Chauvel 2016; Goffart 2019; Guilluy 2018) The “Western middle class” has lost its status as “the cultural referent”, “incarnating the American or European way of life” (Guilluy:78), particularly through the cultural and economic destruction of its “popular base [*socle populaire*]” (p. 82). [The skilled workingclass? GTh] While like the others also pointing to growing economic inequality, Goffart adds another dimension, succinctly summarized on the cover of his book : “Surveillance capitalism changes the rules of the game in state and economy. A handful of internet corporations occupy the public space and pushes [*drängt*] the working middle into digital serfdom.”

In the first volume of Capital, Marx tells his German readers about his analysis of English capitalism, *De te fabula narratur*, this story is about you [and your future]. The Southern writers on the rising Middle Class would do well reading the Northern middle class stories. Under prevailing political economy they are describing the continuation of the middle class story, not into



“olive-shaped” societies but into ever steeper pyramids. Between 1980 and 2014, the middle 40% of India saw their income grow at half the size of the income of the national average. The income share of the top one per cent is back at its level in colonial times, just before World War II (Alvaredo et al 2018:127ff ) The McKinsey consultancy has recently reported on China that “within the burgeoning middle class, the upper middle class is poised to become the principal engine of consumer spending over the next decade” (Barton et al. 2019). The alert Chinese sociologists (in Shanghai) have just launched their first post-middle class project, on China’s Super-Rich. The hopeful of the North, like the OECD Secretariat, or the South, who expect a good society from middle class aspirations, with “intolerance of corruption” and “trust in others” should read Snigdha Poonam’s (2018) amazing book about the Indian Dreamers, the young middle class aspirants who run sophisticated online and call-center scams, from selling fake education and jobs to extorting money from elderly Americans by threatening them with the Inland Revenue Service.

### Class Prospects

So, we have worldwide, workers in the South trapped in pre-industrial work and working conditions, or in quasi-industrial rightsless “informality”, and workers in the North, fragmented, polarized, under surveillance. At the other pole, we have capital richer and more globally powerful than ever, and dynamic at that, in new digital tech business and in spectacular real estate development projects. The Southern middle classes got their fifteen years of fame in the beginning of the twenty-first century, a bit like the middle classes of post-Napoleonic Europe two centuries ago. But the current Northern middle class literature indicates a less than shining future for them, a middle class abandonment by an ever richer upper class.

We are indeed living in grim times of increasing inequality and exploitation, and of a drastic weakening of the labour movement, the very centre of much of twentieth century social progress. If the above analysis is more or less correct, strong labour movements are unlikely ever to rise from the Global South.

However, would it be rational, and scholarly, not just morally abdicating, to view this situation as stable or as located on a steady trend into the future? I think not.

First of all, let us not forget that the disadvantaged of today are, on the whole, much more resourceful than those of a century ago, much less abjectly poor, much healthier, more knowledgeable of the world, much less crushed by racist, sexist, and other ideologies of inherent inferiority and worthlessness, and, often, with access to media of mass communication.

As the most intelligent faction of the global capitalist class has acknowledged at least since 2015 (in Davos), this accelerating accumulation of wealth and power into the One per cent is very risky, likely to provoke resistance and rebellion from large parts of the left out ninety.-nine per cent. So far, few politicians have listened to the enlightened bourgeoisie, but they are likely to harvest what they have not sown.

Current capital power is likely to be disrupted also by two other global processes, of unpredictable consequences. One is the new geopolitical dynamic of globalization, succeeding the brief interlude, 1980s-2008, of market –driven (politically facilitated) globalization, after the twentieth century one of political globalization, from the Russian Revolution to the end of the Cold War. USA is apparently not to gong to accept the rise of China, and this is going to disturb the world economy in unpredictable ways.

The second change of global parameters is the challenge of climate change. It is now driven by a generational movement of unprecedented global scope. The solutions have to deal with a number of conflicting interests under a common planetary cloud, national and international, industrial, class and regional. All these conflicts will bear upon, and question the privileges of the One per cent.

In the twenty-first century, labour will find new means of expression and of demands, alongside and beyond trade unions and labour parties. Both pre- and post-industrial mobilizations and organizations will arouse the downtrodden. The “damned of the earth” of this century may not become revolutionary in the twentieth century sense. But they are likely to be more rebellious, more aware that “another world is desirable”, and perhaps possible. In the face of coming riotous demands, parts of the capitalist upper class may look back at the times of industrial capitalism and its class compromises of binding collective agreements and respectful reformist labour parties with some nostalgia. In short, in comparison with the central class areas of the past century there will be less trade unionism, less labour party reform, and more social riots, more non-class identities of labour resistance, , and more political populism of various kinds. But, however framed, the class capital-labour nexus is most likely to remain at the core of social conflict – and therewith the continuing relevance of class analyses.

### Envoi

In his posthumous last book, How to Be an Anti-capitalist in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century (2019), Erik gave us a valuable pointer to another future, a multifaceted erosion of capitalism, a parallel to capitalism’s own emergence from the secular erosion of feudalism. He was a pacifist rationalist, the world is neither. Capitalism is unlikely to “erode” peacefully and gracefully, its eventual disappearance is more likely to resemble its surge to power, in welters of wars and complex political and social conflicts

Another world is possible and Erik’s very last words indicated to us , the late-born as well as the old survivors, a trail forward to blaze.