Crisis States: Governance, Resistance &amp; Precarious Capitalism

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Despite mainstream discourses that attempt to pose a dichotomy or opposition between the state and capital or the so-called free market (free with regard to state interference if nothing else), the capitalist market has never developed, indeed could not develop, without the active support and reinforcement of the state. On the one hand, the market has depended fundamentally on state force to dispossess, i.e. steal, lands and resources from local populations, to displace local populations who want their lands and resources back, and to impose a desperation and dependency on people such that they are coerced into selling their labor to capital, on the infamous labor market, in order to survive. Such is the history of capitalist development since, at least, the enclosures. On the other hand, capital has required the state to impose its ownership rights, through legislation and force, its conditions of exploitation of labor, its private control over the products of collective labor, and so forth. At the same time the state has been required to establish moral rules by which the exploited and disposed accept, if grudgingly, the rules of the game, conditions of work, the “naturalness” of inequality, etc. This includes prohibitions on theft and self-redistribution of resources as well as moral invocations to accept one’s lot in life and not rebel (beyond limited legalistic forms of protest). Simply put, without the state the exploited and oppressed would
neither accept their exploitation and oppression, nor would they limit their opposition to means and ends dictated by economic and political powerholders.

All of this and more are essential to maintaining conditions of resource distribution, exploitation, and accumulation under capitalist social relations. And these tasks have been delegated largely to states rather than taken on as the private (and costly) endeavors of capital and the market. As Alisa Del Re notes:

The State is the institution that historically has regulated the adjustment between the process of accumulation and the process of social reproduction of the population. Modern States control the conflicts inherent to the distribution of waged labor, the specific distribution of labor, and the resources that it entails. (Del Re 1996, 102)

An associated concern is also the reproduction of the working class itself. Typically the care and reproduction of the working class has been privatized (within the nuclear family form itself) and the costs of restoring the current generation of workers and producing the next generations borne by the working class itself. This has been accompanied by various rebellions and resistance as this cost has been negotiated or refused or repayment (from capital) has been sought. Social movements of the mid-twentieth century were often oriented around these issues of reproduction (education, health care, housing, environment, etc.).

A workable balance between these processes, managed by the state, “represents the condition for the continuity of the process of capitalist accumulation” (Del Re 1996, 102). As autonomist Marxist theorist Nick Dyer-Witheford (1999) notes, capital has increasingly been unwilling and unable to take the reproductive activity of the proletariat for granted. In his view, “To ensure the proper supply and disciplining of the minds and bodies required for work, it has been compelled to extend systematically its control over society as a whole a control mediated through the Leviathan-like structures of the state” (Dyer-Witheford 1999, 100–101). And this occurs through, and in the
context of, social struggles over the distribution and control of collective resources.

And the mask of democracy should not obscure these social relationships. Democracy is really, as Badiou suggests, merely the name given to a state system particularly suited to the peaceful coexistence of the factions that make up the ruling oligarchy on general terms of agreement (market economy, parliamentarism, anti-communism/hatred of alternatives) (2012, 28). Current struggles open up alternative, horizontal, participatory notions of democracy and impel rethinking of democratic practice. At the same time there are strong forces, including from within the Left itself, within the opposition, that strive to restrain opposition within parliamentary “democratic” forms (the worn-out forms of social democracy persist in forms like the New Democratic Party in Canada or Syriza in Greece).

On the Planner State

In the first half of the twentieth century, the threat of militant working-class movements pushed advanced capitalist societies to shift from a Rights State, in which government activity was limited largely to securing the conditions for the free market, to a Planner State, or the social citizenship state (Dyer-Witheford 1999). The Planner State arrangements include the various welfare state provisions often designated as Keynesianism or social democracy.

