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Covid-19 and Capital: Labour Studies and Nonhuman Animals – A Roundtable Dialogue

Charlotte Blattner
University of Bern

Kendra Coulter
Brock University

Dinesh Wadiwel
University of Sydney

Eva Kasprzycka
University of British Columbia

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Abstract

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Covid-19 and Capital:
Labour Studies and Nonhuman Animals —
A Roundtable Dialogue

With

Charlotte Blattner

University of Bern

Kendra Coulter

Brock University

Dinesh Wadiwel

University of Sydney

Moderated by

Eva Kasprzycka

University of British Columbia

Eva Kasprzycka: *Over its development, it has been made apparent that the COVID-19 crisis exacerbates pre-existing crises of class stratification and racial oppression. The pandemic has also exposed the profound interdependence of multiple forms of oppression and that exposure contained a kernel of radical hope. Leftists observed a silver lining during the societal ‘pause’ of a multi-nation lockdown, both for the climate and extinction crises, because those who weren’t entirely aware of animal agriculture and live animal markets’ capacity to pose serious public health risks became more so. In an article published in the Financial Times, environmental and political activist Arundhati Roy spoke prophetically of a portal opening onto a different future because ‘[h]istorically, pandemics have forced humans to break with the past and imagine their world anew’. No one thought a virus would be the event to halt global industry and consumption; but with it came a surprising form of optimism. Now, over a year later, the virus’s amplification of existing social and economic inequalities has obscured sanguine anticipation of ‘a turn’ in social justice. In some parts of the world, life is now returning to ‘normal’; by which I mean the capitalist modes of production are continuing ‘business as usual’ and may even be accelerated—or even multiplied—to make up for lost time and profits. Reflecting on this past year, how have you thought about the politics of COVID-19 in light of your work on animal labour and animal labour movements?*

Kendra Coulter: It’s a very difficult time. With respect to the intersections of animals and labour, we could talk about animals’ engagements in work (of which there are a broad range), people’s work with/for animals (of which there is a vast continuum), and/or interspecies and multispecies work (also involving many, many examples). Prior to the pandemic, when considering this full terrain of animals and labour, there was the good, the bad, the ugly, and the more complicated. That remains true, although some of the bad and ugly have received more attention. I will focus on two or three particularly important dimensions of this.

Greater mainstream and public attention is being paid to slaughterhouses, at least in the global north. The alarming rates of COVID-19 infection have forced more members of the media to at least briefly highlight that and those which most people and societies would prefer to forget and ignore.

The discussion has tended to concentrate on the immediate health dangers to human workers for obvious reasons and on slaughterhouses and the factory farms that fuel them as breeding grounds for the viruses and bacteria that will cause future pandemics. Less noted is that these are workplaces that have long been physically, psychologically, and emotionally damaging to workers; most of whom are poor people from local, often racialized communities, and/or from neighbouring regions or countries, and oftentimes are desperate for paid work and/or the chance at citizenship. No-one dreams of working in a slaughterhouse, even if the pay is a bit higher than the minimum wage.

I saw less discussion of the fact that these are workplaces that always mean terror and death for the animals – an almost incomprehensible numbers of individuals. These are not workplaces we want to defend or simply reform in the name of jobs; these are workplaces we want to replace with more ethical and sustainable alternatives that provide humane jobs as part of reshaping how food is produced.

In response to the second part of the question, I wouldn't argue that there are animal labour movements. The labour movements in most countries haven't included animals in their webs of solidarity. Back in 2014, I synthesized a number of key practical ways unions could begin to incorporate interspecies solidarity in their work as an invitation, challenge, and starting place for union leaders and members. But, so far, little has been done by unions to consider animals' wellbeing. Sweden's largest union, Kommunal, organized a wonderful seminar on caring for animal co-workers which was a promising step but highly unusual. And this past fall I was also invited to speak to the British Columbia Nurses' Union's human rights and equity conference about animals, care, and solidarity. Again, this was historic and really promising, but remains an exception.

Animal advocacy movements, which, of course, vary significantly within nations and around the world, may or may not consider the wellbeing of workers or the need for alternatives to replace the jobs in the many destructive and oppressive industries we want to see eliminated. Many do not ... yet. So, as I've argued elsewhere and often, critique is not enough. We need alternatives which recognize that people need income, and that while it is a small

minority who extract profit from industrialized animal destruction, it is disproportionately poor and working-class people who are paid to actually do the damaging and violent labour.

I'll digress for now with one last comment which I expect both Dinesh and Charlotte will contest somewhat, but I find the growing and diversifying investment in cultured, lab-grown meat and dairy to be a source of hope for animals and the planet – and hopefully for humane job creation. Of course, I want a more democratized food system, and not to simply reproduce inequities present in what Barbara Noske originally called the animal-industrial complex. I am a dreamer, but I am also a pragmatist who will accept better over worse.

The amount and variety of research, development, and investment (some from public, but mostly from private sectors) in cultured meat and dairy have the potential to make significant and substantial changes that largely eliminate some of the worst animal suffering in the world. I am particularly interested in organizations that have made (or are making) the transition from animal-killing to plant-based or cultured alternatives; how farms and rural communities can thrive in a post-factory farming world through different kinds of food cultivation as well as broader reconceptualizing and reshaping initiatives like care farms – and how fewer but happier animals will figure; and how the public sector and public policy could help propel these transitions and promote more fairness and equity therein. Because of technological developments, investment, and the will of a growing number of food leaders, I do think factory farming's days are numbered. That is a powerful source of hope.

Dinesh Wadiwel: I think Kendra has provided a great summary of some of the dynamics of the COVID-19 crisis. In terms of my work, it has been an interesting period for me to refine some of my thinking around the relation of food animals to capitalism. A view I have been building over the last few years is that we need to see the capitalist food system as a 'metabolic' relation which ties animals, humans and capital together within an interconnected form of circulation. Our food system reproduces hundreds of billions of land and sea animals every year. This requires one form of animal labour; namely, the reproductive or, as Sophie Lewis describes this work, the 'gestational' labour of millions of animals who are forced to give birth continually

to animals who enter the food system. This birthed ‘labour force’ of billions of animals are required to spend their life engaged in a metabolic labour to produce their own bodies as products, which will be transformed into food commodities after their lives are extinguished. These food commodities become the means of subsistence for human populations which, as we know over the last 50 to 100 years, have represented a growing proportion of human diets. By and large this whole production process is owned by private interests – and often large-scale corporate interests – who are incentivised to produce by the profits available within these industries; or, in Marxist terms, by the continuing capacity to draw surplus from both human and nonhuman labour within production and to use this surplus to accumulate capital. As I have said, the products of animal agriculture become the means of subsistence for human populations and thus serve a different benefit for capital as this food allows for the reproduction of not just human labour power, but human populations themselves. Capitalist animal agriculture thus orchestrates, in the name of profit, a vast interaction between animal and human biological populations. This whole process, which is ‘biopolitical’ insofar as it enables the endless cycles of life and death in animal reproduction, has a functional aim in reproducing or fostering human life. Hence, I would describe this value-producing activity under capitalism as ‘metabolic’ in nature because these populations are brought together within the circuits of combined organism. COVID-19 has highlighted another dimension of this global metabolism; namely, that our current systems of industrialised food supplies and distribution bring together human and nonhuman biological populations in a way that auto-produces zoonotic disease, which the whole metabolic system must continually attempt to immunise itself against in order to avoid the catastrophe of global pandemic.

