

# 18 Theses on Marxism and Animal Liberation

Sunday 26 August 2018, by [Alliance for Marxism and Animal Liberation](#) (Date first published: 18 August 2018).

**Neither has the Marxist left stood up for the liberation of animals so far, nor has the animal rights and animal liberation movement taken up the construction of a socialist society. We argue however: Marxists and animal liberationists have the same enemy - the bourgeoisie. Our 18 theses justify why they must unite for a truly revolutionary project.**

## Contents

- [18 Theses on Marxism and \(...\)](#)
- [Why anti-speciesism must \(...\)](#)
- [Why Marxism must be anti-speci](#)

The following essay is the English translation of our German **Marxismus und Tierbefreiung - Thesenpapier** published on January 1, 2017. You can also download the English version in pdf format [[1](#)]. We also have a very small print run in English. If you want to order a copy, write us an email to: [mutb@riseup.net](mailto:mutb@riseup.net). But, please take into consideration that it is going to take time and a monetary contribution (depending on the amount of copies you want and where you live).

In any case, since we are a completely independent, self-organised alliance, we are always in need for money. If you want to make a donation, please do so. We are happy about every amount you can afford.

## Bank accounts:

In Germany: TAN, HypoVereinsbank, BIC: HYVEDEMM300, IBAN: DE13 2003 0000 0003 6034 38

In Switzerland: Aktion Tierrechte, 8000 Zürich, IBAN: CH18 0900 0000 8574 1502 6

The original German version is available on facebook, as pdf file, audio file (read by German animal liberation rapper MC Albino) and in print. Reviews and critiques (in German) were written by the Marxist scholar Karl Reitter (Vienna, Austria) and ecological Marxist Athanasios Karathanassis (Hannover, Germany).

We want to thank André and Keith for the translation. Despite their support, we are responsible for all remaining mistakes.

If you want to contact us, go ahead. Write us a personal message on facebook or an email ([mutb@riseup.net](mailto:mutb@riseup.net)).

---

## **18 Theses on Marxism and Animal Liberation**

Marxism and the liberation of animals are two things which, at first glance, do not seem to have much in common. Neither did the former make waves for being particularly animal-loving, nor are animal lovers known for taking up the cause of liberating the working class and the construction of a socialist society.

Quite the opposite: Classical Marxism has little appeal to the predominantly autonomist-anarchist animal rights activists; it is regarded as an overly simplified theory and as an authoritarian ideology which has become obsolete with the end of actually existing socialism. Although the critique of capitalism and the labour movement's vocabulary ('comrade,' 'class') are regaining popularity amongst the radical left, one nevertheless does not quite know what to make of traditional Marxists. Marxists are considered to be people who notoriously hate animals and only talk economy, and who are often indistinguishable from petty bourgeois philistines who do not want to forego their grilled sausages.

Marxists, in turn, do not hold animal liberation activists in particularly high regard either: they are often seen as strange ascetics and bourgeois moralists who invest themselves in negligible causes instead of focusing on the key issues. They are expected to take part in actions and alliances for class struggle, but to leave their 'animal craze' at the door. Many comrades break out in cold sweat when they ponder a society in which both humans and animals alike are liberated from exploitation and oppression, since it would mean giving up their meat and cheese. And anyway: Friedrich Engels already made fun of the "Herren Vegetarianer" who underestimated the importance of meat consumption in the history of human civilization and who were, at best, utopian socialists.

Nevertheless, we reject this opposition and believe that the historical materialist analysis and critique of society developed by Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, the corresponding politics and the call to liberate animals from their socially produced suffering all necessarily belong together. On the one hand, demands for animal liberation are indeed moralist if they do not analyse the historically specific conditions in which the exploitation of animals is taking place and which social changes are necessary to end it. On the other hand, however, every Marxist critique of society remains incomplete if it does not consider the fact that, to make profits, the ruling classes have not only exploited the oppressed classes within the history of class struggle, but also and always animals (and nature).

The exploitation of wage labourers on the one hand, and of animals on the other, may have qualitative differences in the way they have developed historically, and their relation to the means of productions also remains different today. In spite of all the differences, however, the working class and animals have a common history during which they have both faced the ruling class antagonistically as suffering, humiliated, oppressed and abandoned beings; the former as subjects, the latter as objects of liberation. Hence, we argue: the idea of animal liberation remains inconsistent when it repudiates the historical materialist critique of society. At the same time, Marxism remains equally inconsistent when it refuses to acknowledge that today, the liberation of animals must be integral to contemporary Marxist theory and politics. Firstly, the current stage in the development of the productive forces not only makes such liberation possible, but indeed necessary. Secondly, everyone who aspires to create a world without socially produced and objectively preventable exploitation, domination and suffering is required to also acknowledge the suffering of animals and strive for its abolition. Isolated approaches to unite Marxism and animal liberation have already occurred in the history of the left and the labour movement. But these have not become widely accepted to date. The following theses explain why Marxists and animal liberationists should not be compelled into a forced marriage but rather unite in a bond for life.

