



COMMUNISM

in the **21st**
Century

SHANNON K. BRINCAT, EDITOR

The Father of
Communism



Communism in the 21st Century

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Communism in the 21st Century

Volume 1

*The Father of Communism:
Rediscovering Marx's Ideas*

SHANNON BRINCAT, EDITOR

Foreword by Terrell Carver



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These volumes are dedicated to my brother, Dustin Brincat, who upon reading the *Communist Manifesto* for the first time remarked that the communist ideal is the sensible choice given our world's problems, despite the array of asocial behaviors conditioned by contemporary capitalism seemingly opposed to it. By dedicating this series to him, I hope to convey the depth of my gratitude for all his years of support and the esteem I hold for him.

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Foreword

MARX—AND COMMUNISM

Marx is without doubt the most trenchant, unforgiving, scornful, and systematic critic of capitalism we have.¹ But let's keep him in perspective. There have been far more savage destroyers of the commercial relationships that we know as "the [capitalist] economy." Indeed Marx left a yawning gap in his writings, and even in his activism, between critique and power. Others moved in historically to fill this near-vacuum in appalling ways. In his lifetime he wasn't famous; infamy set in later. Discussion of Marx and communism at the moment puts us in the middle ground.

While people will create and join political movements—small and large—with any number of different things in mind, and indeed in that way engaging in any number of different activities—peaceful and otherwise, it is worth pausing to consider how many people *resisted*, rather than embraced, the practices of capitalism—for one reason or another. These practices were monetary exchange, private property in its more abstract and tradable forms, and wealth accumulation. As Marx often pointed out, and as many people knew already, capitalist practices were often aligned with domination, cruelty, and thuggery. However, this raises the question, who actually fought *for* this system? Who were the shock troops of capitalism? Capitalism didn't happen by accident, nor did it arrive from outer space.

The perhaps surprising answer to this question is to look first to imperialism and colonialism, where there were actual shock troops. We can then project this inwards within the nation-state—and its always violent history of formation—to processes of enclosure, legal and intellectual reformations, expropriation, exploitation, and slavery. Marx did just this in

his earliest journalism, and then jointly with Engels in their *Communist Manifesto*.² The latter text undermines rather than reinforces (as is often claimed) the Eurocentric mythologies that northern cultural and religious novelties in themselves produced the industrial revolutions that so occupied Marx and fascinated Engels.³ While I am referring to only a sentence or two, it is clear in the *Manifesto* that the “bourgeois mode of production” is kickstarted by the expropriation of capital from the “new” world, and the subsequent trade in luxury products generated by the mines and plantations of chattel slavery or near-equivalent use of labor.⁴ And there is considerable testimony in Marx—who spent considerable time citing reliable testimony from others—of the violence inherent in “domestic” processes of social change.⁵

Marx’s historically informed and logically sequential explication of how exactly capitalism got to where it was in his day evolves through the chapters of the magisterial *Capital*, Volume I. It is remarkable how little distance there is in theoretical (or perhaps better, philosophical) terms between his work there and our world of hedging, derivatives, even automated trading and the like. Capital for Marx is “self-expanding value,” heading toward an infinity because of its abstract limitlessness. Human greed might have its limits, but a world that has “a life of its own,” where numerical relationships are the only reality, has none at all.⁶ Of course Marx’s book doesn’t explain exactly how these things work, and it isn’t a 101 account of the theory involved in the economics and mathematics that animates these practices today. But he offers a political and philosophical framing for the boom-and-bust capitalism of his time and ours that has appeal because, among other things, it exposes the vacuity of academic subjects that merely presume what needs to be justified. These are the properties and constraints of the intellectual, political, legal, moral, and religious common senses that must be in place for capitalism to make sense of itself as the only game in town.

Common sense of this kind tells us that imperialism and colonialism were—“perhaps”⁷—regrettable, but certainly over and done with, and in any case “over there . . . somewhere else,” but not “here,” that is, within social and geographical spaces domesticated as homelands (for some). These metropolises were of course very powered up as nation-states pursuing gross national product (GNP) of their own in what were increasingly international markets. But common sense about capitalist development also tells us that democracy—an apparatus of self-legitimizing, selectively representative, and highly disciplinary institutions—is a political, *rather than* economic framework, or where the economic system is relevant, it must of course promote freedom, famously conceived by Locke as “life, liberty and property.”⁸ Locke’s ideas didn’t come from nowhere, to be sure, but rather from the practicalities of making trading relationships work within or despite religious, communal, and cultural constraints,

hostilities, and counterrevolutions. Marx's project was rather to insist that no political system makes sense as independent of an economic system, and more strongly, that economic systems generate political systems that secure them.⁹

As Marx spotted, identifying freedom with commercialism and consumerism—but more importantly with the property, legal, and political systems that support these things—was the way to recruit adherents to the cause. He had hard work arguing that those who signed on for this earthly liberation were working against their own best interests, and that this promised land, in his view, was as illusory a vision as the religious ones, for which he had nothing but “this-worldly” scorn.¹⁰ For the few who could make it in the capitalist world, it was an undeserved success, falsely attributed to individual effort and hard work. For those who unsurprisingly didn't make it, it was but a lottery ticket with a very slim chance attached.

Summing up so far, I see Marx as a thinker who blew off the conventions and boundary lines of his own time, and as a theorist (which he has now become) stands opposed to their reinforcement in ours. This is on both the academic and the political side of things. Current disciplinary (obviously the irony has faded away) and subdisciplinary (and even interdisciplinary or multidisciplinary) practices make it difficult to disentangle capitalism from democracy, and commercialism from freedom. For Marx, of course, this was easier to do intellectually, but professionally—other than as independent scholar—he had no life at all. Politically things looked hopeful to him in 1848–49, and again in the late 1850s and on into the 1860s, but he died more than a little embittered.

On the political side of things, we are obviously in a world where huge resources are deployed to promote capitalism, co-opt contrary campaigns, erase any concept of class, and undertake violent and murderous projects of state-building as exercises in freedom and democracy. As Marx and Engels succinctly put it, “the power of the modern state is merely a device for administering the common affairs of the whole bourgeois class,”¹¹ or in other words, the partisan politics of democratic states conforms to what the late Gore Vidal called “the property party.”¹² Since Marx's time things have got worse politically for those whose socialism and communism opposes capitalism in principle.

If read politically, and in a certain framing, Marx's work is very good at describing how some things become thinkable, moral, and commonsensical, rather than controversial, immoral, or illegal, for example, profit-making, interest on money, making a person into a laborer and suchlike, as these things often were “before the fall” into capitalism. One of the most interesting discussions in *Capital*, Volume I, is the passage in which Marx philosophizes as to what exactly one human must assume about another in order for commodity exchange (and ultimately capitalism) to

become thinkable and do-able.¹³ It is clear that his own political position is quite contrary to this, but meta-theoretical searches for his “moral foundations” have proved inconclusive. But then, as an activist, he didn’t need these in making his rhetoric work; only academics would be interested in recondite logics.¹⁴

Marx’s more academic—yet still political—interest was in attacking the economic intellectual establishment of his day, the political economists. Rather more specifically, his focus was on exposing their presuppositions and claims as politically charged, and indeed highly potent. As he said, merely exposing to the reading public their illogicalities and biases, even their omissions and falsehoods, was not enough.¹⁵ A movement contrary to capitalism would have to capture the broad mass of people—and of peoples—and would have to be a reverse or inverted way of remaking the world as sensible and sense-making.

It is an interesting exercise to reread Marx’s critique of capitalism—“the society in which the capitalist mode of production prevails”¹⁶—as a sardonic success story, but rather in a Nietzschean manner, exposing the human capacity for frailty, complicity, perversity, gullibility, hypocrisy, absurdity, and the like. What is difficult is reading his political activism as focused and effective in getting the many on board in order to resist a global social movement—which, as he himself admitted in quite celebratory passages—was remaking the earth, the human “forms of life” all over the planet, and thus the intellectual, moral, and political “common senses” through which the world is (more or less) intelligible to anyone.¹⁷ Class struggle—including class compromise—is the engine through which this intelligibility is constructed, with huge effort, and at huge cost.

On the countercapitalist side of things—at last—we encounter Marx’s communism (or socialism—the terms were not particularly well distinguished, or even distinguishable at the time). Marx and Engels’s critique of previous socialisms—laid out for the world in Part III of their *Communist Manifesto*—built on Engels’s previous critical exercises and surveys, more than on anything that Marx had done himself.¹⁸ The polemical sections of the (so-called) *German Ideology* were a (long-winded) run-up to the snappier versions in the *Manifesto*, where Engels’s journalistic skills met Marx’s sardonic wit and dismissive put-downs.¹⁹

Recent scholarship has promoted the idea that Marx was not wholly hostile to the “utopians” among the socialists and communists,²⁰ and indeed this raises the wider perspective that overall—and for political purposes—he has himself been constructed biographically and interpreted academically as necessarily opposite to those whom he criticized. As intellectual biography these constructions and interpretations are prone to drama, where strong characterization and clear contrasts drive the plot. Yet contrary to later dramatizations, Marx was aware that the communists

and socialists he was criticizing were also his coalition partners (along with middle-class liberal revolutionaries in the pre-1848 context).²¹ And he was aware of his own identification with the “tendency” and “movement” (the latter more an announcement and call-to-join, rather than a descriptive term as such), not least because of the original title and mission statement of the *Manifesto of the Communist Party*. While the biographers and academics—both pro and con—have concentrated on making Marx distinct from his confrère, closer readings reveal a mutual but critical imbrication. Still, it is possible to discern a particular shape to Marx’s communism, or rather to the way he conceived of his role within this quite loose categorization.

Marx was wholly against gurus, personality-cultists with revelatory doctrines and worshipping adherents. He also had absolutely nothing to do with religious framings, Christian ones in particular. He was resolutely for large-scale transformation (whether violent because in working-class self-defense, or otherwise in some more peaceful transition toward socialism and communism). He had no time for historical anachronism and returns to a golden age of simplicity. Nor was he sympathetic to top-down governance and leadership by enlightened intellects. And he presumed that the mass production of necessities, at least, would raise the quality of life and reduce working time (in some sense).²²

Curiously, though, none of these movements, or attempted movements, resembles the social forces through which capitalism was establishing itself (and still is). I wonder if Marx gave some attention to the question, “Why was there no *Capitalist Manifesto*”? Both the capitalist and the industrial revolutions (and the one wouldn’t have been much without the other) were somewhat unself-conscious movements, or perhaps wealth-creation-for-the-few is such an age-old and obvious idea that it hardly needed to declare itself. Certainly collecting shock troops—whether conquistadors or buccaneers or regulars—wasn’t all that difficult, given the development of loanable wealth, as historians have demonstrated. Perhaps if there had been a *Capitalist Manifesto*, certain nations and/or dynasties would have made more successful capital and capitalism from their wealth, for example, Spain and the Hapsburgs. Yet other locales seemed to generate the end-result from few resources, other than a timely readiness with ideas and institutions, for example, the Low Countries. There were certainly any number of enlightened publications on the new thinking and bourgeois lifestyle in a growing literature, but this was not a self-conscious mass movement. Mass action was rather a last resort, as in France in 1789, and—as Marx was at pains to point out—it acquired its shock troops through a democratic sleight of hand, promising equality (of a political sort) and delivering inequality (of economic outcomes).²³

It seems that with respect to socialism the sum of Marx's shibboleths listed above—and his stated conclusion arising from his critique—was that a groundswell of mentalities, local movements and campaigns, revolts and uprisings would win the day for communism in the only way it could be won. The French Revolution is well known to have been his model, in some respects, because it was driven by democratic anger at ruling classes and outmoded privileges and constraints. It burst out into massive, rapid change, and spread the new ways abroad, picking up adherents (e.g., in Marx's native Rhineland) as old institutions toppled and liberation spread. In simple terms the result was the very striking and violent abolition of feudalism in France in 1789, and the triumph of commercial commonsense that pressed on with revolutionizing social and political relationships, the continuance or restoration of feudal anachronisms notwithstanding. However harsh the counterrevolutions, in France or elsewhere, no post-Napoleonic regime restored feudalism exactly as it had been.

Despite Marx's efforts, democracy and political liberation were the cover story for national liberation *and* commercial liberation in various guises, definitely not a democratic revolt that generalized the interests of the working class to all, a number of honorable exceptions notwithstanding.²⁴ As a means—albeit messy ones—of throwing off local feudalisms *and* colonial domination, Marx's political rhetoric was of course supportive. However, what he fought against came to pass, namely the one standing for the other (i.e., democracy standing for commercialism), thus reinforcing the very disjunction in political thinking that he had long opposed. Understandably his method of ideology-critique²⁵ didn't expose the power encompassed by this disjunction, since doing that would work against his aim of overthrowing it. But the political effects of taking democracy to be a solution to inequalities of wealth and power, rather than a highly effective way of explaining these discrepancies away, have been profound. Evidently he had no idea how potent this displacement—of "earthly" economic struggle by "heavenly" realms of supposed equality—could be.²⁶

There are of course two ways to take up the task today. One is to formulate an alternative to capitalism (rather than policy palliatives, as social democrats have done). But this strategy easily falls into the logic of mass movements and enthusiasms, doctrinal prophets and crazed leaders, that made the twentieth century so violent and counterproductive to the cause. The other is to do as Marx and Engels did and locate the movement as ongoing already, just needing publicity and (better) explication. This involved explaining the movement to itself, as well as to potential adherents (and of course famously defying the opposition to resist).²⁷ Michael Hardt (usually in conjunction with Antonio Negri) has taken this line, though I have found *Empire* and *Multitude* rather less punchy and rousing than

Marx and Engels's rhetorical constructions.²⁸ Hardt's later essay, "The Common in Communism," continues in this vein by taking the common to be a vaguely defined area—probably knowledge production and artistic creativity—that is already produced (so he says) in processes that are external to capital. He describes it as a realm of "autonomous human production" and common because it is characterized by "open access" and sharing.²⁹

Perhaps as a metaphor for the elusive concepts of communism that Marx—on famously few occasions—allowed himself to hint at, there is indeed some connection, or possibly of independent value (Marx doesn't have to be right about everything). However, Hardt's approach is decidedly un-Marxian in both ignoring the heavy processes of infrastructure creation and maintenance (or conceivably de-capitalizing and de-industrializing processes of winding this down), and the productive processes through which—his disclaimer notwithstanding—shareable knowledges and stimulating artworks—can conceivably be created for sharing and "open access" at all. Marx's "realm of necessity"³⁰—underspecified as it is—or indeed anyone's realm of necessity ought to be making an appearance, or its absence explained away. Marx may have put too much weight on the proletariat as a political subject, and on trade unions as a way forward, but at least these are phenomena that inspire some credibility in their relationship to physical universals and social basics broadly conceived. Or if Hardt is arguing that communism should be going down the road of mutualism through individual autonomy and personal veto (a route Marx criticized as politically unrealistic) then he should say so. Cooperation is no doubt a powerful social force, and in truth it incentivizes more than a few individuals, and possibly more than self-interest in many circumstances. But compared with Marx's theorization, which links class politics with visible productive forces, it suffers the flaw that Marx himself was always swift to focus on: there is no consumption without production.

Methodologically this argues that Marx distinguishes himself—and his communism—from both capitalism and cooperative or welfare socialisms by focusing on social production in the first instance, and thus its organization as the very basis from which law, politics, morality, and all else must proceed. The upshot of this, of course, is that consumption-based theories—whether of liberal democracy or market economics—never achieve a real *commonality* at all, however equally they share out goods and services, or however open their access to goods that have already been produced and aren't apparently scarce. Planned economies, as they were known in the communist world, generally proceeded without much buy-in from the workers (or consumers) involved. The mystery of course is why capitalist economies—regulated and state-driven as they are—generate the buy-in that they do, and from workers in particular. It may

be that the buy-in is unraveling now, given the decline in real wages, huge growth in inequality, hypervisibility of undeserved wealth, casualization of employment, and withdrawal of pensions and social services. Perhaps in some instances the magic of patriotic warfare is ceasing to work, given the obvious opportunity costs, not to mention (working-class) lives. In an age of volunteer armies, most powerful states have returned to a cannon-fodder mentality, by which economic necessities and ambitions drive poorer citizens (and, as in the United States, noncitizen green card holders) into the military. These forces are then deployed in ways that have left legislative declarations of war, and lately the Geneva Convention laws of war, far behind, often using “humanitarian intervention” as a cover for what might be geostrategic ambitions. In some cases, such as the invasion of Iraq in 2003, the tenuousness of the reasoning involved, and the almost insane character of military operations, leaves one quite breathless.³¹

The *Communist Manifesto* left us a list of specificities quite remarkably coincident with (more or less current) visions of social democracy.³² Indeed in their highly various ways the contributions to these volumes on *Communism in the 21st Century* discuss concepts and views related to the question, “What Is to Be Done?” My task here has been to ponder the question, how did capitalism win over hearts and minds, mobilize large-scale social forces (of revolution, and then counterrevolution), and produce its own list of specificities?³³ In those terms, ideologies of the nation state, and of its democratic institutions, were clear winners, notwithstanding the vast numbers of people who fought—and still fight—tooth and nail for religious universalisms and authoritarian systems that run counter to these now venerable institutions.

As I have argued, the more fundamental economic arguments—about the requirements of the production process and access to the goods and services produced—were largely displaced by being naturalized, or dressed up, or mystified as market relations of consumption, driven by avoidance of the need to labor. While there may be global enthusiasms for saving the environment, or making poverty history, or otherwise promoting a critical focus on capitalism, there is little sense in those theoretical formations of the precise social relationships that would revolutionize the present ones in real life. These are, of course, capital–labor, employer–worker, investor–rentier–wage-earner, propertied homeowner–homeless person, and so on, the familiar categories of the news media, and general common sense. Marx’s genius was to alert us to these and make them seem strange.

Marx was right to contrast earlier forms of production with each other in legal and social terms, as he did with preclassical and ancient slavery, feudal systems of vassalage, and tenure.³⁴ He was then able to identify precisely and in exact detail where the conceptual, moral, legal, and allied areas of the specific subjectivity of capitalism creep in, or storm in, as the case may be. But he didn’t work out the opposing fundamentals

of communism at that level. The chapters in the present volumes are contributions to ongoing efforts to overcome a human system that generates—but offloads—all kinds of negative externalities, as they are known in capitalism-speak. These are much harder on some than on others, but then escape from the other is yet another fantasy trope of capitalism with wide appeal. “We are all in it together” is a notorious piece of cant, but also an inescapable truism. As a way of thinking about this, communism is much better than most.

—Terrell Carver

NOTES

1. In numerous works and lectures, David Harvey is doing an excellent job making this point; see for example *A Companion to Marx's Capital* (London: Verso, 2010) and *The Enigma of Capital: And the Crises of Capitalism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011).

2. For a discussion of Marx's early journalism (sadly neglected for its lack of engagement with Hegel), see Heinz Lubasz, “Marx's Initial Problematic: The Problem of Poverty,” *Political Studies* 24, no. 1 (1976): 24–42; for a fresh translation of the *Manifesto of the Communist Party* from the first edition, see Karl Marx, *Later Political Writings*, ed. and trans. Terrell Carver (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 1–30. References to the *Manifesto* are taken from this edition.

3. See the discussion of Eurocentrism and development in Sankaran Krishna, *Globalization and Postcolonialism: Hegemony and Resistance in the Twenty-first Century* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2009), 7–30; for a discussion of the *Communist Manifesto* in this context, see Terrell Carver, “Ideology in the Age of Digital Reproduction,” in *Rethinking Globalism*, ed. Manfred B. Steger (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2004), 95–105.

4. Marx and Engels, *Manifesto*, 2. My use of new, trade, and labor is ironic, as the terms otherwise presuppose settled usages that normalize what we know about capitalism and its moral and historical relationship with historiography and social studies; see Robbie Shilliam, “Marx's Path to Capital: The International Dimension of an Intellectual Journey,” *History of Political Thought* 29, no. 2 (2006): 349–75.

5. Karl Marx, *Capital*, vol. 1, in *Marx-Engels Collected Works*, vol. 35, ed. Frederick Engels (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1996), 704–761.

6. See the detailed discussion in Terrell Carver, “Marx—And Hegel's Logic,” *Political Studies* 24, no. 1 (1976), 57–68.

7. Niall Ferguson, *Empire: How Britain Made the Modern World* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 2004), is the *locus classicus* for this line of argument.

8. John Locke, *Two Treatises of Government*, ed. Peter Laslett (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988).

9. For an explication that emphasizes the guiding thread qualities of Marx's method, see Terrell Carver, *Marx's Social Theory* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1983).

10. For a discussion of the political relationship between economic and religious rhetoric in Marx's *Capital*, see Terrell Carver, *The Postmodern Marx* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1998), 7–24.

11. Marx and Engels, *Manifesto*, 3.

12. Gore Vidal, *Matters of Fact and Fiction: Essays 1973–1976* (New York: Random House, 1977).

13. These passages are explicated in detail in Carver, *Postmodern Marx*, 33–37.

14. The best of these discussions, in my view, was R. G. Peffer, *Marxism, Morality and Social Justice* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992).

15. Marx, *Capital*, vol. 1, 84–86.

16. *Ibid.*, 45.

17. Marx and Engels, *Manifesto*, parts I and II.

18. See the detailed discussions of Engels's early thought and journalism in Terrell Carver, *Friedrich Engels: His Life and Thought* (London: Macmillan, 1989), 101–132.

19. See the detailed textual comparisons in Terrell Carver, *Marx and Engels: The Intellectual Relationship* (Brighton: Wheatsheaf, 1983), 51–95.

20. See the detailed contextual and textual discussions in David Leopold, *The Young Karl Marx: German Philosophy, Modern Politics, and Human Flourishing* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 279–295.

21. For a discussion of Marx's coalition politics and his relationship to democracy, see Carver, *Postmodern Marx*, 119–145.

22. *Ibid.*, 87–118.

23. I am drawing on a very large, and more or less Marxist historiography here, the works of Robert Brenner and Ellen Meiksins Wood in particular.

24. See Marx's encomium on the Paris Commune in his *The Civil War in France*, in *Later Political Writings*, 163–207.

25. For a detailed discussion, see Terrell Carver, "The Politics of Ideologie-Kritik: Socialism in the Age of Neo/Post-Marxism," *New Political Science* 31, no. 4 (2009): 461–474.

26. See the detailed textual discussions on Marx's politics in Leopold, *Young Karl Marx*, 100–182.

27. Marx and Engels, *Manifesto*, 1.

28. See Terrell Carver, "Less than Full Marx . . .," *Political Theory* 34, no. 3 (2006): 351–356.

29. Michael Hardt, "The Common in Communism," *Rethinking Marxism* 22, no. 3 (2010): 346–356.

30. Karl Marx, *Capital*, vol. 3, in *Marx-Engels Collected Works*, vol. 37, ed. Frederick Engels (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1998), 806–807.

31. I have particularly in mind Rajiv Chandrasekaran's *Imperial Life in the Emerald City: Inside Baghdad's Green Zone* (London: Bloomsbury, 2008). There is of course a very large critical literature on global politics, post-9/11.

32. Marx and Engels, *Manifesto*, part IV.

33. On these specificities, see Manfred B. Steger and Ravi Roy, *Neoliberalism: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010).

34. Karl Marx, "Preface to *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*," in Marx, *Later Political Writings*, 159–161.

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Preface to Volume 1

Marx's importance as a leading political theorist, economist, and philosopher and his legacy as the leading figure in communist thought is beyond doubt. Indeed, it is reported that Marx and Engels's *Communist Manifesto* has been read so widely that it is eclipsed only by the readership of the Bible. Marx's influence cuts across all disciplines in the social sciences and humanities and there continues to be an ever-increasing number of books, articles, and essays that explore all dimensions of his expansive work. In the wake of the ongoing global financial crisis since 2007, there has been a resurgence of interest in Marx's thought—even within the mainstream of the academy—that attests to the ongoing relevance of both his critique of capitalism and his vision of a free, communist association. Nevertheless, despite this array of scholarly engagement, Marx's vision of communism has remained under-theorized and has rarely been systematically investigated, with a few notable exceptions being the work of Ollman and Lebowitz, both of whom contributed to this project. This volume arose specifically to overcome this significant gap in the literature by providing a holistic engagement with Marx's ideas on communism from a variety of theoretical and normative viewpoints that could both give content to how Marx envisioned future, communist society, and to explore the relevance—and potential developments of this ideal—in the context of the early 21st century. The difficulty was in locating scholars who could add to the diversity of perspectives on this topic, without which the volume would soon become repetitive.

With this purpose in firm view, the volume was organized around 10 distinctly themed interpretations of Marx's vision of communism including cultural, socialist, individualist, dialectical, humanist, cosmopolitan, utopian, feminist, environmental, and Romantic perspectives. Each

chapter offers a unique assessment of the legacy and potential within Marx's vision of communism in contemporary political life. The chapters were then rearranged and organized into two halves in a way that emerged organically from the set as a whole. The first half focus on reconstructions (or rediscoveries) of Marx's work specifically related to communism. Here, Eagleton, Sayers, Chattopadhyay, Ollman, and Lebowitz, despite their sometimes radically different interpretations, all give primary consideration to passages in which Marx discussed, in however fragmented form, his approach to communism. The second half, while still premised as critical explorations of Marx's vision of communism, attempt to develop these ideas from a variety of perspectives. These contributions, including Paden, Federici, Burkett, Löwy and myself, all constructively engage with the ideal of communism, serving to highlight areas for the future development of this concept in both theory and practice. The analytical depth of each separately themed chapter on Marx's vision of communism—via a variegated interpretive group of scholars from diverse backgrounds, theoretical orientations, and normative positions—offers a comprehensive and thorough reexamination of the father of communist ideas at the start of the 21st century.

One particular problem faced in such a diverse volume is uniformity of sources on Marx and, to a lesser degree, Engels. Marx's writings comprise a vast amount of literature, including numerous collections, anthologies, and commentaries. While a number of these collections are present in this volume, by far the most cited (though not exclusively) is the English translation *Marx-Engels Collected Works*, abbreviated elsewhere as MECW. This collection comprises 50 volumes in all and was compiled and printed by Progress Publishers of the Soviet Union in collaboration with Lawrence & Wishart (London) and International Publishers (New York), starting in 1975 and completed in 2005. This collection was chosen for this volume as the most complete publication of the works of Marx and Engels in English and because it is regarded as one of the best translations of Marx and Engels's work in any language. Indeed, this collection has been the source of much of the material for the entire series of *Communism in the 21st Century* and particularly so for Volume 1. However, authors were encouraged to source other translations and reference materials of Marx and Engels's work as they saw fit, some used materials in other languages and some from their own translations. As such, the volume does not profess to offer an authoritative account of Marx and Engels's work, an issue that raises concerns of non-uniformity of sources but which, at the same time, offers a rich vibrancy in interpretations and ensures reflexivity. Diversity in interpretation was considered the greater prize for forming a collusive relationship between Marx's texts, translator and the reader, over uniformity, which in many respects remains an unrealizable ideal. From this

there does emerge the problem regarding occasional differences between the use of terms and also differences in translations of passages between authors and chapters that could not be overcome.

On behalf of Praeger, I would like to acknowledge, with sincere gratitude, permissions to reproduce texts, in part or in-full, including: Paul Burkett's "Marx's Vision of Sustainable Human Development" from the *Monthly Review*; Terry Eagleton's "In Praise of Marx" from *The Chronicle of Higher Education*; and Roger Paden's "Marxism, Utopianism, and Modern Urban Planning," and "Marx's Critique of the Utopian Socialists" from *Utopian-Studies*. We would also like to thank Palgrave and Macmillan for permission to cite passages and materials from Sean Sayer's *Marx and Alienation: Essays on Hegelian Themes*.

I would like to acknowledge the copyediting work of Caitlin Sparks for her careful diligence and attention to detail in the final preparation of this volume. All errors and inconsistencies are, of course, my own. This volume would not have been possible without the work of a group of anonymous reviewers and fellow contributors who assisted greatly with strengthening each of the chapters. This series has formed part of my University of Queensland Postdoctoral Research Fellowship and I would like to thank the School of Political Science and International Studies for its support for this type of critical scholarship.

Shannon Brincat
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INTRODUCTION

Communism in the 21st Century: Vision and Sublation

Shannon Brincat

The world is undergoing a profound period of crises and transformation. The ongoing Global Financial Crisis (GFC) has spiraled, forcing austerity measures across communities and states, pushing the neoliberal project into sharp contradictions, if not immediate collapse; the Arab Spring has swept forward calls for democratic process and related freedoms across, and beyond, the Middle East and North Africa; in cities around all around the world the Occupy movement has ushered in a new era of radical politics, one that seeks to build an emancipated future, free of domination and hierarchy, within a profoundly new public sphere. This civil discord and radical potential has brought forward a proliferation of protest movements within communities and states—antiwar, anti-globalization, anti-austerity—that exist alongside ongoing political struggles for the recognition and rights of women, lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender (LGBT), indigenous, and postcolonial peoples, and environmental campaigns that seek to promote sustainability, biodiversity, and climate stability.

Clearly, politics in the early stages of the 21st century is marked by dissent, tumult, and calls for radical change. And behind all these crises and transformative processes is the “specter of communism,” as ubiquitous as it was in 1848 when Marx and Engels wrote these opening lines of the *Communist Manifesto*. The title of this series, *Communism in the 21st Century*, may at first seem circumspect given we are only in the century’s second decade. It is far too early to offer any definitive statements regarding the potentials and the perils facing communism in this new millennium, let alone offer conclusions about its direction. Nevertheless,

both the theory and practice of communism are undergoing a veritable resurgence. This resurgence has been given impetus by the financial crisis of the last few years, but it has also been motivated by the ever-apparent limitations of the state as political community, including its inability to steer the economy, remedy the dissolution of social and cultural bonds under the weight of “callous cash payment,” or address fundamental environmental threats to human existence and all complex biological life. The title was chosen specifically to locate the study of communist thought and practice as it attempts to mediate these challenges, with the underlying assumption that communism has not diminished in its potential reach or radicalism.

Yet despite the radical potential of the communist project, the global economy remains transfixed in an economic morass. Under the ongoing strictures of the GFC, academics in the social sciences and humanities, and activists the world over have been looking for viable alternatives to the neoliberal orthodoxy, its indelible contradictions now visible to even the most foolhardy Reaganite, Thatcherite, or Hayekian. The urgency of this search has been compounded by the worsening conditions of global politics, where the many facets of neo-imperialism threaten to overwhelm collective social-moral learning in international society, creating the conditions for hyperexploitation of the peripheries and heightening the possibility of international conflict. Underlying this geopolitical rivalry is the impending environmental catastrophe associated with climate change, which has made the question of political alternatives no longer one of ideology but of human survival. This intersection between financial collapse, increasing international tensions, and environmental pressures seems to demand a re-envisioning of the political, expanding the notion of community and embracing political possibility *beyond* capital and the state. These tendencies have directly contributed toward the reimagining of communism as a meaningful alternative to the stultifying conditions of world capitalism, the aggressive and ossifying doctrines of *realpolitik* and the predation of our natural world. This series is written in the spirit of revival animating the contemporary theory and practice of communism.

But these volumes do not aim to restate the ghosts of communism’s past. Gone is the scientific certitude and dogmatism of Diamat ideology, which believed that the formation of communism was a determined outcome, reliant only on the development of productive forces. Gone also is the acceptance of political authoritarianism that tainted earlier and still existing forms of communist practice—the litany of failed projects and the crimes committed in the name of communism, the horrors of the Gulag, Stalinization, the Cultural Revolution, and the Killing Fields, among others. Replacing such totalizing projects is a healthy suspicion of revolutionary vanguards and a reassertion of humanist ethics

like emancipation, participation, and co-creation, which were so pronounced in Marx's earlier works. What we see here is not a narrowing of the aspirational dimensions of communist thought but a firming of its commitment to struggle. Determinism and authoritarianism have been rejected and we have regained the most fundamental tenet of revolutionary thought: *that change is up to us*. History does not unfold along some predetermined path, led by a metaphysical dialectic. Our future, as our history, is made by our hands—emancipation can only ever be the confluence of our choices and actions.

ABOUT THE SERIES

Structure

In recent years there has been a veritable explosion of scholarship on the theory and practice of communism. Alain Badiou's *The Communist Hypothesis* was a clear turning point in the literature. It revived the idea of communism as the logic that class subordination was not something inevitable, that it could be overcome through the collective reorganization of society based on a free association of producers that would eliminate the division of labor and the coercive state. Though Badiou contended that we are far from realizing this "community of equals," it was in "formulating and testing the communist hypothesis" that Badiou has since inspired myriad explorations on this idea.¹ One of the most significant and ongoing collaborations on this theme has been Costas Douzinas and Slavoj Žižek's edited volume, *The Idea of Communism*, which followed the London conference inspired by Badiou's call to arms. Emphasizing emancipation and the commons, these works have offered explorations of how to carry the communist idea forward in a world of financial and social turmoil, claiming nothing less than that the "long night of the Left" is, finally, coming to an end. The contributors to these volumes each share the view that we need to distinguish the state from communism and expand the politics of inclusion, with the underlying belief that communism remains an abundant resource for radical politics oriented toward emancipation.²

In this context, works of particular note by Jodi Dean, Bruno Bosteels, and Michael Lebowitz have sought to make the communist vision a reality. Dean has argued for the need to organize as a party on the basis of our common and collective desires, Bosteels has sought to move beyond lofty abstractions to thoroughly rethink communism through a dialogue with a number of key thinkers on the Left, and Lebowitz has offered a model of the socialist alternative through the "socialist triangle" of social production, democratic organization, and new social relations beyond self-interest.³ Others, while not associating with communist ideology directly

have, like Guy Standing's conception of "The Precariat"⁴ or David Graeber's history of debt,⁵ focused on various facets of contemporary capitalist socioeconomic relations and their deformation. In distinction, Hardt and Negri's trilogy *Empire*, *Multitude* and *Commonwealth* has been one of the most influential attempts at understanding the interrelations, at the global level, between war, class, and the commons, in which communism is to be once again associated with the sociality that defines human relations.⁶ Re-engagements with particular aspects of Marx's extensive corpus have proliferated in an expansive literature⁷ that has only been surpassed by a growing number of examinations, inspired by a communist point of view, of the various aspects of the financial and environmental crises—a list too exhaustive to engage here.

What is notable in each of these accounts is the shared belief in the possibilities immanent within the idea of communism, something reflected equally throughout the three volumes of *Communism in the 21st Century*. However, what distinguishes this series from the plethora of recent works in this subject-area is the three aims that frame the project as a whole and which are reflected in each individual volume: (1) a re-engagement with the ideas of Marx; (2) an assessment of the challenges, past and present, facing communist movements, parties, and states; and (3) perspectives on the future possibilities of communist theory and practice. While each volume is stand-alone, together they offer a fluid account of the past, present, and future of communism located in the conditions of the early 21st century.

The periodic crises of capitalism seem, almost as a logical necessity, to bring with them a resurgence of interest in viable alternatives. The GFC was no exception. Marx's work has undergone nothing less than a revival, being read by all concerned parties, from German bankers to the radicals in Zuccotti Park, not only as a means to explain the phenomena of recurrent economic crises but to fill the void left by the fall of this dominant ideology.⁸ Volume 1, *The Father of Communism: Rediscovering Marx's Ideas*, situates the series within this rehabilitation of communist theory. It engages with the ongoing importance of Marx's vision of communism for contemporary radical, emancipatory politics. Despite the centrality of communism to Marx's philosophy and political economy, a detailed engagement with his ideal has been curiously absent in the literature, such that communism has remained one of the most under-theorized aspects of Marx's work within both political science and philosophy.⁹ Without such an explication, Marx's ideal has been left to unnecessary obfuscation that—when coupled with the oppressive regimes associated with its name and the collapse of the Soviet project—have served only to further mystify what could be a potentially liberating force in contemporary politics. This volume attempts to overcome this oversight. The volume is organized around 10 themed interpretations of Marx's concept of communism: cultural, socialist, individualist,

dialectical, humanist, cosmopolitan, utopian, feminist, environmental, and romantic. Through this diverse interpretive group of scholars, theoretical orientations, and normative positions, the volume offers a unique, contrasting, and variegated assessment of Marx's communist vision and its relevance for contemporary politics in both theory and practice.

Turning toward more practical engagements, Volume 2, *Whither Communism? The Challenges of the Past and the Present* focuses on the litany of challenges facing existing communist movements, parties, and states. These challenges are shown to be many and considerable. From the bitter losses of past revolutionary moments to the horrors of failed experiments that continue to resonate, the communist tradition remains mired in a damning, bloody past. The two great bastions of the radical Left, anarchism and communism, remain divided into two hostile camps, as they have been since the demise of the First International. Added to this historical fracturing of the Left, repression of working class and radical movements has intensified across the globe. Many of the reformist gains of Western social-democratic struggle have been lost under the tide of reactionary neoliberalism—or as it is so non-obtrusively labeled under the jargon of economic rationalism, rolled-back. For many peoples in the developing world, these gains were never achieved. These defeats have exposed the intractable limits of reformism, trade unionism, and emancipation through the ballot of the capitalist state. Added to this has been the accretion of crises in finance, production, and employment, alongside the accelerating processes of environmental degradation as late capitalism reaches what is perhaps its terminal phase. Against this tumultuous background, the question of *Whither Communism?* takes on a significance that is not purely historical. For in the context of today's mounting crises the question is no longer, as Rosa Luxemburg once asked, "socialism or barbarism?"; instead, one might say "socialism or extinction?"

Volume 2 begins by examining the continuing significance of key historical events and debates within communism. The tensions between communism and anarchism, the splits within leftist parties and groups within the Internationals, and the capitalist restoration after the demise of the Soviet system, illustrate that communism's past continues to frame the possibilities of the present. But this volume also offers a contemporary analysis of actually existing states that identify as communist, including the economic form of Chinese communism and its rise as the next global superpower; the paradox of North Korea as a communist, dynastic, and pariah state; the changes underway in Vietnamese Socialism as it mediates modernity and development; and the likely direction of change in Cuba with the passing of the Castro era. Alongside these statist communist projects, the volume also examines past and ongoing communist experiments that indicate a certain transcendence of the traditional communist mantra about the capture of state power. Here, novel developments in

the Mexican Commune, Venezuela's transition to socialism, and a global accounting of radical working-class socialism in the early 21st century all indicate an open horizon for the forms of communist struggle and organization to meet the challenges of the present and near future.

Building upon and extending the contemporary focus of Volume 2, Volume 3, *The Future of Communism: Social Movements, Economic Crises, and the Re-imagining of Communism*, analyzes the trajectory of communist struggles, theoretical developments, and organizational praxis into the 21st century. Its theoretical and empirical content offers an indication of the direction communist ideas and practices are taking in shaping this century. The opening chapters examine existing revolutionary and protest movements and their global implications for revivifying communism as a lived social struggle—the World Social Forum (WSF), the Arab Spring, and Occupy, that have all attempted to build alternative futures. These recent movements are set against the background of the unique challenges facing communism in the present, including globalization, digital and communicative technologies, and the problem of value and the commons. This is paralleled with ongoing theoretical developments in communist thought, such as the rapprochement between feminism and communism and the question of the means and ends of revolution in critical theory. Turning to the dimensions of communist praxis, the volume offers insights pertaining to organization in contemporary radical movements. It engages with the militant, the assembly, and communizing, where communism—at least for John Holloway—becomes a process with many points of intersections that exist in the possibilities of the *now*.

Across all these chapters, it seems communism in the 21st century promotes participatory social, economic, and political organization against centralization; calls for harmony through the commons in opposition to commodification; embraces philosophical critique rather than certainty or determinism; and deploys new methods of organization and resistance opposed to the methods of vanguardism and political power, particularly through the state. These examples suggest that the communist horizon—to borrow from Jodi Dean—has expanded considerably from its early manifestations, that the long night of communism *is* coming to an end, and that the dawn is indeed bright for human emancipation in this century.

Themes

The choice of authors for this series was based on the notion that diversity would lead to a fuller and more dynamic engagement with the question of communism in the 21st century. As such, it is a difficult task to draw out thematic commonalities and even more difficult to draw these with analytical precision. Yet while the plurality of interpretations does not graft neatly onto some shared viewpoint on communism, nevertheless convergences are evident—one in particular being the importance

attached to social relations or intersubjectivity as the key dimension of communism's emancipatory project, as we shall see. In this part my primary aim is to draw out the key arguments from each chapter and, as a secondary goal, where possible, to observe any commonalities that emerge within the series taken as a whole. With this in mind, I actively deploy the words of each author in an attempt to weave, as closely as possible, some of these common themes without distorting—willfully or unaware—the unique meaning of each theorist.¹⁰ Needless to say, the contributors to this series do not agree on the idea of communism, their interpretation of Marx's (and Engels's) vision of communism, or of the history, present and future trajectory of communism in the 21st century. The following discussion does not therefore claim agreement in its absence, nor is it intended to foist a synthesis or closure when there is none. The confines of a series such as this, is that it cannot present these many distinct approaches and subject areas as a debate. It is but one step in a task that can only be collective, involving real exchanges, something that requires time and the political will. As such, my intention is limited to illuminating the primary arguments and some of the common themes that emerge even within the diverse array of interpretations, methods, and political commitments contained within *Communism in the 21st Century*.

Volume 1: The Father of Communism

Emphasizing the ongoing importance of Marx's vision of communism for radical and emancipatory politics, in the opening chapter of the *The Father of Communism: Rediscovering Marx's Ideas*, Terry Eagleton does nothing less than praise Marx (Chapter 1, Volume 1). He praises him as a profound moral thinker, a Romantic humanist (a finding shared by Löwy in Chapter 10, Volume 1), whose key insight was the understanding that true self-fulfillment of the individual's powers and capacities could only take place socially, that is, in and through one another. Achieving these distinctive qualities at the interpersonal level is called, by Eagleton, *love*, and at the political level, *socialism*. Echoing these same humanistic dimensions, Sean Sayers (Chapter 2, volume 1) affirms that Marx's ideal of communism is ontological. That is, human beings are endowed with universal capacities and powers, and yet to exercise and develop these fully requires replacing the notion of wealth derived from classical political economy with communism's notion concerning the "wealth of human need."¹¹ Under communism the development of needs *is* value—the true definition of wealth—because it expands human productive and creative powers.¹² For Sayers, this ideal of communism is essential not only to Marx's appeal as a philosopher but also to the socialist movement: communism is a theory of how society will develop, and how it is actually moving, but it is also an ideal social, economic, and political vision.

The radical humanism in Marx's vision identified by Eagleton and Sayers is also emphasized by Chattopadhyay (Chapter 3, Volume 1) who regards communism as the reunion of humanity. Chattopadhyay focuses on the place of the human individual in Marx's vision of the future society, particularly the laboring individual within what he calls the Association Mode of Production. Through the movement toward socialism, human beings are no longer personally or materially dependent, so they no longer exist as "fragmented" individuals: alienation is overcome through this reunion, providing the conditions (and relations) in which all human beings can become "totally developed," "integral" individuals. Indeed, for Chattopadhyay, societies can be judged on the extent to which the individual is free within it, that is, suffering neither personal nor objective dependence. Along these lines, Chattopadhyay extols Marx's vision of communism because of the "free individuality" that can be brought about through its socioeconomic form, something which he considers is nothing less than a restoration of humanity to its essence: "the real appropriation of the human essence by the human for the human." In my own chapter (Chapter 6, Volume 1), I also explore some of these humanistic themes in the emancipatory dimensions of Marx's vision of communism. In broad agreement with Eagleton, Sayers, and Chattopadhyay, I view communism as Marx's ideal form of socioeconomic organization necessary for the flourishing of humankind's creative powers. However, I develop this through the concepts of species-being (the full self-actualization of one's individual capacities that Marx developed from Ludwig Feuerbach) and the notion of the unalienated or "total man" of the *Paris Manuscripts*.¹³ Here, human emancipation and the movement to full communism can be seen as the historical movement that removes all restrictions on the potential development of humanity—something that overcomes the limitations of bourgeois political emancipation—and reunites the private and public essences of humanity.¹⁴

So, against those who foist upon Marx the oppression and crimes of communist states—and who conveniently forget the genocidal crimes of capitalism—Eagleton shows that it was the question of achieving justice and prosperity for all that was the guiding leitmotif of Marx's vision of communism. Nevertheless, as Chattopadhyay makes painfully clear, Marx's original idea of a socialist society underwent a "total inversion" by those who in the name of Marx(ism) called their regimes socialist. Along similar lines, Michael Lebowitz (Chapter 5, Volume 1) rejects the juridical forms of state-socialism of the 20th century, particularly the Leninist model that rendered unto law the "socialist principle" in which the individual was cast as a worker, not a human being—a move that, in the words of Chattopadhyay "negated the laboring individual"—and by which socialism was reduced to a mere question of distribution. Lebowitz's rejection of the state form of socialism forms part of his wider reconceptualization

of Marx's vision of communism as a just, people-based alternative. He sees it as a form of socioeconomic organization that removes all obstacles to the full development of human beings, or what he calls "real human development"—in a similar refrain to the humanism identified by Eagleton, Sayers, Chattopadhyay, and me. This rejection of state-socialist models is also expressed by Bertell Ollman (Chapter 4, Volume 1) who posits that the Soviet Union and China were not evidence of how communism works in practice, not just because of their underdevelopment and constant threat of foreign invasion, but because the regimes of "actually existing socialism" were nothing less than Orwellian constructions. The crucial step in reestablishing Marx's approach to communism, Ollman argues, is to break its connection with these very systems. And yet, in some perverse twist of historical irony, despite the glaring contradictions of these regimes when compared to Marx's express humanistic ideals of communism, they remain the most difficult distortions to correct.

In this context, Silvia Federici (Chapter 8, Volume 1) takes issue with the long-assumed nexus between capitalist development and the eventual liberation of humankind. Federici highlights a number of indelible weaknesses in Marx's reliance on capitalism as somehow necessary for the transition to communism. Such justifications, Federici claims, underestimate the knowledge and wealth produced by noncapitalist societies, just as they underestimate the extent to which capitalism has built its power through their appropriation. They also fail to see how capitalism, far from inventing social cooperation or large-scale intercourse, destroyed societies that had been tied by communal property relations and cooperative forms of work. Moreover, the assumption that capitalism has been inevitable overlooks those in the past who struggled against its imposition, just as it forgets those resisting its machinations in the present. Federici reveals how illusory automation and mechanization have been for human liberation, having not only failed to ease the burden of labor in any meaningful sense but having become parasitic on the earth. Ultimately, such accounts fail to see capitalism as an historical and ongoing process of violent appropriation. Federici claims that capitalism is neither necessary nor progressive in regards to the development of human capacities, but in fact furthers "unequal power relations, hierarchies, and divisions" and generates "ideologies, interests, and subjectivities that constitute a destructive social force." Those accounts that extol a deterministic link between capitalism and communism lead away from the real question of "reconstituting a collective interest" in favor of a productivist and consumerist logic. Ultimately, Federici offers a clear revision of Marxist analysis that contests the notion of capitalism as the necessary precondition for communism, calling for us to instead focus on those social relations that are conducive of human emancipation and the reclamation of the commons rather than a myopic gaze on production, industrialism, and consumption.

It is not that capitalism has achieved nothing, however. Indeed, Marx praised capitalism as generously as Eagleton praises Marx: capitalism has developed human powers of production and furthered a litany of cultural freedoms such as the emancipation of slaves, the invention of human rights, and the dismantling of empires. But the point for Federici—and in distinction to Eagleton’s conciliatory, if not optimistic appraisal of capitalism—is to highlight the epistemological narrowing of what social relations are seen as necessary for the emergence of communist association, against the competitive, asocial logics of capitalism. In other words, what is in contention is how Marx’s insistence on the necessity of developing productive forces for human freedom has been subsequently interpreted by Marxists in a one-sided fashion, overlooking the importance of genuine relations of association presupposed in communism. As we shall see, I make similar findings in regards to Marx’s attachment to internationalism, which restricts the relations of association under nationalism and the juridical form of the state. For Eagleton however, the question was something different: why, under capitalism, where we have accumulated more resources than throughout preceding human history and where we labor harder than our ancestors ever did, do we yet remain unable to overcome poverty, exploitation, and inequality? For Eagleton, the answer lies in the way we organize production: capitalism has not, indeed, cannot free us from toil. And it is on this point that Eagleton praises Marx as authentically prophetic: he did not give us blueprints of the future, but made it clear that unless we change our unjust ways, the future is likely to be “deeply unpleasant”—or not at all. This warning is echoed by Lebowitz, who claims that we now risk a new barbarism, a capitalist endgame, that includes the domination of impoverished peoples and an ecological nightmare.

So what are we to take as the appropriate linkage between capitalism and communism today? For Ollman, the “all too popular separation of Marx’s vision of communism from its historical roots in capitalism” must be overcome. That is, communism must be linked, as it was for Marx, to the “unrealized potential” in capitalism. Ollman here makes a major revision of his famous work “Marx’s Vision of Communism,” claiming that this was based on the wrong question.¹⁵ While utopian speculation can be liberating, Ollman argues that it is no substitute for an analysis of capitalism and the dialectical method of exposition focused on the ways in which Marx looked for evidence of communism inside capitalism: “the future concealed in the present.” There are several of these approaches evident within Marx’s work, which Ollman offers textual support for throughout his chapter. These include projecting capitalism’s major contradictions to the point of their resolution, or, projecting the “end of alienation” through what life would look like under full communism, a device which Marx often used. One of the most important devices however, is the analysis of what Ollman calls the “sprouts” of communism (e.g., cooperatives, unions, and public education) that already exhibit socialist characteristics

within the current order.¹⁶ For Ollman, “the new communist world that capitalism has made possible is staring us right in the face.” Reestablishing the necessary links between capitalism and communism does not make revolution inevitable, nor render Marx a deterministic thinker. Rather, it makes communism a realistic possibility in the present, regardless of how likely or unlikely this tendency is believed to be. Through these examples, the “end of alienation” can be shown to be not just a normative description of life in “full” communism, but something actually possible and something already existing in nascent form. For Ollman focusing on the “sprouts” that can, and do, emerge out of the conditions of the present can convincingly reestablish the immanent link through which the oppressed can “leap” into revolutionary practice. In ways very similar to Ollman’s idea of the sprouts of communism, Sayers observes that even in late capitalism the communal and cooperative social arrangements, which are the progenitor of communism, are common throughout the existing order and are experienced not just in primary relations of family and friends, but also in those social relations marked by generosity rather than the ideology of self-interest, such as with teachers, nurses, and so on. As such, for both Sayers and Ollman, the alternative forms of social and economic organization—the initial stage in the two-step transition from socialism to communism—already exist in “embryo” in our society. What is perhaps most interesting here is the convergence between Ollman, Sayers, Federici and myself on the importance of the type of social relations of cooperation and association within communism, which are routinely downplayed in many Orthodox Marxist accounts that emphasise, in a one-sided manner, the importance of productive forces.

The question of the link between capitalism and communism usually inheres around interpretations of Marx’s statements in the *Critique of the Gotha Programme* and the utility or adequacy of the two-stage thesis about the transition from socialism to true communism.¹⁷ In Volume 1, Sayers, Chattopadhyay, and Lebowitz offer contending readings of this passage. For example, Sayers argues that in the first stage (the “dictatorship of the proletariat”), the capitalist state is replaced by one that will rule on behalf of working people, through which all private property in the means of production will be converted into common ownership and made operative for the common good. Yet even though ownership is to no longer be based around private interests, or production attentive to profit, individuals are rewarded according to the work they do so that the notion of wealth remains confined under its bourgeois trappings. This is a critical point that Lebowitz also engages with at length. Sayers reiterates that this is only to be a transitional phase on the way to full or true communism, however—the place that has transcended and overcome the free market and its notion of profit as value. Only here, under full communism, is productive life brought back under human control and organized for the human good to create a society in which “capital and wage labor, money and the

market, classes and the division of labor," are abolished. Chattopadhyay, while denying the centrality of the two-step process, nevertheless shares with Sayers the notion of the change in wealth under communism. Sayers, it should be recalled, expressed this as the development of needs, which expands human productive and creative powers as value. For Chattopadhyay, the mark of communist society is the change in wealth *from* capital accumulation *to* the expansion of free time for all.

Offering a significant departure from Orthodox Marxism, Lebowitz contests the standard interpretation of the *Gotha Programme* finding that not only does each stage contain strikingly different relations of distribution, but that Marx was not necessarily consistent regarding his depiction of communist society (particularly its economic characteristics). This reading has profound political implications as to whether the socialist principle later identified by Lenin actually corresponded to Marx's conception of the new society—and ultimately explains Lebowitz's rejection of any state-socialist models of communism.¹⁸ For Lebowitz, the question hinges on how we are to understand Marx's account of historical development as a process of *becoming*. Capitalism, as an organic system, spontaneously reproduces capitalist conditions and relations of production, that is, it reproduces its necessary premises and "creates its own presuppositions" as a "connected whole" constantly in the process of renewal.¹⁹ Yet no new system can ever produce all its premises so that when a new system emerges it necessarily inherits premises from the old before it can produce its own. Consequently, as socialism emerges from capitalist society, it is, as Marx so famously expressed it, stamped with the "birthmarks" of the old—it is decidedly not communism as developed from its "own foundations." Lebowitz highlights a manifestation of what socialism inherits from capitalism in how it conforms to a particular distribution of property. That is, while the material conditions of production have been transformed into common property in this stage, the "personal condition of production" remains the property of workers. The new system is therefore defective in the sense that it retains explicitly the private ownership of labor-power: fair exchange is the "exchange of equivalents" and socialism comes to be defined by the principle of distribution. The result is that rather than relating to others "as a member of society," the individual producer enters relations as the owner of his or her own capacity. They are seen as a worker, not a human being.²⁰ It is a one-sided relation. The type of individual produced under such conditions is, of necessity, "deformed by these continuing defects" that will enter *all* social relations. Lebowitz makes clear that this inherited defect of the self-interest of owners in socialism is the opposite of solidarity, community, and association envisaged by Marx and must be actively subordinated if the new society of communism is to develop as an organic system. Yet rather than calling for a struggle to subordinate this defect, Lebowitz finds those whom

he calls “two-stagers”—like Lenin—seek to transform it into a socialist principle to be enforced by the state. As Lebowitz warns, not struggling against these inherited defects risks reverting to them. The result is pernicious not just for the deformation of individuals, but also for the very ideal of communism, which is reduced to merely overcoming scarcity and creating consumption without limits—a far cry from the “true realm of freedom” and “real human development” promised by communism, where the development of human powers is to be an end in itself.²¹

These relational deficiencies are also reflected in the restrictions Marx placed on human emancipation through his emphasis on material production over genuine social relations and his reliance on internationalism over wider forms of solidarity required in communist association. In my chapter, I argue that a focus on material production risks subsuming human emancipation under the interests of industrialism, distribution, and consumption, which unwittingly reproduce capitalist relationalities (in ways similar to those identified by Federici and Lebowitz regarding the exchange of equivalents under socialism). Under the productivist dogma of Diamat at the turn of the 20th century, Marxists would forget entirely that the emancipatory promise of communism is not strictly reducible to material production, that the individual under full communism is not to be considered rich because they *have* much, but because they *are* much.²² Marx’s focus on internationalism, I contend, was equally restrictive of the types of social relations necessitated by communist association that he suggested, in the *Communist Manifesto* and in the organizational structure of the First International, were to have global reach. That is, internationalism served to contract the boundaries of ethical community under the state and limit the expression of solidarity in ways that were seemingly at odds with the wider cosmopolitan ethic implied by Marx’s concept of human emancipation. Internationalism is logically dependent on the juridical form of the nation-state and some prior ethic of nationalism that limits the potential for universal, collective action. As such, principles of socialist internationalism as expressed in the Internationals or notions of world communism, while professing incredibly strong cosmopolitan norms, remain ethically insufficient because of their explicit acceptance of methodological nationalism, the belief that human community is determined by the nation-state. The problem inheres not just with the capture of state power by the vanguard, which threatens the subversion of emancipation under a new ruling class or bureaucracy. It is also bound up with the reliance on the spirit of internationalism that is limited by an underlying commitment to the particularism of the state that may override the type of universal association required by communism.

Along similar lines, Federici calls for us to go “beyond Marx,”²³ not just because of the vast social-economic transformations since the time of his analysis of capitalism, but also because of the limits in his understanding

of capitalist relations that ignored or marginalized subjects from the historical world stage. Marx's focus on wage labor assumed the vanguard role to the proletariat (usually concentrated in the Western metropolis), downplaying the role of the enslaved, the colonized, and the unwaged, not only in the process of accumulation, extraction of surplus value, and system reproduction, but also in anticapitalist struggles. The absence in Marx's analysis of capitalism of domestic labor, family, and gender relations—and the interest of capital and the state in women's reproductive capacity—is striking. Yet by shifting focus from wage labor to labor power (and its reproduction), Federici hopes to widen Marxist analysis to include gender and the colonial dimensions of late capitalism, which she considers most important for a feminist program and for the politics of the commons. The commons are defined in the plural by Federici (which reflects similar ideas of Teivo Teivainen, Jodi Dean, and David Eden in Volume 3, as we shall see) and because they do not depend for their existence on a supporting state, they do not risk becoming the dictatorship of the white/male sector of the working class within the "concretized" state-form presupposed in the dictatorship of the proletariat. Moreover, Federici finds that struggles in defense of our natural commons and the creation of commoning activities are multiplying in contemporary society²⁴—more indications of the embryonic forms of communism sprouting within the present identified by Ollman and Sayers—and it is through these actually existing processes that Federici identifies how we can rid ourselves of "all the muck of ages" and liberate ourselves from external constraints and capitalist ideologies.²⁵

The primacy given to the commons across the radical Left in recent decades, and articulated clearly in Federici's chapter, interconnects with Lebowitz's theorization of the social changes necessary to realize "our communal nature." Recalling that Lebowitz and Federici both problematize, in their own ways, the supposed necessity between capitalism and communism, for Lebowitz what was necessary to overcome the fixation on distribution as the exchange of equivalents under socialism is a set of institutions and practices through which "all members of society can share the fruits of social labor and are able to satisfy their 'own need for development.'" For him these must include workers, neighbor, and communal councils that extend upward to "transcend the local" and achieve "solidarity within society as a whole"—a call that echoes the cosmopolitan sentiments articulated in my own chapter. Here, Lebowitz cites the socialist triangle of the late Chávez of Venezuela as a means to move toward associated producers as an organic system of production, consumption, and distribution²⁶—and many of these communal system processes are documented by Dario Azzellini in Volume 2. For Lebowitz, the socialist triangle offers nothing less than a tripartite expression of "our communal nature": through the social ownership of the means of production comes real social property; through social production for social needs comes

worker decision making oriented toward society's needs; through social production organized by workers and worker decision making comes the transformation of people and their very needs. In all of these ways, social relations are placed at the forefront of Marx's emancipatory project.

These progressive elements of the communal nature of communism are also highlighted by Paul Burkett (Chapter 9, Volume I). Burkett interprets Marx's various outlines of communism as a vision of sustainable human development by sketching the developmental and environmental principles in communal property, production, and relations, that reflect—albeit with differences in terminology—the socialist triangle of production, consumption, and distribution identified by Lebowitz. Given the worsening crisis of poverty and the environment, Burkett rightly points out that the question of sustainable human development is crucial for the communist tradition, which has long been deemed ecologically unsustainable due to its alleged assumption of a limitless nature and human domination over it. In opposition to such interpretations, Burkett observes that, for Marx, communal property did not confer a right to overexploit land and other natural conditions for the needs of associated producers²⁷ but rather was to instill, through communism, “the unity of being of man with nature.”²⁸ Burkett interprets Marx and Engels's references to continued growth of wealth under communism not as an antiecological belief in production for its own sake, but as something that can be properly understood only in relation to their vision of free, well-rounded human development, which we have already explored in the chapters of Eagleton, Sayers, and Chattopadhyay. Human development does not imply limitless growth or the full satiation of all conceivable needs, but rather the “satiation of basic needs and a gradual extension of this satiation to secondary needs as they develop socially through expanded free time and cooperative worker-community.” The fact that production under communism is a broad social process in which wealth and use value is increasingly defined by “free time” or “disposal time” (something Chattopadhyay also reflects on), then takes on tremendous ecological significance. As opposed to the use value of profit under capitalism that licenses the destructive exploitation of the environment, Burkett highlights the environmental dimensions of communism that tends toward the deepening or enrichment of “human–nature relations.” In particular, against those who equate the expansion of free time under communism with the overcoming of all natural constraints, Burkett shows how communism allows for the responsible management of the use of natural conditions, and, through the expansion of free time as a measure of wealth, has the potential to reduce pressures on limited natural conditions.

These progressive dimensions of communism are taken further by Roger Paden (Chapter 7, Volume 1) who reexamines the relation between utopian thinking, communism, and the normativity of urban planning. Paden examines five different strands of Marx and Engels's criticism of

inadequate forms of utopianism—tactical, strategic, materialist, humanist, and historicist—finding that their professed “anti-utopian utopianism” was not paradoxical but directed specifically against *static* utopias, that is, those utopian forms that sought to arrest historical development by restricting the right of future generations to adopt principles different from those that shaped their social institutions (a view that bares similarities to Keir Milburn’s account of the valorization of ongoing rebellion in Jefferson and Hardt discussed in Chapter 9, Volume 3). In fact, far from being opposed to utopianism, Paden finds Marx and Engels to be “utopians of a very special sort,” whom counted the Utopian Socialists among “the most significant minds of all time.”²⁹ Paden assures us that a utopianism that emphasizes the importance of human development, egalitarian dialogue, and urban forms that facilitate processes of association would be approved of by Marx and Engels. This is because in distinction to the static utopian projects of Saint Simon, Owen, and Fourier, Marx and Engels advanced a form of utopianism justified on the human need for conscious self-development (humanism) and the need for the discursive development of moral categories (historicism). For Paden, these justifications point toward what he identifies as a “developmentalist utopia” and a “procedural dialectic utopia,” respectively, within Marx’s vision of communism. Yet more than any other chapter of Volume 1, Paden extends Marx’s vision by using these humanist and historicist justifications of utopianism for a constructive contribution to the types of social processes a Marxist urban planner should facilitate. While Paden admits that the best urban design cannot—in the absence of social revolution—produce the utopian society of Marx’s vision, they can nevertheless contribute to human progress and improve the lives of the living. Indeed, such processes could mirror what urban planning in communist society *could* be, that is, “the science and art of catalyzing and nourishing the close-grained working relationships”³⁰ required for human emancipation.

In ways that complement Paden’s account of the utopian dimensions of Marx’s thought, Michael Löwy (Chapter 10, Volume 1) contends that there are substantial affinities between Marxism and Romanticism, which are too often neglected in deference to their association with French socialism, German philosophy, and British political economy. Löwy demonstrates how romanticism is fundamental to two of the most fundamental aspects of Marx’s thought, namely, his critique of capitalism and his conception of communism. Yet Löwy does not characterize Marx as a Romantic, but rather posits that he accepted the Romantic viewpoint of the plenitude of the precapitalist past and its critique of the bourgeois world, while rejecting both Romanticism’s illusion of a return to the past and the bourgeois apology of the present. So while the reactionary pole of romanticism dreamt of Utopias of return, and the revolutionary pole attempted to detour the past toward an emancipated future, Löwy shows that Marx and

Engels recognized the value of the social critique that the Romantic tradition contributed, namely, their denunciation of the “bourgeois destruction of all human qualities, transformed into commodities, and the ruthless exploitation of the workers.” Yet, Marx and Engels’s debt to Romanticism goes deeper than the critique of modern bourgeois civilization. Löwy goes on to show how Marx and Engels’s conception of a communism that sought to reestablish the role of the “human and natural qualities” of life—a reference to precapitalist forms of production and of life—is a clear link to the Romantic tradition. Simultaneously, however, communism was also a *new* way of life in the process and relations of production, a new social culture. Communism was therefore neither Romantic nor Modernist but “an attempt at a dialectical *Aufhebung* [sublation] between the two, in a new critical and revolutionary worldview . . . one that would incorporate the technological advances of modern society along with some of the human qualities of precapitalist communities.” In this way, communism did not commit the same follies as reactionary dreams of return but was to be a “detour by the past towards the communist future.”

Volume 2: Whither Communism?

Moving on from Marx’s projections of the communist future and the theoretical concerns of Volume 1, Volume 2 *Whither Communism? The Challenges of the Past and the Present* explores the challenges of communism, both past and present. This involves engaging with a number of historical ruptures in the radical Left that continue to resonate in the communist present. This is followed by accounts of the many ongoing state-socialist projects, China, North Korea, Vietnam, Cuba, more recent developments in Mexico and Venezuela, and an assessment of the existent potentialities of radical working-class socialism at the start of the 21st century. Given the vast differences that arise from the distinct historical content or country-specific analysis of each chapter in Volume 2, it is impossible to draw out any commonalities, though it remains pertinent to offer an account of the main arguments of each chapter. A significant caveat needs to be given here. No definition of communism is presented across the series, other than the general notion that combines both the (i) ideals or theoretical aspirations of the communist emancipatory project, and; (ii) concrete historical experiences of movements, parties, states and ‘models’ of communism. For volume 2, this approach permitted the analysis of the gaps between promises and realities of each communist project in question despite their vast difference and possible changes in name, official ideology or political direction of each example. Many socialist parties have abandoned significant dimensions of the socialist project, and their connection to communism may be considered dubious. At the same time, the different periods and conditions of each example are not

distinguished or compared as against wider changes in the global context, ideological shifts or concrete reforms. It is impossible—due to space restrictions—for this volume to offer consistent comparative analysis of each historic period, the general contradictory features of past experiments of Real Socialism, or the nuances and unique conditions of each movement in question. Specific analysis of the historical contexts of each example is, of course, much needed but must await further research and more appropriate forums.

The volume opens with Robert Graham's (Chapter 1, Volume 2) reengagement with the historical disagreements between the anarchists and Marxists, with a particular focus on the debates between Marx and Pierre-Joseph Proudhon, and Marx and Mikhail Bakunin. Despite the divergence on the questions of historical materialism, state power, and the role of the proletariat—all of which continue today—Graham finds that there was broad agreement between Marx and Proudhon on the foundational question of the abolishing the state along with the abolition of capitalism. Nevertheless, what was keenly disputed was the best method and organization to bring about these social, economic, and political transformations. Anarchists argued that the organization of the workers into a class need not result in the creation of a workers' party, nor that a single political party could ever claim to speak for the entire working class. Moreover, anarchists contested Marx's belief that state ownership and control of the means of production would abolish class antagonism and advocated instead for self-management—an idea of collectivity that was to be operated and managed directly by those involved—which became a dominant theme in anarchist proposals for social change. On the other hand, Marx contended with Proudhon's mutualism, arguing that any socialist economic system that retained "individual exchange" would be a class system.³¹ On this point, Graham finds that some anarchists moved toward the communist position, particularly within the First International, but not on the basis of Marx's theory of historical materialism but through the rejection of Proudhon's mutualist economics, his insufficiently revolutionary program, and his waning commitment to anarchism. Bakunin, on the other hand, advocated a collectivist position. He disagreed with those revolutionaries who, like Marx, favored a centralized revolutionary state, arguing that "no dictatorship can have any other objective than to perpetuate itself" and that it "would inevitably result in military dictatorship and a new master."³² As opposed to the Marxian currents in the International, which sought the revolutionary overthrow and capture of state power, Bakunin's proto-syndicalism looked for its replacement through councils of trade bodies and a committee of delegates. These would take the place of politics to create the "free federation of free producers."³³ For Bakunin, it was only through the self-activity of the masses that an anarchist society could be achieved.

The tragedy of the Paris Commune brought these issues to a head. The tide of reaction that swept across Europe strengthened Marx's resolve regarding the need for distinct working-class political parties; for the anarchists, it affirmed the need for militant trade union organization. Yet from the mid-1870s to the early 1880s, there was a convergence between some anarchist and Marxist currents toward libertarian or anarchist communism that resulted (on the anarchist side) from an internal critique of its earlier expressions of anarchist socialism. For Graham, there are now more similarities between these so-called class struggle anarchists and council communists than there are between those anarchist currents that emphasize process, assembly forms of organization (such as the 2011 Occupy movements, discussed by Rodrigo Nunes and Keir Milburn in Volume 3) and the creation of a decentralized ecological society. At the same time, it seems that some rapprochement between these two revolutionary strands of socialism is now possible given the failures of state socialism, the increasingly authoritarian tendencies of the modern state, and the need for direct forms of self-organization at local and cosmopolitan levels. One can hear echoed in Graham's account the slogan that "the revolution will be free, or not at all."

Paul Blackledge (Chapter 2, Volume 2) continues the historical examination of communism by interrogating the failings of the Internationals in promoting working-class solidarity, leading to the outbreak of World War I. Premised around the limitations of the Second International, Blackledge outlines Lenin's condemnation of its "opportunism," which "betrayed" the working class,³⁴ and argues that Lenin's approach to politics has lost none of its pertinence for communism in the 21st century. For Blackledge, the revolutionary Left's lack of proposals to stop World War I can be explained by the way it had become enmeshed within what were de facto reformist organizations and revisionist ideas. The Second International had largely forgotten Marx's focus on "human society, or social humanity,"³⁵ instead—as Rosa Luxemburg had already observed—tending to view socialism as the "inevitable" outcome of the contradictions of capitalism.³⁶ Yet Lenin's reading of Hegel offered a powerful alternative to positivist, neo-Kantian and Hegelian theorists of the Second International, by suggesting that humankind's consciousness did not merely reflect the world but *created* it.³⁷ By renewing the sublation of materialism and idealism that Marx articulated in the 1840s, Lenin was able to raise a devastating criticism of the Second International and the tendency of socialist parties to "cover political passivity beneath radical rhetoric."

In distinction to Kautsky and Bernstein's fatalistic reification of Marxism, Blackledge claims that Lenin understood that subjective practical activity lay at the center of the objective world, holding that social scientific laws should not be fetishized as things distinct from conscious human activity, but instead be recognized as necessarily "narrow, incomplete, [and]

approximate" attempts to frame political intervention.³⁸ It was the specific historical form of capitalism, for Lenin, that created the potential for political action toward the concrete possibility for workers' power in the metropolis, in alliance with national liberation movements in the colonies. For Blackledge, Lenin's use of the terms "betrayal" (in 1914) and "helplessness" (in 1922) to describe international socialism's inability to stop war is best regarded as a call to maximize the effectiveness of the Left, to focus on those things that it could achieve, with a view to building its influence *before* challenging power. Yet, Lenin's ideas were to be rejected within the communist (Third) International in favor of a return to a variant of Second International orthodoxy. The Stalinist deformation of the Soviet Union disassociated the leadership and bureaucracy from the interests of the proletariat in favor of the interests of the Soviet ruling class. These were the specific tyrannies the anarchists foresaw in the attempt to capture state power by representatives or vanguards of the working class, as identified in Graham's chapter.

Building from these antecedents to the Soviet experiment, Catherine Samary (Chapter 3, Volume 2) presents both an historical and contemporary account of the capitalist restoration throughout Eastern Europe, following the demise of the Soviet Union. Despite the many (failed) promises of economic development and civil freedoms that were to follow the introduction of Western capitalism, this process has been attended by a loss of social and economic protections for these subject populations. According to the World Bank and UNICEF, Russia now ranks among one of the most unequal countries in the world, its poverty levels rising from 1/25 in 1988 to 1/5 in 1998, and its life expectancy declining sharply (as high as 6.3 years for men).³⁹ Samary demonstrates how the histories of Eastern Europe have suffered ongoing conflicting national and ideological distortions, including the "official history" after the Stalinization of Soviet Union, but also the relations of domination between the Western European core and the semiperipheralization of Eastern European states that continues today. Most disconcerting however has been the loss or deliberate ambiguation of the 1989 movement's anti-bureaucratic dimensions in favor of portraying them solely as anticommunist.

Samary views the post-1989 changes throughout Eastern Europe as "*revolution*,"⁴⁰ that is, changes combining features of revolutions (systemic transformations) and reforms (changes introduced from above). Yet, whereas much has been made of those aspects that introduced political pluralism, elections and new laws that radically transformed the economy and the state, the other tendency in the spirit of 1989 has been neglected, namely, the desire to hold onto the social contract of the Soviet system, that assured employment, access to basic goods and services, and living conditions. For Samary, any consistent interpretation of 1989 must include both the anticommunist and the anti-bureaucratic dimensions of this

movement—the latter of which had long-standing precedents within the conflicting logics of Real Socialism, such as the reforms in Czechoslovakia (1962 and 1968) or in Yugoslavia (1965). One must go behind the ideological discourses of the 1989 democratic revolutions Samary argues, to see how the United States was able to win *Solidarność* to a liberal as opposed to pro-workerist ideology, or how a broad part of the former state apparatus was transformed through the invention of privatizations, into an emergent bourgeoisie to become the oligarchs of today's Russia and elsewhere. The introduction of neoliberalism—and its benchmarks of elections and privatization—was presented as an answer to the former Soviet dictatorship, but without full knowledge of the economic program that would remove the fundamental aspects of the social contract inherent to state socialism. What the peoples of Eastern Europe really sought, claims Samary, was the retention of the social contract and the obtainment of civil freedom, while getting rid of the bureaucratic and parasitic class.

The rise of the People's Republic of China runs in complete contradistinction to the collapse of the Soviet Union as described by Samary. While the question of whether China equates to a communist state—a question that could be asked about any of the statist projects of the last century, as Lebowitz, Chattopadhyay, and others noted in Volume 1—Alexander Vuving (Chapter 4, Volume 2) affirms that China will “most likely” be the new superpower. Vuving claims that Chinese communism was born of the dream that China would one day regain its lost power and status. Yet largely foregoing engagement with such normative political and social commentary, Vuving offers an economically driven analysis of the developments contributing to the rise of the “Red Dragon.” In terms of the main indicators of power—gross domestic product (GDP) and military expenditure—China is second only to the United States.⁴¹ Furthermore, China has been experiencing super-high growth due to its ability to maintain super-high investment and super-low consumption. Yet alongside these persuasive indicators of China becoming a “peer competitor” to the United States, Vuving identifies a curious dialectic in Chinese development claiming that its success “also bears the seeds of its failure.” The problem is that the same growth model that has catapulted Chinese development will likely collapse rather than be restructured to become sustainable. Vuving demonstrates that China's rise has been premised on sources that will not last for ever: firstly, its ability to save and invest, the so-called cult of investment, has been pursued at the expense of personal consumption; and secondly, its massive allocations of labor from agriculture to manufacturing and services, and from the state to the nonstate sector, relies on a pool of surplus labor from rural areas that is likely to dry up, causing a rise in wages and increasing costs of labor. This will ultimately make the country's products less price competitive. Added to these issues are the social pressures attending the growing gulf between rich and poor

which, in Vuving's estimation, portend "the eventual outburst of social and economic turmoil." China's growth model is, in a word, unsustainable. When these sources of cheap labor, capital, and technology are exhausted, China will experience the natural end of its high-growth phase. Here, the ability to innovate will be key; yet Vuving suggests that the same structures that have allowed China to rise may render it resistant to moving toward a more sustainable form of growth.

In stark contrast to the rise of China that many now see as inevitable, the longevity of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) has continued to confound the many observers who persistently suggest the likelihood of its imminent collapse. Yet for Bruce Cummings (Chapter 5, Volume 2), history has consistently failed to bare out these predictions because observers fail to engage with the nature of a North Korean political system that has survived because it has diverged so fundamentally from Marxism-Leninism, turning to an older political culture of corporatism, a philosophy of neo-Confucianism, and a modern form of dynastic monarchism. Cummings contends with the typical view that the DPRK has survived only because of China's diplomatic and trade assistance, suggesting that what distinguishes North Korean survival is the commitment of its "octogenarian officers" of the civil war to prevent their place in history from being erased, which might well be the case if the North were to ever capitulate to the South. In a culture that treats history and genealogy with the utmost seriousness, being consigned to historical irrelevance or, even worse, erasure, is tantamount to losing connection with one's ancestors and progeny. This is an outcome "to be resisted at all costs."

In addition to these cultural resources, the political form of the DPRK possesses a number of stabilizing features, albeit peculiar and even abhorrent to Western sentiment. Cummings likens the ideology of Kim Il Sung to a form of socialist corporatism, one in which the nation substituted the proletarian class as the unit of historical conflict and in which organic and familial metaphors, of blood, of the fatherly leader were emphasized. Cummings gives significance to the real meaning of *chuch'e* (Kim's trumpeted "Juche idea") that he argues is best translated as "to put things Korean first, always." The term is far more than self-reliance and independence however, for when coupled with the word for nation—*kukch'e*—it evokes an incredibly strong form of nationalism and national dignity. While "Juche" began as a form of anticolonial nationalism it has slowly evolved into an idealist metaphysic that has more in common with the exaltations of neo-Confucianism than Marxism. With an understanding of these politico-cultural norms, Cummings finds that the North Korean system has its own logic, however idiosyncratic it may appear, through which it becomes easier to understand the regime's behavior "as an unusual but predictable combination of monarchy, anti-imperial nationalism, and Korean political culture." On this basis, Cummings contends

that North Korea is unlikely to collapse precisely because of its modern monarchical form, which has already progressed through two stable successions. The proof was manifested in the symbolism of Kim Jong Il's funeral procession that confirmed three generations of rulership. Here, the appearance of Jong Un was as a spitting image of his grandfather, Kim Il Sung, when he came to power in the late 1940s, even to the detail of having the same iconic sideburns shaved up high. Amid such ritualism, it is little wonder that ordinary Koreans often call their leader *wang* (king). While Marx would shudder to hear this monarchy being associated with communism, Cummings points out that DPRK is a modern form of monarchy—born of the resistance to Japanese imperialism and the historical narrative that the regime has chosen to engineer around this—a monarchy realized in a highly nationalist and postcolonial state, and one likely to be around well into the 21st century.