I have described all of this to highlight that, at least for me, the crisis of COVID-19 is an illustration of the extent to which human populations are embedded within the cycles of capitalist animal agriculture and the unique opportunity of this moment for animal advocates to highlight the problems with our food system and effect change.

Perhaps the greatest disappointment for me though today is that it feels like the opportunity has gone past us. As Kendra indicates, while the spotlight has been shone upon animal agriculture, this illumination has been selective and partial. Although the attention to

low-wage human workers – and the labour conditions they face – has been encouraging, we haven't seen large scale interest in the *interaction* between a human workforce and animal labour force. Of course, these two work forces face very different forms of violence. However, both workforces share the reality of exploitation: they are deployed in order to accumulate profits for capitalist food systems.

Of most concern to me is the overwhelming sense that the desire for things to go back to 'normal' is everywhere. The imperative to keep animal agriculture producing through the pandemic (with global scenes of human workers being forced to return to unsafe workplaces) tells us about the low value placed on the lives of human workers within the food system. The fact that in many jurisdictions, and certainly in the US, these human workers are largely people of colour, tells us that this invalidation of human lives is often distinctly racialized. The lack of wide-scale debate over the relationship between animal agriculture and zoonotic disease tells us that by and large there seems to be a perception that not even the risk of another pandemic is enough motivation for substantial change in the direction of our food systems. Finally, the continuing lack of interest in the conditions that nonhuman animals face within animal agriculture – that is, the inherent forms of violence which accompany the processes of reproduction, life and death which I have described – tells us that animal lives and flourishing remain of little moral or political concern globally. I think all of this is sobering for pro-animal movements. COVID-19 is a genuine crisis which highlights the deep contradictions within a system of food production that is founded upon the twin violences of hierarchical anthropocentrism and capitalism. It's incredibly disappointing that today we are confronted by a generalised desire to simply go back to how things were. I at least have some optimism about the future alliances that might be possible: perhaps, the ground has been laid for animal advocates to work more closely with labour rights advocates from a shared platform which sees animal agriculture as dangerous, deadly and exploitative for human and nonhuman beings. The international tendencies of the Black Lives Matter movement, at least insofar as they have highlighted the structural racism which produces forms of life invalidation, may offer another opportunity for animal advocates to be involved with a growing global conversation on racial capitalism.

Charlotte Blattner: We typically like to think we're a 'fully developed' society that has learned from past crises, natural disasters, grave societal conflicts, wars, and other threatening large-scale events – a society that can handle and deal with such emergencies with relatively little effort. COVID-19 was a sobering wake-up call in this respect, forcing us to realize that we, as a global society, tend to misjudge critical situations, underestimate the negative effects of our actions, and, simultaneously, overestimate our capacities to solve existing or emerging problems. At the same time, we disregard the fact that, in doing so, we marginalize billions of other (human or nonhuman) beings and that this has direct, negative repercussions on our own lives. In this process, we (wrongly) perpetuate the understanding of ourselves as individuals that are disconnected from our natural environment and separate from the animal world. The COVID-19 crisis cuts through the core of some of the most foundational questions affecting (co-)existence on this planet, including: What constitutes a state of emergency and for whom? Who makes up our perceived society? Whom are we considering in emergency plans and where are the bounds of our society?

So far, as Kendra points out, the focus of our concern about this Corona crisis has been for humans. This response was positive insofar as some marginalized humans, many of whom are disenfranchised workers, have been receiving broad support from society and, at times, from political leaders (Terpitz). Because slaughterhouses have had to remain open during the Corona crisis, they have become COVID-19 hotspots, from Smithfield plants in Sioux Falls, to Tyson facilities in Iowa, to Tönnies factories in Germany; the percentage of people infected with the virus continuously fluctuated between 40 and 60 percent. These events brought the privileged consumer society face-to-face with the fact that marginalized individuals – often people with migration backgrounds or racialized minorities – are forced to keep working despite the significant risks the pandemic poses to their health and lives. These workers experienced solidarity through societal outcry and clear demands by politicians that safety measures be established and guaranteed.¹ Acts of solidarity also emerged as knowledge spread about their precarious working conditions, including exposure to hazards, the lack of protection against unfair dismissal, lack of overtime pay, denial of bathroom breaks, and other deprivations.

Though the public spotlight was now on slaughterhouses, and with it on practices transforming billions of chickens, cows, sheep, pigs, and other land animals each day into packaged goods, animals have clearly remained out of the bounds of societal concern. As many industries were closed during the global lockdown (including hospitality, construction, arts and entertainment), few seriously considered shutting down the animal-industrial complex. Almost everywhere, breeding facilities, feeding lots, fattening pens, and slaughterhouses continued to produce animal cruelty unabated; a blithe espousal of ‘business as usual’. The COVID-19 crisis revealed the animal-industrial complex as a vast and unstoppable machinery. As restaurants, canteens, and bars closed during the spring of 2020, slaughterhouses sometimes rejected animals for slaughter for lack of purchasing customers. Rather than caring for these animals, companies felt that they had to get rid of these ‘excess’ animals as soon and as cheaply as possible. In Iowa, whistle-blowers have exposed a new method of mass-extinction known as the ‘ventilation shutdown’ where pigs suffocate and roast to death as farmers turn up the heat in the barns and fill them with steam (Greenwald). Their death is gruesome and slow: animals fight for their lives for hours; the few individuals who survive until the next morning are shot by farmers. In Fall 2020, a mutated COVID-19 strain was found on five different mink farms in Denmark, whereupon the government decided that ‘resolute action is needed’. In just a few days, the army, police, and home guard were mobilized to kill the country’s entire population of 17 million minks by gassing them, which causes minks prolonged suffering. Publicly, this method was lauded as the ‘safest’ option for humans because it leaves the mink’s skin unbroken, hence, profitable. The government promised to fully compensate mink farmers for these ‘heavy repercussions’ at a total of €1.74 billion (Podesta). Repercussions for minks were nowhere mentioned. In this world, animals, though recognized as sentient beings, are denied their own lifeworlds. Their desires, social bonds, suffering, and their labour all remain invisible.

