

The Proletariat and the Possibility of Revolution

Agustín Guillamón

27 de agosto de 2026

Contents

Introduction	3
The class struggle as a way of being in the world	4
The proletariat is not an identity, but a social relation.	5
The revolution is not about managing capital differently.	6
The transformation of the proletariat does not mean its disappearance	7
Community cannot take the place of class.	7
Autonomy needs a force capable of generalising it.	8
The question of parliamentarism	8
1936: When autonomy ceased to be an idea	8
Autonomy as a form of proletarian revolution	9
Revolutionary optimism	10
The proletariat and the possibility of revolution	10

Introduction

The difference between Miquel Amorós and myself doesn't lie in one wanting revolution and the other rejecting it, nor in one defending autonomy and the other not. We both start from a radical critique of capitalist society and the conviction that emancipation cannot be the work of institutions separate from those who struggle. We both reject the integration of struggles into state institutions and deeply distrust any organisation that seeks to replace direct worker action. However, when we try to define what this autonomy means, what relationship it should have with the transformation of society, and, above all, who can carry this transformation to its ultimate consequences, a fundamental difference emerges between us.

I would say that this difference can be formulated as follows: Amorós emphasises the concrete reconstruction of autonomous forms of life, while I consider it necessary to ask about the social subject capable of transforming these necessarily partial experiences into a general transformation of capitalist relations. This is not about denying the value of autonomous experiences, nor about postponing emancipation to an indefinite future. It is about determining what social force can transform what today appears as a limited experience into a general way of organising life. This question necessarily leads to the proletariat, and in it, in my view, lies the essential difference between our respective positions.

Amorós begins with a historical observation that cannot be ignored. The traditional forms of the workers' movement have been profoundly weakened by the evolution of capitalism. Political representation, union integration, the fragmentation of labour, and the transformation of lifestyles have destroyed a good part of the conditions that allowed the proletariat to constitute itself, at certain historical moments, as a visible, organised revolutionary force capable of directly intervening in society. Faced with this situation, passively awaiting a future revolutionary recomposition would be a form of impotence. If emancipation has any real content, it must begin in the present.

Hence the importance that autonomy, community, and concrete utopia acquire in Amorós's work. Revolution cannot be a promise that indefinitely justifies the acceptance of a subjugated life. We must reclaim now the capacities that capitalism has taken from us: To decide collectively, to produce and reproduce life without delegating it, to rebuild community ties, to recover knowledge, and to create spaces where human relations are not entirely determined by commodities and the state. This "concrete utopia" precisely expresses the desire not to postpone freedom until an uncertain future.

This demand strikes me as profoundly revolutionary. A revolution that doesn't transform life would be a purely political revolution and, therefore, insufficient. We don't want to change those who govern only to continue living under social relations we don't control. We want the production, reproduction, and organisation of our existence to cease appearing to us as external powers. Emancipation cannot be reduced to modifying the administration of a society that remains essentially the same.

But precisely for this reason, I consider it necessary to raise a question that cannot be resolved by appealing solely to autonomy: What happens when an autonomous experience, even if real and transformative for those who participate in it, continues to develop within a capitalist society whose general relations remain intact?

An autonomous experience can profoundly transform the lives of those who participate in it and yet continue to exist within the market. It can create cooperative relationships and still

need money; it can function without internal hierarchies and still have to buy goods produced by other workers; it can collectively organise a space and still remain subject to the property relations that govern the whole of society. It may even explicitly reject the logic of profit and yet depend, for its own reproduction, on an economy that remains dominated by that logic.

This does not prove that autonomous experiences are false or useless. It demonstrates something far more important: that an experience can begin to negate capitalism without yet having acquired the necessary strength to abolish it.

Herein lies the question I consider crucial. Autonomy is indispensable, but how can it cease to be a particular experience? How can it extend beyond a community, a territory, or a specific network of affinities? How can it confront a system that is not organised communally, but rather through general economic relations imposed on all its members, even against their will?