The Planner State emerges in response to, and always as part of, the question of administration of labor and the need of capital, as much as possible, to manage accumulation. Particularly, it addresses a period of unrest and instability (depression, war, reconstruction) and the presence of an alternative, or perceived alternative (however imperfect). The social management of accumulation and reproduction, and of production relations within processes of value extraction or exploitation, has also been encapsulated within the notion of Fordism (mass produc-
tion and labor peace and mass provisions of social services). The conditions of the Planner State tie labor “peace” and productive stability, in growth, to a redeployment of surplus value into social mechanisms of reproduction (of the working class, for sure, but of class relations more broadly). Fordist arrangements.

Under the Planner State the reproduction of labor power was managed by the state through the institutional networks of schools, hospitals, welfare programs and unemployment provisions (Dyer-Witheford 1999). This is generally referred to as the welfare state. Movements in response to the “insecurity of access to the means of survival for citizens” pushed the state to assume expanded responsibilities for the population (Del Re 1996, 102). These structures of welfare under Fordist relations were based on the logic of “the reproduction of the norm of the wage relationship” (Vercellone 1996, 84). All of this occurred within mass productivist frameworks. As Dyer-Witheford notes, “For the schools, health care systems, and various forms of social payments of the Planner State cultivated the increasingly healthy, educated, and peaceful forms of ‘human capital’ necessary for intensive technoscientific development of the Fordist era” (Dyer-Witheford 1999, 101). Entry into the realm of the secured was predicated on participation in processes of growth.

Welfare state provisions, such as social assistance, social security, and public health, “represent a form of income and social services distribution” (Del Re 1996, 101). Part of this is a crucial shift from the sphere of production to the sphere of reproduction “where what is guaranteed and controlled (without direct links to production but nonetheless aimed at it) is the reproduction of individuals” (Del Re 1996, 101). And reproduced in specific ways.

But what emerges is, as many anarchists have pointed out, the expansion of the state into ever-growing realms of social life. From consumption practices, to leisure activities, to school attendance, to personal hygiene, or public nudity, that state asserts routines and regimes of normalization (and deviance).

The social citizenship, or Planner State, “administratively distributes legality so as to reintegrate the underprivileged classes
within the fiction of a guaranteed community in exchange for renouncing the virtual subversiveness of difference” (Illuminati 1996, 176). That deal also imposed specific rules of action and regulated oppositional activity within specific legal and moral frameworks. Thus the Planner State was accompanied by various moral panics and the policing of deviance among the working class and poor.

The Planner State crystallized the biopolitical character of state capitalist development. The health and wealth of the state depended clearly and increasingly on the health of the population (Lorey 2015, 25). The strength of the bourgeois state depends on the “happiness” of the population (which emerges as a population for its own sake) (Lorey 2015, 24). As Del Re puts it, “The Welfare State is established once the secular principle of solidarity is substituted for the religious principle of solidarity. The idea is that all citizens have the right to live decently, even when the events of their lives, starting from unfavorable initial chances, would not allow it” (1996, 101). But this was never equally or evenly distributed and was founded on the precarity of specific sections of the population against whom protection was sought.

The Planner State never overcame or ended precarity, nor was it ever designed to do so. It was, rather, geared toward management of precarity (largely in a way that would fend off insurrection). The threat of precarity served to gain the obedience of the industrial working classes throughout the period of the Planner State arrangements.

Growing the State, Growing Crisis:
On the Crisis State

The vast social struggles of the 1960s and 1970s, including the struggles of the new social movements, began to corrode the basis of the Planner State. As autonomist Marxist theorist Dyer-Witheford suggests, “Movements of workers, the unemployed,
welfare recipients, students and minority groups began to make demands on the vast system of social administration that transgressed the limits set by capitalist logic” (1999, 101). In a very real sense the concerns with life and welfare, which had formed the working class side of the historic post-war compromise, came up against the demands of capital for intensified accumulation and exploitation (which outstripped the gains afforded by the promise of labor peace which rank-and-file movements increasingly refused by the mid-1970s).

