

BRINGING IN THE ACTORS AND THEIR RELATION OF FORCE

Version: 30 August 2024

Mikael Stigendal (mikael.stigendal@mau.se)

Malmö University, Sweden

This is a draft version of a paper which might become an article, depending on interest and discussions. Comments of every kind is very welcomed. The paper contains some criticism of the annual report, but with the best intentions and hopefully not disrespectful because I do appreciate the annual reports and all the hard work invested in them.

1. Introduction

Just like any other real object in the European reality, the annual reports of the EuroMemo Group may very well have an effect. However, it requires them to be read because otherwise the potentials of the reports will not be actualized. Who are they aimed at? Who might be interested in reading them? That is not explicitly stated in the reports, but it may show in who the reports write about and whose life situation they recognise.

This year's report (hereafter called EM2024) writes extensively about the crises. Many can certainly relate to that and thus become interested in reading the report. In contrast, the report includes no recognition of those who struggle collectively, for example the workers at the Amazon warehouse in Coventry, which this paper will draw attention to below. Furthermore, even if people read the report, it does not automatically lead to the proposals being implemented. Who is supposed to implement them? What social forces have the potential to implement them? Shouldn't the report take a greater interest in how such social forces can be strengthened? Conversely, nor does EM2024 say anything about social forces who might oppose the proposals or even prevent them from getting heard about.

My paper is based on the conviction that the annual reports of the EuroMemo Group need to pay more attention to actors and social forces. In an attempt to remedy this shortage, I want to contribute by drawing on a scientific tradition associated with Antonio Gramsci. For him, the relation of forces was a central concept. He termed a prevailing balance of forces as the conjuncture. Gramsci was a source of inspiration for the first generation of regulation theorists, whose concepts regime of accumulation and mode of regulation will be used in the paper to explain the European development. This will cast some new light on the proposals in the EM2024 and enable me to propose improvements.

And that is the aim of the paper, namely to suggest how the proposals of the EM2024 can be improved by a conjunctural analysis, putting relations of force at the centre. To do that, I have to put the concept of conjuncture in a theoretical framework, but just to the limited extent needed for the purpose of this paper. Similarly, the paper contains some notes on the current conjuncture, but just briefly to show what a conjunctural analysis can imply. A rounded conjunctural analysis of the European development using this theoretical framework remains to be done, but it has to start by reinterpreting the polycrisis, which I intend to do now.

2. A reinterpretation of the polycrisis

EM2024 urges us to see the recent development in the EU in the context of disorder and polycrisis. By polycrisis they mean “a multiplicity of shocks that may appear disparate, but that interact so that the whole becomes even more overwhelming than the sum of its parts.” The current polycrisis includes several such shocks, for example climate change and increasing inequalities. The report does not provide any explanations, however, to how the shocks are related, except for them happening to interact.

Furthermore, the report does not explain why exactly all these shocks should be seen as included in the polycrisis.

According to the report, the current polycrisis “has been generated by the process of disintegration of the neoliberal world order”. However, the authors do not explain their understanding of this world order, and why it has caused all these shocks. Accordingly, focus is put on the effects of the crises, not on their causes. As a consequence, the EU-policy is assessed on the basis of how well it tackles the effects of the crises, not their causes. Another consequence of this focus on effects is that people only appear as affected, not as producers of the wealth that others appropriate; not as representatives of social forces in a relationship with other social forces. As victims of inequality, they have nothing else in common because they are not seen as doing anything together.

And yet, all the crises are made, just as everything associated with the social world, and caused by human activity. The social world would not exist without human activity. Very simplistic, we may treat the crises as symptoms of human activity gone wrong. But what activity? And whose activity? The activity of the wealthy and powerful ones in control of the development escapes scrutiny when focus is put on the effects of the crises. Also, it makes the activity of the ones who produces wealth concealed, for example migrants.

3. From symptoms to causes

EM2024 dedicates a chapter to the issue of human mobility and migration, but without saying anything about what migrants are doing in Europe. Many of them work, for example producing food. What they produce is generally called use-values, which others then buy in the form of commodities. To be sure, use-values do not have to be produced and they may certainly exist without being priced, but when they are, it makes them commodified.

