

**COMMONFARE OR
THE WELFARE OF
THE COMMONWEALTH**

GENERAL INTELLECT

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In contemporary capitalism, both labor and social policies are indissolubly linked. The separation between labor-time and lifetime disappears with the prevarication of labor. Bio-capitalism¹ abstracts the time of life into a relational commodity. Neoliberal governance ensures all value is drained from whatever potency lingers in the struggle of existence. Any residue of welfare, as has been handed down in Europe by hard fought political gains and for a time upheld by the state, is completely overwhelmed by technics of extraction. Now is the time to update the concept of welfare. It must be adequate to the current situation, respectful of gender, ethnic and educational differences, and it must guarantee the wellbeing of the community; the welfare of commonwealth² must replenish life with quality and a right to joy.

The compensative expansion that characterized Fordism, simultaneous growth of wages and profits, has now been exhausted. Today public welfare is perceived as a cost whose funding depends on the fiscal deduction of value produced by the capitalist market economy: a deduction that jeopardizes market competitiveness. In this logic, public welfare is no longer affordable.

With the spread of neoliberal policies, welfare institutions are increasingly 'capitalizing'. Above all, they become directly manageable by the private market hierarchy. Keynesian public welfare, no longer governable with the constraints imposed on the public budget, is gradually replaced by an exclusionary form of workfare. Workfare is a not a welfare system: it is guaranteed only to those who have the financial means to pay for it (such as private pension). It is a self-financed welfare system, as in most of today's European retirement system, comparable to the privatization policy of health and education. Therefore, workfare is complementary to the so-called 'principle of subsidiary' according to which a state may take action only if, and in so far as, the objectives cannot be satisfactorily achieved in a private way.

The concept of social re/production is paradigmatic of cognitive bio-capitalism. It includes the main novelties of the accumulation and valorization paradigm, by considering a wide range of activities, from care, health, education to knowledge and culture.

1 Bio-capitalism (or bio-cognitive capitalism) is defined as an accumulation and valorization process based on the exploitation of knowledge and the commodification of life. Learning and network processes are at the core of value creation, as well the different daily acts of life, more and more inserted in a productive cycle, often without being aware of that (e.g. education, consumption, leisure time, care, and so on).

2 The term commonwealth, as used in this text, refers to its original meaning of 'wealth of the common'. In its etymological origin, commonwealth means the wealth created more by the common (the human capacity to share relations, skills, experiences, attention, etc. inside a social cooperation) then by common goods (the governance of tangible and intangible goods which are the basis of human existence and survive).

With social re/production we mean the complex of interactions and exchanges that are generated, in life, within the social environment. The content and the form of social reproduction, more clearly than in the past, deals with the material body, processed by bio-capitalism, and is inextricably linked to the time and the needs of life.³

Welfare institutions today have become directly productive activities (as opposed to supportive reproductive activities). The share of capital understood as supportive of immaterial wealth (R&D, education, training and health) has exceeded the share of material capital as once accumulated in the traditional spaces such as factories and offices. This became visible in the beginning of the 80s in the US, and later in Europe.

Nowadays, financial capital has become the determining factor in growth and competitiveness. Material capital tends to turn into human capital (the stock of knowledge, habits, social and personality attributes, including creativity, embodied in the ability to perform labor so as to produce economic value). Thus, welfare, after it has been privatized and financialized, starts to serve inside the accumulation process as the primary productive factor. Market actors substitute states and public actors, resulting in a process of segmentation among the population. As a result, universality has become an empty word.

Traditionally, care work has been considered ancillary to the factory's production work. Now, in contemporary capitalism, it has become a direct source of value, partially waged and partially unpaid.

