



# Associated Labor and Production in the Age of Barbarism

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Education Beyond Capital

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Henrique Tahan Novaes

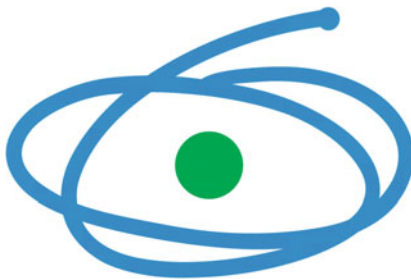
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**CAPES**

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## FOREWORD

Among the many challenges present in the fight to supersede capitalism, there is a huge imperative for the *class-that-lives-off-of-labour*: the need to reinvent a *new way of living*.

This is because, since the Paris Commune's original, embryonic and exceptional experiment, the subsequent experiences that developed after the Russian Revolution couldn't bring forth effective implementation of *autonomous, self-determined and associated work*.

On the contrary, what we saw, throughout the twentieth century (especially with the tragedies of the system known as "real socialism"), was the maintenance of *hierarchical structures of command and control on labour* that, little by little, was suppressing all attempts that sought to move forward in the direction of a structured social formation, based on the *free association of male and female workers*, to reiterate Marx.

And this is exactly the central point of reflection present in Henrique Tahan Novaes's book. Just as much a result of personal investigation, as it is a collective study, the book's concerns are varied and relevant and can be summarised accordingly:

How to conceive of labour in its pendular dialectic that oscillates between *vital activity and alienated work*?

What were the contributions of the labour councils, the factory committees and the cooperatives in the history of the worker's struggle since the beginning of the Industrial Revolution?

What were the main advances and limitations present in the practices that prioritised self-governance?

Coming from the study of diverse experiences carried out by *occupied or recuperated factories* (a term used by the labour movement in Brazil and Argentina), what was able to progress in regard to *self-governance*?

What made them flourish, advance and also regress?

Was it possible to practice effective forms of *associated work*?

Based on some of their experiences, what contributions could the social movements of the Global South offer, with an emphasis on the actions taken throughout four decades by the Landless Workers' Movement (MST) in Brazil?

Given all of these experiences, what seeds of (self)education could effectively flourish? Which ones have shown vitality and force?

Moreover, during the Workers' Party's first terms in government in Brazil (2003–2016) were there gains that remained? And, conversely, what were some of the main causes of their collapse?

In a reality in which *capitalism's system of social metabolism* (Mészáros, I., *Oltre Il Capital*, Edizioni Punto Rosso, 2016) has been accentuating its destructive tripod in relation to *nature*, *work* and to *humanity*, how will it be possible to advance *self-organisation* of labour and the construction of a *new way of life*?

Regarding *nature*, it's about immediately stopping the destruction and thus, seeking instant recovery, since global warming, fossil fuels, pesticides, GMOs, mining, forest fires, agribusiness, etc., have been directly responsible for the environmental destruction and, for this very reason, should definitely be eliminated.

In regard to *work*, the precarisation, *exploitation*, *despoilment* and *expropriation*, as well as the destruction of labour rights that were won in many labour struggles have been the rule and not the exception, especially since the growth of uberised and platformised digital work, occurring during one of capitalism's periods of structural crisis. This obliges us to restore it to its *vital, self-determined* essence, and one that is based on *available time*.

Just as capitalism's system of antisocial consumption destroys nature and work, the construction of a new system of truly humane and social metabolism will only be able to come about by fighting against the destruction of humanity that depends on labour to survive—against all of the forms of class, gender, race and ethnic oppression.

This book by Henrique Tahan Novaes has been a gift in its contribution to this crucial topic of our time. With a perspective from the Global South, it reflects on the lived experiences through the perspective of the world of associated work in its clashing which aims to overcome the system of capitalism.

Ricardo Antunes  
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## PREFACE FOR THE ENGLISH AND ITALIAN EDITIONS

We have entered into the Era of Barbarism. Around the world, there are land grabs on a devastating scale, privatisations, globalisation of hunger and of unemployment, with capitalism trampling down on workers. In Brazil, after the meagre social-liberalism of the Workers' Party that generated more work and resulted in a few rights to those "at the bottom", the already fragile and restrictive democracy was suspended by Michel Temer, and won an even larger momentum with Jair Bolsonaro's counter-reforms.

