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## Turning Globalisation On Its Head

This is a call to subversion – subversion of a system that has been tried and tested in various continents to the detriment of whole communities and nations; even to the detriment of communities and certain classes of people in the metropolitan economies. But the purveyors of this discredited system hold the levers of power, and stubbornly persist in supporting the current neo-conservative framework.

**Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri** submit that global social transformation - a global agreement of 'cosmopolitan social democracy' now becomes possible within the new global order where the oppressed can engage in meaningful contemporary forms of resistance striving for liberation and democracy that supercede the limitations of the national democratic form - from state-centric politics towards 'multi-layered global politics'. Negri and Hardt, argue that global radicalism in the areas of social justice, universal human rights, the rule of law and transnational amity remains an exciting force behind all liberation movements. This could be the response to the unwarranted excesses and manoeuvres of the rich nations, a kind of taming of the disorderly and hegemonic forces let loose by free enterprise. Thus turning globalisation on its head. ▶

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## Politics of Subversion

*Shelly Walia*

**Multitude** by Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri; Hamish Hamilton, London; pages 426; £20.  
Price \$27.95



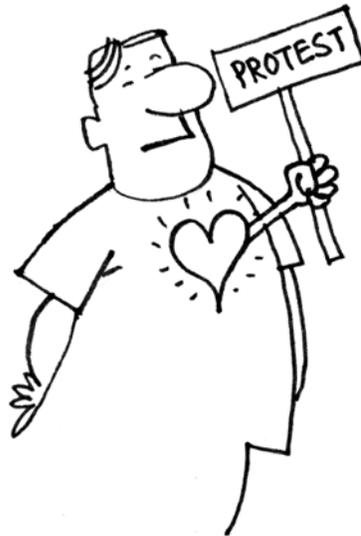
As Eric Hobsbawm, the renowned historian, writes in *The Age of Extremes*, "What has happened has often been quite unexpected. Whatever our reactions, the discovery that we were mistaken about the enlightenment dream of peace and progress in the world must be the starting point for our reflections on the history of our times, of the rise of oppressive ideological or religious dictatorships. This mood, aggravated by the collision course of ethnic and religious strife, continues into the present century. We find ourselves at a historical moment in the process of a major change. Democratisation of violence has become the rule of social behaviour." Let us not remain under the misapprehension that the old imperial order has passed and we are embarking on a 'New World Order' as liberal democracy takes firm root. What we have not anticipated is the economic and political instability, racial and ethnic discord that rages around the globe.

In such a dismal scenario, and in the context of social and cultural pressures of conformity and specialization, one of the ways to engage in social anarchism can be the development and evolution of counter-structures and counter-narratives by rediscovering history suppressed and denied by the state.

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Professor Noam Chomsky has been of the view that the intellectual has to reject the ongoing propaganda of misrepresentation approved by imperialist powers in their fabrication of stereotypes of the Third World.

Rather they should look into the future as visionaries of a utopian world free from abuse and control, desiring to be moral and ideological agents who are never subservient to power. The only path towards assertion of the self is to take up the anti-authoritarian positions manifest in unswervingly critical writings. Hardt and Negri's latest book, *Multitude*, similarly argues that the solution to empire is the recognition of true democracy, "the rule of everyone by everyone, a democracy without qualifiers".



The need of the hour is for the Left to move on from the rather simplistic notions of the rule of the proletariat and classlessness to the idea of the "multitude", to emphasize the "commonality and singularity" of all radical and oppositional discourse. Radical global social transformation now becomes possible within the new global order, where the oppressed can engage in meaningful contemporary forms of resistance striving for liberation and democracy

that supercede the limitations of the national democratic form. At such a juncture of human history, there is nothing nobler than to resist authority. The authors are of the view that "... [j]ust when the powers of Empire are extending ever more broadly and deeply in society, the bases of resistance are proliferating

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everywhere: from movements against big dams in India to movements of landless workers in Brazil, and from protests against patenting life forms to protests against global war".

Dissidence has always been part of human history. People take part in justifiable political protest against their government out of principle and out of loyalty to a cause. The same is true of the relationships between countries. If one looks at the background of social and political dissent, one can see that throughout history there have been "a number of otherwise loyal, upright, law-abiding citizens who believed that they had been driven by their conscience to break the law over certain specific issues". In fact we are all dissidents at one time or another. Protest has to be allowed in society; we live in a world that is constantly changing, and it is by protest that the laws are changed for a more liberal future.

