Postcapitalism?

April 22
Rod and Ron,

The end of capitalism has begun.

https://www.theguardian.com/books/2015/jul/17/postcapitalism-end-of-capitalism-begun?CMP=Share_iOSApp_Other

This article is Paul Mason laying out the basic argument of his book "Postcapitalism". I think that it's a bit schematic and -- well -- utopian, but that it's substantive and worth reading and discussing. Your thoughts?
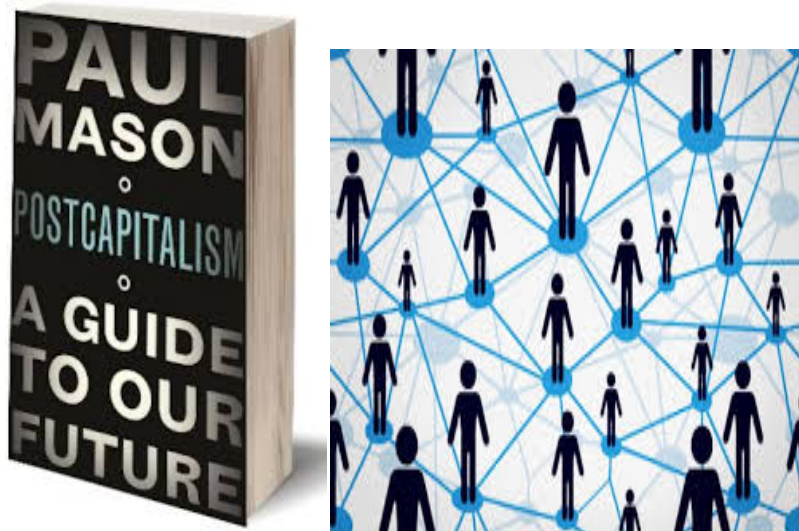
Jack

April 22
Jack and Ron,

I found the article Jack forwarded quite interesting. It is a fresh, out-of-the-box look at the age we are in, and some of the ways in which it transcends past conceptions and opens new doors. I think it is well worth discussing in detail.

1) Mason writes, toward the end of the article/chapter:

The main contradiction today is between the possibility of free, abundant goods and information; and a system of monopolies,

banks and governments trying to keep things private, scarce and commercial. Everything comes down to the struggle between the network and the hierarchy: between old forms of society moulded around capitalism and new forms of society that prefigure what comes next.
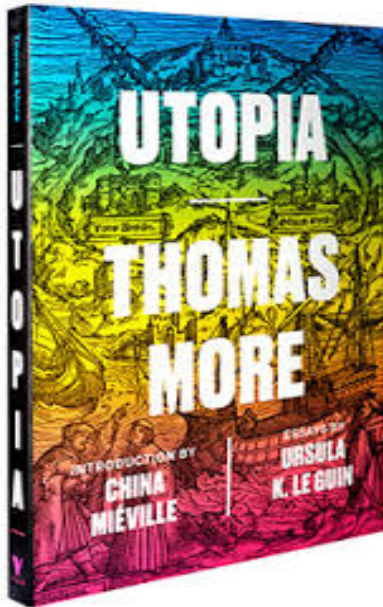

We could have (and did) write this, as did Marx and Engels, minus the word 'information.' So my first question is: Insofar as passing from relative scarcity to conditions of abundance is relevant, does the "information revolution" changes this qualitatively, and if so, how? Mason clearly believes it does.

2) Mason writes,

Postcapitalism is possible because of three major changes information technology has brought about in the past 25 years. First, it has reduced the need for work, blurred the edges between work and free time and loosened the relationship between work and wages...Second, information is corroding the market's ability to form prices correctly. That is because markets are based on scarcity while information is abundant...Third, we're seeing the spontaneous rise of collaborative production: goods, services and organisations are appearing that no longer respond to the dictates of the market and the managerial hierarchy.

I am not sure I grasp his fundamental argument here. The first point seems to relate to a combination of changed working conditions and the steady march of technology, first and foremost

its ability to replace human labor. The second point I do not understand at all. The third point I interpret to mean, loosely speaking, that "cooperatives' or 'communes" or "utopias" in old-speak can slowly emerge as an alternative form of social organization. Perhaps they can; I give more weight to the positive role that 'models' or 'experiments' can play, than I once did, even if I retain some doubt about the degree to which these, in and of themselves, can achieve the 'transition' (revolution).

3) Mason doesn't think these parallel forms ("collaborative production") can achieve a transition to postcapitalism on their own either:

I believe it offers an escape route – but only if these micro-level projects are nurtured, promoted and protected by a fundamental change in what governments do. And this must be driven by a change in our thinking – about technology, ownership and work. So that, when we create the elements of the new system, we can say to ourselves, and to others: "This is no longer simply my survival mechanism, my bolt hole from the neoliberal world; this is a new way of living in the process of formation."