## Why anti-speciesism must be Marxist

### I.

Modern, capitalist society recognises animals only as material carriers of value and as capital's means of production, as means of labour and subjects of labour which are supplied by nature for free – as long as no human labour is used to harness it.

The executives in the meat industry, the heart of the animal exploitation complex, earn billions with the killing of animals. In Germany alone, record turnovers of up to 40 billion Euros per year are reached by slaughtering more than 60 million pigs, 3.5 million cows and 700 million chicken, ducks and geese annually. Even in Switzerland, the sales volume amounts to 10 billion Swiss francs. In circuses and zoos, 'exotic' animals are usually kept under atrocious conditions to perform excruciating, stultifying show-acts. During hunts, they are killed for the mere amusement of mostly well-off hunters. In experiments, they serve as objects of research and labour, while the pet industry overbreeds and sells them off as toys. These conditions are horrific and brutal and anybody who witnesses them and who does not have a completely alienated relationship with the environment experiences at least some sort of empathy with the sentient beings when seeing them in their plight.

As a consequence, a commitment to ending animal exploitation often begins with being appalled by the killing of animals on a mass-scale and by their ideological degradation. At the same time, such a commitment may begin with an impulse of solidarity in search of an explanation for the exploitation and for a way to abolish it. Empathy with the suffering of animals then leads to a theoretical reflection on the relation between humans and animals and sparks the impulse to become active in the struggle for the liberation of animals. But how does this impulse manifest itself in practice? Let us look at the theory and practice of the current animal liberation movement.

### II.

In a nutshell and somewhat simplified, the contemporary German-speaking animal rights and animal liberation movement is dominated by a politico-theoretical current which the Marxist philosopher Marco Maurizi describes as "metaphysical anti-speciesism." It is composed of three main schools of thought:

- **Bourgeois moral philosophy** in the tradition of Peter Singer, Richard Ryder, Tom Regan, Hilal Sezgin and others.
- **Liberal legal criticism**, the figurehead of which was for a long time Gary Francione. Authors such as Will Kymlicka and Sue Donaldson have joined him recently.
- **Social liberal post-structuralist anti-authoritarianism**, which relies on the thinking of Carol J. Adams, Donna Haraway, Birgit Mütherich, Jacques Derrida and others.

Bourgeois anti-speciesist moral philosophy is predominant in a number of organizations and initiatives, such as PETA, which raise political demands for animal rights and animal welfare and appeal to consumers, the state and private institutions by means of petitions, lobbying, campaigns, offering expert consultancy and so forth.

Liberal legal critics form a theoretical and political bridge between moral philosophers and anti-authoritarianism. Depending on their interpretation and affinity to any of the two political theories, they may lean toward one or the other. This also explains to some degree the broad agreement in

the animal welfare, animal rights and animal liberation movement that animal rights indeed are an aim to strive for.

The social liberal post-structuralist-anti-speciesist anti-authoritarianism makes its political appearance in forms of the extra-parliamentary left inspired by autonomism and anarchism respectively. Such autonomist anti-speciesism represents the core of the abolitionist wing of the animal rights and the animal liberation movement.

### III.

Bourgeois anti-speciesist moral philosophy deals with the question of why the suffering of animals is considered different from the suffering of humans, or, to be more precise: why such differences provide the moral basis for actions.

Accordingly, this current vets commonly accepted justifications for killing and utilizing animals – for example that animals do not reason and lack cognitive abilities, that animal suffering is different in kind and less grave than human suffering, and so on. Also, it reveals the inner contradictions in the arguments for killing and using animals by pointing out that not all animals lack cognitive skills, for instance, and that neither are all humans (of all ages, and so on) equally capable of performing cognitive tasks. Moreover, even within the human collective, forms of suffering are so different that we could thus hardly speak of a universal human suffering in opposition to a universal animal suffering. As a consequence of such inconsistencies, advocates of the anti-speciesist moral philosophy maintain that there are no justifiable reasons to make morally significant distinctions between human and animal suffering. Accordingly, they ask why such distinctions are made in practice nevertheless. Their answer: because human society is permeated by *speciesism*, that is, the ideological assumption that the human species is superior. The argument is that just like racism or sexism, speciesism establishes normative boundaries that cannot be justified and thus lacks any actual foundation. Instead, according to Singer, speciesism, defined as “a prejudice or attitude of bias in favour of the interests of members of one’s own species and against those of members of other species,” is the reason for the “discrimination” against animals.