The growing demands of communities and movements posed costs too great for capital from the perspective of profitability. Even more troubling for capital were the demands crystallizing within certain sectors of the working classes for control of the economy and social production itself. These were expressed in dramatic forms in the general strikes in France in 1968 and Quebec in 1972, but also in more quotidian terms in growing strike waves throughout the decade from 1965 to 1975. Within formal channels the assertions of the working classes were expressed in demands for increases in welfare state provisions, and areas of coverage as well. As Dyer-Witheford puts it:

These encroachments were intolerable for North American and European capital, whose rate of profit was already being squeezed by shop-floor militancy and international competition. Its response part of the larger neoliberal restructuring offensive was to repudiate the postwar social contract and dismantle the Planner State, destroying what it could no longer control. (1999, 101)

The move to dismantle the Planner State arrangements and break up the welfare state provisions is carried out within the framework given the now infamous name of neoliberalism. Its modus operandi is austerity, and its impacts are the growth of poverty and spread of homelessness as national crises along with the growing wealth gap and the disparity between rich and poor. More recently some have worried over the decline of the
middle class, which is really a misnaming of the growing precarity and insecurity of the working class.

The state form advancing through the neoliberal policies effects a social organization of crisis. As Dyer-Witheford states it, “In the realm of government, the Planner State is replaced by the ‘Crisis State’ — a regime of control by trauma” (1999, 76). This trauma is expressed in the now-familiar forms of austerity, precarity, social service cuts, growing economic inequality, poverty, homelessness, militarized policing, criminalization of dissent, etc. Under the Crisis State, the state governs fundamentally by planning or, more commonly, simply allowing crises within the subordinate classes.

This reflects, significantly, evolving efforts by capital to rearrange relations of production and re-engineer the organization of labor towards increased profitability (and restored control over the labor process). The Crisis State emerges as part of shifting forms of accumulation, notably the projects of capitalist globalization,

in which certain sectors throughout the world, capital is moving away from dependence on large-scale industries toward new forms of production that involve more immaterial and cybernetic forms of labor, flexible and precarious networks of employment, and commodities increasingly defined in terms of culture and media. (Hardt 1996, 4)

This is what is perhaps too often called “the postmodernization of production.” These new forms of production (flexibilization, precarious work, just-in-time production, computerization, boutique economies, networked production) marked a radical break from the Fordist arrangement of mass concentrations of labor power (of secure work in large-scale workplaces and centralized production forms).

Dyer-Witheford suggests that the post Fordist phase, in which the Fordist organization of the social factory is dismantled, “must be understood as a technological and political offensive aimed at decomposing social insubordination” (1999, 76).
The technological has been effected through work restructuring (flexibilization, just-in-time production, globalization and capital strike, precarization of work) in pursuit of new forms of accumulation. These are the shifts represented in deindustrialization and high-tech new economies, for example (the computerization of workplaces allowed for increased profitability and exploitation but also ensured so-called downsizing, temporary employment, union busting, etc.). The political represents the most dramatic and disturbing forms of the Crisis States, from law and order policing and the “war on drugs” to mass incarceration (all directed overwhelmingly against dissident racialized communities) to the violence of homelessness and the attacks on the poor and homeless pursued under the rubric of “broken windows” crime policies. We might include here too the criminalization of dissent and punishment of oppositional political movements.

The social impacts are dire. And they are intended to be. The reactionary articulation posed by Thatcher in England, Reagan in the US and Mulroney in Canada asserted a repudiation of the social itself. Thatcher openly proclaimed, “There is no society.” And Crisis State actions have been in large part directed toward the dismantling of social resources of value to the majority of society’s members (but which are viewed as costly burdens by capital and by state actors alike). As Dyer-Witheford notes:

On the one hand, privatization, deregulation, and cutbacks systematically subvert the welfare state, slashing the social wage, weeding out enclaves of popular control, and attacking any of labour’s protections from the disciplinary force of the market. The costs of reproducing labour power increasingly devolve back onto individuals and households. This shift becomes ever more important to capital as corporate downsizing and automation ejects more and more workers from production, thereby swelling the ranks of the unemployed and impoverished, increasing welfare roles and diminishing tax revenues. (1999, 101)
These create conditions for intensified accumulation of capital, through reorganization of work, re-assertion of ownership and management claims of capital, and the dependency of people on the labor market, without social alternatives in welfare state provisions. At the same time social resources themselves become privatized, turned into mechanisms of value extraction and profitability. And in Thatcherite fashion, society is rendered obsolete and all that remains is the individual and the family. As a rather painful expression of this we might also recall the numerous neoliberal ideologues who blame poverty, criminalization, mass incarceration, addiction, and violence in poor neighborhoods on a “breakdown of the family” (see Elder 2001; 2012; Moynihan 1986; Wilson 1993; 1997; 2010).