The changes within Vietnam as it grapples with the challenges of modernity and development contrast sharply with the dynastic monarchy in North Korea. Thaveeporn Vasavakul (Chapter 6, Volume 2) provides an analysis of the transformations within Vietnamese socialism since 1975, highlighting not only how the state was redefined but how intra-state and state-citizen relations were also reconfigured. Attempting to adopt good practices of development, the Leninist regime has amended its basic principles of state socialism, including property rights, state ownership of the means of production, central planning, and one-party rule. Economically, the Democratic Republic of Vietnam (DRV) originally followed a mixed model drawn from the Soviet Union and China, and while there was a considerable degree of institutional adaptation, central planning and state control of the means of production were predominant. Politically, the socialist state system consisted of four basic components: the party, the state, the National Assembly, and mass organizations. Yet between 1979 and 1988 a number of policies amended these significantly. The Sixth Plenum of the Fourth Congress in 1979 endorsed a free market to operate within the planned economy and while subsequent reforms were partial toward a multisector commodity economy, they were confirmed in 1986 by the official launch of *doi moi*, the de-collectivization of rural Vietnam and the abolishment of the two-price system in 1989.⁴² *Doi moi* also institutionalized the reconfiguration of the one-party state, redefining party control over the government and strengthening state management capacities. For Vasavakul, this has brought about a related set of political changes: the rise of a strong executive, a state role in business and service delivery, and the enhancement of democratic space (including elected bodies, popular organizations, direct citizen participation, and public accountability). At the same time, however, the state has become a large marketplace where exploitation takes place. Moreover, under the new market system, the working class has become socially fragmented;

the peasantry has gained economically but has been weakened politically; and the system has turned cooperative members into individual and independent producers.

The question for Vietnam is how to institutionalize socialist ideals within this new order. Vasavakul speculates on a number of possibilities. Firstly, Vietnam's current governance reforms, post-central planning, offer distinct possibilities for addressing the interests of increasingly marginalized groups (specifically the peasantry, working class, and women) over the power of enterprise managers in order to contribute to "balancing growth with equality." Secondly, socialist ideals could be made concrete through the reform of state institutions and the improvement of public services (particularly education and health care). Thirdly, Vasavakul looks to the development of socialist democratic spaces, particularly increased roles for popular organizations and the development of grassroots democracy, which may bring about better quality in governance. Finally, socialist ideals may reemerge as Vietnam rethinks post-central planning ideological and cultural values that turned away from the egalitarianism and anti-exploitation ideology of the DRV during the war of national liberation, to one of political patronage networks under *doi moi*. Vasavakul contends that while the ideology of the *doi moi* has birthed many exploitative practices, it does not rule out the emergence of alternative political values that could emphasize the rule of law, meritocracy, and transparency, among others—all of which would offer innovative contributions to the history of Marxism-Leninism and an affirmation of the socialist ideals of Vietnam's revolutionary past.

Moving from Asia to Central America, Bruno Bosteels (Chapter 7, Volume 2) follows the Mexican Commune across the revolutionary history of this country—in Mexico City (1874–77), Morelos (1914–15), Chiapas (1994), and Oaxaca (2006)—observing that from generation to generation, this "utopian ideal" returns again and again, claiming that even the divergent paths of anarchism and socialism have found common ground in the many resurrections of the commune in Mexico. Bosteels observes that it is the politically open, or what Marx called the "expansive," form of the commune⁴³ that could create a temporary zone of "indistinction" between socialism and anarchism, even today. The Morelos Commune of 1914, when Zapata and his troops retreated from Mexico City, was an experiment in self-government and created an egalitarian society with communal roots in their home territory that combined military and administrative control of the villages with radical agrarian reforms. This potential for local self-rule and autonomy continued in what Bosteels describes as "a creative attempt at local self-government based on long-standing traditions of communal decision making and consultation from below" that started with the indigenous revolts of the 1970s and 1980s, culminating in 1994 with what many describe as the Commune in

Chiapas.⁴⁴ In addition, in 2006, the brutal repression of the annual teachers' strike sparked the creation of a democratic structure for self-governance, the Popular Assembly of the Oaxacan Peoples (APPO), a nascent commune that challenged the clientelism and corruption of the Mexican state. These examples demonstrate, for Bosteels, that the potential for local self-rule through the commune is not lost. Nevertheless, there have been deep transformations of the commune throughout this history, and Bosteel's identifies two major inflections of the Mexican Commune: on the one hand, the Marxist-Leninist form, derived from the 1871 Paris Commune, and on the other, an indigenous-subalternist form, focused on the originary community that has tendencies toward horizontal, non-hierarchical, and autonomous forms of self-organization and which Bosteel's claims has restored the commune to its traditional, peasant and agrarian roots. There are clear overlaps here with Graham's description of the processual currents in contemporary anarchism that emphasize assembly, decentralization, and ecologism in the opening chapter of Volume 2—and which also resonate with the discussions in volume 3 by Keir Milburn and Rodrigo Nunes. Yet despite the seeming bifurcation between the Marxist-Leninist and indigenous-subalternist forms of the commune, Bosteels argues that it still offers a "tenuous common ground" in which resides the possibility for other "resurrections" of the commune in Mexico.

This optimistic reading of the future possibilities for the Left continues in Sandra Rein's (Chapter 8, Volume 2) analysis of the "future(s)" potentially open to Cuban society in the post-Castro era. Rein examines the foundations of the 1959 Revolution, finding that the ongoing strength of Cuban social solidarity is based around the nationalist sentiment of the early revolutionary regime, containing both Che Guevara's call for the "new socialist man" and Castro's construction of the nationalist project. This has generated what she calls "strong communities" within Cuba, where the success of one is dependent on the success of all and which, she hopes, may challenge the path dependency of neoliberal capitalism and enter Cuba into its most revolutionary phase. It is important to note here that Rein's account places social relations as the strength of communist Cuba in ways that reflect some of the themes drawn out in Lebowitz, Federici, and my own chapter in Volume 1.

Based on the three important features of the Cuban state consolidated after the Bay of Pigs invasion—the state capitalist economy, the concentration of political power in the Revolutionary Armed Forces (FAR), and the realization of socialist *conciencia* amongst the population—Rein's analysis traces three possibilities for Cuba after the Castros. The first envisages a "managed transition" which the Cuban regime is already engaged given the transfer of power from Fidel to Raúl." The Cuban regime is already engaged with this process, given the transfer of power from Fidel to Raúl. However, this transition will have to deal with a set of related crises, not

just economic but also concerning political participation, civil freedoms (including addressing sexism, homophobia, and racism), the aging demographic, growing inequality, and unemployment. Here, the centralized control of the FAR, whose leadership is increasingly vested with private interests, and the looming economic power of the United States, exists alongside the tendency for foreign capital to reintegrate Cuba into global capitalist networks where the old revolutionary values are unlikely to survive. The second possibility is a “forced and sudden transition” following the death of the Castro’s and the likely succession of FAR officers. Here, the inefficiency of the economy and inability of the state to ensure a basic standard of living may result in the obtainment of International Monetary Fund (IMF) loans and externally mandated restructuring. Ultimately, this scenario portends “massive social dislocation, the loss of core social services, and an unclear political structure.” The final scenario sees Cuba seizing its most revolutionary moment, forcing the revolution to live up to its initial promise, far beyond the scope of its nationalist trappings of 1959. This, Rein believes, could open the possibility for rethinking what a socialist revolution can mean in the 21st century.

The contemporary transformations of the aging revolutionary regime in Cuba are vastly different from the novel experiments with socialism currently underway in Venezuela. Based on his extensive field research, Dario Azzellini (Chapter 9, Volume 2), explores the practices of the Bolivarian Revolution in Venezuela with a particular account of the construction of communal production and consumption under the control of workers and communities.⁴⁵ Here, the transition to socialism is envisioned as combining local self administration and workers’ control of the means of production—elements that Azzellini suggests may lead to a communal state by unleashing the creative capacities that reside collectively. The question is whether the state can overcome or suppress its structurally inherent logic of control to accept such movements “from below.” On this point, Azzellini finds that on a number of fundamental levels the Bolivarian process is acting as a permanent creative collective force of the people (constituent power) that is effectively imposing itself on constituted power (the political authorities). This bottom-up approach of local self-administration—of communal councils, communes, and communal cities—has expanded direct and participatory democratic forms considerably. In addition, many initiatives—including *Empresas de Propiedad Social Directa Comunal* (EPSDC), *Socialist Workers’ Councils* (CST), *Movimiento de Pobladores* (MDP), *Red Nacional de Comuneros y Comunerías* (RNC), and *Comités de Tierra Urbana* (CTU)—have sought to democratize crucial aspects of property, work, and production. Indeed, the latter two groups (the RNC and CTU), while initiated by the state, are now autonomous. Such movements of self-government through the organization of councils have made huge advances throughout Venezuela

and give credence to Azzellini's argument that such communal councils, communes, and communal cities may gradually supplant the bourgeois state. At the very least, they confirm Azzellini's assertion that, following Antonio Negri, the Bolivarian process is not about taking state power but about creation and invention:⁴⁶ an active process fostering the capacities of the community and workers "to analyze, decide, implement, and evaluate what is relevant to their lives."

David Camfield (Chapter 10, Volume 2) closes Volume 2 with a historically contextualized account of radical working-class socialist parties and movements in the early 21st century. The seeming weakness of these groups contrasts sharply with the strength of the radical Left in the previous two centuries, which Graham and Blackledge emphasized at the beginning of the volume. Camfield focuses on one distinct political current of communist lineage: radical working-class socialism, defined by its identification of mass working-class struggle and revolution, as the path to communism; the belief in taking political power by reformism or small radical minorities (i.e., conspiratorial insurrectionism). The bulk of the chapter documents these radical working-class socialist organizations as they currently exist in Asia, South America, Europe, and elsewhere. Significantly, Camfield finds that radical working-class socialist groups and parties are relatively weak, despite the GFC and the rise of anti-capitalist movements since the mid-1990s. Camfield explains that a combination of factors has led to this relative weakness, including how neoliberalism has produced a general crisis of politics; the collapse of USSR and its impact on the ideological basis of these groups; the decline of the political force of the working class since the mid-1970s; and specific characteristics of radical working-class socialism including the marginal status and size of its existing forces, its fragmentation, and its seeming inability to engage in practical collaboration. The global resistance movements against neoliberal orthodoxy—including the international anti-/alter-globalization movements and formation of the WSF—all of which are anti-capitalist⁴⁷ have not brought with them any resurgence in radical working-class socialism. For Camfield, if there is some resurgence in radical working-class socialism, which on the basis of his evidence seems highly unlikely, its language and political culture will be "dramatically different" from those of today.

Volume 3: The Future of Communism

The final volume, Volume 3, *The Future of Communism: Social Movements, Economic Crises, and the Re-imagination of Communism*, follows the trajectory of communist ideas and the possibilities for emancipatory change into the 21st century. Yet, like the previous volume, it is difficult to account for any thematic commonalities given the vast differences in subject matter that each chapter addresses. From the GFC, the Arab Spring, Occupy, and the

WSF, to the problems of value, the commons, and digital technology; from theoretical engagements with feminism and critical theory, to new forms of organization, assembly, militancy, and communizing, Volume 3 offers an array of engagements that cannot be meshed together as one coherent narrative. As with volume 2, comparative analysis must await further debates elsewhere. Despite this, what emerges is an openness to, and construction of, new theoretical and practical dimensions of communism that accord with the humanistic and relational vision of communism at the heart of Marx's thought combined with the sublation of Orthodox Marxist practice that was focused on the state and economism, toward open and participatory methods.

Given the ongoing financial stagnation since the 2007 GFC, and the lack of any substantive changes in banking and finance markets, Massimo De Angelis (Chapter 1, Volume 3) offers a timely examination of the causes of recurrent capitalist crisis. Outlining the dynamics of the last 30 years, De Angelis demonstrates the rise of neoliberalism and its responsibility for this crisis, a crisis which he claims should be seen not as purely economic but a "crisis of social stability" in which capitalism "has reached an impasse." The question is whether capitalism can renew itself, breaking the impasse on its own terms, or, whether another social force can bring about social cooperation and create a "new world." De Angelis discusses four plans that could be deployed to meet this crisis. The first, Neoliberalism Plus, seeks to "coagulate" social cooperation around the need of capital accumulation, with society functioning to support and promote markets. The second, Keynesianism Plus, seeks to coagulate social cooperation around the need of capital accumulation through the triple attractors of markets, states, and civil society. The third, Exclusion/Emergency and Fascism, seeks to coagulate social cooperation around the greatness of a nation, ethnic group, or a community in close organic connection to a hierarchical state that uses force against any form of "otherness." The final plan, Commons and Democracy, seeks to coagulate social cooperation around the expansion and integration of alternative modes of social cooperation based on shared resources and what De Angelis calls "horizontal government," where communities themselves pursue the explicit goals of social justice, freedom, and emancipation. This last plan, clearly favored by De Angelis, combines direct democratic processes that make possible the communalization of property and the actualization of particular resources as a commons. That is, both democracy and the commons are mutually related, or as De Angelis explains "two sides of the same coin" for it is only "deep democratic" forms—the institutions of the commons—that can ensure the sustainability of reproduction, both socially and ecologically, upon which all forms of social organization ultimately depend.

Continuing with the creation of viable futures for human society, Teivainen (Chapter 2, Volume 3) explores the WSF as an avenue for global, postcapitalist alternatives as reflected in its pioneering slogan, “another world is possible.” However, Teivainen prefers the term “commonism” to describe these potentialities that connect with historical socialist and communist ideals but which are distinguished by the WSF’s global scope and are opposed to the state socialist projects of the past. The aim here is to remove the WSF’s nonstate-centric attempts at “commons-based democratic alternatives” from any connotations with Soviet-style authoritarianism. Teivainen describes the main forums and myriad local and thematic events that have developed since the first forum in Porto Alegre, Brazil, 2001, but his primary concern is in detailing the various historical processes—particularly the transnational connectivity of Brazilian social movements—that led to the emergence of the WSF. For Teivainen, the role of the Brazilian Workers’ Party PT (*Partido dos Trabalhadores*) was crucial, specifically its anti-vanguardist inclinations and its ideological justification for a broad, inclusive coalitions of Marxist and social democratic elements, which inspired the construction of the WSF as a “coming-together of diverse groups.”⁴⁸ These ideological and organizational boundaries were codified in a Charter of Principles that combined the notion of the WSF as a space and as movement-oriented.⁴⁹ Nevertheless, it is not open to all movements, restricting the direct participation of political parties, which, it is widely believed, may cause undesirable struggles for representation. It also prohibits military organizations. Both exclusions have been criticized as hypocritical, the former because of PT’s foundational involvement in the WSF and the latter that has excluded armed civil society but whose relation to armed states has been far more ambiguous.

Nevertheless, Teivainen argues that the WSF’s opposition to neoliberalism, the domination of capital or imperialism, and, most of all, its commitment to the idea of open space can be defined as a radically democratic ideology, “a move towards’ global democratization.” Here, the avoidance of statist strategies and logics of representation, of giving more strategic weight to a struggle or identity over others, does not mean the total absence of structure. For the open space method of the forums and autonomist nonstate conceptions of the commons, while germane to local settings, is difficult to mobilize transnationally. The WSF is then caught in a tension between nonstate “commonist” leanings and state-centric realities. For this reason, Teivainen sees the WSF as an “important example of the attempts to create a democratic world through democratic means” while “creating the conditions for learning, networking, and organizing between social movements in relatively transnational and global contexts.”

Against the dynamism and optimism of the WSF, the crisis in Syria is a stark reminder of the failures, confusion, and ineptitude of the

international left in confronting tyranny. Firas Massouh (Chapter 3, Volume 3) interrogates why the Syrian Revolution is yet to receive effective support, despite the youth of Syria's call for social change, equality, dignity, and freedom, which was expected to rally the Left, who had supported the Tunisian and Egyptian revolutions on similar grounds. The case is tragic and farcical, yet symptomatic of an influential current in international leftist politics, which Massouh believes clings to anti-imperialism and thereby lends support to despotic regimes on the pretext of giving priority to the national question. Massouh finds that the Assad regime has exploited Left parties internally, while painting events in Syria as an imperialistic plot externally. This narrative is accepted by segments of the international Left—Assad's "useful idiots," as Hill derides them.⁵⁰ The nature of the conflict is also misconstrued by the mainstream media as sectarian, Islamic, and serving terrorism, which serves only to confirm the regime's narrative that there was never a genuine revolution, but merely a sectarian insurgency of Sunni Islamist militants aiming to destabilize Syrian sovereignty. At the same time, the Left's commitment to the narrative of geopolitical conspiracies about U.S.-led interventions misses out on "the bigger picture" that the conflict is a "revolt against injustice, repression, and censorship."⁵¹ Taken together, these issues have the undesirable consequence of rendering political Islam a far more coherent opposition to the Assad regime, allowing it to usurp the revolutionary leadership. Yet as Massouh questions, along with Slavoj Žižek, Islamofascism is primarily "the result of the left's failure, but simultaneously proof that there was a revolutionary potential, a dissatisfaction, which the left was not able to mobilize."⁵²

There is a tendency to reduce the debate around Syria to the question of minorities—the Sunni Muslims against the rest—something Massouh avoids by showing that Sunnis are not exclusively anti-regime. Indeed, the Sunni merchant class continues to work hand in hand with the regime. Nevertheless, through an engagement with the nuances of Syrian society, Massouh demonstrates "how the 'Sunni contention under the Assad regime represent a distinctive expression of a broader pattern of state-society as well as class relations in modern Syria.'" For Massouh, Assad has been able to propagate the idea that the most threatening force is the Sunnis, who are depicted or constructed as "rural," "uneducated," "backward," "outside," the "unhomely," the "street persons." In all of these ways, society's discontents in Assad's Syria have been projected on the Sunnis. Massouh argues that the Left needs to see how the regime's discrimination and exploitation of the peasantry and working classes—represented mainly by Sunnis—is in essence a "biopolitical endgame," articulated in sectarian terms, that preys on the secular Left's (and the West's) fear of Islamofascism. In these ways, classic notions of class struggle and anti-imperialism are insufficient for understanding the Syrian Revolution, or helping it.

The theme of contemporary revolutionary struggle is also taken up by David Eden (Chapter 4, Volume 3), who posits that the question informing our historical juncture—and one that echoes radical debates of the past—is whether or not to make demands; that is, whether we can win victories in the context of capitalism or whether this sacrifices “communisation.” For some, the very absence of demands is a mark of a struggle’s radicalism, proof of the creation of radical subjectivities moving beyond the boundaries of capitalist social relations. Yet another option is also identified by Eden: Italian post-workerism, based on a politics of the common. In this tradition, demands of the here and now are deemed possible, valuable, and able to lead to radical social transformation. Core demands relate to general social income and participatory democracy, global citizenship, and open access to the common.⁵³ It is not a statist project. Rather, it is about increasing power to win profound changes in how society is organized. Here, the formation of assemblies in recent protests and revolutionary moments, and the demand of maintaining a decent life with dignity, point toward the possibility of the post-workerist vision.

Yet as Eden demonstrates, the question of whether or not to make demands is actually a manifestation of the contradictory nature of the working class as variable capital and as the proletariat. And on this basis, Eden claims, the post-workerists misunderstand what is radical in the condition of labor and thus how we get “from this society to another one.” For them, labor is seen as autonomous, and capital as a form of capture and command that imposes itself on this autonomous project. There is just “the common” for, or beyond, capital. Yet Eden claims that value is the social existence that wealth takes in capitalism, due to the commodification of human creativity, the organization of social cooperation through monetary exchange, and the split between producers and between labor and capital.⁵⁴ Eden turns to Marx’s distinction between concrete labor and abstract labor, in a similar refrain to John Holloway at the end of Volume 3,⁵⁵ which reveals the real antagonism between creativity as a living potential and capital as the endless accumulation of value. The limitation of the post-workerist position is that their notion of struggles remains the struggle of abstract labor; that is, “struggles of the working class as struggles within capitalism” so that their “call for demands remain firmly within capitalist logics.” This recalls, in certain respects, Lebowitz’s claims in Volume 1 regarding the limits of the socialist principle that would reduce communism to distribution. The point for Eden is to go beyond the reformist expression of social struggle, to move from these moments that are “largely contained and normalized, into the creation of a force, a movement, and the production of a different world . . . and to develop forms of organization and commons that arise from these moments.” Eden sees a “world full of proletarian possibilities.” The point here is not to merely contest the conditions of sale or reproduction of capital, but to “question

the existence of this relation itself”—something that speaks directly to the importance of social relations of communism in the 21st century, as has been highlighted previously in many of the chapters of volumes 1 and 2.

Also addressing the theme of the commons pronounced in Eden’s chapter, Jodi Dean (Chapter 5, Volume 3) illuminates how “the common” and “the commons” involves processes of exploitation and expropriation specific to what she calls “communicative capitalism”—the convergence of capitalism and democracy through networked media—offering both new experiences of collectivity and barriers to their politicization. For Dean, network media and communications technologies result in contradiction: they produce collective information and a communication mesh of ideas, *and*, they entrench individualism in which widely shared ideas are conceived less in terms of a self-conscious collective than they are as “viruses, mobs, trends, moments, and swarms.” Division is common to this form of communication, as is its partialness, inseparability from power, and reliance on exclusion. For Dean, whatever could be available for “thinking and relating to others, is always already distanced.” Moreover, as we go about enthusiastically participating in these networks, we end up building the very “trap that captures us,” for as communication is subsumed by capitalism it no longer provides a “critical outside” but instead serves capital by deskilling, surveillance, and the intensification of work—the “tether” of 24/7 availability.

For Dean, the common is seen as a dynamic process, a global network of social relations that is infinite and characterized by surplus.⁵⁶ Here, expropriation does not leave many with little for there is abundance. Nevertheless, Dean details how networked communications provide multiple instances of expropriation and exploitation of the common through data, metadata, networks, attention, capacity, and spectacle, that form the interconnected exploitation of the “social substance.” Communicative capitalism is shown by Dean to seize excess, surplus, and abundance and ultimately privative this social substance that constitutes us and its potential. As each person is productive as a communicative being (and through their communicative interrelations) any ownership or profit thereof is clearly theft. As Dean concludes, to persist in the practices through which communicative capitalism exploits the social substance, is to “fail to use division as a weapon on behalf of a communist project.” The challenge is to “break with current practices by insisting on and intensifying the division of, and in, the common.”

Turning to intertheoretical debates, Nina Power (Chapter 6, Volume 3) engages with the complex and often vexed history of Marxism and feminism. Power raises the question of what it could mean to think of Marxism and feminism without subsuming or postponing demands of women in socialist struggle. Power reinterrogates the famous *Unhappy Marriage* collection of 1981⁵⁷ and more recent attempts to bring Marxism and feminism

together in the work of Sylvia Federici, Arlie Russell Hochschild, and Nancy Fraser, among others. Beginning with the question of domestic labor, feminists such as Federici have made the foundational connection between every economic and political system and reproduction, finding this to be the site where the contradictions inherent to alienated labor are the “most explosive.”⁵⁸ Domestic labor creates surplus value, in both direct and indirect ways, but the claim for the recognition of this value does not call for a “demand for wages” for this work, nor its continuance, but rather “precisely the opposite.”⁵⁹ In contemporary capitalism, work is rebranded as flexible, but in reality this corresponds to less pay and fewer hours, especially for women. Labor is dominated by precarity and while this conceptualization is now popular in contemporary theorizations of work, such as in Standing’s often cited text, Power’s finds that this is merely “catching-up” with feminist insights from 40 years ago. Similarly, Hochschild and others have identified key aspects of the feminization of labor, that is, how work now often takes on attributes normally associated with women—communication, service, care work⁶⁰—that is coupled with how elements typically associated with the private sphere—love, leisure, personality—have increasingly become “attributes exploited by employers to give their customers the ‘best service.’”

Yet despite these radical insights into the fundamentality of domestic labor and reproduction necessary to sustain capitalism, Power finds that feminism—particularly second-wave feminism—has, in some ways, been co-opted by capitalism for what she calls “deeply reactionary aims,” including the justification of imperial wars and the pushing of consumerism. Power points to Fraser who notes the relative failure of second-wave feminism to transform institutions. This has legitimated structural transformations that contradict “feminist visions of a just society” and has effectively neutralized feminism’s demands. Power reiterates the confronting question of whether there is some “elective affinity” between second-wave feminism and neoliberalism.⁶¹ Here, capitalism’s absolute benefit from the mass entry of women into the workforce suggests the need for the reconnection of feminism and class to the critique of capitalism, one that takes into account the economic reliance (even dependency) of capitalism on the labor of women and the international dimensions of struggle against this global form of exploitation. Power emphasizes the urgency of reuniting these approaches, which remain incomplete without each other, toward the reassertion of the “social totality” or what she describes as a “total critique of the existing world—work, family structure and patriarchy combined.”

Continuing with the development of theoretical connectivities between Marxism and other radical approaches, Werner Bonefeld (Chapter 7, Volume 3) engages with critical theory and the question of the means and ends of revolution in relation to contemporary socialist responses

to austerity. Basing his account on Walter Benjamin's *Theses on History*,⁶² Bonefeld posits that revolution is a struggle to stop the progress of historical time, riddled as it is with the muck of the ages, in order to achieve liberation in the "here and now," rather than in some "tomorrow that never comes." For Bonefeld, as for Benjamin, a class-ridden society requires that the history of class struggle, rulers and ruled, comes to a "standstill." That is, as communism seeks universal human emancipation within the commune of "communist individuals,"⁶³ it can only find positive resolution in a classless society. Viewed in this light, Bonefeld claims that traditional communist forms of organization—and the fetishization of labor, which is itself a concept of bourgeois society—belong to the world whose progress of historical time needs to be stopped, for they presuppose the working class as a productive social force that deserves a better deal. The notion that history is on the side of the oppressed, in turn, fortifies the view that "progress is just around the corner." For Benjamin this is nothing but corrosive and delusional. Pauperization, poverty, and alienation are part of the deplorable *conditions* of capitalism; they are not avoidable *situations* that can be made good for the laborer, but require a revolutionary change in "social relations of production" to overcome. As Bonefeld makes clear, for critical theory, communism is not a labor economy; it does not derive itself from capitalism. It is its negation. Communism entails fundamentally different conceptions of social wealth: the idea of a society of the free and equal, or "the autonomy of the social individual in her own social world."⁶⁴ Communism and human emancipation, then, are recast as the "[h]umanisation of social relations," which in the present can only be expressed as "the negation of the negative world." Here, the importance of social relation is, once again, emphasised.

Turning toward the praxeological concerns of revolutionary organization—a theme that cuts across the three closing chapters of the series—Rodrigo Nunes (Chapter 8, Volume 3) takes up Badiou's "widespread search" for a new figure of the militant to replace the vanguard model of "Lenin and the Bolsheviks."⁶⁵ Questions of organization have been propelled by the mass movements of 2011, seeking to prevent the dissipation of these mobilizations and the maintenance of their "powerful" yet "diffuse" desire for radical change. The central problem Nunes identifies in vanguardism is that it tends to perpetuate the militant "as the most advanced detachment in the revolutionary movement"—the mediators, bureaucrats, and functionaries of revolution, power, and truth. Yet, conversely, those who look to spontaneity as the panacea against vanguardism based on the belief that it is *the process itself* which, if "left to its own devices" will "show the way," are shown by Nunes to be equally capable of functioning repressively. This is because "by replacing the uncertainty proper to every situated, subjective decision with a certainty of *the process*

itself . . . not only is the process ascribed teleological certainty (solutions *will* appear), it is made into something external to the agents that constitute it . . .”

Focusing on the network organization of the 2011 movements, Nunes shows that these do not, in and of themselves, eliminate vanguards. Such networks have *hubs* that link with other nodes and clusters, which are clearly not horizontal. Leadership still exists, but it is distributed in the sense that isolated initiatives can be communicated across the network and “trigger positive feedback loops that increase their impact exponentially.” Hence, spontaneity is not miraculous but always induced by a germ of action at precise moments. In all of these ways, Nunes claims that vanguards are not eliminable. However, it is necessary to distinguish between the vanguard as this essential feature of politics (what he proposes to call the vanguard-*function*, in itself neither good nor bad), and vanguardism as a practice to be overcome. It is possible to avoid the latter while bringing the dimension of subjective intervention back into a non-vanguardist revolutionary politics, leaving room for questions of strategy—the collective task of “identifying the paths, leverages, potentials”—in the quest to further “multitudinous, polycentric, open-ended processes *in the direction of systemic change*.”

The conundrum of the 2011 mass mobilizations was that their openness attracted large numbers but simultaneously made concerted action difficult precisely because any decision would risk a point of closure, division, separation. Here, Nunes’s framework offers useful proscriptions, some of which he takes from the popular agent of Liberation Theology. Of note is the notion of “tweaking” as a metaphor for being *inside* a process that has much more momentum than any individual agent, though each agent, as a constituent part(s), has some control. The other he calls “*care for the whole*,” a capacity to think strategically to employ existing conditions for political impact that takes into account the development of the “political process as a whole, rather than of an individual organization or initiative.”

Following on from Nunes’s prescriptions for the militant in the 21st century, Keir Milburn (Chapter 9, Volume 3) looks to the assembly as the dominant form of organization in the Arab Spring, the Spanish Indignados, and Occupy. Assemblyism was the key means of meeting, of displaying commonality, of exhilaration. Yet Milburn points to the organizational lessons of Assemblyism, arguing that while they are necessary, they are ill suited to some necessary functions and therefore insufficient for contemporary movements which must overcome material and social inequalities to reestablish democracy. The point for Milburn is to “move beyond” Assemblyism. Looking at Hardt’s reading of Jefferson,⁶⁶ Milburn sees in the valorization of rebellion the need for the periodic reopening of the revolutionary event, what he calls “a processual transition,” in which new

forms of fetishization can be overcome and new problematics emerge. Politics must start from the present, but cannot determine in advance the end of this critical engagement. Yet, as Milburn identifies, this presents a particular challenge to the prefigurative notion of Assemblyism in which “ultimate ends determine current means”: for how can “the same organizational structures really be equally appropriate throughout this whole process of transformation when it will be peopled by quite different subjectivities and have quite different functions to fulfill[?]”

Milburn concurs with Dean that the radical inclusivity of Occupy’s General Assembly ultimately obscured decision making, leading to its usurpation by unaccountable groups,⁶⁷ and that its emphasis on expression came at the expense of efficient decision making, which risked “unexamined ‘common sense’ assumptions and dogma.” To overcome this, Milburn proposes to supplement horizontal structures not just with the vertical and diagonal structures proposed by Dean, but also with Guattari’s “transversal” structures,⁶⁸ designed to “facilitate transformations in group desire,” to push beyond the “limits of a groups’ common sense assumptions,” and thereby “allow new foci of meaning to develop and new political problems to emerge.” In terms of contemporary organization, this may help shift “the consensus of the movement, of introducing new political problems, new repertoires and new frames of reference”—or put simply, ensuring the Jeffersonian call for periodic reopening of the revolutionary event. For Milburn, the communist project must be a “processual one,” transforming our institutions and ourselves. Its organizational form must be subject to change, involving collective self analysis, where transversality allows for the “emergence of new foci of sense and enabling the movement to move from one problematic to the next.”

Continuing with the theme of communist praxis, and offering a fitting conclusion for *Communism in the 21st Century* as a whole, John Holloway (Chapter 10, Volume 3) states that the noun, communism, cannot adequately express the self-determining type of social organization that “we” desire. Rather, it suggests a notion of “fixity” incompatible with “collective self-creating.” In distinction, Holloway moves to a conception of “communising,” defined as “the moving against that which stands in the way of our social determination of our own lives.” Whereas a noun closes on identity, communising gestures toward the “overflowing of identity,” a “bursting-beyond,” “constant moving,” and “subverting.” This sets up the self-determining movement of communising against the alien determinations of social forms that, as Marx shows in *Capital*, entrap the “potentially unlimited force of human creation” within the commodity form.⁶⁹ But the essential task for Holloway is to *understand* these social forms as capitalist. That is, in order to know how and why “our activity produces a society that denies our activity,” we must understand our dual character, which results from the bifurcation of concrete and

abstract labor. Echoing the discussion from Eden's chapter, Holloway gives the example of a table made through concrete labor, whose existence speaks directly of the act of making—there is no separation. Yet in abstract labor, the same activity is now seen from the perspective of producing commodities: the table is reduced to market value. It becomes a thing outside of its maker, alienated, "independent of the act of creation." For Holloway, it is this reduction of our activity to abstract labor that leads to "rigidification" or the "coagulation of social relations into social forms" into "alien determinations" that entrap "the endless potential and creativity of concrete labor, that is, of human doing." Both concrete and abstract labor are social; the point is that abstract labor dominates concrete labor, "capitalism dominates the communal." For Holloway then, communising, wealth, doing, all continue to exist under capitalism but remain the "hidden substratum of a social form" so that the "common doing" within capitalist society "is hidden from view by its capitalist form." Yet while communality and concrete labor remain trapped within this capitalist form, they "also push against and beyond them." The fact that the notion of revolt exists means that subordination is not total within the capitalist form. There is a dynamism and potentiality to these social relations, which, for Holloway, must be understood as "processes of forming, not as established fact." Under the private determinations and apparent "solidity of money" lies mere appearance. Beneath that lies struggle and enforcement. The surface of commodities, abstract labor, capitalism is nothing without wealth, concrete labor, and communality. This leads Holloway to a stark conclusion: it is "we" who are the crisis of capital, "the latency of another world." In these relations reside the possibility for "the unchaining of our doing, the reclaiming of the world." But communising is for Holloway inherently plural, the task is of "constant communising," of "recognizing, creating, expanding and multiplying the communisings" that exist in the "here and now."

CONCLUDING REMARKS

Today's world is replete with crises and transformations. It holds both immense potentialities for human tragedy and immense possibilities for human emancipation. The point—for Marx, as for us—is to *change* it.⁷⁰ As David Harvey has observed, the global conditions of the working classes at the beginning of the 21st century suggests that the "grand goal" in the final exhortation of the *Manifesto*—for all workers of the world to unite—is more important now than ever.⁷¹ The question is whether the specter of communism can be exorcised from its bloody past, captured as its ideal was by the ruthless domination of tyrants and madmen, and whether we can reanimate its spirit of equality, freedom, and community for human emancipation today. While a definitive conclusion is impossible given the

vast differences in subject areas and the political, theoretical, and normative commitments of each author, what emanates from this series taken as a whole is the ongoing salience of the communist vision—however ambiguously expressed by Marx and others—and the sublation of the content of this vision (including organizational, practical and political content) in, and for, the distinct social conditions of the 21st century.

There seem to be two aspects in this movement. The first is the deliberate withdrawal from a focus on state power and statist politics toward what can be best described as a politics of relationalism. The second is a retreat from economism and determinism, toward a new—or rather an old—conception of the common. Both typify a movement to an increased awareness of the centrality of intersubjectivity in communist theory and practice. It is no longer the capture of state power but the co-creation of genuine social relations in a “vast association”; it is no longer productivism but an economic commons in which participation and creativity are to secure substantive equality for all that illuminates the communist horizon of today.

This renewed emphasis in the communist project on intersubjectivity, relationalism, and the common is detectable across the *Communism in the 21st Century*. In Volume 1, Marx’s vision of communism was uniformly seen to be the actualization of individual capacities and powers made in association with all others. The conditions for this all-sided development of the individual, including the expansion of ethical community and forms of solidarity, were sharply opposed to the narrowness of bourgeois freedom and the shallowness of its content that deformed human relations under capitalist appropriation and exploitation. The frequent use of terms to describe communism like collectivity, communal nature, recognition, cooperation, worker communities, and genuine social relations of association, juxtaposed sharply against the asociality, competitiveness, fragmentation, alienation, and ideology of self-interest inherent to capitalist order. Similarly in Volume 2, calls for direct, autonomous, horizontal, spontaneous, and non-hierarchical forms of self-organization, or of viewing revolution as conscious, social creation, and collective human activity, and even the recognition of the unique type of relations within the commune are all examples of this renewed focus on social relations to meet the challenges of contemporary capitalism, imperialism, and the state. Even within existing state forms of socialism and projects associated with Real Existing Socialism, this renewed emphasis on the importance of social relations was evident in: the possible future direction of China to stave off potential instability of its growth model, for channeling reforms in Vietnam back to socialism, for the resilience of the Cuban Revolution against path-dependency of neoliberal capitalism, and in the novel practices of communisation from below underway in Venezuela. Indeed, the decline of traditional

forms of radical working-class socialism, as found by Camfield, is arguably, directly attributable to its neglect of genuine social relations in the political commitments of Orthodox Marxism in favour of socialism from above—a problem that implied the need to return to genuine relations of intersubjectivity for any viable communist project of the future. Evidence of the fundamentality of social relations to the future of communism also proliferated in Volume 3. Capitalism was resoundingly portrayed foremost as a social relation in which the relations of production that make possible the reproduction of labor were to be interrogated and challenged. Calls to reclaim the commons as a network of social relations or for the reassertion of the social totality for the purposes of critique and social regeneration illustrated the fundamentality of relationalism to the future of communist thought and practice. These were paralleled with the emphasis placed on attaining forms of organization aimed at transforming subjectivities, for providing the conditions of democracy through relations under communalization, and of opening human interactions against the rigidities of the capitalist social form.

From this litany of examples, what emanates from the series taken as a whole are explorations of new forms of communist organization that are open and participatory, subject to constant change and revision, that foster the generation of radical subjectivities and mesh diversity within a dynamic politics of movement—all of which indicate a transcendence of traditional forms of communist struggle *beyond* the state toward a growing appreciation of the radicalism present within a genuine politics of intersubjectivity. It takes little effort to see the connection here with Marx's description of life in communism in the *Grundrisse* as "the absolute movement of becoming."⁷² In the context of today, this dynamism seems to offer a means to confront widespread depoliticization and the seeming directionlessness of many neo-materialist social movements, whether Occupy or recent events in Brazil, coalescing around a fluid idea of self-determination that is unbounded and ongoing: revolution in permanence. All of the chapters echo this notion of the radical humanization of social relations as the purpose or aim of communism today in the 21st century. This is not so much a revision of communism or of Marx however, but a reclamation of the humanist essence that was tragically lost to Real Socialism.

NOTES

1. Alain Badiou, *The Communist Hypothesis* (London: Verso, 2010); Alain Badiou, "The Communist Hypothesis," *New Left Review* 49 (2008): 29–42.

2. It should be noted that Žižek is the sole editor for volume two. Costas Douzinas, Slavoj Žižek (eds.), *The Idea of Communism* (London: Verso, 2010); Slavoj Žižek (ed.), *The Idea of Communism 2* (London: Verso, 2013).

3. Jodi Dean, *The Communist Horizon* (London: Verso, 2012); Bruno Bosteels, *The Actuality of Communism* (London: Verso, 2011); Michael A. Lebowitz, *The Socialist Alternative: Real Human Development* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 2010).
4. Guy Standing, *The Precariat* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2011).
5. David Graeber, *Debt: The First 5,000 Years* (New York: Melville House, 2011).
6. Antonio Negri and Michael Hardt, *Empire* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2000); Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Multitude: War and Democracy in the Age of Empire* (New York, Penguin: 2005); Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Commonwealth* (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2009).
7. For a few more notable examples see: Marcello Musto, ed., *Karl Marx's Grundrisse: Foundations of the Critique of Political Economy 150 Years Later* (Abingdon, Routledge: 2008); Fredric Jameson, *Representing Capital: A Reading of Volume One* (London: Verso, 2011); Harald Bluhm, ed., *Karl Marx/Friedrich Engels: die deutsche Ideologie* (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 2010); Terry Eagleton, *Why Marx Was Right* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2011); Paul Blackledge, *Marxism and Ethics: Freedom, Desire, and Revolution* (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 2012); Eric Hobsbawm, *How to Change the World: Tales of Marx and Marxism* (London: Little Brown, 2011).
8. For an interesting example see Mail Foreign Service, "Credit Crunch Boosts Sales of Karl Marx's Das Kapital in Germany," *Daily Mail*, October 16, 2008. <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-1078232/Credit-crunch-boosts-sales-Karl-Marxs-Das-Kapital-Germany.html>
9. Some notable exceptions include Bertell Ollman, "Marx's Vision of Communism," *Critique* 8, no. 1 (1977): 4–41.
10. To reduce unnecessary and repetitive citations of chapters from the series within this introduction, all chapters are first introduced with the author's name followed by chapter and volume number. All quotes are subsequently taken directly from this author and chapter, unless otherwise stated.
11. Karl Marx, "Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844," in *Early Writings*, trans. Rodney Livingstone and Gregor Benton (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1975), 333, 365.
12. Michel A. Lebowitz, *The Socialist Alternative*, 42–45.
13. Karl Marx, "Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts," in *Marx-Engels Collected Works*, vol. 3, trans. Richard Dixon et al. (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1975), 304, 306.
14. Karl Marx, "On the Jewish Question," in *Marx-Engels Collected Works*, vol. 3, trans. Richard Dixon et al. (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1975), 149, 151, 168.
15. Ollman, "Marx's Vision of Communism."
16. Karl Marx, *Grundrisse: Foundations of the Critique of Political Economy*, trans. Martin Nicolaus (Harmondsworth, UK: Penguin, 1973), 488, 515, 832.
17. Karl Marx, "Critique of the Gotha Programme," in *Karl Marx and Frederick Engels Selected Works in Two Volumes*, vol. 2 (Moscow: Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1962), 13–37.
18. The Soviet Constitution of 1936 instilled this socialist principle into law. Vladimir I. Lenin, *The State and Revolution* (Peking: Foreign Languages Press, 1965), 112–116.

19. Karl Marx, *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy*, vol. 3, ed. Frederick Engels (New York: Vintage Books, 1981), 957.

20. Marx, "Critique of the Gotha Programme," 23–25; Lebowitz, *The Socialist Alternative*, 70–72.

21. Marx, Karl. *Capital*, vol. 3, 959.

22. Erich Fromm, "Introduction," in *Socialist Humanism: An International Symposium*, ed. E. Fromm (New York: Doubleday & Company, 1965), ix.

23. Federici builds on the idea developed originally by Negri. See Antonio Negri, *Marx Beyond Marx: Lessons on the Grundrisse*, ed. Jim Fleming and trans. Harry Cleaver (New York and London: Autonomedia-Pluto, 1991).

24. For example, see Dolores Hayden, "The Grand Domestic Revolution," in *The Grand Domestic Revolution: A History of Feminist Designs for American Homes, Neighborhoods and Cities* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1985).

25. Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *The German Ideology*, part 1, ed. C.J. Arthur (New York: International Publishers, 1988), 95.

26. Michael Lebowitz, *The Contradictions of "Real Socialism": The Conductor and the Conducted* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 2012), 17–19.

27. Marx, *Capital*, vol. 3, 776.

28. Marx and Engels, *The German Ideology*, 45–46, 71.

29. Frederick Engels, *The Peasant War in Germany* (Moscow: Foreign Language Publishing House, 1956), 33.

30. Jane Jacobs, *The Death and Life of Great American Cities* (New York: Vintage Books, 1961), 14.

31. Graham citing Karl Marx, *Selected Writings*, ed. D. McLellan (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), 198, 202.

32. Michael Bakunin, *Statism and Anarchy*, ed. and trans. M. Shatz (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 179; Michael Bakunin, "Program of the International Brotherhood," in *Anarchism: A Documentary History of Libertarian Ideas*, vol. 1, ed. R. Graham (Montreal: Black Rose Books, 2005), 85–86.

33. These ideas were advocated by Jean-Louis Pindy and Eugene Hins at the 1869 Basel Congress. See Daniel Guérin, ed., *No Gods, No Masters: An Anthology of Anarchism*, vol. 1 (San Francisco: AK Press, 1998), 184.

34. Vladimir I. Lenin, *Collected Works*, vol. 21 (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1960–1970), 40, 241.

35. See Karl Marx, "Theses on Feuerbach," in *Karl Marx: Early Writings* (London: Penguin, 1975).

36. Michael Löwy, *On Changing the World* (New Jersey: Humanities Press, 1993), 96; Rosa Luxemburg, "The Junius Pamphlet," in *Rosa Luxemburg Speaks*, ed. Mary-Alice Waters (New York and London: Pathfinder, 1970), 269.

37. See Kevin Anderson, *Lenin, Hegel and Western Marxism* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1995), 113.

38. Stathis Kouvelakis, "Lenin as Reader of Hegel," in *Lenin Reloaded: Towards a Politics of Truth*, eds. Sebastian Budgen et al. (London: Duke University Press, 2007), 174, 186.

39. World Bank, *Transition: The First Ten Years* (Baltimore: John Hopkins, 2002), Overview xv, xiv; UNICEF, *Women in Transition—A Summary. Regional Monitoring Report Summary*, no. 6 (1999), 13–14. <http://www.unicef-irc.org/publications/pdf/monee6/cover.pdf>

40. The term comes from Timothy Garton Ash, *We the People* (London: Penguin, 1993).
41. Paul Kennedy, *The Rise and Fall of Great Powers: Economic Change and Military Conflict from 1500 to 2000* (New York: Random House, 1987).
42. See Adam Fforde and Stefan DeVylder, *From Plan to Market: The Economic Transition in Vietnam* (Boulder, CO: Westview, 1996).
43. Karl Marx, *The First International and After: Politics Writings*, vol. 3, ed. David Fernbach (London: Penguin, 1974), 212.
44. Bosteels cites here Aufheben, *A Commune in Chiapas? Mexico and the Zapatista Rebellion* (Toronto: Abraham Guillen Press & Arm the Spirit, 2002).
45. It should be noted that President Hugo Chávez was still alive at the time Azzellini wrote his chapter.
46. Antonio Negri, *Il Potere Costituente* (Carnago: Sugarco Edizioni, 1992), 382.
47. This can be glimpsed in, for example, Notes from Nowhere, eds. *We Are Everywhere: The Irresistible Rise of Global Anti-Capitalism* (London: Verso, 2003).
48. Philip Roberts, "Importing Gramsci into Brazil," *For the Desk Drawer*, March 11, 2013. <http://adamdavidmorton.com/2013/03/importing-gramsci-to-brazil/>
49. Charter of Principles of the World Social Forum. <http://fsm2011.org/en/wsf-2011>
50. Jess Hill, "Assad's Useful Idiots," *The Global Mail*, September 11, 2012. <http://www.theglobalmail.org/feature/assads-useful-idiots/374/>
51. Vicken Cheterian, "Syria: Neo-Anti-Imperialism vs. Reality," *Open Democracy*, October 16, 2012. <http://www.opendemocracy.net/vicken-cheterian/syria-neo-anti-imperialism-vs-reality>
52. Slavoj Žižek, *The Year of Dreaming Dangerously* (London: Verso, 2012), 73.
53. See Hardt and Negri, *Commonwealth*, 380–381.
54. David Eden, *Autonomy: Capital, Class & Politics* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2012).
55. Karl Marx, *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy*, vol. 1, trans. Ben Fowkes (London: Penguin Classics, 1990), 131–138.
56. This is in distinction to the commons that is finite and characterized by scarcity, the expropriation of which leaves a few with a lot and the many with nothing. Cesare Casarino, "Surplus Common," in *In Praise of the Common: A Conversation on Philosophy and Politics*, ed. Cesare Casarino and Antonio Negri (Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 2008), 15.
57. See Lydia Sargent, ed., *The Unhappy Marriage of Marxism and Feminism: A Debate on Class and Patriarchy* (London: Pluto Press, 1986).
58. Silvia Federici, *Revolution at Point Zero* (New York: Autonomedia, 2012), 2.
59. Power quoting Silvia Federici, "Wages against Housework."
60. Hochschild calls this "emotional labour." See Arlie Russell Hochschild, *The Managed Heart: Commercialization of Human Feeling* (California: University of California Press, 2003 [reprint]).
61. Nancy Fraser, "Feminism, Capitalism and the Cunning of History," *New Left Review* 56 (March/April, 2009): 98–99, 108.
62. Walter Benjamin, "Theses of History," in *Illuminations* (London: Pimlico, 1999), 245–255.
63. Herbert Marcuse, *Soviet Marxism: A Critical Analysis* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1958), 127.

64. On this, see Werner Bonefeld, "Anti-Globalization and the Question of Socialism," *Critique: Journal of Socialist Theory* 34, no. 1 (2006): 39–54; Werner Bonefeld, "Global Capital, National State, and the International," *Critique: Journal of Socialist Theory* 36, no. 1 (2008): 63–72; Karl Marx, *Capital*, vol. 1, 582.

65. Alain Badiou, *Saint Paul. La fondation de l'Universalisme* (Paris: PUF, 1997), 2.

66. Michael Hardt, "Thomas Jefferson, or the Transition of Democracy," in *The Declaration of Independence* by Thomas Jefferson (London: Verso, 2007).

67. This follows Dean's call for a post-Occupy communist party as the form of activity that expresses the desire for collectivity and transferential object or vehicle through which individuals can understand their actions and express their collective will. See Dean, *The Communist Horizon*.

68. Felix Guattari, *Molecular Revolution: Psychiatry and Politics* (New York City: Puffin, 1984), 17.

69. Karl Marx, *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy*, vol. 1, 125.

70. Marx, "Theses on Feuerbach."

71. David Harvey, *Spaces of Hope* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2000), 41.

72. Karl Marx, "Grundrisse," in *Marx-Engels Collected Works*, vol. 28., trans. Richard Dixon et al. (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1986), 411–412.

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CHAPTER 1

In Praise of Marx

Terry Eagleton

Praising Karl Marx might seem as perverse as putting in a good word for the Boston Strangler. Were not Marx's ideas responsible for despotism, mass murder, labor camps, economic catastrophe, and the loss of liberty for millions of men and women? Was not one of his devoted disciples a paranoid Georgian peasant by the name of Stalin, and another a brutal Chinese dictator who may well have had the blood of some 30 million of his people on his hands? The truth is that Marx was no more responsible for the monstrous oppression of the communist world than Jesus was responsible for the Inquisition. For one thing, Marx would have scorned the idea that socialism could take root in desperately impoverished, chronically backward societies like Russia and China. If it did, then the result would simply be what he called generalized scarcity, by which he means that everyone would now be deprived, not just the poor. It would mean a recycling of the old filthy business—or, in less tasteful translation, the same old crap. Marxism is a theory of how well-heeled capitalist nations might use their immense resources to achieve justice and prosperity for their people. It is not a program by which nations bereft of material resources, a flourishing civic culture, a democratic heritage, a well-evolved technology, enlightened liberal traditions, and a skilled, educated workforce might catapult themselves into the modern age.

Marx certainly wanted to see justice and prosperity thrive in such forsaken spots. He wrote angrily and eloquently about several of Britain's downtrodden colonies, not least Ireland and India. And the political movement that his work set in motion has done more to help small nations throw off their imperialist masters than any other political current. Yet Marx was not foolish enough to imagine that socialism could be built in such countries without more advanced nations flying to their aid. And

that meant that the common people of those advanced nations had to wrest the means of production from their rulers and place them at the service of the wretched of the earth. If this had happened in 19th-century Ireland, there would have been no famine to send a million men and women to their graves and another two or three million to the far corners of the earth.

There is a sense in which the whole of Marx's writing boils down to several embarrassing questions: Why is it that the capitalist West has accumulated more resources than human history has ever witnessed, yet appears powerless to overcome poverty, starvation, exploitation, and inequality? What are the mechanisms by which affluence for a minority seems to breed hardship and indignity for the many? Why does private wealth seem to go hand in hand with public squalor? Is it, as the good-hearted liberal reformist suggests, that we have simply not got around to mopping up these pockets of human misery, but shall do so in the fullness of time? Or is it more plausible to maintain that there is something in the nature of capitalism itself that generates deprivation and inequality, as surely as Charlie Sheen generates gossip?

Marx was the first thinker to talk in those terms. This down-at-heel émigré Jew, a man who once remarked that nobody else had written so much about money and had so little, bequeathed us the language in which the system under which we live could be grasped as a whole. Its contradictions were analyzed, its inner dynamics laid bare, its historical origins examined, and its potential demise foreshadowed. This is not to suggest for a moment that Marx considered capitalism as simply a Bad Thing, like admiring Sarah Palin or blowing tobacco smoke in your children's faces. On the contrary, he was extravagant in his praise for the class that created it, a fact that both his critics and his disciples have conveniently suppressed. No other social system in history, he wrote, had proved so revolutionary. In a mere handful of centuries, the capitalist middle classes had erased almost every trace of their feudal foes from the face of the earth. They had piled up cultural and material treasures, invented human rights, emancipated slaves, toppled autocrats, dismantled empires, fought and died for human freedom, and laid the basis for a truly global civilization. No document lavishes such florid compliments on this mighty historical achievement as *The Communist Manifesto*, not even *The Wall Street Journal*.

That, however, was only part of the story. There are those who see modern history as an enthralling tale of progress, and those who view it as one long nightmare. Marx, with his usual perversity, thought it was both. Every advance in civilization had brought with it new possibilities of barbarism. The great slogans of the middle-class revolution—"Liberty, Equality, Fraternity"—were his watchwords, too. He simply inquired why those ideas could never be put into practice without violence, poverty, and exploitation. Capitalism had developed human powers and capacities

beyond all previous measure. Yet it had not used those capacities to set men and women free of fruitless toil. On the contrary, it had forced them to labor harder than ever. The richest civilizations on earth sweated every bit as hard as their Neolithic ancestors.

This, Marx considered, was not because of natural scarcity. It was because of the peculiarly contradictory way in which the capitalist system generated its fabulous wealth. Equality for some meant inequality for others, and freedom for some brought oppression and unhappiness for many. The system's voracious pursuit of power and profit had turned foreign nations into enslaved colonies, and human beings into the playthings of economic forces beyond their control. It had blighted the planet with pollution and mass starvation, and scarred it with atrocious wars. Some critics of Marx point with proper outrage to the mass murders in Communist Russia and China. They do not usually recall with equal indignation the genocidal crimes of capitalism: the late-19th-century famines in Asia and Africa in which untold millions perished; the carnage of World War I, in which imperialist nations massacred one another's working men in the struggle for global resources; and the horrors of fascism, a regime to which capitalism tends to resort when its back is to the wall. Without the self-sacrifice of the Soviet Union, among other nations, the Nazi regime might still be in place.

Marxists were warning of the perils of fascism while the politicians of the so-called free world were still wondering aloud whether Hitler was quite such a nasty guy as he was painted. Almost all followers of Marx today reject the villainies of Stalin and Mao, while many non-Marxists would still vigorously defend the destruction of Dresden or Hiroshima. Modern capitalist nations are for the most part the fruit of a history of genocide, violence, and extermination every bit as abhorrent as the crimes of communism. Capitalism, too, was forged in blood and tears, and Marx was around to witness it. It is just that the system has been in business long enough for most of us to be oblivious of that fact.

The selectiveness of political memory takes some curious forms. Take, for example, 9/11. I mean the first 9/11, not the second. I am referring to the 9/11 that took place exactly 30 years before the fall of the World Trade Center, when the United States helped to violently overthrow the democratically elected government of Salvador Allende of Chile, and installed in its place an odious dictator who went on to murder far more people than died on that dreadful day in New York and Washington. How many Americans are aware of that? How many times has it been mentioned on Fox News?

Marx was not some dreamy utopianist. On the contrary, he began his political career in fierce contention with the dreamy utopianists who surrounded him. He has about as much interest in a perfect human society as a Clint Eastwood character would and never once speaks in such absurd

terms. He did not believe that men and women could surpass the Archangel Gabriel in sanctity. Rather, he believed that the world could feasibly be made a considerably better place. In this he was a realist, not an idealist. Those truly with their heads stuck in the sand—the moral ostriches of this world—are those who deny that there can be any radical change. They behave as though *Family Guy* and multicolored toothpaste will still be around in the year 4000. The whole of human history disproves this viewpoint.

Radical change, to be sure, may not be for the better. Perhaps the only socialism we shall ever witness is one forced upon the handful of human beings who might crawl out the other side of some nuclear holocaust or ecological disaster. Marx even speaks dourly of the possible “mutual ruin of all parties.” A man who witnessed the horrors of industrial-capitalist England was unlikely to be starry-eyed about his fellow humans. All he meant was that there are more than enough resources on the planet to resolve most of our material problems, just as there was more than enough food in Britain in the 1840s to feed the famished Irish population several times over. It is the way we organize our production that is crucial. Notoriously, Marx did not provide us with blueprints for how we should do things differently. He has famously little to say about the future. The only image of the future is the failure of the present. He is not a prophet in the sense of peering into a crystal ball. He is a prophet in the authentic biblical sense of one who warns us that unless we change our unjust ways, the future is likely to be deeply unpleasant. Or that there will be no future at all.

Socialism, then, does not depend on some miraculous change in human nature. Some of those who defended feudalism against capitalist values in the late Middle Ages preached that capitalism would never work because it was contrary to human nature. Some capitalists now say the same about socialism. No doubt there is a tribe somewhere in the Amazon Basin that believes no social order can survive in which a man is allowed to marry his deceased brother’s wife. We all tend to absolutize our own conditions. Socialism would not banish rivalry, envy, aggression, possessiveness, domination, and competition. The world would still have its share of bullies, cheats, freeloaders, free riders, and occasional psychopaths. It is just that rivalry, aggression, and competition would no longer take the form of some bankers complaining that their bonuses had been reduced to a miserly \$5 million, while millions of others in the world struggled to survive on less than \$2 a day.

Marx was a profoundly moral thinker. He speaks in *The Communist Manifesto* of a world in which “the free self-development of each would be the condition of the free self-development of all.” This is an ideal to guide us, not a condition we could ever entirely achieve. But its language is nonetheless significant. As a good Romantic humanist, Marx believed in the uniqueness of the individual. The idea permeates his writings from

end to end. He had a passion for the sensuously specific and a marked aversion to abstract ideas, however occasionally necessary he thought they might be. His so-called materialism is at root about the human body. Again and again, he speaks of the just society as one in which men and women will be able to realize their distinctive powers and capacities in their own distinctive ways. His moral goal is pleasurable self-fulfillment. In this he is at one with his great mentor Aristotle, who understood that morality is about how to flourish most richly and enjoyably, not in the first place (as the modern age disastrously imagines) about laws, duties, obligations, and responsibilities.

How does this moral goal differ from liberal individualism? The difference is that to achieve true self-fulfillment, human beings for Marx must find it in and through one another. It is not just a question of each doing his or her own thing in grand isolation from others. That would not even be possible. The other must become the ground of one's own self-realization, at the same time as he or she provides the condition for one's own. At the interpersonal level, this is known as love. At the political level, it is known as socialism. Socialism for Marx would be simply whatever set of institutions would allow this reciprocity to happen to the greatest possible extent. Think of the difference between a capitalist company, in which the majority work for the benefit of the few, and a socialist cooperative, in which my own participation in the project augments the welfare of all the others, and vice versa. This is not a question of some saintly self-sacrifice. The process is built into the structure of the institution.

Marx's goal is leisure, not labor. The best reason for being a socialist, apart from annoying people you happen to dislike, is that you detest having to work. Marx thought that capitalism had developed the forces of production to the point at which, under different social relations, they could be used to emancipate the majority of men and women from the most degrading forms of labor. What did he think we would do then? Whatever we wanted. If, like the great Irish socialist Oscar Wilde, we chose simply to lie around all day in loose crimson garments, sipping absinthe, and reading the odd page of Homer to each other, then so be it. The point, however, was that this kind of free activity had to be available to all. We would no longer tolerate a situation in which the minority had leisure because the majority had labor.

What interested Marx, in other words, was what one might somewhat misleadingly call the spiritual, not the material. If material conditions had to be changed, it was to set us free from the tyranny of the economic. He himself was staggeringly well read in world literature, delighted in art, culture, and civilized conversation, reveled in wit, humor, and high spirits, and was once chased by a policeman for breaking a street lamp in the course of a pub crawl. He was, of course, an atheist, but you do not have to be religious to be spiritual. He was one of the many great Jewish heretics,

and his work is saturated with the great themes of Judaism—justice, emancipation, the Day of Reckoning, the reign of peace and plenty, the redemption of the poor.

What, though, of the fearful Day of Reckoning? Would not Marx's vision for humanity require a bloody revolution? Not necessarily. He himself thought that some nations, like Britain, Holland, and the United States, might achieve socialism peacefully. If he was a revolutionary, he was also a robust champion of reform. In any case, people who claim that they are opposed to revolution usually mean that they dislike certain revolutions and not others. Are antirevolutionary Americans hostile to the American Revolution as well as the Cuban one? Are they wringing their hands over the recent insurrections in Egypt and Libya, or the ones that toppled colonial powers in Asia and Africa? We ourselves are products of revolutionary upheavals in the past. Some processes of reform have been far more bloodstained than some acts of revolution. There are velvet revolutions as well as violent ones. The Bolshevik Revolution itself took place with remarkably little loss of life. The Soviet Union to which it gave birth fell some 70 years later, with scarcely any bloodshed.

Some critics of Marx reject a state-dominated society. But so did he. He detested the political state quite as much as the Tea Party does, if for rather less redneck reasons. Was he, feminists might ask, a Victorian patriarch? To be sure. But as some (non-Marxist) modern commentators have pointed out, it was men from the socialist and communist camps who, up to the resurgence of the women's movement, in the 1960s, regarded the issue of women's equality as vital to other forms of political liberation. The word proletarian means those who in ancient society were too poor to serve the state with anything but the fruit of their wombs. *Proles* means offspring. Today, in the sweatshops and on the small farms of the third world, the typical proletarian is still a woman.

Much the same goes for ethnic matters. In the 1920s and 1930s, practically the only men and women to be found preaching racial equality were communists. Most anticolonial movements were inspired by Marxism. The antisocialist thinker Ludwig von Mises described socialism as "the most powerful reform movement that history has ever known, the first ideological trend not limited to a section of mankind but supported by people of all races, nations, religions, and civilizations." Marx, who knew his history rather better, might have reminded von Mises of Christianity, but the point remains forceful. As for the environment, Marx astonishingly prefigured our own Green politics. Nature, and the need to regard it as an ally rather than an antagonist, was one of his constant preoccupations.

Why might Marx be back on the agenda? The answer, ironically, is because of capitalism. Whenever you hear capitalists talking about capitalism, you know the system is in trouble. Usually they prefer a more anodyne term, like free enterprise. The recent financial crashes have forced

us once again to think of the setup under which we live as a whole, and it was Marx who first made it possible to do so. It was *The Communist Manifesto* that predicted capitalism would become global, and that its inequalities would severely sharpen. Has his work any defects? Hundreds of them. But he is too creative and original a thinker to be surrendered to the vulgar stereotypes of his enemies.

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CHAPTER 2

Marx on Property, Needs, and Labor in Communist Society

Sean Sayers

INTRODUCTION

Marx wrote little about communism, the great bulk of his work is focused on capitalism. That was deliberate. He insists that communism for him is not an ideal conception of how society ought to be, but rather a theoretical projection of how society will actually develop in the future, grounded on a historical understanding of the forces at work in present, capitalist, society.¹

Despite what he says, however, an ideal vision is also an essential part of the Marxist idea of communism; and in that sense there is what Marx would regard as a utopian aspect to it. It forms the basis for the Marxist critique of capitalism and provides ideas of a better alternative, ideas that have given inspiration to the socialist movement, and which have been—and continue to be—an essential part of the appeal of Marxism as a political philosophy. In other words, Marx's account of communism is both a historical theory about how society will develop and an ideal—both aspects are essential to it. Whether these two aspects can be reconciled is often questioned, but I will not discuss that issue here.² I will focus on Marx's idea of communism itself; and I will concentrate on the social and economic aspects of Marx's account rather than on the political aspects of his thought.

EARLY IDEAS

In the *Communist Manifesto*, communism is defined as the abolition of bourgeois property, that is, private property in the means of production.

The distinguishing feature of communism is not the abolition of property generally, but the abolition of bourgeois property. But modern bourgeois private property is the final and most complete expression of the system of producing and appropriating products that is based on class antagonisms, on the exploitation of the many by the few. In this sense, the theory of the Communists may be summed up in the single sentence: Abolition of private property.³

This familiar formula runs through Marx's later work. His ideas about what it might mean in practice are developed and filled out in various ways as his thought matures and as his political experience accumulates. These developments are traced by Lenin in *State and Revolution*,⁴ which gives the classic account of the evolution of Marx's ideas about communism from 1847, when he wrote *Poverty of Philosophy*,⁵ onward.

Lenin was unaware of what are now usually classified as Marx's early works (with the exception of *The Holy Family*,⁶ which had been published in 1845). One of these, the *1844 Manuscripts* contains Marx's earliest and longest account of communism in the section entitled (by later editors), "Private Property and Communism."⁷ Marx had only recently come to regard himself as a communist and his ideas are still in the process of formation. He had only just begun to study political economy and his understanding of the workings of capitalism was sketchy and vague. In particular, at this time, he has no detailed conception of the processes within capitalism leading toward its supersession. Hence his historical understanding of communism is minimal and his conception of communism as an ideal is particularly pronounced.

In this section of the *1844 Manuscripts* Marx's focus is on property. As in his later works, he regards communism as requiring the overcoming of private property. However, he conceives of property in ways that seem very different from the familiar juridical idea that he uses later. He treats it as an ethical phenomenon. He describes private property as "human self-estrangement" and maintains that communism will lead to the "true appropriation of the human essence."⁸ Indeed, in the *1844 Manuscripts*, Marx dismisses the idea that communism can be achieved simply by abolishing bourgeois private property in the narrow legal sense as "crude" communism. Communism, he insists, will involve a far deeper social and human transformation. For Marx at this time, as Arthur says, communism "is no narrowly political and juridical adjustment of existing powers and privileges. It has fundamental ontological significance."⁹ It involves the creation of what he calls "truly human and social property,"¹⁰ and a true form of appropriation¹¹ through which man will be "completely restored to himself as a social [and] human being" and alienation overcome.¹²

Although there are some major changes in Marx's conception of communism as his thought develops, not least in the language he employs,

there are also significant continuities. Important aspects of Marx's early conceptions of private property and communism are retained in the later work. So far from expressing views that he later comes to abandon, Marx's early writings on private property and communism give expression to radical and visionary themes that run right through Marx's work and thus help to illuminate aspects of Marx's work that are often overlooked.

In the 1844 *Manuscripts* Marx explains his conception of communism by contrasting it with what he calls "crude communism" (*der rohe Kommunismus*, literally raw communism). Some aspects of crude communism are similar to features of what he later comes to believe will be a necessary transitional stage between capitalism and full communism.¹³ This has led a number of writers to identify this early notion of crude communism with the later idea of a transitional stage.¹⁴ That is clearly wrong. In 1844, Marx appears to believe that communism can be achieved immediately after the overthrow of capitalism, the idea that a transitional stage between capitalism and communism might be needed is not yet a part of his thought.

By crude communism, Marx is referring to what he regards as mistaken ideas of communism held by his contemporaries.¹⁵ There is considerable disagreement about whom specifically Marx has in mind.¹⁶ From his criticisms, it is clear that crude communism is supposed to be a poorer and simpler type of society than capitalism. In this respect, it differs from what he later regards as the transitional first stage of communism. However, there are other features that are in common between these ideas. In crude communism, as with the later idea of a transitional stage, private capital is abolished in the sense that it is taken over by the state, the community becomes the universal capitalist: "the community is simply a community of *labour* and equality of *wages*, which are paid out by the communal capital, the *community* as universal capitalist."¹⁷ Moreover, no individual can live by mere ownership, everyone must work for wages, hence "the category of *worker* [i.e., wage worker] is not abolished but extended to all men."¹⁸

Marx makes two basic criticisms of this crude notion of communism. First, it does not understand the "human nature of need." It envisages a simple ascetic community that negates wealth and "levels down."¹⁹ It does not see that the growth of production and of needs for which capitalism has been responsible means also the growth of human powers and capacities. This is a familiar theme in Marx's work from first to last. He rejects the romantic desire for the simple life.²⁰ The growth of needs is a positive development: it means the growth of production, the growth of human powers and capacities. But crude communism does not comprehend this—it does not understand the alienated form that industry takes under capitalism.

Marx's second criticism of crude communism is that by taking private property into common ownership, it achieves only a partial and abstract

negation of it. Crude communism “has not yet comprehended the positive essence of private property” and hence “it is still held captive and contaminated by private property.”²¹ The very idea that there is a positive essence of private property is itself striking. Many on the Left at that time, and still today, regard private property as an entirely detrimental phenomenon. Marx takes a different view. Great development has taken place within the economic and social framework of private property; but under capitalism this development has occurred in an estranged or alienated form. Communism should not simply negate this development, rather it must build upon it and transform it. Communism must be the dialectical supersession (*aufheben*) of capitalism, not the abstract negation of it. Hence capitalist private property should not be repudiated absolutely, or in an abstract way. Rather, its alienated form must be overcome and its positive aspects appropriated in an unalienated fashion.

Similarly, as Marx goes on to say, in capitalist conditions, modern industry and its products seem often to have only detrimental effects, but they should not be repudiated entirely, for they constitute the realization of human powers, but in an alienated form. “In everyday, material industry . . . we find ourselves confronted with objectified powers of the human essence, in the form of sensuous, alien, useful objects, in the form of estrangement.”²² The economy, likewise, confronts us as an independent system that rules over our lives. In fact, however, the market is nothing but our own social activities and relations in an estranged form. “Exchange . . . is the social species-activity, the community, social commerce and integration of man within private property, and for that reason it is the external, alienated species-activity.”²³

True communism recognizes the real character of these alienated powers, activities, and relations. It does not simply repudiate or abstractly negate them; rather, it seeks to overcome them dialectically and to reappropriate them in an unalienated form. This will not happen as the result of superior theoretical understanding. Even in these early writings, communism for Marx is not simply a better theory or set of ideals to be counterposed to the mistaken ideas of crude communism. As in his later work, he sees communism as the projected culmination of real historical processes that are actually occurring²⁴: “it is the complete restoration of man to himself as a *social—i.e., human—being*, a restoration which has become conscious and which takes place within the entire wealth of previous periods of development.”²⁵

In some of his early writings, Marx gives visionary glimpses of what these new forms of appropriation and production will mean in human terms. He talks of the “emancipation of all human senses and attributes” that will occur when they are freed from their instrumental domination by private property²⁶ and he gives a remarkable description of what unalienated production will be like. If we produced in this way, as social and

truly human beings, our individuality would be developed and realized. Marx writes:

Each of us would have . . . *affirmed* himself and his neighbour in his production. . . . Our productions would be as many mirrors from which our natures would shine forth. This relationship would be mutual: what applies to me would also apply to you: My labour would be the *free expression* and hence the *enjoyment of life*. . . . Moreover, in my labour the *specific character* of my individuality would be affirmed because it would be my *individual life*.²⁷

LATER IDEAS: THE FIRST STAGE OF COMMUNISM

In 1844 Marx appears to believe that genuine communism can be achieved immediately after the overthrow of capitalism. By the time of writing the *Communist Manifesto* in 1847 however, he has abandoned that view. He comes to realize that an initial transitional stage “between capitalism and communism,” as he later puts it,²⁸ will be needed, because the new society will have just emerged from capitalism and will still embody many of its features.

What we have to deal with here is a communist society, not as it has *developed* on its own foundations, but, on the contrary, just as it *emerges* from capitalist society; which is thus in every respect, economically, morally, and intellectually, still stamped with the birthmarks of the old society from whose womb it emerges.²⁹

Following Lenin, this first phase is sometimes referred to as socialism.³⁰ The idea of stages of communism is criticized by Lebowitz on the grounds that “Marx described a *single organic system* . . . that necessarily emerges initially from capitalism with *defects* . . . [and] is in the process of *becoming*.”³¹ That is true. However, it is no objection to the idea of stages. There is no reason why “a single organic system” (e.g., a plant) cannot develop through distinct stages. In any case, the new society needs time to be consolidated and to create the conditions for a new social and economic order; but as these are formed, it will develop into the second phase of full communism.

In the first stage, the capitalist state, which rules in the interests of capital, will be overthrown but the state will not be completely abolished. Instead, a state that will rule on behalf of working people—a workers’ state—will be created, a state in which the working class is the ruling class. This is what Marx later calls the “dictatorship of the proletariat,”³² and it supersedes what he sees as the dictatorship of the bourgeoisie that

exists in capitalist society. Nor will all forms of private property be abolished, but only bourgeois private property: capital, private property in the means of production. This will be taken into common (state) ownership, and operated for the common good rather than for private profit. Payment for work (i.e., wages) and private ownership in the sphere of consumption will continue. Everyone who is able will have to work for wages.

In some significant respects, as we have seen, this program is similar to the 'crude' communism denounced by Marx in 1844, in that capital is taken over by the state, and everyone works for wages. Now, and in subsequent works, Marx does not reject such a program outright, he sees it as a necessary stage toward the creation of full communism.³³ Nevertheless, this first, transitional phase is not Marx's ideal of communism, nor its final form, as Marx makes clear in the *Critique of the Gotha Programme*. In this work, Marx goes into some detail about the economic principles that operate in this transitional stage. He criticizes the idea that the "undiminished proceeds of labour" should be distributed equally to "all members of society."³⁴ Some deductions, he insists, must first be made centrally to cover the replacement of means of production, for the development of production and to insure against accidents and other contingencies. In addition, provision must be made for administration, for "the common satisfaction of needs, such as schools, health services, etc.," and to provide for those unable to work (the young, the elderly, the sick).³⁵

According to Marx, in the first phase of communism, after such deductions have been made for social expenditure by the state, individuals will be paid according to the amount of work they perform. Distribution is to be governed by the principle: to each according to their work. As Marx observes, this is a principle of exchange of equal values. In this respect it is similar to the economic principle governing capitalism (Marx calls it the principle of bourgeois right), except for one important difference: in communism it is no longer possible to gain an income merely by owning capital. "Everyone is a worker," everyone who is capable of doing so must work in order to earn a living. Hence, Marx says, there is an advance in equality.³⁶

EQUALITY

Many recent writers have tried to maintain that Marx advocates communism on the basis of principles of equality and justice. In *Critique of the Gotha Programme*, in particular, it is often argued, he justifies first phase communism as an advance in equality compared with capitalism, with the supposed implication that full communism will involve an even more equalitarian distribution of wealth.³⁷ This is a fundamental misunderstanding. It should not be interpreted as an endorsement by Marx of first

stage communism for its greater equality. Its main purpose, rather, is to point out the defects, the *inequalities* that exist in this form of communism. Marx's point is that the principle of equal exchange leads inevitably to inequalities—inequalities that are an inescapable effect of the principle of equal right itself.

This equal right is still constantly encumbered by a bourgeois limitation. The right of the producers is proportional to the labour they supply; the equality consists in the fact that measurement is made with an equal standard, labour. But one man is superior to another physically, or mentally, and supplies more labour in the same time, or can work for a longer time. . . . This equal right is an unequal right for unequal labour. It recognises no class differences, because everyone is only a worker like everyone else; but it tacitly recognises unequal individual endowment, and thus productive capacity, as a natural privilege. It is, therefore, a right of inequality, in its content, like every right. . . . Besides, one worker is married, another is not; one has more children than another, and so on etc., etc. Thus, with an equal amount of work done, and hence an equal share in the social consumption fund, one will in fact receive more than another, one will be richer than another, and so on.³⁸

Even from an egalitarian point of view, in other words, the principle of equal right that prevails in the first stage of communism is defective; it is not ideal.

Rawls questions Marx's view that distribution according to work must inevitably lead to inequalities: "Why, e.g., can't society . . . impose various taxes etc. And adjust incentive so that the greater endowments of some work to the advantage of those with fewer endowments?"³⁹ Of course, a socialist society can take steps to mitigate inequalities—as, indeed, do virtually all capitalist societies through their tax and welfare systems. But Marx's argument is more radical than Rawls realizes. Marx's point is that *any* principle of distribution according to equal property rights will generate inequalities, since every right "is a right to inequality in its content."⁴⁰ As Wood explains:

Equal rights, whatever their nature, are always in principle rights to unequal shares of need satisfaction or well-being. When I have a right to a certain share of means of consumption, I have a claim on this share against others which, within very broad limits, I may enforce irrespective of the consequences to others of my so doing. This is part of what it means to have a right.⁴¹

Marx is not arguing for communism on egalitarian grounds. On the contrary, he criticizes the principle of equal right as bourgeois, even

though he believes it is necessary for the immediate postcapitalist stage of historical development. "These defects are inevitable in the first phase of communist society as it is when it has just emerged after prolonged birth pangs from capitalist society. Right can never be higher than the economic structure of society and its cultural development conditioned thereby."⁴²

To do away with these defects, communism must "wholly transcend the narrow horizon of bourgeois right."⁴³ Its ultimate aim is not to construct a more equal form of property distribution or a fairer system of wages. It is to abolish private property and wages altogether. This is what is also envisaged in the earlier idea of true appropriation. It remains Marx's ideal of communism right through to the end of his life.