Looking at animals used in research, we are observing a steep increase in research procedures on nonhumans since the pandemic’s emergence. Earlier efforts to finally ban research on animals or begin to transition towards better and (more) effective methods were overtaken by the narrative that pandemics necessitate animal research. As all eyes remain on the global race for developing vaccines that are effective and efficient, several countries have relaxed

their ethics review standards. Although, some humans expressed solidarity with animals used for research purposes. The International Coalition of Medicines Regulatory Authorities (ICMRA), for example, agreed that ‘it is not required to demonstrate the efficacy of the SARS-CoV-2 vaccine candidate in animal challenge models prior to proceeding to [first in human] FIH clinical trials’. The University of Oxford was one of the first to follow this as it tested COVID-19 vaccines in humans without prior animal trials. The European Medicines Agency and European Commission also expressed their commitment to advancing animal-free methodologies for drug development and safety assessment during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Across the board, however, the COVID-19 crisis has made clear that most animals are outside the bounds of our concern. It is self-evident that we rely on animals as our unpaid, forced workforce, even in times of crisis. We deploy and erase them as we see fit. Our justifications are absent – flimsy at best – yet they seem to suffice.

Eva: As you are all no doubt aware, the world’s first in vitro meat restaurant opened last autumn in Tel Aviv and in vitro meat was just legalized for sale in Singapore. Kendra raised the possibility of in vitro meat as a source of some hope at this historic moment. Dinesh and Charlotte, do you see in vitro meat as a source of hope or, alternately, are there other beacons of hope that you see for animals at this point in time?

Dinesh: I am certainly less optimistic than Kendra about cultured, lab-grown meat and dairy. While I don’t think we can ignore the growing corporate interest in meat and dairy alternatives, I am not clear on whether these developments will lead to a reduction in the number of animals used, made to suffer and killed by animal agriculture. Over the last decade we have seen a growth in plant-based food availability within many countries and an accompanying expansion in vegan cultures. Unfortunately, this has not, as far as I can see, led to a reduction in per capita global consumption of animal-based foods. The figures from the UN Food and Agriculture Organisation certainly paint a different global picture, with increasing per capita consumption of animal-based foods over this period, and lots of evidence around the world of continuing expansion of animal agriculture, such as the growth of intensive meat and dairy production in

China and Russia, and the ever-expanding systems of industrial scale aquaculture (*OECD-FAO Agricultural Outlook* 26-8). It is possible to imagine a future where viable cultured or lab grown meat or dairy products become available and might start to replace animal-based foods. However, it seems to me equally possible to imagine that cultured, lab-grown meat and dairy will simply eventuate in another set of niche consumer products which are available amongst an ever diversifying and expanding palette of choices for those who are willing to pay, with minimal tangible global change to the number of animals used, made to suffer and put to death by animal agriculture. I am also a little sceptical because cultured, lab-grown meat and dairy appears today as a ‘techno-fix’ to the problem of animal agriculture. I am not clear on whether we should invest energies towards a technological solution to structural forms of violence, exploitation and destruction. This dynamic is resonant with other political contexts where technological innovation is posed as a solution to a social, political or economic problem. For example, we should be rightly suspicious of techno-fixes as a response to climate change, imagining that somehow the market will produce a high-tech solution to anthropogenic global warming. Climate change is directly connected with capitalist industrialisation and the mass-production and accumulation for profit that is inherent within this system. We could fantasise that the market will produce a techno-fix to climate change, but this misses the source of the problem in the first place. In a similar and connected vein, if the rapid expansion of industrial animal agriculture is the outcome of a hierarchical anthropocentrism shaking hands with the limitless planet destroying drives of global capitalism, then I am not sure how much faith to place in the market to deliver cultured, lab-grown meat and dairy as a solution to this problem. However, I stress that I cannot see into the future; it is possible that the growth of interest in lab-based solutions to meat and dairy will make significant change possible, and certainly pro-animal movements must carefully evaluate every opportunity available to dismantle animal agriculture.

Charlotte: There are certainly glimpses of hope – key instances in which awareness was created and humans felt solidarity with non-human animals – even if not to a degree commensurate with the terror and despair animals are forced to endure every day.

To take some examples, people showed solidarity toward bats and pangolins who had been blamed for spreading COVID-19. As residents in San Francisco, Indonesia, North-Western Peru, and China asked for information on how to burn bats and destroy their habitats (which in many cases was followed through)², global leaders in research morphed into bat and pangolin advocates (Dalton).³ Using expert knowledge, these advocates argued that denouncing individual animals – whether bats or the pangolins – as scapegoats for the COVID-19 crisis is neither useful nor justified. As they showed, it was not the bats who caused the pandemic, but our treatment of them. There is no way to tell whether scientists’ calls were effective, but the search for animal culprits seems to have ended.

Scientists also showed solidarity with animals when they argued that pandemics will increase in frequency and spread further unless and only if we are willing to fundamentally change how we treat animals. This is what over 120 Central European scientists in the fields of epidemiology, biology, and chemistry did in May of 2020 when they addressed the public in an open letter (*Le Temps*). The scientists advised that problematic human-animal interactions like those in Wuhan be restricted or prohibited, that clearing rainforests and human invasions of animal territory be halted, and that nature be regenerated, not destroyed. Equally worrying, according to the research group, is the massive extinction of species caused by changes in the natural environment, loss of habitat, depletion of resources, widespread air, water, and soil pollution, and climate change. Humanity today is confronted with the consequences ‘résultant de ses choix économiques et politiques’. In short, our own economic and political decisions led us to this impasse. The United Nations Environment Programme [UNEP] and the International Livestock Research Institute [ILRI] followed suit in July 2020, releasing a joint report on the prevention of future zoonotic diseases (Randolph). ‘The science is clear that if we keep exploiting wildlife and destroying our ecosystems, then we can expect to see a steady stream of these diseases jumping from animals to humans in the years ahead,’ said UNEP Executive Director Inger Andersen.

Solidarity with farm animals increased during this crisis, especially after it became public that concentrated factory farms operate as breeding grounds for novel pathogens. According to the newest 2020 report by the Farm Animal Investment Risk and Return [FAIRR] initiative, as

many as 70% of the world’s largest listed meat, fish and dairy companies are demonstrably at ‘high-risk’ of promoting future zoonotic pandemics. The joint UNEP and ILRI report is clear on the need to transform factory farming when identifying major trends driving zoonotic diseases such as the increased demand for animal protein and the rise in intense and unsustainable farming. I thought I had finally seen a turn in the media in June 2020, when *Der Spiegel*, a magazine well-known in German-speaking countries for its investigative journalism, published a special issue titled ‘Tatort Tönnies’ [Crime Scene Tönnies]. The front page depicted a chalk outline of a pig’s body on the kill floor. Scattered on the floor are bits and traces of evidence; next to the outline, on the left, there is a butcher’s knife – a murder weapon as the blood dripping from the blade seems to suggest. Toward the right of the page, there are metal mesh butcher gloves and a used mask. Piecing these identification markers together indicates the pig was murdered on the kill floor (fig. 1).