In other words, the fundamental question is not merely how to begin living differently, but **which force can transform that possibility into a general transformation of society.**

My answer to this question is the proletariat, because it is a class antagonistic to capital.

Hence, the question of revolution cannot be separated from a fundamental slogan: **The self-organisation of the proletariat.** It is not simply a matter of asserting that workers must emancipate themselves, but of arguing that they must organise their own struggle, their own decisions, and their own capacity to transform society. Autonomy then ceases to be a mere particular experience and acquires a class dimension: **The proletariat must self-organise in order to cease being a force subordinate to capital and become a force capable of abolishing it.**

The class struggle as a way of being in the world

There is also a difference in our political and intellectual background that helps to better understand our divergences. Miquel Amorós does not come from anarcho-sindicalism, although his thinking has frequently engaged with the history and experiences of the anarchist movement, but rather from Situationism and the various intellectual currents that followed the crisis and dissolution of that movement. His fundamental starting point lies in the critique of everyday life, alienation, technology, urbanism, and modern forms of domination, and from there he has developed a radical critique of industrial and capitalist society. In this evolution, the revolutionary centrality of the class struggle tends to be displaced in favour of other categories: Community, territory, autonomy, the defence of certain ways of life, or resistance against the multiple manifestations of domination.

My trajectory and my way of being in the world are different. Born in 1950 into a family of textile workers, the class struggle is not for me a choice or an intellectual preoccupation, nor is it an inherited theoretical category that can be replaced by another, as ideological or cultural fashions change. It is a lived reality, a way of understanding society **and knowing** one's place within it. My priority has been, and continues to be, the class struggle and the emancipation of workers by the workers themselves. Not emancipation granted from above by the State, directed by a party, or administered by a bureaucracy, but the conscious self-emancipation of the proletariat through its own struggle and its own organisation. Elitist free islands, whether libertarian, liberal, or libertine, neither interest me nor are they part of my horizon.

And this is not workerism. I don't idealise the worker, nor do I believe that being born into a working-class family confers any moral, political, or revolutionary superiority. Nor do I identify

the proletariat with a specific working-class culture, the traditional factory, or an inherited identity. The centrality I grant to the proletariat doesn't stem from nostalgia for the old working-class world or from defending a sociological identity. It arises from the recognition of a fundamental social reality: we live in a class-divided society, and as long as there are those who own the means of production and those who, in order to live, must sell their labour power, class antagonism will persist.

My way of being in the world is marked by this awareness. Not because workers are better than others, nor because they possess a moral superiority or an innate revolutionary virtue, but because their position in capitalist society places them in a specific relationship with capital. They are the ones who, through their daily activities, reproduce existing society and, precisely for that reason, are the ones who have the power to stop reproducing it and reorganise it on other foundations.

Class struggle is therefore not, for me, a theoretical preference among other possibilities, nor a category that can be abandoned when new forms of domination or new political sensibilities emerge. Capitalism has profoundly transformed the composition of the proletariat, dispersed its workplaces, fragmented its experiences, and multiplied the forms of exploitation and precarity. But it has not eliminated the fundamental separation between those who possess the material conditions of existence and those who must sell their labour power in order to live.

Perhaps this is one of the most profound differences between Amorós and myself. While his reflection, stemming from Situationism and its subsequent intellectual developments, tends to seek the possibilities of emancipation in the autonomy of ways of life, in community, in territory, and in resistance against the multiple manifestations of domination, I continue to believe that the core of all revolutionary possibility lies in the class struggle and in the emancipation of workers by the workers themselves.

Autonomy, community, and concrete experiences of liberation are indispensable. But they cannot replace the need for those who live by their labour to recognise themselves as a social force capable of transforming the entirety of existing relations. Defending this centrality does not mean worshipping the worker, but rather rejecting any emancipation granted from above and affirming that the liberation of the exploited can only be the conscious work of the exploited themselves.

