

(2024 July 25) Double Movement Fulfilled - Rightwing Workerism, Polanyi, Democratic Capitalism, etc - Holmes (nettime)

I almost always find Brian Holmes' comments spot on and a concise summation of my own thoughts when not a revelation into areas I haven't explored. This short statement on current US politics is typical, so on the mark, I think, that I'm sending it out to several of you who don't usually hear from me, or not on matters of this sort.

The nagging question Holmes' remarks beg is, what, if anything, will - or can - those in the center left or elsewhere on the sinister side do, personally, politically or however, to change the course of Battleship American Capitalism besides stopping trumpist fascism, before total collapse. I see very little being done at ground level or in the towers of power to seriously mitigate the inevitable effects of climate change, let alone its root causes (including the capitalist mindset and hegemony). Very much like the general failure to protect the environment I and other activists have witnessed over the past fifty years: for example, stop one toxic pesticide after another only to see them replaced by others and nothing done to change conditions chemical agriculture was created to address.

Ask people of the center left (aka, the educated class, investment class, et al) what they personally are doing, and you're likely to be met with admissions of what amounts to, in fact, nothing, nothing but vote for more of the same, then continue to fidget, fret, piss and moan and wait in hope that something will happen to avert, or at least defer utter disaster until they're gone.

Like frogs in the warming kettle. Or von Trier's Melancholia. Business as usual.

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[https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Brian\\_Holmes](https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Brian_Holmes)

<https://egs.edu/biography/brian-holmes/>

[https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Karl\\_Polanyi](https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Karl_Polanyi)

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The center left has almost nothing to say about the emergency situation it has helped to create. . . .

The world faces extraordinary challenges, and it has responded by girding for war. This can't be changed through any invocation of anarchism or libertarianism, which now look very similar indeed (individualist philosophies disclaiming any need for social structures and collective solutions)"

- Brian Holmes

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Today's Topics:

1. Double Movement Fulfilled (Brian Holmes)

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Message: 1

Date: Wed, 24 Jul 2024 10:14:06 -0500

From: Brian Holmes <bhcontinentaldrift@gmail.com>

To: "<nettime> is a moderated mailing list for net criticism,  
collaborative text filtering and cultural politics of the nets"  
<nettime-l@lists.nettime.org>

Subject: <nettime> Double Movement Fulfilled

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Among the confusing aspects of contemporary US politics is the new workerism of the right, represented by JD Vance with his silver tongue and endless hillbilly elegy. We do not expect right-wing elites to cry for poor people, but that's what they're doing. What is going on?

Karl Polanyi described the present situation eighty years ago. Capitalism, he said, grows by leaps and bounds until it creates a world market. But in so doing, it causes such cultural alienation, personal harm and environmental destruction that it produces a second movement of withdrawal and self-protection within national confines. This is what we see in the US today.

The globalization of manufacturing and trade has been both rapid and extreme. Everyone is aware of the consequences on employment and wages, but what about culture? The most recent economic expansion, driven by the Internet, has brought cosmopolitan capitalist culture into every village, small town and rural region. Anyone whose social position was based on the stability and channeling of others' desire - such as a parent, a teacher or a priest - is threatened with loss and insignificance. Anyone who could not handle the temptations of capitalist culture - up to and including fentanyl - has gotten badly hurt by now. Collective institutions, and even landscapes, went into serious decline. And then the floods and fires began. It's now impossible, even for rich people in cities, not to see the extent of the damage that the 1990s globalization of both technology and culture has wreaked on everyday life.

JD Vance was able to make bank in Silicon Valley, which is what capitalism expects: take the most capable and then corrupt them absolutely. However, once the double movement is fulfilled, a new opportunity opens up for the absolutely corrupt: They can cynically play with the complaints of those who have been battered and enraged by capitalism. This was the message of the Republican National Convention. Left-wing social promises will now be served on a combination plate featuring racist authoritarianism and religion in equal proportions. It does not matter that the combination is unviable in reality. The need to believe in it is absolute, like a force of nature. It can be manipulated to produce a nationalist paroxysm, probably culminating in war as it did the last time, when the Germans and other national cultures went down the fascist path.

We had a memorable nettime debate on these issues in 2016. I and several others brought up Polanyi's arguments from *The Great Transformation* to explain what was happening with Brexit and Trump. No, we were told by some strident anarcho-feminist, these people are white supremacist patriarchalist fascists, you have to fight them, that's all you need to know. You have to beat them down, and the only explanation they deserve is that they are assholes.

That kind of simplistic, essentializing rhetoric is not as radical as it looks. It has gone mainstream. The center left has almost nothing to say about the emergency situation it has helped to create, except stop the fascists! Save democracy! The fascists, on the other hand, have a lot to say about the problems they face, the kind of life they want, and what stands in their way. They are the reality community - they actually talk about their realities with a view to changing them, whereas all our side really wants is for the economy to grow again. We are not able to genuinely question the current mode of development. Due to the absence of anything we can really believe in, we on the left are highly likely to see the fascist

solutions put into operation, and not just in the US.

Biden was a zombie politician repeating the programs of Obama, Clinton and Kennedy. Under his "guidance" we would have war with China distracting us from collapse into climate chaos. Can Kamala Harris be any different? Not if people keep saying the stupid things they have been saying since 2016, that's for sure.

The world faces extraordinary challenges, and it has responded by girding for war. This can't be changed through any invocation of anarchism or libertarianism, which now look very similar indeed (individualist philosophies disclaiming any need for social structures and collective solutions). In this extremely dangerous situation, all factors have to be recognized and analyzed, then a strategy has to be put into play. There is no way to continue just pushing people off the table and holding them down so the successful races and classes can go on enjoying modernism - that's the Israeli solution, it does not work with the Palestinians and it won't work with the industrial classes either. The left has to learn to talk with the people it has left in the lurch, both economically and culturally. It has to propose an aspirational mode of development that can include those people, alongside and with its core constituencies. Above all it has to describe a believable future, which is neither about sinking into meaningless poverty and cultural alienation, nor about wild technological growth with no guarantees for those left behind. We need a vision of a stable and flourishing world, far from the extremes of Polanyi's double movement.

In theory, that's not so difficult. Under democratic capitalism, it's almost impossible. But the stakes are high. Let's ask a lot from Kamala Harris, Keir Starmer, etc. All we have to lose is a stiflingly hot authoritarian future.