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**Book Review – *Trouble in Paradise: From the End of History to the End of Capitalism*. Žižek, S. (2014). London and New York: Penguin Books.**

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The considerable challenge facing the contemporary Left isn't simply that of combating the advanced mechanisms of expropriation as enabled by global financialised capital. Nor is it the tendential authoritarianism of the post-neoliberal situation. Rather, the primary provocation for the Left lies with the condition of its own dream-life, with the sad state of its utopian aspirations. So incites Slavoj Žižek in *Trouble in Paradise*. Diagnoses of those various mechanisms of capital abound, they being a broad archive to which the text itself adds, 'jumping as it does from our debt-driven economy to the struggle for the control of cyberspace ... from the superego pressure of ideology to the ambiguous role of violence in our struggles' (p. 214). The generation of such analyses remains a central task of the critical commentator, Žižek avers: so long as such diagnoses are declined, the analyst must announce them. That said, and this takes us to the nub of the book, we ought not forget that the task of delivering such diagnoses is, in itself, at risk of seeing us 'tartle' (p. 214). To tartle is, in Scottish parlance, to divert attention from the fact that

there is something significant we have forgotten to say. There's nothing worse, for example, than forgetting in public the name of our partner. Such moments can be covered over, however, and especially so if we're Scottish, with the acknowledgement that we've just 'tartled'. The particular name that is at risk of being forgotten in the current left-leaning clamour for rights, for more progressive taxation regimes, for a greener capitalism and so on is, in Žižek's mind, that of Communism.

The key issue arising around the loss of the name Communism isn't that it can't be said. Indeed, a profusion of new signifiers for the term have abounded in recent decades, as attempts have been made to render the notion current, if not attuned to the tendentious narcissism of neoliberal subjectivity: the 99%; the Precariat; the Commons; co-immunism; radical populism; and so on. Therein lies a swirling problem, in Žižek's mind: such conceptual strategies indicate that former dreams of radical change have become infused with the same state of cynicism criticised of those whose veins pump in synchrony with capital. Think here of criticisms made of ultra-market political parties – like ACT, in the case of Aotearoa New Zealand – who, despite their rhetoric of unremitting personal responsibility, will participate in a manipulation of the electoral system that guarantees them seats in government. Žižek's point is that such criticisms ought not simply be made of interests anathema to those of the Left but, rather, that the same need be applied to the current state of Left-wing utopianism.

Popularising this production of alternative conceptual strategies, is the swathe of horizontalist social movements that have arisen across the societies of late capitalism in the wake of the global financial crisis. It is not the political significance of the expressed discontent which Žižek questions: it is the ability of the movements' participants to stand sufficiently askew to a seeming state of (merely) imagining themselves to believe in radical change. On this point, Žižek finds Lacan's interpretation instructive of Freud on the father who falls asleep while watching over his deceased son's coffin. In Lacan's retelling, the father awakens from his dream-state not because the physical room in which he and the coffin sitting has caught fire (the fact of which might have materialised in the dream) but because of the intrusion into his dream of a realisation that he had been responsible for his son's death. In

this instance, the reality of the fire successfully interrupted the rude Real of the dream, presenting the father with a possible pathway back to his dream-state.

What if, Žižek asks *apropos* of Lacan's interpretation, our problem on the Left today is that we really don't want to see through with our dreams. What if, instead, we have lapsed into practices that seek solace in states of grim reality such that we might elude the raw Real with which the outworking of our utopian dreams will confront us. Think, in this regard, of the challenges Syriza now faces in running a police force that had been fashioned to suppress the very political commitments for which it stands. In the face of such tests, who wouldn't rather wish to withdraw to the cosseting idealism of simple ideological contest on the picket-line between protestors and police?

Successful interruption of the cynical disposition of the Left towards its own dreams can presently only come from one source, Žižek asserts: the return of the Master. (In)famously: the Left needs a Thatcher of its own. The problem of cynicism is a psychical one, and only through the subjectivising work enabled by the transference relation between Master and subject might people, en masse, become enabled to develop into self-organising collectives. We can think in this regard about the productive relationship established by Syriza between itself and the broader left political movement of Greece: membership of Syriza cannot be obtained through an act of signing up to the party: rather, membership can only come through demonstrated participation in grass-roots social reconstruction.

The 'elementary gesture' to be enacted by the Master (p. 186), and which will kick start this transference relation, is not one which promotes identification with their position (as does the Master/Slave relation, common to monotheistic religion). Rather, it is an action that authorises widespread refusal of liberal-democratic capitalism as the ultimate horizon of political imagination. The key mechanism for sidestepping the lure of identification – an attachment which at some point would in all probability see embers enflame of popular hysterical resentment towards, or of cynical resignation in respect of, the Master – concerns a matter of political subjectivity: in what ways might subjectivity develop through the transference relation such that it finds itself enabled to refuse in ways which avoid the lure of simply imagining

itself to eschew. How might subjectivity successfully progress through refusal, where 'through' comes to mean both 'by virtue of' and 'beyond'. Re-phrased in Lacan-ese, how might a subjectivity given to refusal materialise in a manner that exceeds the subject supposed to refuse?

If a kernel exists in this text on that matter, it lies with the sensibility conveyed in its closing thoughts: that Communism does not denote an ideal whose impossibility will always condemn as insufficient our acts of refusal; rather, Communism persists as a dialectical lever upon that which is taken as given, within whose moments of periodic congealing – of historically attuned criticism – we find ourselves enabled to move.