It is not, therefore, a question of identity, nostalgia, or workerism. It is a way of being and existing in the world: Understanding that freedom cannot be granted, represented, or administered by others, and that the emancipation of workers will be the work of the workers themselves or it will not be.

The proletariat is not an identity, but a social relation.

To understand it, we must abandon an overly narrow view of the proletariat, such as Amorós's. The proletariat is not simply the industrial worker in the large factory, nor a particular working-class culture, nor a political identity inherited from the 19th or 20th-century labour movement. It is a class defined by a social relation: That of those who, being separated from the means necessary to autonomously produce their existence, must sell their labour power to capital in order to live.

This definition is crucial because it allows us to understand why the proletariat occupies a position that no other social category can replace. The worker does not simply stand before

capital as a victim of an external power. Their own labour power constitutes one of the conditions for the reproduction of capital. Capital buys this labour power because it needs to use it in the production process and obtain from it a value greater than what it has paid. Without wage labour, there is no valorisation of capital; and without valorisation, there is no reproduction of capital as a social relation.

The relationship between capital and the proletariat thus contains a contradiction that cannot be resolved through reforms or the mere creation of alternative spaces. Capital needs the proletariat to reproduce itself, while the proletariat can only emancipate itself by ceasing to reproduce capital. This contradiction explains the revolutionary centrality of the proletariat in a far more compelling way than any moral, historical, or identity-based consideration.

The proletariat is not the protagonist of the revolution because it is «the poorest», nor because it possesses a supposed ethical superiority, nor because a political tradition has decided to assign it that role. It is the protagonist because it occupies a unique material position within the capitalist structure: **It produces that which allows capital to valorise itself and, precisely for this reason, can interrupt the valorisation process and begin to destroy the relationship that sustains it.**

Herein lies the fundamental difference. A community can resist capital, but it does not, in itself, constitute the relationship that allows capital to reproduce itself. A territory can defend itself against capital, but it does not necessarily contain the antagonism capable of abolishing the wage relationship. A cooperative can organise an economic activity differently and still continue to function within the market. A self-managed experiment can demonstrate that it is possible to collectively organise certain tasks and, at the same time, be forced to reproduce economic relations that exist outside of it.

The proletariat, on the other hand, is at the very heart of the valorisation process. Therefore, their action can have a consequence that no isolated experience can produce: The interruption of the social reproduction of capital.

The revolution is not about managing capital differently.

This point also helps us understand what proletarian emancipation truly means. The proletariat is not called upon to seize power in order to manage capitalist society from a new position. A revolution that replaced private owners with a state or bureaucratic administration would have changed the form of ownership without necessarily abolishing the social relations that make capital possible.

Proletarian emancipation is more radical. The proletariat cannot liberate itself simply by becoming the collective owners of businesses, because that would preserve fundamental forms of separation between producers and the social conditions of production. Nor can it limit itself to improving the conditions of wage labour, because wages themselves presuppose the separation that constitutes the worker as a proletarian.

The revolutionary goal, therefore, is not for the proletariat to find a better place within capitalist society. Its goal is for it to cease to exist as a proletariat through the abolition of the social relations that constitute it as such.

This is why proletarian protagonism does not lead to a new class society, but rather to the possibility of abolishing classes altogether. The working class does not emancipate itself to be-

come the ruling class. It emancipates itself by destroying the conditions that make the existence of ruling and dominated classes possible. Therein lies the universal character of its struggle.

The transformation of the proletariat does not mean its disappearance

It could be objected that all of this pertains to a class composition that no longer exists. Indeed, the contemporary proletariat does not present the same forms it had in other eras. But to confuse the historical transformation of the proletariat with its disappearance would mean accepting precisely the superficial definition that should be rejected.

Capitalism has fragmented labour, shifted production to a global scale, multiplied forms of employment, and extended precariousness. The contemporary worker can be found in a factory, a hospital, a hotel, a logistics warehouse, a digital platform, an office, a farm, or in the care economy. The traditional boundaries between production and reproduction have become much more complex.