FULL COMMUNISM

So far I have been considering the first transitional phase of postcapitalist development. Full communism requires much deeper and more extensive economic, social, and human changes. It involves not only the abolition of private property in the means of production (capital)—that is, not only a partial and abstract negation of private property, as Marx put it in 1844—but its complete supersession; and, along with that, the elimination of the division of labor and all class divisions, the abolition of the state, the overcoming of alienation, and the creation of a free and consciously organized community.

The radical and far-reaching character of this vision was not well understood in much of the mainstream Marxist literature of the Soviet period. The abolition of private property in the means of production by the Soviet regime had, it was supposed, removed the material basis for class differences and created the material conditions for communist society. The transition to full communism was then expected to occur more or less spontaneously with the passage of time, as old habits died out and were superseded.⁴⁴ The ending of all class distinctions and the "withering away" of the state, it was assumed, would occur automatically and relatively rapidly: "twenty or thirty years" was the optimistic estimate of an influential work published in the early years of the Soviet Union.⁴⁵ Unfortunately, there were no signs of this happening in the Soviet Union—quite the reverse indeed. Nor has there been any discernible movement in this direction in any other of the actually existing communist societies. It seems clear that more is involved in creating communism than the abolition of private property in the means of production.⁴⁶

Moreover, as I am arguing, it is clear that Marx also believed this. Communism, for him, means a far fuller and deeper transformation than can be achieved by a change in the property system in its narrow legal sense. This theme is central to his earliest communist writings, as we have seen. It is also present throughout his later work, as we will now see, even though

the way he talks of communism changes, becoming less abstract and philosophical, more concrete, more specific both economically and socially.

The essential features of this later account of full communism are outlined for the first time in the *Poverty of Philosophy*:

The working class, in the course of its development, will substitute for the old civil society an association which will exclude classes and their antagonism, and there will be no more political power properly so-called, since political power is precisely the official expression of antagonism in civil society.⁴⁷

Class distinctions will be eliminated. The state will lose its “political character” and “it withers away” (*er stirbt ab*).⁴⁸

Although Marx’s descriptions of full communism become somewhat more detailed as his thought develops, they always remain vague and sketchy. It is described in a well-known passage in the *Critique of the Gotha Programme* as follows:

In a higher phase of communist society, after the enslaving subordination of the individual to the division of labour, and therewith also the antithesis between mental and physical labour, has vanished; after labour has become not only a means of life but life’s prime want; after the productive forces have also increased with the all-around development of the individual, and all the springs of co-operative wealth flow more abundantly—only then can the narrow horizon of bourgeois right be crossed in its entirety and society inscribe on its banners: From each according to his ability, to each according to his needs!⁴⁹

Brief and sloganistic as this description is, it has given rise to an enormous amount of discussion and controversy. Although communism emerges out of capitalism, it is important to understand just how radical the break Marx envisages between them is. Communism is not simply an amelioration of the injustices and inefficiencies of capitalism but a completely different way of organizing economic and social life. This is not well understood by many recent writers in the analytic tradition, like Cohen,⁵⁰ Rawls,⁵¹ Geras,⁵² who wish to regard Marxism as a form of liberal egalitarianism. Class divisions and the division of labor will be overcome. The economic development unleashed by the new social order will lead, in due course, to a situation of abundance. This will create the conditions for distribution according to need rather than via a system of private ownership and economic exchange. Wages will be abolished: people will work (or not) as they want to, rather than because

they must in order to earn a living. Private property will be eliminated; the market and the money economy will be entirely transcended. There will be no accounting of what is mine or thine and no attempt to abide by the principle of equal exchange. Let us consider the various elements of these ideas in turn.

ABUNDANCE AND DISTRIBUTION ACCORDING TO NEED

As Marx suggests, if distribution is to be according to need and the market is to be transcended, then conditions of abundance must be achieved. Need and abundance are notoriously problematic concepts, but what must be stressed in this context is that the kind of abundance Marx refers to is not an absolute superfluity, so that anything that anyone could possibly desire is on hand for them. Since desires are potentially unlimited, that is impractical. Rather it means that whatever a person could reasonably be judged to need is available to them.

Needs must be distinguished from mere arbitrary subjective desires or preferences. They are determined by what is objectively necessary for human flourishing. However, that varies socially and historically. Beyond the bare minimum for survival, our needs in contemporary society are different from those of people in other kinds of societies and in different historical periods. We are social beings and the character of our needs is, in some part, determined socially. Thus, what an individual needs is not a matter of subjective individual caprice; it is a matter of shared understandings about what requirements are reasonable in a specific context. If what we need by that standard is plentiful and freely available then there is abundance in the relevant sense. In these circumstances, the distribution of resources can be achieved without serious conflict and without resort to allocation by price or mandatory means, such as rationing.

Abundance is a function both of what is available and of the level of our needs. There are thus two different routes to attaining it. A society can either produce more or limit its needs.⁵³ Marx clearly advocates the first course. From his early writings on, as we have seen, he criticizes those who would restrict human needs and hence development. There is nothing ascetic about his vision of communism. He envisages it as an advanced industrial society with its abundance resting on high levels of production and consumption. This is not to deny that false needs are engendered in modern consumer society. However, such needs must be defined historically and relatively.⁵⁴

Nowadays, these ideas are often criticized on environmental grounds. Marx's view that abundance can be reached by developing the productive forces, it is said, ignores the existence of natural, objective, and inescapable—environmentally determined—limits to growth. The aim of continued growth is unsustainable. This raises large and complex issues that I cannot

deal with here.⁵⁵ However, it is clear that growth must be achieved in a sustainable way and Marx is fully aware of that. Marxism is a form of materialism; it is quite false to suggest that it is blind to the existence of environmental limits.⁵⁶ Indeed, communism should be well able to take them into account. For doing so requires the ability to plan and control the economy and that will be possible only when the anarchy of the market is replaced with the conscious organization of economic life that will come with communism.

People are skeptical that abundance can be achieved through economic growth for other reasons as well. Needs, it is often said, expand more rapidly than our ability to satisfy them, and they do so indefinitely. We will always want more than we have. Abundance, and hence distribution according to need, can never be attained by increasing production. Only a few moments reflection are needed to see that this is a highly questionable argument. Abundance is not as inconceivable as it suggests. It is true that human needs have grown continually throughout history with the growth of the productive forces, and no doubt they will continue to do so. However, at any particular historical period, many, indeed, most of our needs are finite and it is quite possible to satisfy them.

Indeed, abundance and distribution according to need *already exist* in many areas. In Britain and many other similar countries many social services and facilities are not directly charged for, but provided according to need: for example, state education, social welfare services, most roads, and some public transport (school buses, free travel for the elderly). Many local services are also distributed according to need, such as street cleaning, rubbish collection, public libraries, and entry to museums and art galleries. In all these cases, distribution can be free because there are sufficient resources to satisfy such reasonable needs. Moreover, there are many other areas to which distribution according to need could undoubtedly be extended, since needs are not infinite and relative abundance is possible.⁵⁷ This is true, for example, of basic foods (bread, milk, vegetables, fruit, and other staple goods), and of many other basic goods and services.

Perhaps the most significant example of provision according to need in Britain is the National Health Service (NHS), which provides an important example both of the possibilities of distribution according to need and also of some of its problems. In a private health care system I can get pretty well whatever I want if I can pay for it. In the NHS provision is according to need, and what constitute needs must ultimately be determined by the service itself. In many cases this is clear, but sometimes it raises controversial and difficult issues. To function satisfactorily these decisions must be socially accepted—that is to say, shared understandings are required about what constitutes need. Moreover, the system can function satisfactorily only if there are relative abundance and adequate resources for such

needs to be met. Otherwise, the perception will be of generalized want and enforced rationing. Similar issues arise in other areas too, for example, the supply of domestic water.⁵⁸

No doubt, there are areas in which distribution according to need could not be introduced at present: for example with expensive and scarce items, such as cars and luxury goods.⁵⁹ Even in these cases, however, this is not because needs for these items are infinitely expandable. These needs, too, are inherently limited. Rather it is because such goods cannot readily be produced in sufficient quantities to satisfy them and create a situation of abundance. However, there is no economic or philosophical reason to prevent distribution according to need being adopted much more widely than at present, and gradually extended as conditions allow.⁶⁰ Such creeping socialism has in fact steadily occurred over the years even in the most staunchly capitalist countries. In short, abundance and distribution according to need are not fantastic and utopian ideas but practical and feasible goals. To repeat, this is not to deny that our needs, even for the most basic items, grow and develop. It would be futile to try to curb them; and communism, as I have stressed, does not aim to do so. Marxism does not seek to limit economic development. Quite the contrary, it celebrates the development of the productive forces.

Why does it do so? Greater production creates more goods to consume. That is what is valued in most mainstream economic thought. For Marx, however, neither production nor consumption is an end-in-itself, nor is economic wealth as such, it is not true wealth. Marx's conception of wealth is quite different. The "wealth and poverty of political economy" must be replaced by the idea of "the rich man and the wealth of human need."⁶¹ The development of needs is of value because it goes together with the growth of human productive and creative powers. This is the true meaning of wealth.⁶² Communism is of value because it will create the conditions for human development. It will lead to

[t]he absolute working-out of [man's] creative potentialities, with no presupposition other than the previous historic development, which makes this totality of development, i.e. the development of all human powers as such the end in itself, not as measured on a *predetermined* yardstick.⁶³

UNALIENATED LABOR

On the other side of the equation, in a communist society people will contribute according to their abilities. They will work because they want to, not just because they are paid to do so. Work will become life's prime want; alienated labor will be overcome. How can communism bring

this about? What are the causes of such alienation and how can it be overcome?

Its primary cause, according to Marx, is the capitalist system, in which ownership of the means of production is concentrated in a few private hands and the direct producers have been dispossessed of everything but their power to labor, which they are forced to sell for wages to the owners of capital. As a result, workers have lost control of their work and its products; the whole process is owned and controlled by capital. In Marx's words, workers are alienated both from the "object" and the "activity" of labor.⁶⁴ The first step toward overcoming alienated labor is taken by communism when it abolishes capitalism and takes the means of production into common ownership. This constitutes the essential precondition for further transformations toward a communist society. However, it is not sufficient to overcome alienated labor. No doubt, in the right circumstances it can lead to increased motivation, but more is required for the overcoming of alienation. There is an instrumental aspect to all work, for work is undertaken to create a product, to achieve an end. Where this end is internally connected to the work itself, the achievement of the end can be satisfying and self-realizing. But in so far as work is done purely to earn a wage, work becomes a means to an end that is external to it. What it produces and how it is produced become arbitrary and irrelevant. In other words, wage labor as such is alienating. The overcoming of alienation requires its abolition.

Is it really possible to organize society on this basis? The very idea, it is often said, is contrary to human nature. A common view is that we work only as a means of gaining a living and satisfying our needs. That is also what is implied by the hedonist theory of human nature that underlies much mainstream economics and utilitarian moral philosophy. This holds that we are driven solely by the search for pleasure and the avoidance of pain. Work means toil and pain, we do it only in order to meet our needs, and we would avoid it if we could. Common as these views are, there are compelling reasons for rejecting them. People's attitudes toward work are a great deal more complex and contradictory than they suggest. Human beings are not mere passive consumers. We are active and productive beings. Working to create and produce things can—potentially—be a fulfilling and self-realizing activity. This view forms the basis of Marx's conviction that the alienation in so much modern work can be overcome and that work can become a fulfilling activity that is undertaken not just as a means to an end but as an end in itself.⁶⁵

Even if it is true that people want to be active and productive, there are other aspects of work that appear to be responsible for alienation, and which even the abolition of both capital and wage labor, radical as these changes would be, would not alter—for there are alienating aspects of work that appear unrelated to the economic system within which it is

performed. A great deal of work, it seems, is intrinsically unsatisfying; the labor process itself is uncreative, unskilled, repetitive, monotonous, and soul destroying. A change in the ownership system might perhaps give those who do such work a greater sense of involvement in it. It might increase their motivation, but it will not alter the inherently unsatisfying character of such work itself. Further changes are needed if work is to be made into a self-realizing activity.

It is sometimes said that the root cause of alienation is modern industry: nothing less than a return to handicraft forms of work is needed in order to overcome the alienation of modern forms of work.⁶⁶ This is not Marx's view. Alienation, he argues, can be overcome only with help of the most advanced industry. Handicraft work limits and constrains creative possibilities. It confines the worker to specific materials, activities, and skills. Machinery can and should have a liberating effect on work. It has the potential to lighten the burden of physical labor and make work more intelligent and attractive. It can take over routine and repetitive tasks. Automation can free people and allow work to become more rational, creative, and "worthy of human nature."⁶⁷

But it does not usually have this effect. Why not? In handicraft work, the worker controls the tool and is in control of the work process. In industrial work in capitalist conditions, by contrast, the worker becomes subordinated to the machine and controlled by it. But this is not because of the industrial character of the work. Rather it is because of the way work is organized under capitalism, in which the machinery is owned and controlled by capital and not by the producers. Under communism, the producers will reappropriate the means of production and subordinate them to their collective will. Then industry and science will no longer take the form of alien powers. They will become forces whose creative potentialities can be exercised by the producers themselves for the common good, and the benefits of automation will be realized.

THE DIVISION OF LABOR

Automation is not the whole answer to the problem of alienation, however. Even with a high degree of it, much routine and repetitive work will inevitably still remain to be done. Indeed, even the most intelligent and creative kinds of work—like painting, writing, or composing music⁶⁸—have repetitive aspects. Repetition in work is ineliminable. The problem of unsatisfying work concerns not just the nature of the tasks that work involves but also the way in which they are distributed socially. In the present division of labor, many workers are confined to doing routine and repetitive tasks that require little skill. They are treated as unskilled and paid correspondingly. A much smaller number of others are trained

to do the creative and intelligent work of planners, managers, designers, scientists, artists, and philosophers. Overcoming alienation—and class divisions—in a communist society must also involve overcoming the present division of labor. No one will be forced to spend their whole working life doing mindless and routine tasks, not because such tasks will somehow have been eliminated but because they will be shared and distributed more equally.

What Marx envisages is that people will no longer be confined to limited and specialized tasks but will be able to engage in a variety of activities and develop in an all-round way. In a communist society, Marx says:

nobody has one exclusive sphere of activity but each can become accomplished in any branch he wishes, society regulates the general production and thus makes it possible for me to do one thing today and another tomorrow, to hunt in the morning, fish in the afternoon, rear cattle in the evening, criticize after dinner, just as I have a mind, without ever becoming hunter, fisherman, herdsman or critic.⁶⁹

There is a great deal of skepticism both about the feasibility and the desirability of this idea. Marx questions both of these views. The social organization of labor is not naturally determined, nor is it simply a matter for pragmatic choice. The division of labor is a fundamental aspect of the system of class divisions. At the present stage of economic development, such economic and social relations take on an alien and independent form, they cannot be altered merely at will. Their form corresponds to the level of development of the productive forces. As these develop, the division of labor changes.⁷⁰ It is destined ultimately to be overcome altogether and specialization eliminated when the stage of full communism is reached.

These ideas are often questioned. The division of labor, in the sense of occupational specialization, it is argued, is necessary economically in a developed society. According to Adam Smith,⁷¹ it is the main means for increasing economic productivity. Conversely, when the same person performs many different tasks, expertise and productivity suffer. Arguments of this kind are familiar: Jack of all trades, master of none. Up to a point, it is true that specialization leads to an increase of expertise and is necessary for the development of particular skills. Beyond that point, however, it also results in fatigue and boredom. Even the most specialized worker, scientist, or athlete needs other activities for a satisfactory and full life, and all their activities benefit from such diversity. The need for this is well recognized in the literature on work.⁷² Many writers, including

Marx, maintain that diversity of work is not only economically feasible; it is inherently beneficial and desirable. The case is often made on empirical and psychological grounds. For example, Fourier maintains that human beings have an inherent psychological need for variety of activity. Excessive specialization makes for unhappiness and inefficiency. He maintains that “activity and energy in labor are increased by brief periods of repose” and by variation of work.⁷³

Marx’s approach is different. His ideas have an ontological rather than a merely empirical or psychological basis. Human beings are universal beings, endowed with universal capacities and powers. To develop fully as human beings they must exercise these capacities and powers in an all-round way. Other animals, by contrast, are governed by particular drives and instincts; they have only limited powers and are capable of engaging only in limited activities for particular purposes. “Animals produce only according to the standards and needs of the species to which they belong, while man is capable of producing according to the standards of every species.”⁷⁴

ALL-ROUND DEVELOPMENT

For Marx, with the overcoming of the division of labor the “full and free development of every individual”⁷⁵ will become a possibility. People will no longer be confined to a narrow range of activities but will be able to exercise and develop all their powers. What does Marx envisage by these words?

Cohen takes Marx to mean that in the future people will engage in every possible activity.⁷⁶ This is not what Marx means. In the capitalist division of labor people are channeled into kinds of work and then confined to these for life. Marx, it seems, is particularly concerned about the larger divisions, between mental and manual labor, town and country occupations, and so on. The idea of overcoming the division of labor must be interpreted in this context. What is envisaged is that we would do both intellectual and manual *kinds* of work. The idea of human universality implies that virtually all people normally have the ability to do all kinds of work, at least with some level of skill. With the present division of labor, the opportunity to develop as hunter or a fisherman, an artist or philosopher, varies enormously according to background and upbringing; and, as Marx says, “the exclusive concentration of artistic talent in particular individuals, and its suppression in the broad mass which is bound with this, is a consequence of the division of labour.”⁷⁷

However, the idea of human universality does not necessarily imply that we all have equal natural abilities in all areas. In *Critique of the Gotha Programme* he refers to “unequal individual endowment.”⁷⁸ Nor does he suggest that everyone has equal artistic potential, but rather

“that anyone in whom there is a potential Raphael should be able to develop without hindrance.”⁷⁹ Marx’s main concern is that people should not be confined to limited and specialized tasks but should be able to engage in a variety of different kinds of activity and develop as they choose.

FREEDOM AND SPECIALIZATION

The assumption Marx is making is that people have a universal range of abilities that they will normally want to exercise in an all-rounded way. Cohen⁸⁰ raises the question, “why, ideally, should [people] engage in richly various activities? . . . What is so bad about a person dedicating himself to one or a small number of lines of activity only?” What if a person prefers to specialize? Why should they not be able to do so?

Marx does not argue that people should be forced to vary their activities.⁸¹ On the contrary, Marx’s view is that work should be freely chosen. One of his fundamental criticisms of the division of labor in capitalist society is that it takes the form of an alien and coercive imposition. In future communist society people will, for the first time, be able to organize their work in a conscious and free fashion. And, given that freedom, the implication is that they will generally prefer an all-round variety of activities over specialization.

Cohen questions this. “What constitutes the *free* development of the individual is never his *full* development,” he says, and Marx “too casually juxtaposes the two.”⁸² As I have been arguing, the way Marx links these ideas is not casual, it comes out of a systematic philosophical theory, which is part of an established tradition of thought about human universality.⁸³ The idea that a free choice will be for a full variety of activities is based on the idea that human beings are universal beings. However, given that different individuals have different aptitudes for different kinds of activity, what this variety will consist of will no doubt vary from individual to individual. As Ware⁸⁴ says, “some may even choose to be one-sided or restricted, but I think most will not and will immediately see better alternatives to the capitalist division of labor.”

As regards this freedom, in the passage about hunting and fishing, Marx says that in communist society it will be possible “for me to do one thing today and another tomorrow . . . just as I have a mind.” At best this is carelessly phrased. Industrial work in modern society is intrinsically cooperative. It requires the simultaneous activity of many people acting in concert. A defect of the examples of hunting and fishing as they appear to be envisaged is that they are solitary.⁸⁵ In modern conditions at least, individuals cannot simply work as they have a mind. Coordination under the command of a directing authority is needed. This is not a feature only of capitalism or of class societies; it is

a technical necessity in all developed modes of production. Marx is well aware of this. As he writes:

All directly social or communal labour on a large scale requires, to a greater or lesser degree, a directing authority in order to secure the harmonious co-operation of the activities of individual, and to perform the general functions that have their origin in the motion of the total productive organism, as distinguished from the motion of its separate organs.⁸⁶

For example, “a single violin player is his own conductor: an orchestra requires a separate one.”⁸⁷

Even though authority and direction are required, however, this does not necessarily mean that consent and freedom must be lacking—for work can be a matter for collective decision and deliberate social regulation. This is often the case with an orchestra or band, for example, which can be voluntary cooperative endeavors. Work as Marx ideally envisages it could be like this. At present it is not so, its forms are dictated by the alien requirements of capital and the market.

When Marx says that it will be possible “for me to do one thing today and another tomorrow . . . *just as I have a mind*” (my emphasis), he immediately goes on to say, “*society regulates the general production*” (my emphasis). The two thoughts appear to be in conflict. Marx is often interpreted to be suggesting that people will be able to exercise a purely individual choice over which particular tasks to perform and when to perform them.⁸⁸ This would imply, for example, that a fisherman could choose only to fish but not to help maintain the nets, or a teacher only to teach but not to do any marking or administration, or a manager opt not participate in the work being managed. Clearly this is not what Marx has in mind. These are the sorts of divisions that prevail at present. It is precisely this sort of division of fulfilling and unfulfilling work roles that eliminating the division of labor is supposed to overcome.

If I can choose exactly what I will do purely individually, without regard to any wider considerations, then the social regulation of production is not possible. However, what Marx has in mind when he says that “*society regulates the general production*” may involve a social (positive) rather than the purely individual and negative conception of freedom. If individuals choose what to do not as atomic individuals but as members of the community, democratically, then perhaps a different way of organizing labor can be freely chosen and agreed upon.⁸⁹

The idea that work might be a free cooperative activity gives rise to some familiar objections. Some jobs are intrinsically unpleasant, it is said, and people will never do them willingly. Marcuse⁹⁰ argues that in a highly developed society in the future arduous and routine jobs will be automated and the issue of unpleasant work will no longer arise. This

is unrealistic. Numerous routine, dirty, menial, and unpleasant tasks will inevitably continue to exist. If work is made a matter of choice, so the objection goes, these jobs will not get done. However, it is wrong to think that free adults will never do unpleasant tasks willingly. When such work needs to be done and is seen to be necessary then people will do it willingly without needing to be externally coerced.⁹¹ It is wrong to think that people are motivated solely by narrow self-interest. They can act cooperatively for the common good even when this means sacrificing their own selfish interests. This is common experience in the family and among friends. Arguments for the possibility of a free cooperative community frequently appeal to this and, it is often argued, such forms of organization could also function on the larger social scale.⁹²

These arguments go back a long way. In Plato's ideal republic the family is abolished in the hope that family loyalties will no longer be socially divisive but will instead be transferred to the wider community. Aristotle criticizes this. He argues that the form of unity of a larger society is different from that of a family or small group, and greater diversity is essential to it.⁹³ Nevertheless, many on the Left have followed Plato in wanting to look upon all fellow beings as comrades—as 'brothers' and 'sisters'—and they have insisted that universal fellowship is a valid aspiration. Marx's vision of communism, I am suggesting, is in this tradition.⁹⁴ Nevertheless, in a voluntary cooperative community there will be some who want to enjoy the benefits of communal productive activity without contributing their share to the common effort. These would-be 'free riders', it is often argued, present a problem, particularly for a fully cooperative community.

It should first be noted that there are many free riders in all societies, though it takes a particular way of looking at things to see them as such. In present society, children, the sick, the elderly, the unemployed, for example, consume without contributing their share economically. If Marx's conditions are met, in a communist society, the voluntarily unemployed or underemployed will be added to the list.

As we have seen, Marx envisages that there will be two stages in the development of postcapitalist society. In the first stage, individuals are rewarded according to the work they do and free riding by those capable of working is thus discouraged: if you do not work, you are not paid.⁹⁵ In the higher stage of full communism, however, people produce and consume as they want to. There are no direct economic sanctions to prevent them from consuming without contributing any work. As a precondition for such a society, as we have seen, Marx envisages that work must first have become a pleasure (life's prime want) not a chore, so that people will positively want to contribute without needing to be forced economically to do so. Marx also envisages a situation of material abundance in which people can consume as much as they wish without creating scarcities. Given these conditions, no doubt, free riders will not be an insuperable problem (these are major assumptions, of course).

Marx rejects the assumption that runs through much of mainstream economics, that human beings are motivated solely by material self-interest.⁹⁶ He implicitly rejects the view that that we all inevitably want to be free riders. People are capable of acting in a cooperative fashion for the common good when they can see that their own interests and the common good coincide. However, it is extraordinarily optimistic to believe that work can really become our prime want or that a situation of abundance can be achieved. As regards the less attractive and interesting tasks that will need to be performed, it is difficult to conceive that none will be tempted to relax their efforts. No matter how good the morale of the society and the enthusiasm of its members, there are bound to be some free riders. It is unrealistic to imagine otherwise. Free riding is bound to remain an issue and it is doubtful that purely moral means are going to be enough to prevent it.⁹⁷ However, if a situation of abundance can indeed be achieved, and people will indeed work because they want to, then the problem may not be so serious and free riders can be tolerated.

THE CURRENT SITUATION

I have been discussing some of the common objections to Marx's idea that the division of labor can be overcome in a future society, and I have presented some of the philosophical reasons for the view that this is both feasible and desirable. For Marx, however, it is not just that: it is the direction in which present society is actually moving.⁹⁸ His ultimate answer to skepticism about the possibility of overcoming the division of labor is that this is actually occurring.

Accounts of the development of the division of labor sometimes suggest that it has steadily intensified as the forces of production have developed, and that this has led to a continuous increase in the fragmentation and deskilling of work.⁹⁹ According to Marx, however, its development is more complex than this and goes through a series of different stages.¹⁰⁰ Handicraft labor requires specific skills and techniques applied to particular materials. Industrial labor with machinery involves increasingly universal forms. Instead of being tied for life to a specific trade or craft, workers can transfer from one area of production to another. Workers need to be more flexible, they must acquire transferable skills, which will equip them for a variety of different kinds of work.¹⁰¹

When Marx was writing these developments had barely begun. They are now quite evident. Some, like Hardt and Negri,¹⁰² portray them in optimistic terms as if they were ushering in a new postindustrial era. That may be so, but it is clear that this is quite different from the ideal communist society imagined by Marx. Indeed, for the most part, these changes mean only greater alienation and exploitation for working people.¹⁰³ According to Marx's analysis, however, these effects are not caused by

any essential features of the division of labor or of the labor process of postindustrial production. Indeed, these new forms of work could mean a liberation from narrow specializations. Rather these effects arise because these forms of work have developed within the economic framework of capitalism that exercises an alien and coercive power over peoples' lives.

In sum, Marx's account of the division of labor is not vulnerable to much of the skepticism so often directed against it. Actual developments, far from refuting Marx's analysis, will serve ultimately to confirm it. If the future that Marx envisages is still far from a reality, that is not so much because of errors in his account of the division of labor and its overcoming, but rather because of the continuing domination of capitalism and the free market. Only when these are overcome can human productive life be brought back under human control and organized for the human good.

IS COMMUNISM REALLY POSSIBLE?

Is all this really possible? Is it really possible to create a society in which capital and wage labor, money and the market, classes and the division of labor are all abolished? We are so often told that there is no alternative to capitalism and the free market that many will dismiss these ideas as completely fanciful and utopian. That would be a mistake. Of course, there are alternatives to capitalism. Indeed, communal and cooperative social arrangements not governed by private ownership and market exchange are common and we have all experienced them.

Family life, cooperative activities among friends, monastic communities, and socialist experiments such as the early *kibbutzim* in Israel are all familiar examples. Moreover, as Cohen rightly observes, "people regularly participate in emergencies like flood or fire on camping trip [i.e., communal] principles."¹⁰⁴ It is important to remember that such nonmarket social arrangements actually exist because they refute the claim that there is no alternative to capitalism and also because, ever since Plato, they have been used to suggest models of what the alternatives might be like.

However, it is said that what may work on a small scale or in a limited way could not possibly work for a whole society, let alone on a global scale as Marxism requires. Families or groups of friends can function as they do because their members feel an immediate bond of fellowship, but this cannot be extended to the larger society. Most people are not sufficiently generous and self-denying for communism. Human beings are ultimately self-interested: this is what will ultimately prevail.

This is questionable. The ideology of self-interest has become so prevalent that we are in danger of forgetting the extent to which fellow feeling exists in almost everyone. Much that gets done in society—for example, by parents, teachers, nurses, and many others—is not determined entirely by self-interest, it relies on cooperation and generosity.¹⁰⁵ The idea that

we are driven purely by self-interest is untenable as an account of the way in which many aspects of society actually function.

However, so too is the view that with the advent of communism, people will set aside self-interest and be motivated solely by fellow feeling. It would be naive to deny that people are self-interested and argue for communism on the grounds that people are cooperative by nature.¹⁰⁶ Human nature is a good deal more complicated than either of these extremes suggest. The possibility of communism can neither be refuted nor proved by arguments about human nature.

Cohen appears to think differently. One of his main reasons for doubting the feasibility of communism is that “we do not know how, through appropriate rules and stimuli, to make generosity turn the wheels of the economy.”¹⁰⁷ However, communism is not predicated on that—it does not require people to be especially generous. People tend to act on what they perceive to be their best interests. The question is where do these lie? With abundance and distribution according to need, there will be nothing to be gained by amassing material possessions. Most people will get more from exercising their creative powers and in working with and for others. They are likely to behave accordingly. But if they do not want to be productive they need not be so and they will not suffer materially. As I have argued, however, everything we know about human behavior suggests that few will take this option, particularly when work is made more attractive—not out of motives of generosity but because being unproductive and inactive is not what they will want for themselves.

To return to Cohen’s doubts about communism: his claim is that we supposedly know how to make an economy run on the basis of selfishness, but not in other ways.¹⁰⁸ Shorn of its dubious assumptions about human nature, Cohen assumes that the market provides the best mechanism for organizing production and distribution in a complex economy. Communism abolishes the market and replaces it with a system of “production by freely associated men . . . consciously regulated by them in accordance with a settled plan.”¹⁰⁹ Such planning and control, it is argued, is inefficient and will not work on a large scale, as the economic record of actually existing communist societies has shown.

The problems with these centrally planned economies were evident, but that should not be taken as a reason to write off central planning altogether and think that there is no alternative to the market. The evidence of experience is far more mixed. In the first place, it is important to see that central planning is an essential feature of the internal organization of all large-scale enterprises, and of the attempts by governments to control the economy, even in capitalism. The idea of pure, free market capitalism is a myth. Moreover, the market has not shown itself to be the efficient, self-regulating mechanism that its advocates claim. Quite the contrary. As recent experience has shown all too clearly, it is dysfunctional and crisis

prone, wasteful, and irrational, and it has brought the whole global economic system to the brink of catastrophe.

There is no reason in principle to think that a better way of running things cannot be found.¹¹⁰ That is what the experience of capitalism really shows. As I have gone out of my way to stress, many of the alternative forms of economic organization that communism advocates already exist in embryo in present society. Thus communism will not arrive as a sudden and completely unheralded transformation. As Marx says, “if we did not find concealed in society as it is the material conditions of production and the corresponding relations of exchange prerequisite for a classless society, then all attempts to explode it would be quixotic.”¹¹¹

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NOTES

1. Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, “The German Ideology: Part I,” in *The Marx-Engels Reader*, ed. Robert C. Tucker (New York: W. W. Norton, 1978a), 162; Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, “Manifesto of the Communist Party,” in *The Marx-Engels Reader*, ed. Robert C. Tucker (New York: W. W. Norton, 1978b), 484.

2. My view is that they can. I have written extensively on this topic elsewhere. See Sean Sayers, *Marxism and Human Nature*, Part 2 (London: Routledge, 1998).

3. Marx and Engels, “Manifesto,” 484.

4. Vladimir I. Lenin, “State and Revolution,” in *Selected Works: A One Volume Selection of Lenin’s Most Essential Writings* (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1969b).

5. Karl Marx, *The Poverty of Philosophy* (Peking: Foreign Languages Press, 1978b).

6. Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *The Holy Family: Or Critique of Critical Critique*, trans. Richard Dixon (Moscow: Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1956).

7. Karl Marx, “Private Property and Communism,” in *Early Writings*, trans. Rodney Livingstone and Gregor Benton (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1975d).

8. *Ibid.*

9. C. J. Arthur, *Dialectics of Labour* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1986).

10. Karl Marx, “Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844,” in *Early Writings*, trans. Rodney Livingstone and Gregor Benton (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1975b), 333.

11. *Ibid.*, 346.

12. *Ibid.*, 348.

13. Karl Marx, “Critique of the Gotha Programme,” in *The Marx-Engels Reader*, ed. Robert C. Tucker (New York: W. W. Norton, 1978a), 538.

14. Shlomo Avineri, *The Social and Political Thought of Karl Marx* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1968), 223; Robert C. Tucker, *Philosophy and Myth in Karl Marx* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1961), 154–156.

15. Arthur, *Dialectics of Labour*, 36–38; Jon Elster, *Making Sense of Marx* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 451.

16. According to Löwy, Marx's targets are Weitling, Babeuf, Cabet, and Villegardelle. See Michael Löwy, *The Theory of Revolution in the Young Marx*, (Leiden: Brill, 2003), 47, 87. The editors of *Marx-Engels Collected Works*, volume 3, suggest French secret societies of followers of Babeuf. See Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *Marx-Engels Collected Works*, vol. 3, ed. Richard Dixon et al., note 83 (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1975), 602. The editor of the Penguin *Early Writings* suggests Fourier, Proudhon, and Babeuf. See Karl Marx, *Early Writings*, trans. Rodney Livingstone and Gregor Benton (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1975a), 345n. As regards Fourier and Proudhon, this is clearly mistaken. See Arthur, *Dialectics of Labour*, 157–158. In the *Communist Manifesto*, the ideas of early “critical utopian socialists,” specifically excluding Babeuf, are described as follows: “The revolutionary literature that accompanied these first movements of the proletariat . . . inculcated universal asceticism and social levelling in its crudest form.” See Marx and Engels, “Manifesto,” 497.

17. Marx, “Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts,” 346–347.

18. *Ibid.*, 346.

19. *Ibid.*, 346.

20. Sayers, *Marxism and Human Nature*, 65–68.

21. Marx, “Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts,” 348.

22. *Ibid.*, 354.

23. Karl Marx, “Excerpts from James Mill’s Elements of Political Economy,” in *Early Writings*, trans. Rodney Livingstone and Gregor Benton (Harmondsworth, UK: Penguin, 1975c), 267.

24. See Sean Sayers, *Marx and Alienation: Essays on Hegelian Themes* (Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 78–100.

25. Marx, “Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts,” 348.

26. *Ibid.*, 352.

27. Marx, “Excerpts,” 277–278.

28. Marx, “Critique of the Gotha Programme,” 538.

29. *Ibid.*, 529.

30. Lenin, “State and Revolution,” 331.

31. Michel A. Lebowitz, *The Socialist Alternative: Real Human Development* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 2010), 107.

32. Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *The Marx-Engels Reader*, 2nd ed., ed. Robert C. Tucker, 220 (New York: W.W. Norton, 1978c).

33. This is the sort of program that was carried out by the Soviet, Chinese, and Cuban communists after their revolutions.

34. Marx, “Critique of the Gotha Programme,” 528.

35. The proportion of the social product devoted to social purposes has expanded greatly, even in capitalist societies, with the growth of welfare provision ever since Marx was writing.

36. Marx, “Critique of the Gotha Programme,” 530.

37. Norman Geras, "The Controversy about Marx and Justice," *New Left Review* 150 (1985): 47–85; G.A. Cohen, *History, Labour, and Freedom* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988), 286–304; John Rawls, *Lectures on the History of Political Philosophy*, ed. Samuel Freeman (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 2007), 359.
38. Marx, "Critique of the Gotha Programme," 530–531.
39. Rawls, *Lectures*, 367.
40. Marx, "Critique of the Gotha Programme," 530.
41. Allen W. Wood, "Marx and Equality," in *Issues in Marxist Philosophy*, vol. 4, ed. John Mepham and David-Hillel Ruben (Sussex: Harvester Press, 1981), 208.
42. Marx, "Critiques of the Gotha Programme," 569.
43. *Ibid.*
44. Lenin, "State and Revolution"; Nikolai Ivanovich Bukharin and Evge-nii Alekseevich Preobrazhenskii, *The ABC of Communism* (Harmondsworth, UK: Penguin, 1969); Alec Nove, *The Economics of Feasible Socialism* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1983).
45. Bukharin and Preobrazhenskii, *The ABC of Communism*, 116.
46. Sean Sayers, "Forces of Production and Relations of Production in Socialist Society," *Radical Philosophy* 24 (1980); Sean Sayers, "Marxism and Actually Existing Socialism," in *Socialism and Morality*, ed. David McLellan and Sean Sayers (London: Macmillan, 1990).
47. Marx, *The Poverty of Philosophy*, 170.
48. Frederick Engels, *Anti-Dühring*, 3rd ed. (Moscow: Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1962), 385; cf. Marx and Engels, "Manifesto," 490–491.
49. Marx, "Critique of the Gotha Programme," 531.
50. G.A. Cohen, *Why Not Socialism?* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2009).
51. Rawls, "Lectures."
52. Geras, "The Controversy about Marx."
53. Marshall Sahlins, *Stone Age Economics* (London: Tavistock, 1974), 1–40.
54. Sayers, *Marxism and Human Nature*, 66–67.
55. See G.A. Cohen, *If You're an Egalitarian, How Come You're So Rich?* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2000) for a brief presentation of this argument. I do not believe that this criticism is justified for reasons I state very briefly in Sayers, *Marxism and Human Nature*, 166–168. See also Reiner Grundmann, *Marxism and Ecology* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991b); Paul Burkett, *Marx and Nature: A Red and Green Perspective* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1999); John Bellamy Foster, *Marx's Ecology: Materialism and Nature* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 2000) for much fuller and better argued defenses of Marx in this regard.
56. Reiner Grundmann, "The Ecological Challenge to Marxism," *New Left Review* 187 (1991a): 103–120.
57. See Ernest Mandel, *Marxist Economic Theory*, vol. 2, trans. Brian Pearce (London: Merlin Press, 1968), ch. 17.
58. Sayers, *Marx and Alienation*, 163–164.
59. David Laibman, *Deep History: A Study in Social Evolution and Human Potential* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 2007), 194.
60. Laibman, *Deep History*, 193–194; Mandel, *Marxist Economic Theory*, 664–668.
61. Marx, "Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts," 365.

62. Lebowitz, *The Socialist Alternative*, 42–45.

63. Punctuation amended by this author. Karl Marx, *Grundrisse: Foundations of the Critique of Political Economy (Rough Draft)*, trans. Martin Nicolaus (Harmondsworth, UK: Penguin, 1973), 488.

64. Marx, "Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts," 323–327.

65. Sayers, *Marxism and Human Nature*; Sean Sayers, "Why Work? Marx and Human Nature," *Science and Society* 69, no. 4 (2005); Sayers, *Marx and Alienation*.

66. John Ruskin, *The Nature of Gothic: A Chapter from the Stones of Venice* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1928); William Morris, "Art under Plutocracy," in *Political Writings of William Morris*, ed. A. L. Morton (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1973); Eugene Kamenka, "Marxian Humanism and the Crisis in Socialist Ethics," in *Socialist Humanism*, ed. Erich Fromm (Garden City, NY: Anchor Books, 1966).

67. See Karl Marx, *Capital*, vol. 3, ed. Frederick Engels (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1971), ch. 48.

68. Marx, *Grundrisse*, 611.

69. Marx and Engels, "The German Ideology: Part 1," 160; These words have raised a great storm of criticism. Some have even questioned whether this passage is meant to be taken seriously. It would take me too far out of my way to discuss these interpretative issues here (but see Sayers, *Marx and Alienation*, 136–141).

70. Karl Marx, *The Poverty of Philosophy*. (Peking: Foreign Languages Press, 1978b), chapter 2.

71. Adam Smith, *An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations* (London: George Routledge and Son, Ltd., 1900).

72. *Work in America: Report of a Special Task Force to the Secretary of Health, Education and Welfare* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1973).

73. Charles Fourier, *Harmonian Man: Selected Writings of Charles Fourier*, trans. Susan Hanson (Garden City, NY: Anchor Books, 1971), 182; cf Morris, "Art under Plutocracy."

74. Marx, "Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts," 329.

75. Karl Marx, *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy*, vol. 1, edited by Frederick Engels and translated by Samuel Moore and Edward Aveling (Moscow: Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1961), 555.

76. G. A. Cohen, "Reconsidering Historical Materialism," in *History, Labour, and Freedom* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988b), 142.

77. Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, "Selections from Parts 2 and 3," in *The German Ideology*, part 1, ed. C.J. Arthur, 109 (New York: International Publishers, 1970).

78. Marx, "Critique of the Gotha Programme," 530.

79. Marx and Engels, "Selections from Parts 2 and 3," 108; These issues are interestingly raised in Lee Hall's play *The Pitman Painters* (London: Faber and Faber, 2008). This deals with a group of remarkably talented painters who emerge from an evening class in the Durham mining community of Ashington in the 1930s. With the same opportunities would similar artists be found in any working class community? In the play, one of the painters indignantly rejects that view. He and the other Ashington painters, he insists, have innate talents that are not universally shared. Evidently this exchange is based on real events. See William Feaver, *Pitman Painters: The Ashington Group 1934–1984* (Ashington: Ashington Group Trustees, 1988). A talented group of peasant painters also emerged in Huxian, a

remote village in China during the Cultural Revolution. Again, the question arises whether similarly talented artists are lurking everywhere. See Feaver, *Pitman Painters*, 165–168.

80. Cohen, "Reconsidering Historical Materialism," 142.

81. In contrast to the way in which city people were forcibly sent to work in the countryside during the Cultural Revolution in China.

82. Cohen, "Reconsidering Historical Materialism," 142.

83. The same cannot be said for Cohen's position on this issue which is simply asserted and not spelled out in any detail at all.

84. Robert Ware, "Marx, the Division of Labor and Human Nature," *Social Theory and Practice* 8 (1982): 65.

85. Nove, *Economics of Feasible Socialism*, 47.

86. Marx, *Capital*, vol. 1, 330–331.

87. *Ibid.*, 331.

88. Nove, *Economics of Feasible Socialism*, 47; G.A. Cohen, "Self-Ownership, Communism and Equality," *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society, Supplementary Volumes* 64 (1990): 31–7.

89. Keith Graham, "Self-Ownership, Communism and Equality," *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society, Supplementary Volumes* 64 (1990): 53–4.

90. Herbert Marcuse, "The Realm of Necessity and the Realm of Freedom," *Praxis* 5 (1969): 20–25.

91. Sayers, *Marxism and Human Nature*, ch. 4.

92. Cohen, *Why Not Socialism?*

93. Aristotle, *The Politics*, rev. ed., trans. T.A. Sinclair and rev. Trevor J. Saunders (Harmondsworth, UK: Penguin, 1981), 1261a–b.

94. Sean Sayers, *Plato's Republic: An Introduction* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1999), 87–89.

95. Marx, "Critique of the Gotha Programme," 530; to simplify matters I am here ignoring unemployment benefits that did not exist when Marx was writing.

96. David A. Spencer, *The Political Economy of Work* (London: Routledge, 2009).

97. Vladimir I. Lenin, "A Great Beginning," in *Selected Works: A One-Volume Selection of Lenin's Most Essential Writings* (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1969a); Nove, *Economics of Feasible Socialism*, 50–54.

98. Marx, *Capital*, vol. 1, 483ff.

99. Harry Braverman, *Labor and Monopoly Capital* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1974).

100. Ware, "Marx, the Division of Labor and Human Nature"; Sayers, *Marxism and Human Nature*, 83–88.

101. There are some important exceptions to these trends. Some branches of scientific, technical, and academic work have become increasingly specialized. See Donald D. Weiss, "Marx versus Smith on the Division of Labor," *Monthly Review* 28, no. 3 (1976).

102. Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Empire* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2000); Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Multitude: War and Democracy in the Age of Empire* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 2005).

103. Barbara Ehrenreich, *Nickel and Dimed: On (Not) Getting by in America* (New York: Henry Holt, 2002).

104. Cohen, *Why Not Socialism?*, 54.

105. *Ibid.*, 58–59.

106. Peter Kropotkin, *Mutual Aid: A Factor in Evolution* (Boston: Extending Horizons Press, 1955).

107. Cohen, *Why Not Socialism?*, 55.

108. *Ibid.*, 58.

109. Karl Marx, *Capital*, vol. 1, 80.

110. It is argued that in a complex economy, feedback through the market is needed to guide production and this cannot be provided in any other way. I am skeptical of that view, but will not discuss it here. See Nove, *Economics of Feasible Socialism*, 30–45.

111. Marx, *Grundrisse*, 159.

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CHAPTER 3

Socialism and the Human Individual in Marx's Work

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INTRODUCTION

Today there is a curious convergence of views between the Right and the dominant Left on the meaning of socialism. Put more concretely, for both the Right and the dominant Left socialism refers to the system that came into being with the conquest of political power by the Bolsheviks in Russia in 1917, and signifies a society governed by a single political party—the Communist Party—where means of production are owned predominantly by the state, and the economy is directed by central planning. The two most important points stressed by both sides for this socialism are the existence of a single central authority exercising political power and the institution of public property—signifying the replacement of private property in the means of production predominantly by state property. Needless to say, the Right looks at this socialism negatively, while the (dominant) Left considers it positively. Both these tendencies, again, find the origin of this socialism in the ideas of Marx.

Now that this socialism has almost evaporated, two kinds of responsibility have been attributed to Marx, involving two kinds of criticism of Marx in regard to this socialism. First, it is held, since the inspiration for this system supposedly came from Marx and, consequently, since Marx is thought to be responsible for its creation, its disappearance only shows the failure of Marx's ideas. Similarly, under the same assumption that this socialism was Marx's brainchild, a contrary charge is directed against him. Here the point is stressed that the horrible reality of this system, as shown above all in its relation to human individuals, only demonstrates that (Marxian)

socialism by nature is repressive; that is, it is an inhuman regime. The second kind of responsibility attributed to Marx and, consequently, the second kind of criticism of Marx is very different. It involves Marx's prognostication of the future after capitalism. The affirmation is made that what Marx had envisaged for the future, that capitalism undermined by its own inner contradictions would disappear out of existence yielding place to a new, infinitely more humane society—a socialist society—has been proved wrong. Capitalism continues to exist in spite of all its ups and downs, and socialism continues to elude us. Marx's vision has simply proved to be unrealizable; at best it is for the "music of the future" (*Zukunftsmusik*), to use Marx's ironical term in relation to the great composer Richard Wagner.¹ In what follows I shall try to go back to Marx's original idea of a socialist society, which, as we shall see, experienced a total inversion in the hands of people who in the name of Marx(ism) called their regimes "socialist" following the Bolshevik victory in Russia in 1917. Our discussion here is focused on the place of the human individual—particularly as the laboring individual—in Marx's vision of the future society. Readers of the *Communist Manifesto*² by Marx and Engels should be familiar with the remarkable affirmation at the end of its second section regarding the future society where "the free development of each" is emphasized as the "condition for the free development of all." A fundamental feature of what has passed for socialism after 1917 was precisely the negation of this affirmation. Indeed, Marx's focus throughout his adult life was on the condition of the human individual in society; in fact his basic criterion for judging a society had been the extent to which the individual is free within it.

Referring to the situation of the individual in society, Marx discerns broadly three stages in the evolution of the human society, which he calls (1) subjective or personal dependence, (2) personal independence but objective or material dependence, (3) free individuality with neither personal nor objective dependence.³ The first two stages refer to the situation of the individual in society concerning the period before socialism. The third stage concerns the situation of the individual in socialist society. The discussion of the third stage forms an integral part of our discussion on Marx's socialism and will be taken up within our discussion of the future, communist society. However, in order to fully appreciate what divides the presocialist or laboring individual from the socialist individual, let us see what happens to the individual in those societies that precede socialism and how they are ultimately transformed into the latter.

SITUATION OF THE INDIVIDUAL

In what Marx calls his "Critique of Political Economy" he is not concerned with the unreal, isolated human individual à la Robinson Crusoe—a situation

which Marx calls Robinsonade⁴—the familiar image of 18th-century classical political economy. His point of departure is, on the contrary, the individual—producing, distributing, and consuming in association with other individuals in society—as a socially determined individual. Let us first elaborate upon the situation of the individual in the human's social evolution during the periods preceding socialism.

- (a) Personal dependence, which characterizes the first stage of social evolution, refers to the situation where individuals relate to one another in their predetermined roles: patriarchy, slavery, feudal systems with vassals and serfs, and system of castes and clans. In such situations, individuals' personal dependence dominates society's relations of production as well as other relations in social life. As a materialist, Marx had absolutely no romantic, idyllic image of such ancient communities. Referring to the old, traditional communities of India, Marx underlined in one of his 1850s articles in *New York Daily Tribune*: "We must not forget that these idyllic little village communities were contaminated by distinctions of caste and slavery, they subjugated the man to external circumstances instead of elevating the man to be the sovereign of circumstances, they transformed a self-developing social state into a never changing natural destiny and thus brought about a brutalizing worship of nature."⁵ Such societies are characterized by relatively slow development of the productive forces taking place at isolated locations only.
- (b) The next stage in social development is the stage of personal independence but material dependence of the individual. This occurs in a society where the products of human labor in general take the form of commodities. Here, the ties of personal dependence are broken and torn asunder and the immediate relation between the producers and their own labor appears as a social relation not between the producers themselves but as social relations between things.⁶ Since the producers do not come into social contact with one another until they exchange their products, the specific social character of each producer's labor does not show itself except in the act of exchange. By the very reciprocity of the process of exchange it is necessary for human beings, by a tacit understanding, to treat one another as private owners of those exchangeable objects and, by implication, as *independent individuals*. The behavior of human beings in the process of production is "purely atomic," in Marx's phrase. Hence the relations between individuals in production assume a material character independent of their control and conscious individual action. The atomic character of behavior as between individuals

generated by the exchange of products as commodities makes the individual appear as an independent, free being. However, as Marx observes, this freedom is an illusion. The independence in question is really reciprocal indifference. The freedom here is really the freedom to collide with one another freely. While the determining factor in the first situation of the individual, discussed earlier, is personal dependence and personal limitation of one individual by another, the determining factor in this second case seems to be a material limitation of the individual by objective circumstances that are independent of the individual and over which the individual has no control.⁷

The image of the isolated hunter and fisher—the starting point of the classical political economy of Smith and Ricardo—arose in the 18th century as a kind of mirror image of bourgeois society, a society of free competition that had been developing since the 16th century. The individual appears here to be free from the bonds of nature and free from a definite, limited human conglomeration. Paradoxically, as Marx observes, “the period which produces this standpoint of isolated individual, is the very period when the social relations have reached the highest state of development in society.”⁸ This is in the sense that the disintegration of all products and activities into exchange values presupposes both the dissolution of all rigid, personal relationships of dependence in production and, at the same time, a universal interdependence of the producers. As Marx observes, “according to the economists each person has the own interest in mind; as a consequence he serves everyone’s private interest, that is, general interest without wishing or knowing that he is contributing to it.”⁹ As one can see, this is the famous “invisible hand” image of Adam Smith. Now, as Marx underlines, the private interest of the individual is already a socially determined interest, which has been achieved only within the conditions established by society. The content of private interest as well as the form and the means of realizing it are only given by the social conditions independently of the will or the knowledge of the individuals. The mutual and universal dependence of individuals who remain indifferent to one another constitutes the social network that binds them together. It is in exchange values that all individuality and particularity are negated and suppressed. It is abstract labor that produces commodities. Producing individuals are subordinated to social production that exists external to them as a kind of fatality. Social production is not subordinated to the producing individuals. In his Parisian “Excerpt Notebooks” Marx wrote, “The individual’s own power over the object appears as the power of the object over the individual; master of one’s own production, the individual appears as the slave of production.”¹⁰ In another passage of the same text we read: “As human beings you have no relation with my object because I *myself* have no relation with it. . . . Our own product has taken a hostile

attitude towards us. It appears as our property whereas, in reality, we are its property. We ourselves are excluded from the *true* property because our *property* excludes other human beings."¹¹ This is what Marx calls alienated labor where the concept of alienation is critically taken over from Hegel who conceived of alienation in idealist terms confusing objectification of labor with alienation of labor. Alienation simply signifies that the world of objects, the creation of human labor (physical and mental), becomes independent of and beyond the control of the subject, the producing individuals, and dominates the subject.

The specific condition of the immediate producer under capitalism—generalized commodity production—corresponds to this alienation. In his Parisian Manuscripts of 1844 Marx writes: "The labourer becomes poorer, the more wealth the labourer produces. The *valorization* of the material world is in direct proportion to the *devalorization* of the human world."¹² In a later manuscript, he wrote in the same vein, "the realization process of labour is exactly its de-realisation process. It posits itself objectively, but it posits its objectivity as its own non-being, or as the being of its non-being—as the being of capital."¹³ In his 1857–58 Manuscripts, Marx observes that the "concept of free labourer implies that he is a pauper, virtual pauper. Following his economic conditions, he is simple living labour power. In is only in the mode of production based on capital that pauperism appears as the result of labour itself, of the development of labour's (own) productive power."¹⁴ Continuing and sharpening this idea in an 1861–63 Manuscript, Marx arrived at the notion of absolute poverty of the laboring individual in capitalism:

Let us consider labor power itself in the form of commodity which stands in opposition to money or in opposition to objectified labor, to the value which is personified in the possessor of money or capitalist. . . . On one side appears labor power as the absolute poverty, in as much as the whole world of material wealth as well as its universal form, as exchange value, as alien commodity and alien wealth, stands opposed to it; this labor power itself however is simply the possibility to labor, embodied in the living body, a possibility which however is absolutely separated from all the objective conditions of realization and thus from its own reality, and in the face of these conditions existing independently, bereft of these conditions. As such the laborer is a "pauper."¹⁵

In a different manuscript composed a few years later (1865–67) and published posthumously—the so called sixth chapter of *Capital*—we find echoes of basically the same idea:

With the capitalist mode of production, to the same extent as the social productivity of labour develops, grows the amassed wealth

confronting the labourer as the *wealth dominating him, as capital*; in opposition to him the world of wealth expands as the world alien to him and dominating him. His subjective poverty, destitution and dependence increase in the same proportion in opposition. His *emptiness* and the corresponding *fullness* on the other side march together.¹⁶

The notion of absolute poverty, pauper, employed in this unusual sense, has a profound meaning, which follows logically from the situation of the laborer—the seller of manual and mental labor power—in capitalism. Here, as Marx underlines, the labor power, separated from the means of labor is, by that very fact, also separated from the means of subsistence. As Marx affirms, “the absolute poverty of the labourer signifies nothing but the fact that his labour power is the only commodity left for him to sell, that his bare labour power stands opposed to the objectified, real wealth.”¹⁷ In other words, the mere fact that a person’s (and her or his family’s) existence depends exclusively on the person’s wage or salary—irrespective of its amount or level—automatically means the situation of absolute poverty for the person. Such a laboring individual is a pauper. Apparently paradoxically, Marx underlines in a later manuscript that both the laborer and the capitalist are equally the victims of alienation. However, there is a basic difference. As he observes,

from the beginning labourer is superior to the capitalist; the capitalist is rooted in the process of alienation and finds there his absolute contentment whereas the labourer who is his victim finds himself, from the beginning, in constant rebellion against the capitalist and feels the condition as an act of enslavement. . . . The capitalist appears there in the same relation of servitude in relation to capital as the labourer, though at the opposite pole.¹⁸

Marx’s principal concern was, as already emphasized, the laboring individual. The individual in the third stage of social evolution is neither subjectively nor materially dependent but enjoys what Marx calls free individuality. In the same way as the laboring individual was the individual of the precapitalist society, this free individual is an integral part of the society which Marx envisioned to succeed capitalist-socialist society. This requires further discussion after we have an idea about how Marx envisions society after capital.

SOCIALISM

First, a word on the confusion about the term socialism. There is a widespread idea that socialism and communism are two successive societies, that socialism is the transition to communism, and hence precedes

communism. This idea has been widespread, particularly after the Bolshevik victory in 1917. For Marx this distinction is nonexistent: socialism is neither the transition to communism nor the lower phase of communism; it is communism tout court. In fact, Marx calls capitalism itself the transitional point or transitional phase to communism.¹⁹ For him socialism and communism are simply equivalent and alternative terms for the same society that he envisages for the postcapitalist epoch, which he calls, in different texts, equivalently: communism, socialism, Republic of Labour, society of free and associated producers or simply association, cooperative society, (re)union of free individuals. Hence what Marx says in one of his famous texts, *Critique of the Gotha Programme*, about the two stages of communism²⁰ could as well apply to socialism having the same two stages. Traditionally—at least following the Bolshevik seizure of power—the rulers of the 20th-century socialism following Lenin's lead but in ways contrary to Marx's own view affirmed that socialism forms the lower phase of communism, and that it is the transition to communism that forms the higher phase. The point however is that since for Marx communism and socialism are identical, what applies to communism applies to socialism as well.

Socialism or communism appears in two different senses in Marx (and Engels): first, as a theoretical expression, and second as a vision of a type of socialist society. As a theoretical expression, the term does not mean a state of things which should be established or an ideal to which reality should conform. It is rather the "real movement which abolishes the present state of things. The movement arises from today's (pre)conditions."²¹ Engels says of socialism/communism: "to the extent that it is theoretical, it is the theoretical expression of the place of the proletariat in the class struggle between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie, the résumé of the conditions of the emancipation of the proletariat."²² Again (in the *Communist Manifesto*), "the theoretical principles of the communists . . . are only the general expressions of the real relations of the existing class struggle, of a historical movement that is going on before our eyes."²³ In the second sense, socialism/communism refers to the society that is envisaged as arising after the demise of capitalism. In this second sense, the latter is not a concept but the representation of a distinct kind of society, with a distinct kind of mode of production, which Marx envisions for humankind following capitalism, which, having completed its historical task of preparing the subjective and material conditions for the advent of the new society, departs.

The conditions for the rise of socialism are not given by nature. Socialism is a product of history. "Individuals build a new world from the historical acquisitions of their foundering world. They must themselves in course of their development first produce the *material conditions* of a new society, and no effort of spirit or will can free them from this destiny."²⁴ It

is capital that creates the material or objective conditions and the subjective agents for transforming the present society into a society of free and associated producers. That is, the creation of the material conditions for socialism is certainly the work of labor (where, following Marx's explicit precision in volume one of *Capital*, the term labor signifies both manual and intellectual labor). However, regarding the ideational or spiritual conditions for this transition the matter is far more complex. Nevertheless, this much is clear following the materialist conception of history, that the spiritual conditions are not directly produced by labor, but they arise only on the basis of the material conditions created by labor itself. As Marx writes, "The material and the spiritual conditions of the negation of wage labor and capital—themselves the negation of the earlier forms of unfree social production—are in turn the result of its [capital's] (own) process of production."²⁵ Even capital's extraction of surplus value from the laboring individual plays, paradoxically, a positive role in preparing the conditions of a much richer individuality of the future society.

As restless striving for the general form of wealth, capital drives labor beyond the limits of its natural needs, and in this way, creates the material elements for the development of a rich individuality, which is all-sided in production as well as in consumption, and the labor of which appears no more as labor but as full development of activity itself in which the natural necessity in its immediate form disappears because a historically created need takes the place of the natural need. This is why capital is productive.²⁶

Alienated labor under capital then contributes in contradictory ways to the creation of the material conditions for the rise of the communist society. In an 1857–58 Manuscript we read:

The extreme form of alienation in which the relation of capital and labour, labour, the productive activity, to their own conditions and their own product is a necessary point of transition and thereby in itself . . . already contains the dissolution of all the limited presuppositions of production, and rather creates the indispensable preconditions of production and therewith the full material conditions for the total, universal development of the productive powers of the individual.²⁷

By reducing the necessary labor time to its minimum capital contributes to create, independently of its will, disposable time for society though it tends to use it to its own exclusive advantage by converting it into surplus labor. The more it succeeds, the more it suffers from overproduction, which compels it to interrupt the necessary labor. The more this contradiction develops, the more it becomes clear that the "growth of the forces of production cannot be made captive of the appropriation of alien surplus

labour but that the labouring mass must appropriate its own surplus labour. When it succeeds in this endeavour the disposable time ceases to have this contradictory existence." Then on the one hand the "necessary labour time will have its measure in the needs of the social individual and on the other hand the development of society's productive power will be so rapid that even though from now on production will be calculated for the wealth of everybody, disposable time also will increase for all because the real wealth is the developed productive power for all individuals."²⁸ In brief, the material conditions are created by capital's inherent tendency toward universal development of the productive forces and by the socialization of labor and production. As regards the subjective conditions, these are provided by capital's "grave diggers"—the proletariat—begotten by capital itself. Even with the strongest will and greatest subjective effort, if the material conditions of production and the corresponding relations of circulation for a classless society do not exist in a latent form, "all attempts to explode the society would be Don Quixotism."²⁹ Or, as expressed in his 1859 Preface to the *Critique of Political Economy*: "No social order ever perishes before all the productive forces for which there is room in it have developed, and new, higher relations of production never appear before the material conditions of their existence have matured in the womb of the old society." More than two decades later, in his polemic with Bakunin, Marx wrote: "A radical social revolution is bound up with certain historical conditions of economic development. The latter are its preconditions. It is therefore only possible where, with capitalist development, the industrial proletariat occupies at least a significant position."³⁰

It must be stressed, however, that capitalist relations are not revolutionized within capitalism automatically even with all the requisite material conditions prepared by capital itself. It is the working class that is the active agent for eliminating capital and building the socialist society; the proletarian revolution is an act of self-emancipation: "The emancipation of the working classes must be conquered by the working classes themselves."³¹ Marx and Engels equally underline that "consciousness of the necessity of a profound revolution arises from the working class itself."³² The starting point of the proletarian revolution is the conquest of political power by the proletariat—the rule of the "immense majority in the interest of the immense majority," the "conquest of democracy."³³ Marx's principal target is exploitation in respect of the process of production. Hence, freedom from exploitation would mean that wage/salaried labor has disappeared and that producing individuals have been emancipated from capitalist bondage. Marx's specific framework here operated at the level of high abstraction of an advanced capitalist society divided basically into two classes, though Marx observes in his 1861–63 Manuscripts that "in reality" there are more classes than two. But at the same time, Marx explicitly holds that the emancipation of the laboring class (being the lowest

class in society) necessarily implies emancipation for the humanity as a whole. This emancipation also carries with it the emancipation of the human from other forms of domination associated with it, such as racism and sexism. This last aspect is explicit in Marx's last programmatic pronouncement in the preamble to the program of the French Workers Party that begins with "the emancipation of the producing class is the emancipation of all human beings without distinction of sex or race."³⁴ After all, socialism being envisaged as a society of free individuals means the freedom of every individual by definition.

This so-called seizure of power by the proletariat does not immediately signify the victory of the revolution;³⁵ it is only the "first step in the worker revolution,"³⁶ which continues through a prolonged "period of revolutionary transformation" required for superseding the bourgeois social order.³⁷ A specific political rule corresponds to this transformation period—the absolute rule of the working class, the so-called dictatorship of the proletariat. It should be stressed that under Marx's supposition that the working class revolution takes place in a society—that is advanced capitalism—where the immense majority consists of workers as wage and salary earners, this proletarian rule during the transformation period is indeed at the same time the greatest democracy. However, until capital totally disappears, the workers remain proletarians by definition and the revolution continues, victorious though they are politically. "The superseding of the economical conditions of the slavery of labor by the conditions of free and associated labor can only be the progressive work of time," and the "working class will have to pass through long struggles, through a series of historic processes transforming circumstances and men," wrote Marx with reference to the Parisian revolution of 1871.³⁸ Later he reminded Bakunin that even with the installation of the proletarian rule "the classes and the old organization of society still do not disappear."³⁹

Only at the end of the process, with the disappearance of capital, the proletariat—along with its dictatorship—also naturally disappears, leaving individuals as simple producers as wage labor naturally vanishes also. Classes disappear along with the state in its last form as proletarian power and the society of free and associated producers—socialism—is inaugurated. Since state has been inextricably associated with the 20th-century "really (non)existing socialism," it is important to stress that in what Marx envisaged as socialism there is absolutely no state, no politics, since this socialism is a classless society. Thus in an 1844 polemic Marx writes: "Generally a revolution—overthrow of the existing power and the dissolution of the old relations—is a political act. Without revolution socialism cannot be viable. It needs this political act to the extent that it needs destruction and dissolution. However, where its organizing activity begins, where its aim and soul stand out, socialism throws away its political cover."⁴⁰ The message is basically the same in the two succeeding texts *Poverty of*

Philosophy and the Communist Manifesto. In *German Ideology* it is explicitly stated that the organization of communism is "essentially economic."⁴¹ There is absolutely no text in Marx's body of work that allows the state or, for that matter, politics, to have a place in the sort of classless society that socialism is precisely envisioned to be.

In all hitherto existing societies—based on class rule—the community has stood as an independent power against individuals and has subjugated them. Thus it has really been a false or illusory or apparent community. The outcome of the workers' self-emancipatory revolution is the socialist society, an "association of free individuals," in which individuals are neither personally dependent as in precapitalism nor objectively dependent as in capitalism. Under these conditions there arises, for the first time, the "true" community where universally developed individuals dominate their own social relations.⁴² This means that these universally developed humans take their social relations under their own collective control instead of resigning themselves to the exploitive relations as they find them. Correspondingly, the capitalist mode of production (CMP) yields place to the "associated mode of production" (AMP). As mentioned earlier, with the disappearance of classes, there is also no state and hence no politics in the new society. In this regard I have already cited Marx's several texts earlier.

Similarly, with the transformation of society's production relations, its exchange relations with nature, as well as among individuals, are also transformed. Capital, driven by the logic of accumulation, seriously damages the environment and undermines the natural powers of the earth together with those of the human producer, the "twin fountains of all wealth."⁴³ In contrast, in the new society, freed from the mad drive for accumulation and with the unique goal of satisfying human needs, individuals rationally regulate their material exchanges with nature with the "least expenditure of force and carry on these exchanges in the conditions most worthy of and in fullest conformity with their human nature."⁴⁴ As regards the exchange relations among individuals under capitalism, commodities, the vehicles of exchange, are the products of private labors, reciprocally independent, which only through alienation in the process of private exchanges are confirmed as social (labor). That is, here individual labor is only indirectly social. In the new society, by contrast, collective production is presupposed, with collectivity as the basis of production from the very beginning. The community is posited before production, and the labor of the individual is directly social from the start. Hence products cease to have exchange value. Exchange of values is replaced by what Marx calls exchange of activities determined by collective needs. From the very inception of the new society as it has just emerged out of the womb of capital—Marx's first phase of socialism—"producers do not exchange their products and as little does labor employed on these products

appear as value."⁴⁵ Collective production of course immediately implies social appropriation of the conditions of production replacing the private ownership.

Finally, we come to the allocation/distribution of instruments of production—the material means of production and the living labor power—and the consequent distribution of products in the new society. The distribution of the instruments of production boils down really to the allocation of society's total labor time (dead and living). This allocation, effected under capitalism through exchange taking value form, is contrariwise performed in socialism by direct and conscious control of society over its labor time. At the same time, in conformity with the nature of the new society, free time beyond the labor time required for satisfying material needs must be provided by society to the associated individuals for their "all-sided development." Hence the "economy of time is the first economic law on the basis of communitarian production."⁴⁶ As regards the distribution of the total social product in socialism, it is first divided between the production needs and the consumption needs of society. Production needs here refer to needs of replacement and extension of society's productive apparatus as well as insurance and reserve funds against uncertainty. Consumption is both collective—health care, education, provision for those unable to work—and personal. The principle governing personal consumption remains that of commodity exchange: the quantity of labor given to society by the individual is received back from society (after necessary deductions) by the individual. However, the mediating labor coupons have no exchange value. In fact, in commodity production there is a contradiction between "principle and practice"; equivalence is established "only on average," since the individual share in total social labor is unknowable. Opposite is the case with socialism.⁴⁷ Similarly, in his famous discussion of the "association of free individuals" in volume one of *Capital*, Marx posits that under "socialised labor, diametrically opposed to commodity production" the mediating labor certificates are not money, they simply ascertain the share allocated to each laboring individual—"only for the sake of a parallel with commodity production"—according to the individual's labor time.⁴⁸ At the initial phase of the new society this principle of equivalence, in parallel with the principle under commodity production (hence called by Marx "bourgeois right") but without having value form assumed by the product, cannot be avoided. This process is wholly overcome only at a higher phase of the society when all the springs of cooperative wealth open up, leading to the adoption of the principle "from each according to one's ability, to each according to one's needs."⁴⁹

LABOR OF THE INDIVIDUAL IN THE NEW SOCIETY

Having delineated the outlines of the socialist mode of production, let us have a closer look at how Marx viewed the laboring individual in the

association. The starting point here is a very important distinction that Marx makes between the individual's labor as such and the individual's labor as self-activity, a distinction which most of the Marx readers generally leave aside. The neglect of this point by readers leads them to a wrong understanding of Marx's explicit emphasis in some texts on the abolition of division of labor and of labor itself in the coming society. This position of Marx (and Engels) appears most explicitly in the *German Ideology*. At first sight this position looks strange. How could a society survive without labor and division of labor? Even many Marxists by and large are embarrassed in the face of this seemingly utopian idea. Let us see the matter more closely. Basically Marx stresses that labor as it has been practiced by the human individuals in society so far across the ages, has been principally involuntary, at the service of others, commanded by others. This was palpably the case with individuals under "personal dependence," as seen in slavery and serfdom (in their different forms). Under "material dependence," with wage labor, this is less palpable but here also an individual's labor is imposed on the laborer by forces external to the laborer. Here, the context is capitalism where by supposition the laborer is no longer personally dependent. But they become objectively or materially dependent. The individual is not compelled to labor for a particular capitalist, and they freely and willingly sign the contract for a job. There is no direct dependence here. The person's dependence is indirect, occurs through the exchange of labor power against wage/salary arising from the person's nonownership of the means of production. Herein lies the material dependence of the laboring individual.

As we saw earlier, labor under capital is alienated from the laborer. In Marx's 1844 Manuscripts, we learn that the alienation of labor's object is summed up in the alienation in the activity of laborer itself. "The labourer finds himself in the same relation to his product as to an alienated object. . . . In his labour the labourer does not affirm but negates himself. The labourer has the feeling of being himself only outside of labour and outside of himself in labour. His labour is not voluntarily given, it is imposed. It is *forced labour*."⁵⁰ One year later, in his polemic with List, Marx remarks that the laborer's activity is not a "free manifestation of his human life, it is rather an alienation of his powers to capital." Marx calls such activity labor and writes that "labour by nature is unfree, inhuman activity" and calls for the "abolition of *labour*."⁵¹ Indeed, Marx cites Adam Smith's view that labor in history so far, including labor under capital, has been repulsive, appearing as sacrifice, as externally enforced labor and that nonlabor is freedom and luck.⁵² Now, as regards the existing division of labor, Marx underlines that the activity of the individual here is not voluntary. The laborer's own act stands in opposition as an alien power that, instead of being mastered by them, enslaves them. As soon as the labor begins to be divided, each laboring individual has a definite, exclusive circle of activity imposed on him and from which he cannot come out.⁵³ In the first version

of *Capital* Marx wrote “[Under capital] the product of living labour, the objectified labour with its own soul stands opposed to it as an alien power. The realization process of labour is at the same time the de-realization of labour.”⁵⁴ Referring to the process of simple reproduction of capital, Marx underlines that inasmuch as before entering the labor process the labor of the laborer is already appropriated by the capitalist and incorporated by capital, this labor is objectified during the process constantly into alien product.⁵⁵

Referring to the division of labor in capitalism, Marx writes that this process seizes not only the economic sphere but also other special spheres, introducing everywhere the process of “parcellization of the (labouring) individual.” Marx also calls such individuals fragmented “individuals,” or “part individuals” carrying on “detail functions.” Very pertinently Marx cited what he called the “outcry” of Adam Smith’s teacher Ferguson, “We make a nation of helots (serfs in ancient Sparta), we have no free citizens.”⁵⁶ In other words, going back to an earlier text, we have here what Marx calls “abstract individuals.” Hence, it is a question of abolishing this labor and this division of labor as the task of the “communist revolution.”⁵⁷ It is in this spirit that Marx wrote in one of his 1861–63 Manuscripts: “As if division of labour was not just as well possible if its conditions appertained to the associated labourers, and the labourers related themselves to these conditions as their own products and the objective elements of their own activity which by their nature they are.”⁵⁸ This is the sense we get in Marx’s 1875 *Critique of the Gotha Programme*. Discussing the lower and the higher phases of the communist society, Marx observed that the lower phase of the new society that has just come out of the capitalist society with all its birth marks cannot completely get rid of the legacy of the mode of labor of the old society including the division of labor, particularly that between mental and physical labor. Only the higher phase of the new society will completely transcend the narrow bourgeois horizon when labor will not simply be a means of life but it will become life’s first need, and not all division of labor will be abolished but only the division of labor which “puts the individual under its enslaving subordination,” along with the opposition between mental and physical labor.⁵⁹

There is another aspect of labor that concerns in a vital way the laboring individual in socialism. In all modes of production, at least after the most primitive stage, total labor time of society is divided into necessary labor time and surplus labor time. Necessary labor is what is required for preserving and reproducing the labor power, while surplus labor is labor beyond necessary labor whose product takes the form of surplus value in capitalism. As Marx wrote in volume one of *Capital*, “For the capitalist it has all the charms of creation out of nothing.”⁶⁰ Once the capitalist form of production is suppressed, a part of the total human activity still remains necessary in the earlier sense of preserving and reproducing the labor

power of the individual laborer through the provisions for collective and individual consumption—including food, housing, health, and education. However, in contrast with capitalism, the domain of necessary labor is much further extended in conformity with the requirements of the total development of the individual, subject only to the limit set by society's productive powers. Labor beyond necessary labor, that is, surplus labor that under capitalism used to serve capital accumulation, disappears.

On the other hand, a part of what is considered under capitalism as surplus labor, the part which today serves as reserve and accumulation funds would, in the absence of capital, be counted as necessary labor. That is, as requirements of growing social needs of the associated individuals including provisions for those who are not in a position to work. All this falls in the domain of material production. So the whole labor devoted to material production is counted as necessary labor under socialism. The time beyond this necessary labor time required for material production is really free time, or disposable time, which is wealth itself. On the one hand, this allows time for enjoying the products of labor and, on the other hand, for free activity, activity that is not determined by the constraints of an external finality, natural necessity or a social duty. In a justly famous passage Marx observes:

The kingdom of freedom begins where the labour determined by necessity and external expediency ceases. It lies therefore by nature of things beyond the sphere of material production really speaking. Just as the savage has to wrestle with nature in order to satisfy his needs, to preserve his life and to reproduce, the civilized person also must do the same in all social forms and under all possible modes of production. With his development increases this kingdom of natural necessity because his needs increase, but at the same time the productive powers increase to satisfy them. . . . (Only) beyond this begins the development of human powers as an end in itself, the true freedom, which, however, can bloom only on the basis of the other kingdom, that of necessity.⁶¹

Even the nondisposable or necessary labor time in socialism has a qualitatively different character compared to the necessary labor time in a class society inasmuch as this time is not imposed by an alien power but is willingly undertaken by the associated producers as self-activity, as self-affirmation. "The time of labour of an individual who is at the same time an individual of disposable time must possess a quality much superior to that of a beast of labour."⁶² It seems that when Marx was speaking of labor not only as means of life but as life's first need in the *Gothacritique* (i.e. the *Critique of the Gotha Programme*) and earlier in his inaugural address to the First International (1864) regarding the distinction between the previous

kind of labor and “associated labour plying its toil with a willing hand, a ready mind and a joyous heart,” he was referring to the necessary labor in socialism in the sphere of material production. As regards the necessary labor time bestowed on material production itself in socialism, the continuous development of productive forces at a high rate spurred on by advancing science and technology, would allow continuous decrease of necessary labor time and corresponding increase of disposable, that is, free time for every individual. “The true wealth is the developed productive power of all individuals. It is then no more the labour time but the disposable time which is the measure of wealth. The labour time as the measure of wealth posits wealth as founded on poverty. . . . This is to posit the whole time of an individual as labour time and thus to degrade the individual to the position of simple labourer, subsumed under labour.”⁶³ Free time allows the individual the infinite possibility of development.