The agenda of cuts under neoliberal regimes of austerity have given rise to a line of theorizing which proposes a lean state reduced in size, function, and funding. Rather than the “lean state” we are better served by the autonomist Marxists’ discussions of the crisis state. The lean state designation suggests that the state has shrunk or is somehow more passive than in the past. Lean state also implies that the state would be used for purposes of social and personal support if only it had the resources, if only it were robust rather than lean. All of these depictions are inaccurate. The lean state is in fact an enlarged activist state with no interest in providing for human needs or security. The crisis state designation captures the real spirit of the contemporary state as one which intervenes regularly to bring large segments of the population to crisis.

Yet the well-known cuts of Crisis State austerity are only part of the equation of effecting broad social crisis. As Dyer-Witheford (1999) notes, the new regime of governance under the Crisis State has a dual character, of which analyses of the Lean State capture only one side.

Yet the other side of Crisis State transformations has been as prevalent and as significant for capital. This is the massive build-up, and associated public funding expenditures, of the openly repressive apparatuses. Not all state programs are viewed alike for the cuts advocates. As Dyer-Witheford notes, “On the other
hand, those aspects of the state necessary to the protection of accumulation such as the security apparatus or subsidization of high-technology investment are strengthened” (1999, 101–102). The agenda of cutbacks is the side of the Crisis State that theorists of the lean state have tended to focus on but this has meant, as is too often assumed, that the state is being reduced. Rather, cuts in one area, social provision, has been a growth in the repressive functions.

The neoliberal claim of a shrunken state, the favored trope of Republicans since Reagan, is revealed as a chimera. While Republican ideology uses a phony commitment to reduced government, behind a populist appeal to cut spending or get the bureaucrats off people’s backs, the reality is that neoliberal governments, from Reagan on, have actually increased government spending and scope. But they have done so in very particular ways suited to the new regime of accumulation and regulation.

One can see from the start the activist characteristics of Crisis State policies, and the wielding rather than shrinking of government action, in the record of Ronald Reagan. Reagan stands as the chief deity in neoliberal ideology and is replayed as a central figure in Republican campaigns over the last several election cycles (at federal and state levels). Reagan perhaps more than anyone is invoked as the icon of “small government” and reduced state involvement in the economy. And Reagan’s approach has provided the template for Crisis State governance by governments of all stripes (Clinton, Bush, Obama, Blair, Cameron, etc.) since. Indeed his name even formed the basis for an alternative designation of neoliberal economics — Reaganomics (which was initially more popular and widely used than the now more common term). Perhaps more memorably, this early presentation of neoliberalism was given the name “voodoo economics” by none other than Reagan’s erstwhile opponent, later running mate and successor, George H.W. Bush.

Yet even a cursory glance at his actual record shows the deified icon of Reaganomics to be a complete distortion, a fabrication which rewrites the history of Crisis State governance under Reagan. Of all of the hallmarks of Reagan’s vision, less govern-
ment, less taxation, fiscal responsibility, privatization, and social service cuts, only the latter two were delivered. Perhaps it was voodoo economics after all.