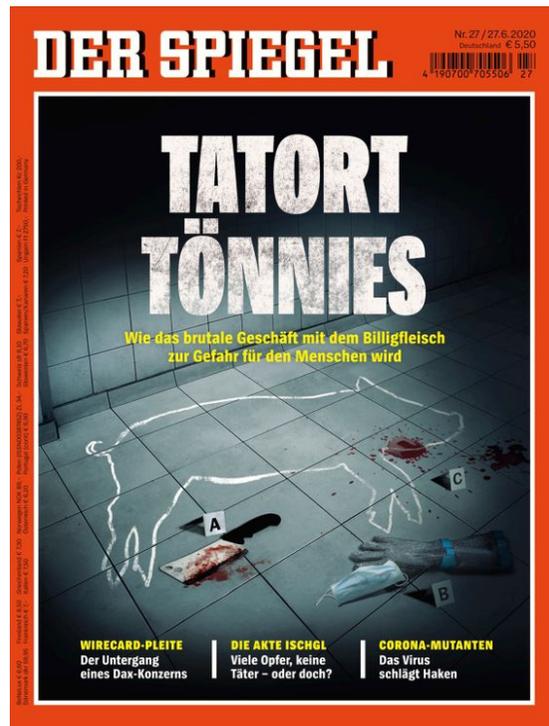


Fig 1. ‘Tatort Tönnies’ @Spiegel.de

Finally, I thought, public media understands slaughterhouses for what they are – a crime scene for animals. But as I read on, I realized this was about how ‘cheap meat’ threatens human values: human lives, livelihoods, and human labour. And while this is all worthy of journalistic coverage, I considered it a missed chance to more broadly address the much richer interconnections between human and animal oppression plaguing slaughterhouses, and the entangled exploitation of human and animal workers. Journalists did not fail to mention ‘the poor pigs’ and underlined that time pressures result in ‘inadequate’ stunning, but this is not the type of interspecies solidarity we are seeing elsewhere (for example, in sanctuaries). And it certainly is not the type of interspecies solidarity that would flow from (fully) recognizing animal labour.

However, creating awareness for how this crisis affects animals and expressing a commitment to do better in the future, for animals, too, is not always sufficient to change practices, especially if they are deeply ingrained in human culture and earn significant revenues for the most powerful people. In these cases, effecting change is more complicated – it takes longer and requires systemic, if not seismic shifts. Typically, our hopes tend to flatten at this point: How are we to advance animals’ interests – as a democratic minority – when whole economies are built on the backs of animals?

Eva: It's difficult to distinguish social events and effects that belong to the pandemic and those that belong to capitalism or systemic racism. The pandemic intensifies forms of suffering experienced by those who are poor, black, brown, disabled, and whose health conditions are already compromised. It's little wonder that BLM's uprising in response to George Floyd's murder should happen in the midst of a pandemic that disproportionately lets poor or racialized people die. Just like police violence, government economic relief strategies and health systems determine which lives matter. The vaccine and its distribution enacts this kind of violence on a global scale where rich countries have bought enough doses to vaccinate their population multiple times over. As a result, it is likely that many countries will not see mass-immunisation until 2024. How would you critique COVID-19's credo in 'economic health' and its proximity to 'active killing' or 'letting die'?

Charlotte: Countries have invested trillions of dollars to deal with the consequences of the COVID-19 crisis. In just the first two months, governments announced \$10 trillion in investment, which was three times greater than the response to the 2008–09 financial crisis (Cassim, et al.). In the US, the bills for cushioning the impact of the COVID-19 virus were one of the costliest relief efforts. Some countries, like Japan, committed to spending as much as 40% of their GDP. Stimulus packages in all shapes and forms, from guarantees, loans, value transfers to companies and individuals, to deferrals and equity investments were issued to maintain financial stability. In many instances, this money tracked existing vectors of oppression, filling the pockets of the aviation industry, car manufacturers, restaurant and event sectors, and other giants, while leaving workers in need. The enormous investments made by countries in the wake of the COVID-19 crisis are a source of hope as it shows government trajectories can be influenced and that nations can act swiftly and are prepared to take unprecedented measures. But after more than a year of being held hostage by the virus, we have to ask why governments invest in favour of business as usual [BAU] – even though we now know that with BAU, the next pandemic is around the corner. Why are state supports, instead, not linked to known requirements needed to avert the risks of future public health crises? Why not invest in safe food production, like plant-based food? Why not phase out jobs and industries that continue to threaten public health and risk future pandemics?

No doubt, meeting these demands requires broad societal shifts. By this, I do not mean the ‘techno-fixes’ that Dinesh rightly warns us against. I also don’t mean changes in individual consumer behaviour or singular events of solidarity, at least not alone, even though these can be immensely powerful. Finally, I am also not talking about market-based approaches that should magically get us out of this crisis. By ‘broad societal shifts’, I mean restructuring economic policy, subsidies and investments, and enterprises so they work toward a viable future for humans and animals – what we could call a ‘Just Interspecies Transition’. Let me unpack this a bit.

First, I want to talk about the reasons structural changes are necessary. We are seeing an increasing number of people exiting the animal-industrial complex. We hear about individual farmers who transform their farm into a sanctuary after having worked, say, in the dairy or meat industry for decades. We hear about researchers pioneering animal-free innovations, realizing that animal research is largely driven by economic interests and that non-animal models are more promising avenues to cures and treatments. In both cases, individuals bear the brunt of a transition. They must develop new business models, retrain their personnel, stem the financial burden, and cope with social stigma.

In the past decade, governments have become increasingly interested and engaged in broad economic restructuring. Perhaps the most prominent example is coal transitions: to limit global warming, several countries have taken initiative to phase out coal. Coal workers are laid-off, lose their promise of retirement and may even end up being unemployable in other sectors. Entire communities in coal-dominated towns were threatened by declining tax revenues, crumbling infrastructure, and degradation of local services. In response to these challenges, ‘Just Transition’ emerged, a movement arguing that the brunt of economic transitions should not be borne by individuals and communities previously thought to provide valuable services to the public, like extracting coal for energy production. Instead, it is the public’s responsibility, as a whole, to ensure justice during transition. The Canadian government was one of the first to recognize this, commissioning a task force to sketch a just transition for Canadian coal power workers and affected communities. In February 2019, the Task Force on Just Transition for Canadian Coal Power Workers filed its final report. It found that the federal government has a duty to prepare communities that are economically dependent on coal for a future when their products aren’t needed and demanded that its proposed policies be written into legislation. As innovative as ‘Just Transition’ may be, phasing out coal alone won’t ensure a low-carbon and climate-resilient future and focusing on greenhouse gas emissions alone won’t secure a viable future on (and for) this planet.

This brings me to my second point – that a viable future for humans requires we respect animals. New empirical research at this interface, like that by Yon Soo Park and Benjamin Valentino, or Kimberly Costello and Gordon Hodson, proves that treating animals better is

conducive to the better treatment of humans, and that states that protect animals are more likely to have stronger human rights guarantees. Human and animal interests are thus not in competition but mutually dependent and can only be addressed and solved in tandem. If we acknowledge these interrelationships and if we are prepared to fundamentally rethink and change our approach to and interactions with animals, we can achieve much.