Given the new phase of bio-capitalism, we propose to direct critical discourse in the following ways:

1. we need to become aware of the forms of direct exploitation of both the human body (organ transplants, surrogacy, ...) and the earth, which increases the degree to which the biosphere can be commodified (in part, thanks to innovations in bio-technology);
2. we need to think about the consequences of 'emotional' care and affect as productive labor, an aspect crucial to many professions in the service sector (not only the teacher and the nurse but also the PR and the fashion/TV professional worker);
3. we need to reflect on how social life, induced by cooperative forms of social networks (Facebook, Twitter, YouTube), is also becoming productive labor;
4. we need to think about how water and health have become privatized. Social reproduction is at the same time a collective and individual activity, since it simultaneously deals with individual learning and social relations. Promoting oneself on LinkedIn, using Google and smartphone apps, participating in Duolingo as life-long learning, liking on Facebook... The issue of exploitation of re/production, and the becoming-invisible of domestic labor and care, is the

3. For more details, see Morini Cristina, 'Social Reproduction as a Paradigm of the Common. Reproduction Antagonism, Production Crisis', in O. Augustin, C. Ydesen (eds), *Post-Crisis Perspectives*, Peter Lang, Frankfurt-New York, 2013, pp. 83-98

contemporary mechanisms of reproduction and production that have dramatically expanded within the horizons voluntary work under neo-liberalism. The expropriation of the value of social reproduction today represents the core of accumulation in a capitalist production context. The governance of social reproduction, outside and beyond the commodified logic of profit accumulation, is the core of what the commonfare project addresses.⁴

The transformation of the labor market over the past two decades in Europe has made increasingly urgent the need to redefine welfare policies. Therefore, it is necessary to introduce a new idea of welfare, what we call the commonfare (welfare of the commonwealth). Through the commonfare concept we will be able to deal with two elements that characterize the current phase of bio-cognitive capitalism, especially in so-called Western countries:

- precarity and the debt condition as dispositive of social control and dominance;
- the generation of wealth that arises from social reproduction, cooperation and general intellect.⁵

Labor is becoming more fragmented, not only from a legal point of view, but more commonly from the qualitative and subjective point of view. There is a growing multitude of atypical and precarious para-subordinate and autonomous workers. The primacy of individual over collective bargaining empties the capacity for trade unions to represent in the traditional way. Furthermore, in times of crisis, the pre-

4 The concept of commonfare originates from a debate in Italy during the struggle against precarious conditions. The first time the claim for commonfare appeared in a political document was in Mayday Network Milano, 'Charter of knowledge-workers rights', *European Institute for Progressive Cultural Policies*, May 2009, <http://eipcp.net/n/124117049>. From a theoretical point, as stated by Tiziana Terranova, Carlo Vercellone, and Andrea Fumagalli, see Tiziana Terranova, 'Red Stack Attack! Algorithms, Capital and the Automation of the Common', *Effimera*, 12 February 2014, <http://effimera.org/red-stack-attack-algorithms-capital-and-the-automation-of-the-common-di-tiziana-terranova/>; Andrea Fumagalli, 'Trasformazione del Lavoro e Trasformazioni del Welfare: Precarietà e Welfare del Comune (Commonfare) in Europa', in Paolo Leon, Riccardo Realonzo (eds), *L'Economia della precarietà*, Roma: Manifestolibri, 2008, pp. 159-174; Andrea Fumagalli, 'Commonfare: Per la Riappropriazione del Libero Accesso ai Beni Comuni', *Doppio Zero*, 14 January 2014, <http://www.doppiozero.com/materiali/quinto-stato/commonfare>; Carlo Vercellone, *Il comune come modo di produzione*, Ombre Corte: Verona, 2017.

5 General intellect is a term that originates from Karl Marx. In his *Grundrisse*, *General intellect* represents a crucial force of production, as a combination of technological expertise and social intellect, or general social knowledge: 'Nature builds no machines, no locomotives, railways, electric telegraphs, self-acting mules etc. These are products of human industry; natural material transformed into organs of the human will over nature, or of human participation in nature. They are organs of the human brain, created by the human hand; the power of knowledge, objectified. The development of fixed capital indicates to what degree general social knowledge has become a direct force of production, and to what degree, hence, the conditions of the process of social life itself have come under the control of the *general intellect* and been transformed in accordance with it; to what degree the powers of social production have been produced, not only in the form of knowledge, but also as immediate organs of social practice, of the real life process' (Karl Marx, *The Grundrisse: Notebook VII*, 1858, <https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1857/grundrisse/ch14.htm>). See also: Carlo Vercellone, 'From Formal Subsumption to General Intellect: Elements for a Marxist Reading of the Thesis of Cognitive Capitalism', *Historical Materialism*, 15.1 (2007): 13–36.

carious condition is strengthened by the increasing of the debt condition, in a vicious circle. The result is the 'precarity trap', which nowadays tends to substitute the 'poverty trap'.