The merits of such a moral philosophy are that speciesist ideology is confronted with its own untenable claims. However, bourgeois anti-speciesist moral philosophy has numerous problems of its own: strictly speaking, it does not *explain* why animals are being exploited, why they are being made objects of economic utilization; rather, it explains how the different treatment of animals and humans is legitimized and shrouded under current social circumstances. This is an important distinction. Therefore, bourgeois moral philosophy can tell us which form of thought justifies that humans are *not* killed in abattoirs and why in the case of animals the slaughtering is *not eliminated*, for example. Yet it cannot contribute anything of substance on the origin and function of animal exploitation or, more specifically, explain both the abattoir as an industrialised business and for what purpose the animals are killed in it. Instead, it reduces all these questions to abstract, individual acts, views and practices that are treated in complete isolation from the functioning of capitalist society. Moreover, such moral philosophy is ahistorical: its subject matter is speciesist ideology of the bourgeois society within the here and now. It is interested in the history of human-animal relations only in terms of the history of ideology, if at all; it can tell us nothing about the social origin and the genesis of speciesist ideology.

### IV.

Liberal animal rights theory primarily attempts to explain why animals, in contrast to humans, do not have civil liberties, why they are treated as *objects* but not as *subjects* of law. Its answer is essentially tautological: because animals are defined by law as property. Following this line of

argument, because animals are normatively determined as human property, every serious conflict of interest between the species then leads to the defeat of non-human creatures. The status of animals as property then prepares the way for the institutionalized exploitation of animals. Depending on the respective politico-scientific reading, the problem is accordingly the absence of either negative or positive basic rights analogous to human rights. Advocates of this theory conclude that current law is based on a moral prejudice that privileges *humans* over *animals*, much in the same way as whites had once been favoured over black slaves. The theory of law thus excludes animals from being subjects of rights by definition.

The criticism of the judicial fact that animals are legally considered to be 'things' and/or 'property' of natural or legal persons has not lost any validity today. However, legal norms neither self-evidentially explain nor have they or the theory of law established the exploitation of animals. Animals are not just private property because the law says so or because jurists presume them to be. Private ownership (of the means of production) is constitutional because the law is the legal expression of bourgeois relations of production and exchange. In the course of class struggle, the ruling class has degraded nature in general and animals in particular to a means of production at their disposal, secured such hierarchy juristically and stipulated it as universally applicable. For that reason, it is lawful today for man to treat the animal as their property. Legal norms allow the exploitation of animals because they are bourgeois, not just because they are speciesist.

However, there are instances in which animal rights theorists have also contributed to focus the analytic perspective despite the legalistic and anti-speciesist mystifications immanent to their positions. In particular, among the irrevocable achievements of the anti-speciesist legal criticism is that it highlights how the juristic status quo enables an economically more efficient exploitation of animals and how it fosters the required political compliance of civil society at the same time - in other words, that the actually existing animal welfare law therefore secures rather than prevents the exploitation and oppression of animals.

Yet it weighs all the heavier, then, that animal rights theory is subservient to bourgeois illusions about state and law. Animal rights theorists sever the connection between capitalist economy on the one hand and the bourgeois form of state and its legal form on the other, and even propagate the latter as a positive frame of reference for progressive politics. Certainly, it is legitimate, insofar as it is possible, to enlist federal institutions and laws as tools in the fight against the animal industry. However, the demand to turn animals into citizens or similar subjects of rights is an ideological one. This is especially true against the background that, even among humans, state and law do not guarantee but undermine liberty, equality and fraternity.

## V.

The post-structuralist-anti-speciesist critique of power proceeds in much the same way as the bourgeois moral philosophy, but radicalizes the ethical consideration of human-animal relations. It asks primarily *how the animal was introduced to the world as a social construct* and holds that this construct is continuously reproduced through, for example, religious, literary or journalistic publications and those of the natural and social sciences - from the bible through Descartes to Kant. Speciesism, it claims in unison, is the result of a dualist construction of society and nature, "the large occidental discourse" (Coetzee) of *the human* and *the animal*. Furthermore, advocates of this current highlight that while all those characteristics that had been somehow beneficial to the progress of human civilization - reason, science, will, rationality and so forth - are ascribed to *society*, whereas the side of nature is identified with everything that has been superseded and left behind by this process - spirituality, drives, affectivity, magic and so on. According to this interpretation, such a dualist construction continues within the relation between humans and animals: humans are constructed as reasonable, rational and analysing subjects, which are raised

above animals who are constructed as unreasonable creatures of nature controlled by their drives and affects. Arguing by means of this dualism is the foundation of the post-structuralist-anti-speciesist critique of power to explain the political dominance of humans over animals, the control of the former over the latter as well as the latter's exclusion from democracy.