But none of these transformations eliminates the fundamental relationship of those who need to sell their labour power to reproduce their existence. The class has changed its composition because capitalism has changed; it has not disappeared because its composition has changed.

Precisely because capitalism has dispersed the proletariat, the political question is to rebuild its unity based on what it has in common, not to replace it with a vaguer category. This is especially important in an era when the fragmentation of social experiences can give the impression that there is no longer a subject capable of acting upon the whole.

The revolutionary problem of our time is not to find a new identity to replace the proletariat. It is **to find the proletariat where capitalism has dispersed it.**

Community cannot take the place of class.

Community can be an extraordinarily important space of resistance. It can protect needs that the market destroys, rebuild bonds that competition dissolves, and produce concrete experiences of cooperation. It can even become a privileged terrain for revolutionary organisation.

But community and class are not equivalent concepts.

A territorial community can bring together people subjected to different social relations. It can include workers and owners, wage earners and rentiers, exploited people and people who benefit from certain forms of ownership. They can unite against a specific enemy and yet separate when the question of ownership or the appropriation of wealth arises.

Therefore, territorial struggles can be contemporary expressions of the class struggle without territory becoming the new universal subject. The issue is not to deny these struggles, but to understand when and how they express class antagonism and how they can be integrated into a struggle capable of challenging capitalist relations as a whole. The same applies to ecology, housing, care work, and territorial defence. Capitalism permeates all these dimensions of existence, and for that very reason, they are fundamental arenas for contemporary proletarian struggle. But they remain intertwined with class. The issue is not finding a new subject to replace the proletariat, but rather recognising the proletariat wherever capitalism has extended and transformed its forms of exploitation.

Autonomy needs a force capable of generalising it.

Herein lies the point where the question of the proletariat acquires its full importance. Autonomy is not the problem; the problem is its limits when it remains isolated.

If an autonomous experience remains separate, capitalism can surround it, condition it, absorb it, or simply wait for its exhaustion. If it manages to spread, the question of its coordination and its confrontation with general social relations immediately arises. At that point, it is no longer enough to speak of community: The need for a force capable of intervening in social reproduction emerges.

The revolution cannot consist of endlessly multiplying small exceptions to capitalism. It must transform these exceptions into a new and general form of the reproduction of life. To do this, it is necessary to appropriate what is currently organised by capital: workplaces, the means of production, distribution networks, infrastructure, urban spaces, and, ultimately, the material conditions of existence.

This appropriation cannot be carried out by an isolated community. Only a class that, by virtue of its position in the production process, has the capacity to halt and reorganise that process can achieve this. At this point, autonomy ceases to be merely a mode of organisation and becomes a question of social power: Who has the effective capacity to stop the functioning of capitalist society and set in motion another form of life reproduction? The answer remains the proletariat.

The question of parliamentarism

Parliamentarism occupies a much smaller place in this difference than is sometimes claimed. We are both anti-parliamentarian, but we don't understand exactly what needs to be overcome when parliamentarism is rejected: Amorós insists more on the incompatibility between emancipation and institutional representation, while I link this critique to a broader issue: The autonomy of the proletarian movement in the face of any form of separate power and the need for decisions to remain in the hands of those directly involved in the struggle.

Therefore, the problem is not simply refusing to participate in Parliament. The problem is preventing the separation between those who struggle and those who speak on their behalf from recurring. And this question only acquires its full meaning when it is linked to the central problem: Which class should retain in its own hands the capacity to decide on its struggle and on the transformation of society.

1936: When autonomy ceased to be an idea

The Spanish revolutionary experience allows us to understand this issue concretely. In 1936, the workers did not wait for any institution to recognise their right to transform society. They created their own organisations, occupied factories and land, organised militias and collectives, and effectively altered power relations. This was much more than a communal experience: It was a proletarian uprising capable of profoundly altering the existing social reproduction.