Merging these two points, namely that (a) structural changes are increasingly common and are focusing more and more on considerations of justice, and that (b) advancing human interests hinges on advancing animal interests, I believe we should begin to discuss the possibilities of a ‘Just Interspecies Transition’ – a bold economic transition, set out by governments, to transition away from exploiting human and animal labour (with its direct negative repercussions for public health, the climate, and future habitability on this planet) toward ‘free’, ‘good’, ‘green’, or, in Kendra’s words, ‘humane’ jobs. Here and now, in the midst of the COVID-19 crisis, at a time of massive economic changes and trillions of dollars of pay-outs, we have a unique opportunity to promote public discussion about a truly viable future for human and nonhuman animals.

Kendra: Two key historical patterns are being reproduced in the world and in this discussion:

Pattern 1: People and places are being deemed disposable, but many of those people are fighting back –and at last winning ground. At the same time, opponents of real justice and progress are becoming more coordinated and emboldened. And these right-wing and white supremacist movements are growing. We need to take them seriously.

Pattern 2: As progressives and critical thinkers have done for so long, we tend to agree on a lot of the problems, but then we split somewhat into more reformist, social democratic, revolutionary, socialistic or anarchistic camps in terms of what the alternatives might be. That’s the case here, but we’re adding animals into the mix which progressives and leftists do not often

do. I'm not convinced enough humans can, would, or will support ambitious, structural changes. Progressive, positive changes – small and large – are clearly needed, within countries, and globally. I hope at least some of them will happen.

Dinesh: First, I want to follow on from Kendra's second point about the historical tendency for progressive/left movements to articulate strategies that fall either into a 'reformist or revolutionary' camp. I think this is an important observation. It is true that sometimes these questions of strategy are divisive in unproductive ways. And while I agree that we need to evaluate and make use of incremental opportunities for change, I do want to stress the importance of being clear about the societies we want to create and the large-scale transformative change required to get there. The worlds imagined by leftists and animal advocates (or leftists who are animal advocates) are actually very radical – for example, worlds without exploitative labour, gender-based violence and an end to violence against animals. Such worlds will only be realised through large-scale structural change. I can understand worrying over the success in convincing others of the need for this radical change, which results in feeling as though we should 'tone down' our demands to avoid alienating our audience. However, we have examples around us of dramatic, indeed 'revolutionary,' change occurring within relatively short periods of time. These changes have been led by leaders who were open about the transformations they were seeking, and this change has happened in a way that has attracted the support of many institutions and people in many parts of the world. Unfortunately, a good example of this is a transformation that has been negative for most people and the planet: namely, the neo-liberalisation of global economies which has occurred over the last 40 years. Neo-liberal transformations have not only modified the ways markets operate, but have altered social life, community relations, and subjectivities. The architects of this revolution, including economists such as Milton Friedman and Friedrich Hayek, and political leaders such as Margaret Thatcher and Ronald Reagan, were crystal clear in espousing their visions for the radical restructuring of societies. In fact, what is alarming when reading their writings and speeches today, is that they never really hid their radical vision for change; instead, they actively spoke about these aspirations and convinced others of the urgent need for reform. And they certainly achieved this dramatic change over a very small time: less than a lifetime. Naturally, we should

note that the neoliberalisation of economies happened in ways that were far from ‘democratic’: David Harvey for example suggests that neoliberalism represented ‘a political project to re-establish the conditions for capital accumulation and to restore the power of economic elites’ (19). Structural adjustment programs from actors such as the International Monetary Fund, pressed economic liberalisation upon the economies around the world (Emeagwali). I of course don’t mean to suggest that this extension of neoliberalism into spheres of social, political and economic life did not encounter barriers; we should also note that neoliberalisation encountered much democratic resistance that continues to this day, and as such, neoliberalism was never supported by everyone, not even by most people. Nevertheless, I think the history of neoliberalism shows us that it possible to completely change how societies operate, and how individuals within societies see themselves and others, in a relatively short period of time. Unfortunately, as this history of neoliberalism has shown us, the right is fully capable of realising its visions. The challenge for the left is that we need to articulate our vision for radical change – that is our vision for a different, more just society – and then engage in the work of convincing others. This change will be slow, and unlike the architects of neoliberalism, we won’t be supported by prevailing elites; in this sense I agree with Kendra that it seems likely that change will be slow and incremental. Naturally, this task of transformation by progressively convincing others of our vision for a different society seems huge; but I can’t see an alternative to this slow work we must engage in.

Second, a note on COVID-19 and its relationship to economic and racial inequality. Capitalism, in many respects by design, reproduces radical inequality. There is an inherent tendency of a capitalist economy to drive down labour costs – to zero or near zero levels if necessary – in order to achieve and maximise the exploitation required to accumulate capital. This radical inequality is shaped by other forms of structural oppression such as race and gender. One aspect of this process is the way in which workers are held in place and subject to exploitative work. From this standpoint it is not accidental that on a global level, the nation state system works in harmony to support this structural inequality, by preventing the free movement of labour through the use of borders, or at least carefully regulating this movement. This reinforces one site of racialized inequality within global capitalism: namely, in the way in which

spatial location determines life outcomes. For most of the planet, where you are born will determine what you get. Most humans – that is most humans outside of affluent, industrialised nations – are born into a world where prominent life opportunities are constrained; most humans face extraordinarily entrenched poverty that often extends to starvation, a lifetime of highly exploitative labour, failure of health systems and exposure to injury and death from preventative illness, warfare and state terror. I don't think there is any theory of justice that can defend the radical inequalities in the patterned distribution of life chances which arbitrarily prevail depending on where on the planet you are born; however this structural inequality in the global distribution of wealth and living standards is functionally necessary for the operation of our economic system, which depends upon labour forces being held in place, since this inequality enables the huge accumulations of wealth in the hands of the few and also the relatively high-living standards of many of those living in the Global North. The fact that this patterned global inequality today cannot be separated historically from European colonisation and the ransacking of resources, theft of land, forced labour and slavery which accompanied it, reminds us that racism has been central to the structuring of inequality under capitalism. It is therefore not an accident that the economic inequalities we see today, whether within societies or at a global scale, are also highly racialized. The impact of COVID-19 only highlights this reality, since the distribution of the virus, the availability of health care systems (and the capacity to pay for these), and the implementation of population vaccination, are all deeply impacted by the global structural inequalities I have described. This means that not only will inequalities in the distribution of life chances within nation states appear highly racialized, but that this also shapes the global racial politics of the pandemic. For example, in sub-Saharan Africa, some reports suggest that low-testing rates and poor access to health systems may contribute to a higher mortality rate from the virus; and further, that the lack of testing means we actually have little knowledge about the spread of the pandemic in these countries.

