

Humans, Animals and Nature in the Crisis

On the need for an anti-capitalist critique of animal exploitation



Saving banks, cutting welfare, de-democratisation. The measures taken to overcome the global economic crisis are the attempt to avert the collapse of the capitalist economic system. Yet there is no reason to save an economic system that is neither willing nor able to find solutions to the social and ecological catastrophes of our time. However, the exploitation of people and the destruction of natural foundations of life are not the only expressions of the destructive violence of capitalist society.

The imprisonment of animals that is ever-present in our society, their merciless exploitation and seemingly perpetual slaughter are also linked inseparably to an economic system that is aimed solely at use and profit. Capitalism has to be abolished, not saved, if we want to put an end to this misery.

No hope for capitalism

The capitalist economy is crumbling. What is portrayed as a state debt crisis is actually a real global economic crisis, which emerged from the property and financial crises. The measures taken to deal with it are not aimed at rescuing national state economies, but are the attempt to prevent the collapse of the capitalist economy itself. Banks and companies are supported to the tune of hundreds of billions of Euros whilst many countries have been forced to implement massive cuts to their social security systems by the troika of the EU, IMF and the ECB. The impoverishment of large parts of the population is knowingly taken into account to create "competitiveness" and "credit worthiness", which mean nothing other than upholding the conditions of capitalist exploitation. There is no good reason to leap to the rescue of an economic system that produces misery on a daily basis and ignores the needs of people and animals.



The so-called saviours of capitalism have proved that they are willing to defend the prevailing conditions to the bitter end. Social attacks in the form of wage reductions, privatisation and welfare cuts are all aimed at securing the interests of finance and recasting more and more areas of life along economic lines. These measures are accompanied by the dismantling of workers' rights, the expansion of the security services and the militarisation of foreign policies, so that any resistance can be quelled before it erupts. These policies subject all social relations to the creed of profit-maximisation that cements the relations of violence between humans and animals.

Fukushima, climate change, industrialised animal murder: Nature domination in capitalism

In capitalist economics, animals, like nature in general, are merely commodities, means of production or resources that may be exploited. The domination of nature is the basis of human society – as humans need to produce in order to reproduce themselves, they have always needed to alter and use nature. But the establishment of capitalist production methods has triggered fatal dynamics that are literally murderous. Capitalist economics require not only competition but also permanent expansion in the form of advancing valorisation of all natural foundations for life.

Unbridled growth therefore necessarily results in not only social but also ecological crises. Fukushima, the global effects of climate change and the industrialised killing of animals are some examples of the devastating consequences of capitalist appropriation of nature. A critique of the systematic destruction of nature is expressed by the social struggles of environment movements, e.g. against coal-fired power stations, or genetic engineering. Protest movements against the privatisation of water or against land-grabbing are also fighting for a collective and sustainable use of nature based on need and against the profit-orientated destruction of capital.

The destruction of nature and with it the destruction of the basis of human society are immediate consequences of production relations that do not serve our needs but those of capitalist accumulation. That fact that capitalist appropriation of nature does not follow the principles of sustainability, conservation or care is not the result of "environmentally unfriendly attitudes" but is actually the logical consequence of turning nature into capital.

Factory farms, vivisection labs, slaughterhouses: Animals as victims of capitalist nature domination

Animals are the main victims of nature domination. Considered to be nature, they are engaged and murdered in their billions, so their labour power can be exploited and their dead bodies exchanged as commodities. Animals are systematically made victims of socially organised violence. Their bodies suffer injuries en masse - in slaughterhouses, laboratories, or on factory farms. A liberated society that really intends to overcome all relations based on exploitation or servitude cannot ignore animals. No victim of socially-caused violence is a legitimate one. With our current state of productive forces – the technological and social possibilities at our disposal – there is no need for violence against animals.