In its proceeding, the post-structuralist-anti-speciesist approach differs little from that of anti-authoritarian feminists and anti-racists, who examine forms of sexist and racist practices in similar ways. According to this perspective, sexism exists because *the woman* is constructed as an emotional creature driven by affects and requiring protection, whereas *the man* is constructed as being rational and 'cool headed,' strong-minded and able to assert himself; the root of racism, in turn, is the construction of *the other*, for instance *peoples* and religions degraded as primitive in contrast to the superior Western nations.

The radicalness of the anti-speciesist critique of power amounts to showing the duality residing in speciesist ideology, to calling this duality out as an instrument of political domination and to reject passing off the struggle against one ideology as more important than fights against other ideologies. For this reason, autonomist anti-speciesists oppose animal exploitation with the same conviction that they oppose sexism, racism, homophobia and other social mechanisms of exclusion which belie any promise of bourgeois emancipation. This is also why the *unity-of-oppression approach* – known in its current form as *intersectionality* or *total liberation* – is so popular among them.

In purely analytic terms, many observations of anti-authoritarian anti-speciesism are correct. The problem is that they deliver mere descriptions of the dominant discourse on human-animal relations and other forms of oppression, but no explanation as to why the human-animal relation is the way it is, and why the criticized discourse is so predominant. A post-structuralist-anti-authoritarian anti-speciesism can elucidate the character of the dualism of human and animal in bourgeois ideology, that is, how it is present as an ideological form of thinking in discourses that are called upon; it cannot, however, determine the origin or the function of this ideology. It offers no explanation for what exactly created the ideological dualism of *the human* and *the animal* and what mediates it. Whenever anti-authoritarian anti-speciesists allude to this point, their analysis becomes woolly. For this reason, it remains phenomenological, in the end purely formal and, above all, idealist, as it considers mere (wrong) thinking to be the engine of history. What is more: The unity-of-oppression approach confuses the question of the qualitative interrelation between different types of oppression and their genesis with their political-normative assessment. Ultimately, it is capable only of tautological patterns of explanation: Speciesism hence arises from speciesist discourse. Historical materialist theories are mostly taboo. The question of the inner and functional correlation between bourgeois relations of production and racist ideology, for example, is confused with the question of whether capitalism as a mode of oppression is normatively worse than racism or more important an issue – or vice versa. Thus, already the attempt at analysis is rejected.

## VI.

We can thus establish: both anti-speciesist moral philosophy, and its more radicalised version, anti-authoritarian anti-speciesism, as well as the liberal legal criticism offer no useful explanations for the exploitation of animals and its ideological concealment. They can describe speciesist ideology and legal norms in detail, determine their parallels and commonalities with other similarly structured ideologies and norms and also highlight inner contradictions within these ideologies and laws. They cannot tell us, however, how ideological thinking about animals or their status as property came into the world and why in bourgeois capitalist society animal exploitation took on precisely the highly technological, industrialised form which it currently has. In short: they do not help us understand why, in whose interest and how exactly animals are exploited in capitalist society.

Such theoretical deficiencies yield immediate consequences for political praxis: all three approaches deal exclusively with the inner functionality of speciesist reasoning. Accordingly, every form of animal exploitation appears to them as the result of speciesist consciousness – for them the political practice directed at liberating animals is also primarily a question of adequate thinking, moral comport and legal norms. The circle of friends, the butcher, the producer of meat, the animal testing laboratory and its lobbyists – according to those schools, they all must cast off their speciesist thinking for animals to be freed. Social praxis is here above all a question of social consciousness, which is the sum of the consciousnesses of all its separate individuals. Animal exploitation and animal liberation are reduced to a philosophical, epistemological, at best theoretical judicial problem. Moral philosophers, theorists of law and anti-authoritarian-anti-speciesists neither really explain that those who profit from the exploitation of animals have a strong interest in perpetuating current forms of animal exploitation, nor do they explain why they have this interest.