Eva: Restructuring economic policy and subsidies, as Charlotte describes, is a process thwarted by bureaucratic red tape in every step towards implementing such goals through legislation. Crises like COVID-19 make apparent that governmental engagement with economic restructuring can occur more quickly than many of us thought possible. A decade ago, the idea of universal basic income [UBI] seemed visionary and

idealistic. Because of an event like COVID-19, the conversation of UBI has leapt from conceptual territories to real-time praxis. The question of where and when UBI might become a reality, and whether or not it should be executed at all, had transformed overnight into a question of how much and how fast it can be distributed. How might labour and animal liberation movements utilize these moments to actualize goals like 'Just Interspecies Transition'?

Kendra: The UBI is an interesting possibility. Some leftist and progressive thinkers are fervently opposed to it. Others are more enthusiastic given UBI's potential, real-world, immediate applicability, particularly if approached thoughtfully and with an eyes-wide-open awareness of how its implementation could be hijacked by anti-progressive objectives, including those interested in dismantling existing social supports and programs. Social democratic thinkers see its potential, along with things like debt forgiveness and the expansion of universal childcare, to fundamentally alter the state of gender and other socioeconomic relations. There's a thought-provoking chapter by Sue Donaldson and Will Kymlicka in our new collection *Animal Labour: A New Frontier of Interspecies Justice?* on a post-work world, in fact!⁴

You certainly could argue that a number of animal exploiting industries would have a more difficult time finding workers if everyone had a basic income, including people in the global south. More workers would become much pickier and likely reject slaughterhouse work, for example, if they had other options and income supports. This pattern has already started to some degree without a UBI and is why some slaughterhouses pay higher wages – to try and lure people in given how awful and dangerous the work is – and why more and more of them rely heavily on migrant workers.

People would also be able to experiment with different pathways for their lives if they knew their basics could be covered (education, a new business, an agricultural transition to, say, plant-based farming). So I could see a UBI working well with other kinds of economic transitions and social programs if we move towards more caring, sustainable, and humane societies and economies.

Charlotte: UBI is a demonstration of a fundamental sense of solidarity within a community and mutual trust. More and more research (such as by Kathi Weeks) shows how widely supported the idea of UBI is across states and, within states, by a range of citizens from different political camps. I share Kendra's openness to and arguments for UBI – especially as a means to abolish bad/unfree/forced labour, to facilitate individuals' choice between different types of work, and to recognize all forms of work as equally deserving. Labour, as it is understood in dominant societies, has led to the fragmentation of family structures, a decline of full-time stable jobs, and higher risk exposure. People who suffer disproportionately from this and who are most likely to be pushed into precarious work environments are people of colour, women, indigenous peoples, and people with disabilities. UBI would enable us to tackle these issues head-on by recognising and rewarding their contributions to society – contributions that capitalism tells us are worthless. This past year in particular has shown that the very forms of work that capitalism frowns upon are indeed valuable to our community. Think, for example, of the many people who went grocery shopping for older generations during the shutdown, including neighbours, grandchildren, and even remote acquaintances. I can see UBI leading to more and more solidaristic, kind, and empathetic acts like these.

Further, there are many different concepts and manifestations of UBI: unconditional forms, minimal forms that subsidize low-wage jobs or that serve as a baseline, or as a means to opt-out of waged work to engage in more socially valuable labour. Debates around UBI should also consider different means of effecting it, like cash transfers or pensions.

I believe that the Just Interspecies Transition is a framework within which UBI can – and should– be discussed. After all, agricultural work is known to be among the most dangerous, undervalued, and precarious forms of work. Additionally, it is done in geographically isolated areas, which poses particular problems in terms of transparency and availability of redress for workers (and working animals!).

Dinesh: I think this is an interesting discussion about UBI, and it is certainly fascinating the way in which this idea that seemed fringe even a couple of years should have found its way into more mainstream debate. Indeed, part of the appeal of the UBI is its potential attractiveness to both left and right: remember the proposal for a UBI is closely related to other proposals for reforms to transfer payments, including the negative income tax proposed by Milton Friedman during the 1960s. That even free market economists should be interested in the UBI at this moment, or other forms of transfer incomes, should not be surprising given the sharp economic downturn generated by COVID-19 and the reality that fiscal intervention by governments – traditionally frowned on by neoliberals – have been necessary to prop up consumer expenditure. UBI is thus of strategic value for leftists because of the potential broad appeal associated with a restructuring of transfer payments operations.

Assuming this interest is sustained and we see proposals implemented, it is conceivable that a UBI could provide a protection against different forms of precarious work. In some cases, this would include low-wage work within animal agriculture (for example, meat-packing labour). I also imagine that the effectiveness of a UBI in achieving this will be dependent upon the value it is set at, and the relationship of this value to prevailing living standards; if a UBI was set too low, then it would only supplement the need for individuals to sustain an adequate standard of living, and thus would not necessarily erase low-wage work or the ‘gig economy’. From this standpoint, as I think Kendra has suggested, while a UBI may be a very useful strategy within a toolbox of approaches which would support ‘just transitions’ of workers away from intensive animal agriculture or other carbon intensive industries, it would have to be used with other initiatives – ones focused on job creation, education, and the democratisation of industries – to ensure that individuals could be engaged in meaningful work activity and sustain standards of living that is in line with prevailing norms. In this context it is also worth noting that a UBI does not, at least directly, challenge the deepening inequality in the ownership of wealth which has led to the explosion of precarious, hyper-exploitative labour. It is here that proposals such as Thomas Piketty’s wealth tax, which go to the heart of challenging this inequality, are interesting

to consider; such a wealth tax would simultaneously provide the fiscal base to support expenditures such as the UBI, and also the public investment that will be necessary to enable just transitions in our food system.

But I am more interested in the other discussions that relate to work and the ability for communities to aspire towards lives without exploitation – ones that enable individual flourishing. A tangent which I think is interesting in relation to the UBI is the opportunity to think about the role of work itself within our societies. One of the appeals of the UBI is its ability to provide security against structural unemployment; and this is one of the reasons that a publicly funded basic income has been of recent interest because of its ability to respond to the restructuring of workforces that will occur as a result of progressive automation of production. Writers such as Paul Mason have argued that these structural transformations create opportunities to diminish the need for work in our societies. While I am not so optimistic about this reality, I do think that writers such as Mason and Kathi Weeks (who Charlotte has mentioned) have provided us with a reminder that central to the old left project was the question of work and its place in our society as a problem of justice. At least one aspiration of socialism was the goal of reducing labour time in order to enable human flourishing; this is an impulse we find present in at least some of the writings of Karl Marx, and it was this same impulse that informed the old trade union demand for the eight-hour day. The argument was that once you addressed the tendency of capitalism to exploit and overproduce so as to create surplus, you are left with an economic system that instead ensures that the labour performed within a society conforms to the provision of need rather than profit. In this vision, we don't work away our lives simply to make others richer. Instead, eliminating unnecessary labour time frees individuals to engage in activity that relates to their flourishing. In my view, this is essential to the justice proposition of left theory and Marxism. UBI offers an opportunity for thinking about the place of work in our societies, since it enables the possibility for individuals to engage in fulfilling lives without wage employment. Remember that the work most beings are compelled to do by capitalist production is not fulfilling because this work is simply aimed at enlarging the profitability of the system. The discussion around UBI thus creates a fantastic opportunity to talk about the kind of meaningful activity that we require to develop as

individuals – activity that goes beyond making others wealthy. Surely a just society would only require work that responds directly to needs and enables individuals and communities to flourish?