The exploitation of animals is legitimised backed up by a complex ideology which has come to be known as speciesism. This means a way of thinking about animals that results from the supposed necessity of their exploitation. A type of false consciousness about animals, speciesism helps make the exploitation of animals seem to be natural and unchangeable, obscuring the historical development and social creation of the exploitation. This obscuring of human domination of animals is expressed in various ways: From the retort that "it's always been this way, it can't be changed.", the trivialisation of violence against animals and the playing-down of any criticism of animal exploitation to attempts to deny animals any consciousness, sentience or individuality. The idea that animals can be used



legitimately by people must be countered with a critique that refutes the myths of animal exploitation. Animals are not there for people, people have appropriated their bodies and their labour power by force! Animals cannot be kept "humanely", any form of exploitation – whether in free-range or factory farms – is against their needs and interests. It is not the meaning of animal lives to land on a plate! Animals are not something, they are someone! Current human-animal relations are the result of human actions and are historic. Therefore they can also be changed by humans!

The fact that animals are not recognised as being victim to social relations of exploitation and domination cements their catastrophic situation. Largely ignored, the system of industrial and institutionalized murder of animals carries on. The slaughterhouse can be taken as a place where capitalist principles of production are realised. Under enormous time pressure, animals are killed almost by the second, after being fattened up to their maximum weight. Fully technically rationalised, animals' bodies are sectioned and processed. Even the smallest scraps of flesh are used to generate capital. The meat industry's path to big business is strewn with corpses. The human side of meat production also has its victims: abattoir workers on minimum wages labour under precarious conditions and at constant risk to their health. This show how humans and animals necessarily fall victim to exploitation under the rule of capitalism.

End capitalism and animal exploitation: Together against all domination

If social relations are to be guided by principles other than just maximising profit, all people must be able to participate in those areas of life that concern them. Overcoming economic relations of dependence is the basis of participatory processes of negotiation in which the needs of animals as well as all humans can be considered. The authoritarian politics of the crisis regimes throughout Europe are the opposite of any sort of freer society. Therefore it is not only necessary to show active resistance against these world-wide de-democratizing processes, but also to fight to regain the control over our own lives.



The immediate collectivisation of key industries like the finance industry, housing and not least food production is needed in order to stop the blind destruction of capitalist exploitation interests. The expropriation of agro-companies could be a first step to overcoming the current order in the areas of production and distribution of food, in which property rights and profit interests of concerns have more value than social and ecological justice. There is no right to profit, especially when it means that through completely destructive technologies and farming methods, people die of hunger and animals die in abattoirs. It's not private economic appropriation of social wealth by companies, but the participation of people in decision-making processes that are actually democratic that could put an end to the daily barbarity of capitalism.

The exploitation of animals is part of this barbarity. Criticism of animal exploitation must not just limit itself to particular forms or areas of violence against animals. Violence itself must be at the centre of this criticism because there is no use of animals that doesn't involve violence; there is no violence that is better or worse. Anyone who really wants to fight against animal exploitation cannot use animals for their own purposes. Anyone who wants to act in solidarity with animals has to be vegan, because violence against animals is not a private matter! Of course there could still be violence against animals in a non-capitalist society, but only that sort of society offers any basis for realising the social project of animal liberation.

One thing is clear: single political movements will not be able to do away with capitalism by themselves. Social struggles can only be successful when they don't remain constricted to single issues, but instead aim to deprive the various relations of domination and oppression their mutual economic basis. The unified resistance against de-democratizing processes, as well as the reclamation and socialisation of central areas of life is a concrete perspective for various political movements to be able to overcome their organisational individualisation and to follow shared goals and strategies.

So let's not lose any time and create a strong resistance against the attempts to rescue an economic system that is only geared towards exploitation and is not based around needs. Every day in which people are in servitude, animals are taken to the slaughterhouse and the natural resources are depleted is barbaric in the face of the possibilities of the here and now: Creating a society beyond the production of commodities, exploitation and oppression.