

Here is an excellent article; comprehensive, insightful and coherent. But it is an article that is crying out for some sort of conclusion. However, Harris is either unwilling or unable to provide one. Of course, in his defence, there are no glib conclusions to the fragmentation and demoralisation of the old European working class any more than there are easy conclusions to be drawn from the relentless march of globalisation and automation. These are the trickiest of subjects. Harris, like the rest of us, does not have a crystal ball, so he can be forgiven for not offering his readers too many definites. But he could have made some tentative suggestions as to where the left should be heading.

I fully accept Harris's description of the traditional working class suffering an identity crisis. Of course they would. Having largely defined themselves around the concept of a life-long job, it is little surprise that many workers should lapse into crude forms of nationalism as a way of filling the void left by the ruthless tide of globalisation and automation. And Harris is absolutely correct in my view to suggest that there will be no return to that golden era. Why would any manufacturer want to pay first world wages when they could get the job done just as efficiently in the developing world at third world wage rates? And furthermore, why would any manufacturer want to employ uppity workers when machines are perfectly capable of doing the job 24/7 and without complaint. As far as the traditional industrial working class is concerned, the die is well and truly cast. And in consequence, the traditional Labour vote is a dead duck.

Does this mean that Europe's social democratic parties, including Britain's Labour Party are all destined for historical scrap heap? Well that depends. If social democratic parties pretend to themselves and the electorate at large that there can be a return to the days of full employment and a job for life,

they are almost certainly deluding themselves and their imagined natural constituency. If they think that by appealing to the solidarity of the working class, this is going to get their party back into office they are, as Harris eloquently explains, are on a hiding to nothing. Even a switch to so called green technologies are not going to produce anything near enough jobs to fill the vacuum. The days of millions of workers pouring into factories to produce things for the domestic and international markets are gone for good. Even Asia will soon have to wake up to this new reality.

The machines are coming whether we humans like it or not. And a good thing too in my opinion. I can see nothing glorious about dragging coal out of a mine or doubled up at a machine for the best part of your life. We humans are capable of so much more. So the questions that Harris did not really grapple with are; what are we humans now supposed to do with our lives and what precisely is it that binds us together if work as we knew it is destined for the dustbin of history? The answers to these two connected questions will no doubt scare the hell out of many people but, if approached creatively, should give us all some cause to rejoice. I'm talking here about a four hour working day, a four or even three day working week, coupled with a guaranteed living wage for all. It sounds hopelessly utopian and it probably was a mere twenty years ago. But given the pace of technological advance, this utopia it is not only desirable but damn well doable.

So what is holding it back? Obviously, it is the one percent still lording it over the ninety-nine percent. This is where the class analysis of society is as relevant, if not more so, than at any time in our uncivilised history. The material basis of class has always been that of scarcity and now, for the very first time in human history, we have at our disposal the technological means to step out of the chains of scarcity and into the sunny uplands of material abundance. This is the historical moment that all progressive activists have dreamed of. This is the historical moment where we can actually transcend our tribal instincts and crawl out of our pre-history. No need to be downbeat Mr Harris. This is our time.

Of course the one percent will be having none of it. No, they have a vested interest in scarcity and they will do everything in their considerable power to delay the day of abundance. And why? There simply isn't any profit to be made from the new era. Solar powered, machine operated factories churning out sustainable goods and services on demand for the entire global population is definitely bad for business. No sir! They will be having none of it. And that, Mr Harris, should be our starting point. It's not so much a red/green/pink/grey alliance that is needed but rather a total fusing of the working class, civil rights, identity and environmental movements. And at the risk of lapsing into clichéd phrases, this is precisely the time to unite humanity against greedy elites and their devious divide and rule strategies. To put it in its blunt Marxist terminology, this is the time to seize and create collective ownership of the means of production. New Labour could not have got it more wrong when they abolished Clause Four of the Labour Party constitution. If those Labour modernisers could have only seen the real lie of the land, they would have realised that the response of globalisation was not to uncritically embrace it but rather to socialise it. They could not see the wood for the trees. They well and truly got lost in the wood.

The Corbynistas are moving in the right direction. That John McDonnell and his mate Jeremy Corbyn are clever fellows. So is Paul Mason, whose recent book, Post Capitalism should be read by all. They all seem to grasp the new emerging realities. As for the future strategy for the Labour Party, it is blindingly obvious. In fact, it was more or less written by the Occupy Movement over a decade ago. Occupy the whole damn planet. It is the one strategy that can unite all fragments of the working class, from those working in the sweatshops of Asia, Africa and South America, to the hopelessly overworked junior doctors in Britain, including the countless millions barely surviving in the growing global precariat. And of course it must include that desperate army of economic migrants heroically searching for some sort of a life free from poverty and war.

Beyond this present gloom and desperation, I sense our technological future could be fantastically, mind-bogglingly bright. A citizens wage for all citizens of planet Earth. A fully sustainable global green economy powered by renewables. And a work-life balance that allows everyone from Bangladesh and Beijing, from to Brighton and Brixton, to become a free thinking individual within a global collective. Everyone a worker, an administrator, a philosopher and a poet. An Einstein, a Mozart and an Arundhati Roy in every street. The Labour Party should learn to dream again and dream big. The alternative is to set yourself up as Tory managers of the global corporate world and that is no alternative at all.

As for John Harris, he is only showing us one side of the coin; one of fragmentation, demoralisation and desperation. If he would only allow himself to flip that coin over, he might be pleasantly surprised by what he sees.

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