Among the most important use-values is labour power. It is mentioned in the EM2024, however as “labour”, defined as being “embodied in human beings with all its physical, gendered and cultural characteristics that are shaped by history, giving labour migration its political and cultural dimensions.” In addition to a great variety of skills, labour power includes the very special ability to produce more than we need ourselves, a surplus labour sufficient also for others to benefit from, for example children, elderly, sick. Surplus labour may also be appropriated by force, for example from slaves or serfs.

Even in the mode of production called capitalism, surplus labour is appropriated, although not by force, at least not in the formal sense. The capitalist pays for the labour-value of labour power but receives in return the new labour-value produced by the worker, inherent in the commodity. The difference between the labour-value of labour power and the new labour-value of the commodity is called surplus value and becomes the basis of the profit.

Labour power may be exchanged also in other modes of production, although not to make a profit. For example, services like schools and care homes owned by the public sector are not profit-oriented and subject to the competitive pressures of market forces to rationalize its production. Therefore, they should be seen as constituting another mode of production, driven by needs. That includes a lot of care, which EM2024 refers to, suggesting the fostering of a specific care-economy. I subscribe to all what EM2024 says about care, except for framing it as a care-economy. That implies a conceptualization with regard to the object of work – care – and not the driving forces. I prefer a distinction on the basis of driving forces between modes of production and suggest the framing of it as a needs-driven care-production.

What makes the world go around, however, is not the fulfillment of needs. Nor is it just money, as they sing in the musical Cabaret, but the relentless movements of money as capital, driven for profits by capitalists, one of the two major classes. Capitalists may be of several kinds, but the most important capitalists for capitalism are the industrial ones; i.e. the ones who buy the labour power and ensure that it is used, primarily to produce surplus value. The other major class, the working class, consists of those who sell their labour power to be consumed in the production of labour value, and surplus value in particular. In between, a range of different occupations exists, belonging to the so-called middle layers, characterized as those who represents capital but often also at the same time work productively. Similar

divisions may exist in other modes of production, but not driven by profit. A class analysis should establish the class divisions in quantitative terms, both within and between the modes of production, but also the overdetermination of it by other categories like for example gender and ethnicity.

The relation between capitalists and workers constitutes a so-called structural contradiction which exposes both sides for strategic dilemmas. If the worker insists on putting his/her particular imprint on the work, he/she will probably lose the job, but if he/she accepts to be mainstreamed, he/she might lose him- or herself. If the capitalist does not put sufficient pressure on the workforce, he/she will probably lose the company, but if the pressure becomes too hard, he/she may lose the labour-power and thus the sole source of surplus-value. The outcome depends on class struggle, both within and between the classes, and that is a major source of the capitalist dynamic. It includes a struggle about both meaning and organisation; or in more generic terms, about semiosis and structuration. Another such major source of the dynamic is competition between the capitalists. Each capitalist is compelled to fight the battle of competition by the cheapening of commodities and expanding of profits or face insolvency.

Capitalist exploitation manifests itself in for example the employment of migrants. Many of them are employed on precarious conditions by employers who try to make them work harder and longer to produce more surplus-value to increase profits; sweatshop growth as it may be called. If the workers are pushed too far, it may happen that they react collectively.

That has happened at the warehouse in Coventry, UK, of Amazon, one of the most profitable companies on the planet. Due to the cost-of-living crisis and a futile increase in pay, Amazon workers across the UK could not just 'go on'. Also, health and safety concerns with a high incidence in serious injuries like burns and traumatic incidences forced them to react. The GMB union has been working on organizing in Amazon for more than ten years but found it notoriously difficult, not just for the anti-union culture of the company but also due to the complexities of a workforce made up predominantly of immigrants from various countries who are unfamiliar with the British labour movement. In previous protests, the workers had demonstrated the strength of feeling that the union could address. Many workers joined the union and after the obligatory ballot, the workers at the warehouse in Coventry made history in January 2023 by staging the first-ever official UK strike at Amazon.

