

# 3

## GLENEAGLES: BREAKING TIME

**John Holloway<sup>1</sup>**

A scream of fury. More than that, a flash of hope.

Did it make poverty history? Of course not. Capitalism generates poverty: to get rid of poverty, we must get rid of capitalism. Did Gleneagles get rid of capitalism? Perhaps, for a moment, for some people.

We have to talk of revolution, not just anti-capitalist protest, not just rebellion, not just of fighting against the G8. We have to talk of revolution because it is clear that capitalism is destroying our lives, destroying humanity in every sense of the word, destroying nature and the preconditions for human existence. Not a revolution from above, with leaders who take control of the state and keep control of the state, but a radical social change that comes from below.

But how can we possibly talk of revolution now, after the failure (and worse than failure) of so many revolutions?

Only as cracks. Each rebellion creates a crack in capitalist domination. Capitalism is a system of command, a form of social organisation that subordinates our lives to the rule of money (with its various masks of value, profit, capital, and so on). Each time we say No, we tear a rent in the texture of domination, create a crack in the system of command. We do it all the time, often without noticing it. We say, 'No, we shall not shape our lives according to the requirements of capital, we shall do what we consider necessary or desirable.' It does not always work out: sometimes we end up submitting. But now in this moment we rebel,

and even if we submit later, we know that many more are taking our place, refusing to submit.

Sometimes these cracks are so tiny that we hardly notice them. But often they are collective, often they lead to a collective and conscious determination to do things differently. And sometimes the cracks are so big that they stand there and radiate their glory through all the world: the Zapatista uprising, for example, or the *argentino* of a few years ago,<sup>2</sup> or the recent events in Bolivia.<sup>3</sup> And other times they come as collective explosions of refusal and rage like Seattle or Genoa or Gleneagles.

Each of these cracks may seem hopeless, like banging our heads on a stone wall. But it is not so: if we bang our heads hard enough, even a stone wall begins to crack.

How can we think of these cracks?

Traditional revolutionary theory thinks of the cracks as states. According to Leninist theory, a crack in capitalist domination acquires real significance only when it leads to the taking of state power; for revolution to be complete, the taking of power in one state should lead on to the taking of power in another and so on, until capitalism is abolished in all the world. However, if one thinks in terms of cracks, there is no reason to limit such cracks to states, and many reasons why it is better not to think of them as states. To name just two:

Firstly, the state is a specific form of organisation and of behaviour developed historically to exclude people from the possibility of determining their own lives. Our insubordination is a push towards social self-determination and this implies the development of different forms of organisation and behaviour, forms that include rather than exclude, forms such as councils or assemblies, which aim at the real articulation of struggle as a process of social self-determination.

And secondly, the state as a form of organisation imposes a temporality of waiting upon our struggle: wait until the next election, wait until we build the party or the revolutionary army and seize control of the state. The intensity of the capitalist attack against humanity is so great that we can no longer wait: revolution is here and now or it is not.

But if we do not think of the cracks as states, then how? Perhaps it helps to think of them in various dimensions:

a) As spatial cracks, territories in which the people say 'we do not accept capital's rule here, we shall shape society as we think fit.' Such areas can be small (like a social centre) or big (like the Zapatista region of Chiapas).

b) As cracks related to certain activities or resources: 'in this aspect of our activity or social intercourse, we shall not accept the rule of capital; we shall create or organise as we think fit.' Examples of this would be the struggle in all the world against the privatisation of water and other basic resources, or the struggles against the direct subordination of health care to capital, or the struggle against the imposition of private property on software and music.

c) As temporal cracks: 'in this moment, in this event, capital does not rule; we shall decide the rules and shape the social relations, we shall do what we consider necessary or desirable.' Such temporal cracks can be seen in anti-capitalist events of all sorts, and in outbursts of revolutionary activity such as December 19/20 2001 in Argentina or the recent upheavals in Bolivia. Gleneagles, then, is that: a temporal crack in capitalist domination.