## **VII.**

Here is precisely where Marxism comes into play. The early writings by Marx and Engels discuss the relation of being and consciousness, of nature and society and also of humans and animals. Marx and Engels pose the question in what way historically specific forms of cognition and consciousness interrelate with the way in which society is organized – in other words, the question of the element of mediation between being and consciousness. Their answer, grossly simplified: through social labour in the respective historically specific relations of production, humans produce by way of their material existence their own consciousness as well as the conditions by which this consciousness can and has to change. It is social labour – the active alteration of pre-existing conditions – which molds both nature and the functionality of society, while also creating the basis for the understanding of both. Hence, Marx and Engels say: we must look at what produces the supposed dualism between being and consciousness, between society and nature, what mediates and influences it, what constitutes the inner relation between humans, society and nature – and this something is social labour in its respective historically specific form. Therefore, the contradiction between society on the one hand, and animals and nature on the other does not simply develop in people's minds: capitalism as a historically specific form of organizing social labour produces this contradiction constantly anew: within the capitalist process of production, animals and nature quite literally become a mere resource to exploit.

This way of understanding the relation between humans, society and nature is historical materialist. It is a materialist perspective, because it assumes that social existence forms the basis for consciousness; and its materialism is historical, because it does not consider existence as fixed and invariable but understands it as existence that is produced socially by humans themselves. There also exists an unhistorical materialism, from which Marx and Engels disassociated themselves forcefully. The relation between being and consciousness is not a deterministic one in the sense of a simple schematism, as Engels emphasizes: "The economic situation is the basis, but the various factors of the superstructure — political forms of the class struggle and its consequences, namely constitutions set up by the ruling class after a victorious battle, etc., forms of law and the reflections of all these real struggles in the minds of the participants, i.e. political, philosophical and legal theories, religious views and their expansion of the same into dogmatic systems — all these factors also have a bearing on the course of the historical struggles of which, in many cases they largely determine the form. It is in the interaction of all these factors and amidst an unending multitude of fortuities (...) that the economic trend ultimately asserts itself as something inevitable."

## **VIII.**

If we want to explain, criticize and abolish the exploitation of animals, rather than deal exclusively with the patterns of its legitimization, we must rely on the tools of historical materialism.

In one of their most important texts for this endeavour, *The German Ideology*, Marx and Engels show how humans step by step worked their way out of nature by repressing both inner and outer nature, how they learned to use and subjugate nature and how thereby humans produced the difference between nature and society themselves. According to this analysis, humans produced and domesticated themselves by learning to dominate external and their inner nature through labour. Marx and Engels highlight that humans were originally animals – and that they also remain such. However, through social labour, through the social development of production and distribution and through their socio-historical evolution humans attained a gradual difference from other animals. In Marx's and Engels' words: "Men can be distinguished from animals by consciousness, by religion or anything else you like. They themselves begin to distinguish themselves from animals as soon as they begin to produce their means of subsistence, a step which is conditioned by their physical organization. By producing their means of subsistence men are indirectly producing their material life." At the same time, it would not occur to Marx and Engels to "dispute the ability of animals to act in a planned, premediated fashion," as Engels writes in *Dialectics of Nature*, "but all the planned action of all animals has never succeeded in impressing the stamp of their will upon the earth." Humans, creatures of nature, who have to satisfy natural needs such as food, drink and so forth, hence do not differ categorically but gradually from animals, and this gradual difference is the result of their own politic-economic social praxis.

## IX.

Therefore, historical materialism provides a fruitful approach to explain the history and development of human-animal relations: they are the result of a process of civilization in which humans have worked their way out of nature through social labour and have thereby produced the difference from non-human animals themselves. Unlike post-structuralist anti-speciesism, for example, historical materialism can not only describe the dualism between humans and animals but also explain it. Furthermore, it can identify social labour as the element through which this dualism is constantly reproduced in practice. It follows that the ideological perceptions of animals are not mere figments of imagination but are also actually true, in so far as they have a real material foundation. Speciesist thinking about animals hence is not the basis of animal exploitation, but rather the latter's ideological reflex. Marco Maurizi got to the heart of this: "We do not exploit animals because we deem them to be inferior, rather, we deem animals to be inferior because we exploit them." Yet from this also follows that we have to determine the historically specific forms this relation is organised in. After all, there is no universal social labour that propels the process of civilization, but always only social labour in historically particular forms of organization.

## X.

It is not just the politico-economic relations of current capitalist society that brought about classes that confront each other antagonistically, but also the preceding relations. The conflict between the classes, which results from their opposing interests, remains history's engine to this day. Accordingly, the *Manifesto of the Communist Party* states: "The history of all hitherto existing society is the history of class struggles."