As the example shows, for something like a class interest to exist and be retained, it must to some extent have been created and selected by receptive actors. That does not necessarily happen. Workers may very well be more interested in finding more subtle and individualistic ways of defending their well-being, like foot-dragging or absenteeism. Individualistic solutions, however, may be encouraged by a company like Amazon. The company wants to make another sense of the conflict, make it less meaningful for the workers to see themselves as a collective with common interests and may even try to prevent them from joining the union. Class struggle is therefore in the first place a struggle about class formation, i.e. making sense and meaning of class as well as getting organized (Sum & Jessop 2013, 187). Therefore, it would matter if an organisation like the EuroMemo Group recognised such collective efforts to succeed with objectives similar to the ones presented in the annual reports.

4. Capitalist socialization

The working conditions offered to many of today's migrants were common in Europe 100 years ago and just as at Amazon in Coventry, workers across Europe reacted collectively against it. What came instead? How was a more stable development possible? The transformations implemented by Henry Ford in 1914 at his plant in Michigan use to be referred to as the birth of the new era. Gramsci was the one who in his "Americanism and Fordism" from 1934 recognised the significance of Ford's increases of wages and reduction of the working day to 8 hours in exchange for the introduction of mass production on assembly lines. He called it Fordism.

Subsequently, Fordism became an important concept in the understanding of the golden decades after the Second World War, pioneered by the Parisian school of the early regulation approach in the mid-1970s (hereafter also called RA). They treated Fordism as a specific pattern, linking production and consumption (Aglietta 1987: 117), termed a regime of accumulation. The early regulation approach drew on a Marxist account of the economy. In recent decades, however, these Marxists roots have been

weakened or even deliberately cut, in favour of more one-sidedly institutionalist work. In contrast, Jessop has insisted on keeping the Marxist roots (Jessop 2013, 9). Instead of abandoning the early RA, he has contributed immensely to reinvigorating it. I side with Jessop and regard the Marxist roots as crucial to understand why the regulations exist and what they concern.

The key assertion of the Parisian school of the early regulation approach (RA) is that capitalism cannot be reproduced entirely through market exchange. Instead of being reproduced quasi-automatically, independently of effective social agency (Jessop & Sum 2006: 37), capitalism needs regulating. Why? The answer requires an explanation of the dynamic of capital accumulation.

Capitalists fight the battle of competition by the cheapening of commodities, forcing the capitalists to constantly advance the forces of production. Thus, competition drives production forward by transforming itself into a compulsory law for the individual capitalist to constantly improve the machinery and the productive power. However, the cheapening of commodities tends to reduce the mass of profits and thereby the capital available for investment. If that happens and the capitalist fails to improve the machinery, he/she runs the risk of being outcompeted. To avoid that, the capitalist must exploit the improved productive power to produce more. That may increase the mass of profits, but not the rate of profit which tends to fall as the number of workers employed relative to machinery are squeezed out due to the increase in productivity. To compensate, capitalists must find new areas to exploit, commodifying ever greater shares of our lives, the world and even the future by creating fictitious capital. That makes growth imperative for capitalists to keep up both the mass and the rate of profits. When they succeed, this translates to an economy that must grow without bounds.

However, it requires that demand and consumption expand at a similar pace. That does not happen automatically. While the forces of production seem to know no bounds, the ability of workers to buy is limited. Thus, capital accumulation involves a constant tension between a restricted consumption and a production striving to overcome it. Capitalists are compelled to increase production, not because of the demands of consumption, but because of the competition on appropriating surplus value. In other words, capital accumulation involves a tendency to overproduce. For capital accumulation to succeed, this crisis tendency has to be counteracted by a matching expansion of consumption. The early regulation theory called such conjunctions between production and consumption for regimes of accumulation.

Regimes of accumulation are created through forms of regulations. Regulation theory has identified and analysed several such forms. One of them, called the wage relation, regulates the relation of production and of exchange between capital and labour. Other forms of regulation emerges within the state, more specifically in those respects where a compromise between capital and labour has been institutionalized as well as in forms of intervention. To be sure, the state is in principle institutionally separated from the economy, but it does secure key conditions of the economy and more than that, it intervenes in the economy to support the valorization of capital and the reproduction of labour-power. As Jessop emphasises, this 'is not just a secondary activity aimed at modifying the effects of a self-sufficient market but is absolutely essential to capitalist production and market relations.' (2002, 43) However, it is structurally contradicted by the overall responsibility of the state for holding society together.