Marx refers to the idea of the ancients that the aim of production is the human individual, and considers this as “sublime” compared to the modern world where the aim of humans is production and the aim of production is wealth (and not the human individuals, that is). Marx adds:

Once the limited bourgeois form disappears, wealth appears as nothing but the universality of needs, of capacities, of enjoyments, productive powers of the individuals, the absolute elaboration of the individual’s creative aptitudes with no other presupposition but the previous historical development which makes an end in itself the totality of development of all human powers as such, not measured by a standard, previously set, but where the individual is not reproduced according to a particular determinity, but creates his totality. In the bourgeois economy, and the corresponding epoch of production this complete elaboration of the human interiority appears as complete emptiness.⁶⁴

In consonance with the three-stage analysis of the situation of the individual given above, Marx discusses (in English) the changing relation through time of what he calls the “Man of Labour” and the “Means of Labour” in his 1865 discourse to the workers of the International: the “original union,” its “decomposition,” and finally “the restoration of the original union in a new historical form.”⁶⁵ Here the last form refers to socialism where through the appropriation of the “means of labour” by the collective body of the freely associated individuals the “reunion” takes place. An important point, hardly noticed, is that in the last section of the first chapter of *Capital*, volume one, where Marx offers a portrait the society after capital, the latter is referred to in the standard Moore and Aveling English translation as a “community of free individuals.” True, community is a correct translation of Marx’s original German term *Verein*. However, it could also

be translated as union or association. In the French version—the writing of which Marx actively participated—we find this term translated as re-union, which, more than any other term, exactly translates the spirit of the restoration of humankind that Marx advocates.⁶⁶ Once this re-union is established the human ceases to be personally or materially dependent, and no more exists as an alienated, parcellized, fragmented individual and becomes a “totally developed,” “integral” individual. This “free individuality” signifies the real appropriation of the human essence by the human for the human, a conscious return to the human essence conserving all the wealth of previous development.⁶⁷ With this begins humanity's real history, leaving, in Marx's celebrated phrase, “the pre-history of the human society” behind.⁶⁸ Socialism is indeed the beginning, and not the end, of human history.

NOTES

1. Karl Marx, “Manuskripte zum zweiten Buch des Kapitals,” in *Marx-Engels Gesamtausgabe*, II/11 (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 2008), 794.
2. Karl Marx and Fredrick Engels, “Manifest der kommunistischen Partei,” in *Marx-Engels Studienausgabe*, vol. 3 (Frankfurt/a.Main: Fischer Taschenbuch Verlag, 1966), 77.
3. Karl Marx, *Grundrisse der Kritik der Politischen Ökonomie* (Berlin: Dietz, 1953), 75.
4. *Ibid.*, 1.
5. Karl Marx, “The British Rule in India,” in *Marx and Engels, On Colonialism* (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1959), 40–41.
6. Karl Marx, “Le Capital,” in *Oeuvres: Économie*, vol. 1, 607 (Paris: Gallimard, 1965).
7. Marx, *Grundrisse*, 81.
8. *Ibid.*, 6.
9. *Ibid.*, 74.
10. Karl Marx, “Aus den Exzerptheften: Ökonomische Studien,” in *Marx/Engels Gesamtausgabe*, I/3, 536 (Berlin: Marx-Engels Verlag, 1932).
11. *Ibid.*, 545. Emphasis in original.
12. Karl Marx, “Ökonomisch-philosophische Manuskripte (1844),” in *Marx-Engels Werke*, Ergänzungsband Part I, 512 (Berlin: Dietz, 1973a). Emphasis in original.
13. Karl Marx, “Zur Kritik der Politischen Ökonomie (Manuskript), (1861–63),” in *Marx-Engels Gesamtausgabe*, II/3.6 (Berlin: Dietz, 1982), 2283.
14. Marx, *Grundrisse*, 498.
15. Karl Marx, “Zur Kritik der Politischen Ökonomie (Manuskript), (1861–63),” in *Marx-Engels Gesamtausgabe*, II/3.1 (Berlin: Dietz, 1976b), 33–35. Emphasis in original.
16. Karl Marx, “Ökonomische Manuskripte, (1863–67),” in *Marx-Engels Gesamtausgabe*, II/4.1 (Berlin: Dietz, 1988), 126. Emphasis in original.
17. Karl Marx, “Kritische Randglossen zu dem Artikel ‘der König von Preussen’,” in *Marx-Engels Werke* I (Berlin: Dietz, 1976a), 36.

18. Marx, "Ökonomische Manuskripte, (1863–67)," 65.

19. Marx, *Grundrisse*, 438; Karl Marx, *Theorien über den Mehrwert (1861–63)*, vol. 3 (Berlin: Dietz, 1962), 425–426.

20. This text appears to be the only place in Marx's writings where this two-phase temporal division of the future society is found, excepting for a rather vague suggestion to this effect in his 1844 Parisian Manuscripts.

21. Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, "Die deutsche Ideologie," in *Marx-Engels Werke*, vol. 3 (Berlin: Dietz 1973b), 35.

22. Frederick Engels, "The Communists and Karl Heinzen," in *Marx-Engels Collected Works*, vol. 6 trans. Richard Dixon et al. (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1976), 305.

23. Marx and Engels, "Manifest der kommunistischen Partei," 70.

24. Karl Marx, "Die moralisierende Kritik und die kritisierende Moral," *Marx-Engels Werke*, vol. 4 (Berlin: Dietz Verlag, 1972a), 339. Emphasis in original.

25. Marx, *Grundrisse*, 635.

26. *Ibid.*, 231.

27. *Ibid.*, 414–415.

28. *Ibid.*, 596.

29. *Ibid.*, 77.

30. Karl Marx, "Konspekt von Bakunins Buch 'Staatlichkeit und Anarchie'," in *Marx-Engels Werke*, vol. 18 (Berlin: Dietz, 1973c), 633.

31. International Workingmen's Association, "Rules and Administrative Regulations of the International Workingmen's Association," in *Marx-Engels Collected Works*, vol. 20, trans. Richard Dixon et al. (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1985), 441.

32. Marx and Engels, "Die deutsche Ideologie," 69.

33. Marx and Engels, "Manifest der kommunistischen Partei," 74, 76.

34. Karl Marx, "Preamble to the Programme of the French Workers' Party," in *Marx-Engels Collected Works*, vol. 24, trans. Richard Dixon et al. (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1989), 340–342.

35. Like the widely used phrase of the Left, "victory of the October (1917) revolution," by which is meant the seizure of political power.

36. Marx and Engels, "Manifest der kommunistischen Partei," 76 .

37. Karl Marx, "Randglossen zum Programm der deutschen Arbeiterpartei," in *Marx-Engels Ausgewählte Schriften*, vol. 2 (Berlin: Dietz, 1964), 24.

38. Karl Marx, *On the Paris Commune* (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1971), 76, 156–57.

39. Marx, "Konspekt von Bakunins Buch 'Staatlichkeit und Anarchie'," 630.

40. Karl Marx, "Kritische Randglossen zu dem Artikel 'der König von Preussen'," 409.

41. Marx and Engels, "Die deutsche Ideologie," 70.

42. Marx, "Aus den Exzerptheften : Ökonomische Studien," 536; Marx and Engels, "Die deutsche Ideologie," 73, 74; Marx, *Grundrisse*, 593; Karl Marx, *Das Kapital*, vol. I, in *Marx-Engels Gesamtausgabe*, II/6 (Berlin: Dietz, 1987), 109.

43. Marx, *Das Kapital*, vol. I, 477.

44. Karl Marx, "Ökonomische Manuskripte (1863–67)," in *Marx-Engels Gesamtausgabe*, II.4.2 (Berlin: Dietz, 1992), 838.

45. Marx, "Randglossen zum Programm der deutschen Arbeiterpartei," 15.

46. Marx, *Grundrisse*, 89.

47. Marx, "Randglossen zum Programm der deutschen Arbeiterpartei," 16.

48. Marx, *Das Kapital*, vol. I, 109, 122; Marx, "Manuskripte zum zweiten Buch des Kapitals," 347. Interestingly, considering both the texts of the two volumes of *Capital* on allocation-distribution as given here, one sees clearly that they refer not to the higher phase of the socialist society but to its lower phase referred to in the Gotha critique; that is, we already have a society of free and associated individuals with neither commodity production nor wage labor.

49. Marx, "Randglossen zum Programm der deutschen Arbeiterpartei," 17.

50. Marx, "Ökonomisch-philosophische Manuskripte (1844)," 514. Emphasis in original.

51. Emphasis in manuscript. Karl Marx, "Über Friedrich Lists Buch 'Das nationale System der politischen Ökonomie'," in *Beiträge zur Geschichte der Arbeiterbewegung*, Heft 3me (Berlin: Dietz, 1972b), 435–36.

52. Marx, *Grundrisse*, 505.

53. Marx and Engels, "Die deutsche Ideologie," 33.

54. Marx, *Grundrisse*, 358.

55. Marx, "Le Capital," 1072; Marx, *Das Kapital*, vol. I, 527.

56. Marx, "Le Capital," 896, 992; Marx, *Das Kapital*, vol. I, 349, 463, 466.

57. Marx and Engels, "Die deutsche Ideologie," 67, 69.

58. Marx, "Theorien über den Mehrwert (1861–63)," 271.

59. Marx, "Randglossen zum Programm der deutschen Arbeiterpartei," 17.

60. Marx, *Das Kapital*, vol. I, 226.

61. Marx, "Ökonomische Manuskripte (1863–67)," 838.

62. Marx, "Theorien über den Mehrwert (1861–63)," 255–56; In his 1865 lecture (in English) to the workers of the International Marx declared: "Time is the room of human development. A man who has to dispose of no free time, whose whole life time, apart from the mere physical interruptions by sleep, meals and so forth, is absorbed by his labour for the capitalist, is less than a beast of burden. He is a mere machine for producing Foreign Wealth, broken in body and brutalized in mind." Marx, "Ökonomische Manuskripte, (1863–67)," 424.

63. Marx, *Grundrisse*, 596.

64. *Ibid.*, 387.

65. Marx, "Ökonomische Manuskripte, (1863–67)," 412; "The original unity between the labourer and the conditions of production," writes Marx, "has two main forms (leaving aside slavery where the labourer himself is a part of the objective conditions of production): the Asiatic community (natural communism) and the small family agriculture (bound with household industry) in one or the other forms. Both are infantile forms and equally little suited to develop labour as social labour and productive power of social labour, whence the necessity of separation, of rupture, of the opposition between labour and ownership (in the conditions of production). The extreme form of this rupture within which at the same time the productive forces of social labour are most powerfully developed is the form of capital. On the material basis which it creates and by the means of the revolutions which the working class and the whole society undergoes in the process of creating it can the original unity be restored." Marx, "Theorien über den Mehrwert (1861–63)," 419.

66. Here the “original unity” appears in the endnote immediately preceding this endnote. Hence the most appropriate term conveying the new society is really not simple “union,” but “re-union.” This is an improvement on the English version.

67. Marx, “Ökonomisch-philosophische Manuskripte (1844),” 536.

68. Karl Marx, “Ökonomische Manuskripte und Schriften(1858–61),” in *Marx-Engels Gesamtausgabe*, II/2 (Berlin: Dietz, 1980), 101.

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CHAPTER 4

Communism: The Utopian “Marxist Vision” versus a Dialectical and Scientific Marxist Approach

Bertell Ollman

INTRODUCTION

“What was Marx’s vision of communism?” This is the wrong question. Instead, we should be asking, “How did Marx come to his views on communism and how did he usually present them to his readers?” The answer to the “vision” question, whatever it is, cannot help but appear disconnected from, and externally related to, the analysis of capitalism to which Marx devoted the greater part of his life; and this holds true no matter how much one tries to qualify it with material taken from Marx’s empirical studies. For it is not just a matter of such additions being too little, too late, but of the vantage point from which communism is approached in the first question inclining both speaker and listener alike to treat it as a finished product, where the criteria used in judging whether communism is desirable or even possible can only be the ethical principles, or personal wishes and biases, of the parties involved. Approached in this way, Marx’s views on communism—which have contributed so much to the spread of Marxism—could never have convinced anyone who was not already prepared to be convinced by them.

With the popularity, particularly in recent years, of placing Marx’s views on the communist future on an altogether different plane from his analysis of the capitalist present, it should be no surprise that Marx’s opponents

make many of the same criticisms of his unsupported vision of the future that he himself voiced of the utopian socialists, who did exactly that. This is not to deny the important influence that several utopian writers had on Marx's early formation, or that Marx always recognized the many useful contributions of their school of thought to the progressive movement. Speculating about the future, for example, even when unchecked by any analysis of the present, can be a very liberating experience, helping some people emerge from the status quo, if only in their imaginations. Touching on hitherto unsuspected sources of pleasure, it can also pique people's desire for something better as well as trigger a more critical outlook. In more creative minds, like that of Fourier—Marx's and my own favorite utopian thinker—it can also lead to uncovering some possibilities that only later thinkers will be able to complete.

Once an analysis of capitalism that showed how our society actually works and its real potential for becoming a home worthy of the human species—in short, once Marxism came along—all this changed. From then on, utopian thinking became an easy way of discrediting Marxism in so far as the latter could be misrepresented as just another form of wish fulfillment. Hence, the frequent equation of Marxism with communism, as if that—and not capitalism—were the main subject of Marx's studies, with the step that usually follows, as if by reflex, of taking the Soviet Union and China as evidence for how communism, and therefore Marxism, works in practice. Of all the distortions to which Marx's ideas have been subjected, probably none have been as difficult to correct as this one, for the problem lies not only in what happened (or what most people believe happened) in these two countries but in the all too popular separation of Marx's vision of communism from its historical roots in capitalism. Unaware of capitalism as the proper space in which to investigate what communism is and could be, it was easy to substitute what was happening in a few underdeveloped countries, subjected to the constant threat of foreign invasion, that called themselves communist, to determine the worth of all Marx's theories.

It was to be expected, of course, that most of Marx's opponents would take this way out, if only to avoid having to deal with his critique of capitalism. Knowing too little of Marx's analysis of capitalism to suspect that it might have a role to play in his projection of communism, however, and operating with an ideological predisposition to treat past, present, and future as fully separate and largely independent "stages" of history, they are ill-equipped to do otherwise. The case is or, at least, should be altogether different with those friends and allies who give Marx's views on communism a utopian form while denying that he is a utopian thinker. Unfortunately, in presenting communism from the vantage point of communism (i.e., starting with a description of how communism works and not with capitalism), it is not that different in its form, and this turns out to

be decisive. The typical result is that most of those addressed find it very difficult to believe in the possibility of such a society, which only adds to their skepticism about all the other ideas associated with such an “outlandish” view of the future. While, given the internal relations between all of Marx’s theories, winning people over to any one of them usually gains support for the others. This applies as much to the theories that explain capitalism in their relation to communism as it does to the latter in its relation to the former, and argues for an exposition that thoroughly integrates the two in the manner of Marx, who seldom misses a chance to point to one or another feature of communism in the midst of his analysis of capitalism, as something made possible by how it has developed and is developing, treating it, in effect, as a partly hidden extension of capitalism itself.

It doesn’t help matters that in recent years there has been a revival of utopian thinking on the non-communist Left—drawing an ideal picture of the future from principles of one sort or another without any but the most superficial look at capitalism—with which this Marxist version of utopian thinking has often been confused, which only adds to the widespread belief that struggles for a better future can dispense with Marx’s analysis of the present.

Before leaving this topic, I should confess that I too have been at least partly guilty of the approach that I criticize above.¹ The changes in my thinking on this matter are due to a deeper study of Marx’s dialectical method, and especially its use in inquiry and exposition.

LOOKING FOR COMMUNISM INSIDE CAPITALISM

How then did Marx derive his views on communism from his analysis of capitalism? Believing that the future would grow out of the present just as the present grew out of its own past, Marx extended the interpenetrating, overlapping, and interacting processes he found in the capitalist present to include their most important preconditions in the past as well as their most likely future developments as evidenced by the main tendencies and potentials he found in this present, particularly though not solely in its mode of production. With capitalism recast as an internally related whole consisting of its actual past and present, and its most likely future, Marx used a variety of approaches to tease out what can be learned about what hasn’t happened yet from what has.

The crucial role of the notion of potential in dialectical thinking, of course, has been noted by a variety of Marxist thinkers. C. L. R. James refers to the internal relation between actuality and potentiality as “the entire secret” of Hegel’s dialectics (meaning Marx’s as well).² Marcuse claims to have found an insoluble bond between the present and the future in the very meanings of the concepts with which Marx analyzes the present.³ Maximilien Rubel makes a similar point when he suggests, half seriously,

that Marx invented a new grammatical form, the “anticipative-indicative,” where every effort to point to something in front of him foreshadows something that is not yet there.⁴ But this still doesn’t explain how Marx does it. Where exactly is the future concealed in the present? And how does Marx’s dialectical method help him uncover it? There are, in fact, several different approaches that Marx uses to look for evidence of communism inside capitalism. The most important of these are the following:

1. Singling out the “sprouts” of communism that are visible inside capitalism and indicating how they would appear and function without the constraints of the current order. Sprouts of communism can be found in those developments—like cooperatives, unions, and public education—that already exhibit some socialist characteristics, even though they are severely limited in how they function by the larger capitalist context. Such sprouts are also visible in many of the conditions and operations that are distinctive of late capitalism—such as the progressive replacement of private capital with the banking system and the extensive planning that goes on in every corporation—once we recognize that they are laying part of the necessary foundations for socialism at the same time. Even a major capitalist problem, such as unemployment, becomes a sprout of communism when viewed in terms of all the workers who would be available to share the work with those who are currently employed, expanding the amount of “free time” for everyone. Further, whenever any capitalist problem—like the profit driven destruction of the environment—is shown to have only a communist solution, it can be added to the number of sprouts of communism inside capitalism, i.e. to the growing number of signs that communism is not only possible but necessary. One can find numerous examples of these sprouts throughout Marx’s writings. This is also the simplest and probably the most convincing of Marx’s approaches to this subject, which is why I have chosen to concentrate on it for this article.
2. Using capitalism’s relation with its necessary presuppositions in the mode of production that preceded it to inform us about its new role in providing the necessary presuppositions for the kind of society that will follow it.
3. Projecting the development of capitalism’s major contradictions—such as those responsible for periodic crises—to the point of their resolution and beyond into the new patterns assumed by what remains of their components.
4. Viewing the workers, once they come to power, as no less likely to build a society that serves their class interests than the capitalists and the aristocracy were when they had the chance do so, one can

deduce a good deal of what a workers' government—benefitting from the advanced conditions inherited from capitalism—would do (their major class interest at that time being to replace all the conditions that underlay their exploitation in capitalism).

5. As regards the character of the state—again, given all the changes that will have taken place in other sectors of society—asking “What *functions* of the modern state will remain in existence at that time?”
6. Treating the separations at the core of alienated labor between workers and their productive activity, products, other people (both capitalists and fellow workers), and their potential as members of the human species as a major condition underlying capitalism, including its most distinctive forms (like value in general and surplus-value) and problems (like periodic crises), projecting what the opposite of alienation would look like provides a helpful, if very general, overview of communism. If the relations of alienation under capitalism are the result of the practical “negation” (the rejection and turning into its opposite) of the traditional ties between people and their work, product and others that existed under feudalism, it is reasonable to expect that performing the same negation of these relations in capitalism can reveal a good deal about the society that is likely to succeed it. This “negation of the negation” (Marx’s expression) recovers some of the social interconnectedness, suitably transformed, experienced in feudal society, while retaining and expanding many of the material accomplishments of capitalism, making “spiral” rather “circular” the appropriate metaphor for this type of movement. The same approach also makes the “end of alienation” one of the best descriptions of life in full communism, and is often used in that way by Marx.⁵

These different approaches to studying communism inside capitalism overlap to a large extent; even together, they do not—and could not—provide us with anything like the full or detailed picture that some would like; and there is no doubt that other approaches to this subject can be found in Marx’s writings. But the ones listed here are all based on what Marx had come to understand about capitalism. They grow out of his dialectical analysis of this historically specific social formation and carry with them the stamp and heft of his life’s work as the premier scholar of a capitalism bursting at its seams with potentials for communism. It is this distinctive combination of inductive and deductive research that allowed him to find the broad lines of our likely future in the emergence and unfolding of the present out of its own past, and to claim scientific standing for the totality of his work (which like any scientific work

deals with degrees of probability, not absolute certainty, and allows for changes of mind and direction, and occasional errors). It is also with this family of capitalist-centric approaches, that is, in this context and from this vantage point, that we today should study and present communism, now—as ever—one of the most appealing features of Marxism, to our contemporaries.⁶

SPROUTS OF COMMUNISM INSIDE CAPITALISM

Texts

1. *The Nature of the Relationship between Capitalism and Communism:*

- (a) “within bourgeois society, the society that rests on exchange value, there arise relations of circulation as well as of production which are so many mines to explode it . . . On the other hand, if we didn’t find *concealed in society as it is* the material conditions of production and the corresponding relations of exchange prerequisite for a classless society, then all attempts to explode it would be quixotic.”⁷
- (b) “Communism is not for us a stable state which is to be established, an ideal to which reality will have to adjust itself. We call communism the real movement which abolishes the present state of things. The conditions of this movement result from premises now in existence.”⁸
- (c) “we do not anticipate the world dogmatically, but rather wish to find the new world through the criticism of the old.”⁹

2. *“In Our Days Everything Seems Pregnant with Its Contrary”:*

“There is one great fact, characteristic of this our nineteenth century, a fact which no party dares deny. On the one hand, there have started into life industrial and scientific forces, which no epoch of the former human history had ever suspected. On the other hand, there exist symptoms of decay, far surpassing the horrors recorded of the latter times of the Roman Empire.”

“In our days everything seems pregnant with its contrary. Machinery, gifted with the wonderful power of shortening and fructifying human labor, we behold starving and overworking it. The new-fangled sources of wealth, by some strange weird spell, are turned into sources of want. The victories of art seem to be bought by the loss of character. At the same pace that mankind masters nature, man seems to become enslaved to other men or to his own infamy. Even the pure light of science seems unable to shine but on the dark background of ignorance. All our invention and progress seem to result in endowing material forces with intellectual life,

and in stultifying human life into a material force. This antagonism between modern industry and science on the one hand, modern misery and dissolution on the other hand; this antagonism between the productive powers and the social relations of our epoch is a fact, palpable, overwhelming, and not to be controverted."

"Some parties may wail over it; others may wish to get rid of modern arts, in order to get rid of modern conflicts. Or they may imagine that so signal a progress in industry wants to be completed by as signal a regress in politics. On our part, we do not mistake the shape of the shrewd spirit that continues to work all these contradictions. We know that to work the new-fangled forces of society, they only want to be mastered by new-fangled men—and such are the working men. They are as much the invention of modern times as machinery itself. In the signs that bewilder the middle class, the aristocracy and the poor prophets of regression, we do recognize our brave friend, Robin Goodfellow, the old mole that can work in the earth so fast, that worthy pioneer—the Revolution."¹⁰

3. *Workers' Cooperatives are the "First Sprouts" of Communism inside Capitalism:*

"The co-operative factories of the laborers themselves represent within the old form the first sprouts of the new, although they naturally reproduce, everywhere in their actual organization, all the shortcomings of the prevailing system. But the antithesis between capital and labor is overcome within them, if at first only by making the associated laborers into their own capitalist, i.e., by enabling them to use the means of production for the employment of their own labor. They show how a new mode of production naturally grows out of an old one, when the development of the material forces of production and of the corresponding forms of social production have reached a particular stage. Without the factory system arising out of the capitalist mode of production there could have been no co-operative factories. Nor could these have developed without the credit system arising out of the same mode of production. The credit system is not only the principal basis for gradual transformation of capitalist private enterprises into capitalist stock companies, but equally offers the means for the gradual extension of co-operative enterprises on a more or less national scale. The capitalist stock companies, as much as the co-operative factories, should be considered as transitional forms from the capitalist mode of production to the associated one, with the only distinction that the antagonism is resolved negatively in the one and positively in the other."¹¹

4. *Stock Companies (Corporations) as the "Abolition of Capital as Private Property within the Framework of Capitalist Production Itself":*

"Formation of stock companies. Thereby:

- (a) An enormous expansion of the scale of production and of enterprises, that was impossible for individual capitals. At the time, enterprises that were formerly government enterprises become public.
- (b) The capital, which in itself rests on a social mode of production and presupposes a social concentration of means of production and labor-power, is here directly endowed with the form of social capital (capital of directly associated individuals) as distinct from private capital, and its undertakings assume the form of social undertakings as distinct from private undertakings. It is the abolition of capital as private property within the framework of capitalist production itself.
- (c) Transformation of the actually functioning capitalist into a mere manager, administrator of other people's capital, and of the owner of capital into a mere owner, a mere money-capitalist. Even if the dividends which they receive include the interest and the profit of enterprise, i.e., the total profit (for the salary of the manager is, or should be, simply the wage of a specific type of skilled labor, whose price is regulated in the labor-market like that of any other labor), this total profit is henceforth received only in the form of interest, i.e., as mere compensation for owning capital that now is entirely divorced from the function in the actual process of reproduction, just as this function in the person of the manager is divorced from ownership of capital."

"Profit thus appears (no longer only that portion of it, the interest, which derives its justification from the profit of the borrowers) as a mere appropriation of the surplus-labor of others, arising from the conversion of means of production into capital, i.e., from their alienation vis-à-vis the actual producer, from their antithesis as another's property to every individual actually at work in production, from manager down to the last day-laborer. In stock companies the function is divorced from capital ownership, hence also labor is entirely divorced from ownership of means of production and surplus-labor. This result of the ultimate development of capitalist production is a necessary transitional phase towards the reconversion of capital into the property of producers, although no longer as the private property of the individual producers, but rather as the property of associated

producers, as outright social property. On the other hand, the stock company is a transition toward the conversion of all functions in the reproduction process which still remain linked with capitalist property, into mere functions of associated producers, into social functions. . . .”

“ This is the abolition of the capitalist mode of production within the capitalist mode of production itself, and hence a self-dissolving contradiction, which *prima facie* represents a mere phase of transition to a new form of production. It manifests itself as such a contradiction in its effects. It establishes a monopoly in certain spheres and thereby requires state interference. It reproduces a new financial aristocracy, a new variety of parasites in the shape of promoters, speculators and simply nominal directors; a whole system of swindling and cheating by means of corporation promotion, stock issuance, and stock speculation. It is private production without the control of private property. . . .”

“ Conceptions which have some meaning on a less developed stage of capitalist production, become quite meaningless here [in more developed capitalism]. Success and failure both lead here to a centralization of capital, and thus to expropriation on the most enormous scale. Expropriation extends here from the direct producers to the smaller and medium-sized capitalists themselves.

It is the point of departure for the capitalist mode of production; its accomplishment is the goal of this production. In the last instance, it aims at the expropriation of the means of production of all individuals. With the development of social production the means of production cease to be the means of private production and products of private production, and can thereafter be only means of production in the hands of associated producers, i.e., the latter’s social property, much as they are their social products.”

“ However, this expropriation appears within the capitalist system in a contradictory form, as appropriation of social property by a few, and credit lends the latter more and more the aspect of pure adventurers. Since property here exists in the form of stock, its movement and transfer becomes purely a result of gambling on the stock exchange, where little fish are swallowed by the sharks and the lambs by the stock-exchange wolves. There is antagonism against the old form in the stock companies, in which the social means of production appear as private property; but the conversion to the form of stock still remains ensnared in the trammels of capitalism; hence, instead of overcoming the antithesis between the character of wealth as social and as private wealth, the stock companies merely develop it in a new form.”¹²

5. *The Banking System as the Abolition of the Private Character of Capital within Capitalism:*

“ The banking system, so far as its formal organization and centralization is concerned, is the most artificial and most developed product turned out by the capitalist mode of production, a fact already expressed in 1697 in *Some Thoughts on the Interests of England*. This accounts for the immense power of an institution such as the Bank of England over commerce and industry, although their actual movements remain completely beyond its province and it is passive toward them. The banking system possesses indeed the form of universal book-keeping and distribution of means of production on a social scale, but solely the form. We have seen that the average profit of the individual capitalist, or of every individual capital, is determined not by the surplus-labor appropriated at first hand by each capital, but by the quantity of total surplus-labor appropriated by the total capital, from which each individual capital receives its dividend only proportional to its aliquot part of the total capital. This social character of capital is first promoted and wholly realized through the full development of the credit and banking system.”

“ On the other hand this goes farther. It places all the available and even potential capital of society that is not already actively employed at the disposal of the industrial and commercial capitalists so that neither the lenders nor users of this capital are its real owners or producers. It thus does away with the private character of capital and thus contains in itself, but only in itself, the abolition of capital itself. By means of the banking system the distribution of capital as a special business, a social function, is taken out of the hands of the private capitalists and usurers. But at the same time, banking and credit thus become the most potent means of driving capitalist production beyond its own limits, and one of the most effective vehicles of crisis and swindle.”¹³

6. *Overproduction is an “Element of Anarchy” Only within Capitalist Society:*

“ . . . surplus is not an evil in itself, but an advantage; however it is an evil under capitalist production . . . ”

“ Once the capitalist form of reproduction is abolished, it is only a matter of the volume of the expiring portion—expiring and therefore to be reproduced in kind—of fixed capital . . . varying in various successive years. If it is very large in a certain year (in excess of the average mortality, as is the case with human beings), then it is certainly so much smaller in the next year. The quantity of raw materials, semi-finished products, and auxiliary materials required for the annual production of the articles of

consumption—provided other things remain equal—does not decrease in consequence. Hence the aggregate production of means of production would have to increase in the one case and decrease in the other. This can be remedied only by a continuous relative over-production. There must be on the one hand a certain quantity of fixed capital produced in excess of that which is directly required; on the other hand, and particularly, there must be a supply of raw materials, etc., in excess of the direct annual requirements (this applies especially to means of subsistence). This sort of over-production is tantamount to control by society over the material means of its own reproduction. But within capitalist society it is an element of anarchy.”¹⁴

7. *Increased Productivity and the Economy of Labor:*

“The more the productiveness of labor increases, the more can the working-day be shortened; and the more the working-day is shortened, the more can the intensity of labor increase. From a social point of view, the productiveness increases in the same ratio as the economy of labor, which, in its turn, includes not only economy of the means of production, but also the avoidance of all useless labor. The capitalist mode of production, while on the one hand, enforcing the economy in each individual business, on the other hand, begets, by its anarchical system of competition, the most outrageous squandering of labor-power and the social means of production, not to mention the creation of a vast number of employments, at present indispensable, but in themselves superfluous.”

“The intensity and productiveness of labor being given, the time which society is bound to devote to material production is shorter, and as a consequence, the time at its disposal for the free development, intellectual and social, of the individual is greater, in proportion as the work is more and more evenly divided among all the able-bodied members of society, and as a particular class is more and more deprived of the power to shift the natural burden of labor from its own shoulders to those of another layer of society. In this direction, the shortening of the working-day finds at last a limit in the generalization of labor. In capitalist society spare time is acquired for one class by converting the whole life-time of the masses into labor-time.”¹⁵

8. *Capitalism’s Redundant Workers are also Evidence of the Possibility of More Free Time for Everyone with another Organization of Society:*

“A development of productive forces which would diminish the absolute number of laborers, i.e., enable the entire nation to accomplish its total production in a shorter time span, would *cause a revolution*, because it would put the bulk of the population out

of the running. This is another manifestation of the specific barrier of capitalist production, showing also that capitalist production is by no means an absolute form for the development of the productive forces and for the creation of wealth, but rather that at a certain point it comes into collision with this development. This collision appears partly in periodical crises, which arise from the circumstance that now this and now that portion of the laboring population becomes redundant under its old mode of employment. The limit of capitalist production is the excess time of the laborer. The absolute spare time gained by society does not concern it. The development of productivity concerns it only in so far as it increases the surplus labor-time of the working-class, not because it decreases the labor-time for material production in general. It moves thus in a contradiction."¹⁶

9. *The Growing Alienation of Individual Capitalists as well as Workers from Capital [Their Separation from It and Lack of Control over It] "Implies at the Same Time the Transformation of the Conditions of Production into General, Common, Social, Conditions":*

"We have seen that the growing accumulation of capital implies its growing concentration. Thus grows the power of capital, the alienation of the conditions of social production personified in the capitalist from the real producers. Capital comes more and more to the fore as a social power, whose agent is the capitalist. This social power no longer stands in any possible relation to that which the labor of a single individual can create. It becomes an alienated, independent, social power, which stands opposed to society as an object, and as an object that is the capitalist's source of power. The contradiction between the general social power into which capital develops, on the one hand, and the private power of the individual capitalist over these social conditions of production, on the other, becomes ever more irreconcilable, and yet contains the solution of the problem, because it implies at the same time the transformation of production into general, common, social conditions. This transformation stems from the development of the productive forces under capitalist production, and from the ways and means by which this development takes place."¹⁷

10. *Projecting the Effect of the Rapid Developments in Science and Technology [and, if Marx Were Alive, Their Continuation in Automation, Computerization, and Robotization on the Production of Value and the Relations between Capitalists and Workers]:*

"The exchange of living labor for objectified labor—i.e. the positing of social labor in the form of the contradiction of capital and

wage labor—is the ultimate development of the value relation and of production resting on value. Its presupposition is—and remains—the mass of direct labor time, the quantity of labor employed, as the determining factor in the production of wealth.”

“But to the degree that large industry develops, the creation of real wealth comes to depend less on labor time and on the amount of labor employed than on the power of the agencies set in motion during labor time, whose “powerful effectiveness” is itself in turn out of all proportion to the direct labor time spent on their production, but depends rather on the general state of science and on the progress of technology, or the application of this science to production. (The development of this science, especially natural science, and all others with the latter, is itself in turn related to the development of material production.) Agriculture, e.g., becomes merely the application of the science of material metabolism, its regulation for the greatest advantage of the entire body of society. Real wealth manifests itself, rather—and large industry reveals this—in the monstrous disproportion between the labor time applied, and its product, as well as in the qualitative imbalance between labor, reduced to a pure abstraction, and the power of the production process itself. (What holds for machinery holds likewise for the combination of human activities and the development of human intercourse.) No longer does the worker insert a modified natural thing as middle link between the object and himself; rather, he inserts the process of nature, transformed into an industrial process, as a means between himself and inorganic nature, mastering it. He steps to the side of the production process instead of being its chief actor. In this transformation, it is neither the direct human labor he himself performs, nor the time during which he works, but rather the appropriation of his own general productive power, his understanding of nature and his mastery over it by virtue of his presence as a social body—it is, in a word, the development of the social individual which appears as the great foundation—stone of production and of wealth.”

“The theft of alien labor time, on which the present wealth is based, appears a miserable foundation in face of this new one, created by large-scale industry itself. As soon as labor in the direct form has ceased to be the great well-spring of wealth, labor time ceases and must cease to be its measure, and hence exchange-value [must cease to be the measure] of use-value. The surplus labor of the mass has ceased to be the condition for the development of general wealth, just the non-labor of the few, for the development of the general powers of the human head. With

that, production based on exchange-value breaks down, and the direct, material production process is stripped of the form of penury and antithesis. The free development of individualities and hence not the reduction of necessary labor time so as to posit surplus-value, but rather the general reduction of the necessary labor of society to a minimum, which then corresponds to the artistic, scientific, etc. development of the individuals in the time set free, and with the means created, for all of them."¹⁸

CONCLUSION

Who can deny that the sprouts of communism are found throughout capitalism, or that they are more numerous and much more evident now than in Marx's time? Witness automation and robotization, the spread of globalization, the extensive economic planning done by every corporation, developments in transportation and communication, the sheer amount of waste of finished goods, means of production and labor power that accompanies capitalist production, the onward march of democracy and its worsening abuses everywhere, and all the material and intellectual means available (but not fully or properly used) to resolve the problems of rising unemployment, growing economic inequality, rapidly accelerating climate change, wars of all sorts, massive food shortages, the threat of new and the return of old plagues, and—running through it all—the rampant commodification of most forms of learning, making knowledge itself a growing part of the problem instead of an essential part of the solution. What makes all of these conditions and problems sprouts of communism is that the means for dealing with them are all available—typically as by-products of the very developments that have given rise to these problems—but they have no chance of being put to use in capitalism. Yet, almost everywhere we look, the new communist world that capitalism has made possible is staring us right in the face, though most people have great difficulty recognizing it behind all the capitalist forms in which it appears.

Since my earliest writings on communism, the collapse of “actually existing socialism” (an Orwellian construction in the best of times) has led those dissatisfied with capitalism to intensify their search for an alternative. Unfortunately—and somewhat surprisingly—even socialists who never saw the Soviet Union as a model for anything seem to have drawn negative lessons from its demise for the possibility of communism. If communism was never before so possible materially, technologically, socially—indeed, in every way but politically—never before has it met with such widespread skepticism. What is the bearing of this changed situation on all of our efforts to present Marx's views on communism? While

it is probably more difficult today to get this much maligned subject taken seriously, there has never been a time when it was more needed. For, as the Cheshire Cat tells Alice—if you don't know where you want to go, then any path will do. Why give priority, we are asked again and again, to any one reform over others?

The first step in reestablishing Marx's approach to communism and providing the broad working class with a clear direction in which to carry on its struggles is to break the connection between communism and the former Soviet Union. Unfortunately, this is how most people continue to think about communism. Instead, communism must be linked, as it was for Marx, to capitalism. Viewed in relation to the Soviet Union, communism cannot help but be sullied by the distortions that disfigured even the modest successes that occurred under that regime. Also, and what is of equal importance, whenever communism is viewed in connection with the Soviet experience (whether one approves or disapproves of the results), it seems to be an alternative available to people anywhere, at any time, and under any conditions. What counts in this case are a variety of subjective factors ranging from the intelligence and commitments of the leadership to the type of party they create and the strategy it adopts. Viewing communism in and through its ties to capitalism, on the other hand, brings to the fore the objective conditions responsible for the particular problems from which people suffer together with the related conditions—most of which were completely absent in the Soviet Union—that provide a basis for their solution. It is this approach that allowed Marx to treat communism as an unrealized potential within capitalism.

But, if this is so, then—like Marx—we must give top priority to the analysis of capitalism, and not of market society, or industrial society, or the information society, or modern society, or postmodern society, or even American society. As part of this, we must stop avoiding the use of the word "capitalism" where we know it applies. For our worst problems—crisis, economic exploitation, alienation, unemployment, social and economic inequality, imperialism, and environmental degradation—all arise from the natural workings of capitalism. Substituting another way of organizing society for capitalism, therefore, leaves the origins of these problems out of focus or worse, and makes it very difficult to see where the solutions for them might come from.

As our present economic crisis deepens, many non-Marxist writers have grudgingly admitted that Marx seems to have been right about capitalism, but—they are quick to add—wrong about communism. In the celebration of the 150th anniversary of the *Communist Manifesto*, the Canadian-American psychologist, Bill Livant has identified this as "coitus manifestus," subvariety, "communismus interruptus" (in a letter to the author). For, if Marx was right about capitalism, given all he understands by capitalism, then he had

to be right about communism, for the latter resides inside the folds of the former. In which case, the only way to deny the possibility of communism is to reject the analysis of capitalism that portrays it as a realistic possibility.

What is to be done, then—contra Lenin—at least in this gray interregnum through which the world Left is now passing is to reestablish the necessary links between capitalism and communism. This is not the same as maintaining that communism is inevitable. Even Marx saw barbarism, “the common ruin of the contending classes” in his words, as a possible alternative to communism, though he considered it very unlikely and never gave it the attention that we now know it deserves.¹⁹ Today, after fascism and the civil wars in Rwanda and Somalia and the breakdown of state authority in a half dozen other countries, we have a better idea of what barbarism might bring, and how great a danger it poses. The steady erosion of the ecological conditions necessary for the reproduction of human life and the growing destructive power of modern weaponry have presented us with two more possible outcomes to human history.

In presenting the choice before humanity in the coming period as between communism, barbarism, ecological suicide, and nuclear annihilation (or some combination of the last three), I am trying to make two main points: that the continuation of democratic capitalism, whose necessary preconditions are even now disappearing, is not one of the alternatives; and that none of the real alternatives to communism are acceptable to anyone. For people to choose communism, however, still requires that they recognize it as a realistic possibility, no matter how unlikely they believe it to be. For whereas communism can be achieved only if the majority of workers (understood as those who have to sell their labor power in order to survive), which includes practically everyone in the developed capitalist countries nowadays, set out on this path, the other possible outcomes to human history can come about without anyone actually choosing them. As capitalist decline turns into a full scale rout all that is required is that people put off choosing communism long enough.

Close to half of Marx’s writings are devoted to the critique of bourgeois ideology, in which the assumption of capitalism’s natural and, therefore, permanent character serves as the central pivot. Against this, Marx sets out to show not only how capitalism works, where it has come from and how quickly it is changing, but—as an essential part of his analysis—what it is changing into. The theories that seek to capture this systemic and historical whole are all interrelated and support one another. Only with a substantial space within this whole accorded to a better future, however, one that is also believable because its first sprouts emerge out of conditions and developments that exist all around us—only when Marxist theory and capitalist events convincingly establish this internal link—can workers and other oppressed people be expected to take the leap from their class interests to revolutionary practice. In the midst of what may be

its terminal economic crisis, capitalism can be counted on to do its part. Those of us who consider ourselves Marxists cannot do any less.

Finally, after arguing that the crucial question to address is, How did Marx come to his views on communism?, I am ready to admit there may be occasions when it is useful to answer the question, What was Marx's vision of communism? The huge differences between what Marx called communism and what came to pass in the so-called communist countries require clarification whenever they come up, and the persistent student who insists on an answer to his or her question deserves one. However, given the destructive effect of separating capitalism from communism on any adequate understanding of either (and thus, too, on the political actions that would usually follow from such an understanding), I would simply urge those who are tempted to take this path to devote more quality time to how Marx came to his views on communism. As for myself, I shall continue to postpone any reconstruction of Marx's vision of communism until my audience has heard—with the help of the kind of examples found in this chapter—how and where these views originated.

NOTES

1. Bertell Ollman, "Marx's Vision of Communism," in *Social and Sexual Revolution: Essays on Marx and Reich*, ed. Bertell Ollman (Montreal: Black Rose Books, 1978).
2. C.L.R. James, *The C.L.R. James Reader*, ed. Anna Grimshaw (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1992), 129.
3. Herbert Marcuse, *Reason and Revolution* (Boston: Beacon, 1964), 295–296.
4. Maximilien Rubel, "Non-Market Socialism in the Twentieth Century," in *Non-Market Socialisms in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries*, ed. Maximilien Rubel and John Crump (London: Macmillan, 1987), 25.
5. Karl Marx, *Grundrisse: Foundations of the Critique of Political Economy*, trans. Martin Nicolaus (Harmondsworth, UK: Penguin, 1973), 488, 515, 832.
6. What follows comes from a chapter in my forthcoming edited book, *Marx's Theory of Economic Crisis*. The excerpts and the parts of headings in quotes are from Marx. I have used italics for the rest of the headings and to highlight what I consider most important for our purposes.
7. Marx, *Grundrisse*, 159.
8. Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *The German Ideology*, trans. R. Pascal (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1942), 26.
9. Karl Marx, "Letter to Ruge, from Kreuznach, September 1843," *Writings of the Young Marx* (Garden City, NY: Anchor, 1967), 212.
10. Karl Marx, "Speech at the Anniversary of the People's Paper," in *Marx/Engels: The Socialist Revolution*, ed. F. Teplov and V. Davydov (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1978), 111–112.
11. Karl Marx, *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy*, vol. 3, ed. Frederick Engels and trans. Samuel Moore and Edward Aveling (Moscow: Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1959), 431.

12. *Ibid.*, 427–431.
13. *Ibid.*, 593.
14. Karl Marx, *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy*, vol. 2, ed. Frederick Engels and trans. Samuel Moore and Edward Aveling (Moscow: Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1957), 468–469.
15. Karl Marx, *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy*, vol. 1, ed. Frederick Engels and trans. Samuel Moore and Edward Aveling (Moscow: Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1958), 530.
16. Marx, *Capital*, vol. 3, 258–259.
17. *Ibid.*, 259.
18. Marx, *Grundrisse*, 704–705.
19. Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *Communist Manifesto*, trans. Samuel Moore (Chicago: Charles H. Kerr, 1945), 1–2

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CHAPTER 5

Scarcity and the Realm of Freedom

Michael A. Lebowitz

INTRODUCTION

Were Marx's ideas about socialism "unrealisable, contradictory" and "very seriously defective and misleading"? That is the assessment of Alec Nove in his *Economics of Feasible Socialism*. In particular, Nove scoffed at the concept of a communist society characterized by abundance—a "golden age" where abundance "removes conflict over resource allocation, since by definition there is enough for everyone, and so there are no mutually exclusive choices, no opportunities forgone and therefore there is no opportunity cost."¹

On the contrary, he argued, there are always opportunity costs: "resources (and time) being finite, *everything has an opportunity-cost*. Something potentially useful is being forgone."² But not for the "fundamentalist-millennarians" who believe in a stage of communist abundance. Because such naïve souls "cling to Marx's technological and resource availability optimism" and assume "out of existence" the very possibility of problems associated with scarcity, they are saved "a great deal of unnecessary thought."³ Alas, Nove declared, this concept of abundance is "an unacceptable assumption."⁴

But that assumption of the world of plenty, he argued, is at the core of the concept of communism: "The utopian aspects of Marx's ideas, especially the New Man, the absence of conflict between individuals and groups, depend decisively on an unrealisable degree of plenty."⁵ In this scenario, "new human attitudes would develop: acquisitiveness would wither away . . . because acquisitiveness would have lost all purpose." "No doubt also 'the lion shall lie down with the lamb.' We are back in the

realm of religious faith.”⁶ Is this picture a caricature and *reductio ad absurdum*, though, of Marx’s concept of communism?

THE STORY OF TWO STAGES

For many people, Marx’s concept of historical development can be found in a few paragraphs of his 1859 preface to the *Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*—despite the wealth of his discussion in *Capital* of production under capitalist relations and the development of a specifically capitalist mode of production. Unfortunately, several paragraphs from Marx’s comments upon the *Gotha Programme* of 1875 similarly often serve as Marx’s view of communist society—despite the fact that the concept of communism pervades Marx’s thought.

In particular, the standard interpretation of Marx’s *Critique of the Gotha Programme*⁷ introduces a story of “two stages”—socialism and communism—with strikingly different relations of distribution. Whereas the higher stage of communism would be characterized by distribution in accordance with need, in the lower stage the principle of distribution was one in which each would receive in accordance with her contribution. Underlying the difference between the two principles of distribution in this conception is the extent of the development of the productive forces. Socialism is viewed as the stage in which society develops productive forces and thereby prepares the way for the higher stage. The Soviet Constitution of 1936⁸ offered a classic version of this vision of socialism. According to Article 11, socialism is a society in which economic life is “determined and directed by the state national economic plan with the aim of increasing the public wealth, of steadily improving the material conditions of the working people and raising their cultural level.” And, Article 12 reads:

In the U.S.S.R. work is a duty and a matter of honor for every able-bodied citizen, in accordance with the principle: “He who does not work, neither shall he eat.”

The principle applied in the U.S.S.R. is that of socialism: “From each according to his ability, to each according to his work.”⁹

The immediate source of this concept of two stages and a specific “socialist” principle was Lenin. Reading Marx’s distinction in *Critique of the Gotha Programme* between the new society as it initially emerges from capitalism and that society once it has produced its own foundations, Lenin labeled these as the stages of socialism and communism, respectively. And, he asked in *State and Revolution*,¹⁰ what would be the character of the state after capitalism? His answer was that a state would be unnecessary in the higher stage of communism. However, a state would clearly be required within socialism. Why? Because until such time as it was possible

to distribute products in accordance with needs and until such time as it was possible to allow people to choose whatever activities they wished, a state was necessary.

The state was necessary within socialism, Lenin argued, in order to apply the rule of law as “regulator (determining factor) in the distribution of products and the allotment of labour among the members of society.” Indeed, he insisted, until the higher stage, “the *strictest* control by society *and by the state* over the measure of labour and the measure of consumption” would be essential. “He who does not work, neither he shall not eat” was one principle that would be applied strictly—as would “the other socialist principle: ‘An equal amount of products for an equal amount of labour.’”¹¹

Further, Lenin indicated that this need for the state to regulate “the quantity of products to be received by each” would continue until the socialist stage brought about “an enormous development of productive forces.” The latter would be the “economic basis for the complete withering away of the state”; it would create “such a high stage of Communism that the antithesis between mental and manual labour disappears.” In this realm of abundance, society then could adopt the rule, “from each according to his ability, to each according to his needs.” No longer would it be necessary to ensure “the *strictest* control by society *and by the state* of the measure of labour and the measure of consumption.”¹² To each according to his needs, thus, would be possible for people once “their labour becomes so productive that they will voluntarily work *according to their ability*.”¹³

There, in a nutshell, is the story of communism that Nove challenges—the society in which “an enormous development of productive forces” permits distribution in accordance with need, the society of abundance. Aside, though, from any skepticism about this unacceptable assumption, we need to ask if this conception of two stages (“stages of economic ripeness”) and of the specific “socialist principle” actually corresponds to Marx’s conception of the new society.

THE BEING AND BECOMING OF A NEW SOCIETY

Certainly, the kernel of the two-stages story is present in the *Critique of the Gotha Programme*. There, Marx distinguished between a communist society “as it has *developed* on its own foundations” and one “just as it *emerges* from capitalist society; which is thus in every respect, economically, morally and intellectually, still stamped with the birthmarks of the old society from whose womb it emerges.”¹⁴ *But what does it mean to speak of a society that “has developed on its own foundations”?*

You won’t find the answer in the *Critique of the Gotha Programme*. But you can find it very clearly elsewhere in Marx’s work. A system which

has its own foundations is one which produces its own premises—that is, which is dependent upon results it itself has created. As Marx noted in the *Grundrisse* about capitalism, “in the completed bourgeois system, every economic relation presupposes every other in its bourgeois economic form, and everything posited is thus also a presupposition; this is the case with every organic system.”¹⁵

Marx was describing there a system which is an organic whole, a “structure in which all the elements coexist simultaneously and support one another,” a structure in which those elements mutually interact and support the reproduction of the system.¹⁶ A system that rests upon its own foundations is one that contains within it the conditions for its own reproduction. “Whatever the social form of production process,” Marx declared at the opening of Chapter 23 of volume I of *Capital*, “it has to be continuous; it must periodically repeat the same phases. A society can no more cease to produce than it can cease to consume. When viewed, therefore, as a connected whole, and in the constant flux of its incessant renewal, every social process of production is at the same time a process of reproduction.”¹⁷

And, that was what Marx demonstrated in this chapter—that his discussion in *Capital* had provided the basis for us to understand capitalism as a system of reproduction. He underlined this point by concluding Chapter 23 as follows: “the capitalist process of production, therefore, seen as a total, connected process, i.e. a process of reproduction, produces not only commodities, not only surplus value, but also produces and reproduces the capital-relation itself; on one hand the capitalist, on the other the wage-labourer.”¹⁸

Marx understood capitalism, in short, as a “connected whole” constantly in the process of renewal, one which produces and reproduces material products and social relations, and which are themselves presuppositions and premises of production. “Those conditions, like these relations, are on the one hand the presuppositions of the capitalist production process, on the other its results and creations; they are both produced and reproduced by it.”¹⁹ Capitalism as an organic system spontaneously reproduces capitalist relations of production (on one hand the capitalist, on the other the wage-laborer)—that is, it reproduces its necessary premises.

Of course, an organic system does not drop from the sky: “the new forces of production and relations of production do not develop out of nothing, nor drop from the sky, nor from the womb of the self-positing Idea; but from within and in antithesis to the existing development of production and the inherited, traditional relations of property.” There is a process of development, a process of *becoming*, before the new system can produce its own premises: “the process of becoming this totality forms a moment of its process, of its development.”²⁰

If we are to understand Marx’s brief comments in the *Critique of the Gotha Programme*, it is essential to grasp his distinction between the

Becoming of a system and its Being—between the historical emergence of a particular form of society and the nature of that society once it has developed upon its own foundations. We need to understand his conception of communist society as it has developed on its own foundation if we are to recognize what is necessary for it to become. A system completes itself when it produces its own presuppositions, when its presuppositions and premises themselves are results. *But when a new system first comes on the scene, it never produces its own premises.*

Rather, when a new system emerges, it necessarily inherits premises from the old. Its premises and presuppositions are historic ones, premises that are produced outside the system. This distinction between premises produced within a system and historic premises is crucial: if we want to understand an organic system, we can't focus upon those historic premises. If you want to understand the modern city, Marx noted, you don't do it by discussing the flight of serfs to the cities. That is "one of the *historic* conditions and presuppositions of urbanism [but] . . . not a *condition*, not a moment of the reality of developed cities." Similarly, let's not talk about things like how "the earth made the transition from a liquid sea of fire and vapor to its present form."²¹ If we want to understand the earth and capitalism, let's talk about them now—not focus upon those "presuppositions of their becoming which are suspended in their being."

The historic presuppositions of capitalism took many forms, among which were individual savings acquired from various sources. However, the dependence of capitalism upon original savings, Marx stressed, belongs "to the *history of its formation*, but in no way to its *contemporary* history, i.e. not to the real system of the mode of production ruled by it." Once capitalism exists, capital "itself, on the basis of its own reality, posits the conditions for its realization." In short, you have real capital when capital produces its own premises, when it no longer rests upon historic presuppositions. "These presuppositions, which originally appeared as conditions of its becoming—and hence could not spring from its *action as capital*—now appear as results of its own realization, reality, as *posited by it—not as conditions of its arising but as results of its presence.*"

Thus, to understand capitalism as a system it is essential to look at how the system is reproduced, how it "creates its own presuppositions . . . by means of its own production process." Marx focused upon how capital "no longer proceeds from presuppositions in order to become, but rather is itself presupposed, and proceeds from itself to create the conditions of its maintenance and growth."²² When we understand capitalism as an organic system, central to our analysis is the demonstration that capital is the result of the exploitation of workers, that is, it is the workers' own product turned against them.

In contrast, it is a serious theoretical error to start from the conditions in which the new system is still stamped with the birthmarks of the old.

In such a case, you cannot understand the true nature of the system. See, Marx stressed, how bourgeois economists obscured the distinct nature of capital by “formulating the conditions of its becoming as the conditions of its contemporary realization; i.e. presenting the moments in which the capitalist still appropriates as not-capitalist—because he is still becoming—as the very conditions in which he appropriates as *capitalist*.”²³ This completely distorts the nature of capitalism. By treating capital as if it *remains* based upon historic presuppositions like individual savings, the capitalist relation of production (and, thus, capital’s dependence upon exploitation of the wage-laborer) disappears. *This is why Marx explicitly distinguished between the accumulation of capital within capitalism as a system and the ‘original accumulation,’ and why the former must come first in our analysis.*

Theory, in short, guides the historical inquiry. Our method, Marx noted, “indicates the points where historical investigation must enter in”; understanding the nature of capitalism as an organic system “point(s) towards a past lying behind this system.”²⁴ Once we understand the nature of the organic system (its Being), then we can investigate the process by which it emerged (its Becoming). Once Marx had identified the essential elements in capitalist relations of production as capital and wage-labor, then he could focus upon the preconditions for the initial emergence of each. And, that approach is precisely what we need to follow if we are to grasp Marx’s comments in the *Critique of the Gotha Programme*.

THE SOCIETY OF ASSOCIATED PRODUCERS

To understand capitalism as an organic system, it is essential to focus upon the nature of capitalist relations of production and to see how the elements in its particular combination of production, distribution, and consumption interact to ensure the reproduction of the system. Similarly, to understand the new society that Marx envisioned, we need to focus upon the relations of production of the society of associated producers and to see how the elements in its particular combination of production, distribution, and consumption interact to ensure the reproduction of this system.

Whereas the capitalist’s conscious goal (the ought that drives the system) is the production and expansion of capital, the ought of productive activity for the associated producers is the production and expansion of what Marx called “rich human beings”—that is, the full development of human capacities. From the outset of his work in 1844, Marx rejected the preoccupations of the political economists of his time and envisioned instead a rich human being—one who has developed his capacities and capabilities to the point where he is able “to take gratification in a many-sided way”—“the *rich man profoundly endowed with all the senses*.” “In place of the *wealth and poverty* of political economy,” he proposed, “come the *rich human being* and *rich human need*. The *rich human being*

is simultaneously the human being *in need of* a totality of human manifestations of life—the man in whom his own realisation exists as an inner necessity, as *need*.”²⁵

In the *Grundrisse*, Marx continued to stress the centrality of the concept of rich human beings. “When the limited bourgeois form is stripped away,” he asked, “what is wealth other than the universality of individual needs, capacities, pleasures, productive forces etc., created through universal exchange?”²⁶ In continuing to envision a rich human being “as rich as possible in needs, because rich in qualities and relations . . . as the most total and universal possible social product,” Marx looked to the “development of the rich individuality which is as all-sided in its production as in its consumption.”²⁷

This was Marx’s conception of the new society—a society that removes all obstacles to the full development of human beings. He made the point explicitly in *Capital*: in contrast to the society where the worker exists to satisfy the need of capital for its growth, Marx envisioned “the inverse situation, in which objective wealth is there to satisfy the worker’s own need for development.”²⁸ In that society of associated producers, each individual is able to develop his full potential—that is, the “absolute working-out of his creative potentialities,” the “complete working out of the human content,” the “development of all human powers as such the end in itself.”²⁹ In that society, the productive forces would have “increased with the all-round development of the individual, and all the springs of cooperative wealth flow more abundantly.”³⁰

This “all-round development of the individual,” however, does not come as a gift from above. To understand the society of associated producers, we need to recognize that human development requires practice—continuous practice. Starting from his articulation of the concept of revolutionary practice—“the coincidence of the changing of circumstances and of human activity or self-change”—Marx consistently stressed that, through their activity, people simultaneously change as they change circumstances.³¹ We develop ourselves, in short, through our own practice and are the products of all our activities—the products of our struggles (or the lack of same), the products of all the relations in which we produce and interact. In every human activity, in short, there is a *joint product*—both the change in the object of labor and the change in the laborer herself.

And, so it is in the society of associated producers. The particular productive activity that takes place within the productive relation of associated producers has as its result a particular kind of person. When we grasp the unity of human development and practice, Marx’s key link, we understand that only where there is conscious cooperation among associated producers, where the goal of production is that of the workers themselves, are there the conditions for the full development of human capacities.

Characteristic, then, of productive relations in this society is worker management, which ends the division between thinking and doing. But this involves more than worker management in individual workplaces. The goals of production are those of workers in society, too—workers in their communities and all social institutions.

Implicit in this key link of human development and practice, accordingly, is democratic, participatory and protagonistic activity in every aspect of our lives. Through revolutionary practice in our communities, our workplaces and in all our social institutions, we produce and reproduce ourselves as “rich human beings”—rich in capacities and needs. Our practice produces us as people who recognize the need for and importance of solidarity in our workplaces, communities, and society. In short, social production organized by workers is essential for developing the capacities of producers and building new relations—relations of cooperation and solidarity.

But production for what purpose? Very simply, the new society starts from the recognition of “the worker’s own need for development”—all workers. Unlike previous societies where “the development of the human capacities on the one side is based on the restriction of development on the other,” the society of associated producers places upon its banner the words of the *Communist Manifesto*: “the free development of each is the condition for the free development of all.”³²

And that means we base our productive activity upon the recognition of our common humanity and our needs as members of the human family. This is not a matter simply of helping others; rather, it has definite implications for our own development. “Let us suppose we had carried out production as human beings,” the young Marx imagined. In this case, producing as members of a human family, if I produce consciously for your need, I know my work is valuable, I know that I am satisfying your need, and I gain from this. “In my individual activity,” Marx commented, “I would have directly *confirmed* and *realised* my true nature, my *human nature*, my *communal nature*.” My work in this relationship is a “*free manifestation of life*, hence an *enjoyment of life*”; such activity, to use a term Marx employed later, is indeed “life’s prime want.” And, in this way, we not only produce ourselves—we also produce our relation, our connection as members of a human society.³³ What is so obvious here is the joint product characteristic of this association among the producers—in producing directly and consciously for others, we not only satisfy the needs of others but we also produce ourselves as rich human beings. At its core, this is the concept of a gift economy—one in which those who give are rewarded not by the anticipation of what they may receive at some point in return but rather by the way in which they “construct themselves as certain kinds of people, and build and maintain certain relationships of debt and care.”³⁴ Acting within such a relation builds trust and solidarity among people; it produces the people fit for this society.

This theme of the realization of human potential by producing for others within a community permeates Marx's early writing. In this new society, he proposed, there is "*communal activity and communal enjoyment—i.e., activity and enjoyment which are manifested and affirmed in actual direct association with other men.*" Here, "*man's need has become a human need*" to the extent to which "*the other person as a person has become for him a need—the extent to which he in his individual existence is at the same time a social being.*"³⁵

This communal society, once developed, "*produces man in this entire richness of his being—produces the rich man profoundly endowed with all the senses—as its enduring reality.*"³⁶ Again, this is not only the young Marx. Returning to the focus upon communality in the *Grundrisse*, Marx stressed that the condition for producing as social beings and thereby producing ourselves as rich human beings is *community*—the association of producers within society. "*Communal production, communality, is presupposed as the basis of production. The labour of the individual is posited from the outset as social labour.*"³⁷ Here, productive activity is consciously undertaken for the needs of others, and thus there is an exchange not of exchange values but of "*activities, determined by communal needs and communal purposes.*"³⁸ In short, social production for social needs is an essential aspect of the society of associated producers.

We are describing the society of associated producers as an organic system of production, consumption, and distribution. When we engage in cooperative production for social needs, the product of our activity is "*a communal, general product from the outset.*" Thus, the exchange of our activities "*would from the outset include the participation of the individual in the communal world of products.*"³⁹ That communal world of products, too, includes the means of production—the common property of all. Although this particular distribution may be a historic premise, one which is a condition of its "*arising*", within this organic system it is a result of the system itself which "*proceeds from itself to create the conditions of its maintenance and growth.*"

That distribution of the means of production is a premise of the system—a presupposition posited by the system. With the "*free exchange among individuals who are associated on the basis of common appropriation and control of the means of production,*" we see the production and reproduction of rich human beings. We grasp Marx's vision of "*free individuality, based on the universal development of individuals and on their subordination of their communal, social productivity as their social wealth.*"⁴⁰

Social ownership of the means of production, social production for social needs, social production organized by workers—these three sides of what President Chavez of Venezuela called the "*socialist triangle*" form members of a whole.⁴¹ They are parts of a "*structure in which all the elements coexist*

simultaneously and support one another," and they mutually interact (as is "the case with every organic whole").⁴² Within this structure, social ownership of the means of production ensures that our communal, social productivity (including the results of past social labor) is directed to the free development of all rather than used to satisfy the private goals of capitalists, groups of producers, or state bureaucrats. Social production organized by workers, in turn, continuously builds relations of cooperation and solidarity among producers. And, satisfaction of communal needs and purposes as the goal of productive activity means that, instead of interacting as separate and indifferent individuals, we function as members of a community.

The socialist triangle is a system of reproduction, one which produces its own premises. Within this particular combination of production, distribution, and consumption, the interdependence of these three specific elements suggests that realization of each element depends upon the existence of the other two. Without production for social needs, no real social property; without social property, no worker decision making oriented toward society's needs; without worker decision making, no transformation of people and their needs. In socialism as an organic system, "every economic relation presupposes every other in its [socialist] economic form, and everything posited is thus also a presupposition, this is the case with every organic system."⁴³ In particular, "seen as a total, connected process, i.e., a process of reproduction," the system produces and reproduces the relation of associated producers as it has developed upon its own foundations—rich human beings in a rich human community.

The concept of the rich human being brings us logically to the place of abundance within such a society. Certainly, it is not the vision of abundance that appears in capitalism. In place of the abundance and scarcity of the political economy of capital "come the *rich human being* and *rich human need*." Rather than a need for *things*, the need of people within this society is the need for community and the need to feel that their activity is useful—indeed, that they matter. This society of associated producers is one in which "the *rich human being* is simultaneously the human being *in need of* a totality of human manifestations of life—the man in whom his own realisation exists as an inner necessity, as *need*."⁴⁴

To describe Marx's concept of the new society as one characterized by an abundance which "removes conflict over resource allocation, since by definition there is enough for everyone, and so there are no mutually exclusive choices" reveals a profound ignorance. Of course, there are choices that must be made. Of course, there are opportunity costs and trade-offs. And, the associated producers make those choices through their communal institutions—including the choice to develop productive forces (in a way which flows from and reinforces this relation of production); they do

so with the understanding that “the free development of each is the condition for the free development of all.”

THE CRITIQUE OF THE GOTHA PROGRAMME AND THE SOCIALIST STAGE

How, though, does this organic system of associated producers *become*? In Hegel’s words, while the “new world is perfectly realized as little as the new-born child,” it is able to realize its potential “when those previous shapes and forms . . . are developed anew again, but developed and shaped within this new medium, and with the meaning they have thereby acquired.”⁴⁵ As Marx put it, “its development to its totality consists precisely in subordinating all elements of society to itself, or in creating out of it the organs which it still lacks. This is historically how it becomes a totality.”⁴⁶

So, how does this new society subordinate all elements of society to itself and create the organs that it still lacks in order to rest upon its own foundations? How does it go beyond the elements that are not part of the new organic system—that is, the defects it inherits? In the traditional story of “two stages”, the so-called socialist stage is the stage that removes the defects and prepares the way for the fully developed stage of communism—that is, socialism is the “becoming”.

Consider Marx’s *Critique of the Gotha Programme*. Rather than elaborating upon all the probable defects in the new society as it emerges, Marx focused explicitly here on only one. And, that is not at all surprising. This was, after all, simply his critical marginal notes on the Unity Programme—limited by, among other things, his doctor’s insistence upon the need to rest. We all know that marginal notes are definitely shaped by the text one is commenting upon. In this respect, it is essential to understand that the *Critique* was not at all intended as a full treatise. Rather, its purpose was to signal specific differences with a “thoroughly objectionable programme” in order to avoid misguiding friends by a “diplomatic silence.”⁴⁷

Marx’s silences, then, are important, and the dog didn’t bark with respect to the goal of a cooperative society based upon the common ownership of the means of production. Like Marx, *the Gotha Programme* explicitly advocated these. What Marx did assail, though, was the Lasallean illusion that cooperatives in both industry and agriculture with democratic control by producers should be established “with state aid.” On the contrary, he stressed, workers want to establish the conditions for cooperative production on a national scale, and this “has nothing to do with the foundation of co-operative societies with state aid.” Indeed, the present cooperatives are “of value *only* in so far as they are the independent creations of the workers.”⁴⁸

Besides the *Gotha Programme's* idea of relying upon the state to support cooperatives, Marx also dismissed its focus upon the demand that the state be free and democratic. For Marx, this demonstrated that the socialist ideas of the *Programme* with respect to the topic of the state "are not even skin-deep." Rather than treating the state as an entity independent of society, a "government machine," a "special organism separated from society through division of labour," Marx argued that it was essential that the state be understood as rooted in the existing society. Rather than the illusion that one advances to the new society by making a collection of democratic reforms, he stressed that the entire basis of the state needs to be changed. "Freedom," Marx insisted, "consists in converting the state from an organ superimposed upon society into one completely subordinate to it," and the process of building the new society requires a different kind of state, "*the revolutionary dictatorship of the proletariat.*"⁴⁹

Similarly, Marx rejected the abstract Lasallean ideas in the *Gotha Programme* about distribution. He fumed at empty phrases about how the "proceeds of labour belong undiminished with equal right to all members of society" and about a "fair distribution of the proceeds of labour." And so, Marx proceeded to point out that before the distribution of the proceeds among individuals which the *Programme* stressed, it was necessary to make allowance for deductions for replacement and expansion of the means of production (including contingency reserves) as well for administration costs, provisions for common satisfaction of needs and support for those unable to work. Only then, with these "diminished" proceeds, could one consider the *Programme's* concern as to how the means of consumption were to be "divided among the individual producers of the cooperative society."⁵⁰

But what did it mean to speak of equal right and a fair distribution? The characteristics of distribution of the means of consumption are not determined by abstract considerations and principles. Rather, it is essential to situate distribution in relation to the existing society. It was precisely Marx's challenge in the marginal notes to these unexplained phrases that become the source of Lenin's interpretation (and the basis of the two-stage story).

Consider the new society, a cooperative society based upon the common ownership of the means of production "just as it *emerges* from capitalist society." For Marx, in this situation the birthmarks of capitalism clearly affect the distribution of the means of consumption: "the individual producer receives back from society—after the deductions have been made—exactly what he gives to it." He receives back from society the same amount of labor he has given to it: "a given amount of labour in one form is exchanged for an equal amount in another form."⁵¹ *But why?* This principle has been repeated endlessly but without explanation of its underlying basis.

Very simply, Marx was describing a process of *exchange*: “Here obviously the same principle prevails as that which regulates the exchange of commodities.” It is an exchange between the individual producer who provides his labor, on the one hand, and society which provides individual means of consumption, on the other hand. But, exchange implies something behind it, and this relationship of exchange implies *ownership*. There are here two owners of property: the owner of individual labor (or, more accurately, labor power), and society as owner of articles of consumption. These owners face each other and engage in an exchange, a quid pro quo (I give you this in return for that). And, the “fair” exchange between owners of property is the exchange of equivalents. In short, the principle of distribution of means of consumption here reflects the distribution of property. Marx’s marginal notes make precisely this point:

Any distribution whatever of the means of consumption is only a consequence of the distribution of the conditions of production themselves. The latter distribution, however, is a feature of the mode of production itself. The capitalist mode of production, for example, rests on the fact that the material conditions of production are in the hands of non-workers in the form of property in capital and land, while the masses are only owners of the personal condition of production, of labour power.⁵²

As the new society emerges from capitalism, we see a particular distribution of property: although the material conditions of production have been transformed into common property, the “personal condition of production” remains the property of workers. This point is critical—not to acknowledge explicitly the private ownership of labor power is to lose sight of the underlying basis of the defect in the new society, the defect that takes the form of the orientation to the exchange of equivalents. That leaves the relation of distribution hanging in mid-air. Private ownership of labor power, the existence of this particular property right, means that “bourgeois right” has not yet been “crossed in its entirety”; and flowing from that “bourgeois limitation” is the logic of an exchange of equivalents between the individual owner and society. Distribution of the conditions of production is the premise of distribution of the means of consumption.

Significantly, as Marx pointed out in his *Critique*, “it was in general a mistake to make a fuss about so-called *distribution* and put the principal stress upon it.” What the *Gotha Programme* did was to take over “from the bourgeois economists the consideration of distribution as independent of the mode of production and hence the presentation of socialism as turning principally on distribution.”⁵³ Particular relations of distribution are

the product of particular relations of production. Change the relations of production, the economic structure of the society, and you change the relations of distribution.

Here was the defect in this new society as it emerged—productive relations between private owners of labor power. Rather than relating to others “as a member of society,” characteristic of the relations of production is that the individual producer enters the relation as the owner of his own capacity. And, precisely for this reason, he considers “unequal individual endowment and thus productive capacity as natural privileges.” His claim as owner to an equivalent, Marx noted, was “a right of inequality”—one which entirely ignores workers as human beings.

It should come as no surprise that Marx understood that this relation between the producers as owners, with its focus upon equivalents, is one-sided. As he had described quite early the bourgeois economists who look at the producer “only as a *worker* [and do] not consider him when he is not working, as a human being,” Marx indicated in his *Critique* that in the focus upon the right to equivalents the producers are considered “from one *definite* side only, for instance, in the present case, are regarded *only as workers* and nothing more is seen in them, everything else being ignored.”⁵⁴

Characteristic of the relation between individual producers as owners of labor power, the personal condition of production, is that we lose sight of and are indifferent to others as human beings in all their sides. There exists (as Marx described exchange within capitalism) a “connection of mutually indifferent persons.” In this exchange between owners, there is “the total isolation of their private interests from one another.”⁵⁵ From capitalist society, in short, we inherit the self-interest of owners—the precise opposite of the solidarity and sense of community characteristic of the society of associated producers once it develops upon its own foundations. Accordingly, this inherited defect must be subordinated if the new society is to develop as an organic system.

Rather than calling for a struggle to subordinate this defect, however, the two-stagers transform the defect into a so-called socialist principle that must be enforced by the state. Indeed, quoting the *Critique*, they insist that “Right can never be higher than the economic structure of society and the cultural development conditioned thereby”—which for them means that there is no alternative to building upon the “socialist principle.”⁵⁶ By “economic structure of society,” though, they mean the level of productive forces rather than the relations of production. Indeed, they say nothing about relations of production at all. Rather, the mantra is: develop the productive forces and all defects disappear. This, as noted earlier, is the task assigned to the socialist stage—to create that “enormous development of productive forces” which makes possible the higher stage of communism, the society of abundance in which there can be distribution in accordance

with need. Develop the productive forces, develop the productive forces—that is Marx and the prophets.⁵⁷

GOING BACKWARD

What happens if, rather than building upon and deepening social ownership of the means of production, social production organized by workers and production for communal needs and purposes, you try to build the new society by building upon an alien defect inherited from capitalism?⁵⁸ What happens, in short, if you embrace the one-sided perspective which ignores everything but the producers as owners of labor power?

Consider the kinds of people produced within the relation of exchange characteristic of the stage of socialism. Insofar as they relate as owners of the personal condition of production, producers are *alienated*—alienated both from their laboring activity and from the products of their labor. Rather than their productive activity being an expression of themselves, it is a means to secure alien products. Accordingly, as the young Marx commented, in the relation of property owners “my activity is a *forced* activity and one imposed on me only through an *external* fortuitous need, *not* through an *inner, essential* one.” Productive activity here is toil and trouble, a disutility, which each producer would like to minimize if possible.⁵⁹ And, as earlier noted, characteristic of the producers in this relation is indifference to the needs of others—that is, alienation from other producers and, indeed, from society. These are the joint products of production within these relations.

Marx did not explore the implications of such alienation in the *Critique* or anywhere else explicitly. However, we can make some inferences from his theoretical work (aided by some insights from actual experience). Consider the implicit logic behind the application of the socialist principle. Given that each producer wishes to maximize the quantity of means of consumption she can receive (i.e., the alien products she can command) and minimize the quantity of labor she performs (i.e., her toil and trouble), “the *strictest* control by society *and by the state* of the measure of labour and the measure of consumption” is required to ensure an equilibrium that safeguards “equality in labour and equality in the distribution of products.” By attempting to guarantee, too, that those workers who contribute more will receive more, enforcement of the socialist principle is intended to provide an incentive to contribute more.

What happens, though, if some producers believe that they are not receiving the equivalent for their special skills, capacities, or efforts? Will they not attempt to reduce their efforts or to seek alternative (extra-legal) uses of their capacities in order to secure the articles of consumption they seek? Similarly, if articles of consumption are available for free or are significantly subsidized for all workers or for those deemed to have special

needs, will this not be an opportunity for alienated workers to satisfy their needs without having to work (or to expend much energy in this)?

Insofar as alienated labor appears as toil and trouble, inherent in this relation is the tendency on the part of workers to reduce the length and intensity of the (official) workday; it is a tendency for low productivity. But, rather than confronting their source in the existing relations of production, for the two-stagers the explanation will be simple: in Gorbachev's words, they are the result of "serious infractions of the socialist principle of distribution according to work." And, the logical solution from this perspective is to put an end to such subsidies and other manifestations of "the psychology of levelling."⁶⁰ The answer, in short, is more vigorous enforcement of the "socialist principle", which is the means of *coping* with alienation rather than removing its source.

For the two-stagers, only that "enormous development of productive forces" can remove the defect. Only this can create the state of abundance in which there can be distribution in accordance with need. Presumably (since the development of human capacities as such is not a focus in this story,) this occurs through additions to the means of production—that is, through "deductions" from the "undiminished proceeds of labour." But how are those particular deductions to be made and who decides?

Consider a scenario in which society (via the state) is recognized as the owner not only of the means of consumption that are to be distributed in accordance with the socialist principle but as the owner of all the proceeds of labor. In the form of the state, it determines how much will be deducted from the undiminished proceeds for expansion of the means of production. Such deductions, while potentially permitting an increase of production in the future, mean that less is available immediately in the form of means of consumption. To the extent, though, that the producers are focused upon securing the maximum return from their labor and are alienated from other producers and society, this deduction will be perceived as an extraction by a state over and above the producers.

From the perspective of alienated producers, the state here is owner: it determines the goal of production and how that goal will be achieved, and it owns the means of production as well as the means of consumption which it exchanges with the owners of labor power. From the perspective of alienated producers, the means of production are the property of an Other, and they accordingly may waste them (or, indeed, steal them as a means of securing more articles of consumption.) "The worker actually treats the social character of his work, its combination with the work of others for a common goal, as a power alien to him; the conditions in which this combination are realized are for him the property of another, and he would be completely indifferent to the wastage of this property if he were not himself constrained to economize on it."⁶¹

Accordingly, the state also must direct, monitor, and discipline workers within the process of production. State direction and discipline in the workplace, state ownership of the means of production, a state over and above the producers—how far we move away from the starting point of social ownership and social production organized by workers when the focus is upon enforcing the “socialist principle”.⁶² This trajectory, though, is not unique to the case of a state over and above all.

