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**Title:** Review of *A new dawn for politics* by Alain Badiou

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## Review of *A new dawn for politics* by Alain Badiou

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Alain Badiou, *A new dawn for politics*, translated by Robin Mackay (Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 2022).

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*A new dawn for politics* is a collection of Alain Badiou's writings from 2016 and 2020 which comprise essays and lectures on the ideological and political situation worldwide and in France. With great precision, he provides a detailed bird's eye view of the real existential dangers facing our planet and humanity today. He delves into the societal movements that erupted in recent years and tries to situate, understand, and critique them in order to explain where to go next within the "logic of ideas and the logic of activism" (p. ix). Ultimately, Badiou seeks to provide us with the ideas and means to bring about *Good*.

It is very clear that Badiou's wish for a rebirth of politics is inherently linked to the ontological questions of humanity and the planet's continued existence which are inevitably raised by globalised capitalism. Technological transhumanism which promised us our salvation, in striving for the Nietzschean Superman, has not made it past Frankenstein's Monster. Inequality, technological exclusion of the poor, private property, and the concentration of capital in the hands of a minority of oligarchs protected by the state "by means of armed forces" has created the backdrop for the "contemporary form of the Neolithic age" (p. 8) – i.e., capitalism – we live in.

Badiou argues that the capitalist organisation of society is especially destructive for the lives of young people who have no alternative but to participate in the so-called progressive, and competitive spirit of the creation of global capital or to drown in a hopeless nihilism. Badiou's

concern for young people is commendable as few from the academic/intellectual world directly confront and approach the problems of today's youth.

The disorientation not just of the lives of young people but of all of us argues Badiou, accompanied by the ideas of Plato and Marx, is the consequence of a false contradiction between the "inevitable exit from the hierarchical symbolic tradition" (p. 20). The opposition between the West and Barbarism is particularly emphasised in the Western media's propaganda yet in reality they are two sides of the same coin; on one side is the affirmation of today's capitalism and on the other is a fascist return to old hierarchies. Badiou notices that this still unresolved dilemma opposing the exit from traditionalism demands that we "must work towards the invention of an egalitarian system," or in other words "the *Communist Idea*" (p. 21). The *Communist Idea* is not based on the state socialism of China or the former USSR, but rather on a new organisation of society oriented towards new values. Nevertheless, traditionalist values are so deeply rooted in many of the world's societies especially among those which reject the West's values primarily because of its secular scientific worldview. The West's ideology which is founded on secularism and egalitarianism is not considered to be morally or cognitively acceptable. Such divisions will be very difficult to overcome even if it is evident that the future demands a new world. Yet Badiou affirms that "one must have the courage to go outside, to see the outside, to understand the people outside, to be with them" (p. 41).

One of the most important elements for new values is the need for an ideology of the future. Badiou proposes an overcoming of the classical

Marxist understanding of ideology as a conflict between the dominant bourgeois ideology and proletarian ideology. Furthermore, he seeks to go beyond the work of Althusser and his concept of “scientific ideology” primarily because the “ideological struggle between idealism, on the side of ideology without universality, and materialism, on the side of science,” (p. 28) is in fact just another manifestation of capitalism’s materialism. In order to overcome the freedom to buy and consume – the only freedom we have – in materialist capitalism, we must become idealists if we are to ever build a new egalitarian system.

Democratic capitalism, which emanates from the contradiction between democratic materialism and conservative materialism, is the foundation of the middle class who in turn supports the political economic oligarchs. In order for the middle class to change its understanding of its own existence outside of capitalism, democracy must be based on a new materialism, that is a dialectical materialism. Dialectical materialism is an “organic movement” (p. 44) which creates an opening for the proletariat to enter the middle class and liberate the democratic process from capitalist materialism.

Badiou often returns to the failure and collapse of the events of the Paris Commune (1871) and the Cultural Revolution in China (1966–1976), to proclaim a universal new beginning which can produce possibilities for a new event to happen. It is crucial to understand that “an event cannot have a universal status if it is solely negative” (p. 52). In other words, the event must not simply be one situation being substituted for another without any qualitative leap forward for society. An example of a negative event is the negation and destruction of the European countries with state socialism in the late 1980s. After the collapse, ex-communist countries had a great possibility to change their political and ideological systems into, as Badiou calls it, a new idea of communism, a new polit-

ical invention, but they did not seize it. Instead, they opted for liberal capitalism, private property, inequalities, corruption – all the worst capitalism has to offer.

As someone from (Former) Yugoslavia, a country with state socialism that was not behind the Iron Curtain, its collapse and catastrophic destruction left a feeling of despair that will never leave me. It is true that political, economic, and social change was inevitable at the beginning of the eighties, but the ruination of the entire existing system and the forced adoption of capitalist democracy through war and conflict is exactly what Badiou refers to as the extension of capitalist democracy. It is therefore imperative to find a way to bring about a “new dawn for politics” which must prevent “capitalist modernity” and thus break “with what today is the planetary force of the desire of the West” (p. 63). This is the West, which in times of crisis, always leans perilously towards fascism and then lays waste to the planet and humanity.

Badiou concludes that it is obvious that we need new movements in order to overcome the current political deadlock. Unfortunately, all the mass movements – from the Arab Spring to the protests in Hong Kong, Brazil, California, Iran – lack a “common political proposition that is clearly free of the constraints of contemporary capitalism” (p. 105). These movements opposed political leaders, who they sought to replace, but they had no proposition for a way out of the situation they were protesting; no one proposed a change of system. To effect such a major change, a complete understanding of the world we live in is essential. And that is why Badiou asks what, exactly, is the situation of the world today? How many worlds do we have? Just one? Maybe two as in the religious sphere? Or maybe none? Finally, what would a “desirable world” (p. 116) be? Surely it would be a “single world” (p. 116) answers Badiou. But “neither the real world of capitalist globalisation nor the desirable world of

realised communism nowadays assembles sufficient existential options to serve as the supports of a *single world*” (p. 116). Here Badiou moves toward a politics of the world with an understanding that the existence of the world itself is at stake and that the only way to make a world exist is to create a “world of living subjects, a world of the plenitude of existence”(p.117).

Badiou strongly emphasises that living subjects need not, and should not strive to be the same. Sameness is not an option for the new world which still has yet to happen and yet to exist. He believes that the desire for identity in this new world is completely different from today’s democratic capitalism. The desire for identity should not be based on the accumula-

tion of capital and material goods, but rather it should be an affirmative and creative process adhering to Nietzsche’s directive to “become who you are” (p.136).

*A new dawn*, is Badiou’s great attempt to show us how to think, to act, and to write as revolutionaries in order to create a society, planet, a new age where *Good* prevails: “[W]e have known that the new age must begin, the age of unprecedented technologies for all, of work distributed equally to all, of the sharing of everything and of education that affirms the genius of all” (p. 11). And yet as simple as this seems, the wall standing between us and a new dawn of existence has never been higher.

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