The real story is telling if one looks at economic issues under Reagan. When Reagan entered office in January of 1981, the top tax rate was 70 percent. When he left it had been reduced to 28 percent (Spicer 2012). The result of tax breaks to the wealthy was a reduction in federal government revenue from those sources. But Reagan did not reduce the government budget. He actually sought to increase federal revenues but did so on the backs of the working class rather than capital (and his business allies). He increased payroll taxes as well as the rate on the lowest two quintiles. Far from being a tax-cutting hero as the mythology insists, Reagan actually raised taxes eleven times over the course of his terms in office (Seitz-Wald 2011). Reagan actually raised taxes in seven of the eight years he was in office, and these tax increases were felt most severely and painfully by the lower and middle income strata of the working class. Increased taxes on the working class coupled with cuts to essential services and programs needed by the working class served as dual pincers of austerity, crisis, anxiety, and desperation.

Reagan was also largely responsible for the US debt crisis, which resulted from his fiscal policies and particularly his ideological commitment to cut taxes for the wealthy. When Reagan came into office the national debt was $900 billion, that following a recession, but by the time he left the US national debt had tripled to $2.8 trillion (Noble n.d.). This, of course, provided a boon to bankers while serving as a powerful ideological justification to impose more austerity and crisis on the working class and poor. In terms of spending, in 1985 Federal outlays were 22.9 percent GDP, marking the highest over the period from 1962 to the George W. Bush era (Spicer 2012).

All of this was matched with increases in unemployment under Reagan. The unemployment rate jumped from 7.5 percent when he took office to 11 percent a year later, before Reagan infamously changed the way in which unemployment was measured in order to make the rates look less dire. When em-
ployment did pick up it was largely represented through a conversion of better-paying secure jobs into lower-paying, insecure service sector jobs.

Reagan’s activism also included, perhaps most impactfully, his attack on unions. Mere months after taking office, in August 1981, Reagan intervened in the air traffic controllers’ dispute, acting overtly on behalf of capital. Despite neoliberal claims that government must stay out of the economy and let the “invisible hand” decide, Reagan openly sided with business and fired 11,345 PATCO (Professional Air Traffic Controllers Organization) workers for not ending their strike and returning to work.

Yet, despite distortions in the historical remembrance, these are all bedrock components of Crisis State management. And they represent fundamentally a social re-engineering and a redistribution of social wealth upwards. And the state, far from being reduced or withdrawn, has been the key tool for effecting all of this social re-jigging.

Under the Crisis State “the governmental apparatus is dissolved in so far as it serves popular purposes, but maintained or enlarged as the coercive and administrative arm of capital” (Dyer-Witheford 1999, 102). Thus under austerity regimes military and police budgets grow. Reagan the neoliberal cost cutter, showing the Crisis State commitment to the martial apparatus of the state, also massively expanded defense spending by over $100 billion a year to a level not seen in the US since the height of the Vietnam war. It was Reagan the government reducer who added the Department of Veterans Affairs with a budget close to $90 billion.

The neoliberal government shrinkers, from Reagan on, oversee a massive growth in the penal apparatus, such that one now speaks of a prison industrial complex (PIC) and a carceral society. This reflects the cynical dual logic of Crisis State arrangements in which people are rendered more and more precarious, and thus more needing of surveillance, regulation, and containment within a broadened and interlinked carceral apparatus. In Dyer-Witheford’s terms:
As whole strata of the population are cut off from support, potential social disorder is kept in check by the technologically intensive policing applied against the poor, indigent, and ghettoized. Around those convicted of transgression, the web of informational control tightens inexorably. (1999, 102)

This brings together simultaneous processes of poor bashing and racialized repression. False crises are manufactured around issues like welfare fraud, social assistance “scroungers,” aggressive panhandling, etc. These fake crises are used as reasons to cut social spending on welfare policies (welfare, subsidized housing, rent controls, etc.) that benefit the working class but also as excuses to extend surveillance and regulation of those same individuals and communities. Thus in several jurisdictions social welfare cuts are shadowed by large increases in spending on surveillance, monitoring, and regulatory mechanisms to oversee and investigate the poor and welfare recipients. These include obnoxious developments like welfare snitch lines set up so that neighbors and family members can rat out people for cheating the system. Notably these snitch lines have found virtually no evidence for welfare fraud (costing several times more to set up than is ever recovered).