But that experience also revealed the decisive difficulty: As long as state structures capable of regaining authority existed, and as long as revolutionary organisations could not impose au-

onomous social coordination against them, the gains could be contained and ultimately defeated. The events of May 1937 constituted a brutal expression of this contradiction.

The lesson is not to claim that the collectives were a mistake. It is to understand that they were insufficient because their social force did not become widespread enough to destroy the relations that could return power to the State and capital.

This is a fundamental difference. Revolutionary autonomy does not fail because it is too autonomous; it fails when it cannot become a sufficiently broad social force to prevent the reconstruction of what it seeks to abolish. And this problem brings us back to the proletariat.

Here, therefore, appears the slogan that summarises the fundamental political problem: **The self-organisation of the proletariat**. If capitalism has fragmented the workers, dispersed their experiences, and weakened their traditional forms of organisation, the task is not to wait for an institution to once again represent their unity. Nor is it to replace the proletariat with a sum of particular communities, movements, or identities. The task is for the proletarians themselves to rebuild their capacity to recognise, deliberate, decide, and act collectively.

Self-organisation means precisely that the organisation of the struggle cannot be separated from those who struggle. It means that decisions remain in the hands of the workers and that no external leadership can appropriate their power, speak permanently on their behalf, or replace their initiative. But it also means something more: That organisation is not an external instrument simply intended to achieve reforms, but rather the process by which the proletariat begins to recognise itself as a common social force, capable of halting the reproduction of capital and reorganising life on other foundations.

Therefore, the slogan cannot simply be “autonomy,” but rather **the self-organisation of the proletariat**. Autonomy signifies the need for independence from the state, political parties, integrated trade unions, and all forms of separate power; self-organisation indicates **who** should exercise that autonomy and **how** it can become an effective historical force. The crucial issue is that those who produce and reproduce capitalist society must learn to organise themselves in order to cease reproducing it.

Autonomy as a form of proletarian revolution

From this perspective, defending the proletariat does not mean abandoning autonomy, but rather giving it concrete social content. Autonomy means that the class organises itself and that no institution, party, union, or external leadership can replace it. It does not mean building a sphere separate from capitalism, but rather acquiring the capacity to confront it and transform the relations that organise society.

Therefore, it also does not mean living indefinitely in small, alternative spaces. It means beginning to build, from concrete struggles, a different form of social reproduction. And it does not mean replacing the State with an organisation that governs in the name of the workers, but rather preventing the re-emergence of a separation between those who decide and those who obey.

The proletariat is the protagonist of the revolution precisely when it ceases to be understood as a passive sociological category and begins to act as a social force conscious of its position. It is a class that produces, transports, cares, builds, cleans, cultivates, distributes, and maintains the infrastructure and services upon which society depends. It does so, however, under conditions

determined by capital. This position constitutes its weakness as long as it remains subordinate, but this is also its historical strength, because those who participate decisively in the material reproduction of society possess the power to disrupt and reorganise it.

The bourgeoisie possesses capital, and the state has coercion at its disposal, but neither can replace the activity of the proletariat. When this activity ceases to be subordinate to capital, the material foundation of existing society begins to disappear.

Revolutionary optimism

Defending proletarian leadership today should not be a defensive stance, a nostalgic exercise, or a ritualistic repetition of old formulas. On the contrary, it is a profoundly optimistic affirmation. It means recognising that capitalism is not an invulnerable whole and that society is not condemned to reproduce itself eternally under the same relations. It means understanding that the force that keeps this society functioning is also the force that can stop it.

We don't need to invent the subject of revolution from the outside. That subject already exists. It exists wherever someone has to sell their labour power to live; it exists wherever an activity necessary for society is subordinated to the production of value; it exists in the factory and the hospital, in the hotel and the logistics warehouse, in the countryside, in transportation, on the digital platform, and in care work. It exists wherever capital needs labour to reproduce itself.

What still doesn't exist to the necessary degree is the awareness of that force, its autonomous organisation, and its capacity to recognise itself as a common force. That is the fundamental political problem of our time.