Normally, when we think of revolution, we think in spatial terms, even if we do not put the state in the centre of our thinking. The Zapatista uprising, for example, fits into this way of thinking. But the Zapatistas are in the countryside and there the spatial concept works. The problem posed by the Zapatistas' Sixth Declaration and their decision to come out of Chiapas is whether the same concept can apply in an urban context.<sup>4</sup> Perhaps it can: we would all like the city or neighbourhood in which we live to be a city or neighbourhood in rebellion. But for many of us this is difficult to imagine.

But supposing we change the dimension. Supposing, instead of (or in addition to) thinking in terms of space, we think in terms of time, what happens then? We do not live in the sort of relatively stable community that characterises the Zapatista area of Chiapas, or indeed certain urban areas fifty or a hundred years ago, and we do not own land that we can cultivate in order to sustain ourselves. Our lives are much more unsettled. It is not that our communities do not exist, but they are much more volatile: we come together for a moment, or for a few days, and then we go our own way, until the next time, certainly building friendships and links that last, but the intense sense of community is a temporary one. Perhaps we should take that as a basis and think that the struggle is not so much to conquer spaces as to conquer moments: to conquer moments that belong to us and then try to convert those moments into cracks, cracks that run and spread and multiply.

Thinking of time in this way is an attack on time itself. The importance of such cracks in the time of capitalist domination depends not just on their duration but (perhaps especially) on their intensity. The time of such cracks is not clock time, according to which one minute is the same as another. On the contrary, there is a shooting of clocks, an intensification of time, a 'moment of excess' as our friends from Leeds put it, a pushing towards that moment of complete fulfilment in which time stops still. It opens a perspective in which communism (or whatever we want to call that other world that we say is possible) emerges as a world in which the axis is not duration, but intensity.

This does not mean that I am advocating just a politics of events. I think that events are very important, not so much because of what they achieve in terms of concrete reforms, but above all because they blast apart the dreary tick-tick of capitalist time. But my argument here is not that we should concentrate on events, but rather that perhaps we should focus on time. The explosive, intense time of events needs to be supported by a slower temporality, a temporality of

preparation and then of reflection, but also of the patient practice of anti-capitalism in our everyday lives within a capitalist society. The event is not just a hole in capitalist time but at best creates a crack that reaches out, a crack that runs, but runs at a different pace. The event is a brick thrown through a metaphorical window, but the brick does not just make a hole, the hole has fingers or cracks that reach out, cracks that are extended by the determined and unspectacular work of those who dedicate their lives (or, perhaps more realistically, part of their lives, since our lives are always contradictory) to the creation of a different world, the creation of different social relations, the struggle for dignity.

A scream of fury, then, a flash of hope, a brick thrown through the smugness of capitalist clock time, a crack that runs, right across the Atlantic Ocean, to Mexico and beyond, a crack that joins up with other cracks: that is what Gleneagles means to me.

- 1 *Unfortunately, I was not in Edinburgh or Gleneagles. The present reflection on the events there draws on discussions with Raquel Gutierrez and Sergio Tischler, on the various pamphlets of Leeds May Day Group (in their various appellations) and Ernst Bloch's Principle of Hope.*
- 2 *The argentinazo refers to the uprising of December 19/20 2001 in Argentina, with all that followed: the overthrowing of several presidents, the creation of neighbourhood councils in the biggest cities, the wave of occupations of factories and other places of work, the upsurge of the piquetero movement (movement of the unemployed).*
- 3 *There was an upsurge of revolt in Bolivia in May/June 2005, which forced the resignation of the President: one of the main centres of force was the Juntas Vecinales or Neighbourhood Councils of El Alto, a city on the outskirts of La Paz.*
- 4 *The Sixth Declaration of the Lacandon Jungle issued by the Zapatistas at the end of June 2005 announces that they are coming out of Chiapas to integrate themselves directly in struggles in the rest of Mexico and beyond, and that they will no longer focus principally on indigenous struggles. This has given rise to an intense period of preparation and discussion throughout Mexico.*