The "waves" of the dictator, removal of rights, closing of factories, commodification of life, outsourcing and sub-contracting of labour, progression of agribusiness and de-industrialisation in the last 40 years have devastated Latin-American indigenous peoples. In contrast, as a product of the resistance of a portion of workers, associated work experiences where male and female workers encounter new forms of decision-making, producing, using the surplus and means of production that emerged and have been arising within the core mode of capitalist production, regardless if it is still very little and still rather small in terms of quantity.

The World of Associated Work, with its wealth and misery as well as its contradictions, progress and limits, is portrayed in this book through the vantage point of recovered factories in Brazil and Argentina—from the experiences of cooperations and the cooperativism of the Landless Movement, from the experiences of the "murtirão" (mobilization of a



group of people, paid or otherwise, that executes a service that benefits the larger community) and the homeless work cooperatives.

We believe that, at least to some degree, they demonstrated the possible and urgent need to change the nature of work. They are forms of working that, on their onset, alter labour and possess an emancipatory potential, but also reproduce a sort of deterioration of labour and indirect subordination to capitalism.

In the same context of the advancement of the World of Associated Work, experiences in Education have emerged in Latin America beyond the realm of capitalism. In the very recovered factories, besides self-learning on the job, schools were created that altered both the content and educational framework. With regard to the fight for self-determination and food security, and against destructive production, we observed the creation of agroecology schools from the Landless Movement. They made a critique of the use and possession of land of the so-called “green revolution” while at the same time theorising and practising agroecology. The agroecology schools also give the students new ways of organising life in the schools and within the settlements, through centres, committees and general assemblies that question government-taught technocracy and practice self-governance within the schools.

The fruit of my research with friends who are devoted to the movement or study these themes, this book addresses the new world that insists on coming forth, staring down the old world of capitalism that insists on crushing workers, commercialising life, destroying the conditions of existence on the land, unemploying, underemploying and hijacking everything that is still public.

\* \* \*

This book was published in March of 2018 in Brazil by the Publishing company Lutas Anticapital (Anticapitalism Fights). In 2022, it was published in Spanish by the publishing company Callao (Argentina); and will it be published by Editora Ediciones desde abajo (Publishing from below Publisher—Colombia), Quimantú (Chile) in 2024.

It is highly likely that the World of Associated Work and its alternative forms of education—which in this book I call education beyond capitalism (Mészáros, 2002)—found more “fertile” land in Latin America than in that of Europe and the United States.

Latin America hasn't been able to free itself of neoliberalism, let alone capitalism. At the exact moment in which I write these words—a far-right president has been elected in Argentina (Javier Milei). While the political scene in Argentina is heated, Brazil is even more ablaze, with record temperatures close to 44.8° Celsius.

The lack of a radical and far-reaching alternative on the part of the political left (Mészáros, 2002) has brought about a sort of peculiar election “pendulum” in the Southern Cone: neoliberal parties won the elections and implemented their neoliberal dos and don'ts in the 90s. The political left in power (Lula, Kirchner, etc.) was elected and made small positive reforms but it was recently superseded by the right or the far-right (Macri, Temer, Bolsonaro, La Calle Pou). Fernandez's election in Argentina and Lula's return to Brazil generated and will generate very meagre reforms that didn't create and won't create an electorate “identity” for these presidents. The response to Argentinian constituency was very clear. Don't vote for candidates on the political left in Argentina, but rather for those right-wing extremists—those who are truly “revolutionaries” and “anti-system”. Evidently, we have to reference the new types of coups and the immense media machine that concocts far-right politicians who are supposedly against the “political class” and who will supposedly resolve social issues.

In this political scenario where there is a lack of anti-capitalist theory and praxis on a large scale that radically changes capitalism's order, the world of associated work acquires an “exotic” character, even though we can't write off its role in teaching, as a tool of the working class to change the “here and now” reality of a part of the working class, in a context where capitalism is in the offence.