The issue, therefore, is not abandoning concrete utopia, but preventing concrete utopia from becoming a substitute for revolution. It is not a matter of choosing between living now and transforming the world, but of transforming the world so that what we can only experience today as an exception can become the common condition for all.

The proletariat and the possibility of revolution

This is, ultimately, the reason why I defend the proletarian leading role in the revolution. Not because all other struggles are unimportant, nor because the entire working class automatically acts in a revolutionary manner, nor because the proletariat possesses an innate revolutionary consciousness, and certainly not because one must uphold a promise out of fidelity to tradition. I defend it because its position within capitalism contains a possibility that no other social position contains in the same way: **The possibility of abolishing the relationship upon which the reproduction of capital depends.**

Capital has done everything possible to fragment the proletariat, to individualise it, to make it precarious, to pit it against itself, and to convince each worker that they exist solely as an individual competing with others for survival. But this fragmentation has not destroyed the social relationship that binds them together. Wherever there is wage labour, wherever life depends on selling one's labour power, wherever capital needs to appropriate the labour of others to increase its value, antagonism still exists.

The revolutionary task is not to invent something else to replace it. It is to make conscious, organised, and effective the force that already exists. Therefore, the revolutionary horizon is not

a community that has managed to escape the world, but a world from which escape is no longer necessary. We do not want to conquer a corner of freedom while the rest of society remains subjugated. We want freedom to cease being the privilege of those who have managed to build a protected space and to become the material condition of everyone.

We do not wait for a historical saviour to appear. We do not wait for a vanguard to think for us. We do not wait for the State to grant us freedom. The force capable of radically transforming the world already exists within it: It is the force of those who, working every day to reproduce capitalist society, can one day decide to stop reproducing it.

The revolution begins when the proletariat understands that it is not condemned to be the labour force of capital, but that it can become the social force capable of abolishing it. Then the struggle ceases to be a desperate defence against advancing barbarism and becomes a conscious offensive for human emancipation. It is no longer a question of conquering a more dignified place within a world that condemns us to exploitation, but of ending the social relations that make exploitation possible; it is no longer a question of preserving a few spaces of freedom within existing society, but of making freedom the foundation of all society.

Because this is, ultimately, the question before us: **Either capital leads humanity toward ever-deepening barbarism, or the proletariat finds in its own strength the capacity to stop it and pave the way for a world without classes, without exploitation and domination, without police, without armies, without borders, without states.**

The revolution will not be the administration of an inherited world, but its conscious abolition to make another possible. The slogan that emerges from all of the above is, therefore, simple and at the same time decisive: **the self-organisation of the proletariat.** We do not expect anyone to organise from the outside the force capable of emancipating us. We do not expect an institution to represent us, a vanguard to think for us, or a State to transform existing social relations from above.

Revolutionary organisation can only arise from the struggle itself, from the capacity of the exploited to recognise themselves as a common force and to take into their own hands the decisions that affect their existence. **Self-organisation** does not mean confining oneself to a working-class identity or building an organisation separate from society; **it means collectively organising the force of those who live by their labour to abolish the social relations that make them proletarians.**

Therefore, in the face of fragmentation, representation, and delegation, the slogan remains: **self-organisation of the proletariat.** Not as an empty formula, but as the concrete process by which the class that reproduces the world of capital today can begin to organise its abolition.

And this time we will not fight to conquer the future: We will fight so that, at last, the future ceases to belong to capital and belongs to emancipated humanity.

Islands of freedom or self-organization of the proletariat?

Agustín Guillamón
Altafulla, day of the eclipse

The Anarchist Library (Mirror)
Anti-Copyright



Agustín Guillamón
The Proletariat and the Possibility of Revolution
27 de agosto de 2026

<kaosenlared.net/guillamon-y-amoros-el-proletariado-y-la-posibilidad-de-la-revolucion>
Translated anonymously without AI.

usa.anarchistlibraries.net