Within contemporary bourgeois-capitalist class society, the organization of social labour rests basically upon two social relations: the organization of labour by way of the market – labour is a commodity – and class relations: workers and capitalists confront each other in the process of production. Capitalists own the means of production (or the necessary capital for their acquisition), they thus buy instruments of labour, subjects of labour and labour force (the latter offered by the wage labourers who have nothing else to sell) and deploy them in the production process. The product re-assumes the form of commodity, which is sold for profit. However, this profit, the accumulation of which is the reason and purpose of capitalist production, does not just fall from the



sky. It can be obtained only by exploiting the workers: they work beyond the point at which they have produced a value equivalent to their wage; they thereby produce a surplus that is not at their own but at the capitalists' disposal. Capitalists, writes Marx in the third volume of *Capital*, build "a veritable freemason society vis-à-vis the whole working class."

Therefore, given that there are both exploiters and exploited in capitalist society, it is not the whole human species who exploits animals. Instead, the exploitation of animals and wage labourers first and foremost takes place following the interests and under the direction of the ruling class. Of course, the exploitation of animals and the exploitation of wage labourers differ qualitatively, and the latter do not necessarily act in solidarity with animals just because they are also being oppressed and exploited. Workers in abattoirs even kill animals. But capitalist relations of production do not only rest upon an antagonism between capitalists and the working class, but also between the ruling class and nature as well as animals. The former conducts the industrially organised exploitation of animals and profits substantially from it. Accordingly, as Marx writes, "The view of nature attained under the domination of private property and money is a real contempt for and practical debasement of, nature." This of course includes animals. To answer the question why not only workers are exploited under capitalism but also animals – if in a particular qualitatively different way – one must examine the position and function that animals inherit in this form of organizing social labour, and hence the specific capitalist form of animal exploitation.

## **XI.**

Animals do not immediately take part in the social relations that are characteristic for capitalism as active individuals – they do not purchase or sell anything on the market, not even their labour: when they expend labour in the process of production they do not receive wages in return. Accordingly, animals do not produce surplus value and are not part of the working class. Their exploitation corresponds to what Marx describes as exploitation of nature: by virtue of bourgeois property rights and the economic power at their disposal, the capitalists make a profit from the ruinous dealing with animals and nature. This is not exploitation in the sense of the labour theory of value. Yet Marx also does not limit the notion of exploitation to the production of surplus value. And he certainly does not conclude from the observation that slaves also do not produce surplus value that they are not exploited.

Since they cannot resist in an organized manner, animals are appropriated just like other natural materials as freely available means of production, that is, as instruments of labour (as though they were machines for the production of eggs, milk, meat and so forth) and subjects of labour (leather, meat for further processing and so on). Wage labourers perform the oftentimes violent appropriation in practice. They execute, under capital's command, the production of surplus value, which in the animal industry encompasses killing and milking as well as performing vivisections and suchlike more. The products that are produced by animals or which they themselves are, are processed further by wage labourers and are finally sold as commodities. The production of profits hence rests not only upon the exploitation of wage labourers, but also on that of animals in particular and of nature in general. For the purpose of maximizing the profits that are realized through the exploitation of animals, capitalists are striving to integrate animals into the process of production as efficiently as possible. Efficiently also means: by abstracting from their qualities, among which is their ability to suffer.

## **XII.**

From all this follows for us that only a historical materialist anti-speciesism proves capable of comprehensively explaining and analysing human-animal relations, which upon closer inspection reveal themselves today as relations of exploitation and domination between capital on the one hand

and the proletariat, animals and nature on the other. A historical materialist anti-speciesism opens up new perspectives for the analysis and critique of bourgeois class society, and it identifies areas in which the capitalist order proves vulnerable and which need to be targeted in order to liberate animals from exploitation.

Indeed, one cannot conclude from the critique of political economy that animals would automatically be liberated within a socialist or communist society. Yet, the struggle against the rule of capital and its expropriation are necessary preconditions in order to enable people to collectively cast the decision: we will liberate the animals!

As long as the relation of capital persists and with it the control of the ruling class over what is produced, as well as how and by what means, capital will appropriate nature and incorporate everything into the process of valorisation from which one cannot save oneself or take a stand against.

### **Why Marxism must be anti-speciesist**

#### **XIII.**

For Marxists, much of what has been said so far is not new. Historical materialism and the Marxian critique of political economy are after all the guiding principle of their economic and political analyses. They could therefore shrug their shoulders and tell the animal liberationists: well spotted, now stop with the moralizing and start fighting capitalism with us. And they would have good reasons for this!

We think, however: If one is serious about historical materialism, then one must acknowledge that humans and animals do not only have a shared history. Above all, the oppressed, exploited classes and animals have the same enemy, who profits from and is responsible for their exploitation while also organizing – in different ways – their oppression: the ruling class. In addition, Marxists need to recognize that due to its damaging social and ecological effects the current extent of animal production is objectively irrational and obstructs social progress.