There is a similar disintegration in an alternative scenario in which the deductions for the expansion of means of production are made directly by the private owners of the personal condition of production from the proceeds of their own labor. Even where the means of production are common property, given their orientation to increasing their consumption, the producers in individual cooperative or collective enterprises will deduct from their current consumption to invest in means of production under one condition—that they anticipate higher income/consumption in the future. For the individual groups of producers, the means of production (the fruits of their social labor) are viewed as their property, and enforcement of the socialist principle from their perspective is the right of an equivalent exchange for their present *and* past labor—regardless of any inequalities which result. Group property rather than social property prevails.

Similarly, the organization of social production by workers is deformed by the emphasis upon the collective self-interest of particular producers. Given the orientation toward maximizing income/consumption within these groups (and the lack of a focus upon development of the capacities of the producers,) a decision to follow the wisdom of experts who can guide the producers to that goal is logical. In such a situation, the division between thinking and doing is reinforced. Rather than the all-round development of the producers to which Marx looked, the joint products within these enterprises are crippled and one-sided producers.

Despite such unfortunate tendencies flowing from alienated production in both cases, is it nevertheless possible that the continuing expansion of the means of production can conquer all? That is, can the abundance of things ultimately be achieved through that “enormous development of productive forces”? There is no point in wasting a moment, though, to speculate on how much productive capability would be enough to allow for distribution in accordance with needs. *There will never be enough based upon this productive relation because there is a second side of the equation.*

Alienated labor constantly generates new needs for alien products. And, here we have the essential reason for skepticism about ever reaching the stage of communism. Nove’s entire critique of the possibility of overcoming scarcity is based upon the implicit assumption of continuing alienated production. It projects the alienation characteristic of a capitalist

society—alienation from one’s productive activity, alienation from the products of one’s labor, and alienation from others within society—as the natural condition of human beings. Assume alienation, and unlimited wants are always there to overwhelm scarce resources.

So, were Marx’s ideas “unrealisable, contradictory” and “very seriously defective and misleading”? In fact, the entire conception of communism of Nove and others is infected by their starting point in the defect of the new society as it emerges, the defect it inherits from capitalism. (This is precisely the same error as that of the bourgeois economists who obscure the nature of capital.) Begin with a focus upon alienated workers who want to maximize their consumption of means of consumption and minimize the labor they expend (i.e., a birthmark of the old society), and your conception of the new society will inevitably be that of a society in which one can consume without limit and live in leisure like “the lilies of the field who toil not neither do they spin.”⁶³

In any event, it is all an illusion and one would search in vain for any suggestion from Marx that it is possible to get to that future stage of abundance by trying to build upon a defect inherited from capitalism. On the contrary, relying upon the material self-interest of producers (and thus the focus upon the socialist principle) is a dead end. As Che indicated in his *Man and Socialism in Cuba* (and as the 20th century demonstrated), reliance upon “individual material interest as the lever” is (in Nove’s words) “an unacceptable assumption”:

The pipe dream that socialism can be achieved with the help of the dull instruments left to us by capitalism (the commodity as the economic cell, individual material interest as the lever, etc.) can lead into a blind alley. And you wind up there after having travelled a long distance with many crossroads, and it is hard to figure out just where you took the wrong turn.⁶⁴

However, reliance upon the dull instruments left to us by capitalism does more than merely lead into a blind alley. To build upon material self-interest is to build upon an element from the *old society*; and, as we have seen, it tends to undermine both social ownership and social production organized by workers. Indeed, it is through the designation of a separate stage of socialism that an alien principle is smuggled into the concept of the society of associated producers, a principle that points backward.

GOING FORWARD

The development of an organic system, as noted, “consists precisely in subordinating all elements of society to itself, or in creating out of it the organs which it still lacks.”⁶⁵ The society of associated producers must

therefore subordinate the defects it has inherited from capitalism and create the organs that it requires in order to rest upon its own foundations.

But, what organs does this new society require in order to reproduce itself? The society of associated producers has as its premises social ownership of the means of production, social production organized by workers, and a solidaritarian society in which there is production for communal needs and purposes. However, in the absence of an actual mechanism by which this particular combination of production, distribution, and consumption can be realized, this remains merely a vision. To produce and reproduce rich human beings in a society based upon solidarity requires a conscious attempt to ensure that the necessary conditions for full human development infuse all levels of society. Consequently, implicit in the concept of this society as an organic system is a set of institutions and practices through which all members of society can share the fruits of social labor and are able to satisfy their own need for development.

Certainly, those necessary institutions include workers councils that ensure that the collective workers in particular workplaces can determine democratically the goals of production (including the workers' own needs for development) and the process by which these are to be achieved. Similarly, neighbor and communal councils are essential to identify local needs and capabilities and to supervise the utilization of common property (i.e., the commons). But these are just cells of a much larger set of necessary organs in this society. Not only must there be a mechanism that brings together individual workers' councils in a larger body of collective workers in a particular area but also a set of institutions and practices that directly link workers' councils to communal councils. Further, while these democratic and protagonistic institutions at the level of neighborhoods and workplaces are essential for producing and reproducing solidarity, a network of bodies extending upward to commune, city, state, and national levels is needed for solidarity which transcends the local—that is, solidarity within society as a whole.⁶⁶

This combination and articulation of councils and delegates at different levels of society is necessary to ensure the reproduction of a society in which the free development of each is the condition for the free development of all. And, this state—a *particular* state, a state from below, a state of the commune-type—is an integral part of the society of associated producers as an organic system. How could this organic system be made real in the absence of institutions and practices such as these?

Of course, some people may not wish to call this set of institutions a state because these are society's "own living forces"—that is, not "an organ standing above society" but "one completely subordinate to it."⁶⁷ Taxonomy, though, should not trump content. So, if some people prefer to call these articulated councils a non-state or the "Unstate," this should not present a problem—as long as they agree that the new

society as an organic system requires these institutions and practices in order to be real.

Creating all those new organs, then, is an essential part of the process of becoming. And if these organs are a necessary part of a society characterized by (1) social production organized by workers, (2) social ownership of the means of production and (3) production for communal needs and purposes, it points to what must be subordinated in the society as it emerges with all its defects from capitalism. Obviously, worker control must replace the despotism of a workplace in which some conduct and others are conducted. Similarly, private ownership of the means of production must be ended and replaced by social ownership democratically exercised by all members of society at all levels (i.e., not by a state over and above all). Further, the focus upon individual or group self-interest must be subordinated and replaced by the development of a solidararian society in which the free development of all is the goal; that is, the relation in which producers interact as private owners of labor power must be subordinated. Finally, the old state must be replaced by the new, decentralized, democratic state from below. Subordination of all these defects is essential for developing the productive relations of a society of associated producers.

We know that the elements of the new society can never drop from the sky in their pure, fully developed form. But not to struggle to subordinate the inevitable inherited defects is to rely upon foundations of the old society and to be in danger of reverting to it. *You cannot decide to leave some defects until later.* If there is a continued separation of thinking and doing in workplaces and society, if some have a privileged access to the use and fruits of particular products of past social labor, if self-interest and indifference to others prevails, if there is a state over and above society—the people produced within this society will be necessarily deformed by these continuing defects and enter into all their relations as such.

We always, in short, have to keep in mind the joint product of our activity—the nature of people produced. By struggling on all fronts to create the new organs and to subordinate the inherited defects, we simultaneously develop our capacities and develop “the rich individuality which is as all-sided in its production as in its consumption.”⁶⁸ We struggle, for example, against the defect that Marx identified in the *Critique* (the one that the “socialist principle” presumably addresses) by building the institutions of community and solidarity; that is, direct social relations among producers based upon the recognition of the needs of others and, in particular, the need for the free development of all, is the way to break down the one-sided perspective and indifference of the private owners of labor power.

Of course, that’s not easy. Of course, it requires much work and patience. But there is no alternative but to build the communal society that “produces man in the entire richness of his being—produces the *rich* man

profoundly endowed with all the senses—as its enduring reality.”⁶⁹ That is a process of producing people with new, qualitatively different needs—needs for others, needs for society. And, as noted earlier, an abundance of things is not at all a necessary condition. *The realm of freedom does not have to wait until the realm of necessity has been ended.* Rather, “the true realm of freedom, the development of human powers as an end in itself” is built within the realm of necessity itself and redefines necessity.⁷⁰ And, it is built by developing the relations of production of the society of associated producers in all its sides.

In short, after our productive activity has become the way we realize “our communal nature”—that is, “has become life’s prime want; after the productive forces have also increased with the all-round development of the individual, and all the springs of cooperative wealth flow more abundantly,” then the society of rich human beings can inscribe upon its banner, to each according to her own need for development.

NOTES

1. Alec Nove, *Economics of Feasible Socialism Revisited* (London: Harper Collins, 1991), vii–viii, 17.

2. *Ibid.*, 20.

3. *Ibid.*, 19, 21, 46, 63.

4. *Ibid.*, 18.

5. *Ibid.*, 63.

6. *Ibid.*, 18, 46, 63.

7. Karl Marx, “Critique of the Gotha Programme,” in *Karl Marx and Frederick Engels Selected Works in Two Volumes*, vol. 2 (Moscow: Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1962), 13–37.

8. Soviet Constitution of 1936, <http://www.departments.bucknell.edu/russian/const/36cons01.html>.

9. *Ibid.*

10. Vladimir I. Lenin, *The State and Revolution* (Peking: Foreign Languages Press, 1965).

11. *Ibid.*, 112, 116.

12. *Ibid.*, 115–116.

13. *Ibid.*, 114–115.

14. Marx, “Critique of the Gotha Programme,” 23.

15. Karl Marx, *Grundrisse: Foundations of the Critique of Political Economy* (London: Penguin 1973), 278.

16. Karl Marx, “The Poverty of Philosophy” in *Marx-Engels Collected Works*, vol. 6, trans. Richard Dixon et al. (New York: International Publishers, 1976), 167.

17. Karl Marx, *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy*, vol. 1, ed. Frederick Engels (New York: Vintage Books, 1977), 711.

18. *Ibid.*, 724.

19. Karl Marx, *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy*, vol. 3, ed. Frederick Engels (New York: Vintage Books, 1981), 957.

20. Marx, *Grundrisse*, 278.
21. See Marx, *Grundrisse*, Notebook IV.
22. *Ibid.*, 459–460.
23. *Ibid.*, 460.
24. *Ibid.*, 460–461.
25. Karl Marx, “Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844,” in *Marx-Engels Collected Works*, vol. 3, trans. Richard Dixon et al. (New York: International Publishers, 1975), 302, 304.
26. Marx, *Grundrisse*, 488.
27. *Ibid.*, 325, 409.
28. Marx, *Capital*, vol. 1, 772.
29. *Ibid.*, 488, 541, 708.
30. Marx, “Critique of the Gotha Programme,” 24.
31. Karl Marx, “Theses on Feuerbach,” in *Marx-Engels Collected Works*, vol. 5, trans. Richard Dixon et al. (New York: International Publishers, 1975), 3.
32. Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, “The Communist Manifesto,” in *Marx-Engels Collected Works*, vol. 6, trans. Richard Dixon et al. (New York: International Publishers, 1976), 506; Karl Marx, “Economic Manuscript of 1861–63,” in *Marx-Engels Collected Works*, vol. 30, trans. Richard Dixon et al. (New York: International Publishers, 1988), 190–192.
33. Karl Marx, “Comments on James Mill,” in *Marx-Engels Collected Works*, vol. 3, trans. Richard Dixon et al. (New York: International Publishers, 1975), 227–228.
34. Holly High, “Cooperation as Gift versus Cooperation as Corvee,” paper presented at *Regenerations: New Leaders, New Visions in Southeast Asia*, Council of Southeast Asian Studies, Yale University, 2005. <http://www.freeebay.net/site/content/view/801/34/>.
35. Marx, “Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts,” 296, 298.
36. *Ibid.*, 302.
37. Marx, *Grundrisse*, 172.
38. *Ibid.*, 171–172.
39. *Ibid.*, 158, 171.
40. *Ibid.*, 158–159.
41. Michael A. Lebowitz, *The Contradictions of “Real Socialism”: The Conductor and the Conducted* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 2012), 17–19.
42. Marx, *Grundrisse*, 99–100.
43. *Ibid.*, 278.
44. Marx, “Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts,” 302, 304.
45. G.W.F. Hegel, *The Phenomenology of Mind*, trans. J.B. Baillie, (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1967), 81, 75, 6.
46. Marx, *Grundrisse*, 278.
47. Karl Marx, “Letter to W. Bracke, May 5, 1875,” in *Karl Marx and Frederick Engels Selected Works in Two Volumes*, vol. 2 (Moscow: Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1962), 15–16.
48. Marx, “Critique of the Gotha Programme,” 30–31.
49. *Ibid.*, 31–34; See the discussion of the “workers’ state” in Michael A. Lebowitz, *Beyond CAPITAL: Marx’s Political Economy of the Working Class* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003).

50. Marx, "Critique of the Gotha Programme," 18–22.
51. *Ibid.*, 23.
52. *Ibid.*, 25.
53. *Ibid.*, 23–25.
54. *Ibid.*, 24; Michael A. Lebowitz, *The Socialist Alternative: Real Human Development* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 2010), 70–72.
55. Marx, "Critique of the Gotha Programme," 158.
56. *Ibid.*, 24; One often finds this statement in official Cuban discourse these days.
57. See Lebowitz, *Contradictions*, ch. 8, "Goodbye to Vanguard Marxism."
58. See Michael A. Lebowitz, "Building on Defects: Theses of the Misinterpretation of Marx's Gotha Critique," *Science and Society* 71, no. 4 (October 2007): 484–489. This paper was presented originally at the 3rd International Conference on the Work of Karl Marx and the Challenges of the 21st Century in Havana, Cuba, May 3–6, 2006.
59. Marx, "Comments on James Mill," 225, 228; Lebowitz, *The Socialist Alternative*, 66–68.
60. Lebowitz, *Contradictions*, 138; Note that in the *Critique*, Marx indicated that from the outset of the new society the deduction from the proceeds of labor, "intended for the common satisfaction of needs, such as schools, health services, etc." grows considerably "and it grows in proportion as the new society develops." Marx, "Critique of the Gotha Programme," 22.
61. Marx, *Capital*, vol. 3, 178–179.
62. A further devolution with the emergence of managers as incipient capitalists is explored in Lebowitz, *Contradictions*.
63. See the discussion of Keynes's invocation of the Sermon on the Mount in Lebowitz, *Contradictions*, 180.
64. Carlos Tablada, *Che Guevara: Economics and Politics in the Transition to Socialism* (Sydney: Pathfinder, 1989), 92.
65. Marx, *Grundrisse*, 278.
66. See a discussion of the links and interaction between such bodies through spokespersons in Michael A. Lebowitz, "The State and the Future of Socialism," *Socialist Register* 49 (2013). <http://socialistregister.com/index.php/srv/article/view/18825>.
67. Marx, "Critique of the Gotha Programme," 31–32; Karl Marx, *On the Paris Commune*, by Karl Marx and Frederick Engels (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1971), 152–153; Michael A. Lebowitz, *Build It Now: Socialism for the 21st Century* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 2006), 189–96.
68. Marx, *Grundrisse*, 325.
69. Marx, "Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts," 296, 298; Lebowitz, *The Socialist Alternative*, 78–81.
70. Marx, *Capital*, vol. 3, 959; Although Marx commented with respect to the realm of freedom that "the reduction of the working day is its basic prerequisite," this is a conception of labor within the workday as inherently alienated and separate from human development. In contrast, I have argued that, rather than reducing the workday, the point is to *transform* it into a socialist workday, which includes in its definition time for education in worker management and time for

contributing to the community and household. See Michael A. Lebowitz, "The Capitalist Workday, The Socialist Workday," *MRZine* (April 2008), <http://mrzine.monthlyreview.org/2008/lebowitz250408.html>; Lebowitz, *The Socialist Alternative*, 134, 156.

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CHAPTER 6

Emancipation and the Limits of Marx's Cosmopolitan Imaginary

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Every emancipation is a restoration of the human world and of human relationships to man himself.

—Karl Marx, “On the Jewish Question”¹

INTRODUCTION

The entire trajectory of Marx's thought, from his doctoral dissertation concerned with the free-development of humankind's self-consciousness to his critique of political economy that exposed the alienating conditions of capitalism, was committed to the goal of human emancipation.² Marx viewed human freedom as the positive power to assert one's true individuality: the active, self-directed unfolding of the totality of the individual's—and humankind's—capacities. As opposed to the liberal conception of emancipation defined purely negatively under the principle of noninterference, Marx extended the concept of freedom to include the development of individual powers and consequently devoted much of his work to conceptualizing the ideal form of community (both local and international) in which each individual had the means to cultivate their “gifts” in all directions.³ The social and economic spheres were thus integral to his vision. Indeed, the movement to communist society was predicated on Marx's belief that this mode of socioeconomic organization could best provide the conditions necessary for the individual to be self-actualizing with, and through, all others. Yet it was not just the development of productive forces that was to bring forth the “realm of freedom.” Equally important were the fundamental changes in social relations between subjects

that would come about through the abolishment of private property across the globe. Marx's vision demanded nothing less than a new social world, one that replaced a political economy centered on the accumulation of capital and extraction of value with one concerned with the direct realization of all radical human needs, the fulfillment of the multifaceted individuality of *all* persons. It is this cosmopolitan aspiration underlying Marx's notion of emancipation however that has been routinely downplayed in Marxist literature and which this chapter intends to redress.

This chapter explores Marx's vision of human emancipation through the concepts of species-being, defined as the full self-actualization of one's individual capacities, and communism that Marx came to regard as the ideal socioeconomic association to bring about the conditions for the creation of the "all-rounded" or "rich" individual. This places Marx's praxeological commitments for actualizing the potential of all human beings—the "totality of human manifestations of life"—as the key component of his vision of communist association that is a "stage of historical development in the process of human emancipation."⁴ It is contended however, that Marx's emancipatory vision remains inadequate because of the limited ethical sphere envisioned in communist society and the underdevelopment of intersubjectivity in cosmopolitan community that has become particularly pronounced in later Marxist accounts. If, as Marx suggests in the opening quote taken from "On the Jewish Question," emancipation is the restoration of the human world and all human relationships to ourselves, then this totality must necessarily include social relations within the cosmopolitan sphere to make emancipation actual for all. I make two arguments in support of this thesis regarding the contraction of cosmopolitanism in Marx's thought: (1) the relative underdevelopment of intersubjectivity as a result of the overemphasis on production rather than social relations in communist association; and (2) the curtailment of universality through privileging statist and internationalist forms of political community in opposition to cosmopolitan association. Ultimately, it is argued that full, human emancipation requires a more radical cosmopolitan imaginary than provided by Marx but which nevertheless remains latent in his thought.

HUMAN EMANCIPATION AND SPECIES-BEING IN EARLY MARX

The Kantian and Hegelian undertones in Marx's notion of human emancipation are palpable. Marx called for the end of fractured human existence and, in the Kantian refrain, intended to actualize the "categorical imperative to overthrow all circumstances in which man is humiliated, enslaved, abandoned and despised." Yet, similar to both Rousseau and Hegel, Marx considered attaining such freedom as a social achievement

that hinged on whether the individual related to itself as a universal being with, and through, all others.⁵ The variegated nature of an individual's unique potential could only be realized socially, that is, where the full development of each was made compatible and reliant on the development and freedom of all others. Whereas for Rousseau this social realm was to arise, somehow, from isolated individuals shackled together under the organicism of the "general will," and whereas for Hegel sociality came about through the coercive institutions of the state working in concert with the "cunning of reason" above civil society, for Marx it was to come about through the self-determination of the species itself. This demanded a profoundly different philosophy than Kant or Hegel had hitherto provided—not one of a perpetual sundering of the is and the ought, nor of the postreflective judgment of Minerva who only begins her flight at dusk—but a conscious being making its own history, creating the conditions of its own self-emancipation.

Marx deployed emancipation both as an exhortative ideal for the immediate improvement of human conditions in which the working class, and the universal interest it represented, had a world to gain, *and*, as a tool of critique to condemn the alienation endemic to capitalist society.⁶ The difficulty is that Marx's specific references to emancipation and communist society are tantalizing in their brevity and presented less systematically than most, if not all, of his other ideas. As many commentators have lamented, it is frustrating that Marx extrapolated so little on a concept so central to his entire thought.⁷ Nevertheless, from those passages on species-being, human emancipation and communism, we can infer Marx's ideal in its positive, albeit, fragmentary form. Despite this definitional absence, and the fact that in his later years the term emancipation is not used as regularly as in his pre-1848 works, the writings of the so-called historic period (1861–1867) and beyond continue to express emancipatory themes so that the concept cannot be sundered from the artistic whole. The unalienated or "total man" of the *Paris Manuscripts* reappears in *Capital*, and the *Grundrisse* confirmed that the themes of 1843–1844 regarding human emancipation remained central for the Marx of 1858. As such, Marx's later writings assume rather than divorce themselves from the ideal of human emancipation and can be understood only in reference to this seminal theme, without which there would be no normative underpinning for his ideal of communist society or his critique of capitalism. This marked degree of continuity in Marx's thought—as the vast majority of Marxian scholars now agree—can be read as a systematic, unified attempt to ground human emancipation in a new form of society immanent to capitalism.⁸

Marx's concept of human emancipation first emerged around 1843, well before his study of political economy, his turn to communism, or his discovery of the proletariat. Marx distinguished between various expressions

of emancipation, from the political (general and formal), to the emancipation of specific groups (particular and limited), and “full” or “human” emancipation that he favored.⁹ In his famous polemic against Bruno Bauer, Marx deployed the normative idea of human emancipation to highlight the limitations of formal emancipation through the state. While he did not define the concept, textual analysis suggests that emancipation referred to the formation of social conditions in which a person is self-directing in their “life,” “activities,” and “relationships” (a theme that re-emerges in Marx’s notion of non-alienated labor).¹⁰ What Marx designated as full, human emancipation connoted the restoration of the world and all relationships to humankind: the removal of all political, economic, and historical restrictions imposed on the potential development of humanity and every individual in it.¹¹ Emancipation through communism embodied the “genuine resolution” of a true community and it is this substantive ideal that replaced Marx’s earlier calls for the radicalizing of democracy that he had discovered could only ever be merely formal.¹² Where before 1842–1843 Marx had called for a new form of state that embodied “freer popular consciousness,” his later notion of human emancipation sought to move beyond the egoism of civil society and the institutions of even the most radical democratic polities.¹³ In this conceptual movement, we can see that Marx effectively overcame his earlier romanticized notion of democracy as a means to promote freedom in abstraction from the social, economic, and political relations it required. Nevertheless, his account of human emancipation, at this stage, lacked a specific institutional system for its attainment. Indeed, while adumbrating his ideas of human emancipation and species-being in the so-called transitional period (1842–1844), Marx remained critical of communist theory. It was only in the *Manuscripts* of 1844 that Marx began to embrace communism as the ideal socioeconomic form to realize human emancipation.

How Marx distinguishes human emancipation from existing political forms is critical for understanding his eventual move to communism. Human emancipation is presented by Marx as the sublation of political emancipation as espoused in liberal constitutionalism and the doctrines of the Rights of Man. In this movement, human emancipation both exposes the limits of formal, political equality and rises above the notion of freedom as egoism to what Marx called “social freedom.”¹⁴ Political emancipation confirmed the separation of state and civil society, the battle between egoistic self-interest and an ideal universality. It was neither a complete nor a consistent form of emancipation. The state could formally remove religious, property, or racial qualifications from the ambit of citizenship but this did not mean that people were really freed from them, or, that such differences disappeared from civil society to no longer effect private life. Rather, as the Rights of Man assumed atomized and mutually antagonistic civil relations, it could only serve to confirm the separation

of persons and not their universal association under citizenship.¹⁵ Freedom was reduced to a form of self-alienating individualism preoccupied with positive possession and negative rights, the ability to own and to contract, rather than a freedom of individual self-development expressed socially, in and through, others. Yet Marx did not therefore denigrate the value of political emancipation, or the civil rights that accompanied it.¹⁶ What he did was to reveal the fundamental limitations of this conception of freedom constrained as it was by egoism, private property rights and free competition that, rather than being the embodiment of freedom, suspended its individual expression.

In Marx's view, political emancipation constituted the highest form of emancipation possible within capitalism and yet its bourgeois ontology actively precluded the expression of other—higher—forms of freedom, such as the freedom to develop one's full capacities. Political emancipation mired itself in the granting of civil rights and formal protections (as exemplified in the French and American Constitutions), yet these so-called Rights of Man merely expressed bourgeois values of individualism and had little social about them. As in Bentham's utilitarianism, these documents abstracted the modern shopkeeper as "natural" man, effacing the diversity of humanity under an essentialized type of particularity characteristic of capitalist society and its competitive ethos in which everybody "looks only to himself." It was bourgeois personhood and not public citizenship that was believed to characterise the true and authentic man.¹⁷ In this way, political emancipation abstracted the real differences between the members of civil society and made them appear nonpolitical. The myth that the state was somehow representative of the common interest was based on the fictive notion of the equality of citizenship. Yet formal equality did not abolish the material differences that divided them. The universality of citizenship was "unactual" or "unreal" because in their real existence, persons related to each other only negatively as competitors within civil society so that each led a "double life": whereas in the state the person considered themselves a "communal being," in civil society they were a "private individual" that treated others "as means" and reduced themselves "to a means."¹⁸ The state was relegated to formal, negative activity that was impotent to combat the unsocial consequences springing from the asocial nature of civil society and the glaring material inequalities that rendered the equality of citizenship under bourgeois society a "colossal illusion."¹⁹

On its own, political emancipation could not overcome the egoism of civil society to draw all up to real equality promised by citizenship but it also undermined positive freedoms in relations of community and was thereby a barrier to fuller forms emancipation that could emerge only through social power.²⁰ By reducing freedom to the right of property, contract and the pursuit of self-interest, political emancipation inverted the idea of social

freedom so that relations with others were viewed not as realizations of, but as limitations to, one's individualized liberty. This was a one-sided understanding of emancipation precisely because it was not based on the association of persons but on their radical separation. As liberalism considered that the only force that brought human beings together was "the gain and the private interest of each," all that was left for individuals in their relations with each other was "to contract oneself out."²¹ The ontological man assumed in this relationship was the "un-social man" that could only ever reproduce the contradiction between the particular and the universal. Political emancipation was not final or absolute but could only ever be one step in the ongoing process of emancipation. It could not restore the world and human relations back to humankind, just as it could not redeem or make possible the full creative powers of each individual. For Marx, the limitations of political emancipation could only be sublated by actualizing "social freedom," by "organising all the conditions of human existence on the basis of social freedom."²²

The bourgeoisie's push for political emancipation, particularly its opposition to the privileges of the nobility as the *raison d'être* for its (momentary) revolutionary zeal, had appeared as general emancipation for all classes. For this moment, its aims corresponded to a universalizable but narrow aspect of emancipation.²³ Yet while the "mass" were enthusiastic and interested in the bourgeois revolution for this reason, they did not find their actual interests but, in the end, only the "exclusive power and the *political* recognition" of the bourgeoisie's "own *special* interest."²⁴ The rhetorical use of liberal ideals continued only so long as the bourgeoisie sought to erode the privileges of the nobility and ended soon after its capture of state power that it now wielded against the mass. The nature of bourgeois interest was unveiled in its unwillingness to overcome the forms of social injustice that resulted from unequal property rights that the bourgeoisie now used the state apparatus—that it had wrested from the hands of the nobility—to formally protect. Instead of furthering the ideals of *Liberté, Fraternité, Égalité*, the now dominant class used political emancipation to capture and instrumentalize the state as the tool for the promotion of its own interests. In distinction, as would become clear in *The Eighteenth Brumaire*, Marx sought to make such ideals realizable by stripping away the ideological veil of private property rights that hindered their full articulation.²⁵

Marx's critique of political emancipation was also inextricably linked to his break with Hegel. While Marx shared Hegel's deepest aspirations regarding transforming social reality into a rational order of freedom, this gave way when the harmony of Hegel's ideal *Reichstaat* was revealed as sheer fantasy against the reality of bourgeois civil society. Marx subjected Hegel's conception of the state to a rigorous ontological interrogation, finding that Hegel had merely celebrated its abstract and

speculative "idea" rather than its empirical reality.²⁶ The problem centered on Hegel's idealist reification of the state that had subjectivized its ideal rather than its "active forms." For Marx, not everyone could feel the independence and self-respect that Hegel assumed within civil society. This intrinsic defect in Hegel's political program arose from the arbitrariness and egoism lying at the heart of the system that, instead of instantiating the ideal of rational freedom, expressed only the interests of the most dominant sections within civil society. Hegel had provided the most complete expression of the philosophy and the state but it lacked any analysis of the state in its concrete existence including its "imperfection," the "degeneracy of its flesh"—that yawning chasm between Hegel's ideal union of particular and universal in *Sittlichkeit* and what Nietzsche would call the atomizing swirl of egoisms in civil society. In Hegel, the state was deployed to subordinate the subjective freedom of individuals expressed in civil society to a higher authority in order to give concrete ethicality to the universal. Yet, Hegel's specific institutions of the corporation and *polizei* did not create the conditions for the flourishing of rational freedom he intended but were limiting conditions imposed externally upon it. The fact that Hegel saw these institutions as necessary to subordinate civil society revealed that the state could not achieve the ideal reconciliation of the universal and particular assumed by his ideal notion of *Sittlichkeit* but was instead a form of compulsion.²⁷

For Marx, the contradiction between Hegel's ideal state and the realities of civil society could be resolved only through the radical humanization of *Sittlichkeit* and the movement toward human emancipation in which each member of the ethical system possessed and exercised actual, rational freedom. In this sense, Marx offered not a rejection of the Hegelian ideal but a radicalization of its vision, an attempt to replace the "illusory form" of the *Reichstaat* by realizing its essence through "social power."²⁸ Here, the goal of establishing genuine, harmonious species-life called for nothing less than for the "revolution to be permanent" including overcoming all forms of domination and alienation, moving from mere political emancipation to human emancipation.²⁹ This did not mean fortifying the state, or shackling the egoism in civil society to some fanciful universal, but the sublation of this antagonism itself. Political emancipation had created the demand that it be consistent with its own principles and had armed the mass with the political freedoms necessary for the movement toward full emancipation. What remained to be done, as stated by Bloch, was to transform liberty, equality, and fraternity of the purely political citizen into the "living energies of living men."³⁰ For Marx, this move to human emancipation could be advanced only when the individual drew back the "abstract citizen" (that included both man in civil society and communal man) into itself, when the private and public essences of humanity were reunited.³¹ This required the conditions in which species-being could thrive.

Marx's commitment to human emancipation through his critique of the Rights of Man, the bourgeois revolution, and the liberal state, can be seen as an attempt to sublimate the contradictions inherent to political emancipation. Yet this is only the negative overcoming of the political form in Marx's dialectic of freedom. The positive movement, in contrast, stems from the human emancipation is a sublation of the contradictions in political emancipation. Yet this is only the negative overcoming of the political form in Marx's dialectic of freedom, the positivity of which stems from the idea of species-being that Marx imputed with acute sociopolitical significance—something that could be attained only through human emancipation. The concept of species-being, developed from Feuerbach, had two chief connotations: the social basis of human consciousness and the understanding of ourselves as members of a species; and, the species' powers, capacities, and needs unique to humankind, including our potential as social (universal) beings. Species-being is manifested in the sensuous characteristics of being human that establish the framework in which human existence takes place and by the activities that can be achieved only by being human. It was in creating the social conditions in which species-being could be fully actualized—in Marx's words, "bringing out" all our shared "species-powers"—that formed the normative underpinning of human emancipation.³² Both connotations of species-being (species-life and species-power) projected the necessity of a form of political community that had overcome the state/civil society duality and elevated life toward unified, social man.³³

Species-being remained Marx's lifelong concern, prevalent in both *Capital* and the *Grundrisse* (even though it is employed less frequently) and was made the aim of communist society that was to provide the conditions in which the range of "life activities" were given the widest possible expression. Through social cooperation the individual "strips off the fetters of his individuality, and develops the capabilities of his species."³⁴ This normative concept also underpinned Marx's critique of capitalism given that capitalism's principal defect was how it alienated species-being from humankind, precluding the full development of our unique capacities as individuals and the free expression of our life-activity as a species. This nexus between species-power and species-being meant that "free, conscious activity" were expansive notions that expressed humankind's unique capacity for creativity and self-determination rather than simply labor. To be a species-being was to be endowed with the capacities to be consciously self-transcending, to re-make one's own conditions, both individually and collectively. Humanity carried within itself the tools of its self-emancipation and Marx looked to how these potentialities could and ought to be manifested "under conditions most worthy of their human nature."³⁵

As can be seen, species-being and human emancipation formed the nexus between Marx's conception of freedom and his vision of communist society that was to realize them fully. The egalitarian liberty presupposed in the idea of species-being was to be realized by securing the right of all

human beings to the social recognition of their individual abilities and potentialities, in a universal form of association that would bring about these conditions for all. Species-being forms the fundamental driver behind Marx's account of the type of social relations within this new form of communist association. In the *Manuscripts*, Marx identified species-being on both an individual and universal level. Here, species-being as "a being for himself," represented both an individual person and humanity as a whole, and could be actualized only through human emancipation that would give rise to the conditions in which "*objective human relation[s]*" could thrive. Expressed alternatively, through a process of reciprocal recognition in human emancipation, albeit one overdetermined by self-consciousness, the "I" could relate to all others humanly because all others now related humanly to it.³⁶ As Ollman has observed, this parallels similar accounts of recognition elsewhere.³⁷ Through this elevated form of consciousness arises an awareness of being part of humanity, the recognition of others as possessing needs and capacities similar to one's own and, ultimately, the understanding of oneself—and all humankind—as free beings.³⁸ Here, the recognitive dimensions to the concept of species-being regarding its inherent reciprocity and social awareness offer the primary resources for the revolutionary transformation of society toward a universal association. The question is whether the radicalism inherent to both human emancipation and species-being could be adequately realized in Marx's projected ideal of international communism.

THE LIMITS OF MARX'S VISION OF COMMUNIST ASSOCIATION

For Marx, the realization of species-being and human emancipation was possible only through the collective effort of humankind and the full utilization of social power. Based on his notion of the interdependency of the individual in community, his vision was suggestive of the power of cooperation in enhancing the freedom of the individual: that is, as social beings, it was only in "real community" that the individual had the actual means to "cultivate their gifts in all directions" and obtain their personal freedom "in and through their associations." Ultimately, it was only in the nonalienated sphere of communism—where "universal intercourse" was controlled by all—that individuals would be in a position to achieve such "self-activity" without restriction to develop all their capacities.³⁹ Marx considered communism a society in which the richest flourishing of human individuality could occur, because it affirmed the free unfolding of all unique capacities of the individual in genuine association with all others. It was for this reason that Marx committed himself to the complete abolition of private property because only this, he believed, could open the space for a social realm of cooperative, free, and associated producers: a "social system free from social oppression and worthy of man."⁴⁰

Communism as a movement toward human emancipation can be seen as the dialectical sublation of the limits of emancipation that had both separated man's private and communal self, and, had abstracted the social basis of human freedom by reducing it to the pursuit of self-interest—as discussed in the “Jewish Question.”

Communism then did not refer solely to changes in the means of production but connoted the radical transformation of the totality of human existence. This view is typified in the *Manuscripts* and *The German Ideology*, where Marx described communist society as a place where each person felt at home, positioning notions of care, respect, self-worth, and recognition as central. What emerged was a vision of emancipation premised on two essential themes: a cooperative social sphere with the common ownership of the means of production and a society where the free-development of all had become “a tangible reality, a secular maxim.”⁴¹ Just as important as the freeing of labor time and the abrogation of private property was the association these changes would produce and the different forms of social relations they would foster. In this section, rather than explicating the content of the various models of communism Marx presented—something already addressed by Ollman and others⁴²—I wish to explore the type of association that Marx envisioned and how far his notion of community extended. Here, I draw out two of the ways in which Marx's institutional account of communist association led to a restriction, rather than an enrichment, of social relations between all human beings: firstly by an overemphasis on production that contributed to the determinism of Orthodox Marxism; and secondly, by neglecting cosmopolitan social relations in deference to the state and internationalism that served to contract the boundaries of ethical community.

The Contraction of Community through the Emphasis on Production Rather than Social Relations

For Marx and Engels there is a fundamental nexus between freedom and the manner of relations in society because it is only in “real community” that individuals can “obtain their freedom in and through their association.” As they affirm in *The German Ideology*, “[o]nly in community [has each] individual the means of cultivating his gifts in all directions; only in the community, therefore, is personal freedom possible.”⁴³ This view was confirmed in the *Grundrisse* where Marx stipulated that human emancipation and the rich individual was conditional on the form of association in society.⁴⁴ Communism was to be the means by which humankind not only brought exchange and production under their collective control but also the mode of their “mutual relations”;⁴⁵ the relational conditions through which “the complete return of man to himself as a *social* (i.e. human) being could arise.”⁴⁶ The revolutionary dimension of communist society then lies not just in its potential to unfetter production but in its new form of

association that offers the recognition of all our unique needs and capacities and in making their full articulation the goal of social life.

This reciprocity between individuals within real community reveals the presence of a specific recognitive dimension in communist society that is reminiscent of the ideal, if not the letter, of Hegel's Master/Slave dialectic in the *Phenomenology*. As Marx writes, in communist society "individual need" has become a "human need" to the extent—and on the condition—that "the other person as a person has become for [the other] a need." Here, each individual recognizes their existence, and the existence of the other, as a "social being."⁴⁷ Only through the specific intersubjective relations unique to communist society can the all-rounded individual of Marx's earlier writings emerge because only here are all persons affirmed in actual and direct association with each other. Indeed, "man's consciousness of the necessity of associating with the individuals around him is the beginning of the consciousness that he is living in society at all."⁴⁸ The notion of "association" is therefore given transformative substance, gravitas, in Marx's account of communism because it is not just in our workplace, productive activity, or free-time, but throughout the ensemble of social relations that we recognize and (re)produce ourselves, and each other, as rich human beings. The actualization of individual capacities within communism was paralleled with an increase in cooperative activities of humankind as a whole and Marx used terms such as "communal activity," "communal consumption," "real association with other men," and the "direct expression of society" as indicative of the enhancement of relations of mutuality that was to take place in communist society. These new social activities involved a heightened form of mutual recognition where one's own "immediate activity" confirmed, at the same time, "his own existence for other men . . . and their existence for him."⁴⁹

This emphasis on social relations is not just part of Marx's political vision but fundamental to his ontology, from the concept of species-being to his method of political economy. For example, whereas Feuerbach's conception of species-being was built on the ontological separation of human agents rather than their relationality within community (or, as Feuerbach expressed it, "on the reality of the *distinction* between I and thou"),⁵⁰ Marx transformed this into an individual within a particular society. Here, "the essence of man" was not to be located in the hypostatized, isolated individual, abstracted from history and community, but was to be found in "its *actuality*," that is, within "the ensemble of social relations."⁵¹ Human beings, for Marx, exhibited their species-being, their essence, in and through their social relations.⁵² The centrality of social relations is equally present in "The Method of Political Economy" that Marx outlined in the *Grundrisse*. Here, Marx writes against the tendency to focus downwardly from the abstraction of macro-subjects (such as populations in classical political economy) to even "thinner abstractions," for such approaches could only

ever arrive at the “simplest determination” of things because they do not consider how such phenomena ascend from “simple relations.” Only by the careful analysis of this ascendancy of relations can we move from a “chaotic conception of a whole” to “a rich totality of many determinations and relations.”⁵³ So while it appears that the “real and concrete” can be adequately grasped at the macro level, it is only by understanding the basic social relations that constitute them that the totality, in all its complexity, can be known.

The centrality of social relations to Marx’s thought is pervasive, extending to the cosmopolitan sphere—though, as we shall see in the last section, not forming a part of his political program. The key example is Marx’s reference to the “universal intercourse” between all persons adumbrated in *The German Ideology*. In this passage, Marx writes of the formation of global relations through the development of capitalism that overcome mere local attachments but which “produces in all nations simultaneously the phenomenon of the ‘propertyless’ mass,” “alienation” and “universal competition.” These deformed social relations of “universal intercourse” under capitalism are to be sublated through communism—specifically, the “universal development of productive forces and the world intercourse”—to bring forth “world-historical, empirically universal individuals” in place of alienated, local particularities under capitalism.⁵⁴ The totality of social relations that Marx implies in the concept of “universal intercourse” is an expansive one and yet it is one that has since been typically misunderstood by those Marxist scholars who attach importance solely to overcoming the alienation of the property-less mass and bringing an end to generalized want. Yet the conditions of propertylessness, want, and alienation denote a relational absence within global capitalism, an absence not strictly reducible to augmenting material production without corresponding changes to how we relate to property and each other.

The German Ideology reminds us that it is not just the mode or function of productive forces but the relational conditions between persons in production that is of key importance for understanding the machinations of global capitalism as well as for human emancipation; indeed, they are two-sides of the same dialectical coin.⁵⁵ World-historical individuals are interested in their emancipation from the same, universally alienating conditions of global capitalism as experienced within the context of their unique cultural/local situation in the world economy. Moreover, their interest is not only negative but finds its positive affectation in overcoming (*aufhebung*) existing forms of universal intercourse that are alienating conditions, and rendering them genuinely social. Yet, it is the fundamentality of such global social relations within communist association that has been significantly downplayed in favor of a deterministic account of productivism that came to dominate the Second International, Dialectical Materialism, and Stalinism (or Orthodox Marxism, more generally).⁵⁶ Some, based on Part II of *The*

German Ideology, believed communism to be solely reliant on the historical development of production; others on a myopic reading of *Capital*, believed that communism could emerge only beyond the realm of necessity, thereby equating emancipation with material abundance; and others still, lifting ideas out of the context of the *Gotha Programme* and adopting Engels's later portrayal of communism that neglected any mention of the conditions of full human emancipation, presented the dictatorship of the proletariat as communism.⁵⁷ Within all these models, full emphasis is placed on production, modernization, and industrialization to attain the place where "springs of co-operative wealth flow more abundantly." And in each account, freedom is therefore not only made contingent on the level of production necessary to achieve it but is to be actively subsumed—at least initially—under this goal of production. Against this tide, the philosophy of intersubjectivity in human emancipation that Marx outlined failed to develop in any meaningful sense within radical Marxist currents, until recently.⁵⁸

Instead of social relations, Orthodox Marxists came to emphasize the necessity of productive forces as structurally determinative of the process of social transformation, subsuming emancipation under industrial reorganization and interests of consumption. Yet such forms of communism appear just as one-sided as "crude" communism that Marx so vehemently dismissed because both neglect the positive sublation of private property that would allow for the reappropriation of "*human essence* through and for man." To focus on material abundance as the determination of communism is to fall prey to the same bourgeois reduction of freedom to property, of mistaking acquisition of material goods for actual social freedom. Like crude communism's ethic of absolute equality, wealth abstracted from the social goals of emancipation and species-being is but an alienated expression derived from purely economic categories that reflect the narrow demands of bourgeois society and its notion of possessory rights.⁵⁹ Communism would not only remain constrained by bourgeois notions of property but would reproduce them. Such stages of development are not regarded by Marx as true communism, the form that has positively transcended private property relations and restored humankind to its "social" essence. Marx's ideal was a humanity that was rich not because it had much but because it was much,⁶⁰ a vision that is lost if emancipation is limited to wealth creation over the enhancement of social relations and the development of one's capacities in, and through, each other.

From the perspective of human emancipation, the totality of capitalism must be understood not by abstracting its beneficial development of productive forces away from how these same processes restrict the expression of socialistic forms of ethical life. In this regard, Orthodox Marxism's emphasis on production is analytically defunct in at least two respects: it lacks an account of relationalism that can unfetter productive forces in the socialistic manner it so desires; and, its precommitment to the benefits

of development blind it to how capitalist relations are prohibitive of the emergence of social man. Marx is keenly aware of this and indeed, as we have seen, his critique of Hegel's theory of the state was based on the premise that the class division of civil society precluded the functioning of Hegel's ideal *Sittlichkeit*. Because capitalism orients production to exchange-value (profit) it cannot create social relations of mutual freedom but is a fetter upon the type and quality of social relations we can express. The pursuit of self-interest results in mutual indifference or direct exploitation of others that suspends any genuine association from emerging, and is the basis of capitalism's systemic tendency toward the deformation of social relations. In place of wider solidarities, capitalism compresses the social sphere to one of unequal relations that in turn foster ideologies, consciousness, and interests that are focused on self-aggrandizement rather than mutuality. The end, Marx states obliquely, is "total isolation."⁶¹

This contradiction inherent to capitalist modernity is discussed by Marx throughout his writings. In *Capital* he refers to how the division of labor subsumes not only economics but all social spheres so that fragmented/alienated individuals emerge everywhere—evidence of a global relational deficiency throughout the "entanglement of all peoples in the net of the world market."⁶² Marx had praised the French Socialists because they illustrated this process most clearly. Their critique revealed "the contradictions and unnaturalness of modern life not only in the relationships of particular classes, but in all circles and forms of modern intercourse."⁶³ These global contradictions of capitalist modernity are presented in their fullness in the *Manifesto*, between how capitalism spurs universal interdependence, intercourse in every direction, and gives a cosmopolitan character to production and consumption, while at the same time rendering developing countries dependent on civilized ones, exposing all workers to the vicissitudes of competition, and bringing "uninterrupted disturbance to all social conditions," "everlasting uncertainty and agitation," "naked, shameless, direct, brutal exploitation." Here, there is nothing left of social relations other than "naked self-interest," and the "callous 'cash payment.'"⁶⁴ By fortifying these very social pathologies in order to reach material abundance Orthodox Marxism has had the unwanted side-effect of distorting—if not entirely preventing—the formation of relations of solidarity that the turn to communism is predicated upon. If, as Marx claims in the *Gotha Programme*, we have to deal with communist society not as if it develops on its own foundations but "as it emerges from capitalist society," that is, as something "stamped with the birthmarks of the old society from whose womb it emerges," then we can discern why attempts at revolution through the production and abundance mantra of Orthodox Marxism have been doomed.⁶⁵ For such movements cannot realize the socialistic presuppositions of community, solidarity, and association necessary to sustain the

turn to communism because its emergent form of ethical life is dictated by, and unwittingly reproduces, capitalist relationalities.

There is a long historical and geographical trajectory to the painful expansion of capitalism that is lost if we neglect social relations in favor of production. Far from being the harbinger of progress, the emergent capitalist society of the 18th century subverted new forms of communal relations from arising, just as it destroyed preexisting forms of the commons within feudal society. Habermas speaks of "violent onset of a competitive society" in terms of the breakdown of the family, neighborhood, and guild relations that it prompted, the disappearance of which were "experienced as a loss."⁶⁶ Yet the process effaced bonds of community not just in rural areas or the West, but on a global scale across colonial and indigenous peoples also. For Federici, in contradistinction to Orthodox Marxism, capitalism arrested the rising tide of communalism and today requires ongoing infusions of requisitioned capital through, among others, the expropriation of women's unpaid labor, the resources, knowledge, labor, and lands of postcolonial states and indigenous peoples.⁶⁷ Failing to recognize these contradictions in the dialectic of history, Orthodox Marxism condemns communities in the periphery—and all future generations—to some abstract template of historical development that compels the recreation of the horrors of capitalist industrialization in order to achieve emancipation. It also assumes that such peoples cannot be the agents of their own freedom, given their existent levels of economic development. Such beliefs mystify the nature of alienation in capitalism as a structural necessity and willfully ignore other forms of emancipatory relations that either preexisted or have survived alongside it.

Retrieving such forms of social relations amenable to human emancipation from the premodern and archaic periods became a noticeable concern in Marx's later studies. In particular he focused on how, despite their lack of productive forces, precapitalist (particularly agrarian) communities retained the kinds of relational resources necessary for communism which had been lost in Western modernity. In Marx's famous letter to Vera Zasulich he affirmed the "*natural viability*" of the commune as a "*direct point of departure* for the economic system towards which modern society tends; it can turn over a new leaf . . . without passing through the capitalist regime." Within its type of social relations, he claimed, lay the "fulcrum" or "element" of social regeneration, which was singled out as its "element of superiority" over countries, which, despite their developed productive forces, were nevertheless enslaved by the capitalist system.⁶⁸ Similar themes are presented in his 1882 preface to the *Manifesto* where Marx theorized that the Russian *obshchina*, as a form of "primeval common ownership of land," could complement the proletarian revolution in the West. Surprisingly here, it was not the economically developed proletariat that was given transformative agency but the relations of the common

ownership of land within the *obshchina* that could “serve” as the “starting point for communist development.”⁶⁹

The Contraction of Cosmopolitan Community through the State and Internationalism

So far we have seen how Marx’s vision of emancipation and his critique of capitalism were far more relational than many of his Orthodox disciples took account. There were clear intersubjective dimensions to communist society and the way individual freedom was to unfold through the utilization of social power in genuine association. Conversely, it was the deformation of social relations that occurred under capitalism (dominated, as they were, by interests in profit and the extraction of value) that were the focus of his contempt. However, one question that has been consistently overlooked in critiques of Marx’s work concerns the adequacy of internationalism as a form of global political community for bringing about the conditions of species-being and human emancipation for all. If, as we have seen from the *Grundrisse*, the production of social beings and the rich individual is conditional on the form of association in community⁷⁰ and if, as stated in *The German Ideology*, only in “a real community [can] individuals obtain their freedom in and through their association,”⁷¹ this question is crucial to the actualization of human emancipation. As many have confirmed—Hobsbawm and Gilbert in particular—Marx’s horizon was firmly international, established on the principles of a unity of the class struggle globally and the simple laws of morals and justice in international relations.⁷² The point of institutional mediation between the individual and society was to be the nation-state; beyond it, solidarity was to be outwardly expressed through internationalism. Yet binding association to a national particularity threatens to reproduce the systemic limitations of both the nation-state and the international system on the expression of human community. While many anarchists critiques have been made of the problem of the state and the authoritarian use of political power that arises from Marx’s political commitment to it, the issue I wish to interrogate is why Marx deemed internationalism a sufficient global form of ethical community for communist association, as opposed to a wider cosmopolitan ethic implied in the normative concept of human emancipation.

Part of this question can be answered by understanding the role of the dictatorship of the proletariat in the process of emancipation, a stage that—returning to themes in *The Holy Family* and *The Jewish Question*—equated to the political emancipation of the working class and the control of the state apparatus in, and by, its own interest. In the *Manifesto*, this phase is said to be marked by the establishment of democracy and the centralization of the instruments of production in the state, elements

confirmed in Marx's *Address to the Communist League Manuscripts*, *Gotha Programme*, and the *Grundrisse*.⁷³ On the one hand, Marx describes this notion of communal control as a form of social power that possessed the ability to transcend centralization and in its place develop an association. On the other, this stage embodied a strong centralization of state power in its own terms, with two key differences from the existing bourgeois state being that it was to be an active rather than parliamentary body and that all delegates were to be immediately revocable. These dimensions were believed to restore the legitimate functions of the state to "responsible agents of society" and, in the place of the state, create "free and associated labor" and "co-operative production."⁷⁴ What prevents this phase from being emancipatory is that its "despotic inroads" against the right of property involve an instrumental use of state power in which the proletariat is ascendant. With the move to material abundance and social relations in which private property had not only been abrogated but forgotten,⁷⁵ Marx believed these coercive functions or "political character" of the state would no longer be necessary—the only tasks left being administrative, public functions that would be placed in the hands of the vast association.⁷⁶

Marx's commitment to the state was premised on raising it to the international level of interdependence and cooperation. As his comments on the cosmopolitan nature of the Paris Commune illustrate, Marx clearly expected the dictatorship of the proletariat to be worldwide phenomena, leading to what he elsewhere referred to as "united co-operative societies."⁷⁷ With the abolition of private property, the basis of the divisions in capitalist society and in the society of states would cease to exist. Yet while there would no longer be a division between states, nations, and natural diversity of the species, this did not mean the creation of a world state or a Kantian federation of states. There was to be no world parliament or army, and as Ollman has observed, aside from the global coordination of production, no world executive.⁷⁸ Rather, communism sought to liberate from national/local barriers the connections between the "material and intellectual production of the whole world" so that all people were "in a position to acquire the capacity to enjoy this all-sided production of the whole earth (the creations of man)." Through communism, the "world-historical co-operation of individuals" would achieve "the control and conscious mastery of these powers."⁷⁹ Marx placed much emphasis—and hope—in this ever-expanding international union of workers and the reduction of national antagonisms that would go along with it.⁸⁰

The problem inheres not just with the capture of state power that threatens the subversion of emancipation under a new ruling-class but equally the reliance on internationalism that is supposed to override the radical particularism of the state and render emancipation human and universal. This tension was played out in the First International. Its proclamations implored workers of the world to unite, for all citizens to be "declared

free and equal, without reserve," and its insistence that "The poor have no country."⁸¹ Membership and fraternity were open to all because "the emancipation of labor," it claimed, was "neither a local nor a national, but a social problem, embracing all countries in which modern society exists."⁸² Yet at the same time, it remained committed to nationalism affirming in 1872 that true internationalism "must necessarily be based upon a distinctly national organization" and that the first duty of each member organization was "to establish their own national independence." Only in this way, it was believed, could the workers of the world "act together in harmony for their common emancipation."⁸³

There is a clear tension then between Marx's formal commitments to internationalism and a far more expansive cosmopolitan ethic operating within his notion of human emancipation. The problem has since been how to reconcile the national form of struggle with the totality implied in Marx's vision of human emancipation. The First International's rather limited goal of promoting fraternal bonds by acting as a medium of communication between member organizations meant that this contradiction did not arise sharply. As stated by Marx, the International "gives the greatest play to local energy and independence. In fact, the International is not properly a government for the working class at all. It is a bond of union rather than a controlling force."⁸⁴ Of course, Marx implied a far stronger form of international solidarity than what we today understand by the term. Indeed, his views on the emancipatory character of nationalism reflected the populist movements of the time that juxtaposed the old Europe of the Holy Alliance and its aristocratic privilege to the new Europe born of national liberation. Even though he would deride the nationalism of Mazzini and others as "nothing better than the old idea of a middle-class republic,"⁸⁵ long before the nationalistic violence of the 20th century and the increasingly xenophobic nationalism of today, Marx could still consider socialistic internationalism consistent with, and as part of, the emancipation of subordinate classes. Similarly, Marx's belief that the "simple laws or morals and justice" could prevail in international relations⁸⁶ reflected, in part, the relative stability of Europe between the Vienna Congress (1815) and World War I (1914). Nevertheless, his reliance on the nation-state and internationalism appears one of the most confused, if not contradictory, aspects of his entire political program: For if, as he so famously claimed in the *Manifesto*, the executive of the modern state is "nothing but a committee for the bourgeoisie," then why did he permit the national ethos that it deploys to cloak itself in legitimacy, to form the boundary of future communist association?

The result is a political trap from which human emancipation cannot be extricated. On the one hand, subordinating human emancipation to national concerns made it prisoner to schemes of the national interest that are given a priori significance. Socialism is made to serve national

ends, rather than the converse. We see this dynamic being played out in many subsequent Marxist revolutions: Cuba's radical nationalism under Castro that was more Martí than Marx; China's political program that firmly wedded socialism to Chinese characteristics; or the Soviet Union under Stalin came to increasingly rely on allusions to Great Patriotism that ended with the dismemberment of the spirit of internationalism and a foreign policy that mirrored capitalist America.⁸⁷ On the other hand, Marx's commitment to methodological nationalism also limited how international solidarity could be institutionally expressed. Internationalism is logically dependent on some conception of nationalism, so that its referent is always the nation-state. The limits of internationalism are the limits of the national ideology that underpins it, that is, the belief that struggles at the national level are sufficient to achieve political objectives, even those to be externalized beyond the state. Marx's prioritization of the national level of struggle was masked by rhetorical commitments to internationalism that hid this contradiction under the universal principles of solidarity, egalitarianism, and equality. Yet these same principles all gestured far beyond, and indeed required far more, than what even a socialist nation-state could offer. The International, committed to nationalism in its very name, was rendered largely impotent in such struggles because solidarity could arise only through national organs and be communicated outwardly. Yet individuals and groups—even the radical working class—confined to the state apparatus, do not dispose of any instrument of political action beyond the national boundary. Beyond legislative influence on foreign policy or executive power that remains firmly in control of the state, they were forced to rely on mere communicative iterations of solidarity.

This form of internationalism then made the mistake of viewing international politics in terms of the "pre-eminence of domestic policy,"⁸⁸ with the goal of merely leveling up liberated domestic conditions to the international sphere. Such a view does not attribute any autonomy to the international political system but assumes liberation as a necessary consequence of the transformation of the internal structures of states—the internal transformation of which is then given precedence over all international forms of emancipation. Yet because nationalism gives priority to the independence of the state, principles of international solidarity must be sacrificed in the service of this end. Herein lies the "irremediable contradiction" between the aspiration of the equality of nations in the doctrine of internationalism and their actual political division. Not until the tragedy of World War I would this contradiction come to a head in the Second International. But the roots of this split in the working class lay in the reliance on forms of international, rather than cosmopolitan, solidarity that informed the flawed voluntarist presuppositions of the International. When the working class of Western Europe began to enter progressively

into national political life through democratization and socialization between 1870 and 1914, international solidarity was undone; for these political changes gave the worker a material interest in the power of the nation-state—and more problematically—an interest in asserting these national particularities over workers in other countries.⁸⁹ As correctly observed by Levi, the “impotence of the Internationals in the face of war was not simply a casual episode, but the expression of a structural tendency.”⁹⁰ Workers of the world could not unite because the form of solidarity they could express was bounded by a limited, juridical form of community that overrode universal, collective action.

So while Marx clearly aspired to move beyond parochial, local attachments of ethical life toward the universality of human emancipation, at the same time he fortified the national institutionalization of particularism that was supposed to wither away. In so doing, he rejected a form of social relations that could retrieve human emancipation from its contraction between the state and capital: cosmopolitanism. Marx viewed cosmopolitanism in either of two ways: something in the service of bourgeois free trade (“cosmopolitan exploitation”); or, as abstract principles of “justice or humanitarian sentiment”⁹¹, both of which he dismissed. Whereas “national emancipation” was something concrete and practical, cosmopolitan appeals to “universal brotherhood” were disregarded as vain idealism, or worse, a mask for bourgeois interests.⁹² In making this assessment, Marx made a crude reduction of this concept, foregoing analysis for ideology, and thus mistaking the expression of cosmopolitan social relations deformed under capitalism as the limits of human community. That is, he made the surprising mistake of ignoring completely an important sociological dimension to human life that he himself and helped expose in his economic analysis of global capitalism. For cosmopolitanism embodies those social relations that exist in the global sphere across and above state borders, the power of which Marx attested to in *Capital*. Here, Marx had traced the expansion of capitalism across the globe, how it created new forms of intercourse across nations, adding relational dimensions hitherto unknown to older forms of society. In this context, he suggested that because of the expansion of global capitalist relations, emancipatory struggle could no longer be confined to national walls.⁹³ Viewed in this light, cosmopolitanism is not abstract but refers to the material relations of humankind across the globe; it appears sentimental or vague only when one does not understand the complexity of these material relations or loses sight of them with their deformation under capitalism.

Yet it is exactly these types of social relations that Marx ignores in deference to national forms of intercourse, neglecting the political importance of the social conditions of human emancipation beyond the state. Focusing on the national dimensions of struggle without integrating them into an analysis of the “rich totality of many determinations and relations” was undialectical and led to a range of omissions in his political

program—omissions that Marx was elsewhere wary of.⁹⁴ He wrote in *Gotha Programme* that the “framework of the present-day national state” exists within the economic “framework” of the world market, so that while the proletariat’s “own country is the immediate arena of its [class] struggle” this struggle is national not in content but in form.⁹⁵ Yet he reversed this in his political program of the International, making the form of national struggles the content of internationalist solidarity. In this way, the long-term goal of human emancipation remained bound to a bypassed form of solidarity soon irrelevant and grossly ineffective to the changed nature of the state and capital. Even at the time of Marx’s writing, the solidarity shown by the working class surpassed that of internationalism. For example, the act of workers in Manchester who organized in opposition to Lord Palmerston’s attempts to intervene for the Confederacy in the American Civil War took the form of cosmopolitan solidarity not an internationalist one: British workers blocked the intentions of their own state not in support of American nationalism or the interests of the North, nor to either promote or hinder the state based protections of the British bourgeoisie, but to end slavery and promote the interests of universal labor.⁹⁶

Consequently, Marx’s endorsement of internationalism, rather than cosmopolitanism, can be seen as an incorrect practical application of his political ethics. For the normative model of internationalism exists in the contradiction between the real-politik that necessarily inheres between competing states and the cosmopolitan ethos it projects. As Burke has recently shown, by putting the statist ontology of internationalism into question, we can see that even socialist internationalism that professes incredibly strong cosmopolitan norms remains ethically insufficient because of its acceptance of the notion that human existence is determined by the nation-state.⁹⁷ For human emancipation, the realization of the values of solidarity, egalitarianism, and equality can only ever be partially and imperfectly expressed within the state; national liberation, like political emancipation, can only ever be a stage in an ongoing process of emancipation. This problem requires nothing less than the sublation of the state: a movement that overcomes the contradiction between its particularity and its bounded form and actualizes those principles of solidarity, egalitarianism, and equality it presupposes as universal. There can be no boundaries between members in the ethical system of human emancipation.

CONCLUSION

In this chapter, we have seen that Marx’s vision of communism was premised on attaining a universal ethical community of human emancipation in which the unique species-being of each individual could flourish. This vision required at least two conditions: (1) economic conditions in which “self-activity” corresponded with the “development of individuals

into complete individuals" and (2) social relations that brought forth the "human essence" of "social power" through the "*universal* intercourse."⁹⁸ Much has been made of the first condition regarding how communism sought to overcome all forms of alienation and replace them with social conditions that confirmed the "actual individual communal being," the rich individual that is "total" and "all-sided."⁹⁹ Much less weight has been given to the requirements of the second condition and the type of social relations within full, human emancipation presupposed in Marx's notion of association. This chapter revealed a number of limitations that Marx placed on human community, firstly by an emphasis on production within Marxist thought and secondly, by a reliance on the state and internationalism.

Just as capitalist relations were exposed by Marx as fetters on relations of production, so too are statism and internationalism fetters on the type of social relations that can be expressed across all humanity. By holding to this form, Marx unwittingly reproduced the same limitations he had criticized in the doctrines of political emancipation because communism bounded by both the juridical form of the state and the delimited ethical form of internationalism would still, necessarily, involve a separation of social power from humankind "in the shape of *political* power."¹⁰⁰ The aims of internationalism are then insufficient for the movement to the worldwide association of human emancipation. Moreover, the weight given to internationalism over cosmopolitanism clouded the intersubjective social relations necessary to sustain human emancipation in a truly global communist association. For Internationalism restricts expressions of global solidarity, by prioritizing national forms of solidarity in which internationalism can only ever be a secondary ethic. What must be reclaimed in cosmopolitanism is the essence of the truly global nature of human social relations, of world community, of humanity, of genuine association.

It is said that in the years prior to Marx and the slogan "Workers of the world, Unite," the Communist League had inscribed upon its banners "We Are All Brothers and Sisters." The project of human emancipation is better represented, and would be better served, by this cosmopolitan foundation. For the spectre that haunts must be one far beyond Europe, any national particularity, or international solidarity. It must be a new cosmopolitanism, an emancipatory one.

NOTES

1. This is sometimes translated as "All emancipation is a reduction of the human world and relationships to man himself." See Karl Marx, "On the Jewish Question," in *Marx-Engels Collected Works*, vol. 3, trans. Richard Dixon et al. (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1975), 168.

2. See Karl Marx, "The Difference between the Democritean and Epicurean Philosophy of Nature," *Marx-Engels Collected Works*, vol. 1, trans. Richard Dixon et al. (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1975), 25ff; Karl Marx, "Preface to A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy," in *Karl Marx and Frederick Engels Selected Works in Two Volumes*, vol. 1 (Moscow: Foreign Languages Publishing House, Moscow 1950), 327.

3. Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, "The German Ideology," in *Marx-Engels Collected Works*, vol. 5, trans. Richard Dixon et al. (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1975), 84–85.

4. Karl Marx, "Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts," in *Marx-Engels Collected Works*, vol. 3, trans. Richard Dixon et al. (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1975), 304, 306.

5. *Ibid.*, 275.

6. This difference in inflection and use of language toward emancipation is best seen in the dichotomy between the *Manifesto* and the *Grundrisse*. See Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *The Communist Manifesto: A Modern Edition* (London: Verso, 1997), 77; and Karl Marx cited in David McLellan, ed., *Marx's Grundrisse* (St Albans: Paladin, 1973), 139.

7. See J.J. Clarke, "'The End of History': A Reappraisal of Marx's Views on Alienation and Human Emancipation," *Canadian Journal of Political Science* 4, no. 3 (1971): 367.

8. This is in distinct opposition to the Althusserians who posit an epistemological break between the Marx of the 1840s and the author of *Capital*. See Louis Althusser and Étienne Balibar, *Reading Capital* (New York: Pantheon, 1970), 25–28.

9. See Marx, "Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts," 300ff; Karl Marx, "The Emancipation Question," in *Marx-Engels Collected Works*, vol. 16, trans. Richard Dixon et al. (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1975), 139–147.

10. See Marx, "On the Jewish Question," 149, 151, 168.

11. This idea of emancipation is also visible in some of Marx's other early works where he relates the "true state" (an ideal Hegelian community) to a "free humanity." Karl Marx, "The Supplement to Nos. 335 and 336 of The Augsburg Allgemeine Zeitung on the Commissions of the Estates in Prussia," in *Marx-Engels Collected Works*, vol. 1, trans. Richard Dixon et al. (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1975), 292–306.

12. Marx, "Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts," particularly section on "Private Property and Communism," 293–305.

13. Karl Marx, "In Connection with the Article 'Failures of the Liberal Opposition in Hanover' Editorial Note," in *Marx-Engels Collected Works*, vol. 1, trans. Richard Dixon et al. (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1975), 265.

14. Karl Marx, "Introduction to a Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Law," in *Marx-Engels Collected Works*, vol. 3, trans. Richard Dixon et al. (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1975), 175.

15. Marx, "On the Jewish Question," 152. Marx's earlier work on Press Freedom raises similar themes regarding abstract, indirect, and partial nature of political emancipation and formal freedoms. Karl Marx, "Debates on the Freedom of the Press," in *Marx-Engels Collected Works*, vol. 3, trans. Richard Dixon et al. (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1975), 132–181.

16. It should be noted that republicanism and universal suffrage were the first and second demands of the Communist league in 1848. Karl Marx, "Demands of the Communist Party in Germany," in *Marx-Engels Collected Works*, vol. 7, trans. Richard Dixon et al. (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1977), 3–7.

17. Karl Marx, *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy*, vol. 1, ed. Frederick Engels and trans. Samuel Moore and Edward Aveling (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1958), 254, 874.

18. Marx, "On the Jewish Question," 154.

19. The term is sometimes translated as "terrible illusion." See Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, "The Holy Family," in *Marx-Engels Collected Works*, vol. 4, trans. Richard Dixon et al. (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1975), 122.

20. Marx, "On the Jewish Question," 168.

21. Irving Fetscher, "Marx's Concretisation of the Concept of Freedom," in *Socialist Humanism: An International Symposium*, ed. Eric Fromm (New York: Doubleday & Company, 1965), 241.

22. Marx, "Introduction to a Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Law," 175ff.

23. Marx had examined similar attempts to universalize the particular bourgeois ideals of liberty and freedom in his work on the *Rhenish Diet*. See Karl Marx, "The Leading Article in No. 179 of the Kölnische Zeitung: Religion, Free press, and Philosophy," in *Marx-Engels Collected Works*, vol. 1, trans. Richard Dixon et al. (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1975), 184–202.

24. Marx and Frederick Engels, "The Holy Family," 124.

25. Karl Marx, "The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte," in *Marx-Engels Collected Works*, vol. 11, trans. Richard Dixon et al., part 4 (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1979).

26. Marx, "Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts," 330.

27. See Karl Marx, "Contribution to the Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right," in *Marx-Engels Collected Works*, vol. 3, trans. Richard Dixon et al. (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1975), 110–123.

28. Marx, "Contribution to the Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right," 64ff.

29. Marx, "On The Jewish Question," 156.

30. Ernst Bloch, "Man and Citizen According to Marx," in *Socialist Humanism: An International Symposium*, ed. Eric Fromm (New York: Doubleday & Company, 1965), 206.

31. See Marx, "On the Jewish Question," 168.

32. Marx, "Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts," 333.

33. David A. Duquette, "Marx's Idealist Critique of Hegel's Theory of Society and Politics," *The Review of Politics* 51, no. 2 (1989): 236.

34. Marx, *Capital*, vol. 1, 472. On the similarities between the social or universal individuals in the *Grundrisse* and the "all-round" individuals of the *Paris Manuscripts*, see David McLellan, *The Thought of Karl Marx*, 3rd ed. (London: Macmillan, 1995), 70–71.

35. Karl Marx, *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy*, vol. 3, ed. Frederick Engels and trans. Samuel Moore and Edward Aveling (London: Electric Book Company, 1998), 1098.

36. In a note, Marx comments: "In practice I can relate myself to a thing humanly only if the thing relates itself humanly to the human being." See Marx, "Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts," 303–306.

37. See Bertell Ollman, *Alienation: Marx's Conception of Man in Capitalist Society* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1971), 8.

38. Marx located the "human essence" in the social basis of humanity's consciousness. See Karl Marx, "Theses on Feuerbach," in *Marx-Engels Collected Works*, vol. 5, trans. Richard Dixon et al. (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1975), 3–5.

39. Marx and Engels, "The German Ideology," 27, 48.

40. Marx, "Contributions to the Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right," xi–ix.

41. See L. D. Easton and K. H. Guddat, "Introduction," *Writings of the Young Marx on Philosophy and Society*, trans. L. D. Easton and K. H. Guddat (New York: Doubleday Anchor, 1967), 10.

42. Bertell Ollman, "Marx's Vision of Communism a Reconstruction," *Critique* 8, no. 1 (1977), 4–41.

43. Marx and Engels, "The German Ideology," 81–85.

44. Karl Marx, *Grundrisse: Foundations of the Critique of Political Economy* (New York: Vintage Books, 1973), 172.

45. Marx and Engels, "The German Ideology," 50–53.

46. Marx, "Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts," 296.

47. Marx writes in an idiom consistent with Hegel: "self-consciousness, is *at home in its other-being as such*. It is therefore—or if we here abstract from the Hegelian abstraction and put the self-consciousness of man instead of self-consciousness—it is *at home in its other being as such*." See Marx, "Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts," 326ff.

48. Marx and Engels, "The German Ideology," 35–38.

49. Marx, "Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts," 296, 305.

50. Ludwig Feuerbach, *Principles of the Philosophy of the Future*, trans. M. H. Vogel (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1966), 91. My emphasis added.

51. Marx, "Theses on Feuerbach," 3–5.

52. See Jacob M. Held, "Marx via Feuerbach: Species-Being Revisited," *Idealistic Studies* 39, no. 1 (2009): 144.

53. See Marx, *Grundrisse*, "Chapter 3: The Method of Political Economy."

54. Marx and Engels, "The German Ideology," 48ff.

55. See Rudolf Hilferding, "The Materialist Conception of History," in *Modern Interpretations of Marx*, ed. T. Bottomore (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1981), 127.

56. Plekhanov is the exemplar of such approaches. See Georgi Plekhanov, *Fundamental Problems of Marxism* (New York: International Publishers, 2010).

57. See Marx and Engels, "The German Ideology," Part 2; Marx, *Capital*, vol. 3, 820; Karl Marx, *Critique of the Gotha Programme* (Peking: Foreign Languages Press, 1972), 21–28; Frederick Engels, *Principles of Communism*, (Peking: Foreign Languages Press, 1977).

58. Honneth's work is the exemplar here. See Axel Honneth, *The Struggle for Recognition* (Boston, MA: MIT Press, 1995).

59. Marx, "Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts," 296, 293–306.

60. Erich Fromm, "Introduction," in *Socialist Humanism: An International Symposium*, ed. E. Fromm (New York: Doubleday & Company, 1965), ix.

61. Marx, *Grundrisse*, 158.

62. Marx, *Capital*, vol. 1, 714–715.

63. Karl Marx, "Peuchet: On Suicide," in *Marx-Engels Collected Works*, vol. 4 trans. Richard Dixon et al. (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1975), 597. My emphasis added.
64. The words are expressions taken from Marx and Engels, *The Communist Manifesto*, ch. 1.
65. Marx, *Critique of the Gotha Programme*, 15. My emphasis added.
66. Jürgen Habermas, "What Does Socialism Mean Today? The Rectifying Revolution and the Need for New Thinking on the Left," *New Left Review* I, no. 183 (1990): 15.
67. Silvia Federici, *Caliban and the Witch: Women, the Body and Primitive Accumulation* (New York: Autonomedia, 2004).
68. Karl Marx, "First Draft of Letter to Vera Zasulich," *Marx-Engels Collected Works*, vol. 24 trans. Richard Dixon et al. (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1989), 346ff.
69. Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, "Preface to the Second Russian Edition of the *Manifesto of the Communist Party*," in *Marx-Engels Collected Works*, vol. 24, trans. Richard Dixon et al. (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1989), 425ff.
70. Marx, *Grundrisse*, 172.
71. Marx and Frederick Engels, "The German Ideology," 81–83.
72. See Eric Hobsbawm, introduction to *The Communist Manifesto: A Modern Edition*, by Karl Marx and Frederick Engels (London: Verso, 1997), 25–27; Alan Gilbert, "Political Philosophy: Marx and Radical Democracy," in *The Cambridge Companion to Marx*, ed. Terrell Carver (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 168–195.
73. On the 10 measures see Marx and Engels, *The Communist Manifesto*, 60–61.
74. Karl Marx, *The Civil War in France* (Moscow: Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1959), 89ff.
75. See McLellan, ed., *Marx's Grundrisse*, 173.
76. See Marx and Engels, *The Communist Manifesto*, 60–61.
77. Marx, *The Civil War in France*, 96, 102–103.
78. Ollman, "Marx's Vision of Communism a Reconstruction," 28–32.
79. Marx, "The German Ideology," 47.
80. Marx and Engels, *The Communist Manifesto*, 46, 58.
81. See, respectively: Karl Marx, "Inaugural Address of the Working Men's International Association," in *Marx-Engels Collected Works*, vol. 20, trans. Richard Dixon et al. (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1985), 5–13; International Workingmen's Association, "To the People of the United States of America" and "To the Paris Students, To the Students and Young People of All Countries from the Workers of All Countries," in *Minutes of the General Council of the International Workingmen's Association, 1864–1886* (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1964). Available at: <http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/iwma/documents/minutes/index.htm>
82. International Workingmen's Association, "Rules and Administrative Regulations of the International Workingmen's Association," in *Marx-Engels Collected Works*, vol. 20, trans. Richard Dixon et al. (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1985), 441.
83. Frederick Engels, "Relations between the Irish Sections and the British Federal Council," in *Marx-Engels Collected Works*, vol. 23 trans. Richard Dixon et al. (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1988), 154–156.
84. Karl Marx (interview with R. Landor), "Interview with Karl Marx, head of L'Internationale," *New York World*, July 18, 1871, reprinted *Woodhull &*

Claffin's Weekly, August 12, 1871. Available at: <http://www.hartford-hwp.com/archives/26/020.html>

85. *Ibid.*

86. Marx, "Inaugural Address of the Working Men's International Association," 13.

87. On this last point see Kenneth Waltz, *Theory of International Politics* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1979), 6, 51–52.

88. Lucio Levi, "What Is Internationalism?" *The Federalist* 33, no. 3 (1991): 176.

89. *Ibid.*, 188–189 citing E. B. Carr, *Nationalism and After* (London: MacMillan, 1968), 33–34.

90. *Ibid.*, 185.

91. See Karl Marx, "Speech on the Question of Free Trade Delivered to the Democratic Association of Brussels at Its Public Meeting of January," in *Marx-Engels Collected Works*, vol. 6, trans. Richard Dixon et al. (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1976), 450–465; Karl Marx, *On the First International* (New York: McGraw Hill, 1973), 174.

92. Marx's dismissal of international brotherhood of peoples was a specific attack on the bourgeois pacifist International League of Peace and Freedom that promoted unlimited competition rather than its commitment to humanity. See Marx, *Critique of the Gotha Programme*, 21 note 14 .

93. See Marx, *Capital*, vol. 1, ch. 31.

94. Hilferding, *Modern Interpretations of Marx*.

95. Marx, *Critique of Gotha Programme*, 20.

96. International Workingmen's Association, "To the People of the United States of America." See also John Bellamy Foster, "Marx and Internationalism," *Monthly Review* 52, no. 3 (2000): 11–22.

97. Anthony Burke, "The Good State, From a Cosmic Point of View," *International Politics* 50, no. 1 (2013): 57–76.

98. Marx and Engels, "The German Ideology," 46–48, 87–88.

99. Marx, "Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts," 304, 306.

100. Marx, "On the Jewish Question," 168.

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CHAPTER 7

Marx and Engels's Critique of the Utopian Socialists and Its Implications for Urban Planning

Roger Paden

The philosophers have only *interpreted* the world in various ways; the point, however, is to *change* it.