Forms of regulations emerge to handle such structural contradictions and the crisis-tendencies of capitalism when sets of institutions have been made complementary in what Jessop calls an 'institutional fix'. In addition, spatial and temporal boundaries may be established in a 'spatio-temporal fix' (STF) (Jessop 2013). Both fixes may constitute and secure not only individual forms of regulation but a coherence among them in a mode of regulation and in its co-evolution with a regime of accumulation, constituting growth models. However, that does just handle the contradictions and not make them disappear. Therefore, the order brought about is always only temporary. As capitalism expands through commodification, the structural contradictions and thus the probability for disorder also proliferate. Furthermore, the forms of regulation and the fixes in which they inhere are contested and dependent on unstable equilibria of compromise between social forces.

Using these concepts, Fordism consisted of; firstly, large-scale mass production with ever-increasing productivity; secondly, an accumulation regime linking mass production to mass consumption; thirdly, a mode of regulation, including collective agreements and the Keynesian national welfare state; and

fourthly, the growth model itself, comprising it all. It was based on a spatio-temporal fix where the territorial boundaries of the national state served as containers for national societies.

The Fordist STF was dismantled by neoliberalism and globalization, paving the way for a finance-dominated growth model. By operating on a global basis, capital got access to an abundance of labour-power and in particular cheap labour in the Global South. Also, sources of demand widened considerably as capital got access to the purchasing power of consumers globally. Key features of this growth model are asset-inflation and enormous amounts of debt, linked to an exploitation in terms of 'unusual deals with political authority', predatory capitalism, and reckless speculation, favoured by institutional fixes emerging from neoliberal quests for deregulation. This regime of accumulation is a major cause of global warming by linking production, often on sweat-shop conditions, in the Global South to consumption in the Global North. It is secured by spatio-temporal fixes that keep the Global South separated from the Global North, but also the losers from the winners in segregated cities (see below).

The finance-dominated growth model is also secured by institutional fixes, as states across the western world have been instrumental in this transformation. Concomitantly, they have been increasingly imprinted by the developmental logic of capitalism. Changing relations of force have been institutionalized in the three formal dimensions of the state, defined by Jessop in his theory of the state as basically a social relation (Jessop 2016, 58). All the three of them – modes of representation, institutional architecture of the state and modes of intervention – have been endowed with strategic selectivities which support, supplements and guides a finance-dominated regime. This means that the state as well as other systems and actors have become more dependent on the development of capitalism in an increasingly extended capitalist societalization, corresponding to what Gramsci called a 'historic bloc'.

To understand how social forces have contributed to this development, Jessop's theory of the state also distinguishes between three substantial dimensions; firstly, the social basis of the state; secondly, state projects which secures an operational unity of the state and its capacity to act; and thirdly, a hegemonic vision. Hegemony is another one of Gramsci's key concepts. It refers to the political, intellectual, and moral leadership established and maintained by the dominant social forces to secure the broad-based consent of allied and subordinate groups. Since the 1980s, a neo-liberal hegemony has prevailed, which left-leaning social forces have failed to challenge. Instead, social democratic parties have gradually adapted to a neoliberal state project, transforming its electorate into a social basis of beneficiaries, mainly through tax deductions.

Such neoliberal state projects have promoted the expansion of capital accumulation on an increasingly global scale. Through this extremely complex and organic web of relations, we have become increasingly dependent on each other as for example producers, investors, recipients of various kinds of income, taxpayers, and consumers in a global capitalist societalization. However, mainly profitability makes it work, and when it works, it causes inequality and global warming. Accordingly, causes of the crises are inherent in capitalism and its societalization. That makes the causes of the crisis systemic.