The questions here, it seems to me, are: a) what would lead the government to foster the transition/revolution? We could point to some possibilities, such as a wing of the capitalist class believing in

the importance of alternative energy source, or in the importance of rejecting sexually discriminatory laws/actions, or in the importance of ousting Bill O'Reilly, but still...and, b) would such a governmental role be positive, even if possible.

4) On the whole, I wonder if Mason's ideas are too close to early 20th-century Progressivism, where an elite (intellectuals, scientists, and technocrats) would 'engineer' a new society? I don't think that this captures his essence, but he does write:

By creating millions of networked people, financially exploited but with the whole of human intelligence one thumb-swipe away, info-capitalism has created a new agent of change in history: the educated and connected human being.

These are some initial thoughts and questions on the article. I look forward to discussing it further.

Rod

April 23
Jack and Rod,

My initial reaction to the Mason piece:

A rose is a rose is a rose....

Marxism is Marxism is Marxism....

The logic of technology is freedom the logic of technology is freedom the logic of technology is freedom

Ron

Go Local?

April 10
Ron and Jack,

There seems to be growing economic power of cities and other non-Federal government entities, along with a developing political shift on the liberal/left to seeing the positive power of local rather than national (sanctuary cities, climate change issues, etc.) While all this is within a capitalist framework, it perhaps suggests that there may be a longer-term trend underway which at least moves in the direction of our notions of bottom-up, and breaks with the 20th-century 'progressive' framework, which saw the national government as the 'champion.' What do you think?

Rod

April 10
Rod,

There has already been some commentary about liberals in cities and states using concepts of local rights to continue to fight for "progressive" causes; the commentators have also noted the irony of liberals using "states rights" as an ideological justification. I think this is all to the good, for a variety of reasons. However, if/when the liberals win more power on the national level, I expect they will continue to promote federal mandates on a bunch of issues. (By the way, did you get a chance to look at the Bloomberg piece I posted?)

In addition, there is quite an extensive literature from people who might be called "eco-anarchists" about the viability of locally-based technological solutions to a variety of problems/issues. Wayne has

read a fair amount of this stuff and may well have written some pieces about it for the Utopian. In fact, this line of thinking goes all the way back to Peter Kropotkin's "Fields, Factories, and Workshops."

On your earlier emails: I don't think Trump is stupid; I do think he is arrogant and limited in the ways I've described. In particulary, the (blunt) skills that have served him reasonably well in business don't translate easily into politics, and it's taken him a long time to figure that out, if he is even capable of doing so. He obviously can't manage a team in any kind of coherent, morale-building manner.

As far as foreign policy is concerned, I think the logic of the global situation, from the point of view of trying to preserve the slowly eroding power of the US, pushes him toward the mainstream foreign policy conceptions, which are (and basically have been since World War II) shared by both Democrats and Republicans. Did you see Hillary Clinton's comments on Trump's missile strikes? She would have done the same thing, she says. Of course.

Ron

April 10
Ron,

On the 'go local' issue, I agree with you that for the liberals, it is a matter of short-term convenience, not any principle, and they can

easily revert back to national government/big state. I think we agree, though, that wind blowing in the direction it is blowing (drifting?) is a good thing, particularly if proves to be at least somewhat sustained. I might have missed the Bloomberg piece (though I generally read all the articles; I will look for it.)

I agree that foreign policy in particular pushes him Trump away from the extreme right, though he rhetorically (but not always consistently) occupied that space during the campaign and even after. It will be interesting to see how Bannon/Kushner shakes out, and where domestic policy goes. And, yes, I saw Hillary giving her 'right ons,' confirming our view that she was not even remotely a less aggressive militarist/imperialist.

Rod

More on Ethics

April 17

here's my basic thinking about ethics: ethics should be the foundation of law. going back to Cardozo's statement that in law, form and substance are one

so yes, there is a lot to be drawn from in faith-based ethics. my interest in the discussion is not whether this or that faith adheres to this or that value, but what those values need to be to act as a

foundation for laws.

. . .

for example, my favorite faith-based ethical rule is the "golden rule"

. . .

I also have an interest in finding out whether or not there is any push in primary schools to teach ethics, if such is even possible. how can compassion and empathy be woven into early education? let alone ethics.

. . .

and...my particular interest is in ethical economics, because economic theory is used to justify and guide government policies that are clearly unethical or at best a-ethical. sustainability requires ethics, at least as far as I am concerned, because sustainability is in essence ethically based. the way i see it, at least.

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Robin