As we stated before, the production of wealth is no longer based solely on material production. The existence of learning economies (which generate knowledge) and network economies (which allow its diffusion, at different levels) now represent the key variables that are at the origin of the increases in productivity: a productivity that comes from the exploitation of both common goods and the commonwealth, arising from the social cooperation of humans (such as in education, health, knowledge, space, social relations, etc).

A redefinition of welfare policy should be able to respond to the unstable trade-off inside the accumulation process of bio-cognitive capitalism: the negative relationship between precarity and social cooperation under platform capitalism (such as Peerby, Airbnb etc.). It is necessary to remunerate social cooperation, from one side, and favor forms of social production, from the other.

Our commonfare proposal is based on four pillars:

First Pillar: Unconditional Basic Income

Basic income should be available for everyone who lives in the territory, regardless of his/her professional and civil status, and should begin with the people under the relative poverty threshold. Basic income should be understood as a kind of monetary compensation (remuneration) of social productivity and of productive time which is not certified by the existing labor contracts. It occurs at the primary level of income distribution (it's a primary income), hence it cannot be considered merely as a welfare intervention, according both to workfare and Keynesian logic. This measure must be accompanied by the introduction of a minimum wage both for employees and freelancers, in order to avoid a substitution effect (dumping) between basic income and the same wages in favor of firms and to the detriment of the employees. Basic income together with minimum wage makes possible an expansion of the range of choices in the labor market, i.e. to refuse a 'bad' job and then modify the same labor conditions. The unconditional possibility of the refusal of labor opens up perspectives of liberation that go far beyond the simple distributive measure. Minimum wage for freelancers should be introduced. The group of people doing freelance work is increasing rapidly. For these people it is hard, if not impossible to join a union to fight for their rights. Individual bargaining leads often to too low wages for freelancers, which in their place will lead to reduced wages for employees.

Conversely, traditional welfare is based on the fact that people get back to work regardless of the uselessness of the task performed. 'Getting back on the horse' (of work) by doing obsolete or superfluous work seems more important than staying at home and maintaining the family. This is despite the fact that a well-cared for family reduces (future) costs of criminality, healthcare and poverty support, due to more space for education and upbringing, more so than the current costs of poverty support. The state of care has become a state of control. The fear of the state that people will stop working when receiving an unconditional basic income is partly well founded in the sense that people will stop doing unnecessary and meaningless jobs. Instead, many

will get more education, before returning to do meaningful work. Others will spend (part of their) time doing social work or other highly underrated, often voluntary, work such as care for the elderly or needy.

Second Pillar: Managing Both Common Goods and Commonwealth

The idea of commonfare implies, as a prerequisite, the social re-appropriation of the gains arising from the exploitation of common goods that are the basis of accumulation today. This re-appropriation does not necessarily lead to the transition from private to public ownership. As far as basic services such as health care, education or mobility are concerned, the goal is to install public management of the use-value supply in order to protect it against any attempt of commodification and extraction.

But if we refer to the commonwealth, the framework is different, since the fruits of social cooperation and general intellect are neither private nor public goods. The only way to manage the commonwealth is through self-organization, by imagining a different régime of valorization.

Concerning common goods, the proposal of commonfare entails that:

- as far as the cognitive commonwealth (general intellect) is concerned, it is able to reduce intellectual property rights and patent laws in favor of greater freedom of the circulation of knowledge and the ability to acquire free information infrastructures; simultaneously, it should dismantle all social and monetary barriers to a free, autonomous and universal education (access to immaterial common goods);
- as far as social re-production is concerned, it is able to provide free basic conditions of health, housing, mobility, transport and sociality, by improving good practices to experiment in new forms of self-organized welfare from below (access to the self-organization of life);
- it is able to be free from the hierarchy imposed by economic oligarchy, commodities and utilities. Over the past 20 years, these have been subject to extensive privatization as a consequence of the Cardiff process⁶ on the regulation of the market for goods and services (access to material common goods);
- it is able to provide institutions of the common, at the local level, regarding essential goods such as water, energy, housing stock, and environmental sustainability, through forms of ‘municipalism’ from below (democratic principle).