The major impending crisis, however, concerns capitalism itself. Symptoms include the frail profitability, poor productivity growth, feeble output, and low productive investment at the historic sites of advanced capitalism, particularly after the crisis of 2007-09 (Lapavitsas 2023). As productive capital and the 'real' economy has failed to keep pace with the expansion of fictitious capital (financialization), the mass and share of profits going to interest-bearing capital has instead increased (Jessop 2017), engendering a vicious circle of productive decline. The prospects for capitalism to continue its expansion seem bleak. The world seems to be quite fully exploited. That may unleash the inherent crisis-tendencies of capitalism. Who is prepared for that?

5. European horizons

How, then, can these concepts help us explain the current European development? EM2024 claims that the European development should be seen in the context of polycrisis, but tends to limit its focus to the tangible effects. That makes the European horizon European. Instead, a perspective is needed which makes the European horizon global. This paper suggests such a perspective by shifting the focus to the

systemic causes. This can explain the mentioned crises but also make other crises visible, for example the dumping of waste in Africa which destroys the livelihoods for many millions and becomes one of several causes of migration.

All these crises are symptoms of larger systemic problems that concern capitalism's societalization of the world. As mentioned above, its beating heart consists of the expanding dynamics of capital accumulation. The fact that the economy can nevertheless develop stably, at least periodically, is due to accumulation regimes and forms of regulation. With the help of these concepts, we may understand the economy in its inclusive sense. In contrast, the GDP measure deceives us into seeing developments in a narrow sense, ignoring the importance of abundance and consumption, especially the overconsumption of commodities that have largely been produced in the Global South on conditions similar to those that were common in Europe 100 years ago.

In many respects, we in the Global North have become dependent on the production that occurs on such conditions in the Global South. However, not everyone is equally dependent. Most dependent are those who live at what can be called the other side of segregation. Segregation exists through spatial separations of at least two different social groups and/or categories that live in different parts of a city, for example. It does not have to be a problem, for example when segregation applies to different age groups, but it becomes a problem when segregation coincides with inequality. This means a difference between winners and losers, where the latter are losers in the sense that they cannot assert their human rights. When inequality coincides with segregation, it means that, for example, poor people live in areas of a city that are characterized by societal exclusion, while rich people live in other areas, characterized by societal inclusion.

However, only the losing side used to be highlighted as a problem. The winning side, however, accounts for much of the consumption-based emissions that cause climate change. There, overproduction is matched by overconsumption. However, it requires financial resources and assets that can be mortgaged. Neoliberal policies have made this possible by unleashing market forces and thereby increased inequality in several respects. The losing side has largely been excluded from quality housing and concentrated in slummed residential areas where living conditions have deteriorated as a result of the dismantling of the welfare state and where sweatshop growth has gained a foothold, for example with gig jobs on lousy terms.

It should not be that surprising, therefore, that on the losing side of segregation, social forces have emerged, revolving around crime, which has come to pose an increasing threat to society. That should also be included among the Polycrisis crises. Politicians are reacting by tightening the spatio-temporal forms of regulation and making it even more difficult to get included. For people in conditions of societal exclusion, the material wealth of the societally included becomes something to strive for, but increasingly difficult to achieve in other ways than through crime.

For the societally included, the societally excluded life serves as a clear reminder of how they do not want to live. That makes them inclined to protect their position in the world wide web, which from a regulation theoretical perspective can be understood as a regime of accumulation. Thereby, the winning side extends the bounds for the expansion of capitalism, but at the cost of causing climate change, inequality and other crises. The segregated relation between winners and losers in cities has become a vicious spiral. I can only draw the conclusion that capitalism must be abolished in order for human civilization to survive.

6. Analysing the conjuncture

To summarize the steps taken so far in this paper, a Gramscian conjunctural analysis draws on a definition of capitalism as first of all a mode of production, where surplus-value is produced by workers but appropriated by capitalists. That polarizes society into two contradictory classes, capitalists and workers, which forms the basis for the emergence of social forces. The special character of the contradictions and the crisis-tendencies inherent in the circuit of capital makes capital dependent on mechanisms that extend well beyond the capitalist economy in a narrow sense. That requires forms of regulation, made inherent and organic by antagonistic and class-relevant social forces in institutional,

spatio-temporal, and semantic fixes. That may secure a social order, but always contingently, provisionally, and partially due to the organic movements of capital accumulation.