—Karl Marx, "Theses on Feuerbach"¹

INTRODUCTION

Despite Marx's intentions expressed in the preceding passage and despite the existence of a number of self-professed "Marxist urban planners," many have claimed the very idea of an urban planning inspired by Marxist ideals is something of an oxymoron as there is a necessary conflict between Marxist theory and the essentially normative reformist stance that must inform the practice of urban planning.² According to Peter Hall, Marxist urban planners are caught up in a "dilemma. Either Marxist theory is about unraveling the historical logic of capitalism or it is about prescriptions for action. Since the planner-theorist . . . could never hope to divert the course of capitalist evolution by more than a millimeter . . . the logic would seem to demand that s/he sticks firmly to the first and abjures the second. In other words, the Marxian logic is strangely quietistic; it suggests that the planner retreat from planning altogether into the academic ivory tower."³

Robert Fishman claims that the problem for Marxist planning theory lies in the structure of Marxist theory itself:

In an important series of articles collected under the title, *The Housing Question*, Frederick Engels maintained that urban design was part of the “superstructure” of capitalist society and would necessarily reflect that society’s inhumanities, at least until after the socialist revolution had succeeded in transforming the economic base. He concluded that any attempt to envision an ideal city without waiting for the revolution was futile and, indeed, that any attempt to improve the cities significantly was doomed so long as capitalism endured. The working class must forget attractive visions of the future and concentrate on immediate revolution. . . . [Only after the revolution] . . . could planners begin to think about a better kind of city.⁴

From this view, there is an essential tension between Marxist theories and the practice of urban planning as these theories call into question the power of urban planners to affect significant and lasting positive social change independent of any revolution merely by redesigning the details of urban institutions and structures. More broadly, Marxist theory also calls into question all utopian thinking (e.g., urban planning) that imagines a substantially better or perfect society could be brought about in the absence of a complete social revolution. Not only could such a utopian society not be realized without a revolution, but, given that utopias must be founded on ideologically based moral theory, utopianism, as such, must be rejected. As urban planning seems to be based on utopian normative theory, it follows that Marxists must reject it.

I disagree with this view. Far from being opposed to utopianism, Marx and Engels were themselves significant utopian theorists whose theories have important implications for urban planning: not only can their criticisms of inadequate forms of utopianism be used to help understand the history of urban planning theory, but their construction of a utopian alternative to contemporary society can be used to guide urban planning practice. Herein, I develop a Marxist theory of utopia by examining Marx and Engels’s criticisms of the “utopian socialism” of Henri Saint-Simon, Charles Fourier, and Robert Owen. I then use this theory of utopianism to develop some ideas on Marxist urban planning. Due to their ambiguous and changing attitude toward utopianism—which Steven Lukes once characterized as an “anti-utopian utopianism”—this critique is not entirely clear and is open to at least five readings.⁵ I argue that, while none of them is entirely satisfactory, a systematic examination that considers all of them together can provide some important insights into Marx’s and Engels’s ambiguous relationship both to the utopian socialists and to utopian thought more generally. An examination of these readings is central to the

project of applying Marxist theory to urban planning, as the utopian socialists were not just philosophers or social theorists, but they—along with Ebenezer Howard, thought by many to be the father of modern urban planning—were also planners who not only developed a number of town plans but who actually participated in the realization of some of them. Thus, an examination of Marx and Engels's criticisms of the utopian socialists should tell us a great deal about the relationship between Marxism and urban planning.

THE UTOPIAN SOCIALISTS AND EBENEZER HOWARD

One of the difficulties in understanding the Marxist critique of the utopian socialists is that the utopian socialists do not seem to form a unified group. Marx and Engels adopted the term "utopian socialism" from other writers who used it to refer indiscriminately to the ideas of Saint-Simon, Fourier, and Owen, despite the fact that these men held many mutually contradictory views. They further muddied the waters by placing the utopian socialists into a classification scheme which they developed to interpret the history of socialist thought so as to put their own theories in a favorable light.⁶ According to this scheme, various socialists were grouped together on the basis of the class origins of their ideas. Thus, "reactionary socialists" reflected a feudal worldview, "conservative socialists" reflected the interests of the emerging bourgeoisie, while communists reflected the position of the proletariat. Unfortunately, the utopian socialists did not fit comfortably into this scheme. Like the communists, they were progressives who wrote in opposition to the bourgeois order; however because they were writing too early in the modern period to understand the nature and role of the proletariat, the utopian socialists could, at best, only criticize the emerging bourgeois society on moral grounds. Consequently, they failed to reflect consistently the interests of any class, but wrote sometimes from a bourgeois perspective and other times from a feudal perspective.⁷ As a result, it was difficult for Marx and Engels to apply just one of their standard criticisms to them and, as a result, their critique was both complex and somewhat confused.

Insofar as they shared anything in common, the utopian socialists combined "a rationalist faith in science with a radical critique of individualism."⁸ In general, they proposed to redesign society on a cooperative basis, in order to promote the welfare of all. To do this, they proposed educational programs to strengthen various socializing influences and to weaken competitive and individualistic attitudes and beliefs. They did not emphasize political activity, but focused instead on plans to make production more efficient and distribution fairer by means of such things as the public ownership of land, the rationalization of industry, the end of class distinctions, and the redesign of cities and towns.⁹ Their proposals were

based on a shared, humanistic approach to moral theory, which held that people are, by nature, cooperative and equal members of society. However, on this view, the individualism of modern society undermined this original social nature. Consequently, despite the increases in productivity brought about by the still-incomplete processes of industrialization, modern society had not satisfied everyone's natural needs. Accordingly, society needed to be reorganized so as to complete the process of economic rationalization, while at the same time reversing the deleterious effects of modern individualism. As this would be in everyone's interest, the utopian socialists believed that such a program would meet little resistance: all that was needed to bring about these changes was a clear understanding of current society, together with small models of a socialist society to demonstrate the advantages of cooperation. The utopian socialists also agreed on a second point: their proposals must be based on a social science closely modeled on the natural sciences. Each of the utopian socialists claimed to have already developed the beginnings of such a science. Although occasionally drawn into flights of fantasy, the utopian socialists developed what many thought an admirable approach to social theory and political practice. Marx and Engels, in particular, repeatedly stated that they owed a great debt to the utopian socialists each of whom, according to Engels, was to be "reckoned among the most significant minds of all time."¹⁰

Although the utopian socialists developed a number of proposals for the reform of society based on this common approach, due to the fact that they worked independently, these proposals differed in a number of ways.¹¹ For example, whereas Saint-Simon emphasized large-scale plans to rationally transform the whole of society, Fourier and Owens focused on the design of small-scale utopian communities. Nevertheless, their proposals included a number of common elements, such as the principle of the public ownership of the land, the elimination of social distinctions based on economic classes, and the rationalization of industry. They also made a number of similar proposals concerning the proper design of cities and towns.

Owen advocated the building of utopian communities based on the paternalistic social principles he developed while supervising the textile mills he owned in New Lanark. This prototypical utopian town took the form of a parallelogram, with residential buildings on all four sides, in which the town's 1,200 citizens would be housed according to their age and marital status. At one point, Fourier developed a plan for the City of Garantism, which envisioned a city composed of three concentric bands including a commercial zone surrounded by an industrial zone surrounded by an agricultural zone. However, he is best known for his phalanstères, small communities consisting of several large connected buildings that oddly resembled the palace of Versailles. Fourier designed his community

for 2,000, as that number would allow it to contain two adult representatives of each of the 810 personality types he described, thereby guaranteeing that each member could find at least one partner with a compatible "passionate nature." Owen's and Fourier's utopian ideas led to the construction of several utopian communities, including New Harmony and Brook Farm.

In his book, originally published in 1898 under the title, *Tomorrow: A Peaceful Path to Real Reform*, Howard proposed the construction of a small Garden City of about 30,000 people zoned in such a way as to segregate different activities while at the same time ensuring that they were easily accessible.¹² The city, which resembled Fourier's City of Garantism, was to occupy 1,000 acres in the middle of a 5,000 acre tract reserved for farms, which would be large enough to provide the bulk of the food required by the city's citizens and to provide many of them with employment. Forest preserves located in the agricultural belt would ensure that each citizen had ready access to nature, while preventing suburban sprawl. Instead, future growth would require the construction of new garden cities surrounding a larger Central City to form an integrated Social City linked by rail lines. Just inside the greenbelt around each Garden City would be an area dedicated to manufacturing in which factories would be joined together by a railroad used to transport goods efficiently. Six large roads would extend from the periphery to the city's center, dividing the city into six pie-shaped Wards, each with its own neighborhood center and neighborhood park to serve its 5,000 residents.

According to Fishman, "the utopian socialists were largely forgotten by the time Howard . . . began work, so there was little direct influence from them . . . [However, his] search . . . for a city whose design expressed the ideals of cooperation and social justice led him to revive many of the themes of his utopian socialist . . . predecessors."¹³ Although, the utopian socialists had little direct influence on Howard, it is likely that they had a strong indirect influence on him through such intermediaries as Edward Bellamy, Peter Kropotkin, Henry George, William Morris, and John Ruskin.¹⁴ The most important idea shared by these men was their shared humanistic approach to social reform. Like the utopian socialists, Howard's goal was to create "a condition of life in which every endeavor is made by Society . . . to satisfy from the bountiful reservoirs of Nature the needs of Society as a whole. . . . We . . . must . . . therefore earnestly endeavor to ascertain . . . the urgent needs of Society" before attempting to reform it.¹⁵ Like the utopian socialists, Howard believed that his city would solve many of the problems created by the rapid anarchic development that characterized the Industrial Revolution. Not only would the Garden City overcome the separation between town and country, which many thought lay at the root of a variety of social and spiritual problems, but it would also contribute to a greater equality by raising wages and

allowing rents to be used to benefit all citizens. As Howard believed that these results could never be achieved through coercion, he, like the utopian socialists, advocated peaceful change. Unlike the utopian socialists, however, he had a detailed plan to achieve this end.¹⁶

Howard's Garden City shared many features with the utopian socialists' ideal communities. Howard and the utopian socialists advocated the creation of small, self-sufficient, cooperative, pastoral communities, designed to create full employment and ensure social equality, and they did so for similar reasons: they were all formal humanists, that is, theorists who believed that all humans shared a common, unchanging, scientifically discoverable human nature or form implicit in each human being that determined their nature and defined their ends. As formal humanists they believed that morality required the fair satisfaction of these common needs, and they looked to science to discover how they could be satisfied.¹⁷

FIVE INTERPRETATIONS OF THE MARXIST CRITIQUE

Despite their admiration for the utopian socialists, Marx and Engels repeatedly criticized their ideas on a variety of grounds. Their remarks are scattered throughout their work and suggest at least five different strands of criticisms. After explaining each criticism, I will evaluate them both as a criticism of the utopian socialists and of the utopian project generally. I will then use it to develop a unified interpretation of Marx and Engels's position.

The Tactical Criticism

This interpretation of the Marxist critique of the utopian socialists was based on the idea that Marx addressed it primarily to other socialists. While Marx and Engels believed that there was nothing wrong in principle with the construction of theories of ideal societies, they considered utopianism to be a political trap insofar as it was a mistake to spend time on the development of such idle dreams and an even greater mistake to debate the relative merits of alternative societies in public. This was not because they thought it impossible to develop a well-grounded utopian theory, but rather because, politically, they believed it wasted valuable time and energy.¹⁸ Despite its emancipatory potential, Marx and Engels believed, in practice, utopianism was a conservative trap.

It is easy to see how the work of the utopian socialists might provoke such a criticism, for they were complete failures politically.¹⁹ While a number of short-lived utopian communities were inspired by the work of Owen and Fourier and while some of Saint-Simon's followers were active in such projects as the Suez Canal, their work did not lead to any large-scale social change. Moreover, the utopian socialists endlessly criticized

each other's ideas, and the time they spent describing and defending their utopian visions took them away from more politically effective work.

A number of passages support the claim that this is the correct interpretation of the Marxist criticism of the utopian socialists. For example, Marx and Engels argued that "communism is for us not a state of affairs which is to be established, an ideal to which reality will have to adjust itself. We call communism the real *movement* which abolishes the *present* state of things. The conditions of this movement result from now existing premises."²⁰ In *Capital*, Marx argued that "the construction of the future and its completion for all times is not our task. . . . We do not anticipate the world dogmatically, but rather wish to find the new world through criticism of the old."²¹

Marx and Engels developed three arguments to support the view that utopianism had no place in a revolutionary movement. First, utopian speculation was not needed as an organizational tool as the problems of capitalism were so severe that they would, of themselves, lead to revolution. Marx and Engels's goal was to "shorten and lessen the birth pangs" of the new society and this required both knowledge of the problems of capitalism and some organizational skills, but it did not require a detailed plan of the future society. Second, utopian speculation was an unnecessary diversion from the task at hand. Finally, utopian speculation tended to be divisive as every detail in the description of an ideal society could be challenged in endless and unproductive arguments.

It is clear, however, that it is a mistake to reject utopianism for these reasons as utopian speculation can play an essential role in the revolutionary project. Moreover, the widespread rejection of utopianism has undermined Marxism in several ways. First, it has contributed to the abstract nature of Marxist theory and its inability to offer solutions to particular existing social problems. As Lukes put it, "Marxism has failed to clarify its ends and to explore the institutional and political forms that could embody them . . . [As a result, it has] totally failed to bring social and political imagination to bear upon . . . [existing] problems."²² Second, the failure to sketch out the details of an alternative society made the misuse of Marxism inevitable. Without an authoritative picture of the new society, virtually anyone can claim that he or she is building a Marxist society without fear of contradiction. As Joseph Schumpeter argued, "in trying to distance himself [from utopia], the Socialist not only is being ungrateful to the wave that carries him, but he is also courting the danger that its forces might be harnessed into other service."²³ Finally, the failure to outline and defend a vision of an ideal society can contribute to what might be the greatest existing barrier to social change; namely, the belief that no alternatives are possible.²⁴ Fortunately, this seems to be a somewhat narrow interpretation of the Marxist criticism. Although some passages support it, the fact that Marx and Engels went on at great length to criticize

the details of the utopian socialists' theories makes it unlikely that this simple criticism was their main point. Moreover, the fact that Marx and Engels developed their own vision of an ideal society should, by itself, be enough to reject this interpretation. While Marx and Engels worried about the negative effects of utopian speculation and, as we shall see, sought to avoid overly detailed accounts of socialist society, they did not reject utopianism on these grounds.

The Strategic Criticism

On this interpretation, the Marxist criticism of the utopian socialists was based on the idea that while Marx and Engels might have shared with the utopian socialists a vision of the general shape of the ideal society, they believed that the means the utopian socialists proposed to attain those ends were insufficient. Contrary to the utopian socialists, Marx and Engels thought that an ideal society could not be attained by peaceful means; violent revolution alone can realize utopia. Evidence for this last claim can be found in the complete failure of the utopian socialists to realize their dreams. This is one of the most common interpretations of their critique. For example, Krishan Kumar has written that "Marx and Engels distinguished themselves from the utopians principally in their understanding of how socialism would come about."²⁵ Karl Kautsky has argued that utopian socialism was "utopian less on account of the impracticability of its aims than on account of the inadequacy of the means at its disposal for their achievement."²⁶ And Georg Lukács has claimed that "every utopian scheme has failed to determine the *mode* and the *means* necessary for its realization and has therefore come to nothing."²⁷

This interpretation is based on several points. First, it assumes that Marx and Engels actually developed and championed a sophisticated picture of an ideal society. Ollman has argued this point in detail, pointing out that in the *Communist Manifesto*, Marx and Engels developed detailed descriptions of, not one, but two stages of their utopia.²⁸ During the first short stage, the government will take the form of a "dictatorship of the proletariat," which was modeled after the workers' government of the Paris Commune.²⁹ The second stage would be reached when the dictatorship of the proletariat successfully abolished the last vestiges of the class structure.³⁰ It is worth noting that many of the elements of both the first and second stages of the Marxist utopia were borrowed from the utopian socialists. For example, as Kumar noted Marx adopted their slogan "from the government of men to the administration of things," their idea of the "withering away" of the state, and their idea that "in any given society the degree of the emancipation of women is the natural measure of general emancipation," along with many of the details of

the communist society.³¹ Leszek Kolakowski also listed numerous similarities between the two utopian visions.³² Marx and Engels were aware of the origins of these ideas and repeatedly praised the utopian socialists for having first developed them. Engels, in particular, often praised the utopian socialists for their insight into the nature of socialist society, claiming that "German theoretical Socialism . . . stands on the shoulders of Saint-Simon, Fourier, and Owen, three men who despite their . . . utopianism . . . anticipated with genius, countless matters whose accuracy we now demonstrate scientifically."³³ Marx also acknowledged his debt to the utopian socialists, arguing that their work

contains a critical element. They attack every principle of existing society. Hence they are full of the most valuable materials for the enlightenment of the working class. The practical measures proposed in them [such as the abolition of the distinction between town and country, of the family, of the carrying on of industries for the account of private individuals, and of the wage system, the proclamation of social harmony, the conversion of the functions of the state into mere superintendence of production] point solely to the disappearance of class antagonisms which were, at the time, only just cropping up.³⁴

However, according to this interpretation, Marx and Engels rejected the means by which the utopian socialists proposed to reach those ends:

From the moment the working men's class movement became real, the fantastic utopias [of the utopian socialists] evanesced, not because the working class had given up the *end* aimed at by these utopians, but because they had found the real *means* to realize them.³⁵

Specifically, Marx and Engels rejected the idea that the ideal society could be achieved through gradual change driven by moral arguments and small demonstration projects, particularly when those moral arguments were aimed at the bourgeoisie.³⁶ Thus, according to this view, the utopian socialists were good socialists and good utopians, but they were bad revolutionaries. Their political programs would not only fail, but they would actually confuse the workers and dissipate their energies, thereby delaying the changes they championed.

There are also good reasons to reject this reading as embodying the whole of Marx and Engels's views. Although, generally, they advocated violent revolution, there are a number of passages that hint at a different, more philosophical critique of the utopian socialist's theories. These passages suggest that Marx and Engels would reject their project even if the utopian socialists abandoned their pacifism and became advocates of revolutionary violence. These passages point in two different directions; some

seem to be part of a critique of the utopian socialists' "scientific methodology;" others seem to be part of a critique of their ends.

The Materialist Criticism

According to this interpretation, the Marxist criticism of the utopian socialists focused on their methodology. It holds that, on Marx and Engels's view, the utopian socialists' central mistake was that they based their utopian visions on an epistemologically questionable moral position. Engels, in particular, criticized the utopian socialists for developing their utopias "out of the human brain [alone]. Society presented [them with] nothing but wrongs; to remove these was the task of reason. It was necessary, then, to discover a new and more perfect system of social order and to impose this upon society from without. . . . These new social systems were foredoomed as Utopian."³⁷ Summarizing this view, Melvin Lasky wrote that, at the time they were writing, socialism was caught "between the ethical projection of the ideal and the critical analysis of the real" and that Marx and Engels chose to reject the former and engage in the latter.³⁸ As a result, they declined to dream of distant utopias, criticized the utopian socialists for giving in to this temptation, and chose instead to focus on the scientific analysis of existing societies.

This position, which emphasized the difficulties of knowing the details of the future ideal society and the morality appropriate to it, has been widely adopted by orthodox Marxists and can be easily traced back as far as Lenin, who believed that "in Marx, you will find no trace of utopianism in the sense of inventing the 'new' society and constructing it out of fantasies." Lenin believed himself to be following Marx on this point, arguing that we "cannot outline Socialism [for what it] . . . will look like when it takes on its final form we do not know and cannot say."³⁹ A number of passages support this point. For example, in *Capital*, Marx claimed that, unlike the utopian socialists, he confined himself to the "critical analysis of actual facts, instead of writing recipes . . . for the cook-shops of the future."⁴⁰ In addition, Engels argued that one of the "most pleasing differences between ['scientific socialism' and its predecessors] . . . lies in the complete disappearance of utopian concepts [from its theories]," adding that "as it is not our task to create utopian systems for the arrangement of the future society, it would be more than idle to [discuss such questions]."⁴¹ This position reflected the fact that, according to Marx, "the working class . . . has no ready-made utopias to introduce. . . . They have no ideals to realize, but [seek only] to set free the elements of the new society with which the old collapsing society itself is pregnant."⁴²

This criticism can be understood in two ways. One interpretation focused on the fact that Marx and Engels believed that the utopian socialists wrote during the very early stages of industrial capitalism and so were

unaware of the vast social and technological changes that capitalism would soon bring about. As a result, their utopian visions were too disconnected from these emerging realities to serve as a blueprint for the future. As Engels put it, the historical situation of early capitalism dominated the founders of socialism. To the crude conditions of capitalistic production and the crude class conditions, correspond crude theories. The solution of the social problems, which as yet lay hidden in the undeveloped economic conditions, the Utopians attempted to evolve out of the human brain.⁴³ Into Engels's criticism Marx introduced an additional element: it is not just that the utopian socialists were only aware of an early underdeveloped stage of capitalist society, but they also lacked an adequate social science that could have allowed them to foresee the future.⁴⁴

This particular reading of this criticism, however, does not accord with the texts used to support it. Note that, as it stands, it was not a criticism of utopianism as such; instead it was a critique only of what might be termed "premature utopianism"; that is, empirically and theoretically ungrounded utopianism. On this reading, the utopian socialists went wrong because they wrote too early in the history of capitalism and without the benefit of a sound scientific theory. It follows, however, that there should be nothing wrong with utopian constructions based on valid scientific theories or developed during the mature stages of a social system. Of course, as that Marx and Engels believed themselves to be in possession of a valid social science and to be writing during Capitalism's final stages, they could not have thought that this criticism applied to their own utopian constructions. This reading, however, conflicts with the statements quoted earlier in which Marx and Engels disavow every attempt to develop a blueprint for the ideal society (even their own); for, given this reading, their position in history, and their knowledge of the science of Historical Materialism, Marx and Engels should be able to say what form Socialism will finally take.

There is, however, another way to understand this criticism, which is focused not on the historical period during which the utopian socialists wrote, nor on the fact that they lacked a predictive theory, but on the fact that the utopian socialists failed to understand the structure of society as it is revealed by the science of Historical Materialism. In particular, they failed to understand that the social function of morality is to accommodate people to the existing class structure. Existing moral categories, on this view, cannot be used to ground a radical critique of existing society. Unaware of this scientific principle and based on their formal humanism, the utopian socialists simply accepted as universally valid a variety of moral judgments concerning existing society and used them to project a better society. In doing this, they failed to realize that their moral critique and ethical projection were based on bourgeois moral concepts, that such a critique could never reveal the real problems of bourgeois society, and

that any ethical projection based on it could never provide a real alternative to the existing society.

Marx and Engels tied this abstract analysis to a more detailed critique of the central moral principles accepted by the utopian socialists as a basis of their work, namely, justice, just distribution, and equality. They argued that these terms referred to inherently bourgeois values that find their place in the present social structure and cannot legitimately be abstracted from it.⁴⁵ In addition, Marx and Engels argued that the utopian socialists' notion of "natural human needs" was borrowed from an earlier, quasi-feudal, stage of bourgeois society and if it were used to design a new set of social institutions, the resulting society would leave no room for the development of new—but equally human needs. As a result, the utopian socialists' ideals are "pastoral" in nature and their project is essentially reactionary and oppressive.⁴⁶ Their utopias were, therefore, well-intended dystopias.

According to this reading of this critique, the future society with its new economic and class relationships must necessarily embody a radically different morality and if, as Hegel argued in his famous Owl of Minerva metaphor, philosophical understanding is always retrospective, it would be impossible to determine the shape of this future morality in advance. Because, on this interpretation, Marx and Engels accepted this idea, they were committed to the rejection of all moral critiques and ethical projections, including those of the utopian socialists. Hence, Marx and Engels were resolutely and without exception anti-utopians. As it is impossible to use existing moral categories to project a future utopian society, the successful revolutionary class must develop its own morality after it has radically transformed society and no one, not the utopian socialists, not Marx and Engels, not even Lenin, can predict the nature of this morality.

Although this might be a better reading of this criticism, it can be faulted on both external and internal grounds. Externally, it can be faulted on two grounds. First, it rested on very insecure foundations, namely, the unwarranted scientific pretensions of Historical Materialism with its discredited economic determinism. Second, this criticism implied a simplistic moral relativism which is not only philosophically objectionable, but which would undercut the moral force of Marxism. Internally, this criticism did not square with the fact that Marx and Engels developed a detailed description of the general shape of a utopian society. Finally, it contradicted the fact that Marx's utopia is based on moral principles derived from a coherent moral theory that Marx and Engels thought universally valid. The materialist criticism must be understood as a warning against naïve speculation, not as a rejection of all forms of utopianism.

The Humanist Criticism

On this interpretation, Marx and Engels, like the utopian socialists, were utopian humanists who believed not only that utopian speculation must

play an important role in guiding political activity, but that utopian ideals must be based on moral principles derived from a well-grounded conception of human nature. Their disagreement with the utopian socialists, on this view, was based on their belief that the utopian socialists adopted a mistaken conception of human nature and derived from it a false set of moral principles and utopian ideals. To correct this error, Marx and Engels developed an alternative conception of human nature from which they derived a different set of principles and ideals. In this view, Marx and Engels were utopian humanists, but unlike the utopian socialists' formal humanism, which stressed the existence of a fixed set of natural quasi-biological human needs, Marx and Engels's dialectical humanism involved a conception of human nature that stressed the capacity of human beings to develop new abilities, new relationships, and new forms of life. These differing conceptions of human nature led to differing moral principles and to differing critiques of the existing society. While the utopian socialists criticized bourgeois society on the grounds that it created and maintained both inequality and poverty that kept these natural human needs from being satisfied, Marx and Engels also criticized bourgeois society for limiting human development and creating alienation.

A number of writers have adopted this interpretation. For example, Kolakowski argued that "Marx's starting point . . . is not poverty [and inequality] but dehumanization."⁴⁷ According to Lukes, this position led Marx to develop a vision of utopia in which all people would be able to engage fully in "the self-transforming and self-realizing process of emancipation."⁴⁸ Such a utopia, Ollman added, would allow its inhabitants to achieve a "complete victory over the alienation that has characterized humanity's existence throughout class society."⁴⁹

This humanistic interpretation was based on the idea that, far from rejecting the ethical projection of utopia, Marx and Engels actually adopted a moral theory that informed both their utopian vision and their criticism of bourgeois society. This reading of the Marxist criticism, however, raises deep and contested questions concerning the existence of a Marxist moral theory.⁵⁰ As many writers have pointed out, the claim that such a theory exists was problematic for, as I argued in the last section, it seemed to follow from Historical Materialism that, since all ethical theories are mere ideological productions that reflect and support the interests of the ruling class, there can be no universally valid ethical theory.⁵¹ However, there are a number of passages that directly conflict with this view. In perhaps the best example, Engels argued that "a really human morality which stands above class antagonisms . . . [is] possible [but it can be realized] only at a stage of society which has . . . overcome class antagonisms."⁵² Eugene Kamenka argued on the basis of these passages that Marx and Engels not only accepted the existence of a "truly human morality," but that they developed a philosophical account and defense of it. According to Kamenka, their theory was based on the idea that

man, as an empirical being, has certain purposes, needs, and requirements which form part of the description of man and which must be recognized by any science that has man for its subject . . . [It is possible] to ground this humanistic ethic in logic by arguing that “man” as a class-concept or universal necessarily involves criteria or principles by which we distinguish the human from the non-human. “Man” is thus a normative concept from the start; to describe or define man is already to recognize goals toward which man works or ends towards which he strives.⁵³

Evidence that Marx and Engels adopted this particular dialectical humanism takes three forms. First, they celebrated the uniquely human capacity for self-development and looked forward to the day when it would not be limited by oppressive social structures. Moreover, they repeatedly characterized their utopia as a society in which all people will be actively involved in, and in control of, the process of self-development. For example, they described the transition to a communist society as occurring when “in place of the old bourgeois society, with its classes and class antagonisms, we shall have an association in which the free development of each is a condition for the free development of all.”⁵⁴ As the Manuels point out, they described that society as a society that makes possible the “free development of the individual [and the] self-actualization of the individual . . . [It will be a society that will] set in motion the many-sided development . . . of men . . . [allowing them] to become masters of their own socialization.”⁵⁵ Second, they believed that the creation of such a society is morally required. Third, they connected their notion of freedom with the idea of self-development, each of which they described separately as being “an end in itself.”⁵⁶ In “Alienated Labor,” Marx argued that our “species-being”—our human nature—is our ability to engage in self-conscious, self-transforming labor and that we are truly free only when we are so engaged.⁵⁷ Finally, Marx and Engels repeatedly condemned capitalism for alienating people from this human nature, arguing that it was alienation that made revolution a moral necessity as it dehumanizes people.

According to this interpretation, humanistic moral theory was the foundation upon which Marx and Engels built their utopia. Specifically, they designed the institutions of their new society to enhance both freedom and self-development. They understood this to require the sweeping away of those institutions that prevent people from expressing their true humanity. Freedom, that is to say, can be achieved only through the destruction of the institutions of bourgeois society that cause alienation. Generally, they take this to be an essentially negative task, a matter of destroying old alienating institutions and allowing people the freedom to express their inner nature, rather than a matter of building new nonalienating institutions.

Oddly, despite the fact that Marx and Engels rejected the utopian socialists' conception of human nature and the moral principles and utopian ideals it supported, the institutional changes they proposed closely parallel those proposed by their utopian predecessors. However, while the utopian socialists supported these new utopian institutions on the claim that they would guarantee the equal satisfaction of basic human needs, Marx and Engels supported them on the claim that they would help overcome alienation and in so doing create new human capacities and needs. Given their virtually identical institutional arrangements, these differing expectations can be explained only by reference to another function, namely, the differing role that technology was to play in these two types of utopia. With the exception of Saint-Simon, the utopian socialists were virtual luddites whose static utopias were based on early, unchanging 19th-century technology. In these utopias, people would work the fields or engage in craft-based manufacture in order to supply the simple consumer goods needed to satisfy a limited set of basic needs. Because they only worked to satisfy these needs, their work would not be onerous; and because the product of their work was to be equally distributed, they would all lead pleasant lives. In the utopian society envisioned by Marx and Engels, however, people would make use of highly advanced and constantly developing technology to satisfy their continuously changing needs. Moreover, automated industrial technology would not just produce more and new consumer goods; it would also produce an abundance of free time. As a result, people in the Marxist utopia would be free to turn their attention to the task of self-development. As Marx put it:

The realm of freedom actually begins only when labor . . . determined by necessity and by mundane considerations ceases . . . ; [freedom can exist only when] socialized men . . . regulate their intercourse with nature and bring it under their common control . . . with the least expenditure of energy and under conditions most favorable to . . . their human nature. But this nonetheless remains a realm of necessity. Beyond it begins that development of human energy which is an end in itself, the true realm of freedom, which, however, can blossom forth only with this realm of necessity as its basis.⁵⁸

Given free time, people would naturally want to develop themselves, and the Marxist utopia will allow them to do so. Thus, this utopian society would be incredibly dynamic. In it the humanities, arts, crafts, and sciences would flourish. The Marxist utopia would thus incorporate the incredible dynamism of capitalism, but only after stripping it of its oppressive characteristics.

Despite the attractions of this Marxist vision of utopia, it was not without its problems. Philosophically, these problems revolved around the basic concept that Marx and Engels used in its construction, namely, human nature. If this concept was flawed, then all forms of humanism

must be rejected. Unfortunately, it seems to have a number of problems. Historically, it was most at home in ancient philosophy and seems to conflict with more modern—and presumably more well-grounded—scientific and philosophical conceptions of humanity. Second, it was not clear how a thing's essential nature can be determined. As Marcuse implies, human nature is not a purely descriptive concept, but is also, at least in part, a moral concept. If so, it would not be possible to discover this underlying reality simply through observation, especially in those societies characterized by alienation. However, if humanistic moral theories cannot be based on observation alone, it would seem that there would be a great danger that these theories will be based on a type of circular reasoning in which a moral view is projected onto humanity as an essential nature from which a set of moral ideals is deduced. Third, as many philosophers have recently argued, regardless of its content, when this concept is used to shape social institutions, it becomes totalizing and the resulting institutions are necessarily oppressive and unjust.

There are three problems with this reading as an interpretation of Marx and Engels's work. First, in a number of passages, Marx explicitly adopted some of the broad antihumanist arguments mentioned earlier, for example, criticizing socialists—who “hunt everywhere for the words ‘man’ and ‘human’ and condemn when [they] cannot find them”—as being necessarily a-historical and idealistic.⁵⁹ These writers, he argued, “transform the relations of . . . particular [historically-situated] individuals into relations of . . . ‘Man.’ In doing so, they have abandoned the real historical basis [of scientific thought] and returned to that of ideology.”⁶⁰

Second, Marx developed a peculiar conception of human nature, which is incompatible with moral theories based on formal humanism. In these theories, the concept of a human nature was supposed to name an unchanging reality lying outside of society from which social institutions and practices can be criticized. Marx, however, gave a definition of human nature according to which it “is no abstraction inherent in each single individual. In its reality, it is the ensemble of social relations.”⁶¹ If this is the case, however, then human nature does not stand outside of society, but is instead its highly changeable social product. Marx explicitly drew this conclusion when he argued against Feuerbach that “the sum of productive forces, capital funds and social forms of intercourse, which every individual and every generation finds in existence as something given, is the real basis of what the philosophers have conceived as the ‘substance’ and ‘essence of man.’”⁶² However, such a conception of human nature cannot be used to ground a humanistic moral theory, as it is insufficiently distant from society to provide the necessary perspective.

Finally, there are a number of passages in which Marx and Engels criticized the utopian socialists for attempting to impose their morality on the future society.⁶³ These passages should not be understood as making

first-order, moral criticisms of the utopian socialists; instead they suggest that it is difficult or impossible to predict what form morality will take in the future society. They also suggest that that morality will continue to evolve after the revolution, once it is freed from the demands imposed upon it by class-based societies. If this is the case, it is not simply difficult or paternalistic to attempt to specify a morality for the future society in advance but such an attempt would conflict with the nature of morality itself. True human morality, in this view, cannot be fixed in detail because it is always evolving; and if it is always evolving, it cannot be based on some unchanging underlying reality. If this is true, however, then all humanistic moral theories—including the utopian socialists' needs-based morality and Marx and Engels's developmentalist morality—are fundamentally flawed and should be rejected—not just on normative grounds, but on the deeper philosophical ground that they are based on the flawed concept of a fixed and independent human nature. This idea, however, points to the final interpretation.

The Historicist Criticism

According to this interpretation, Marx (but not Engels) came to accept the philosophical critique of humanism outlined earlier, and, consequently, was forced to abandon, not only the humanism of the utopian socialists, but his own dialectical humanist moral theory and the utopian ideal based on it as well.⁶⁴ On this interpretation, Marx's central criticism of the utopian socialists was not based on the fact that they were *utopians*; instead, it was based on the fact that they were *utopian humanists*. In rejecting humanism, however, he did not reject morality or the ethical projection of utopian ideals: while his rejection of humanism required him to reject his humanist criticisms of bourgeois society, this did not lead him to adopt a relativistic, nor a quietistic position. Instead, he adopted a sophisticated antihumanist, historicist meta-ethical position that held that, although morality can have no philosophical foundations, it can be grounded in the free reasoned consensus of the community. Finally, he not only used this meta-ethical theory as a basis from which to criticize both the utopian socialists and bourgeois society, but he also used it to ground a utopian ideal. Therefore, on this view, Marx adopted a position that occupied a middle ground between materialism and humanism. He adopted the humanistic project of the ethical projection of utopian ideals *and* the materialistic rejection of humanistic utopianism, while, at the same time, rejecting materialism's moral nihilism. As a result, although he rejected utopian humanism, he remained a utopian.

To understand this position, it is necessary to understand the historicist meta-ethical theory this interpretation ascribes to Marx. In *The Ethical Dimensions of Marxist Thought*, Cornell West has described and defended

such a meta-ethical theory. West argued that what is unique to the historicist approach to ethics is that it denies the very possibility of an ethics which rests on “philosophic grounds [such as] criteria, grounds, or foundations . . . that carry the weight of rational necessity and/or universal obligation.”⁶⁵ Of course, if historicism is true, then all forms of humanism, which seek to place ethics on a type of philosophic foundation, are necessarily false. Indeed, most of West’s arguments for historicism are, in fact, arguments against its alternative (objectivism). To make his case for historicism, however, West must also argue against the commonly held view that the falsity of objectivism entails the truth of relativism, which, West asserted, holds that since “there is no Archimedean point from which to adjudicate conflicting ethical beliefs or judgments,” all moral judgments are equally irrational.⁶⁶ The falsity of both positions is possible, on West’s view, because there is an intermediate position between these two extremes, namely, historicism. As opposed to relativism, historicism holds that, despite the fact that morality has no philosophical foundations,

people make [rational] ethical judgment in light of moral principles, employ [reasonable] criteria to understand such principles, and give reasons to justify their criteria, principles, and judgments. But it claims that these judgments, principles, and criteria are philosophically groundless . . . [as they] do not rest upon philosophic foundations . . . [Therefore, for the] historicist, the task of ethics is not *philosophic*, it is not to put forward irrefutable justifications of particular moral viewpoints. Rather the task of ethics is . . . to discover ways in which to develop a larger consensus and community . . . If one disagrees with a particular consensus or community, the task is . . . to put forward a realizable alternative, a new possibility for consensus and community, and then to make it attractive to others.⁶⁷

Often, the attempt to establish a new, wider consensus requires historicists to challenge the old consensus, but in doing so historicists cannot argue that it conflicts with some philosophically unimpeachable conception of human nature; instead, they must call that consensus into question by arguing, for example, that it is internally inconsistent or that it was originally adopted for illegitimate ideological reasons or imposed by force. Therefore, historicists (like materialists) will often turn to historical accounts of morality that offer “plausible descriptions and explanations for the emergence, dominance, and decline of particular moral principles under specific social conditions in the historical process . . . [In doing so, they will prefer to use sociological] notions such as role, function, description, and explanation.”⁶⁸

West claimed that there is a close connection between the historicist view of morality and Hegel’s theory of the dialectical development of

social institutions, according to which, it is possible to understand the historical development of social institutions in terms of the rational unfolding of their implicit purpose, where the course of this development proceeds through a process involving the overcoming of its initial internal contradictions. Marx, of course, made use of similar ideas. For example, in an early—and very Hegelian—work on the philosophy of law, he wrote that he was in search of a method that would allow him to understand law as “something living and developing in a many sided way . . . as something imbued with contradictions in itself [which] finds its unity through itself.”⁶⁹ Such an analysis, Marx later argued, would reveal that “reason has always existed [within social institutions], but not always in rational form. The critic, therefore, can start with any form of theoretical and practical consciousness and develop the true actuality out of the form inherent in existing actuality as its . . . goal.”⁷⁰

Marx modified this essentially Hegelian approach in two ways. First, he rejected Hegel's idealism. Second, he increasingly turned his attention to those political, social, and economic elements in a society that prevent this rational development from occurring. Ultimately, this led him to develop a theory of society—Historical Materialism—to explain the development of these alienating and oppressive social institutions. However, this theory makes sense as a political theory connected to a political praxis only if it retains its links to a vision of nonoppressive society based on a well-formed moral consensus. As a historicist interested in establishing a new moral consensus, he had to provide a vision of what society would be like in the absence of the oppressive, morally questionable institutions of bourgeois society. In this sense, Marx was a utopian.

In constructing his utopian vision, however, Marx had to operate under severe constraints. To a degree, even from within the historicist project, he could have simply justified a utopian vision on the grounds that it would solve a particularly pressing problem and alleviate a specific existing hardship, and his argument that the problem of alienation in bourgeois society could be solved through the adoption of his nonalienating developmentalist utopia can be read in that light. Given his historicism, however, he could not base this argument on humanist metaphysical grounds; instead, he could argue only on critical historical grounds that it was a more desirable society. However, Marx did not rest his case—or his vision of utopia—entirely on this type of argument; instead he based it on the nature of historicist theory itself.

According to that theory, moral ideals can only be justified by contingent, community-wide agreements that arise from free and open discussion. The fact that it is impossible to predict in advance the results of such a discussion seems to preclude a utopianism based on the ethical projection of moral ideals. It does not preclude, however, an incomplete description of an ideal society based on another approach to utopianism,

an approach that might be termed historicist utopianism. According to this approach, a utopia is not a society that conforms to some predetermined conception of the good; rather, a utopia is a society that permits its members to develop social institutions in accordance with their (changing) ideas of the good arrived at through free and open dialogue.

But what would this society be like? Of course, most of the particulars of this society could not be determined in advance as “the working class must work out their own emancipation.”⁷¹ However, because they must do this through an ongoing process involving free and open dialogue, the historicist utopia must be designed in such a way as to guarantee the permanent possibility of such an open-ended discussion. Therefore, it is necessary that such a utopia include a particular set of framework institutions that make such discussion possible. I would suggest that virtually the same institutions that were to guarantee individual self-development in Marx’s dialectical humanistic utopia would also guarantee the appropriate type of free debate required by the historicist utopia. Thus, the two utopias would have a similar institutional structure (one “anticipated with genius” by the utopian socialists): in both, the state would shrink and focus on the administration of things, free public education would be emphasized, private ownership of the means of production would be prohibited, individuals would be guaranteed the leisure to develop themselves, and the arts and humanities would be encouraged. Finally, efforts would be made to strengthen the public sphere in which free and open public discussions concerning the best design for social institutions and the nature of the good life can take place.

Summary of the Marxist Criticism of the Utopian Socialists

Taken together, these interpretations show that Marx and Engels’s “anti-utopian utopianism” was not as paradoxical as it first might seem. Although, on the tactical and the materialist interpretation, they seem to be anti-utopians and while on the strategic, humanist, and historicist interpretation, they seem to be utopians, it is clear that, in fact, they were utopians of a very special sort. They believed in a dynamic utopia, one which is constantly changing as a result of the development and dialogue of its inhabitants. As a result, they were very wary of any attempt to describe the ideal society in detail and were especially wary of all static utopias. Moreover, they were wary of the ethical projection of utopia, as they realized that the inhabitants of the ideal society might adopt moral principles that differ from the ones that shape existing social institutions. This is the main reason why they objected to the utopias of the utopian socialists. Not only have these socialists paid too little attention to political questions and underestimated the stability of bourgeois society, but they have failed to see that their utopian ideals have been borrowed from

that society, while they have foreclosed the possibility that the citizens of their utopias might wish to modify the institutional structure under which they live. While the utopian socialists' opposition to poverty and inequality is to be commended, the static utopias they have proposed are, in fact, little better than the society upon which they are unconsciously modeled. Finally, Marx rejected the humanism of the utopian socialist. Most important, Marx and Engels's arguments against the utopian socialist should not be understood as indicating a principled opposition to all utopias; instead, Marx and Engels were utopians who, although they were well aware of the problems of utopian theory and practice, developed a vision of a utopian society that resembled those of the utopian socialists in many ways. The central disagreement they had with their predecessors was in the way they justified their vision of utopia. Marx and Engels offered two such justifications: one was a humanist justification that emphasized the human need for conscious self-development; the other was a historicist justification that emphasized the need for the discursive development of moral categories. These justifications point, respectively, toward a developmentalist utopia and a procedural dialectic utopia, which in large part possess very similar institutional structures.

APPLYING THE MARXIST CRITIQUE TO EARLY MODERN TOWN PLANNING

Unfortunately, Marx and Engels did not systematically apply their criticisms of the utopian socialists' utopian theories to their urban plans. If they had then it would have been relatively simple to sketch out a Marxist theory of urban planning. Moreover, what Marx and Engels did write about urban plans and planners was almost wholly negative and, therefore, seems to support the view that Marxists must completely reject urban planning, at least prior to the revolution. For example, in his writings on "the housing question," Engels discussed the problems of urban life during the last half of the 19th century in some detail and criticized Baron Haussmann's rebuilding of Paris.⁷² He argued, in what was little more than an extended elaboration on Marx's call for the "gradual abolition of the distinction between town and country," that this division was the source of most urban problems.⁷³ Given this, it is not surprising that Engels argued that the "bourgeois solution" to the housing question (in particular, programs to help workers buy their own homes in the city) was essentially flawed:

The bourgeois solution to the housing question has come to grief and it has come to grief owing to *the antithesis of town and country*. And with this we have arrived at the kernel of the problem. The housing question can only be solved when society has been sufficiently

transformed for a start to be made toward abolishing the antithesis between town and country, which has been brought to an extreme point by present-day capitalist society. Far from being able to abolish this antithesis, capitalist society . . . is compelled to intensify it . . .⁷⁴

As the utopian socialists recognized this antithesis as a central problem, Engels was favorably disposed toward their ideas, but, nevertheless, he argued that their attempts to build small communities set in natural surroundings were premature:

It is not the solution of the housing question which . . . solves the social question; instead only by the solution of the social question (that is, by the abolition of the capitalist mode of production), is the solution of the housing question made possible. To want to solve the housing question while at the same time desiring to maintain the modern big cities is an absurdity. The modern big cities . . . will be abolished only by the abolition of the capitalist mode of production.⁷⁵

This, of course, is essentially a strategic criticism of these plans: a solution to the urban crisis must wait on the larger transformation of society. In addition, Marx criticized the utopian socialists' town plans on tactical grounds, arguing that, with their focus on envisioning ideal communities, the utopian socialists led the proletariat into endless competing "doctrinaire experiments [which must] . . . necessarily suffer shipwreck."⁷⁶ Finally, Engels criticized these plans on materialist grounds, arguing that socialists who develop town plans that seek to realize justice and equality through architectural or other means are guilty of adopting essentially bourgeois values that are incompatible with a truly ideal society.⁷⁷

It should be clear that these same criticisms could be leveled against Howard's Garden City. Although Howard was more successful in attracting the support of bourgeois bankers and politicians and while an association he founded was able to build two garden cities, this success actually seems to support rather than contradict a strategic criticism of Howard's plans. In fact, it is tempting to apply a line from *The Housing Question* to Howard's work: the garden city concept failed to achieve its revolutionary goals because it "has been borrowed directly . . . from the [town plans of the] socialists Owen and Fourier . . . [but] made entirely bourgeois by discarding everything socialist about them."⁷⁸ In practice, the garden city concept was profoundly conservative for, not only did it not lead to broader social changes, but it did not produce any great improvement in city life. Garden cities proved unable to attract the industry they need to be self-sufficient and, as a result, tended to be inhabited not by the working poor, but by the middle class. In addition, without their own factories, they became dependent on access to urban centers, and, as a result,

they rapidly became nothing more than garden suburbs. Consequently, while pleasant places to live, like most suburbs, they did little to solve the problems of the city and, in fact, often only exacerbated such problems as residential segregation and transportation gridlock.⁷⁹ Ultimately, bourgeois society was able to assimilate the garden city movement. In part, this reflects the fact—one fully in accord with the materialist criticism—that Howard's garden city was grounded in bourgeois values. Marx and Engels could have added that Howard made a tactical error in that, by proposing an ideal city as a way to transform society, he opened the door to unproductive utopian speculation and debate.

These entirely negative remarks seem to support the received view that Marxism cannot, in principle, make a constructive contribution to urban planning—but there is more. From a humanist perspective, Marx and Engels could point out that both Howard and the utopian socialists based their town plans on a flawed form of humanism and that, as a result, neither Howard nor the utopian socialists understood the importance of self-development. Consequentially, neither Howard nor the utopian socialists developed plans that would contribute to the overcoming of alienation. Instead, their towns were designed to be inhabited, not by creative and self-developing individuals, but by essentially unchanging individuals with fixed needs. Consequently it is likely that, in them, alienation would continue unabated. Finally, from a historicist perspective, Marx could criticize the humanist nature of both Howard's and the utopian socialists' approach to urban planning by arguing that their towns allow no room for social change; that, from the moment of creation, they are finished products; and that their plans evince no recognition of the importance of practical discourse in shaping social institutions and provide no forums for such discourse, nor opportunities for the types of experiments in living that are essential to such discourse.

Given Howard's position in the history of urban planning, these criticisms should apply without change to more recent work in urban planning. Indeed, I believe that nearly all of the criticisms Marx and Engels deployed against the work of the utopian socialists can be applied with equal force to the urban plans of more contemporary, modern urban planners such as Le Corbusier and Lúcio Costa. This was understood (eventually) by Oscar Niemeyer, Costa's collaborator in the design of Brasília, who said: "I see now [after the construction of Brasília] that a social architecture without a socialist base leads to nothing—that you can't create a class-free oasis in a capitalist society, and that to try ends up being, as Engels said, a paternalistic pose that pretends to be revolutionary."⁸⁰ This is nothing more than a (terribly poignant) recapitulation and application of the strategic criticism to modern planning. In addition, it is clear that modern urban planners have been committed to the same limited, quasi-biological humanism accepted by Howard and the utopian socialists, and

are open to the same humanist and historicist criticisms Marx and Engels could have leveled at the utopian socialists' urban plans. Taken together, these criticisms do seem to lead to the "strange quietism" that Hall and other critics have warned would be the result of applying Marxism to urban planning.

However, in addition to providing grounds for criticisms of these urban plans, the humanist and historicist interpretations might provide grounds for a description of a city that could make a more constructive contribution to urban planning. If this can be done, then Hall will have been refuted. Of course, neither Marx nor Engels developed such a theory, but it is now fairly easy to see what direction it could take. A Marxist urban theory would be utopian in nature in that it would attempt to use urban planning to help establish and maintain an ideal society, but it would be guided by principles requiring that the design of the city contribute as much as possible to the processes of self-development and dialogue that play a central role in their utopian visions.

At first, it is tempting to say that urban design can make no positive contribution to these processes. However, even the briefest examination of life in many contemporary cities will provide evidence that urban design can negatively affect them. At the very least, therefore, a Marxist urban planning would attempt to avoid these mistakes. Contemporary city design negatively affects the process of self-development in a number of ways. It does this by isolating individuals, by making it difficult for them to maintain old social relationships and develop new ones, by homogenizing their experience, by encouraging personal consumption rather than creative, thoughtful expression, by engendering fear and producing frustration, and by depriving people of accessible venues for display and encounter. Cities designed by modern urban planners, in particular, seem as if they were designed precisely in order to bring about these results. For example, Brasília, as de Beauvoir, noted, seems to have been designed so as to impede just those processes which, on this view, a Marxist urban planner should seek to facilitate within the confines of a capitalist world economy.⁸¹

But if modern cities hinder these processes, it should be possible to design other cities that can facilitate them. A good place to look for some ideas on what a Marxist ideal city would be like is the work of those urban planners who criticize modern urban planning. For example, Jane Jacobs offers a treasure trove of ideas on how cities can encourage development and dialogue. Almost every proposal she made, from saving the corridor street to creating numerous parks of different sizes to creating mixed-use zones to enhancing transportation to connect the various parts of the city, can be seen as helping to develop and maintain these processes. Of course, Jacobs is not a Marxist, and, as a result, her theories are, at best, an incomplete expression of a Marxist urbanism. To develop such a theory,

many more ideas would have to be added to hers and they would have to be systemized into a coherent position. However, if I am right, a Marxist urban planner could not help but agree with Jacobs's claim that urban planning "must become the science and art of catalyzing and nourishing the close-grained working relationships [that a successful city requires]" for this seems only to restate in different language the claim that urban planners should try to facilitate self-development and dialogue.⁸²

CONCLUSION

I have argued that the theory that Marxist urban planning is self-contradictory is false. This view is based on the idea that urban planning is essentially a utopian practice and that Marx and Engels completely rejected utopianism. While I have accepted the utopian nature of urban planning, through an examination of Marx and Engels's critique of the utopian socialists, I have rejected the idea that they were opponents of utopianism. Although Marx and Engels were wary of utopian speculation for tactical and strategic reasons, and while they rejected naive utopianism, they developed a utopian vision which they based on both dialectical humanism and on historicism. This utopia emphasizes the importance of both human development and egalitarian dialogue. It follows that Marx and Engels would approve of urban forms that would facilitate these processes. Given this, the notion of Marxist urban planning is vindicated and awaits further development. Hints as to its form were provided immediately above.

It might be objected, however, that what I have been calling Marxist urban planning should be rejected by Marxists as a waste of time, as the positive effect of even the best urban design cannot on its own produce the utopian society that Marx and Engels envisioned. This last point is, of course, true; despite Le Corbusier's challenge, architecture cannot replace revolution. But it would be equally wrongheaded to think that urban planning cannot make any contribution to human progress. To accept such a claim would be to accept the least well-supported aspect of Marxist theory, namely, the theory of historical materialism. This theory, however, can no longer be thought to be the best available social science, as it has been repeatedly falsified. Moreover, to accept this position is to take the first step down the road that led to Brasília and to the failure to understand its failure: Brasília—pace Niemeyer—did not fail because it lacked a socialist base—it failed because it was based, not on a Marxist urban planning, but on a type of pre-Marxist urban planning that was based on the same assumptions as the plans of the utopian socialists. If Costa and Niemeyer had read Marx and Engels as utopian planners, Brasília might have been a vastly different city; it might have been to the 20th century what Haussmann's Paris was to the 19th. This may not have

led to a revolution in Brazil, but it could only have improved the lives of those who live in that sad city.

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CHAPTER 8

Marx, Feminism, and the Construction of the Commons

Silvia Federici

Communism is for us not a *state of affairs* which is to be established, an *ideal* to which reality will have to adjust itself. We call communism the *real* movement which abolishes the present state of things. The conditions of this movement result from the premises now in existence.

—Karl Marx and Frederick Engels,
“The German Ideology”¹

INTRODUCTION

What tools, principles, and ideas can Marxism bring to feminist theory and politics in our time? Can we think today of a relation between Marxism and feminism other than the “unhappy marriage” that Heidi Hartman depicted in a much-quoted essay of 1979?² What aspects of Marxism are most important for reimagining feminism and communism in the 21st century? And how does Marx’s concept of communism compare with the principle of the commons, the political paradigm inspiring so much radical feminist thinking today?

In asking these questions, I join a conversation on the construction of alternatives to capitalism that has begun in encampments and squares across the planet where, in ways replete with contradictions but creative of new possibilities, a society of “commoners” is coming into existence, striving to build social spaces and relations not governed by the logic of the capitalist market.

Assessing the legacy of Marx’s vision of communism for the 21st century is not an easy task, however. Added to the complexity of Marx’s

thought is the fact that in the last period of his life, after the defeat of the Paris Commune, Marx apparently abandoned some of his political axioms, especially with regard to the material preconditions for the construction of a communist society.³ It is also agreed that there are important differences between his two major works, *Capital* and the *Grundrisse*,⁴ and that Marx is not a writer whose thought can be grasped through any set of formulations, as “his level of analysis [was] continuously changing with his political design.”⁵

TWO THINGS, HOWEVER, ARE CERTAIN

The political language that Marx has given us is still necessary to think of a world beyond capitalism. His analysis of surplus value, money, and the commodity form, and above all his method—giving history and the class struggle a material foundation, and refusing to separate the economic from the political—are still indispensable, though not sufficient, for understanding contemporary capitalism. Not surprisingly, with the deepening of the global economic crisis there has been a revival of interest in Marx that many could not have anticipated in the 1990s when the dominant wisdom declared his theory defunct. Instead, amid the debris of realized socialism, broad debates have emerged on the questions of “primitive accumulation,” the modalities of the “transition,” and the historical and ethical meaning and possibility of communism. Mixed with feminist, anarchist, antiracist, queer principles, Marx’s theory continues to influence the disobedients of Europe, the Americas, and beyond. An anti-capitalist feminism, then, cannot ignore Marx. Indeed, as Stevi Jackson has argued, “[u]ntil the early 1980s the dominant perspectives within feminist theory were generally informed by, or formulated in dialogue with, Marxism.”⁶ However, there is no doubt that Marx’s categories must be given new foundations and we must go “beyond Marx.”⁷ This is not only because of the social economic transformations that have taken place since Marx’s time, but because of the limits in his understanding of capitalist relations—limits whose political significance has been made visible by the social movements of the last half a century that have brought to the world stage social subjects that Marx’s theory ignored or marginalized.

FEMINISM AND THE VIEWPOINT OF SOCIAL REPRODUCTION

Feminists have made an important contribution to this process, but they have not been alone. In the 1950s and 1960s, in the wake of the anticolonial struggle, political theorists like Frantz Fanon⁸ questioned an analysis that, like Marx’s, has almost exclusively focused on wage labor and assumed the vanguard role of the metropolitan proletariat, thus marginalizing the

place of the enslaved, the colonized, and the unwaged, among others, in the process of accumulation and anticapitalist struggle. These political theorists realized that the experience of the colonies called for a rethinking “of Marxism as a whole,” and that either Marxist theory could be reframed to incorporate the experiences of 75 percent of the world population or it would cease to be a liberating force and become instead an obstacle to it.⁹ For the peasants, the peones, the lumpen, who made the revolutions of the 20th century, showed no intention of waiting for a future proletarianization, or for “the development of the productive forces,” to demand a new world order, as orthodox Marxists and the parties of the Left would advise them to do.

Ecologists, including some eco-socialists, have also taken Marx to task for promoting an asymmetrical and instrumental view of the man–nature relation, presenting human beings and labor as the only active agents and denying nature any intrinsic value and self-organizing potential.¹⁰ But it was with the rise of the feminist movement that a more systematic critique of Marxism could be articulated, for feminists brought to the table not only the wageless of the world but the vast population of social subjects (women, children, occasionally men) whose work in fields, kitchens, bedrooms, the streets, daily produces and reproduces the workforce, and with them a set of issues and struggles concerning the organization of social reproduction that Marx and the Marxist political tradition have barely touched upon.

It is starting from this critique that I consider the legacy of Marx’s vision of communism concentrating on those aspects of it that are most important for a feminist program and for the politics of the commons, by which I refer to the many practices and perspectives, embraced by social movements across the planet that today seek to enhance social cooperation, undermine the market’s and state’s control over our lives, promote the sharing of wealth, and, in this way, set limits to capital accumulation. Anticipating my conclusions I argue that Marx’s vision of communism as a society beyond exchange value, private property and money, based on associations of free producers and governed by the principle “to each according to their needs from each according to their abilities” represents an ideal that no anticapitalist feminist can object to. Feminists can also embrace Marx’s inspiring image of a world beyond the social division of labor, although they may want to ensure that between hunting in the morning, fishing in the afternoon and criticizing after dinner, there would remain some time for everyone to share cleaning and childcare. However, feminist politics teach us that we cannot accept Marx’s conception of what constitutes work and the class struggle and even more fundamentally we must reject the idea—permeating most of Marx’s published work—that capitalism is or has been a necessary stage in the history of human emancipation, and a necessary precondition for the construction of a communist

society. This must be firmly stated, as the idea that capitalist development enhances workers' autonomy and social cooperation and thereby works toward its own dissolution has proven remarkably intractable.

Far more important for feminist politics than any ideal projection of a postcapitalist society are Marx's relentless critique of capitalist accumulation and his method, beginning with his reading of capitalist development as the product of antagonistic social relations. In other words, as Roman Rosdolsky¹¹ and Antonio Negri,¹² among others, have argued, more than the visionary revolutionary projecting a world of achieved liberation, the Marx who most matters to us is the theorist of class struggle, who refused any political program not rooted in real historical possibilities and throughout his work pursued the destruction of capitalist relations, seeing the realization of communism in the movement that abolishes the present state of things. From this point of view, Marx's historical/materialist method, which posits that in order to understand history and society we must understand the material conditions of social reproduction, is crucial for a feminist perspective. Recognizing that social subordination is a historical product, rooted in a specific organization of work has had a liberating effect on women. It has denaturalized the sexual division of labor and the identities built upon it, projecting gender categories not only as social constructs, but as concepts whose content is constantly redefined, infinitely mobile, open-ended, always politically charged. Indeed, many feminist debates on the validity of "women" as an analytic and political category could be more easily resolved if this method were applied, for it teaches us that it is possible to express a common interest without ascribing fixed and uniform forms of behavior and social condition.

Analyzing the social position of women through the prism of the capitalist exploitation of labor also discloses the continuity between discrimination on the basis of gender and discrimination on the basis of race, and enables us to transcend the politics of rights that assumes the permanence of the existing social order and fails to confront the antagonistic social forces standing in the way of women's liberation. However, as many feminists have shown, Marx has not consistently applied his own method, not at least to the question of reproduction and gender relations. As both the theorists of the Wages for Housework Movement—Mariarosa Dalla Costa,¹³ Selma James,¹⁴ Leopoldina Fortunati¹⁵—and eco-feminist theorists, like Maria Mies¹⁶ and Ariel Salleh,¹⁷ have demonstrated, there is a glaring contradiction at the center of Marx's thought. Although it takes the exploitation of labor as the key element in the production of capitalist wealth, it leaves un-theorized some of the activities and social relations that are most essential for the production of labor power, like sexual work, procreation, the care of children, and domestic work. Marx acknowledged that our capacity to work is not a given but is a product of social activity¹⁸ that takes always a specific historical form, for "hunger is hunger, but the

hunger that is satisfied by cooked meat eaten with knife and fork is different from the hunger that devours raw meat with the help of hands, nails and teeth."¹⁹ Nevertheless, we do not find in his published work any analysis of domestic labor, the family and the gender relations specific to capitalism, except for scattered reflections to the effect that the first division of labor was in the sexual act,²⁰ that slavery is latent in the family,²¹ and so forth. In volume one of *Capital*, sexual work is never considered even in its paid form as prostitutes are excluded, together with criminals and vagabonds, even from sphere of the "paupers,"²² clearly associated with that "lumpen-proletariat" that in the *Eighteenth Brumaire*²³ Marx dismissed as forever incapable of transforming its social condition. Domestic work is dealt with in two footnotes, one registering its disappearance from the homes of the overworked female factory hands during the Industrial Revolution, and the other noting that the crisis caused by the American Civil War brought the female textile workers in England back to their domestic duties.²⁴ Procreation is generally treated as a natural function,²⁵ rather than a form of labor that in capitalism is subsumed to the reproduction of the workforce and therefore subject to a specific state regulation. Even when presenting his "relative surplus population" theory,²⁶ Marx barely mentions the interest of capital and the state in women's reproductive capacity, attributing the determination of a surplus population to the requirements of technological innovation,²⁷ although arguing that the exploitation of the workers' children set a premium on their production.²⁸

Because of these omissions many feminists have accused Marx of reductionism, and viewed the integration of feminism and Marxism as a process of subordination.²⁹ The authors I have quoted, however, have demonstrated that we can work with Marx's categories³⁰ but we must reconstruct them and change their architectural order, so that the center of gravity is not exclusively waged labor and commodity production but the production and reproduction of labor power and especially that part of it that is carried out by women in the home. For in doing so, we make visible a new terrain of accumulation and struggle, as well as the full extent of capital's dependence on unpaid labor and the full length of the working day.³¹ Indeed, by expanding Marx's theory of productive work to include reproductive labor in its different dimensions, we can not only craft a theory of gender relations in capitalism but gain a new understanding of the class struggle and the means by which capitalism reproduces itself through the creation of different labor regimes and different forms of uneven development and underdevelopment.

Placing the reproduction of labor power at the center of capitalist production unearths a world of social relations that remains invisible in Marx, but is essential to exposing the mechanisms that regulate the exploitation of labor. It discloses that the unpaid labor that capital extracts from the working class is far greater than Marx ever imagined, extending to both

the domestic work that women have been expected to perform and the exploitation of the colonies and peripheries of the capitalist world. There is a continuity, in fact, between the devaluation of the reproduction of labor power that takes place in the home and the devaluation of the labor employed in the many plantations that capitalism has constructed in the regions it has colonized, as well as in the heartlands of industrialization. In both cases, not only have the forms of work and coercion involved been naturalized, but both have become part of a global assembly line designed to cut the cost of reproducing the waged workers. On this line, the unpaid domestic labor ascribed to women as their natural destiny joins with and relays the work of millions of *campesinas*, subsistence farmers, and informal laborers, growing and producing for a pittance the commodities that waged workers consume or providing at the lowest cost the services their reproduction requires. Hence the hierarchies of labor that so much racist and sexist ideology has tried to justify, but which only demonstrate that the capitalist class has maintained its power through a system of indirect rule, effectively dividing the working class, with the wage used to delegate to the male workers' power over the unwaged, starting with the control and supervision of women's bodies and labor. This means that the wage is not only the terrain of confrontation between labor and capital—the terrain on which the working class negotiates the quantity and constitution of socially necessary work—but is also an instrument for the creation of unequal power relations and hierarchies between workers, and that workers' cooperation in the labor process is by no means sufficient to unify the working class. Consequently, the class struggle is a far more complicated process than Marx assumed. As feminists have discovered, it must often begin in the family since in order to fight capitalism women have had to fight with their husbands and fathers, in the same way that people of color have had to fight against white workers and the particular type of class composition that capitalism imposes through the wage relation. Last, recognizing that domestic work is labor that produces the workforce enables us to understand gender identities as work functions and gender relations as relations of production, a move that liberates women from the guilt we have suffered whenever we have wanted to refuse domestic work, and amplifies the significance of the feminist principle that “the personal is the political.”

Why did Marx overlook that very part of reproductive work that is most essential to the production of labor power? Elsewhere,³² I have suggested that the conditions of the working class in England in his time may provide an explanation, since when Marx was writing *Das Kapital*, very little housework was performed in the working-class family (as Marx himself recognized), for women were employed side by side with men in the factories from dawn to sunset. Housework, as a branch of capitalist production, was under Marx's historical and political horizon. Only in

the second part of the 19th century, after two decades of working-class revolts in which the specter of communism haunted Europe, did the capitalist class begin to invest in the reproduction of labor power, in conjunction with a shift in the form of accumulation, from light (textile-based) to heavy (coal, steel based) industry, requiring a more intensive labor discipline and a less emaciated workforce. As I wrote in a recent essay, "In Marxian terms, we can say that the development of reproductive work and the consequent emergence of the full-time proletarian housewife were in part the products of the transition from 'absolute' to 'relative surplus' value extraction as a mode of exploitation of labor."³³ They were the product of a shift from a system of exploitation based on the absolute lengthening of the working day to one in which the reduction of the work day would be compensated by a technological revolution intensifying the rate of exploitation. But a further factor was certainly the capitalists' fear that the superexploitation to which workers were subjected, due to the absolute extension of the work day and the destruction of their commons, was leading to the extinction of the working class and influencing women's refusal of housework and childcare—a frequent theme in the official reports that the English government ordered starting in the 1840s to assess the factory worker's conditions and state of health.³⁴ It was at this junction that a labor reform increasing capital's investment (of funds and work) in the reproduction of the workforce was introduced, promoting a series of Factory Acts that first reduced and then eliminated women's factory employment, and substantially increased (by 40% by the end of the century) the male wage.³⁵ In this sense, the birth of the full-time proletarian housewife—a phenomenon that Fordism accelerated—can be read as an attempt to restore to the male waged workers, in the form of a vast pool of women's unpaid labor, the commons that they had lost with the advent of capitalism.

These reforms marked "the passage to the modern state" as planner of the construction of the working class family and the reproduction of the workforce.³⁶ But what most stood out when Marx was writing *Capital* was certainly that workers could not reproduce themselves. This can partly explain why housework is almost nonexistent in his work. It is likely, however, that Marx also ignored domestic labor because it represented the very type of work that he believed modern industry would and should replace, and he failed to see that the coexistence of different labor regimes would remain an essential component of capitalist production and work discipline.

I suggest that Marx ignored domestic labor because it lacked the characteristics that he considered essential to the capitalist organization of work, which he identified with large-scale industrialization—in his view the highest model of production. Being home-based, organized in a noncollective, noncooperative manner, and performed at a low level of

technological development, even in the 20th century at the peak of domesticity, housework has continued to be classified by Marxists as a vestigial remnant of precapitalist forms of production. As Dolores Hayden has pointed out in *The Grand Domestic Revolution*,³⁷ even when they called for socialized domestic work, socialist thinkers did not believe it could ever be meaningful work³⁸ and, like August Bebel, envisioned a time when housework would be reduced to a minimum.³⁹ It took a women's revolt against housework in the 1960s and 1970s to prove that domestic work is "socially necessary labor"⁴⁰ in the capitalist sense, that even though it is not organized on an industrial basis, it is extremely productive, and that to a large extent it is work that cannot be mechanized; for reproducing the individuals in which labor power subsists requires a variety of emotional as well as physical services that are interactive in nature and therefore very labor-intensive. This realization has further destabilized Marx's theoretical and political framework, forcing us to rethink one of the main tenets of Marx's theory of revolution, that is, the assumption that with the development of capitalism all forms of work will be industrialized and, most important, that capitalism and modern industry are preconditions for the liberation of humanity from exploitation.

MACHINERY, MODERN INDUSTRY, AND REPRODUCTION

Marx presumed that capitalism and modern industry must set the stage for the advent of communism because he believed that without a leap in the productivity of work that industrialization provides humanity would be condemned to an endless conflict motivated by scarcity, destitution, and the competition for the necessities of life.⁴¹ He also viewed modern industry as the embodiment of a higher rationality, making its way into the world through sordid motives, but teaching human beings attitudes apt to develop our capacities to the fullest, as well as liberating us from work. Modern industry is for Marx not only the means to a reduction of "socially necessary labor," but it is the very model of work, teaching workers uniformity, regularity, and the principles of technological development, thereby enabling us to engage interchangeably in different kinds of labor,⁴² something (he reminds us) the detailed worker of manufacture and even the artisan tied to the *métier* could never achieve.

Capitalism, in this context, is the rough hand that brings large-scale industry into existence, clearing the way for the concentration of the means of production and cooperation in the work process, developments Marx considered essential for the expansion of the productive forces and increase in the productivity of work. Capitalism is also for him the whip that schools human beings in the requirements of self-government, like the necessity to produce beyond subsistence and the capacity for social cooperation on a large scale.⁴³ Class struggle plays an important role in

this process. Workers' resistance to exploitation forces the capitalist class to revolutionize production in such a way as to further economize labor in a sort of mutual conditioning, continually reducing the role of work in the production of wealth, and replacing with machines the tasks that human beings have historically tried to escape. Marx believed that once this process was completed, once modern industry reduced socially necessary labor to a minimum, an era would begin in which we would finally be the masters of our existence and our natural environment, and we would not only be able to satisfy our needs but would be free to dedicate our time to higher pursuits.

How this rupture would occur he did not explain, except through a set of metaphoric images suggesting that, once fully developed, the forces of production would break the shell enveloping them triggering a social revolution. Again, he did not clarify how we would recognize *when* the forces of production should be mature enough for revolution, only suggesting that the turning point would come with the worldwide extension of capitalist relations, when the homogenization and universalization of the forces of production and the correspondent capacities in the proletariat would reach a global dimension.⁴⁴

Nevertheless, his vision of a world in which human beings can use machines to free themselves from want and toil and free time becomes the measure of wealth has exercised an immense attraction. Andre Gorz's image of a postindustrial/workless society where people dedicate themselves to their self-development owes much to it.⁴⁵ Witness also the fascination with the "Fragment on Machines" in the *Grundrisse*, the site in which this vision is most boldly presented, among Italian Autonomist Marxists. Antonio Negri in particular, in *Marx beyond Marx*, has singled it out as the most revolutionary aspect of Marx's theory. Indeed, the pages of Notebooks VI and VII, where Marx describes a world in which the law of value has ceased to function as science and technology have eliminated living labor from the production process and the workers only act as the machines' supervisors, are breathtaking in their anticipatory power.⁴⁶ Yet, as feminists in particular, we are today in a good position to see how illusory are the powers that an automated system of production can place at our disposal. We can see that "the allegedly highly productive industrial system" that Marx so much admired, "has been in reality a parasite on the earth, the likes of which have never been seen in the history of humanity"⁴⁷ and it is now consuming it at a velocity that casts a long shadow on the future. Ahead of his time in recognizing the interplay of humanity and nature, as Salleh noted,⁴⁸ Marx intuited this process, observing that the industrialization of agriculture depletes the soil as much as it depletes the worker.⁴⁹ But he obviously believed that this trend could be reversed, that once taken over by the workers the means of production could be redirected to serve

positive objectives, that they could be used to expand the social and natural wealth rather than deplete it, and that the demise of capitalism was so imminent as to limit the damage a profit-bound industrialization process inflicted on the earth.

On all these counts he was deeply mistaken. Machines are not produced by machines in a sort of immaculate conception. Taking the computer as an example, we see that even this most common machine is an ecological disaster, requiring tons of soil and water and an immense amount of human labor for its production.⁵⁰ Multiplied by the order of billions, we must conclude that, like sheep in 16th-century England, machines today are “eating the earth” and at such a fast pace that even if a revolution were to take place in the near future, the work required to make this planet habitable again would be astounding.⁵¹ Machines moreover require a material and cultural infrastructure that affects not only our nature commons—lands, woods, waters, mountains, seas, rivers, and coastlines—but our psyche and social relations, molding subjectivities, creating new needs and habits, producing dependencies that also place a mortgage on the future. This partly explains why, a century and a half after the publication of *Capital*, volume 1, capitalism gives no sign of dissolving, though the objective conditions that Marx envisioned as necessary for social revolution would seem more than mature. What we witness, instead, is a regime of permanent primitive accumulation reminiscent of the 16th-century enclosures, this time organized by the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank, with a cohort of mining and agribusiness companies that in Africa, Asia, and Latin America are privatizing communal lands and expropriating small-scale producers to acquire the lithium, the coltan, and the diamonds modern industry requires.⁵² We must also stress that none of the means of production that capitalism has developed can be unproblematically taken over and applied to a different use. In the same way (which we will see later) as we cannot take over the state so we cannot take over capitalist industry, science and technology, as the exploitative objectives for which they have been created shape their constitution and mode of operation.

That modern industry and technology cannot simply be appropriated and reprogrammed for different purposes is best demonstrated by the growth of the nuclear and chemical industries, which have poisoned the planet and provided the capitalist class with an immense arsenal of weapons now threatening us with annihilation or, at the very least, with the mutual destruction of the contending classes. As Otto Ullrich has put it, “[t]he most outstanding achievement of scientized technology has undoubtedly been the increase in the destructive power of the war machine.”⁵³ Similarly, the capitalist rational treatment of agriculture that Marx contrasted to presumably the irrational method of cultivation of the small producer⁵⁴ has destroyed the abundance, diversity, and nutritional

value of food and much of it will have to be discarded in a society where production is for human beings rather than being humanity's goal.

There is another consideration that makes us question Marx's concept of the function of technology in the formation of a communist society, especially when examined from a feminist viewpoint. A machine-based communism relies on an organization of work that excludes the most basic activities human beings perform on this planet. As I have mentioned, the reproductive work that Marx's analysis bypasses is, to a large extent, work that cannot be mechanized. In other words, Marx's vision of a society in which necessary labor can be drastically reduced through automation clashes with the fact that the largest amount of work on earth is of a highly relational nature and hardly subject to mechanization. Ideally in a postcapitalist society we would mechanize several household chores, and we would certainly rely on new forms of communication for company, learning, and information, once we controlled what technology is produced, for what purposes, and under what conditions. But how can we mechanize washing, cuddling, consoling, dressing, and feeding a child, providing sexual services or assisting those who are ill or the elderly who are not self-sufficient? What machine could incorporate the skills and affects needed for these tasks? Attempts have been made with the creation of *nursebots*⁵⁵ and interactive *lovebots*, and it is possible that in the future we may see the production of mechanical mothers. But even assuming that we could afford such devices, we must wonder at what emotional cost we would introduce them in our homes in replacement of living labor. But if reproductive work can only in part be mechanized, then the Marxian scheme that makes the expansion of material wealth dependent on automation and the reduction of necessary labor implodes; for domestic work, and especially the care of children, constitutes most of the work on this planet. The very concept of socially necessary labor loses much of its cogency. How is socially necessary labor to be defined if the largest and most indispensable sector of work on the planet is not recognized as an essential part of it? And by what criteria and principles will the organization of care work, sexual work, and procreation be governed if these activities are not considered part of social necessary labor?