Marx once said that workers' cooperatives are the first rupture in the old structure, even if they reproduce all of the flaws of the old structure. The World of Associated Work isn't insignificant, but in the absence of more substantive shifts in society, it tends to make up a marginal role in financialised capitalism.

While observing these limits, we intend to analyse both the positive and negative aspects (Mészáros, 2002) of the experiences of associated production and alternative education of the Latin-American social movements.

We believe that the deepening of barbarism has only allowed capitalists to create superficial solutions to severe problems created by the mode of capitalist production. Severe socio-environmental issues are being

“solved” interestingly enough with an expansion of neoliberal policies and with environmental “solutions”—on the part of the transnational corporations—which don’t even scratch the surface of capitalism’s destructive progression.

In turn, the expansion of neoliberal educational policies has produced illiteracy and precarity “within” public services, by providing services for private companies that commercialise education and devour public funds.

This book, modestly, intends to contribute to the debate for a radical and far-reaching alternative to the theory of democracy of the councils and of education beyond capitalism. Concurrently, it intends to help elucidate the contradiction regarding the world of associated work and of the educational experiences of the social movements: their achievements, contradictions and limits.

In one way or the other, it also contributes to the socialisation of the theory of transition by István Mészáros, one of the main Marxists at the end of the twentieth century.

\* \* \*

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São Paulo, Brazil  
November 2023

Henrique Tahan Novaes  
On the hottest recorded day  
in the history of Brazil

# INTRODUCTION

The Wealth and Misery of the World of Associated  
Labour and An Education Beyond Capital in the  
Age of Barbarism

This book is a collection of articles written by myself and by researchers Douglas Silva, Erika Alaniz, Fabiana Rodrigues, João Henrique Pires, Lais Santos and Maurício Sardá de Faria. Some of this research has already been presented at conferences, as is normal in our field, or in book chapters. For this book, the texts have been revised and expanded, eliminating repetitions where possible and necessary, and merging parts in order to provide the reader with a more organic book.

This book presents articles or chapters written over the last 7 years, as a development of the research I carried out with the support of FAPESP during my master's and Doctoral studies (UNICAMP), as well as the first results of the research funded by FAPESP for the 2015-16 biennium (process 2014/19013-8), as Professor at Unesp-Marília.

\* \* \*

Everything indicates that we have entered the age of barbarism. Capitalism has absolutely nothing left to offer humanity. Proof of this is the increase in illiteracy and functional illiteracy, the destruction of the

environment, the increase in unemployment and underemployment on a global scale and the destruction of workers' rights.

There are processes of “slummification” and “condoisation”. Land theft and the murder of landless squatters, indigenous peoples and quilombolas are also prominent phenomena in the Age of Barbarism.

The commodification of education, health and the few public projects that existed in the state also symbolises the end of the “civilising” phase of capitalism. Finally, we have the complete commodification of life. Capitalism, or rather the socio-metabolism of capital, may take 500–600 years to “fall”, and this will depend on a sociopolitical revolution permeated by the constant and coordinated struggle of the most diverse anti-capitalist social movements. Overcoming a society that produces commodities and alienated labour is the prize at stake.

The age of barbarism has opened a new cycle of struggles for workers around the world. The capital-controlled media do not show us, but from China to Uruguay, from California to Russia, numerous anti-capital struggles are emerging.

The chapters presented here are the direct and indirect result of the research that I and my friends have carried out on the world of associated labour, on the alienation and embryos of alienation from work of Latin American social movements. They are also the fruit of my research on destructive production, agroecology and the embryos of an education beyond capital, which I began in my doctoral thesis.

If associated labour is an educational principle, it means that workers, by organising themselves to produce, are experiencing—in *statu nascendi*—new social relations that to some extent anticipate how anti-capital labour can organise itself, while reproducing the “defects” of the capitalist mode of production and indirectly subordinating themselves to capital.