#### **XIV.**

The current level of the development of productive forces does not just allow us to think about resolving the socially produced suffering of animals and to pose the question of including them in the struggle for liberation. A glance at the carbon footprint of the meat industry or its mindless consumption of natural resources also highlights the urgent necessity to develop a Marxist position on the social dealing with animals. The contradiction between capitalism and nature has reached a scale today that threatens the principal survival of the human species – to which industrialised animal production makes a significant contribution.

Today, the exploitation of animals is not only objectively unnecessary, but irrational and counter-progressive. It causes excessive and ever-growing consumption of resources such as water and soy, which are not used for meaningful purposes but are deployed in the production of meat, milk and eggs, and which are not at all rationally distributed. The ecological damages caused by clearing rain forests, by monoculture cultivation or by the pollution of water are already partially irreversible. Therefore, whoever believes that they can ignore the production of meat or even transpose it into a socialist operation, is taken in by the naïve and romanticized image of industrialized food production that the capital lobby groups are promoting. The conversion of the food and meat industry into ecologically sustainable, vegan and socially planned production, in contrast, would be a timely

socialist demand.

It is well-known that the utilization and consumption of animals plays an important part in the history of human civilization. This, however, does not warrant its continuation to the present day: today's productive forces do not only permit sympathy for the suffering of animals, but they also make it possible and necessary to restructure the relations of production accordingly. And, as the present theses in this paper ought to prove, Marxists have no reasonable cause not to do so.

The fact that the technological potential of developed capitalism enables historical progress should not hide the fact that this potential also allows for capacious destruction: it contains the possibility for liberation and at the same time for total reification, disregard and annihilation of life. If modern productive forces shall no longer be destructive forces but means for the unfolding of progress and well-being, those who have a mutual interest in this must join forces. They need to change the social relations, so that the productive forces are no longer deployed for the profit of few, but instead be developed and applied for the benefit of all. That is why we say: Marxists and animal liberationists should join forces in their struggle for a revolutionary, truly civilizing project – the liberation of humans, animals and nature.

## **XV.**

In contrast to idealist conceptions of history, historical materialists assume that not ideas, but class struggles are the engine of human history. This struggle is based on the fact that within class societies the interests of classes which antagonistically oppose each other can never be reconciled – the antagonism can merely be disguised, or, rather, be suppressed by way of ideological mechanisms, religion, politics, law and so on. The ruling class is at pains to assure as much, for example by imposing their ideas as the dominant ideas.

Just as there are qualitative differences in the functions animals and wage labourers have within the process of production and in the process of their exploitation, the role animals inherit in the struggle against the ruling class is also different from that of the wage labourers. Wage labourers can organize to defend themselves, plan strikes and demonstrations or think about a liberated society. Above all, however, in contradistinction to animals, they can analyse the social conditions under which they are being exploited and dominated and, consequently, derive concrete measures to organize their own liberation. For this reason, the working class can be the subject of its own liberation. Animals, in contrast, can only be objects of liberation.

When it comes to the question of animal liberation, traditional Marxists often bring up this difference between wage labourers and animals. They argue that no historical necessity for the liberation of animals can be deduced from a systematically reflected social analysis. This is correct: when it comes to its implementation, animal liberation is essentially a politico-economic question – its necessity cannot be derived immediately from an analysis of capital. Yet the situation with regard to abolishing wage slavery is not significantly different. As a historical necessity, organized class struggle from below can neither be deduced from the analysis of capital relations and the realization that class struggle is the driving force of history. It also only exists if and when wage labourers politically decide to take it up.

Revolutionary Marxists not only analyse the modern mode of production. They also make the political decision to fight against their subjugation to capital based on their experiences, their suffering, their consciousness that they have of capitalist exploitation and their knowledge of the “material conditions, which alone can form the real basis of a higher form of society, a society in which the full and free development of every individual forms the ruling principle,” as Marx writes.

Whoever has accepted that liberation is necessary (at all) to end socially produced suffering and exploitation has no reason – other than an ideological one – to exclude animals from this endeavour. The analysis of capital relations as central relations of exploitation and domination in today's society shows that the production of capitalist profits is not solely based upon the exploitation of wage labourers, but also upon the exploitation of animals (and nature in general). Capitalist production, in which the interaction between society and nature is organized in order to maximize profits, simultaneously saps the original sources of all wealth: "the soil and the labourer" (Marx). An uncompromising struggle for the abolishment of this relation must therefore include the struggle for the liberation of animals and nature.