The increasing skepticism about the possibility of substantially reducing domestic work through mechanization is one of the reasons why there is now among feminists a renewed⁵⁶ interest and experimentation with more collective forms of reproduction and the creation of reproductive commons, redistributing work among a larger number of subjects than the nuclear family provides. Exemplary here is "The Grand Domestic Revolution," an ongoing living research project, inspired by Dolores Hayden's work, initiated by feminist artists, designers, and activists in Utrecht (Holland) to explore how the domestic sphere, as well as the neighborhoods and the cities, can be transformed and "new forms of living and

working in common" can be constructed. Meanwhile, under the pressure of the economic crisis, struggles in defense of our natural commons (lands, waters, forests) and the creation of commoning activities (e.g., collective shopping and cooking, urban gardening) are multiplying. It is also significant that "[c]olonization and tech-transfer notwithstanding, the bulk of the world's daily needs continue to be supplied by Third World women food growers outside the cash nexus" and with very limited technological inputs, often farming on unused public land.⁵⁷ At a time of genocidal austerity programs, the work of these female farmers is the difference between life and death for millions.⁵⁸ Yet this is the very type of subsistence-oriented work that Marx believed should be eliminated, as he considered the rationalization of agriculture—that is, its organization on a large scale and on a scientific basis—"one of the great merits of the capitalist mode of production" and argued that this was possible only through the expropriation of the direct producer.⁵⁹

ON THE MYTH OF THE PROGRESSIVITY OF CAPITALISM

While a critique of Marx's theory concerning the power of industrialization to free humanity from toil and want is in order, there are other reasons his belief in the necessity and progressivity of capitalism must be rejected. First, this theory underestimates the knowledge and wealth produced by noncapitalist societies and the extent to which capitalism has built its power through their appropriation—a key consideration if we are not to be mesmerized by the capitalist advancement of knowledge and paralyzed in our will to exit from it. Indeed, it is politically important for us to recall that the societies capitalism destroyed, thousands of years before the advent of mechanization, achieved high levels of knowledge and technology, learning to navigate the seas across vast expanses of water, discovering by night-watches the main astral constellations, inventing the crops that have sustained human life on the planet.⁶⁰ Witness the fantastic diversity of seeds and plants that the Native American populations were able to develop, reaching a mastery in agricultural technology so far unsurpassed, with more than 200 varieties of corn and potatoes invented just in Meso-America—a stark contrast to the destruction of diversity we witness at the hands of the scientifically organized capitalist agriculture of our time.⁶¹

Capitalism did not invent social cooperation or large-scale intercourse, as Marx called trade and cultural exchanges. On the contrary, the advent of capitalism destroyed societies that had been tied by communal property relations and cooperative forms of work, as well as large trade networks. Highly cooperative work systems were the norm, prior to colonization, from the Indian Ocean to the Andes. We can recall the *ayllu* system in Bolivia and Peru and the communal land systems of Africa that have

survived into the 21st century, all counterpoints to Marx's view concerning the "isolation of rural life."⁶² In Europe as well, capitalism destroyed a society of commons, materially grounded not only in the collective use of land and collective work relations but in the daily struggle against feudal power, which created new cooperative forms of life such as those experimented with by the heretic movements (Cathars, Waldensians) that I have analyzed in *Caliban and the Witch*.⁶³ Not accidentally, capitalism could only prevail through a maximum of violence and destruction, including the extermination of thousands of women through two centuries of witch-hunts, which broke a resistance that by the 16th century had taken the form of peasant wars. Far from being a carrier of progress, the development of capitalism was the counter-revolution as it subverted the rise of new forms of communalism produced in the struggle, as well as those existing on the feudal manors on the basis of the shared use of the commons. Add that much more than the development of large-scale industry is needed to create the revolutionary combination and association of free producers that Marx envisioned at the very end of *Capital*, volume 1.⁶⁴ Capital and large-scale industry may boost the "concentration of the means of production" and the cooperation in the work process that results from the division of labor,⁶⁵ but the cooperation required for a revolutionary process is qualitatively different from the technical factor that Marx describes as being (together with science and technology) the "fundamental form of the capitalist mode of production."⁶⁶ It is even questionable whether we can speak of cooperation with regard to work relations that are not controlled by the workers themselves and therefore produce no independent decision making except at the moment of resistance when the capitalist organization of the work process is subverted. We also cannot ignore that the cooperation that Marx admired as the mark of the capitalist organization of work has historically become possible precisely on the basis of the destruction of workers' skills and cooperation in their struggle.⁶⁷

Second, to assume that capitalist development has been inevitable, not to mention necessary or desirable at any time in history, past or present, is to place ourselves on the other side of the struggles that people have made to resist it. But can we say that the heretics, the anabaptists, the diggers, the maroons and all the rebel subjects who resisted the enclosures of their commons, or fought to construct an egalitarian social order, writing, like Thomas Muntzer, *omnia sunt communia* ("All property should be held in common") on their banners, were on the wrong side of history, viewed from the perspective of human liberation? This is not an idle question. For the extension of capitalist relations is not a thing of the past but an ongoing process, still requiring blood and fire, and still generating an immense resistance which undoubtedly is putting a brake to the capitalist subsumption of every form of production on earth and the extension of waged labor.

Third, to posit capitalism as necessary and progressive is to underestimate a fact on which I have insisted throughout this chapter: capitalist development is not, or is not primarily, the development of human capacities and above all the capacity for social cooperation, as Marx anticipated. It is also the development of unequal power relations, hierarchies, and divisions, which, in turn, generate ideologies, interests, and subjectivities that constitute a destructive social force. Not accidentally, in the face of the most concerted neoliberal drive to privatize the remaining communal and public resources, it has been not the most industrialized but the most cohesive communities that have been able to resist and in some cases reverse the privatization tide. As the struggles of indigenous people have demonstrated—the struggle of the Quechua and Aymara against the privatization of water in Bolivia,⁶⁸ the struggles of the U'wa people in Colombia against the destruction of their lands by oil drilling (among other examples)—it is not where capitalist development is the highest but where communal bonds are the strongest that capitalist expansion is put on halt and even forced to recede. Indeed, as the prospect of a world revolution fueled by capitalist development recedes, the reconstitution of communities devastated by racist and sexist policies and multiple rounds of enclosure appears not just an objective condition, but a precondition of social change.

FROM COMMUNISM TO THE COMMONS: A FEMINIST PERSPECTIVE

Opposing the divisions that capitalism has created on the basis of race, gender, age, reuniting what it has separated in our lives and reconstituting a collective interest must then be a political priority for feminists and other social justice movements today. This is what is ultimately at stake in the politics of the commons, which, at its best, presupposes a sharing of wealth, collective decision making, and a revolution in our relation to ourselves and others. For the social cooperation and knowledge-building that Marx attributed to industrial work can be constructed only through commoning activities—urban gardening, time banking, open sourcing—that are self-organized and require, as well as produce, community. In this sense, insofar as it aims to reproduce our lives in ways that strengthen mutual bonds and set limits to capital accumulation,⁶⁹ the politics of the commons, in part, translates Marx's idea of communism as the abolition of the present state of things. It could also be argued that with the development of online commons—the rise of the free software, free culture movements—we are now approximating that universalization of human capacities that Marx anticipated as a result of the development of productive forces. But the politics of the commons is a radical departure from what communism has signified in the Marxist tradition and in much of

Marx's work, starting with the *Communist Manifesto*. There are several crucial differences between the politics of the commons and communism that stand out especially when we consider these political forms from a feminist and ecological viewpoint.

Commons, as discussed by feminist writers like Vandana Shiva, Maria Mies, Ariel Salleh, and practiced by grassroots women's organizations, do not depend for their realization on the development of the productive forces or the mechanization of production, or any global extension of capitalist relations—the preconditions for Marx's communist project. On the contrary, they contend with the threats posed to them by capitalist development and revalorize locale-specific knowledges and technologies.⁷⁰ They do not assume that there is a necessary connection between scientific/technological and moral/intellectual development, which is an underlining premise of Marx's conception of social wealth. They also place at the center of their political project the restructuring of reproduction as the crucial terrain for the transformation of social relations, thus subverting the value structure of capitalist organization of work. In particular, they attempt to break down the isolation that has characterized domestic work in capitalism, not in view of its reorganization on an industrial scale but in view of creating more cooperative forms of care work.

Commons are declined in the plural, in the spirit promoted by the Zapatistas, with the slogan "One No, Many Yeses," which recognizes the existence of diverse historical and cultural trajectories and the multiplicity of social outcomes that are compatible with the abolition of exploitation. For while it is recognized that the circulation of ideas and technological know-how can be a positive historical force, the prospect of a universalization of knowledges, institutions, and forms of behavior is increasingly opposed not only as a colonial legacy, but as a project achievable only through the destruction of local lives and cultures. Above of all, commons do not depend for their existence on a supporting state. Though in radical circles there is still a lingering desire for the state as a transitional form, presumably required to eradicate entrenched capitalist interests and administer those elements of the commonwealth that demand large-scale planning (water, electricity, transport services, etc.), the state form is today in crisis and not only in feminist and other radical circles. Indeed, the popularity of the politics of the commons is directly related to the crisis of the state form, which the failure of realized socialism and the internationalization of capital has made dramatically evident. As John Holloway has powerfully put it in *Change the World without Taking Power*, to imagine that we can use the state to bring forth a more just world is to attribute an autonomous existence to it, abstract from its network of social relations, which inextricably tie it to capital accumulation and compel it to reproduce social conflict and mechanisms of exclusion. It is also to ignore the fact "that capitalist social relations have never been limited by state frontiers" but are globally

constituted.⁷¹ Moreover, with a world proletariat divided by gender and racial hierarchies, the “dictatorship of the proletariat,” concretized in a state form, would risk becoming the dictatorship of the white/male sector of the working class. For those with more social power might very well steer the revolutionary process toward objectives that maintain the privileges they have acquired.

After decades of betrayed expectations and electoral ballots, there is now a profound desire, especially among younger people, in every country, to reclaim the power to transform our lives, reclaim the knowledge and responsibility that in a proletarian state we would alienate to an overarching institution that in representing us would replace us. This would be a disastrous turn. For rather than creating a new world we would forfeit that process of self-transformation without which no new society is possible, and reconstitute the very conditions that today make us passive even in front of the most egregious cases of institutional injustice. It is one of the attractions of the commons as the “embryonic form of a new society” that it stands for a power that comes from the ground, rather than from the state and relies on cooperation and collective forms of decision making rather than coercion.⁷² In this sense, the spirit of the commons resonates with Audrey Lorde’s insight that “the master’s tools will never dismantle the master’s house,”⁷³ and I believe that, if Marx lived today, he would agree on this point. For though he did not much dwell on the ravages produced by the capitalist organization of sexism and racism and he gave scarce attention to the transformation in the subjectivity of the proletariat, he nevertheless understood that we need a revolution to liberate ourselves not only from external constraints, but from the internalization of capitalist ideology and relations, from, as he put it, “all the muck of ages,” so that we become “fitted to found society anew.”⁷⁴

NOTES

1. Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *The German Ideology*, part 1, ed. C.J. Arthur (New York: International Publishers, 1988), 56–57.

2. Heidi I. Hartmann, “The Unhappy Marriage of Marxism and Feminism: Towards a More Progressive Union,” *Capital and Class* 3 (Summer 1979).

3. This argument is based on readings of Marx’s Ethnological Notebooks, notes Marx collected in the last years of his life in preparation for a major work on the topic. His comments here show that Lewis Henry Morgan’s *Ancient Society*, “and especially its detailed account of the Iroquois, for the first time gave Marx insights into the concrete possibilities of a free society as it had actually existed in history,” and the possibility of a revolutionary path not dependent on the development of capitalist relations. Rosemont argues that Morgan was on Marx’s mind when in correspondence with Russian revolutionaries he considered the possibility of a revolutionary process in Russia moving directly to communal forms of ownership, on the basis of the Russian peasant commune rather than through its dissolution

See Franklin Rosemont, "Karl Marx and the Iroquois." July 2, 2009. <http://libcom.org/library/karl-marx-iroquois-franklin-rosemont>. On this subject see also Kevin B. Anderson, "Marx's Late Writings on Non-Western and Precapitalist Societies and Gender," *Rethinking Marxism* 14, no. 4 (Winter 2002): 84–96; and T. Shanin, *Late Marx and the Russian Road: Marx and the "Peripheries" of Capitalism*. (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1983), 29–31.

4. Antonio Negri, for instance, has claimed that the *Grundrisse* should be seen as the culmination of Marx's thought and that the importance of *Capital* has been overestimated, for it is in the *Grundrisse* that Marx developed his major concepts and the most radical definition of communism. See Antonio Negri, *Marx beyond Marx: Lessons on the Grundrisse*, ed. Jim Fleming and trans. Harry Cleaver (New York and London: Autonomedia-Pluto, 1991): 5–4, 8–9, 11–18. By contrast, George Caffentzis argues that *Capital* has a more integrative concept of capitalism and, in this later work, Marx discarded some of the main theses in the *Grundrisse*, like the thesis that capitalism, through the automation of production, can go beyond the law of value. See George Caffentzis, "From the Grundrisse to Capital and Beyond: Then and Now," *Workplace: A Journal for Academic Labor*, no. 15 (September 2008): 59–74, <http://www.cust.educ.ubc.ca/workplace>.

5. Ariel Salleh, *Ecofeminism as Politics: Nature, Marx and the Postmodern* (London and New York: Zed Books), 71; Bertell Ollman, *Dialectical Investigations* (New York: Routledge, 1993).

6. Stevi Jackson, "Why a Materialist Feminism Is (Still) Possible," *Women's Studies International Forum* 24, no. 3/4 (2001): 284.

7. Negri, *Marx beyond Marx*.

8. As Frantz Fanon wrote in *The Wretched of the Earth*: "This is why Marxist analysis should always be slightly stretched every time we have to do with the colonial problem. Everything up to and including the very nature of precapitalist society, so well explained by Marx, must here be thought out again." See Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth* (New York: Grove, 1986), 40.

9. Roderick Thurton. "Marxism in the Caribbean" In *Two Lectures by Roderick Thurton. A Second Memorial Pamphlet* (New York: George Caffentzis and Silvia Federici, 2000).

10. See, for instance, Joel Kovel, "On Marx and Ecology," *Capitalism, Nature, Socialism* 22, no. 1 (September 2011): 11–14. Kovel argues that Marx remained prisoner of a scientist and productivistic viewpoint postulating "a passive nature worked over by an active Man," and encouraging the "all-out development of the productive forces" (pp. 13, 15). There is, however, a broad debate on the subject to which I can only cursorily refer. See, for instance, John Bellamy Foster, "Marx and the Environment," in *Monthly Review* (July–August 1995): 108–123.

11. Roman Rosdolsky, *The Making of Marx's "Capital"* (London: Pluto Press, 1977).

12. Negri, *Marx beyond Marx*.

13. Mariarosa Dalla Costa, "Women and the Subversion of the Community," in *The Power of Women and the Subversion of the Community*, ed. Selma James and Mariarosa Dalla Costa (Bristol: Falling Wall Press, 1975).

14. Selma James, *Sex, Race and Class* (Bristol: Falling Wall Press, 1975).

15. Leopoldina Fortunati, *The Arcane of Reproduction: Housework, Prostitution, Labor and Capital*, trans. Hillary Creek (Brooklyn: Autonomedia, 1995).

16. Maria Mies, *Patriarchy and Accumulation on a World Scale* (London: Zed Books, 1986).

17. Ariel Salleh, *Ecofeminism as Politics*.

18. Karl Marx, *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy*, vol. 1, ed. Frederick Engels and trans. Ben Fowkes (London: Penguin, 1990), 274. As he writes, "the value of labour-power is determined, as in the case of every other commodity, by the labour-time necessary for the production, and consequently, also the reproduction of this specific article. In so far as it has value, it represents no more than a definite quantity of the average social labor objectified in it. Labour-power exists only as a capacity of the living individual. Its production consequently presupposes his existence. Given the existence of the individual, the production of labour-power consists in his reproduction of himself or his maintenance."

19. Karl Marx, *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*, ed. Maurice Dobb (New York: International Publishers, 1989), 197.

20. Marx and Engels, *The German Ideology*, 51.

21. *Ibid.*, 52.

22. Marx, *Capital*, vol. 1, 797.

23. Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Napoleon* (New York: International Publishers, 1963).

24. This occurs in a footnote, in "Machinery and Large Scale Industry," commenting on the growing substitution of female for male (workers), resulting from the introduction of machinery in the factory, "throwing every member of the family onto the labor market." He writes: "Since certain family functions, such as nursing and suckling children, cannot be entirely suppressed, the mothers who have been confiscated by capital must try substitutes of some sort. Domestic work, such as sowing and mending, must be replaced by the purchase of ready-made articles. Hence the diminished expenditure of labour in the house is accompanied by an increased expenditure of money outside. The cost of production of the working class family therefore increases. . . ." Marx, *Capital*, vol. 1, 518n. Referring to this passage Leopoldina Fortunati has noted that "Marx managed to see housework only when capital destroyed it, and saw it through reading government reports which had realized the problems posed by the usurpation of housework far earlier. . . ." Fortunati, *The Arcane of Reproduction*, 169.

25. Marx writes, for instance, that "the natural increase of the workers does not satisfy the requirements of the accumulation of capital." Marx, *Capital*, vol. 1, 794. Emphasis added.

26. Marx, *Capital*, vol. 1, 794ff.

27. *Ibid.*, 782.

28. *Ibid.*, 795. Marx does not clarify, however, who determines this increased production—an apt question given that still in *Capital*, vol. 1, his descriptions of maternal relations in England's industrial districts indicates a widespread refusal of mothering such as to preoccupy the contemporary policymakers and employers. See *Ibid.*, 521, 521n, 522.

29. Hartman, "The Unhappy Marriage," 1.

30. An exception is Maria Mies who has repeatedly stated that within Marxism it is impossible to think gender relations. Mies, *Patriarchy and Accumulation on a World Scale*.

31. Silvia Federici, *Revolution at Point Zero: Housework, Reproduction and Feminist Struggle* (San Francisco: PM Press), 38.

32. *Ibid.*, 94–95.

33. Marx, *Capital*, vol. 1, chapter 16, Part V.

34. *Ibid.*, 348, 591, 599, 630. The last three page numbers cited here discuss the effect of women's factory employment on their discipline and reproductive work. As Marx put it, "Aside from the daily more threatening advance of the working class movement, the limiting of factory labor was dictated by the same necessity as forced the manuring of English fields with guano. The same blind desire for profit that in one case exhausted the soil had in the other case seized hold of the vital force of the nation at its roots."

35. It is no coincidence that by 1870 we simultaneously have in England both a new Marriage Act and the Education Act (which introduced the right to universal primary education), both signifying a new level of investment in the reproduction of the workforce. Starting in the same period, hand in hand with the hike in the family wage, we have a change in the eating habits of people in Britain, and the means of food distribution, with the appearance of the first neighborhood food shops. In the same period the sewing machine begins to enter the proletarian home. See Eric J. Hobsbawm, *Industry and Empire: The Making of Modern English Society, Vol. 2, 1750 to the Present Day* (New York: Random House, 1968), 135–136, 141.

36. Fortunati, *The Arcane of Reproduction*, 173.

37. Dolores Hayden, *The Grand Domestic Revolution: A History of Feminist Designs for American Homes, Neighborhoods and Cities* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press).

38. *Ibid.*, 6.

39. August Bebel, *Women under Socialism* (New York: Schocken Books, 1971).

40. "Socially necessary labour-time is the labour-time required to produce any use value under the conditions of production normal for a given society and with the average degree of skill and intensity of labour prevalent in that society." Marx, *Capital*, vol. 1, 129.

41. Marx and Engels, *The German Ideology*, 56.

42. Marx, *Capital*, vol. 1, 618.

43. *Ibid.*, 775.

44. Marx and Engels, *The German Ideology*, 55ff; Marx and Engels, *The Communist Manifesto*.

45. Andre Gorz, *A Farewell to the Working Class* (London: Pluto, 1982). See also Andre Gorz, *Paths to Paradise: On the Liberation from Work* (London: Pluto, 1985). On this subject see also Edward Granter, *Critical Social Theory and the End of Work* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2009). Granter points out that Gorz' idea of a society in which free time is a measure of wealth is a Marxian idea, and in fact Gorz makes explicit reference to Marx with quotes from the *Grundrisse* (Granter, *Critical Social Theory*, 121).

46. Negri, *Marx beyond Marx*.

47. Otto Ullrich, "Technology," in *The Development Dictionary: A Guide to Knowledge as Power*, eds. Wolfgang Sachs (London: Zed Books, 1993), 281.

48. Salleh, *Ecofeminism as Politics*, 70.

49. As he wrote in *Capital*, vol. 1 at the end of the chapter on Machinery and Large-Scale Industry: "all progress in capitalist agriculture is a progress in the art, not only of robbing the worker, but of robbing the soil; all progress in increasing the fertility of the soil for a given time is a progress towards ruining the more long-lasting sources of that fertility. The more a country proceeds from large-scale industry as the background of its development, as in the case of the United States, the more rapid is this process of destruction. Capitalist production, therefore, only develops the techniques and the degree of combination of the social process of production by simultaneously undermining the original sources of all wealth- the soil and the worker" Marx, *Capital*, vol. 1, 638.

50. Saral Sarkar, *Eco-Socialism or Eco-Capitalism? A Critical Analysis of Humanity's Fundamental Choices* (London: Zed Books, 1999), 126–127.

51. Think for example, the work necessary to monitor and neutralize the damaging effects of the nuclear waste piles accumulated throughout the globe.

52. See Silvia Federici, "War Globalization and Reproduction," in *Revolution at Point Zero* (San Francisco: PM Press, 2012), 76–84; Silvia Federici, "Women, Land Struggles, and the Reconstruction of the Commons," *WorkingUSA* 14, no. 1 (March 2011); and Silvia Federici, "Witch-Hunting, Globalization, and Feminist Solidarity in Africa Today," *Journal of International Women's Studies* 10, no. 1 (October 2008).

53. Ullrich, "Technology," 227.

54. Karl Marx, *Capital*, vol. 3, ed. Frederick Engels and trans. Ben Fowkes (London: Penguin, 1991), 948–949.

55. Nancy Folbre, "Nursebots to the Rescue? Immigration, Automation, and Care," *Globalizations* 3, no. 3 (September 2006), 356.

56. On this subject see, Silvia Federici, "Feminism and the Politics of the Commons in an Era of Primitive Accumulation," in *Revolution at Point Zero* (San Francisco: PM Press, 2012), 138–148.

57. Salleh, *Ecofeminism as Politics*, 79; Federici, "Feminism and the Politics of the Commons," 138–148.

58. According to the United Nations Population Fund, "some 200 million city dwellers" in 2001 were growing food "providing about 1 billion people with at least part of their food supply." United Nations Population Fund, *State of the World Population 2001* (New York: United Nations, 2001). A Worldwatch Institute Report of 2011, "Farming the Cities Feeding an Urban Future," confirms the importance of subsistence farming, noting in a Press Release, that "Currently an estimated 800 million people worldwide are engaged in urban agriculture, producing 15–20 percent." It should be noted that these figures do not include subsistence farming in the rural areas. Worldwatch Institute. "State of the World 2011: Innovations that Nourish the Planet" (Press Release, June 16, 2011). <http://blogs.worldwatch.org/nourishingtheplanet/wp-content/uploads/2011/06/Urban-agriculture-chapter-10-press-release-june-2011-nourishing-the-planet.pdf>

59. Marx, *Capital*, vol. 3, 754–755.

60. Clifford D. Conner, *A People's History of Science: Miners, Midwives, and "Low Mechanics"* (New York: Nation Books, 2005).

61. Jack Weatherford, *How the Indians of the Americas Transformed the World* (New York: Fawcette Columbine, 1988).

62. On this translation see Hal Draper, *The Adventures of the Communist Manifesto* (Berkeley: Center for Socialist History, 1998) paragraph 28.
63. Silvia Federici, *Caliban and the Witch: Women, Body and Primitive Accumulation* (New York: Autonomedia, 2004).
64. Marx, *Capital*, vol. 1, 930n.
65. *Ibid.*, 927.
66. *Ibid.*, 454.
67. On this subject see Marx, *Capital*, vol. 1, 563–568. In “Machinery and Large-scale Industry,” section 5, “The Struggle between Worker and Machine,” Marx writes: “The instrument of labor strikes down the worker.” Not only do the capitalists use machines to free themselves from dependence on labor but machinery is “the most powerful method for suppressing strikes. . . . It would be possible to write a whole history of the inventions made since 1830 for the sole purpose of providing capital with weapons against working-class revolt” (*ibid.*, 562–563).
68. Raquel Guitierrez Aguilar, *Los Ritmos del Pachakuti: Levantamiento y Movilización En Bolivia (2000–2005)* (Miguel Hidalgo, Mexico: Sisifo Ediciones, 2009).
69. Massimo de Angelis, *The Beginning of History: Value Struggles and Global Capital* (London: Pluto Press, 2007).
70. Maria Mies and Vandana Shiva, *Ecofeminism* (London: Zed Books, 1986); The Ecologist, *Whose Common Future? Reclaiming the Commons* (Philadelphia: Earthscan, 1993).
71. John Holloway, *Change the World without Taking Power: The Meaning of Revolution Today* (London: Pluto Press, 2002) 14, 95.
72. John Holloway, *Crack Capitalism* (London: Pluto Press, 2010), 29.
73. Audre Lorde, “The Master’s Tools Will Never Dismantle the Master’s House,” in *The Bridge That Is My Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color*, eds. Chem’è Moraga and Gloria Anzaldúa, 98–101 (New York: Kitchen Table, 1983).
74. Marx and Engels, *The German Ideology*, 95.

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CHAPTER 9

Marx's Vision of Sustainable Human Development

Paul Burkett

INTRODUCTION

In developed capitalist countries, debates over the economics of socialism have mostly concentrated on questions of information, incentives, and efficiency in resource allocation. This focus on socialist calculation reflects the mainly academic context of these discussions. By contrast, for anticapitalist movements and postrevolutionary regimes on the capitalist periphery, socialism as a form of human development has been a prime concern. A notable example is Ernesto "Che" Guevara's work *Man and Socialism in Cuba*, which rebutted the argument that "the period of building socialism . . . is characterized by the extinction of the individual for the sake of the state."¹ For Che, socialist revolution is a process in which "large multitudes of people are developing themselves," and "the material possibilities of the integral development of each and every one of its members make the task ever more fruitful."²

With global capitalism's worsening poverty and environmental crises, sustainable human development comes to the fore as the primary question that must be engaged by all 21st-century socialists in core and periphery alike. It is in this human developmental connection, I will argue, that Marx's vision of communism or socialism (two terms that he used interchangeably) can be most helpful.³

The suggestion that Marx's communism can inform the struggle for more healthy, sustainable, and liberating forms of human development may seem paradoxical in light of various ecological criticisms of Marx that have become so fashionable over the last several decades. Marx's vision has been deemed ecologically unsustainable and undesirable due to its

purported treatment of natural conditions as effectively limitless, and its supposed embrace, both practically and ethically, of technological optimism and human domination over nature.

The well-known ecological economist Herman Daly, for example, argues that for Marx, the "materialistic determinist, economic growth is crucial in order to provide the overwhelming material abundance that is the objective condition for the emergence of the new socialist man. Environmental limits on growth would contradict 'historical necessity'. . . ." The problem, says environmental political theorist Robyn Eckersley, is that "Marx fully endorsed the 'civilizing' and technical accomplishments of the capitalist forces of production and thoroughly absorbed the Victorian faith in scientific and technological progress as the means by which humans could outsmart and conquer nature." Evidently Marx "consistently saw human freedom as inversely related to humanity's dependence on nature." Environmental culturalist Victor Ferkiss asserts that "Marx and Engels and their modern followers" shared a "virtual worship of modern technology," which explains why "they joined liberals in refusing to criticize the basic technological constitution of modern society." Another environmental political scientist, K.J. Walker, claims that Marx's vision of communist production does not recognize any actual or potential "shortage of natural resources," the "implicit assumption" being "that natural resources are effectively limitless." Environmental philosopher Val Routley describes Marx's vision of communism as an antiecological "automated paradise" of energy-intensive and "environmentally damaging" production and consumption, one which "appears to derive from [Marx's] nature-domination assumption."⁴

An engagement with these views is important not least because they have become influential even among ecologically minded Marxists, many of whom have looked to non-Marxist paradigms, especially that of Karl Polanyi, for the ecological guidance supposedly lacking in Marxism. The underutilization of the human developmental and ecological elements of Marx's communist vision is also reflected in the decision by some Marxists to place their bets on a "greening" of capitalism as a practical alternative to the struggle for socialism.⁵

Accordingly, I will interpret Marx's various outlines of postcapitalist economy and society as a vision of sustainable human development. Since there are no important disagreements between Marx and Engels in this area, I will also refer to the writings of Engels, and works coauthored by Marx and Engels, as appropriate. After sketching the human developmental dimensions of communal property and associated (nonmarket) production in Marx's view, I draw out the sustainability aspect of these principles by responding to the most common ecological criticisms of Marx's projection. I conclude by briefly reconsidering the connections between Marx's vision of communism and his analysis of capitalism, focusing on that all important form of human development: the class struggle.

BASIC ORGANIZING PRINCIPLES OF MARX'S COMMUNISM

There is a conventional wisdom that Marx and Engels, eschewing all "speculation about . . . socialist utopias," thought very little about the system to follow capitalism, and that their entire body of writing on this subject is represented by "the *Critique of the Gotha Programme*, a few pages long, and not much else."⁶

In reality, postcapitalist economic and political relationships are a recurring thematic in all the major, and many of the minor, works of the founders of Marxism, and despite the scattered nature of these discussions, one can easily glean from them a coherent vision based on a clear set of organizing principles. The most basic feature of communism in Marx's projection is its overcoming of capitalism's social separation of the producers from necessary conditions of production. This new social union entails a complete decommodification of labor power plus a new set of communal property rights. Communist or associated production is planned and carried out by the producers and communities themselves, without the class-based intermediaries of wage-labor, market, and state. Marx often motivates and illustrates these basic features in terms of the primary means and end of associated production: free human development.

The New Union and Communal Property

For Marx, capitalism involves the "decomposition of the original union existing between the labouring man and his means of labour," while communism will "restore the original union in a new historical form." Communism is the "historical reversal" of "the separation of labour and the worker from the conditions of labour, which confront him as independent forces." Under capitalism's wage system, "the means of production employ *the workers*" under communism, "the workers, as subjects, employ the means of production . . . in order to produce wealth for themselves."⁷

This new union of the producers and the conditions of production "will," as Engels phrases it, "emancipate human labour power from its position as a *commodity*." Naturally, such an emancipation, in which the laborers undertake production as "united workers" (see later), "is only possible where the workers are the owners of their means of production." This worker ownership does not entail the individual rights to possession and alienability characterizing capitalist property, however. Rather, workers' communal property codifies and enforces the new union of the collective producers and their communities with the conditions of production. Accordingly, Marx describes communism as "replacing capitalist production with cooperative production, and capitalist property with a *higher form* of the archaic type of property, i.e. communist property."⁸

One reason why communist property in the conditions of production cannot be individual private property is that the latter form “excludes cooperation, division of labour within each separate process of production, the control over, and the productive application of the forces of Nature by society, and the free development of the social productive powers.” In other words, “the individual worker could only be restored as *an individual* to property in the conditions of production by divorcing productive power from the development of [alienated] labour on a large scale.” As stated in *The German Ideology*, “the appropriation by the proletarians” is such that “a mass of instruments of production must be made subject to each individual, and property to all. Modern universal intercourse cannot be controlled by individuals, unless it is controlled by all . . . With the appropriation of the total productive forces by the united individuals, private property comes to an end.”⁹

Besides, given capitalism’s prior socialization of production, “private” property in the means of production is already a kind of social property, even though its social character is class-exploitative. From capital’s character as “not a personal, [but] a social power” it follows that when “capital is converted into common property, into the property of all members of society, personal property is not thereby transformed into social property. It is only the social character of the property that is changed. It loses its class-character.”¹⁰

Marx’s vision thus involves a “reconversion of capital into the property of producers, although no longer as the private property of the individual producers, but rather as the property of associated producers, as outright social property.” Communist property is collective precisely insofar as “the material conditions of production are the co-operative property of the workers” as a whole, not of particular individuals or sub-groups of individuals. As Engels puts it: “The ‘working people’ remain the collective owners of the houses, factories and instruments of labour, and will hardly permit their use . . . by individuals or associations without compensation for the cost.” The collective planning and administration of social production requires that not only the means of production but also the distribution of the total product be subject to explicit social control. With associated production, “it is possible to assure each person ‘the full proceeds of his labour’ . . . only if [this phrase] is extended to purport not that each individual worker becomes the possessor of ‘the full proceeds of his labour,’ but that the whole of society, consisting entirely of workers, becomes the possessor of the total product of their labour, which product it partly distributes among its members for consumption, partly uses for replacing and increasing its means of production, and partly stores up as a reserve fund for production and consumption.” The latter two “deductions from the . . . proceeds of labour are an economic necessity” they represent “forms of surplus-labour

and surplus-product . . . which are common to all social modes of production." Further deductions are required for "general costs of administration," for "the communal satisfaction of needs, such as schools, health services, etc.," and for "funds for those unable to work." Only then "do we come to . . . that part of the means of consumption which is divided among the individual producers of the co-operative society."¹¹

Communism's explicit socialization of the conditions and results of production should not be mistaken for a complete absence of individual property rights, however. Although communal property "does not re-establish private property for the producer," it nonetheless "gives him individual property based on the acquisitions of the capitalist era: i.e., on co-operation and the possession in common of the land and of the means of production." Marx posits that "the *alien property* of the capitalist . . . can only be abolished by converting his property into the property . . . of the *associated, social individual*." He even suggests that communism will "make individual property a truth by transforming the means of production . . . now chiefly the means of enslaving and exploiting labor, into mere instruments of free and associated labour."¹²

Such statements are often interpreted as mere rhetorical flourishes, but they become more explicable when viewed in the context of communism's overriding imperative: the free development of individual human beings as social individuals. Marx and Engels describe "the community of revolutionary proletarians" as an "association of individuals . . . which puts the conditions of the free development and movement of individuals under their control—conditions which were previously left to chance and had acquired an independent existence over against the separate individuals." Stated differently, "the all-round realisation of the individual will only cease to be conceived as an ideal . . . when the impact of the world which stimulates the real development of the abilities of the individual is under the control of the individuals themselves, as the communists desire." In class-exploitative societies, "personal freedom has existed only for the individuals who developed under the conditions of the ruling class" but under the "real community" of communism, "individuals obtain their freedom in and through their association." Instead of opportunities for individual development being obtained mainly at the expense of others, as in class societies, the future "community" will provide "each individual [with] the means of cultivating his gifts in all directions; hence personal freedom becomes possible only within the community."¹³

In short, communal property is individual insofar as it affirms each person's claim, as a member of society, for access to the conditions and results of production as a conduit to her or his development as an individual "to whom the different social functions he performs are but so many modes of giving free scope to his own natural and acquired powers." Only in this way can communism replace "the old bourgeois society, with its classes

and class antagonisms," with "an association, in which the free development of each is a condition for the free development of all."¹⁴

The most basic way in which Marx's communism promotes individual human development is by protecting the individual's right to a share in the total product (net of the above-mentioned deductions) for his or her private consumption. The *Manifesto* is unambiguous on this point: "Communism deprives no man of the power to appropriate the products of society; all that it does is to deprive him of the power to subjugate the labour of others by means of such appropriation." In this sense, Engels observes, "social ownership extends to the land and the other means of production, and private ownership to the products, that is, the articles of production." An equivalent description of the "community of free individuals" is given in volume 1 of *Capital*: "The total product of our community is a social product. One portion serves as fresh means of production and remains social. But another portion is consumed by the members of society as means of subsistence."¹⁵

All of this, of course, raises the question as to how the distribution of individual workers' consumption claims will be determined. In *Capital*, Marx envisions that "the mode of this distribution will vary with the productive organisation of the community, and the degree of historical development attained by the producers." He then suggests ("merely for the sake of a parallel with the production of commodities") that one possibility would be for "the share of each individual producer in the means of subsistence" to be "determined by his labour-time." In the *Critique of the Gotha Programme*, the conception of labor time as the determinant of individual consumption rights is less ambiguous, at least for "the first phase of communist society as it is when it has just emerged after prolonged birth pangs from capitalist society." Here, Marx forthrightly projects that

the individual producer receives back from society—after the deductions have been made—exactly what he gives to it. What he has given to it is his individual amount of labour. . . . The individual labour time of the individual producer is the part of the social labour day contributed by him, his share in it. He receives a certificate from society that he has furnished such and such an amount of labour (after deducting his labour for the common fund), and with this certificate he draws from the social stock of means of consumption as much as the same amount of labour costs. The same amount of labour which he has given to society in one form, he receives back in another.

The basic rationale behind labor-based consumption claims is that "the distribution of the means of consumption at any time is only a consequence of the distribution of the conditions of production themselves."¹⁶ Given that the conditions of production are the property of the producers,

it stands to reason that the distribution of consumption claims will be more closely tied to labor time than under capitalism, where it is money that rules. This labor-time standard raises important social and technical issues that cannot be addressed here—especially whether and how differentials in labor intensity, work conditions, and skills would be measured and compensated.¹⁷

However, what Marx emphasizes is that insofar as the individual labor-time standard merely codifies the ethic of equal exchange regardless of the connotations for individual development, it is still infected by “the narrow horizon of bourgeois right.” Marx therefore goes on to suggest that “in a higher phase of communist society,” labor-based individual consumption claims can and should “be fully left behind and society inscribe on its banners: from each according to his ability, to each according to his needs!” It is in this higher phase that communism’s “mode of distribution . . . allows *all* members of society to develop, maintain and exert their capacities in all possible directions.” Here, “the individual consumption of the labourer” becomes that which “the full development of the individuality requires.”¹⁸

Even in communism’s lower phase, the means of individual development assured by communal property are not limited to individuals’ private consumption claims. Human development will also benefit from the expanded social services (education, health services, utilities, and old-age pensions) that are financed by deductions from the total product prior to its distribution among individuals. Hence, “what the producer is deprived of in his capacity as a private individual benefits him directly or indirectly in his capacity as a member of society.” Such social consumption will, in Marx’s view, be “considerably increased in comparison with present-day society and it increases in proportion as the new society develops.”¹⁹

For example, Marx envisions an expansion of “technical schools (theoretical and practical) in combination with the elementary school.” He projects that “when the working-class comes into power, as inevitably it must, technical instruction, both theoretical and practical, will take its proper place in the working-class schools.” Marx even suggests that the younger members of communist society will experience “an early combination of productive labour with education”—presuming, of course, “a strict regulation of the working time according to the different age groups and other safety measures for the protection of children.” The basic idea here is that “the fact of the collective working group being composed of individuals of both sexes and ages, must necessarily, under suitable conditions, become a source of humane development.” Another, related function of theoretical and practical education “in the Republic of Labour” will be to “convert science from an instrument of class rule into a popular force,” and thereby “convert the men of science themselves from panderers to

class prejudice, place-hunting state parasites, and allies of capital into free agents of thought."²⁰

Along with expanded social consumption, communism's "shortening of the working-day" will facilitate human development by giving individuals more free time in which to enjoy the "material and intellectual advantages . . . of social development." Free time is "time . . . for the free development, intellectual and social, of the individual." As such, "free time, *disposable time*, is wealth itself, partly for the enjoyment of the product, partly for free activity which—unlike labour—is not dominated by the pressure of an extraneous purpose which must be fulfilled, and the fulfillment of which is regarded as a natural necessity or a social duty." Accordingly, with communism "the measure of wealth is . . . not any longer, in any way, labour time, but rather disposable time." Nonetheless, since labor is always, together with nature, a fundamental "substance of wealth," labor time is an important "measure of the *cost* of [wealth's] production . . . even if exchange-value is eliminated."²¹

Naturally, communist society will place certain responsibilities on individuals. Even though free time will expand, individuals will still have a responsibility to engage in productive labor (including child-rearing and other care-giving activities) insofar as they are physically and mentally able to do so. Under capitalism and other class societies, "a particular class" has "the power to shift the natural burden of labour from its own shoulders to those of another layer of society." But under communism, "with labour emancipated, everyman becomes a working man, and productive labour ceases to be a class attribute." Individual self-development is also not only a right but a responsibility under communism. Hence, "the workers assert in their communist propaganda that the vocation, designation, task of every person is to achieve all-round development of his abilities, including, for example, the ability to think."²²

It is important to recognize the two-way connection between human development and the productive forces in Marx's vision. This connection is unsurprising seeing as how Marx always treated "the human being himself" as "the main force of production." And he always saw "forces of production and social relations" as "two different sides of the development of the social individual." Accordingly, communism can represent a real union of all the individual producers with the conditions of production only if it ensures each individual's right to participate to the fullest of his or her ability in the cooperative utilization and development of these conditions. The highly socialized character of production means that "individuals must appropriate the existing totality of productive forces, not only to achieve self-activity, but, also, merely to safeguard their very existence." In order to be an effective vehicle of human development, this appropriation must not reduce individuals to minuscule, interchangeable cogs in a giant collective production machine operating outside their

control in an alienated pursuit of "production for the sake of production." Instead, it must enhance "the development of human productive forces" capable of grasping and controlling social production at the human level in line with "the *development of the richness of human nature as an end in itself.*" Although communist "appropriation [has] a universal character corresponding to . . . the productive forces," it also promotes "the development of the individual capacities corresponding to the material instruments of production." Because these instruments "have been developed to a totality and . . . only exist within a universal intercourse," their effective appropriation requires "the development of a totality of capacities in the individuals themselves." In short, "the genuine and free development of individuals" under communism is both enabled by and contributes to "the universal character of the activity of individuals on the basis of the existing productive forces."²³

Planned, Nonmarket Production

In Marx's view, a system run by freely associated producers and their communities, socially unified with necessary conditions of production, by definition excludes commodity exchange and money as primary forms of social reproduction. Along with the decommodification of labor power comes an explicitly "socialised production," in which "society"—not capitalists and wage-laborers responding to market signals—"distributes labour-power and means of production to the different branches of production." As a result, "the money-capital" (including the payment of wages) "is eliminated." During communism's lower phase, "the producers may . . . receive paper vouchers entitling them to withdraw from the social supplies of consumer goods a quantity corresponding to their labour-time" but "these vouchers are not money. They do not circulate." In other words, "the future distribution of the necessaries of life" cannot be treated "as a kind of more exalted wages."²⁴

For Marx, the domination of social production by the market is specific to a situation in which production is carried out in independently organized production units on the basis of the producers' social separation from necessary conditions of production. Here, the labors expended in the mutually autonomous enterprises (competing capitals, as Marx calls them) can only be validated as part of society's reproductive division of labor *ex post*, according to the prices their products fetch in the market. In short, "commodities are the direct products of isolated independent individual kinds of labour," and they cannot be directly "compared with one another as products of social labour" hence "through their alienation in the course of individual exchange they must prove that they are general social labour."²⁵

By contrast, "communal labour-time or labour-time of directly associated individuals . . . is *immediately social* labour-time." And "where labour

is communal, the relations of men in their social production do not manifest themselves as 'values' of 'things'":

Within the co-operative society based on common ownership of the means of production, the producers do not exchange their products; just as little does the labour employed on the products appear here *as the value* of these products, as a material quality possessed by them, since now, in contrast to capitalist society, individual labour no longer exists in an indirect fashion but directly as a component part of the total labour.²⁶

The *Grundrisse* draws a more extended contrast between the indirect, *ex post* establishment of labor as social labor under capitalism and the direct, *ex ante* socialization of labor "on the basis of common appropriation and control of the means of production":

The communal character of production would make the product into a communal, general product from the outset. The exchange which originally takes place in production—which would not be an exchange of exchange values but of activities, determined by the communal needs and communal purposes—would from the outset include the participation of the individual in the communal world of products. On the basis of exchange values, labour is *posited* as general only through *exchange*. But on this foundation it would be *posited* as such before exchange; i.e. the exchange of products would in no way be the *medium* by which the participation of the individual in general production is mediated. Mediation must, of course, take place. In the first case, which proceeds from the independent production of individuals . . . mediations take place through the exchange of commodities, through exchange values and through money. . . . In the second case, the *presupposition is itself mediated*; i.e. a communal production, communality, is presupposed as the basis of production. The labour of the individual is posited from the outset as social labour. . . . The product does not first have to be transposed into a particular form in order to attain a general character for the individual. Instead of a division of labour, such as is necessarily created with the exchange of exchange values, there would take place an organization of labour whose consequence would be the participation of the individual in communal consumption.²⁷

The immediately social character of labor and products is thus a logical outgrowth of the new communal union between the producers and necessary conditions of production. This de-alienation of production negates

the necessity for the producers to engage in monetary exchanges as a means of establishing a reproductive allocation of their labor:

The very necessity of first transforming individual products or activities into *exchange value*, into *money*, so that they obtain and demonstrate their social *power* in this *objective* form, proves two things: (1) That individuals now produce only for society and in society; (2) that production is not *directly* social, is not "the offspring of association," which distributes labour internally. Individuals are subsumed under social production; social production exists outside them as their fate; but social production is not subsumed under individuals, manageable by them as their common wealth.²⁸

That the bypassing of market exchange and the overcoming of workers' alienation from production are two aspects of the same phenomenon explains why, in at least one instance, Marx defines communism simply as "dissolution of the mode of production and form of society based on exchange value. Real positing of individual labour as social and vice versa." Communism's "directly associated labour . . . is entirely inconsistent with the production of commodities."²⁹

As noted earlier, academic debates over the "economics of socialism" have tended to focus on technical issues of allocative efficiency ("socialist calculation"). Marx and Engels themselves often argued that the postcapitalist economy would enjoy superior planning and allocative capabilities compared to capitalism. In *Capital*, Marx describes "freely associated" production as "consciously regulated . . . in accordance with a settled plan." With "the means of production in common . . . the labour-power of all the different individuals is consciously applied as the combined labour-power of the community . . . in accordance with a definite social plan [which] maintains the proper proportion between the different kinds of work to be done and the various wants of the community." In *The Civil War in France*, Marx projects that "united co-operative societies" will "regulate national production upon a common plan, thus taking it under their own control, and putting an end to the constant anarchy and periodic convulsions which are the fatality of capitalist production."³⁰

Nonetheless, Marx and Engels did not treat planned resource allocation as the most fundamental factor distinguishing communism from capitalism. For them, the more basic characteristic of communism is its de-alienation of the conditions of production vis-à-vis the producers, and the enabling effect this new union would have on free human development. Stated differently, they treated communism's planning and allocative capacities as symptoms and instruments of the human developmental impulses unleashed by the new communality of the producers and their conditions of existence. Communism's decommodification of production

is, as discussed earlier, the flip side of the de-alienation of production conditions. The planning of production is just the allocative form of this reduced stunting of humans' capabilities by their material and social conditions of existence. As Marx says, commodity exchange is only "the bond natural to individuals within specific limited relations of production" and the "alien and independent character" in which this bond "exists *vis-à-vis* individuals proves only that the latter are still engaged in the creation of the conditions of their social life, and that they have not yet begun, on the basis of these conditions, to live it." Hence, the reason communism is "a society organised for co-operative working on a planned basis" is not in order to pursue productive efficiency for its own sake, but rather "to ensure all members of society the means of existence and the full development of their capacities." This human developmental dimension also helps explain why communism's "cooperative labor . . . developed to national dimensions" is not, in Marx's projection, governed by any centralized state power; rather, "the system starts with the self-government of the communities." In this sense, communism can be defined as "the people acting for itself by itself," or "the reabsorption of the state power by society as its own living forces instead of as forces controlling and subduing it."³¹

MARX'S COMMUNISM, ECOLOGY, AND SUSTAINABILITY

Many have questioned the economic practicality of communism as projected by Marx. Fewer have addressed the human development dimension of Marx's vision, one major exception being those critics who argue that it anchors free human development in human technological domination and abuse of nature, with natural resources viewed as effectively limitless. It is useful to address this environmental dimension on three levels: (1) the responsibility of communism to manage its use of natural conditions; (2) the ecological significance of expanded free time; (3) the growth of wealth and the use of labor time as a measure of the cost of production.

Managing the Commons Communally

That communist society might have a strong commitment to protect and improve natural conditions appears surprising, given the conventional wisdom that Marx presumed "natural resources" to be "inexhaustible," and thus saw no need for "an environment-preserving, ecologically conscious, employment-sharing socialism." Marx evidently assumed that "scarce resources (oil, fish, iron ore, stockings, or whatever) . . . would not be scarce" under communism. The conventional wisdom further argues that Marx's "faith in the ability of an improved mode of production to eradicate scarcity indefinitely" means that his communist vision provides

"no basis for recognizing any interest in the liberation of nature" from anti-ecological "human domination." Marx's technological optimism—his "faith in the creative dialectic"—is said to rule out any concern about the possibility that "modern technology interacting with the earth's physical environment might imbalance the whole basis of modern industrial civilization."³²

In reality, Marx was deeply concerned with capitalism's tendency toward "sapping the original sources of all wealth, the soil and the labourer." And he repeatedly emphasized the imperative for postcapitalist society to manage its use of natural conditions responsibly. This helps explain his insistence on the extension of communal property to the land and other "sources of life." Indeed, Marx strongly criticized the *Gotha Programme* for not making it "sufficiently clear that land is included in the instruments of labour" in this connection. In Marx's view, the "Association, applied to land . . . reestablishes, now on a rational basis, no longer mediated by serfdom, overlordship and the silly mysticism of [private] property, the intimate ties of man with the earth, since the earth ceases to be an object of huckstering." As with other means of production, this "common property" in land "does not mean the restoration of the old original common ownership, but the institution of a far higher and more developed form of possession in common."³³

Marx does not see this communal property as conferring a right to over-exploit land and other natural conditions in order to serve the production and consumption needs of the associated producers. Instead, he foresees an eclipse of capitalist notions of land *ownership* by a communal system of *user rights and responsibilities*:

From the standpoint of a higher economic form of society, private ownership of the globe by single individuals will appear quite as absurd as private ownership of one man by another. Even a whole society, a nation, or even all simultaneously existing societies taken together, are not the owners of the globe. They are only its possessors, its usufructuaries, and, like *boni patres familias*, they must hand it down to succeeding generations in an improved condition.³⁴

Marx's projection of communal landed property clearly does not connote a right of "owners" (either individuals or society as a whole) to unrestricted use based on "possession." Rather, like all communal property in the new union, it confers the right to *responsibly utilize* the land as a condition of free human development, and indeed as a basic source (together with labor) of "the entire range of permanent necessities of life required by the chain of successive generations." As Marx says, the association treats "the soil as *eternal* communal property, an *inalienable* condition for

the existence and reproduction of a chain of successive generations of the human race."³⁵

Why have the ecological critics missed this crucial element of Marx's vision? The answer may lie in the ongoing influence of so-called "tragedy of the commons" models, which (mis)identify common property with uncontrolled "open access" to natural resources by independent users. In reality, the dynamics posited by these models have more in common with the anarchy of capitalist competition than with Marx's vision of communal rights and responsibilities regarding the use of natural conditions. Indeed, the ability of traditional communal property systems to sustainably utilize common pool resources has been the subject of a growing body of research in recent years. This research arguably supports the potential for ecological management through a communalization of natural conditions in postcapitalist society.³⁶

Marx's emphasis on the future society's responsibility toward the land follows from his projection of the inherent unity of humanity and nature being realized both consciously and socially under communism. For Marx and Engels, people and nature are not "two separate 'things'" hence they speak of humanity having "an historical nature and a natural history." They observe how extra-human nature has been greatly altered by human production and development, so that "the nature that preceded human history . . . today no longer exists" but they also recognize the ongoing importance of "natural instruments of production" in the use of which "individuals are subservient to nature." Communism, far from rupturing or trying to overcome the necessary unity of people and nature, makes this unity more transparent and places it at the service of a sustainable development of people as natural and social beings. Engels thus envisions the future society as one in which people will "not only feel but also know their oneness with nature." Marx goes so far as to define communism as "the unity of being of man with nature."³⁷

Naturally, it will still be necessary for communist society to "wrestle with Nature to satisfy [its] wants, to maintain and reproduce life." Marx thus refers to "the associated producers rationally regulating their interchange with nature, bringing it under their common control." Such a rational regulation or "real conscious mastery of Nature" presumes that the producers have "become masters of their own social organisation."³⁸ But it does not presume that humanity has overcome all natural limits; nor does it presume that the producers have attained complete technological control over natural forces.

For instance, Marx sees the associated producers setting aside a portion of the surplus product as a "reserve or insurance fund to provide against misadventures, disturbances through natural events, etc." especially in agriculture. Uncertainties connected with the natural conditions of production ("destruction caused by extraordinary phenomena of nature, fire, flood, etc.") are to be dealt with through "a continuous relative

over-production," that is, "production on a larger scale than is necessary for the simple replacement and reproduction of the existing wealth." More specifically, "There must be on the one hand a certain quantity of fixed capital produced in excess of that which is directly required; on the other hand, and particularly, there must be a supply of raw materials, etc., in excess of the direct annual requirements (this applies especially to means of subsistence)." Marx also envisions a "calculation of probabilities" to help ensure that society is "in possession of the means of production required to compensate for the extraordinary destruction caused by accidents and natural forces."³⁹

Obviously, "this sort of over-production is tantamount to control by society over the material means of its own reproduction" only in the sense of a far-sighted regulation of the productive interchanges between society and uncontrollable natural conditions. It is in this prudential sense that Marx foresees the associated producers "direct[ing] production from the outset so that the yearly grain supply depends only to a very minimum on the variations in the weather; the sphere of production—the supply—and the use-aspects thereof—is rationally regulated." It is simply judicious for "the producers themselves . . . to spend a part of their labour, or of the products of their labour in order to insure their products, their wealth, or the elements of their wealth, against accidents, etc." "Within capitalist society," by contrast, uncontrollable natural conditions impart a needless "element of anarchy" to social reproduction.⁴⁰

Contradicting their ecological critics, Marx and Engels simply do not identify free human development with a one-sided human domination or control of nature. According to Engels,

Freedom does not consist in the dream of independence of natural laws, but in the knowledge of these laws, and in the possibility this gives of systematically making them work towards definite ends. This holds good in relation both to the laws of external nature and to those which govern the bodily and mental existence of men themselves—two classes of laws which we can separate from each other at most only in thought but not in reality. . . . Freedom therefore consists in the control over ourselves and over external nature which is founded on natural necessity.

In short, Marx and Engels envision a "real human freedom" based on "an existence in harmony with the established laws of nature."⁴¹

Expanded Free Time and Sustainable Human Development

Marx's ecological critics often argue that his vision of expanded free time under communism is antiecological because it embodies an ethic of

human self-realization through the overcoming of natural constraints. Routley, for example, suggests that Marx adopts “the view of bread labor as necessarily alienated, and hence as something to be reduced to an absolute minimum through automation. The result must be highly energy-intensive and thus given any foreseeable, realistic energy scenario, environmentally damaging.” For Marx, evidently, “it is the fact that bread labor ties man to nature which makes it impossible for it to be expressive of what is truly and fully human; thus, it is only when man has overcome the necessity to spend time on bread labour that he or she can be thought of as mastering nature and becoming fully human.” Less dramatically, Walker points to a tension between Marx’s vision of expanding free time, which “clearly implies that there must be resources over and above those needed for a bare minimum of survival,” and Marx’s purported failure to “mention . . . limitations on available natural resources.”⁴²

The preceding discussion has already done much to dispel the notions that Marx and Engels were unconcerned about natural resource management under communism, and that they foresaw a progressive *separation* of human development from nature as such. However, it must also be pointed out that the ecological critics have mischaracterized the relation between free time and work time under communism. It is true that, for Marx, the “development of human energy which is an end in itself . . . lies beyond the actual sphere of material production,” that is, beyond that “labour which is determined by necessity and mundane considerations.” But for Marx, this “true realm of freedom . . . can blossom forth only with [the] realm of necessity as its basis,” and the relationship between the two realms is by no means one of simple *opposition* as claimed by the ecological critics. As Marx says, the “quite different . . . free character” of directly associated labor, where “labour-time is reduced to a normal length and, furthermore, labour is no longer [from the standpoint of the producers as a whole] performed for someone else,” means that “labour time itself cannot remain in the abstract antithesis to free time in which it appears from the perspective of bourgeois economy”:

Free time—which is both idle time and time for higher activity—has naturally transformed its possessor into a different subject, and he then enters into the direct production process as this different subject. This process is then both discipline, as regards the human being in the process of becoming; and, at the same time, practice, experimental science, materially creative and objectifying science, as regards the human being who has become, in whose head exists the accumulated knowledge of society.⁴³

In Marx’s vision, the enhancement of free human development through reductions in work time resonates positively with the development of

human capabilities in the realm of production which still appears as a "metabolism" of society and nature. Marx's emphases on "theoretical and practical" education, and on the de-alienation of science *vis-à-vis* the producers, are quite relevant in this connection. Marx sees communism's diffusion and development of scientific knowledge taking the form of new combinations of natural and social science, projecting that

natural science . . . will become the basis of *human* science, as it has already become the basis of actual human life, albeit in an estranged form. One basis for life and another basis for science is *a priori* a lie . . . Natural science will in time incorporate into itself the science of man, just as the science of man will incorporate into itself natural science: there will be *one* science.⁴⁴

This intrinsic unity of social and natural science is, of course, a logical corollary of the intrinsic unity of humanity and nature. Accordingly, Marx and Engels "know only a single science, the science of history. One can look at history from two sides and divide it into the history of nature and the history of men. The two sides are, however, inseparable; the history of nature and the history of men are dependent on each other so long as men exist."⁴⁵

In short, the founders of Marxism did not envision communism's reduced work time in terms of a progressive separation of human development from nature. Nor did they see expanded free time being filled by orgies of consumption for consumption's sake. Rather, reduced work time is viewed as a necessary condition for the intellectual development of social individuals capable of mastering the scientifically developed forces of nature and social labor in environmentally *and* humanly rational fashion. The "increase of free time" appears here as "time for the full development of the individual" capable of "the grasping of his own history as a *process*, and the recognition of nature (equally present as practical power over nature) as his real body." The intellectual development of the producers during free time *and* work time is clearly central to the process by which communist labor's "social character is posited . . . in the production process not in a merely natural, spontaneous form, but as an activity regulating all the forces of nature."⁴⁶ Far from anticological, this process is such that the producers and their communities become more theoretically and practically aware of natural wealth as an eternal condition of production, free time, and human life itself.

The ecological critics also seem to have missed the potential for increased free time as a means of *reducing* the pressure of production on the natural environment. Specifically, rising productivity of social labor need not increase material and energy throughput insofar as the producers are compensated by reductions in work time instead of greater material

consumption. However, this aspect of free time as a measure of wealth is best located in the context of communism's transformation of human needs.

Wealth, Human Needs, and Labor Cost

Some would argue that insofar as Marx envisions communism encouraging a shared sense of responsibility toward nature, this responsibility remains wedded to an antiecological conception of nature as primarily an instrument or material of human labor. Alfred Schmidt, for example, suggests that "when Marx and Engels complain about the unholy plundering of nature, they are not concerned with nature itself but with considerations of economic utility." Routley asserts that for Marx, "Nature is apparently to be respected to the extent, and *only* to the extent, that it becomes man's handiwork, his or her artifact and self-expression, and is thus a reflection of man and part of man's identity."⁴⁷

It should be clear from our previous discussion that any dichotomy between "economic utility" and "nature itself" is completely alien to Marx's materialism. A related point is that Marx's conception of wealth or use value encompasses "the manifold variety of human needs," whether these needs be physical, cultural, or aesthetic. In this broad human developmental sense, "use value . . . can quite generally be characterised as the *means of life*." David Pepper rightly concludes that "Marx did see nature's role as 'instrumental' to humans, but to him instrumental value . . . included nature as a source of aesthetic, scientific and moral value."⁴⁸

As per "man's handiwork," Marx does not employ an oppositional conception of labor and nature in which the former merely subsumes the latter. He insists that the human capacity to work, or labor power, is itself "a natural object, a thing, although a living conscious thing" hence labor is a process in which the worker "opposes himself to Nature *as one of her own forces*" and "appropriates *Nature's productions* in a form *adapted to his own wants*." Marx views labor as "a process in which both man and Nature participate . . . the necessary condition for effecting exchange of matter between man and Nature" in production. As a "universal condition for the metabolic interaction between nature and man," labor is "a natural condition of human life . . . independent of, equally common to, all particular social forms of human life." Labor is, of course, only part of "the universal metabolism of nature" and as a materialist Marx insists that "the earth . . . exists independently of man." In this ontological sense, "the priority of external nature remains unassailed," even though Marx does insist on the importance of social relations in the structuring of the productive "metabolism" between humanity and nature.⁴⁹

But what of Marx and Engels's notorious references to continued growth in the production of wealth under communism? Are these not

immanently antiecollogical? Here it must be emphasized that these growth projections are always made in close connection with Marx's vision of free and well-rounded human development, not with growth of material production and consumption for their own sake. Accordingly, they always refer to growth of wealth in a general sense, encompassing the satisfaction of needs other than those requiring the industrial processing of natural resources (matter and energy throughput). In discussing the "higher phase of communist society," for example, Marx makes the "to each according to his needs" criterion conditional upon a situation where "the enslaving sub-ordination of individuals under division of labour, and therewith also the antithesis between mental and physical labour, has vanished; after labour, from a mere means of life, has itself become the prime necessity of life; after the productive forces have also increased with the all-round development of the individual." Similarly, Engels does refer to "a practically limitless growth of production," but then fills out his conception of "practical" in terms of the priority "of securing for every member of society . . . an existence which is not only fully sufficient from a material standpoint . . . but also guarantees to them the completely unrestricted development of their physical and mental faculties."⁵⁰ Such human development need not involve a limitless growth of material consumption.

For Marx, communism's "progressive expansion of the process of reproduction" encompasses the entire "living process of the *society* of producers" and, as discussed earlier, he specifies the "material and intellectual advantages" of this "social development" in holistic human developmental terms. When Marx and Engels envision communism as "an organisation of production and intercourse which will make possible the normal satisfaction of needs . . . limited only by the needs themselves," they do not mean a complete satiation of limitlessly expanding needs of all kinds:

Communist organisation has a twofold effect on the desires produced in the individual by present-day relations; some of these desires—namely desires which exist under all relations, and only change their form and direction under different social relations—are merely altered by the communist social system, for they are given the opportunity to develop normally; but others—namely those originating solely in a particular society, under particular conditions of production and intercourse—are totally deprived of their conditions of existence. Which will be merely changed and which eliminated in a communist society can only be determined in a practical way.⁵¹

As Ernest Mandel points out, this social and human developmental approach to need satisfaction is quite different from the "absurd notion" of unqualified "abundance" often ascribed to Marx, that is, "a regime of unlimited access to a boundless supply of all goods and services." Although

communist need satisfaction is consistent with a “definition of abundance [as] *saturation of demand*,” this has to be located in the context of a hierarchy of “basic needs, secondary needs that become indispensable with the growth of civilization, and luxury, inessential or even harmful needs.” Marx’s human developmental vision basically foresees a satiation of basic needs and a gradual extension of this satiation to secondary needs as they develop socially through expanded free time and cooperative worker-community control over production—not a full satiation of all conceivable needs.⁵²

Here, one begins to see the full ecological significance of free time as a measure of communist wealth. Specifically, if the secondary needs developed and satisfied during free time are less material and energy intensive, their increasing weight in total needs should reduce the pressure of production on limited natural conditions. This is crucial insofar as Marx’s vision has the producers using their newfound material security and expanded free time to engage in a variety of intellectual and aesthetic forms of self-development.⁵³ Such a development of secondary needs is to be enhanced by the greater opportunities that real worker-community control provides for people to become informed participants in economic, political, and cultural life.

Of course, labor (along with nature) remains a fundamental source of wealth under communism. This, together with the priority of expanded free time, means that the amounts of social labor expended in the production of different goods and services will still be an important measure of their *cost*. As Marx explains in the *Grundrisse*:

On the basis of communal production, the determination of time remains, of course, essential. The less time the society requires to produce wheat, cattle etc., the more time it wins for other production, material or mental. Just as in the case of an individual, the multiplicity of its development, its enjoyment and its activity depends on economization of time. Economy of time, to this all economy ultimately reduces itself. Society likewise has to distribute its time in a purposeful way, in order to achieve a production adequate to its overall needs; just as the individual has to distribute his time correctly in order to achieve knowledge in proper proportions or in order to satisfy the various demands on his activity. Thus, economy of time, along with the planned distribution of labour time among the various branches of production, remains the first economic law on the basis of communal production. It becomes law, there, to an even higher degree.⁵⁴

Marx immediately adds, however, that communism’s economy of time “is essentially different from a measurement of exchange values (labour or

products) by labour time." For one thing, communism's use of labor time as a measure of cost "is accomplished . . . by the direct and conscious control of society over its working time—which is possible only with common ownership," unlike the situation under capitalism, where the "regulation" of social labor time is only accomplished indirectly, "by the movement of commodity prices." More importantly, communism's economy of labor time serves use value, especially the expansion of free time, whereas capitalism's economy of time is geared toward increasing the surplus labor time expended by the producers.⁵⁵

Marx and Engels do not, moreover, project labor time as the sole guide to resource-allocation decisions under communism: they only indicate that it is to be one important measure of the social costs of different kinds of production. That "production . . . under the actual, predetermining control of society . . . establishes a relation between the volume of social labour-time applied in producing definite articles, and the volume of the social want to be satisfied by these articles" in no way implies that environmental costs are left out of account. Equivalently, it does not preclude the maintenance and improvement of natural conditions from being included under the "social wants to be satisfied" by production and consumption.⁵⁶

For strong evidence that Marx and Engels did not see communism prioritizing minimum labor cost over ecological goals, one need only point to their insistence on the "abolition of the antithesis between town and country" as "a direct necessity of . . . production and, moreover, of public health." Observing capitalism's ecologically disruptive urban concentrations of industry and population, industrialized agriculture, and failure to recycle human and livestock wastes, Marx and Engels early on pointed to the "abolition of the contradiction between town and country" as "one of the first conditions of communal life." As Engels later put it: "The present poisoning of the air, water and land can only be put an end to by the fusion of town and country" under "one single vast plan." Despite its potential cost to society in terms of increased labor time, he viewed this fusion as "no more and no less utopian than the abolition of the antithesis between capitalist and wage-workers." It was even "a practical demand of both industrial and agricultural production." In his *magnum opus*, Marx foresaw communism forging a "higher synthesis" of "the old bond of union which held together agriculture and manufacture in their infancy." This new union would work toward a "restoration" of "the naturally grown conditions for the maintenance of [the] circulation of matter . . . under a form appropriate to the full development of the human race." Accordingly, Engels ridiculed Dühring's projection "that the union between agriculture and industry will nevertheless be carried through even *against* economic considerations, as if this would be some economic sacrifice!"⁵⁷ It is obvious that Marx and Engels would gladly accept increases in social labor time in return for an ecologically more sound production.

Still, one need not accept the notion, repeated *ad nauseam* by Marx's ecological critics, of an inherent opposition between labor cost reductions and environmental friendliness. Marx's communism would dispense with the waste of natural resources *and* labor associated with capitalism's "anarchical system of competition" and "vast number of employments . . . in themselves superfluous." Many antiecological use values could be eliminated or greatly reduced under a planned system of labor allocation and land use, among them advertising, the excessive processing and packaging of food and other goods, planned obsolescence of products, and the automobile. All these destructive use values are "indispensable" for capitalism; but from the standpoint of environmental sustainability they represent "the most outrageous squandering of labour-power and of the social means of production."⁵⁸

CAPITALISM, COMMUNISM, AND THE STRUGGLE OVER HUMAN DEVELOPMENT

Marx argues that "if we did not find concealed in society as it is the material conditions of production and the corresponding relations of exchange prerequisite for a classless society, then all attempts to explode it would be quixotic." He refers to "development of the productive forces of social labour" as capitalism's "historical task and justification . . . the way in which it unconsciously creates the material requirements of a higher mode of production." In short, the "original unity between the worker and the conditions of production . . . can be re-established only on the material foundation which capital creates."⁵⁹

Time and again, Marx's ecological critics have found in such pronouncements evidence that he uncritically endorsed capitalism's antiecological subjugation of nature to human purposes, and that he saw this subjugation continuing and even deepening under communism. Ted Benton, for example, asserts that in seeing capitalism as "preparing the conditions for future human emancipation," Marx shared "the blindness to natural limits already present in . . . the spontaneous ideology of 19th-century industrialism." This critique may be viewed as an ecological variation on Nove's theme that Marx thought "the problem of production had been 'solved' by capitalism," so that communism would not be required "to take seriously the problem of the allocation of scarce resources."⁶⁰

In addition to bypassing Marx and Engels's deep concern with natural resource management and, more fundamentally, with the de-alienation of nature and the producers, under communism, these ecological critics have also misinterpreted Marx's conceptions of capitalist development and the transition from capitalism to communism.

What, exactly, is the historical potential capitalism creates in Marx's view? Does it lie in the development of mass production and consumption

to the point where all scarcity disappears? Not really. It is, first, that by developing the productive forces, capitalism creates the possibility of a system "in which coercion and monopolisation of social development (including its material and intellectual advantages) by one portion of society at the expense of another are eliminated," partly through a "greater reduction of time devoted to material labour in general." In short, insofar as it develops human productive capabilities, capitalism negates, not scarcity as such (in the sense of a non-satisfaction of all conceivable material needs), but rather the scarcity rationale for class inequalities in human developmental opportunities. As Marx indicates, "Although at first the development of the capacities of the human species takes place at the cost of the majority of human individuals and even classes, in the end it breaks through this contradiction and coincides with the development of the individual."⁶¹

Secondly, capitalism potentiates less restricted forms of human development insofar as it makes production an increasingly broad social process, "a system of general social metabolism, of universal relations, of all-round needs and universal capacities." Only with this socialized production can one foresee "free individuality, based on the universal development of individuals and on their subordination of their communal, social productivity as their social wealth." For Marx, capitalism's development of "the universality of intercourse, hence the world market" connotes "the possibility of the universal development of the individual." As always, it is with all-round human development in mind (not growth of production and consumption for their own sake) that Marx praises "the universality of individual needs, capacities, pleasures, productive forces etc., created through universal exchange" under capitalism.

The same goes for people–nature relations. The potential Marx sees in capitalism does not involve a one-sided human subordination of, or separation from, nature, but rather the possibility of less restricted relations between humanity and nature. It is only by comparison with these richer, more universal human–nature relations that "all earlier ones appear as mere *local developments* of humanity and as *nature-idolatry*." In earlier modes of production, "the restricted attitude of men to nature determines their restricted relation to one another, and their restricted attitude to one another determines men's restricted relation to nature."⁶²

Marx's analysis would only be antiecollogical if it had *uncritically* endorsed capitalism's appropriation of natural conditions. In fact, Marx emphasizes "the alienated form" of "the objective conditions of labour," including nature, in capitalist society. He insists that capitalism's alienation of "the general social powers of labour" encompasses "natural forces and scientific knowledge." As a result, in his view, "the forces of nature and science . . . confront the labourers as *powers* of capital." Under capitalism, "science, natural forces and products of labour on a large

scale" are utilized mainly "as means for the exploitation of labour, as means of appropriating surplus-labour." Nor is Marx's critique of capital's use of natural resources limited to the exploitation directly suffered by workers in production and the limits it places on workers' consumption. As shown by John Bellamy Foster, Marx had a profound grasp of the broader "metabolic rift" between humanity and nature produced by capitalism, one symptom of which is the anti-ecological division of labor between town and country with its "irreparable break in the coherence of social interchange prescribed by the natural laws of life." Marx used this framework to explain how capitalism both "violates the conditions necessary to lasting fertility of the soil" and "destroys the health of the town labourer." According to Engels, the system's alienation of nature is manifested in the narrow viewpoint on nature's utility necessarily adopted by "individual capitalists," who "are able to concern themselves only with the most immediate useful effect of their actions" in terms of "the profit to be made"—ignoring "the natural effects of the same actions."⁶³

For Marx, the "alienated, independent, social power" attained by nature and other "conditions of production" under capitalism poses a challenge to workers and their communities: to convert these conditions "into general, communal, social, conditions" serving "the requirements of socially developed human beings . . . the living process of the *society* of producers." Such a conversion requires a prolonged struggle to qualitatively transform the system of production, both materially and socially. Communist production is not simply inherited from capitalism, needing only to be signed into law by a newly elected socialist government. It requires "long struggles, through a series of historic processes, transforming circumstances and men." Among these transformed circumstances will be "not only a change of distribution, but a new organization of production, or rather the delivery (setting free) of the social forms of production . . . of their present class character, and their harmonious national and international co-ordination." This "long struggle" scenario for postrevolutionary society is a far cry from the interpretation put forth by the ecological critics, which has Marx endorsing capitalist industry as a qualitatively appropriate basis for communist development. Indeed, Marx's vision corresponds more accurately to Roy Morrison's view that the "struggle for the creation of an ecological commons is the struggle for the building of an ecological democracy—community by community, neighborhood by neighborhood, region by region . . . the struggle and work of fundamental social transformation from below."⁶⁴

In Marx's view, the struggle for "the conditions of free and associated labour . . . will be again and again relented and impeded by the resistance of vested interests and class egotisms." This is precisely why communism's human developmental conditions will be generated in large part by the revolutionary struggle itself—both in the taking of political power

by the working class and in the subsequent struggle to transform material and social conditions. As Marx and Engels put it, communist "appropriation . . . can only be effected through a union, which by the character of the proletariat itself can again only be a universal one, and through a revolution, in which, on the one hand, the power of the earlier mode of production and intercourse and social organisation is overthrown, and, on the other hand, there develops the universal character and the energy of the proletariat, which are required to accomplish the appropriation, and the proletariat moreover rids itself of everything that still clings to it from its previous position in society."⁶⁵

By now it should be clear why Marx argued that "the emancipation of the working classes must be conquered by the working classes themselves." The struggle for human development ultimately requires "the abolition of all class rule," and the working class is the only group capable of undertaking such a project. The self-emancipatory nature of communism also explains why Marx's vision does not take the form of a detailed blueprint *à la* the utopian socialists. As Alan Shandro observes, any such blueprint would only foreclose political debates, conflicts, and strategies developed by the working class itself "understood as a unity in diversity, as a political community." Marx and Engels's attempts to envision communism's basic principles should be seen not as a "master plan" but "as means of organising the workers' movement and structuring and guiding debate in and around it." Although their projections need to be constantly updated in light of developments in capitalist and postrevolutionary societies, their basic approach is still relevant today.⁶⁶

The demand for more equitable and sustainable forms of human development is central to the growing worldwide rebellion against elite economic institutions—transnational corporations, the IMF, World Bank, NAFTA, WTO, and so on. But this movement needs a vision that conceives the various institutions and policies under protest as elements of one class-exploitative system: capitalism. And it needs a framework for the debate, reconciliation, and realization of alternative pathways and strategies for negating the power of capital over the conditions of human development: that framework is communism. The classical Marxist vision of communism as de-alienation of production in service of human development still has much to contribute to this needed framework.

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man-development. It is reprinted with the express permission of the *Monthly Review*. Some slight editorial changes have been made.

NOTES

1. Ernesto Che Guevara, "Man and Socialism in Cuba," in *Man and Socialism in Cuba: The Great Debate*, ed. Bertram Silverman (New York: Atheneum, 1973), 337, 350.

2. *Ibid.*, 350; see also Oskar Lange and Fred M. Taylor, *On the Economic Theory of Socialism* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1964); "Socialism: Alternative Views and Models," symposium in *Science & Society* 56, no. 4 (Spring 1992); "Building Socialism Theoretically: Alternatives to Capitalism and the Invisible Hand," symposium in *Science & Society* 66, no. 1 (Spring 2002).

3. For prior discussions of Marx's vision of communism, see Paresh Chattopadhyay, "Socialism: Utopian and Feasible," *Monthly Review* 37, no. 10 (1986); and Bertell Ollman, "Marx's Vision of Communism," in *Social and Sexual Revolution: Essays on Marx and Reich*, ed. Bertell Ollman (Boston: South End Press 1979), 48–98.

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16. Marx, *Capital*, vol. 1, 78; Marx, *Critique of the Gotha Programme*, 8, 10.

17. Engels, *Anti-Dühring*, 220–222.

18. Marx, *Critique of the Gotha Programme*, 10; Engels, *Anti-Dühring*, 221. Emphasis in original; Marx, *Capital*, vol. 3, 876. See also Marx and Engels, *The German Ideology*, 1976, 566.

19. Marx, *Critique of the Gotha Programme*, 7–8.

20. *Ibid.*, 20, 22; Marx, *Capital*, vol. 1, 488, 490; Marx, "The Civil War in France," 162.

21. Marx, *Capital*, vol. 1, 530 and vol. 2, 819–820; Marx, *Theories of Surplus Value*, part 3, 257. Emphases in original; Karl Marx, *Grundrisse: Foundations of the Critique of Political Economy* (New York: Vintage, 1973), 708.

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23. Marx, *Grundrisse*, 190, 706; *Theories of Surplus Value*, part 2, 117–118. Emphasis in original; Marx and Engels, *The German Ideology*, 96, 465.

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25. Karl Marx, *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy* (New York: International Publishers, 1970), 84–85.

26. *Ibid.*, 85 (emphasis in original); *Theories of Surplus Value*, part 3, 129; *Critique of the Gotha Programme*, 8. Emphasis in original.

27. Marx, *Grundrisse*, 159, 171–172. Emphases in original.

28. *Ibid.*, 158. Emphases in original.

29. *Ibid.*, 264; Marx, *Capital*, vol. 1, 94. See also Engels, *Anti-Dühring*, 337–338.

30. Marx, *Capital*, vol. 1, 78–80; Marx, "The Civil War in France," 76.

31. Marx, *Grundrisse*, 162; Engels, *Anti-Dühring*, 167; Karl Marx, "Inaugural Address of the International Working Men's Association," in *The First International and After*, ed. David Fernbach (New York: Random House, 1974), 80; Karl Marx, "Notes on Bakunin's Book 'Statehood and Anarchy,'" in *Marx-Engels Collected*

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33. Marx, *Capital*, vol. 1, 507; Marx, *Critique of the Gotha Programme*, 5–6; Karl Marx, *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*, trans. Martin Milligan (New York: International Publishers, 1964), 103; Engels, *Anti-Dühring*, 151.