Michael Hardt, a professor at Duke University, United States, and Antonio Negri, formerly a professor of Political Science at the University of Padua and now a freelance writer recently released from imprisonment for his radical political views, have written their second monumental work. Their first book, *Empire*, argued that the nation-state had surrendered to the overriding control of neocolonialism or, as they put it, to the "supranational, multidimensional network of power" they term "empire". Empire, according to them, is constituted by "a global network of collaborating powers, including the dominant nation-states, the major capitalist corporations, the supranational institutions, along with various local and regional powers". All these work together to protect the interests of the powerful, even if they have to engage in a global war.

Underneath the garb of free trade, peace and democracy, there lurks a permanent state of war, exploitation and dominance. This view is in agreement with that expressed by Joseph Stiglitz in his book *Globalisation and its Discontents*. Stiglitz scathingly

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attacks neoliberal policies that impose fiscal austerity on depressed economies. Such policies exacerbate their economic situation by dampening demand further leading to considerable social violence and a corresponding increase in government control. In Indonesia, for example, IMF-imposed food subsidies resulted in riots that engulfed the entire country. High rates of interest and the compulsions of the free trade economy lead to bankruptcy and the economic annihilation of small industry. It is a fact that neoliberal initiatives are more destabilising and prone to lower growth rates. The myth of progress under neoliberal economic theory calls to attention the unsuitability of liberalisation and short-term inflows of foreign capital that only produce economic disaster in developing countries because they ignore the social and political needs of people as well as local resources.

Negri and Hardt are two of the most stimulating and visionary writers of today. In *Multitude* they present the idea of countering 'empire' with the very structures of empire. Learned, controversial, polemical – the book is timely and incisive. According to their argument, empire has helped eradicate borders and link more areas of human activity than ever before, thus making it feasible to initiate a global democracy. In this 'global village', as Marshal MacLuhan talked about many decades ago, there is the possibility that people will come together in various forms of resistance. *Multitude* is reminiscent of Keri Hulme's *The Bone People*. He writes:

*They are nothing more than people by themselves  
Even paired, any pairing  
They would have been nothing more  
Than people themselves.  
But altogether they have become  
The heart and muscle and  
Mind of something perilous and  
New, something strange and growing and great.*

*Together, all together, they  
Are the instruments of change.*

We live in a world where inequality is rising relentlessly, inside each society as well as among nations, engendering pathological insecurity in the face of terrorism and the clash of civilisations. As Vaclav Havel writes, "You do not become a 'dissident' just because you decide one day to take up this most unusual career. You are thrown into it by your personal sense of responsibility, combined with a complex set of external circumstances. You are cast out of existing structures and placed in a position of conflict with them. It begins as an attempt to do your work well, and ends with being branded an enemy of society." It is the creation of this mood, both agitational and inspirational, through global resistance movements of insurrection and counteraction that *Multitude* envisions as the environment for social transformation. Though the writers put forward a thesis that largely supports the notion of the end of borders and international free trade movements, the developing world still struggles against the fences created by the rich. To bring down these barriers activists from separate movements around the world must "recognise each other as allies and struggle together".

This has been pointed out by the Notes From Nowhere Collective, which has continuously supported voices of the masses from below who go unheard and are never allowed to tell their 'little' stories. These efforts are now slowly succeeding in making the powerful in their corporate offices aware of subaltern concerns and the revolutionary fervor of the multitudes.

The fences at Seattle or Gleneagles have to be broken down so that the disparity and disorder created in the name of globalization is checked. The fence is clearly visible when the poor are kept out of shopping malls, or when millions in Brazil are not permitted to grow food while the rich celebrate their

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opulence on land once owned by natives who sang and danced, but where now their children are forbidden. The multitudes have slowly begun to remember their rights and their history. They may not rewrite history but they are seizing their past, present and future from the stranglehold of the powerful and rich, and returning it to where it belongs. For them the personal has become the political.

In this great globalization debate we have to ask the compelling question: "Who rules in whose interests and to what ends?" A global agreement of 'cosmopolitan social democracy' could be the response to the unwarranted excesses and manoeuvres of the rich nations, a kind of taming of the disorderly and hegemonic forces let loose by free enterprise. At the present point in time we are steadily moving from state-centric politics towards 'multi-layered global politics'. And in all this free market dynamics, argue Negri and Hardt, global radicalism in the areas of social justice, universal human rights, the rule of law and transnational amity remains an exciting force behind all liberation movements.

*Multitude* is a confrontational, thought-provoking and much-needed broadside against the slick assumptions of the politics of globalization. It is, as Naomi Klein has pointed out, "an inspiring marriage of realism and idealism".

The sooner we realize and understand the dominant argument of the book, the sooner we will be prepared to confront the full onslaught of the forces of globalization and its underlying exploitative politics. These forces are yet to embed themselves fully in world politics. It is not yet too late. ▶

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