There is hidden here another more radical question that I believe relates to the trillions of animal lives that are sucked into capitalist production: namely, what exactly does unnecessary labour time look like for animals? While perhaps it is true that some human communities have no choice but to rely on animals for their subsistence; the reality today is that most people on most of the planet might conceivably do without these animal-based products. From this standpoint most work performed by most animals under capitalism is strictly ‘unnecessary’ – there are, as we know, alternatives. Further, and by definition, much of this labour has no relationship with the flourishing of these nonhuman workers themselves. We know this because most animals exist today in food systems and experimental labs solely to become use values for humans (profit and food). This is one of the reasons I think it useful to understand animals today as workers under capitalism, as it helps to frame the problem in a different way. Situating animals as labourers forces us to recognise animals as agents of production; agents who have an interest in avoiding the painful, exploitative and deadly work they have been compelled to do, work that by its nature diminishes their prospect of leading flourishing lives. Our responsibility as animal advocates is to advocate for the elimination of this labour. In a sense this demand is in keeping with the old socialist aspiration to restructure society so that rather than work being intended to generate profit, instead all labour time would aim at satisfying fundamental individual and community needs for flourishing. The difference between the old socialists and animal advocates today, or at least leftist animal advocates today, is in a demand for a society that is devoted to the flourishing of humans and animals, and not merely the flourishing of humans at the expense of animal lives.

Eva: Each of you is rightly sceptical of ‘techno-fixes’ to public health threats that are guaranteed to occur in today’s modelling of animal agriculture and food systems. A lot of this speaks to capitalism’s inherently – and dangerously – reactionary logic. Proactive measures are not a part of capitalism’s raw machinery; the

invisible hand of the market uses capital to reactively 'supply' what consumers 'demand.' Waiting for the market to sort out global warming, the prevention of zoonotic pathogens or anti-bacterial resistance is a bit like waiting for paramedics to stop you from smoking. From the past and your own understanding, how have labour movements and social justice initiatives combatted reactionary tactics? How can we employ what has succeeded in the past to urge governments to invest in safer, plant-based food production? To come back to the issue of in vitro meat, how can we understand this both in terms of concern over techno-fixes and within a goal of working towards a Just Interspecies Transition? Is labour a focal point in conversations regarding in vitro meat? If adopted, could this techno-approach be used to transition economies dependent on animal agriculture? What could this mean for controlling (or lack of) zoonotic diseases?

Charlotte: I see your point about capitalism being reactionary, to the extent that it is unable to appropriately *react to* and *solve* some of the greatest tragedies of our time: poverty, diseases, global warming, etc. However, I also feel that capitalism plays a dangerously *proactive* role in shaping our lives; for example, by artificially creating demand for things we don't actually need, which in turn destroys the environment and human lives. At the same time, we are made to feel that we don't need to care about production methods and that the many negative externalities are just 'exceptions' to an otherwise perfect system. It's actually amazing how much our world has already been destroyed as a result – we kill billions of truly fascinating animals each day, tens of millions of people live in conditions of modern slavery, zoonotic diseases emerge from every other CAFO, the steep decline of species diversity, and global warming as the 'new normal'.

The risks of venturing into a future where economic growth and capital accumulation are not the main determinants of our lives are certainly great. After all, all our activities in the modern world have so far revolved around either bowing to these factors or fighting them. To this extent, our lives are 'reactionary', too. But once we become aware – truly aware – of the many downsides to the status-quo, we should individually and collectively build confidence that the future can only be better.

Kendra: So far, cultured meat initiatives have almost entirely been driven by corporate leaders. This is another example of an animal – and health – related issue that progressive movements and actors haven't really integrated or promoted as much as capitalist vegans or business leaders who are not vegan but who see the potential and value of moving away from such a destructive and polluting agricultural model (or simply the financial potential of doing so). Most governments continue to predominantly subsidize and bail out pieces of the animal-industrial complex in various ways through grants, loans, transfers, and direct investment, with only a few exceptions. Even though it's imperfect, I'm still hopeful about this 'techno fix' and see it as one of the more likely changes to actually occur.

There is a simultaneous need for public and political leadership on just food transitions. Cory Booker and Elizabeth Warren's bill that outlines a tangible plan for moving away from factory farms in the US is a good example. More of such initiatives are necessary, along with complementary organizations and coalitions like the Food Empowerment Project, the Phoenix Zones Initiative, the Rancher Advocacy Program, Miyoko's Dairy Farm Conversion Program, the Good Food Institute, and the Agricultural Fairness Alliance. These are just some examples from the US; there are others elsewhere, although more are urgently needed. In other words, organizing at grassroots, organizational, research and policy development, and political levels, in cities and in rural areas alike, is essential for change to occur.

Labour and workers have not been a focus or key consideration in the cultured meat and dairy developments so far, but could and should be. There are lessons to learn from both successful and failed green jobs initiatives, too. For example, if you present a community with a proposal for what you deem to be better jobs, but those jobs require education, training, and skills that people in those communities don't have or see as realistically attainable, the jobs may seem out-of-reach and therefore not necessarily better than the status quo, even if it is also flawed.

I'm grouping plant-based agricultural and invitro meat and dairy together, here, but I see these transitions as unequivocally clear and important opportunities for humane job creation. Such transitions replace job losses that will occur in other parts of the agricultural sector while

proactively creating new and more equitable job opportunities and livelihoods. I envision there being good work for people of diverse backgrounds and social locations in a future with expanded cultured meat and dairy production and more plant-based food and drinks. I also think there is good potential for a revival of more sustainable rural communities to take place after factory farming and don't want them/us to be forgotten in this discussion. A more just future can include agriculture of different kinds. This revival may expand care farms and diversify how rural spaces are used for the delivery of education, training, health and childcare. It can also include some strategic recreation and ecotourism, including indigenous-led initiatives. There can be some rewilding.

Some will say I sound too technocratic now. Others will label this vision too utopian. It's a matter of perspective. For those of us who genuinely care about animals, the earth, and other people, especially the most marginalized, and who want to see real, tangible changes, not just discussion, there is no blueprint or simple path to follow. Instead, there's a constant tension between the aspirational and the achievable. It exists alongside the discouraging and the hopeful. And we maintain our unrelenting commitment to trying to do far better for animals in this imperfect world, as members of a very challenging species, arguably the most complicated one on earth.