Due to this expansionary dynamic, social forces always need to be prepared to act. 'These incessant and persistent efforts', to quote Gramsci (Gramsci 1971, 178), 'form the terrain of the "conjunctural", and it is upon this terrain that the forces of opposition organise.' Since the conjunctural emerges with regard to the organic, a conjunctural analysis needs to include both organic and conjunctural aspects; the former constituting the current social order with its interlinked forms of regulation, which causes crises like the ones highlighted by EM2024, while the latter concerns the prevailing relation of social forces seeking to retain, reform, or transform capitalism and its mode of societalization.

Drawing on this perspective, I will make a few remarks on the current conjuncture, focussing on forms of regulations. The first one is the wage relation. During Fordism, it was institutionalised and thus made organic in collective agreements. This is what the workers at Amazon in Coventry aim for and the struggle illuminates the conjunctural aspects of the conjuncture. There is currently a surge in trade union activity and mobilisation in some countries. So far, however, the trade unions have focused on organising members to win isolated battles over pay and conditions, which makes the struggle limited to aspects of the conjuncture which can be called economic-corporate.

Other forms of regulation inhere in the institutional ensembles of the state and are dealt with by political forces. Several issues, like global warming and inequality, have become increasingly manifest and urgent to handle. As I have explained in this paper, these and other topics have a basis in an extended capitalist societalization. An important reason to why it carries on is that social democratic parties, participating in the neoliberal state project, have allowed themselves to be shaped by a logic which makes it almost compulsory to address people as individual consumers. That has weakened their class-relevance for the majority. Such a strategic selectivity is part of how the playing field has been rigged in favour of the elite. This highly asymmetric power relation is a major characteristic of the current conjuncture.

The expanded capitalist societalization makes politicians appear to favour the few at the expense of the many. Social democratic parties in particular, quite organically involved in the neoliberal state project, have become an easy target for such a criticism, raised by both left-wing and right-wing forces. In the current conjuncture, right-wing forces have gained momentum by exploiting that opportunity. That has not prevented capitalist societalization from continuing its expansion and thereby, its inherent structural contradictions and crisis-tendencies to intensify.

Another form of regulation concerns spatio-temporal fixes which exist in the cities, keeping winners and losers separated spatially. On the losing side, that has laid the foundation for growing crime. Such organised interests can perhaps be seen as social forces which represents a form of autocratic societalization. The current nation-society, representing a democratic societalization, respond by policing the crises. A power struggle has emerged between social forces representing different forms of societalization. On the side of the democratic societalization, however, the battle is fought at the expense of an increasing inequality, which feeds the autocratic social forces. A similar division exists globally, also based on spatio-temporal fixes put in place to make the world go around on behalf of capital. The escalating tensions between the US and China should be understood in this context.

Finally, I suggest hegemony to be seen as a form of regulation, although of course not a structural one. Sum and Jessop treats it as a third form of social fix which they call semantic, 'grounded in the sedimentation of particular imaginaries and their role in building and consolidating, at least temporarily, taken-for-granted interpretations of the social world.' (Sum & Jessop 2013, 150) There are many such taken-for-granted interpretations, maintained by the dominant social forces to secure the broad-based consent of allied and subordinate groups ... tbc.

7. Concluding proposals

The 2024 EuroMemo conference invites papers that explicitly address policy implications. This paper aims to do that by proposing policy alternatives which relate to the ones proposed by the EM2024. As

entry-point for the paper, I highlighted the lack of actors in the EM2024. Who might be interested in reading the annual reports and who is supposed to implement their proposals? Equally important, who might oppose them? Answering the last question, a good guess would be those that are the most responsible for causing the crises. However, the EM2024 has refrained from identifying such social forces due to the focus on the effects of the polycrisis in Europe. These effects are also what the 2024 EuroMemo conference invites papers to address.

In my paper, I have responded to this request by reinterpreting the polycrisis. Surely, the crises have devastating effects, but if we want to deal with these effects, we'd better tackle the causes of the crises. That requires another way of seeing the recent developments in Europe; i.e. another perspective. For example, when EM2024 proposes "EU-wide public investment plans ...", it seems very urgent, but I find it quite unrealistic as the report does not say how it might be implemented. My first proposal, thus, is to deploy another perspective, one which can explain the causes of the crises, accounts for the involvement of social forces and also challenges the current hegemony.