## **XVI.**

Thus, once one has decided to fight for liberation, there is no reason why one undertakes everything to end socially produced suffering, while at the same time excluding animals from this goal (according to some Marxists this is even the case in communism). Indeed, despite all qualitative differences in the exploitation of wage labourers and animals: both humans and animals alike have the capacity to suffer – even though it constantly takes on different forms. It would be inconsistent and a product of false consciousness to set a clear and absolute distinction between humans and animals where this capacity is concerned, something which has remained their commonality in spite of the gradual differences that have been developed socio-historically.

At this point, many Marxist comrades object saying that all the talk of suffering is moralism, and that morals cannot provide the foundation for a class conscious anti-capitalist politics. After all, one cannot fight the bourgeoisie with empathy or appeals to sympathy, but with an organization and a deliberate political line developed on the grounds of a concrete analysis of the concrete situation. And this is correct, but even so, they make two mistakes: they misjudge the historical materialist significance of suffering and confuse the genuine existence of morality with bourgeois moralism.

The suffering we are writing about here is not an idealistic, but a historical materialist category. It is not a kind of suffering like lovesickness or toothache, but a suffering which is grounded necessarily in society's organization, in its relations of production, and accordingly can and must be alleviated and potentially abolished. The will to do precisely this is an essential propulsion of class struggle and solidarity – it is part and parcel of historical materialism's spark. To neglect the suffering in Marxist theory means accordingly to negate an important element of its foundation.

Even politics in the best Marxian sense is initially motivated by morals, for the simple reason that, as we have demonstrated, the suffering under (wage) slavery and exploitation is a catalyst of the search for possibilities to abolish capitalism. The realization that the production of exploitation, oppression, imperialism and suchlike is inherent to capitalism, or, in other words: that it spawns conditions under which we suffer, causes Marxists to analyse and criticize society and, on this basis, to do revolutionary politics.

We can hence establish: Marxists are also driven by a moral impulse, which is essential for the decision to become politically active as well as to promote political messages. Yet they do not stop there. Rather, they realize the political and economic limitations of empathy and make the experience of suffering the starting point of a historical materialist analysis of society. Thereby, they derive the political necessity to organize themselves not exclusively from the exploited's collective experience of suffering, but from the understanding of the objective position wage labourers occupy in the social fabric – and which possibilities for a class struggle from below arise from this.

This is the difference between morality and moralism: revolutionary morals understand that a "really human morality which stands above class antagonisms and above any recollection of them becomes

possible only at a stage of society which has not only overcome class antagonisms but has even forgotten them in practical life" (Engels).

## **XVII.**

As long as the class antagonism is not overcome, the alienation of workers from their product of labour, from themselves, from the social process of production and from nature will also persist. In the animal industry, such alienation needs to be extreme so that wage labourers are able to harm creatures capable of suffering in the process of production, to process them industrially, that is, to kill them. Within capitalist exploitation of animals, we lose the consciousness that we have an essential commonality with animals: that we, too, possess a tormentable body, and that ultimately to be a human also means to be an animal. The suppression of the inner nature of humans is both a condition and a consequence of the capitalist mode of organizing social labour at the same time.

## **XVIII.**

When taking all of this into account, then we also have to conclude: the very indignation we experience in the face of capitalism's brutality that drives us to a Marxist analysis of society and to resistance is the same one that animal liberationists experience in the face of the suffering of animals. The enemy of animals – capital – is also the enemy of humans. As a Marxist, as an anti-capitalist, one must turn this impulse of solidarity into fuel for one's life, and understand and acknowledge the objective position of animals within the capitalist process of production, that is, that they belong to those oppressed creatures at whose expense the ruling class accumulates its wealth. The class struggle for the liberation of animals is the struggle for the liberation of the proletariat.

## **Bündnis Marxismus und Tierbefreiung/Alliance for Marxism and Animal Liberation**

---

## **P.S.**

- MARXISMUS UND TIERBEFREIUNG·SAMEDI 18 AOÛT 2018:  
<https://www.facebook.com/notes/marxismus-und-tierbefreiung/18-theses-on-marxism-and-animal-liberation/797354620467883/>
- Bündnis Marxismus und Tierbefreiung/Alliance for Marxism and Animal Liberation is an association of people active in the animal liberation movement and in the communist left.

---

## **Footnotes**

- [1] Here: [http://www.assoziation-daemmerung.de/wp-content/uploads/2018/08/TP\\_English\\_A6.pdf](http://www.assoziation-daemmerung.de/wp-content/uploads/2018/08/TP_English_A6.pdf)