At the same time these practices are often deployed through racialized, and outright racist, discourses. Thus neoliberal cuts to welfare in the 1980s and 1990s were accompanied by racist myths such as the “welfare queen” for which Reagan provided the template in his election campaign against Carter. This was adopted and the ante upped under Bush I as the additional peril of “crack babies” was added on. These mythologies, in addition to ideologically buttressing calls to cut social services for the working classes, also provide supporting imagery for the war on drugs launched against poor and racialized communities and the ongoing crisis this has imposed on those communities and their members.

Negri (1988) also applies Marcuse’s reference to the transition from “welfare state to warfare state” in describing the transition from the Planner State to the Crisis State. Can one really be too
surprised that if one wages a “war on drugs” or a “war on poverty” that one will end up with militarized policing and armored vehicles moving against local domestic populations?

These interlocking processes of manufacturing crisis are extended in the expansion of the carceral framework and mass incarceration. This includes three strikes legislation and mandatory sentences. It also, in a way that again shows the economic impetus for accumulation and exploitation that are always part of Crisis State arrangements, effects the privatization of the penal system as reflected in the growth of private prisons and prison industries (where exploitation is restored to absolute slave-like levels). Recent analysts of carceral society, such as Dominque Moran and Hadar Aviram, remark on the curious fact that in a society obsessed with cost-benefit calculations that frame ideational values, social responsibility, and public priorities almost entirely as matters of concern over public spending there has been so little attention over decades of collective investment (in the billions) in the prison industrial complex, and much of that attention only more recently.

The fundamental outcome has been the Crisis State centerpiece of increased economic inequality and the massive, and growing, gap between rich and poor. As David Leonhardt of the New York Times has noted, “Since 1980, median household income has risen only 30 percent, adjusted for inflation, while average incomes at the top have tripled or quadrupled” (2010). The systematic growth in social inequality and division of society into a one percent of wealth and a 99 percent of precarity, to use the language of the Occupy Movement, is the very heart of Crisis State manipulation.

The lean, or better, crisis state is incapable of offering much in the way of actual security or certainty so it compensates with a zealous focus on safety, but only specific types of safety for specific citizens. Most common is the safety for consumers to consume (or perverse distortions of the security of workers to work for minimal wages under horrible conditions as in so-called “right to work” states).
The crisis of neoliberalism suggests the margin of a new cycle of the central control of economies (Negri 2008, 198). It may be more public and more common. Neoliberalism shows exactly the contrary of what it hopes to demonstrate. The problems of management of the economy, as well as society, become fundamental under neoliberalism. Neoliberalism’s crisis owes not only to economic disequilibrium (that its policies and programs create) but also to its unilateral American political management globally. For Negri, “It’s a crisis that determines conditions that capitalism can’t manage any longer. We are at the point of a cyclic specific phase that started with Thatcher and [Ronald] Reagan, against which everything now declares war” (2008, 197). Neoliberal control of economic development, despite its rather self-serving boasts, is extremely limited.

Governance and Resistance: From Planning (to) Crisis

Liberal forms of governing are not purely top-down and repressive. They involve people governing themselves and those around them. In this sense governance is self-replicating, self-(re)producing (Lorey 2015, 35). Self-government occurs through participation, not solely in politics, but in living. People are involved in self-government in the way they live. They embody liberal democratic forms of governing (Lorey 2015, 35). As Lorey suggests, “It is precisely through the way they conduct themselves, how they govern themselves, that individuals become amenable to social, political and economic steering and regulation” (2015, 35). Yet, these ways of living are, to be sure, structured and framed by instituted authorities and powerholders and, under capitalist relations, relate especially to capitalist forms of valorization.

Planner State arrangements included practices of self-governing which were, to be sure, geared toward the capitalist “free market” and economic rationalization. Thus, self-governance
comes to be oriented around consumerist practices (various “self help” schemes but also a commodified version of the “good life” itself). And this is accompanied by, indeed underwritten by, a fidelity to the labor market and waged labor and the acceptance of state capitalist claims on social ownership.