Third Pillar: Alternative Sharing Economy

We need to offer accessible alternatives against the negative externalities of the capitalist sharing economy, which include: (1) the generation of relations between users as the cornerstone of digital sharing platforms, and (2) the ownership of whatever physical asset is being shared. The second point even has scarier implications than the first if we start to imagine a full-fledged capitalist sharing economy. This

6 The Cardiff process is a reference to the 1996 European Treaty about the liberalization of public utilities inside the European Union in order to ease the constitution of Monetary European Union.

would be an economy in which ‘everything is shared and nothing is owned’. This is already a nerd dream in which there is a hope for ‘sharing power tools’. What a poor, nurtured dream! We can do better than that and instead really need to open our collective imaginaries.

Fourth Pillar: Commoncoin

Commonfare presupposes autonomy and independence, so it requires the activation of processes of self-organization or self-governance. The development and implementation of good practices requires a test-bed of experimentation and is therefore not always productive. To this end, it is essential to ensure full economic sustainability in order to avoid subsidence processes. From this point of view, commonfare presupposes its own self-capitalization in the direction of growing and widespread alternative productions, aimed at producing use-value instead of exchange-value. It follows that commonfare can be financially autonomous only if it is placed within a monetary circuit which is in turn independent from diktat and the imposition of dominant financial conventions.

Commoncoin is therefore the expression of commonfare and defines the framework of its implementation. Commonfare justifies Commoncoin when this currency is functional to an alternative production context based on the production of human beings for human beings. Commoncoin is designed to take care of the relation between bio-political value produced by the singularities composing the multitude and the social relations necessary to produce such value. At the economic and monetary levels, this self-reinforcing process needs then to be organized with the implementation of a set of monetary tools that can help answer the following question: how can the processes that define different redistributive models be automated with digital technologies, starting from a platform made to share bio-political value production by and for the multitude?

Capital is not keen to let the multitude enact the exodus from its yoke. Therefore, the underlying assumption for the creation of a complementary crypto-currency such as Commoncoin emerges from the need to enable the multitude to fight against monetary bio-power in the process of an exodus by weaponizing money itself. In reality, this may happen through bottom-up initiatives that apply critical thinking to crypto-currency design for the common good of the multitude. Hence, if implemented as crypto-currencies on distributed ledgers, the Commoncoin crypto-currency system could be operated at a fraction of the cost of both current public welfare provisions in that disintermediation and transaction costs near to zero would make them more attractive for the bottom-up institutionalization of commonfare. More concretely, Commoncoin is thought of more as a means of exchange to flow in alternative economic circuits than a store of value for ordinary crypto-currencies.

Commonfare, thanks to the growth of the service sector, could favor the spread of alternative forms of production, compatible with environmental constraints, respectful of human nature and above all aimed at valorizing the creative activity of *otium* (leisure) and *opus* (work) against today's dictatorship of labor: a dictatorship based on performance efficiency, productivity for capital, and with the result to destroy any social and natural ties.

Commonfare, therefore, is also adapted to the ecological constraints that emerged after more than 50 years of the Taylorist efficiency regime. This can be done according to two guidelines. The first concerns a 'common' management of environmental goods, subject to scarcity, from air to water, to nature in general (forests, animals, seas, and so forth), from one side, and of social reproduction and human relationships, from the other. The second derives from the implementation of an unconditional basic income which, in the name of the right of choice and self-determination of one's own life, can favor eco-compatible value-generation against production which damages environmental equilibrium.

Commonfare implies an ad hoc economic policy for a better governance of the present phase of what has been termed the 'capitalocene'. Since the dimension of life is the core of the processes of accumulation and exploitation and thus of valorization, welfare conditions are today the elements that condense these issues as a mode of production.

Commonfare intends to overcome the imperative of contemporary pessimism, connected with the current processes of impoverishment and proletarianization of the general intellect, by creating new imaginaries. Its aim is to develop concrete forms of micro-politics able to valorize presence and the capacity of different talents, the richness of human exchanges. It should also be able to adapt, at least partially, production to the needs and desires of the community. The metropolitan and social spaces, the relations between individuals and communities, the engines of valorization and the means of production are already directly in our hands, bodies and minds.

To get out of paralysis, we can already map out an infinity of realities that build 'commonwealth', social cooperation, self-production, inventions on the ground of social reproduction and inclusive exoduses. Such mapping is to begin to imagine the contours of a desirable society.

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