Dinesh: There is certainly a lot to unpack here. One thing I would like to point out is that we do need an appraisal, and more analysis, of the relationship between production and consumption. One point of view, which is implied in Eva's question, and is certainly prominent within animal rights theory, is that the reason we expose animals to so much violence is that we desire animal-based food, and we have systems of production that responds to this collective desire. In other words, and according to this view, capitalism simply responds to the demands of the consumer; production is determined by consumption. This view of the relation between production and consumption has shaped contemporary strategies. Vegan movements have attempted to change this desire for animal-based foods by encouraging people to alter their dietary practices; they have tried to manipulate production by influencing consumer decisions.

The innovators who are developing cultured lab-based meat and dairy are banking on a slightly different strategy: they have not tried to change the desire for meat, they have instead offered a simulation of meat which allows the consumer to continue this desire's satisfaction without the harms associated with the 'real' product.

Against these views which suggest that consumers drive production, Charlotte has offered us a different perspective: human desires for meat have been shaped by capitalism and it is problematic to simply assume that capitalism is only responding to pre-existing desires. In this perspective, production drives consumption. We can note that scholars such as Melanie Joy have put forward similar points of view, reflecting on how the demand for and identification with animal products is ideological in nature, that this demand is shaped by prominent knowledge systems which normalise meat eating as a practice.

I have a slightly different view from both perspectives above: namely, that we need a strong analysis of the *relation* between production and consumption, which holds both aspects in view. We can't understand consumption commodities without understanding how production works under capitalism. One tendency of capitalism is to over-produce commodities in the name of profit. Because production under capitalism does not aim directly at satisfying needs but instead aims at profit (or more precisely, surplus or capital), there is continual mismatching between what is produced and what is a genuine use value for individuals or communities. This means commodities are constantly produced in a way that does not meet core needs, and worst, produced in ways that are not sustainable. We are living through the reality of this mismatch between production and consumption in the form of anthropogenic climate change. We all know the planet cannot afford to sustain the high levels of production and consumption that we find prevalent across the globe, particularly concentrated in rich countries; however, the economic system continues to drive this unsustainable production in the name of profit. This interconnects with the history of animal-based foods which have expanded on a per capita basis, replacing traditional diets almost everywhere, and doing so in a way that is completely out of sync with planetary health. There is another side to this that has been noted by Raj Patel and Jason Moore: the 'cheapening' of animal-based foods, which accompanied the industrialisation and intensification of the food system, had the goal of reducing the cost of living, and thus the

reduction of the wage bill of capitalism. In this way, not only did the overproduction of animal-based foods enable the massive extraction of surplus from the production of these commodities, it also simultaneously reduced the cost of the means of subsistence for human populations, thus driving down wages and increasing the possibilities for exploitation. In more Marxist terms, the costs for the reproduction of human life and labour were reduced, thus increasing the capacity to extract surplus value from the system.

The point of all of this isn't to say one way or another whether consumption drives production or production shapes consumption. Rather it is to point out that we can't talk about a consumption commodity without reflecting on how it is produced, and for what reason it is produced; that is, we always need to talk about the interaction between production and consumption. As Kendra notes, huge financial interests have turned their attention towards the investment of developing cultured, lab-based meat and dairy. We don't know where this will go, but we have no reason to believe that these entrepreneurs are driven solely by a care for animals. On the contrary, we know that what motivates this investment is the possibility of profit; this is the central driving force of our economic system. Of course, there are potential benefits for animals if we see a massive take up of these products by consumers and this happens to replace animal-based foods. Animal advocates might be able to seize this opportunity – where capitalism appears to be interested in the development of alternatives to meat – to help push towards a turning away from the mass-utilisation of animals. But I think it is important to understand the motivations of those involved and to be realistic about the likely scenarios that may play out. Again, the tendency of the economic system will be towards the over-production of commodities for profit; cultured, lab-based meat and dairy may simply be another product in the catalogue of an ever-expanding list of available consumer commodities which do not end up replacing animal-based foods.

Kendra has highlighted the role of grassroots and democratic transformation. I agree this has to be a focus. One area that has been of continued interest to me is the relationship between animal advocates and labour movements. From my standpoint, any proposal to transform the food system has to start with that relationship. In this respect it is curious to me, as Kendra notes, that much of the interest in cultured, lab-based meats and plant-based foods has been

from entrepreneurs and producers rather than the workers who are involved in producing these foods. I have also been interested in the strategic alliances we build with workers within animal agriculture to draw attention to work that is exploitative and violent for both humans and animals (Wadiwel). A different area that I think is useful to explore are partnerships with labour movements engaged with agriculture to produce plant-based foods. In many parts of the world, production of these foods remains highly exploitative, with endemic use of low-wage, precarious labour. In my view there is much potential in animal advocates working with trade unions to support unionisation and improvement of conditions for workers who produce the plant-based foods that we see as central to the societies we want to build in future.

Importantly, this work also highlights a different leftist aspiration: namely, the democratisation of production. Animal advocates have had a curious relation to production; we have often been vocal in our demands to stop or shut down production because of the horrific conditions for animals within industrial agriculture. But this means we haven't necessarily been focused in our strategies on the sort of production we want to see in a future society, and the conditions of those who work within these industries. Democratising production calls for a politics that's very different from consumer boycotts or a demand to close down an industry. Rather than simply voting with our dollars as vegan consumers, we need to also be advocating for a more just system of food production that does not devastate the planet and that distributes the value created by this production in fairer ways. Our vision of justice is distinctive here: we don't want a new food system which is just fairer for the humans that work within it; we want a food system that produces justice for workers and does not simultaneously create mass-scale violence towards animals. For this reason, I think it is important for animal advocates to be part of conversations regarding the transformation of food systems and I see this work as a positive and interesting direction for animal advocacy movements.

Notes

¹ Operation Fettfleck, Die Zeit, https://www.zeit.de/2020/50/fleischindustrie-ausbeutung-toennies-schlachthof-corona-mindestlohn-arbeitsschutz-gesetz/seite-4?utm_referrer=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.google.com%2F.

² Tsang, Yuki. ‘Hundreds of Bats Burned in Indonesia in Bid to Prevent Coronavirus Spread,’ *South China Morning Post*. March 16, 2020. <https://www.scmp.com/video/asia/3075441/hundreds-bats-culled-indonesia-prevent-spread-coronavirus>.

³ See also Juliette Irmer’s piece in *NZZ am Sonntag*, ‘Jagd auf Fledermäuse und Flughunde: Die Sündenböcke der Pandemie bezahlen mit dem Leben.’ 3 Apr. 2020.

⁴ ‘Animal Labour in a Post-Work Society’ deals specifically with UBI for nonhuman animals as a thought-provoking extension of existing UBI proposals.

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