This is reflected too in the historic postwar compromise with capital by mainstream union movements. In exchange for increased wages, benefits, vacations, etc.—the good life operationalized—unions dropped claims on capital, ownership, or workers’ control of industry (and the end of exploitation). In virtually all union contracts of the period unions even gave up the fundamental right to withdraw labor according to the direct needs of workers themselves. This was expressed in provisions prohibiting wildcat strikes during the life of the contract.

Practices of self-discipline and self-governance play important parts in the Planner State arrangements, as part of the compromise against sectoral precarity undertaken by waged labor and the unions. Thus, it did not first take hold as a regulating principle under neoliberalism (Lorey 2015, 28).

Indeed it could be said that the self-discipline and self-governance that took hold in working class consciousness (and conscience) under Planner State arrangements helps us to understand the restricted and constrained opposition to neoliberal austerity over the first few decades of its imposition. Many activists from the 1980s on have expressed their exasperation with the timidity of opposition and its adherence to legal forms (elections, protests, demonstrations, petitions, lobbying) even as defeat piled on (self)defeat. The internalization of self-discipline (along lines of what stand as bourgeois morality) also helps shed light on the too-ready acceptance of conciliatory overtures and slight reforms (even as they are routinely not delivered or are simply rolled back).

This again raises the question of the power, the necessity, of rule breaking, of lawbreaking, and illegalism in resistance and struggle against domination in the current period of crisis and precarity. Under Crisis State conditions there grows an excess of what cannot be controlled. There is an excess of what goes
beyond regulation. The uncontrollable or ungoverned challenge the social order. As obedience is delinked from protection and security the ranks of the uncontrollable pose new challenges for the state.

Crisis States and Precarity for All

Under the Planner State arrangements the threatening Other was relegated to the margins — rendered precarious as means of securing the welfare state. As Lorey puts it:

Within the framework of its welfare-state paradigm of protection, liberal governmentality was based on multiple forms of precarity as inequality through othering: on the one hand, on the unpaid labour of women in the reproduction area of the private sphere; on the other hand, on the precarity of all those excluded from the nation-state compromise between capital and labour — whether an as abnormal foreign or poor — as well as those living under extreme conditions of exploitation in the colonies. (2015, 36)

Under the Planner State these were the precarized. These were also, to use the language of criminology, the general deterrence example. That is, the specified precarized stood as the example with which the partially secured could be threatened. There but for the grace of the state go you.

The institutions of the Planner State were not geared toward the security of workers as is often imagined (particularly by nostalgic social democrats today) but instead to support “economically productive self-government techniques among obedient and cautious citizens, who ensured themselves and precarized others simultaneously” (Lorey 2015, 39). Many were excluded from or left out of security, or provided inadequate care, in the welfare state (including the poor, homeless, women, migrants, indigenous people most of all).
Under Crisis States the precarized have been moved to the center. Or, more fully, precarity has become the norm (Lorey 2015, 39). Crisis States render precarity and the conditions of individual and collective insecurity as means of universal regulation and governance.

It was only in the last half of the twentieth century in certain jurisdictions that waged labor became associated with some sense of security within the framework of the welfare states in those countries. This security took a legislative form of access to limited rights of citizenship, sometimes referred to as social citizenship.

Crisis States restore waged labor to the realm of insecurity and despair. The breakup of welfare state provisions renders labor as subject entirely to the laws of the capitalist market—its abject condition historically.

The Crisis State is geared toward a regulation of social life based on dependence and desperation. This structures a source of labor with options, dependent on any “success” on the labor market for uncertain survival (without the slight fallback of the welfare state provisions). This in turn establishes and undergirds processes of exploitation and capital accumulation at renewed levels and intensities.

One is faced not with the promise of inclusive social welfare but rather of a state of bare life. The prospects of homelessness and poverty, and increasingly criminalization and detention, are explicitly placed before the working class without reservation or remorse.