We believe that associated labour has enormous potential to educate workers in a new form of social control. It also entails the need to create systematic spaces for education and/or training that will help us to educate the future.

Capitalist production in the age of barbarism, essentially destructive of human beings and nature, has proved ineffective and inefficient in solving the problem of world hunger. On the contrary, the “green revolution” has stimulated a growing concentration of land ownership and increased unemployment in the countryside, and has also led to the expulsion

and displacement of peasants, increased allergies and cancer and generated a new phase of “primitive” accumulation that has not yet been fully described by academics.

Social movements, intellectuals, political parties and NGOs have spoken out about the harmful relationship between agribusiness, synthetic fertiliser, pesticides, transgenic seed and tractor industries and the capitalist state. The resistance of social movements to the advance of the “green revolution” has led to the creation of numerous landless settlements with agroecological principles, fairs, “public policies” and, above all, the creation of agroecological centres and schools. These educational experiences, still little known in Latin America, have led us to study and now socialise what we have found, especially in the state of Paraná.

\* \* \*

To present this debate, we have divided the book into 10 chapters.

Chapter 1 introduces the discussion of work as a vital need and an analysis of alienated work. This is followed by a brief analysis of the ontology of social being, that is, the difference between humans and other animals. In the second section, we describe alienated labour within the framework of capitalist society, where workers are alienated from themselves, the products of their labour, their relationship with other human beings and with nature. In the third section, we briefly outline ways of overcoming the alienation of labour, based at least in part on our research into anti-capitalist social movements. They led us to believe in the need to foster associated labour and school spaces beyond capital.

“Workers’ Councils and The Limits of Cooperativism: The Contribution of István Mészáros” is the title of Chapter 2. We note that Mészáros argues that workers’ councils must fulfil the role of effective material mediators between the old order and the desired socialist order. He warns that as long as the vital control functions of socio-metabolism are not effectively occupied and exercised autonomously by associated producers, as opposed to being left to the authority of a separate control group, that is, a new type of personification of capital, labour itself will continue to reproduce the power of capital against itself, maintaining it materially and thereby extending the domination of alienated wealth over society. Similarly, Mészáros shows us the limits of cooperativism in a society where the strategic centres of control are fully in the hands of capital.

Chapter 3—Factory committees: an attempt at self-management in the midst of a dictatorship? It was written by myself and Prof. Maurício Sardá de Faria. We look at the formation of factory committees in Brazil in the context of growing workers' struggles from the 1950s to 1968. Our hypothesis is that the Factory Committees were formed as embryos of workers' self-management struggles in Brazil, which were quickly stifled by the intensification of the military dictatorship in 1968 and then by the restructuring of the productive sector.

The exhaustion of the “civilising” phase of capital and the historical need for educational projects beyond capital are discussed in Chapter 4. In the first part of the chapter, we characterise the world counterrevolution and the exhaustion of the “civilising” phase of capital. We briefly discuss the growth of child labour, the violence of structural unemployment, the return of slave labour and, last but not least, the violence of underemployment and alienated labour.

The second part of the chapter begins with a brief look at the manifestations of barbarism in Brazilian schools and the misery of São Paulo's education policy. It then defends the historical need for an education beyond the capital.

Chapter 5 provides an overview of urban-associated labour in Brazil, showing the positive and negative sides of self-management in the productive microcosm. We try to explore the positive and negative sides of associated labour based on the experiences of worker-owned enterprises, collective efforts and associations in civil construction, as well as in garbage collection associations and urban popular cooperatives.

Chapter 6 is called “Cooperation and cooperativism of the MST in São Paulo: an analysis of the actions of the capitalist state that block the educational potential of associated labour”. I wrote it together with João Henrique Pires and Douglas Silva. We note that the State of São Paulo offers a privileged vantage point from which to observe the restructuring of the countryside and the (im)possibility of an agrarian reform aimed at creating the conditions for the development of cooperative, cooperativist and agroecological agrarian reform settlements. The first half of the chapter provides a brief historical overview of the political economy of the countryside in the state of São Paulo, with special emphasis on São Paulo's autocratic traits. The second part shows the limits and contradictions of cooperation and cooperativism in MST settlements in the face of the new agribusiness offensive in the state. The chapter concludes with some final considerations.