Secondly, I propose policy alternatives which recognize the significance of social forces and includes measures of collective empowerment. In my paper, I have mentioned the struggle at Amazon in Coventry as an example. An organisation like EuroMemo Group may contribute to empowering the workers just by recognising them in an annual report, and that might be reciprocally beneficial because a lot of collective empowerment would be needed to implement the proposals of the annual reports.

When EM2024 proposes that "the EU's inflation problem should be dealt with through fiscal policy ...", it is an important proposal, but again unrealistic, unless it is linked to relation of social forces; i.e. power relations. Indeed, the report establishes that "while the ratio of employee compensation (wages & employers' social contributions) to GDP declined by 0.3% over the 20-year period 2002-2022. By contrast, the profit ratio increased by 0.6% over the same period." Thus EU inflation cannot be attributed to 'demand pull' factors, the report claims, but instead 'supply push' factor, I would add, in particular increasing profit ratios. That makes inflation a matter of power relations. The surge in inflation has not only "intensified the distributional conflict between capital and labour", as the report puts it, but inflation itself has to a significant extent been caused by capital. Furthermore, it is not only a "distributional conflict", but a power relation which involves both the production and distribution of wealth, as I have tried to show in this paper.

Collective empowerment and mobilisation can also be achieved by producing conjunctural analyses in transdisciplinary collaborations of researchers and practitioners, beneficial for both. To succeed with the task of making useful conjunctural analyses, practitioners experience-based knowledge has to be recognized and taken advantage of in knowledge alliances (Stigendal & Novy 2018).

Thirdly, EM2024 proposes several policy alternatives which I think should be treated in conjunction under the heading of the wage relation. As explained in this paper, the wage relation is a form of regulation, suggested by RA, which covers both relations of production and of exchange. That includes proposals by the EM2024 on full employment and "fair deal for workers". In the context of the latter proposal, EM2024 suggests: "Strengthening collective bargaining rights is essential ...". That endorses my proposal above on collective empowerment because how could collective bargaining rights be strengthened without the strengthening of the unions?

The same applies to the next policy alternative too, "Employment re-regulation, job quality and better working conditions should be at the top of the policy agenda", and also the next, "Minimum income support should be based on a rights-based approach ...". An important purpose of treating these policy alternatives in conjunction within a coherent perspective would be to make them more collectively empowering.

Fourthly, EM2024 proposes a care economy to be fostered by a public investment programme. Instead, I propose the fostering of a needs-driven economy (see also Bärnthaler & Gough 2024). Of course, that includes care, but much more and a care driven by needs, not by profits. That should enable the combination, asked for by the EM2024, of "a rights-based approach with investments in public services and infrastructure to foster socio-ecological transformation". A needs-driven economy would also be needed to dismantle the spatio-temporal fixes, locally as well as globally. We in the Global North "simply" need to deserve our place in the world on conditions other than profitability.

Fifthly, to implement such a transformation, a new political project is needed, replacing the neo-liberal ones by the advancement of a needs-driven economy, locally as well as in global relations. That has to include a de-commodification in many respects which means a replacement of market demands by needs. Such a political project is not possible without the collective empowerment mentioned above and thus, various forms of collective empowerment should be interlinked to shape a social basis for it. Furthermore, it should exploit the various forms of structural contradictions inherent in capitalism, touched upon briefly in this paper.

As an example, the dynamic of capital accumulation causes an increasing centralisation of control over the relations of production and surplus appropriation, structurally contradicted by a concomitantly growing societalization of productive forces and interdependence among us. That is also how the capitalist system works and part of its dynamic, which on the one side poses an increasing threat to democracy and on the other side may engender hopes to revitalise it. A new political project should use the former as a target for a mobilisation of the latter. The potentials include the 250 million Indian workers that went on a strike the 8 of January 2020, the biggest strike in world history. In many parts of the country, the 24-hour strike shut down banking, transport, retail, public services, construction and industry.

References (tbc)