Managed precarity is linked with extensions of repressive forms of power and control. This is seen in the mechanisms of the carceral state and campaigns such as the “war on drugs” or “broken windows” policing. It is also expressed in the proliferation of absurd legislation such as that which criminalizes survival strategies of the poor and/or homeless, such as anti-panhandling or anti-window squeegeeing laws. Among the most mean-spirited are laws against binning or dumpster diving, suggesting that even capital’s property claims over garbage are worth more than the lives of the poor.
Those left precarious under the Planner State are not properly understood as excluded. Rather, the issue is still the nature of their inclusion. And they are centrally included, particularly within systems of criminalization, punishment, and repression. Indeed, as I have suggested elsewhere, contemporary systems of criminal justice in Western liberal democracies like Canada and the US would collapse without the processing of poor people (almost always for non-violent crimes, usually for victimless crimes, increasingly for bureaucratic or administrative “crimes” like failing to appear for court dates).

Conclusion

Crisis States throw liberal governance on its head. Rather than governing through the promise (not necessarily met) of protection, it governs through the production of social insecurity. It offers the associated justification, famous since Thatcher, of “no alternative.”

As Judith Butler notes, precarity is not simply a passing or momentary condition. Rather, it is a new form of regulation that marks the current period of development (2015, vii). Precarity has become a regime of governance. It is by now a hegemonic mode of regulation and control (2015, vii).

Precarity and insecurity have from the start been central conditions of life for the working class and subordinate groups under capitalism. Indeed precarity and insecurity were necessary conditions for the emergence and expansion of capitalism. This is what enclosure of the commons and associated successive laws such as Poor Acts were deployed to effect, to enforce dependence on labor markets for survival, for example.

Neoliberal austerity was initially deployed to break the social resources, infrastructures, and bases for resistance built up by the working class over the period of struggles in the post-war period (which found state response in the mechanisms of the Planner State). This includes, front and center, the well coordi-
nated and aggressive attacks on unions especially but also urban policing precarizing the poor and border controls and criminalization of migrant labor.

Its neoliberal character is precisely an attempt to restore conditions of capitalist dominance and working class insecurity as obtained in the early periods of so-called *laissez faire* capitalism. So we want to be cautious in not overstating the novelty of austerity and precarity when considering essential conditions of capital accumulation and exploitation.

At the same time, we recognize that *laissez faire* has always been an inaccuracy. The capitalist market has required state involvement and action, state management. There has never been a capitalist market free of the state despite the ideological effluence of Republican or Conservative Party “libertarians.”

As Lorey suggests, precarization in the present period is not an exception, something outsourced to the periphery. It has become the rule. We might add — it has become the rule *again*. Precarity extends beyond the loss of waged employment; it speaks to more than insecure or temporary jobs. Rather, it now “embraces the whole of existence, the body, modes of subjectivation” (Lorey 2015, 1).

Under the Crisis State, precarity, as Lorey suggests, becomes normalized. Or to put it another way: “In neoliberalism precarization becomes ‘democratized’” (Lorey 2015, 11). Under the Crisis State fears of job loss, fears of unemployment are everyday. Fears of not being able to pay the rent, feed the kids, pay for health, dental, eye care, press even for those who are employed. As Paolo Virno notes, anxieties are felt within community that were typically felt outside of community (2004, 33).

Indeed, Agamben (1996) proposes the refugee, the non-status, as the paradigmatic political subjectivity of contemporary life and politics. The segmentation of the workforce between national and foreign workers, citizens and non-status, has seriously weakened the political power of workers. The condition of being non-status has been experienced both in terms of the labor market and in terms of the response from unions.
This raises important questions for resistance and the opposition to crisis. On one hand it poses a commons of experience in precarity that poses opportunities for shared struggle. At the same time it can impel a rupture with the conditions of crisis in splitting communities from the prospect of positive resolution, of satisfaction, within the context of the current arrangements. All of this is laid bare in recent struggles, from Idle No More to #BlackLivesMatter to the new poor people’s movements of various types in countries across the neoliberal democratic West, which make explicit the incapacity of the system to meet their demands, and indeed raise the undesirability of attempts at accommodation and recuperation which do not fundamentally disrupt and alter existing institutions and power and authority.