Chapter 7 discusses associated labour as an educational principle and schooling. To do this, we have rescued our research on Brazilian and Argentinean Recovered Factories and how these experiences raise the debate on education, schools and training in social movements.

In Chapter 8, Erika Alaniz and I look at the experience of the National Centre for Training in the Solidarity Economy to show the contradictions of the self-managed education of the solidarity economy movement.

Chapter 9, entitled ““Green Revolution”, Agroecology and the MST Agroecology Schools”, was written by myself, João Henrique Pires and Lais Santos. In it, we criticise the so-called “Green Revolution”, and show attempts to build an alternative production proposal, the so-called agroecology, as well as the bountifulness and contradictions of the agroecological schools.

“Notes on social movements and education: challenges of the struggle between capital and labour in the Brazilian reality” is the title of Chapter 10. It was written by Fabiana Rodrigues and myself. In it, we make some observations on the relationship between social movements and education in light of the particularities of Brazilian capitalism. It is based on the understanding that social movements are an expression of class struggle. However, there are different theoretical explanations for the existence of these movements and the way they develop. Therefore, a summary of the different theories of social movements is presented first. Then we work on a specific understanding of social movements as an expression of the contradictions between capital and labour in the capitalist mode of production. Based on this understanding, the third part of the text discusses the relations between social movements and their educational potential in the specificity of Brazilian capitalism.

Through the socialisation of our production, we believe that the reader will have access to the results of collective research on the world of associated labour and the embryos of education beyond capital. I sincerely hope you enjoy reading this book!

2017

Henrique Tahan Novaes



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## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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His doctoral thesis became the book *Reconnecting an interrupted wire: The relationship between University and social movements in Latin America* (Expressão Popular-Fapesp, 2012, 2nd edition by the Lutas Anticapital Press, also published in 2016, in Argentina). He has also written the book "The world of associated labour and embryos of education beyond capital" (The world of associated labour and embryos of education beyond capital) (Lutas Anticapital Press, 2018).

He has also been a professor at the School of Philosophy and Science at UNESP, in the city of Marília, since 2011, and a professor at the Graduate Studies Program in Education since 2013. He is the coordinator of the Itinerant Enhancement Course "Social Movements and Contemporary Crises, seen in the light of the classics of Critical Materialism" (9 editions). Coordinated the Post-Middle Courses in Agroecology (2014-2016) and the Technical Course in Agriculture and Livestock Raising, integrated into

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## ABBREVIATIONS

ABC Paulista	The ABC Paulista is a group of municipalities on the outskirts of São Paulo: Santo André (A), São Bernardo (B) and São Caetano (C)-ABC
ANTEAG	National Association of Workers in Self-Management Companies
CEBs	Ecclesial Base Communities
CFES	Centre for Training in Solidarity Economy
CFES	Nacional—National Centre for Training in Solidarity Economy
CIPA	Committee to Prevent Accidents
CNBB	National Brazilian Bishops' Council
CUT	Single workers center (syndicate)
EBEM	Brazilian Meeting on Education and Marxism
ERTs	Worker-recovered Companies
FAPESP	Public foundation in the State of São Paulosupport research projects in higher education and research institutions
GMOs	Genetically modified organisms
MST	Landless Rural Workers Movement
NGOs	Non-governmental organizations
OTAs	Associated Labor Organisations
PACs	Alternative Community Projects
PLANFOR	National training plan
PNQ/Proesq	National Qualification Plan - Special Qualification Projects
POS	Political opportunity structure
RFs	Recovered Factories (RFs)
RMT	Resource Mobilization Theory
SEBRAE	Brazilian Support Service for Micro and Small Businesses

Sedex	The Brazilian Mail Service's express service
Sudene	Superintendency for the Development of the Northeast
TPM	Theory of Political Mobilization
UEL	State University of Londrina
UNISOL	Center for Cooperatives and Solidarity Enterprises
UNISINOS	University of Vale dos Sinos