34. Marx, *Capital*, vol. 3, 776.

35. *Ibid.*, 617, 812. Emphases added.

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37. Marx and Engels, *The German Ideology*, 45–46, 71; Frederick Engels, *Dialectics of Nature*, 3rd rev. ed., trans. Clemens Dutt (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1964), 183; Marx, *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844*, 137.

38. Marx, *Capital*, vol. 3, 820; Engels, *Anti-Dühring*, 309.

39. Marx, *Critique of the Gotha Programme*, 7; *Capital*, vol. 2, 177, 469.

40. Marx, *Capital*, vol. 2, 469; Karl Marx, "Notes on Wagner," in *Texts on Method*, ed. Terrell Carver (Oxford, UK: Blackwell, 1975), 188; *Theories of Surplus Value*, part 3, 357–358.

41. Engels, *Anti-Dühring*, pp. 125–126.

42. Routley, "On Karl Marx," 242; Walker, "Ecological Limits," 242–243.

43. Marx, *Capital*, vol. 3, 820; Marx, *Theories of Surplus Value*, part 3, 257; Marx, *Grundrisse*, 712.

44. Marx, *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts*, 143. Emphasis in original.

45. Marx and Engels, *The German Ideology*, 34. See also Ollman, "Marx's Vision of Communism," 76.

46. Marx, *Grundrisse*, 542, 612. Emphasis in original.

47. Alfred Schmidt, *The Concept of Nature in Marx* (London: New Left Books, 1971), 155; Routley, "On Karl Marx," 243. Emphasis in original.

48. Marx, *Grundrisse*, 527; Karl Marx, "Economic Manuscript of 1861–63, Third Chapter," in *Marx-Engels Collected Works*, vol. 30, trans. Richard Dixon et al.

(New York: International Publishers, 1988), 40. Emphasis in original; David Pepper, *Eco-Socialism* (London: Routledge, 1993), 64.

49. Marx, *Capital*, vol. 1, 177, 183–184, 202. Emphases added.; Marx, “Economic Manuscript of 1861–63, Third Chapter,” 63; Marx and Engels, *The German Ideology*, 46. For details on Marx’s dialectical conception of human labor and nature, see Burkett, *Marx and Nature*, chapters 2–4; Foster, *Marx’s Ecology*; and John Bellamy Foster and Paul Burkett, “The Dialectic of Organic/Inorganic Relations: Marx and the Hegelian Philosophy of Nature,” *Organization & Environment* 13, no. 4 (2000).

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51. *Capital*, vol. 3, 250, 819. Emphasis in original.; Marx and Engels, *The German Ideology*, 273.

52. Ernest Mandel, *Power and Money: A Marxist Theory of Bureaucracy* (London: Verso, 1992), 205–207. Emphasis in original; and Howard J. Sherman, “The Economics of Pure Communism,” *Review of Radical Political Economics* 2, no. 4 (Winter 1970).

53. Marx, *Grundrisse*, 287; Marx and Engels, *The German Ideology*, 53.

54. Marx, *Grundrisse*, 172–173, 708.

55. *Ibid.*, 172–173; Karl Marx, “Marx to Engels, January 8, 1868,” in *Selected Correspondence*, by Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, ed. S. Ryazanskaya (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1975), 187; Marx, *Capital*, vol. 1, 71 and vol. 3, 264.

56. Marx, *Capital*, vol. 3, 187.

57. Engels, *Anti-Dühring*, 323–324. Emphasis in original; Engels, *The Housing Question*, 92; Marx and Engels, *The German Ideology*, 72; Marx, *Capital*, vol. 1, 505–506.

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60. Ted Benton, “Marxism and Natural Limits,” *New Left Review*, no. 178 (November/December 1989), 74, 77; Nove, “Socialism,” 230.

61. Marx, *Capital*, vol. 3, 819; *Theories of Surplus Value*, part 2, 118.

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CHAPTER 10

Marx and Engels as Romantic Communists

Michael Löwy

INTRODUCTION

Usually one mentions French socialism, German philosophy, and British political economy as the main sources of Marx's (and Engels's) communism. I would like to add another one, which is as important as those three, and which contributed to shape his critique of capitalism and his vision of an emancipated society: Romanticism. In the following pages I will examine these Romantic sources and determine the extent to which Marx and Engels's writings have a significant Romantic dimension. My argument is not that Marx and Engels were Romantic thinkers, but rather that there are substantial affinities between Marxism and Romanticism, which have been too often neglected.

WHAT IS ROMANTICISM?

This discussion firstly requires an adequate understanding of the meaning of Romanticism. Most scholarship on Romanticism is based on the apparently obvious assumption that one is dealing with a literary movement of the early 19th century. In my view—a view developed in collaboration with Robert Sayre¹—this assumption is doubly wrong: Romanticism is much more than a literary phenomenon—although, of course, it had an important literary moment—and it did not come to an end in 1830 or in 1848. In fact, Romanticism, as a cultural protest against modern industrial/capitalist civilization, is one of the main forms of modern culture and it extends from Rousseau, a founding father writing in the mid-18th century, until the present day. One could define the

specificity of the Romantic worldview (in the sense of a global *Weltanschauung*) as a rebellion against key aspects of this civilization—the disenchantment of the world, the universal quantification and mechanization of life, the destruction of community, and so forth—in the name of precapitalist, or premodern values. Of course, Romanticism is not a politically homogenous field; it includes a wide range of choices, most of which gravitate toward one of two poles: reactionary or conservative Romanticism, which dreams of a return to the past; or utopian or revolutionary Romanticism, which operates a detour through the past toward an emancipated future. Most studies of political Romanticism refer only to the first pole, which includes figures as Novalis, Adam Müller, Chateaubriand, John Ruskin, and Ernst Jünger; however, the emancipatory current is at least as important and includes figures such as Jean-Jacques Rousseau, William Blake, Friedrich Hölderlin, William Morris, and E. P. Thompson. There are many examples of revolutionaries who became conservatives, such as Friedrich Schlegel or Samuel Taylor Coleridge, but there are also cases of an inverse movement: Victor Hugo and William Morris are prime examples. Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels have a greater affinity with the utopian/revolutionary pole of Romanticism, but, as we will see, they were also interested in the anticapitalist criticism of conservative Romantic authors like Thomas Carlyle and Balzac.

One of the best definitions of Romanticism is the one suggested by Karl Marx himself. In the unfinished manuscript the *Grundrisse*, he writes (1857–58):

In previous periods of the human evolution, individuals enjoyed a greater plenitude precisely because the plenitude of their material conditions, confronting them as independent social relations and powers, had not yet taken place. It is as ridiculous to yearn for this past plenitude as to accept the present total void. The bourgeois conception never was able to go beyond an opposition to the Romantic viewpoint (*Über den Gegensatz gegen jene romantische Ansicht ist die bürgerliche nie Herausgekommen*), and therefore, this viewpoint will follow it as its legitimate counterposition (*berechtigeter Gegensatz*) until the happy disappearance of the bourgeoisie.²

This passage has three important and interesting arguments: in the first instance, Marx fully accepts the Romantic viewpoint on the plenitude of the precapitalist past; secondly, he simultaneously rejects the Romantic illusion of a return to the past and the bourgeois apology of the present; finally, he considers the Romantic critique of the bourgeois world as legitimate—a negative counterpoint that will follow it, like a shadow, until the end of bourgeois society.³ In my view this passage is not only an

excellent explanation of what Romanticism is and why it will survive as long as capitalism exists, but it also gives us an insight into Marx's own attitude toward Romanticism.

AFFINITIES BETWEEN MARXISM AND ROMANTICISM

As the preceding quote from the *Grundrisse* shows, it would be wrong to characterize Marx as a Romantic thinker. However, as I will argue, Romanticism is an important dimension of his critique of the capitalist system and of his conception of communism. The affinity between the Marxist and Romantic modes of opposition to the rationalized culture of the bourgeoisie has been observed and discussed by several sociologists and philosophers. One of the first was Karl Mannheim, in "Das konservative Denken."⁴ He shows that a number of oppositions—concrete vs. abstract, dynamic or dialectic vs. static, totality vs. fragmentation, a totalizing grasp of history vs. an individualist approach—are features shared by both the Right and the Left in their critiques of *bürgerlich-naturrechtliche Denken* (bourgeois thinking about natural law). However, most of the examples of the Marxist position that Mannheim puts forward are drawn from Lukács *History and Class Consciousness*, a book that is already a combination of Marxism with German sociology as inspired by Romanticism. In addition, Mannheim is more interested in the methodological similarities between the revolutionary Marxist and the conservative Romantic styles of thinking than in the possible convergence of their concrete critiques of bourgeois-industrial society.⁵

Following Mannheim, a number of sociologists or historians of literature referred to the connection between Romanticism and Marxism. Alvin Gouldner insisted on the presence of "important components of Romanticism" in Marx's thought;⁶ Ernst Fischer asserted that Marx had incorporated into his socialist vision "the romantic revolt against a world which turned everything into a commodity and degraded man to the status of an object."⁷ Unquestionably, the Marxist concept of alienation is strongly tinged with Romanticism. As István Mészáros has shown, one of the major sources of Marx's thought is the Rousseauist critique of the alienation of the self as "selling one's freedom."⁸ Both Fischer and Gouldner see the dream of integral man, beyond fragmentation, division, and alienation, as the chief link between Marx and the Romantic legacy. More recently, Jürgen Habermas criticized the thinking of young Marx for being a form of "Romantic socialism," to the extent that "the idea of a free association of producers has always been loaded with nostalgic images of the types of community—the family, the neighborhood and the guild—to be found in the world of peasants and craftsmen that, with the violent onset of a competitive society, was just beginning to break down, and whose disappearance was experienced as a loss."⁹ According

to Habermas, the very idea of a society in which individuals cease to be alienated in relation to the product of their work, other human beings, and themselves, is a utopia rooted in Romanticism.¹⁰

Thanks to these affinities and analogies there appeared, and expanded throughout the 20th century, a significant current of Romantic Marxists. Many examples come to mind: William Morris, whose Utopian novel, *News from Nowhere*,¹¹ combined revolutionary socialism with Gothic nostalgia was to leave a powerful imprint on English radicalism; Ernst Bloch, the Philosopher of Hope, who referred to his first essays, *The Spirit of Utopia*¹² and *Thomas Münzer: Theologian of Revolution*,¹³ as Romantic revolutionary writings; André Breton, the founder of surrealism, who in 1935 merged in one single appeal the French poet Rimbaud's call for "changing life" and Marx's one for "transforming the world"; José Carlos Mariategui, the great Peruvian Marxist, who called for an Indo-American socialism rooted in the indigenous collectivist traditions (Inca communism); the Frankfurt School (Benjamin, Adorno, and Marcuse), which owes much of its critique of capitalist civilization to the Romantic tradition; Henri Lefebvre, the dissident communist philosopher, who called in 1958 for a new Romanticism; Guy Debord, the founder of Situationism, whose railings against the *Society of the Spectacle*¹⁴ are suffused with melancholic Romantic feelings; the British historian E.P. Thompson, author of a brilliant biography of William Morris, *From Romantic to Revolutionary*,¹⁵ and many others. These authors are obviously very different from each other and does not belong to a common philosophical or political school, yet they share the desire to bring together, in an explosive fusion, the powerful ingredients of Marxist communism and revolutionary Romanticism. In their sharp criticism of capitalist civilization and in their dreams of a new society, precapitalist values, cultural creations, and social forms are a crucial reference.

CARLYLE, BALZAC, SISMONDI AND THE COMMUNIST MANIFESTO

Let us now try to assess Marx and Engels's relationship to Romanticism. We know that during his years of study at the University of Bonn, Marx chose to attend courses on Homer offered by an old Romantic, Schlegel. Marx's early writings—poems, dramas, and plays—exhibit the visible mark of Romantic literature (they manifest particular affinities with Hoffmann's writings), and they bear witness to a typically Romantic revolt. In addition, somewhat surprisingly, Marx's first attempt to produce a critique of Hegel was strongly influenced by Schelling's *Naturphilosophie*.¹⁶ An interesting analysis of the influence of Romanticism on the poems of the young Marx is offered by Leonard P. Wessell, Jr., in his book, *Karl Marx, Romantic Irony, and the Proletariat*. Unfortunately, the bulk of Wessell's

book consists in a wholly arbitrary attempt to reduce all of Marx's political thought to "mythopoeetry."¹⁷

After his conversion to Hegelian dialectics, materialism, and the philosophy of praxis (1840–1845), Marx left his youthful Romanticism behind: his new philosophy of history seems to have had no room for nostalgia. In the *Manifesto of the Communist Party*,¹⁸ he rejects as "reactionary" any dream of returning to craftsmanship or other precapitalist modes of production. He celebrates the historically progressive role of industrial capitalism, which not only developed productive forces on a vast and unprecedented scale but also unified the world economy—an essential preliminary condition for future socialist humanity. He also praised capitalism for having torn away the veils that had concealed exploitation in precapitalist societies, but this type of praise has ironic overtones: by introducing more brutal, more open, and more cynical forms of exploitation, the capitalist mode of production favors the development of consciousness and class struggle on the part of the oppressed. Marx's anticapitalism does not seek to produce an abstract negation of modern (bourgeois) industrial civilization, but rather its *Aufhebung* (negation/conservation/supersession): it is to be abolished, while its greatest conquests are maintained; and it is to be surpassed by a superior mode of production.

Still, Marx was not unaware of the other side of this "civilizing" coin; in *The Communist Manifesto* one can find some powerful examples of a critical perspective denouncing, for instance, the mean, odious, and exasperating tyranny of the factory owners, and the barbarism of the capitalist crisis. Moreover, he follows a typical Romantic argument by emphasizing that in bourgeois society "personal dignity became a simple exchange-value," while all human relations were replaced by callous cash payment—Carlyle's cash nexus—and drowned in the icy waters of calculating egoism.¹⁹ Additionally, in Chapter 25 of *Capital*, "The General Law of Capitalist Accumulation,"²⁰ Marx uses a dialectical approach to describe capitalism as a system that transforms every instance of economic progress into a public calamity. It is through the analysis of the social disasters provoked by capitalist civilization—as well as through his interest in precapitalist communities—that he rejoined the Romantic tradition.

Marx and Engels's work was significantly influenced not only by economists such as Sismondi and the Russian populist Nikolai Danielson, with whom they corresponded over a 20-year period, but also by writers such as Charles Dickens and Honoré de Balzac, by social philosophers such as Thomas Carlyle, and by historians of ancient communities such as Georg Maurer, Berthold Georg Niebuhr, and Lewis Morgan. Additionally, however, both Marx and Engels greatly respected certain Romantic Socialists, toward whom they recognized their own intellectual indebtedness, such as Charles Fourier, Pierre Leroux, and Moses Hess. In reality, Romanticism is one of Marx and Engels's neglected sources, a

source perhaps as important for their work as German neo-Hegelianism or French materialism.

Among the Romantic critics of capitalist society, Thomas Carlyle was arguably one of those whom Marx and Engels most appreciated, despite obvious disagreements. They were particularly interested in his ferocious critique of modern bourgeois society as a civilization where all cultural or spiritual values are sacrificed to the Religion of Cash. In 1844, Engels published an enthusiastic review of *Past and Present*²¹ in which he cites approvingly Carlyle's tirades against "Mammonism," the cult of Mammon—the ancient divinity of Money or Gold—that reigned in England. Even as he criticized the author's conservative choices, Engels recognized a decisive connection between these choices and the social interest of the work: "Thomas Carlyle . . . was originally a Tory. . . . This much is certain: a Whig would never have been able to write a book that was half so humane as *Past and Present*." His philosophy was inspired by "vestiges of Tory romanticism," but Carlyle was nonetheless the only Englishman from the "respectable" class who had "kept his eyes open at least toward the facts" and had "correctly apprehended the immediate present."²² As for Marx, he closely read Carlyle's little book on *Chartism*,²³ which denounced the alienation of the working class and criticized liberal laissez faire political economy. When reading the pamphlet in 1845, Marx copied many excerpts into his notebook. One of the passages Marx noted contains a marvelous Romantic image for industrial capitalism: "If men had lost belief in a God, their only resource against a blind No-God, of Necessity and Mechanism, that held them like a hideous World-Steamengine, like a hideous Phalaris' Bull, imprisoned in its own iron belly, would be, with or without hope,—revolt."²⁴

Engels returned to Carlyle in an 1850 article; although he categorically rejected the latter's most recent writings, he sketched an analysis of Carlyle's work from the 1840s that is quite illuminating:

To Thomas Carlyle belongs the credit of having taken the literary field against the bourgeoisie at a time when its views, tastes and ideas held the whole of official English literature totally in thrall, and in a manner which is at times even revolutionary. For example, in his history of the French Revolution, in his apology for Cromwell, in the pamphlet on Chartism and in *Past and Present*. But in all these writings, the critique of the present is closely bound up with a strangely unhistorical apotheosis of the Middle Ages, which is a frequent characteristic of other English revolutionaries too, for instance Cobbett and a section of the Chartists.²⁵

This remark contains two propositions that strike us as fundamental in the Marxist approach to Romanticism: (1) the Romantic critique of the

capitalist present is “closely bound up with” nostalgia for the past and (2) in certain cases this critique may take on an authentically revolutionary dimension.

An equally important influence on Marx and Engels was exercised by someone who may be considered one of the most biting Romantic critics of bourgeois civilization, Honoré de Balzac, from whose work Engels acknowledged having learned “more than from all the professed historians, economists, and statisticians of the period.”²⁶ This formula reiterates almost word for word, moreover, the judgment Marx had pronounced several decades earlier on English writers such as Charles Dickens, Charlotte Brontë, and Mrs. Gaskell: “the present splendid brotherhood of fiction-writers in England, whose graphic and eloquent pages have issued to the world more political and social truths than have been uttered by all the professional politicians, publicists and moralists put together.”²⁷

It is clear that their reading of Carlyle and Balzac is highly selective: both Engels and Marx categorically reject the backward-looking illusions of the two writers. But they appropriate unhesitatingly for themselves the latter’s critique of bourgeois-industrial modernity, even though that critique is deeply invested with precapitalist ethical and sociocultural values. They were both fascinated by the way Balzac described the corruptive power of money, the tortuous manipulations of the financial oligarchy, and the unscrupulous, relentless, and obsessive pursuit of profit and accumulation by bankers, industrialists, and property owners in general.

This appropriation is evident in as seemingly modernist (i.e., favorable to capitalist progress) a text as the *Manifesto of the Communist Party*. Although they categorized the Romantic currents as “reactionary,” Marx and Engels recognized very explicitly the value of the social critique these currents contributed, by denouncing the bourgeois destruction of all human qualities, transformed into commodities, and the ruthless exploitation of the workers. Like them, they were convinced that the bourgeoisie had, as they wrote in the *Manifesto*, “reduced human dignity to a simple exchange value.” Even “feudal Socialism,” a sui generis blend of the “echo of the past” with the “menace of the future,” despite its “total incapacity to comprehend the march of modern history,” has the undeniable merit “at times, by its bitter, witty and incisive criticism, [of] striking the bourgeoisie to the very heart’s core.”²⁸ It is interesting to note that this phrase is an almost literal quote from a comment Balzac made concerning the aristocratic critique of the Liberal bourgeoisie in his novel, *Le Cabinet des Antiques*.²⁹

Despite its limitations, the “petit-bourgeois socialism” of Sismondi and his followers

dissected with great acuteness the contradictions inherent in the conditions of modern production and laid bare the hypocritical apologies

of economists. It proved, incontrovertibly, the disastrous effects of machinery and division of labour; the concentration of capital and land in a few hands; over-production and crises; it pointed out the inevitable ruin of the petty bourgeois and peasant, the misery of the proletariat, the anarchy in production, the crying inequalities in the distribution of wealth.³⁰

Here is a rather impressive acknowledgment of an intellectual debt. While they unambiguously reject the positive solutions offered by the likes of Sismondi, Marx and Engels nevertheless integrate the entire analysis of the “social calamities” of capitalism inherent in this “petit-bourgeois” Romantic current into their vision of bourgeois society. Unlike the Romantics, they are unsparing in their admiration for the “eminently revolutionary” role of the conquering bourgeoisie and its economic achievements, which are superior to the pyramids of Egypt and the Roman aqueducts—achievements that pave the way, in their eyes, for the material conditions of the proletarian revolution.³¹

Thus Paul Breines’ remark on the Manifesto appears eminently pertinent:

In the “Manifesto” and Marx’s previous writings, the capitalist industrial revolution and the entire world of objectified relations it creates are grasped as simultaneously liberating and oppressive . . . [T]he Enlightenment and its Utilitarian progeny had stressed the former side of the picture; the Romantic current, the latter. Marx stood alone in transforming both into a single critical vision.³²

MARX AND ENGELS ON PRECAPITALIST FORMATIONS

However, we cannot also follow Breines when he asserts that in the writings of Marx and Engels in the second half of the 19th century, the utilitarian root alone flourishes, while the Romantic aspect withers. This is far from obvious to the extent that, from the 1860s on, Marx and Engels manifested increasing interest in and sympathy for certain precapitalist social formations—a characteristic theme of the Romantic vision of history. Their fascination with primitive rural communities—from the Greek gens to the old Germanic Mark and the Russian *obschtchina*³³—stemmed from their conviction that these ancient forms incorporated social qualities that modern civilizations had lost, qualities that prefigured certain aspects of a future communist society.

Their discovery of the works of Georg Maurer, the historian of ancient Germanic communities, and later of Lewis Morgan, led Marx and Engels to give new value to the past. Thanks to these authors, they could refer to an exemplary precapitalist formation that was distinct from the feudal system exalted by the traditional Romantics: the primitive community.

Marx expresses clearly this political choice of an alternative past in a letter to Engels dated March 25, 1868, in which he discusses Maurer's book:

The first reaction to the French Revolution and the Enlightenment bound up with it was naturally to regard everything as medieval, romantic, and even people like Grimm are not free from this. The second reaction to it is to look beyond the Middle Ages into the primitive age of every people—and this corresponds to the socialist tendency, though these learned men have no idea that they are connected with it. And they are then surprised to find what is newest in what is oldest, and even egalitarians to a degree which would have made Proudhon shudder.³⁴

Engels, too, was struck by Maurer's research, which inspired among other things a brief essay on the old Germanic Mark, an essay in which Engels proposes "reviving the Mark"—though "not in its old, outdated form, but in a rejuvenated form"—as a socialist program for rural areas.³⁵ He even goes beyond Maurer, who seems to him still too marked by the evolutionism of the *Aufklärung*: in a letter to Marx dated December 15, 1882, he complains about the persistence in Maurer of the "enlightened pre-supposition that, since the dark Middle Ages, things must have changed steadily for the better; this prevents him from perceiving, not only the antagonistic nature of true progress, but likewise individual setbacks."³⁶ This passage strikes me as a remarkably accurate synthesis of the basic position held by both Engels and Marx on this problematic: (1) rejection of a naïve and linear if not apologetic "progressism," which views bourgeois society as universally superior to earlier social forms; (2) insistence on the contradictory nature of the progress undeniably brought about by capitalism; and (3) a critical judgment of industrial-capitalist civilization as representing, in certain respects, a step backward, from the human point of view, in relation to communities of the past.

This last proposition is moreover one of the principal themes of *The Origin of the Family*:³⁷ starting from Morgan's studies on the gens, Engels emphasizes the regression that civilization constitutes, to a certain extent, with respect to the primitive community:

And a wonderful constitution it is, this gentle constitution, in all its childlike simplicity! No soldiers, no gendarmes or police, no nobles, kings, regents, prefects, or judges, no prisons, or lawsuits—and everything takes its orderly course . . . All are equal and free—the women included. . . . And when we compare their position with that of the overwhelming majority of civilized men today, an enormous gulf separates the present-day proletariat and small peasant from the free member of the old gentile society.³⁸

Here, the criteria that allow Engels to speak of stepping backward are above all social (freedom, equality), but they are also ethical: the dissolution of the gens by private property was inevitable, but it amounted nevertheless to "degradation, a fall from the simple moral greatness of the old gentile society."³⁹

In the late 19th-century struggle against Russian populism (especially with the writings of Georgii Valentinovich Plekhanov), a radically anti-Romantic Marxism began to emerge: a modernizing, evolutionist strain that viewed capitalist-industrial progress with unconditional admiration. It is true that this tendency was based on some texts by Marx and Engels, but nothing more clearly reveals the difference between this de-romanticized Marxism and the thinking of Marx himself than Marx's own work on the Russian rural commune. Without sharing all of the Narodniki's presuppositions, Marx believed as they did in the future socialist role of the traditional Russian commune (*obshtchina*). In his view, as he stated explicitly in a letter of March 8, 1881, to Vera Zasulich, "this commune is the fulcrum of social regeneration in Russia, but in order that it may function as such, it would first be necessary to eliminate the deleterious influences which are assailing it from all sides, and then ensure for it the normal conditions of spontaneous development."⁴⁰

A draft of the letter to Vera Zasulich also contains remarks on precapitalist rural communities in India, comments that point up the evolution of Marx's views from the 1850s onward. In 1853, Marx was depicting English colonization in India as both monstrously destructive and, in spite of everything, progressive (e.g., owing to the introduction of railways); progress took the form of "that hideous, pagan idol, who would not drink the nectar but from the skulls of the slain." At that stage Marx still believed in the economically progressive role of colonialism, regardless of the heavy price paid in social and human terms.⁴¹ In a draft for the 1881 letter, however, he wrote: "As for the East Indies, for example, everyone except Sir Henry Maine and others of his ilk realises that the suppression of communal landownership out there was nothing but an act of English vandalism, pushing the native peoples not forwards but backwards."⁴² This judgment is not in contradiction with the one he formulated in 1853, but here he stressed the regressive aspect of capitalist modernization in human terms.

CRITIQUE OF CAPITALIST MONETARY QUANTIFICATION

Besides nostalgia for a lost communist paradise, the other major dimension of Marxist thinking that is undeniably Romantic in inspiration is the critique of certain fundamental aspects of industrialist-capitalist modernity. Contrary to what is commonly supposed, this critique is not limited to the question of the private ownership of means of production: it is much broader, deeper, and more radical. The entire existing mode

of industrial production and the whole of modern bourgeois society are called into question using arguments and attitudes often similar to those of the Romantics. As I see it, however, these parallels are particularly striking in relation to the crucial question of quantification, that is, the dissolution of qualitative moral or cultural values—such as dignity, honor, and friendship—by the destructive power of pure quantitative capitalist values: money, price, amount of capital or possessions, and so forth.

The critique of the quantification of life in (bourgeois) industrial society occupies a central place in Marx's early writings, especially in *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*, which represents a particularly powerful synthesis of Romanticism and materialism. According to this text, the power of money is such, in capitalism, that it permits that system to destroy and dissolve all human and natural qualities by subjecting them to its own purely quantitative measure. "The quantity of money becomes more and more its sole important property. Just as it reduces everything to its own form of abstraction, so it reduces itself in the course of its own movement to something quantitative." The exchange among concrete human qualities—love for love, confidence for confidence—is replaced by the abstract exchange of money for merchandise. The worker is reduced to the condition of human merchandise (*Menschenware*), becoming a damned creature, physically and spiritually dehumanized (*entmenschetes*). "Man reverts once more to living in a cave, but the cave is now polluted by the mephitic and pestilential breath of civilization." Just as a tradesman who sells precious stones sees only their market value and not the beauty or the particular nature of the stones, individuals in capitalist society lose their material and spiritual sensitivity, and replace it by the exclusive sense of possession. In a word: *being*, the free expression of the richness of life through social and cultural activities, is increasingly sacrificed to *having*, the accumulation of money, merchandise, and capital.⁴³

One can find, in Marx's polemical essay against Proudhon, *Misery of Philosophy*, a striking passage where the critique of capitalist monetary quantification is formulated with strong Romantic overtones:

Then came a time when all that human beings considered as inalienable became object of exchange, traffic and could be alienated. A time when the things that till then had been . . . given but never sold; acquired, but never bought—virtue, love, opinion, science, consciousness, etc.—when finally everything became object of commerce. It is the time of general corruption, of universal venality, or, to speak in terms of political economy, the time when everything, moral or physical, having become a venal value, was brought to the market to be assessed according to its correct value.⁴⁴

What singles out these comments as Romantic is the comparison, explicit or implicit, with previous times—those of a precapitalist past when this corruption of social relations had not yet taken place. As we saw earlier, this was an argument developed not only by Carlyle but also by Balzac, Charles Dickens—particularly in *Hard Times*—and many other Romantic authors. Clearly communism would be for Marx a society where such human values—virtue, love, opinion, science, consciousness—would be restored to their moral and social dignity.

These themes in Marx's early writings are less explicit in *Capital*, but they are present nonetheless, especially in the well-known passage in which he compares the ethos of modern capitalist civilization exclusively focused on production of more and more goods and in the accumulation of capital (i.e., on "quantity and exchange value"), with the spirit of classical antiquity which holds "exclusively by quality and use value."⁴⁵ Although Marx does not quote Carlyle, there are echoes of his sharp polemic against Mammonism in the chapter on commodity fetishism. Carlyle's influence is particularly evident when Marx ironically describes its supreme form, monetary fetishism, as the transformation of Money into an idol, a fetish with magical powers.

The principal issue addressed in *Capital* is the exploitation of labor, the extraction of added value by the capitalist owners of the means of production. But it also contains a radical critique of the very nature of modern industrial labor. In its charge against the dehumanizing character of capitalist-industrial labor, *Capital* is still more explicit than *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*, and there is very probably a connection between the critique it formulates and those of the Romantics. There are obvious parallels, for instance, with Charles Dickens's description of the inhumanity of industrial labor in his novel, *Hard Times*. Dickens saw the capitalist factory as a hellish place and the workers as damned souls, not because they were exploited but because they were obliged to follow mechanical movements, the uniform rhythm of the steam engine's piston, which "worked monotonously up and down like the head of an elephant in a state of melancholy madness."⁴⁶

Marx clearly did not dream, as Romantics such as John Ruskin or Sismonde de Sismondi did, of reestablishing the medieval craft system. He nevertheless criticized industrial labor, in *Capital*, as a socially and culturally degraded form in relation to the human qualities of precapitalist labor: "The knowledge, the judgment, and the will . . . [that] are practiced by the independent peasant or handcraftsman" are lost by the piecework laborers of modern industry. Analyzing this degradation, Marx draws attention first of all to the division of labor which "converts the labourer into a crippled monstrosity, by forcing his detail dexterity at the expense of a world of productive capabilities and instincts." In this context he cites the conservative (Tory) Romantic David Urquhart:

"To subdivide a man is to execute him, if he deserves the sentence, to assassinate him if he does not. . . . The subdivision of labour is the assassination of a people." As for the machine, while in itself an element of progress, it becomes in the contemporary mode of production a curse for the worker; it strips work of all interest and "confiscates every atom of freedom, both in bodily and intellectual activity." With the capitalist machine system, work "becomes a sort of torture" because the worker is reduced to "the miserable routine of endless drudgery and toil in which the same mechanical process is gone through over and over again, is like the labor of Sisyphus. The burden of labour, like the rock, keeps ever falling back on the worn-out labourer." In the modern industrial system, the whole organization of the process of work crushes the worker's vitality, freedom, and independence. To this already dark picture, Marx adds the description of the material conditions under which work is carried out: insufficient space, light, and air, deafening noise, a dust-filled atmosphere, the risk of being mutilated or killed by a machine, and countless illnesses stemming from "the dangerous and unwholesome accompaniments of the productive process."⁴⁷ In short, the natural and cultural qualities of workers as human beings are sacrificed by capital to the purely quantitative aim of producing more goods and obtaining more profits.

Marx's and Engels's conception of communism is intimately connected with this radical critique of modern bourgeois civilization. It implies a qualitative change, a new social culture, a new way of life, a different type of civilization that would reestablish the role of the "human and natural qualities" of life, and the role of use value in the process of production. By this key reference to precapitalist forms of production and of life, there is an obvious link to the Romantic tradition. For Marx and Engels, socialism (or communism, as both were synonymous for them) required the emancipation of labor, not only by the expropriation of the expropriators—according to the well-known formula from *Capital*—and the control of the production process by the associated producers, but also by a complete transformation of the nature of work itself.

How is this aim to be achieved? This is a problem Marx addresses above all in *Grundrisse* (1857–1858): in the socialist community, in his view, technological progress and mechanism will drastically reduce the time needed for "necessary labour" (the labor required to satisfy the fundamental needs of the community). Most of the hours in a day will thus be left free for what Marx, after Fourier, calls attractive labor: that is, truly free labor, work that is the self-realization of the individual. Such work and production, which can be material as well as spiritual, is not simply play—and here Marx separates himself from Fourier—but can require maximum effort and maximum seriousness. Marx mentions musical composition as an example,⁴⁸ but the same could be said of art,

poetry, philosophy, or science. Marx's idea of communism also includes an emancipation from the narrow limits imposed by the capitalist division of labor. His famous passage in *The German Ideology*, about individuals in a communist society being able "to hunt in the morning, fish in the afternoon, rear cattle in the evening, criticize after dinner" has clear romantic undertones.

CONCLUSION

It would be quite mistaken to deduce from the foregoing remarks that Marx was a Romantic: he owes more to the philosophy of the Enlightenment and to classical political economics than to the Romantic critiques of industrial civilization. Nevertheless, the latter helped him to perceive the limits and the contradictions of the former, as well as to shape his vision of a communist society. In a revealing passage of the *Economic and Political Manuscripts of 1844*, he refers to the contradiction between the old landowners and the new capitalists, expressed in a polemic between Romantic authors (Möser), and political economists (Ricardo, Mill): "This contradiction is extremely bitter, and each side tells the truth about the other."⁴⁹ Similarly, a recurrent theme of his late economic writings is that Sismondi is capable of seeing Ricardo's limitations, and vice versa; while Ricardo perceived the enormous productive power of capitalism, and its economic superiority over precapitalist forms, Sismondi was able to see, from his petty-bourgeois perspective, the contradictions of the system, the murderous consequences of the division of labor, the crisis of overproduction, and so forth.

Marx and Engels cannot be—in spite of their interest for the Romantic arguments—defined as being Romantics. Their ideas were neither Romantic nor modernizing, but constituted an attempt at a dialectical *Aufhebung* between the two, in a new critical and revolutionary world view. Neither apologetic for bourgeois civilization nor blind to its achievements, they sought a higher form of social organization, one that would incorporate the technological advances of modern society along with some of the human qualities of precapitalist communities. They did not dream of a return to the past—the typical reactionary Romantic attitude—but a detour by the past toward the communist future: a future that would open up a boundless field for the development and enrichment of human life.

NOTES

1. Michael Löwy and Robert Sayre, *Romanticism against the Tide of Modernity*, trans. C. Porter (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2001).

2. Author's own translation. Karl Marx, *Grundrisse der Kritik der Politischen Ökonomie* (Berlin: Dietz Verlag, 1953), 80.

3. *Ibid.*, 80. According to the editors of the *Grundrisse*, the Romantics to whom Marx refers here are Adam Müller, the conservative Romantic economist and Thomas Carlyle, on whom more will be said later.

4. Karl Mannheim, "Das konservative Denken. Soziologische Beiträge zum Werden des politisch-historischen Denkens in Deutschland," in *Wissensoziologie* (Berlin: Luchterhand, 1964).

5. *Ibid.*, 425, 438, 440, 486, 497, 507.

6. Alvin. W. Gouldner, *For Sociology: Renewal and Critique in Sociology Today* (New York: Basic Books), 339.

7. Ernst Fischer, *Marx in His Own Words* (London: Penguin Books), 15.

8. István Meszaros, *Marx's Theory of Alienation* (London: Merlin Press, 1970), 48–61.

9. Jürgen Habermas, "What Does Socialism Mean Today? The Rectifying Revolution and the Need for New Thinking on the Left," *New Left Review*, no. 183 (1990), 15.

10. *Ibid.*, 15.

11. William Morris, *News from Nowhere* (London: Penguin Classics, 1986).

12. Ernst Bloch, *Geist der Utopie* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1985).

13. Ernst Bloch, *Thomas Münzer als Theologe der Revolution* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1972).

14. Guy Debord, *La Société du Spectacle* (Paris: Gallimard, 1992).

15. E.P. Thompson, *William Morris: From Romantic to Revolutionary* (London, Merlin Press, 1977).

16. Auguste Cornu, *Karl Marx et Friedrich Engels* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1955), tome I: 67–69, 75, 93–97, 103.

17. Leonard P. Wessell Jr., *Karl Marx, Romantic Irony, and the Proletariat: The Mythopoetic Origins of Marxism* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1979).

18. Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, "Manifesto of the Communist Party," in *Marx-Engels Collected Works*, vol. 6, trans. Richard Dixon et al. (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1976), 477–519.

19. *Ibid.*, 483.

20. Karl Marx, "Capital, vol. 1." In *Marx-Engels Collected Works*, vol. 35, translated by Richard Dixon et al. (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1996), 607–641.

21. Frederick Engels, "The Condition of England. Past and Present by Thomas Carlyle, London, 1843," in *Marx-Engels Collected Works*, vol. 3, trans. Richard Dixon et al. (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1975), 444–468.

22. *Ibid.*, 447, 461, 456.

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Communism in the 21st Century

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Communism in the 21st Century

Volume 2

*Whither Communism?
The Challenges of the Past
and the Present*

SHANNON BRINCAT, EDITOR

Foreword by Terrell Carver



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These volumes are dedicated to my brother, Dustin Brincat, who upon reading the *Communist Manifesto* for the first time remarked that the communist ideal is the sensible choice given our world's problems, despite the array of asocial behaviors conditioned by contemporary capitalism seemingly opposed to it. By dedicating this series to him, I hope to convey the depth of my gratitude for all his years of support and the esteem I hold for him.

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Preface to Volume 2

This volume is focused on the challenges faced by communism, as a movement and an idea, in both the past and present. The volume engages with the historical dimensions of communism as well as how existing communist movements, parties, and states are navigating the many issues and problems confronting the revolutionary Left today. Exploring the past and present of communism was considered a necessary field of study in this series offering, a retrospective analysis of the failings and the tragedies of communism's past, alongside an account of the present conditions that form the horizon of possibilities for communism's future. In this way, volume 2 serves as a bridge between the rediscoveries of Marx's ideas discussed in volume 1 and contemporary research on the conditions of communism's present. This also leads directly into the concerns of volume 3 regarding the future possibilities of communism. Indeed, the subtitle—*Whither Communism?*—was chosen to emphasize this aim of placing communism in an open horizon of possibilities that, as with all social transformation, is informed by its historical past and contextualized within given conditions. Communism is positioned here as a question of agency, of struggle, something undetermined but also unbounded.

This dual aim of exploring the challenges within communist movements of the past and the present immediately raised a number of issues related to the definition of communism, the relevant groups and events to include in analysis, and ensuring coherence across the many different languages and cultures that the volume would need to engage. In regards to the first issue, perhaps the most fundamental problem for volume 2 was treating with sensitivity and analytical precision the divergent meanings attributed to the term communism and the vast ideological, theoretical,

and practical distinctions between existing movements, parties, and states that are associated with this label. Part of this problem was political in nature, for the doctrinal differences between communist groups are notorious and create immense differentiations in meaning and ideology. As Massimo De Angelis affirms in volume 3, "There [is] one word, communism, and many meanings, many organizational forms, often in open conflict with one another." The other part of this issue was analytical, how to speak across such vast discrepancies, which are not merely ideologically opposed, but often in direct contradiction with each other. Defining communism in a way that could be inclusive of such politically variegated, competing ideologies, while being able to adequately capture their divergences in a scholarly manner was of paramount concern.

It was decided to take a pragmatic and nominalist approach to this dilemma, with the only viable solution being to not advance a particular perspective of communism. However, we have retained the general meaning of communism to include both (i) ideals or theoretical aspirations and presentations of the main aims of the communist emancipatory project, and; (ii) concrete historical experiences, societies, parties, states and 'models' (that includes institutions and concrete social relationships in specific contexts). As such, the volume includes those movements, parties, and states that attribute the term to themselves, or who are widely associated with the term. That is, those who self-identify as communist, those who are informed by or express ideas and practices associated with communism, and those who are regarded as holding to, or deploying, communist ideals and practices by others. While there are considerable disagreements, for example, on the question of whether any of the states discussed in this volume can be properly associated with communism—given the forms of repression associated with their rule, which contradict the emancipatory aspirations of the theory of communism conveyed in volume 1—such judgments were not considered appropriate for editorial decision. Rather, authors were encouraged to pursue any line of inquiry they wished into these movements, parties, and states—revisionist or otherwise—in order to interrogate the gulf between the theory of communism and its historical practice.

The second problem related to the question of inclusion. With the incredibly wide subject matter that could be discussed, volume 2 faced two potential limitations. On the one hand, given the long and rich history of communism, the volume could face charges of excluding relevant groups or events within its narrative. On the other hand, as the subject area of each chapter could warrant book-length treatment in their own right, if the volume attempted to draw upon too wide a set of communist groups and events, it could fall to parsimony. No history can hope to achieve total comprehension of its subject, nor can any analysis—for reasons of length alone—hope to engage with all relevant topics to

the satisfaction of all. The difficulty was in organizing such a rich history into coherent parts, with the caveat that some things would be overlooked, while engaging with the plurality of existent communist movements, parties, and states.

Here, the purpose of the volume—exploring the challenges of communist movements in both the past and present—brought balance by structuring the volume, and each chapter, through three overlapping themes: the historical legacy; the present status; and the future challenges of communist movements, parties, and states. Taken together, these themes ensured that the volume did not exclude relevant groups and events, nor result in a surfaced critique of such groups and events. The first chapters explore the methods of communism through debates with anarchism and the experiences of the Commune; the next set of chapters—largest component of the volume—consist of various accounts of the past and present transformations of Real Socialism; and the final chapters concern communist movements confronted with the distinct challenges in the context of contemporary world order, offering a transition into the themes of Volume 3.

The first two chapters offer a reappraisal of key historical debates related to communism and an assessment of how these continue to affect communist movements in the present. Here, Graham's examination of Marxist and anarchist conceptions of communism, coupled with Blackledge's work on the splits between the radical Left within the Internationals, offer differing accounts of the failings of working-class solidarity that, in many respects, continue today.

The second and certainly the largest component in volume 2 were those chapters focused on the examination of communist states, both past and present. It should be noted that given spatial constraints, this volume does not aim to achieve consistent comparative analysis, something which must be left to future research. This volume suggests the need for further scholarship that would emphasise the general contradictory features of past Socialist countries and the unique attributes of each, combined with specific research concerning each historical period that would include careful analysis of the changes in the global context and official/unofficial changes in ideology and concrete reforms in each project.

Samary engages with the practices of Real Socialism in the Soviet sphere and Eastern Europe, looking not only at their historical development but also their collapse and the capitalist restoration that followed the fall of the Soviet Union. Vuving offers an economic analysis of China as the new superpower and the challenges it now faces in mediating its dramatic rise against its unsustainable growth model. Cummings provides an assessment of the longevity of North Korea that he suggests is a result of its fundamental divergence from Marxism-Leninism, from

which it has since devolved into a monarchical system. The challenges for North Korea are not those typically reported in the Western media regarding collapse, famine, or nuclear arms control. Rather, they are centered on ensuring that its own place in history is not erased. Vasavakul takes a different approach in her analysis of Vietnam that examines the many economic and political changes underway in Vietnam, particularly through the emergence of *Doi Moi Policy*, as Vietnam seeks to creatively adapt Marxist-Leninism to the challenges of today. The long history of the Mexican Commune is given by Bosteels. His chapter suggests Mexican revolutionary history draws a number of parallels for the challenges facing today's radical Left, particularly regarding the potential for local self-rule. Looking to the future of Cuba, Rein speculates on the challenges of adaptation that the Cuban socialist project is likely to face after the Castros. Using primary research, Azzellini looks to the novel experiments currently underway in Venezuela's transition to socialism regarding communal councils, communes, and communal cities that, he argues, offer direct and participatory alternatives to representative democracy.

The third theme present, at least to some degree, in all of the chapters, is an assessment of the challenges now facing communist movements, parties, and states. This theme is most visible in those chapters that are specifically future-focused, such as the rise of China as the new superpower; the persistence of North Korea into the 21st Century; and the likely direction of Cuban socialism with the passing of the Castro era. In the context of this theme, Camfield's work offers a suitable point of closure for volume 2 and a lead into volume 3, by giving an historically contextualized, global account of radical working-class socialism that he documents in Asia, South America, Europe, and elsewhere. For Camfield, contemporary forms of radical socialism face daunting obstacles regarding the fragmentation of these movements, the commitment to political goals wider than self-preservation, and the capacities for building practical collaboration with other groups.

While these three themes—the historical legacy, present status, and future challenges of communist movements, parties and states—ensured inclusivity and thoroughness in content, they also had the unavoidable consequence that state communist projects figured heavily throughout the volume. This was inevitable given the importance of the state to political life and the fact that many communist movements have actively sort to capture and/or transform state power. Nevertheless, the emphasis on the state and state forms of communism was balanced by the deliberate inclusion of those communist groups unconcerned with, or outside, the state. The chapters focusing on these groups lead into the concerns of volume 3 which engages with a wider range of movements associated with communist or socialist ideals, including Occupy,

the World Social Forum, and the Arab Spring. In all of these ways, the volume achieves coherency across a vibrant, if tragic past, whilst examining the present challenges of communist struggles.

The final problem concerned the different languages and cultural idioms the volume necessarily relied on. Using sources and primary research in a variety of languages was unavoidable, given that the volume interrogated the past and present of communism across a wide array of contexts, ranging from Yugoslavia to Cuba, from Venezuela to Vietnam. While disadvantaging those who cannot translate these sources, their inclusion offers unique insights that can be found nowhere else in the literature. The contributors selected for volume 2 are all leading experts in their fields of research—whether country or region specific—and their source material is testimony to the quality of their work.

I would like to acknowledge the copyediting work of Tim Aistrop who helped with the compilation of this volume. All errors and inconsistencies are my own. As with the other volumes in this series, *Whither Communism?* would not have been possible without the work of the contributors who, in addition to penning their own chapters, offered constructive reviews of the work of their fellows. The volume would not be as strong without their support.

Shannon Brincat
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CHAPTER 1

Marxism and Anarchism on Communism: The Debate between the Two Bastions of the Left

Robert Graham

INTRODUCTION

In this chapter, I review the historical disagreements between the anarchists and Marxists, focusing on Marx himself, but wish to show that the adoption of a communist position by the majority of anarchists by the 1880s was largely the result of an internal anarchist critique of earlier forms of anarchist socialism, and not in response to Marx's criticisms of them. Indeed, anarchist communism retained several elements of its anarchist precursors to which Marx had expressed profound disagreement. However, despite continued theoretical disagreements, particularly over Marx's theory of history (or historical materialism), after the Russian Revolution and the advent of council communism, some anarchist and Marxist currents began to converge into a hybrid doctrine referred to by some as libertarian communism.¹

THE ORIGINS OF THE DEBATE: PROUDHON AND MARX

In putting the debates between Marxists and anarchists in historical context, it is important to bear in mind that both anarchist and communist doctrines had emerged prior to the publication of Marx's first two important political works setting forth his communist views, *The Poverty of Philosophy* (1847) and *The Manifesto of the Communist Party* (1848). Anarchism

was not merely a reaction to Marxism, and communism and Marxism are not synonymous.

The Poverty of Philosophy was a critique of Pierre-Joseph Proudhon's *System of Economical Contradictions, or the Philosophy of Misery* (1846). Proudhon had already famously proclaimed himself an anarchist in *What Is Property? An Inquiry into the Principle of Right and of Government* (1840), a work which Marx praised at the time as "the first resolute, pitiless, and at the same time scientific investigation" of private property.² However, despite advocating a form of anarchist socialism, famously denouncing property as theft, Proudhon was opposed to the communist doctrines then current in France.

Although subsequent anarchist communists were to argue that communism and anarchy were necessary for each other, Proudhon regarded them as fundamentally incompatible. In *What Is Property*, Proudhon argued that communism could be created and maintained only by a strong central authority. Either labor would have to be made compulsory, in order to ensure enough was produced to satisfy everyone's needs, or the productive members of society would have to be forced to share what they produced with unproductive members of society, replacing capitalist exploitation with parasitism.³

By the time Marx's *Poverty of Philosophy* was published, Proudhon's anarchist views were already fairly well developed. Proudhon advocated a society composed of equal contracting parties exchanging goods and services of equivalent value, directly and between the various groups to which they would belong, with no political authority above them. Credit would be made freely available to enable the workers to finance their own enterprises. He described this form of anarchist socialism as mutualism, after the *mutuellistes* of Lyon, a group of workers who sought to replace capitalism with a network of workers' associations.⁴

While Marx's critique of Proudhon's anarchism helped Marx hone his own views, it had very little or no impact on the development of European anarchism. Very few copies of Marx's book were sold and Proudhon never publicly responded to it.⁵ The first German edition was published only in 1885, by which time ideologically distinct anarchist and Marxist movements had emerged in Europe. A second French edition of *The Poverty of Philosophy* was not published until 1896, and an English translation did not appear until 1900.⁶

Historical Materialism

Nevertheless, it is useful to highlight the main points of disagreement between Marx and Proudhon. Marx argued against Proudhon that any socialist economic system that retained "individual exchange" would be a class system. This is because individual exchange corresponds "to

a definite mode of production which itself corresponds to class antagonism."⁷ Only changing modes of production can result in changed social relationships: "The hand-mill gives you society with the feudal lord; the steam-mill, society with the industrial capitalist."⁸ Thus, for the working class "to be able to emancipate itself it is necessary that the productive powers already acquired and the existing social relations should no longer be capable of existing side by side."⁹ Communism and the abolition of classes are the social relations that will correspond to the new productive powers no longer capable of being constrained within a capitalist mode of production.

This theory of historical materialism became a defining characteristic of Marxism. Regardless of Proudhon's views on historical development, he was never a historical materialist. Although Proudhon argued in the late 1840s and early 1850s that a social revolution that would result in the end of capitalism and the state was a historical necessity (see especially *The General Idea of the Revolution in the Nineteenth Century* (1851), "Second Study"), by the end of his life he had come to the view that anarchy itself was to remain a perpetual desideratum, that is, an ideal to work toward but which was unlikely to be achieved.¹⁰

The anarchist communist, Peter Kropotkin, while much more optimistic regarding the anarchist prospect, subsequently argued that from "all times two currents of thought and action have been in conflict in the midst of human societies," a popular anarchist current, and an authoritarian current represented by the "governing minorities," regardless of a society's particular stage of technological development.¹¹ It was largely on the basis of the anarchists' failure to accept Marx's theory of historical materialism that Marx and later Marxists have accused the anarchists of being idealists, namely people who believe that ideas have causal effects, when they simply did not accept Marx's view of history.¹²

Market Socialism

In *The Poverty of Philosophy*, Marx took Proudhon, and other socialists of similar views, to task for advocating various forms of what would today be described as market socialism, that is, a form of socialism that would retain some kind of economic exchange and individual remuneration based on each worker's productive output. What market socialists, including Proudhon, sought to achieve was a form of "exchange without exploitation."¹³ Another reason why Proudhon advocated the retention of some market mechanisms was at least in part to avoid reliance on any governmental or state institutions to regulate economic relations. However, as subsequent anarchists were to argue, anarchism is not necessarily tied to market socialism. Proudhon's mutualism is simply one of many different conceptions of what kinds of social relationships are compatible

with, suitable for, or required to maintain an anarchist society, a society without a state. As we shall see, when self-avowed anarchist movements began to emerge in Europe in the early 1870s, they were not committed to Proudhonian mutualism and, in fact, quickly gravitated toward a communist position.

Marx himself was later to concede that during the transition from capitalism to communism, each worker would be remunerated based on the amount of labor he had contributed to social production, drawing "from the social stock of means of consumption as much as costs the same amount of labour" as he contributed.¹⁴ Proudhon advocated much the same thing, but as a permanent "solution to the social problem," rather than as a temporary phase in the transition from capitalism to communism.¹⁵ Later anarchist communists disagreed with individual remuneration, or a wage system, as either a transitional measure or the goal of a social revolution.¹⁶

Technology

Marx disagreed with Proudhon's criticisms of machinery or technology. Proudhon was critical of the technology being developed under capitalism because it rendered many workers redundant, it resulted in the deskilling of workers, it made workers slaves to the machines, and it engendered both "overproduction and destitution."¹⁷ No matter how great "the pace of mechanical progress" or technological advancement, Proudhon argued, the ultimate effect is to "make the chains of serfdom heavier, render life more and more expensive, and deepen the abyss which separates the class that commands and enjoys from the class that obeys and suffers."¹⁸

For Marx, the technological advancement generated by capitalism would ultimately result in the abolition of capitalism and the creation of communism. As technology develops, the workers combine to further their interests as a class, not just as individuals. The capitalists respond, in part, by developing new technology to reduce their need for workers, resulting in further technological development incompatible with the capitalist mode of production. The transformation of the workers into a revolutionary class, according to Marx, therefore "supposes the existence of all the productive forces which could be engendered in the bosom of the old society."¹⁹ Marx's disagreements with Proudhon regarding machinery and technology are therefore ultimately based on Marx's historical materialism. Because Marx believed that Proudhon failed to grasp the revolutionary nature of technological development under capitalism, he accused Proudhon of wanting to return to the craft-based production of the Middle Ages.²⁰

After the emergence of Marxist and anarchist movements in the 1870s, they continued to disagree regarding whether a particular level

of technological development was necessary for socialism or communism to be achieved. In addition, most anarchists advocated decentralized, human scale technology for the society of the future, a view most fully developed by Kropotkin in his influential book, *Fields, Factories and Workshops*.²¹

However, neither Proudhon nor subsequent anarchists advocated a return to a mythical preindustrial arcadia. In *The System of Economical Contradictions*, Proudhon argued that despite the negative effects of modern technology, "it is impossible for us to retreat."²² He criticized Sismondi for wanting to abandon "the division of labour, with machinery and manufactures," in order to "return to the system of primitive indivision."²³ In *The General Idea of the Revolution*, he argued against those "philanthropic conservatives" who wanted "to go back to the feudal-farming period" that "it is not industry that is at fault, but economic chaos," namely capitalism, for the plight of the workers.²⁴

Ironically, the 19th-century socialist who came closest to advocating a return to craft production was William Morris, whom Marxists, such as E. P. Thompson, have since sought to claim as one of their own.²⁵ Kropotkin, while a great admirer of Morris's *News from Nowhere*, could not agree with what he described as "Morris's hatred of machines," seeing a much more positive role for advanced technology in making work less onerous and more enjoyable.²⁶

The Role of the Working Class

Proudhon did not support strikes because he thought any increase in wages would result in a corresponding increase in prices,²⁷ a view which Marx debunked in *The Poverty of Philosophy*. Nevertheless, Proudhon still regarded the workers as one of the primary agents of revolutionary change. "The new socialist movement," he wrote, "will begin with a fact sui generis, the war of the workshop."²⁸ For Proudhon, the workshop was the primary locus of class struggle because it was "the constitutive unit of society."²⁹ However, Proudhon did not see this as necessarily culminating in a violent revolution, as did Marx in his conclusion to *The Poverty of Philosophy*.³⁰ Rather, Proudhon argued that the workers "will at no time need a brusque uprising, but will become all, by invading all, through the force of principle" and their own mutualist associations.³¹ While many subsequent anarchists, particularly the anarcho-syndicalists, agreed with Proudhon that the workshop was the focal point of the class struggle, they did not share his opposition to strikes, which they saw as a means for strengthening the organization and solidarity of the workers, leading the way to the social revolution.

But as much as Proudhon and later anarchists looked to the emerging working class as an agent of revolutionary change, most did not share

Marx's view that the industrial working class was the preeminent revolutionary class destined to abolish capitalism and all classes. Proudhon was hopeful that certain elements of the bourgeoisie could be won over to the revolutionary cause, dedicating *The General Idea of the Revolution* to them.³² In *On the Political Capacity of the Working Classes* (1865), he advocated an alliance between the workers and the peasantry, for the "peasants' cause is the same as that of the industrial workers," namely the elimination of exploitation and inequality.³³ Subsequent anarchists were to follow up on Proudhon's suggestion of a revolutionary alliance between workers and peasants, and some even saw a role for the so-called lumpenproletariat.

The End of the State

One area where Marx and Proudhon appeared to be in agreement was on the ultimate end of the state following the abolition of capitalism. Proudhon argued that once the "economic Revolution" was accomplished, "the State must entirely disappear." With socialism being achieved, there is "no further need of government."³⁴ The end result of the social revolution is therefore "anarchy" conceived in a positive sense as spontaneous order arising from voluntary relationships based on equality and reciprocity.³⁵ Similarly, Marx concluded *The Poverty of Philosophy* by stating that the "working class, in the course of its development, will substitute for the old civil society an association which will exclude classes and their antagonism," such that "there will be no more political power properly so called, since political power is precisely the official expression of antagonism in civil society."³⁶

Marx's Communist Manifesto

In *The Manifesto of the Communist Party* (1848), Marx argued that industrial development led to the "organization of the proletarians into a class, and consequently into a political party."³⁷ Anarchists argued that the organization of the workers into a class need not result in the creation of a workers' party and that no single political party could claim to speak for the entire working class. In his most explicitly anarchist works, especially *The General Idea of the Revolution*, Proudhon advocated the abolition of the state and all authority, whether political, judicial, economic, or ecclesiastical. Consequently, Proudhon was opposed to any form of political representation. In the First International, whether workers' parties should be formed to participate in existing systems of political representation became a major point of contention between Marx and the anarchists.

For Marx, the “conquest of political power by the proletariat” was to be the “immediate aim” of the workers organized into a political party.³⁸ Marx claimed that the “Communists” represented “the interests of the [working class] movement as a whole.”³⁹ This was because the communists were “the most advanced and resolute section of the working-class parties of every country,” having “over the great mass of the proletariat the advantage of clearly understanding the line of march, the conditions, and the ultimate general results of the proletarian movement.”⁴⁰ In other words, the communists were those who embraced Marx’s theory of historical materialism, expressing, “in general terms, actual relations springing from an existing class struggle, from a historical movement going on under our very eyes,” which would ultimately lead to the abolition of private property.⁴¹ Bakunin and later anarchists were to argue that intellectuals claiming to have a clear understanding of the march of history would use their claims to intellectual authority to justify claims to political authority, representing not the workers but their own self-interests.⁴²

Once the proletariat, organized into a political party, achieved power, it would “use its political supremacy to wrest, by degrees, all capital from the bourgeoisie, to centralize all instruments of production in the hands of the State, i.e., of the proletariat organized as the ruling class.”⁴³ Marx emphasized that this would require “despotic inroads on the rights of property” and the sweeping “away by force” of “the old conditions of production.”⁴⁴ Among other things, he called for the centralization of credit and the means of communication and transport “in the hands of the State,” the “extension” and state ownership of the “instruments of production,” and the establishment of “industrial armies, especially for agriculture.”⁴⁵

This “revolutionizing” of “the mode of production” would ultimately lead to the disappearance of “class distinctions,” such that “public power” would “lose its political character.”⁴⁶ Having “swept away the conditions for the existence of class antagonisms and of classes generally,” the proletariat “will thereby have abolished its own supremacy as a class,” resulting in a classless society without a coercive state apparatus, a positive form of anarchy.⁴⁷

Self-Management

During the 1848 French Revolution, Proudhon himself had appealed to the provisional government to transform the Bank of France into a “People’s Bank,” asking himself, “why should I not use things as they are, to change things as they are?”⁴⁸ But he expressly argued against the bank being kept under state control. Instead, there would be a “democratization

of the Bank,” with the operation of the bank being turned over to a democratically elected “council of administration.”⁴⁹ General control of the bank would be exercised by a general assembly of “delegates chosen by all branches of production and of the public service,” subject to imperative mandates and immediate recall.⁵⁰

Instead of state control of the means of transportation, such as railways, Proudhon advocated that the workers themselves operate these collective enterprises, forming associations or “companies” of the workers involved in each enterprise that would exchange their services and products with other workers’ associations, localities, and individuals.⁵¹ Although subsequent anarchists, particularly the anarchist communists, saw no need for a people’s bank or any kind of market exchange, this idea that collective endeavors would be operated and managed directly by those involved became a common theme in anarchist proposals for social change. In contrast to the state ownership and control advocated by Marx in order to abolish class antagonism, the anarchists therefore advocated various forms of self-management.

While self-management can be viewed as a form of self-government, it is a form of self-government without the state. In the anarchist conception of federalist self-management, society is composed of a variety of functional groups, from productive units to transportation networks, from schools to municipal services, which federate into regional networks in order to coordinate their activities, with no central authority above them. Within each group, and within each federation, membership is to be voluntary and decision making based on consensus or some form of direct democracy, or a combination of both, rather than decisions being made by elected representatives. Underlying anarchist conceptions of self-management is the notion of “self-assumed obligation,” the idea that for group decisions to be binding, each participant or member must have directly participated in making the decision and freely agreed to be bound by it.⁵²

Communism

In the *Manifesto of the Communist Party*, Marx sets forth in more detail his conception of the “Communist” mode of production that is to result from the “revolutionizing” of the mode of production by the proletarian state.⁵³ Under communism, “individual property” will no longer be capable of being “transformed into bourgeois property, into capital.”⁵⁴ Capital will instead be “converted into common property.”⁵⁵ People will be able to “appropriate the products of society” for their personal use, but they will not be able to claim ownership over any remaining surplus.⁵⁶ With no one being in a position “to subjugate the labour of others by means of [the] appropriation” of surplus value, “accumulated labour” will become

“a means to widen, to enrich, to promote the existence of the labourer.”⁵⁷ In a communist society, “the free development of each” will therefore be “the condition for the free development of all.”⁵⁸

Anarchist communists would find little to disagree with in these general statements regarding future communist society. The real disagreements were over how production and distribution would actually be organized, through complex networks of voluntary associations, as the anarchists advocated, or through a bureaucratic administrative apparatus that had somehow lost its political character with the abolition of private property and class antagonisms. Marx’s references in *The Manifesto of the Communist Party* to “industrial armies, especially for agriculture,” did not inspire confidence regarding how work would actually be organized under the Marxist conception of communism.

Other anarchists were to move toward a communist position, not because they were convinced by Marx’s theory of historical materialism, but because they regarded Proudhon’s mutualism as insufficiently revolutionary. Joseph Déjacques was an anarchist contemporary of Proudhon who advocated something akin to anarchist communism. He criticized Proudhon’s mutualism from an explicitly anarchist perspective, daring Proudhon to be “frankly and wholly anarchist and not one quarter anarchist, one eighth anarchist, one sixteenth part anarchist,” and to press “on to the abolition of contract . . . not merely of the sword and of capital, but also of property and authority in every guise.”⁵⁹ For him, an “anarchistic community” was a communist one, “wherein every individual might be free to produce and to consume at will . . . without having to exercise or endure oversight from anyone or over anyone.”⁶⁰

The First International and Anarchist Collectivism

Proudhon never changed his views on communism, but he did move away from anarchism toward a doctrine he called “federalism,” which acknowledged a limited role for the state. He no longer advocated complete “anarchy,” which he defined as a system in which “political functions have been reduced to industrial functions,” with “social order” arising “from nothing but transactions and exchanges.”⁶¹ In addition to these economic relationships, there would be political agreements between various groups and localities resulting in the creation of a “federated state” based on the separation and division of powers, with the role of the state being reduced to “that of general initiation, of providing guarantees and supervising.” The “execution of its orders” would be “subject to the approval of the federated governments and their responsible agents.”⁶² While later anarchists agreed with the concept of individuals and groups voluntarily federating with one another, they saw no need for any state power above the federated groups.

Not only did subsequent anarchists disagree with Proudhon's abandonment of anarchism, most of them came to reject his mutualist economics. However, the movement away from Proudhon's mutualism toward anarchist communism only really began in earnest during the debates on collective property in the First International, starting with the 1867 Lausanne Congress. The Belgian delegates argued that Proudhon's own "mutualist program," based on the view "that the whole product of labour shall belong to the producer," entailed not only that larger industrial and commercial enterprises should be considered collective property to be managed by companies of workers, as the mutualists agreed, but that the land should be considered collective property to be worked by the peasants and farmers. Neither the capitalists nor the land owners ought to be able to appropriate the product of the workers' and the peasants' labors.⁶³

The argument for collective property was therefore based on Proudhon's own arguments in favor of some forms of collective property, not on a Marxist historical analysis. Proudhon's argument was based on notions of just entitlement derived from the labor theory of value. If labor is the source of economic value, then laborers should be entitled to the full product of their labor, regardless of what stage of industrial development has been reached.

By the time of the 1868 Brussels Congress, a majority of International delegates had adopted a position in favor of collective property. In addition, the Belgian delegates argued that the trade unions constituted the "embryo" of the future society where companies of workers and peasants would manage collective enterprises.⁶⁴ For the anarchists, this meant that there was no need either for political parties during the transition to socialism or for a state once that transition had been achieved.

BAKUNIN AND ANARCHIST COLLECTIVISM

Bakunin, who was only just beginning to identify himself as an anarchist, supported the collectivist position that each "share in the enjoyment of social wealth . . . only to the extent that he has contributed his own [labour] to its production."⁶⁵ Bakunin took from Proudhon the view that the workers and peasants were entitled to receive the full value of their labor because wealth "is produced only by labour."⁶⁶

Bakunin was opposed to communism not only because it did not provide for remuneration based on individual effort, but also because, as with Proudhon, he believed that communism required "the concentration of property in the hands of the State, whereas" he desired "the abolition of the State."⁶⁷ On the other hand, Bakunin argued against the more orthodox mutualists that a system that retained some form of private property "presupposes a State" to "sanction and guarantee" the inequality that

would inevitably result when some men remain able to “appropriate to themselves the product of the work” of others.⁶⁸

Bakunin opposed the right of inheritance on similar grounds, namely that the enforcement of such a right would require a coercive state apparatus.⁶⁹ For Bakunin, and other anarchists, the state and the laws it enforces are not merely superstructural but have their own causal effects, such that the state “must be overthrown if we wish to arrive at an order of things different from what now exists.”⁷⁰ Bakunin opposed either the state “sanctioning . . . property rights” through coercive law enforcement, or the state being used to “expropriate . . . millions of small farmers,” as this “would inevitably cast them into reaction, and we would have to use force against them to submit to the revolution.”⁷¹ With the abolition of the state and its enforcement of private property rights, the farmers would be left only with “possession de facto” of their small holdings, which “deprived of all legal sanction” would “be transformed easily under the pressure of revolutionary events and forces” into collective property.⁷²

Bakunin’s arguments in support of collective property were therefore based on an essentially Proudhonian notion of just entitlement and his own critique of Marx’s theory of historical materialism. While Bakunin commended Marx’s *Capital* for its “merciless . . . exposé of the formation of bourgeois capital and the systematic and cruel exploitation that capital continues exercising over the work of the proletariat,”⁷³ he did not accept Marx’s theory of historical development, according to which “the most advanced countries, and consequently those most capable of producing social revolution, are the ones where modern capitalist production has reached its highest point of development,” because this meant that countries “more backward from the viewpoint of capitalist production . . . are necessarily equally backward from that of social revolution.”⁷⁴

Disagreeing with Marx’s view that a particular stage of technological development was necessary for socialism to be achieved, Bakunin saw landless peasants as a potentially revolutionary class and the natural allies of the workers. Consequently, Bakunin urged his fellow revolutionaries to encourage the peasants to “take the land and throw out those landlords who live by the labour of others,” inciting them “to destroy, by direct action, every political, juridical, civil, and military institution,” thereby establishing “anarchy through the whole countryside.”⁷⁵

Bakunin opposed those revolutionaries who favored “a powerfully centralized revolutionary State” on the ground that this “would inevitably result in military dictatorship and a new master,” with the masses being condemned “to slavery and exploitation by a new pseudo-revolutionary aristocracy.”⁷⁶ He also opposed workers’ organizations, such as the International, being “divided into two groups—one comprising the vast

majority and composed of members whose only knowledge will be blind faith in the theoretical and practical wisdom of their commanders," and a "learned, clairvoyant, and cunning minority, carefully hiding its despotism behind the appearance of obsequious respect for the will of the sovereign people."⁷⁷

Bakunin and the anarchists rejected participation in "all bourgeois, monarchical, liberal or even radical democratic politics" because it could not "have any goal other than the consolidation and extension of bourgeois power."⁷⁸ Bakunin therefore sided with the proto-sindicalist currents in the International, represented by people like Jean-Louis Pindy and Eugene Hins at the 1869 Basel Congress, who argued that capitalism and the state should be replaced "by the assembled councils of the trades bodies, and by a committee of their respective delegates, overseeing the labour relations which are to take the place of politics," so that "wage slavery may be replaced by the free federation of free producers."⁷⁹ This vision of "the organization of work in the future" would serve as a model for "the societies of resistance in the present."⁸⁰ As Bakunin put it, the workers' trade union organizations "bear in themselves the living seeds of the new society which is to replace the old world . . . creating not only the ideas, but also the facts of the future itself."⁸¹

Parallel to the organization of work on the basis of cooperative associations would be a federation of communes, an idea which was championed by many of the Internationalists during the Paris Commune and which Bakunin also supported.⁸² Subsequent anarchists advocated networks of federated functional, productive, and communal groups.

The Franco-Prussian War and the Paris Commune

In September 1870, Bakunin published *Letters to a Frenchman on the Present Crisis*, in which he called for the war against Prussia to be transformed into a social revolutionary war against capitalism and the state. Bakunin argued that a revolution of the workers and peasants in France, rejecting "all official organization" and "government centralization" would lead to "the social emancipation of the proletariat" throughout Europe.⁸³ Bakunin called for the establishment of revolutionary communes throughout France and was involved in the attempt to establish a revolutionary commune in Lyon toward the end of September 1870. This "touched off a chain reaction up and down the Rhone valley and through Provence," with attempts to establish revolutionary communes in "Toulouse, Narbonne, Cette, Perpignan, Limoges, Saint-Etienne, Le Creusot," Marseilles and Paris in the Fall of 1870.⁸⁴ Bakunin argued that a "revolution that is imposed upon people—whether by official decree or by force of arms" would be counterrevolutionary, "for it necessarily provokes reaction."⁸⁵ Instead, he called on the workers and

peasants to take direct action by taking over the land and the workshops themselves.

Marx's attitude toward the Franco-Prussian War was much different from that of Bakunin. Marx thought that a Prussian victory, resulting in "the centralization of State power" in Germany, would "be useful to the centralization of the German working class. Moreover, German ascendancy will transfer the centre of gravity of the European workers' movement from France to Germany," constituting "the ascendancy of our theory over Proudhon's."⁸⁶ Marx described any "attempt at upsetting the new Government in the present crisis, when the enemy is almost knocking at the doors of Paris," as "a desperate folly" and ridiculed Bakunin's attempt to establish a revolutionary commune in Lyon.⁸⁷

As for Bakunin's endorsement of the view that the International constituted the embryo of the future socialist society, such that it "should already now be the true image of our principles of freedom and federalism," banishing "all principles which tend to lead to authority and dictatorship,"⁸⁸ Marx claimed that this would result only in "anarchy in the proletarian ranks."⁸⁹ The future Marxist, Jules Guesde, when he was still an anarchist, argued to the contrary that political organizations with a central authority, as favored by Marx, were much more vulnerable to state repression because the police only needed to strike at the center of the organization to paralyze or destroy it.⁹⁰

After Bakunin, anarchists continued to argue that, in Jean Grave's words, the "surest means of making Anarchy triumph is to act like an Anarchist."⁹¹ Whether prerevolutionary organization should prefigure post-revolutionary society remained a major point of disagreement between anarchists and Marxists, particularly with respect to the Marxist concept of "the dictatorship of the proletariat." Anarchists shared Bakunin's view that "no dictatorship can have any other objective than to perpetuate itself."⁹²

After the proclamation of the Paris Commune in March 1871, Marx argued that "the Central Committee surrendered its power too soon, to make way for the Commune."⁹³ Bakunin, on the other hand, argued that neither a dictatorship nor a constituent assembly could achieve the social revolution, which could only be "brought to its full development . . . by the spontaneous and continuous action of the masses" and the immediate abolition of the state.⁹⁴

After the fall of the Commune Marx appeared to move closer to an anarchist position, arguing that the Commune demonstrated that "the working class cannot simply lay hold of the ready-made state machinery, and wield it for its own purposes."⁹⁵ Marx praised the Commune for trying to transform "the means of production, land and capital, now chiefly the means of enslaving and exploiting labour, into mere instruments of free and associated labour," something which Proudhon, Bakunin, and the proto-syndicalists such as Pindy, Hins, and Eugene Varlin had been

advocating, but which Marx now claimed was the very “Communism” that he supported.⁹⁶ However, Marx, without mentioning Proudhon, associated federalism with the counterrevolutionary Girondins of the French Revolution, rejecting it because it sought “to break up . . . that unity of great nations which, if originally brought about by political force, has now become a powerful coefficient of social production.”⁹⁷ Thus, the “few but important functions which still would remain for a central government were not to be suppressed . . . but were to be discharged by Communal, and therefore strictly responsible agents.”⁹⁸ Each commune was to be both an “executive and legislative body” based on universal suffrage.⁹⁹

Writing on the 10th anniversary of the Commune, the anarchist communist Peter Kropotkin argued that “there is no more reason for a government inside a commune than for a government above the commune.”¹⁰⁰ Instead of setting up a revolutionary government, “forced to discuss when it was necessary to act,” the people themselves should “take possession of all social wealth so as to put it into common according to the principles of anarchist communism,” utilizing their own organizations, such as trade unions, mutual aid societies and neighborhood committees.¹⁰¹ Social and economic policies would be developed and implemented by these self-managed worker and communal organizations, forming “themselves freely according to the necessities dictated to them by life itself.”¹⁰²

Instead of drawing Marx and the anarchists closer together, the brutal suppression of the Commune only served to drive them further apart. Marx reiterated the need for the working class to form its own distinct national political parties in the face “of an unbridled reaction which violently crushes every effort at emancipation on the part of the working men.”¹⁰³ Returning to the views he expressed in *The Poverty of Philosophy* and *The Manifesto of the Communist Party*, Marx argued that the “political movement of the working class has as its ultimate object . . . the conquest of political power for this class . . . with the object of enforcing its interests in a . . . form possessing general, socially coercive force.”¹⁰⁴

Political Power and the General Strike

The anarchists in the International argued against Marx that “all political organization cannot help but be the organization of domination to the benefit of one class to the detriment of the masses,” such that “the destruction of all political power is the first duty of the proletariat.”¹⁰⁵ Some of the surviving Communards, such as Louise Michel, became anarchists because they felt that the people had waited for the politically divided Commune to institute and safeguard the social revolution, when the only effective means of achieving the social revolution was through their own direct action.

Contrary to Marx's claims that the antiparliamentary approach of the anarchists meant that the capitalists and the governments in their control would be able to exploit the working class unimpeded,¹⁰⁶ the anarchists, in contrast to Proudhon and his more conservative adherents, favored militant trade union organization, regarding strikes "as a precious weapon in the struggle" against capitalism.¹⁰⁷ Bakunin suggested that when "strikes spread out from one place to another, they come very close to turning into a general strike," eventually resulting "in a great cataclysm which forces society to shed its old skin."¹⁰⁸ Through trade union organization and collective action, the workers would prepare themselves "for the great and final revolutionary contest which, destroying all privilege and class difference, will bestow upon the worker a right to the enjoyment of the gross product of his labours and thereby the means of developing his full intellectual, material and moral powers in a collective setting."¹⁰⁹ The concept of the general strike was to remain one of the main tactics advocated by anarchists as a means of overthrowing the capitalist regime, but was derided by Marx and Engels,¹¹⁰ leading the Marxist Social Democrats to later dismiss the general strike as "general nonsense."¹¹¹

Given the savagery of the French state's suppression of the Commune, with some 30,000 Communards being massacred and thousands more imprisoned and exiled, the majority of European anarchists rejected Proudhon's advocacy of peaceful social transformation. Proudhon's gradualist program was seen as completely incapable of dealing with counterrevolutionary violence. Anarchists came to embrace class war in a very literal sense, calling for armed uprisings against the bourgeoisie. Participation in bourgeois politics by means of working class political parties would hopelessly compromise the revolutionary struggle. For Bakunin and the anarchists, "no state, howsoever democratic its forms, not even the reddest political republic . . . is capable of giving the people what they need: the free organization of their own interests from below upward, without any interference, tutelage, or coercion from above."¹¹²

Statism and Anarchism

Marx's 1874 marginal notes on Bakunin's *Statism and Anarchy* (1873) provide a useful contrast between Marxism and anarchism around the time that anarchists were moving toward a communist position. In response to Bakunin's question regarding over whom the proletariat would rule once it became the ruling class, Marx emphasized that during the transition to communism, while classes continued to exist, "the proletariat's conquest of governmental power" would enable it to remove or transform by force "the economic conditions on which . . . the existence of classes depend."¹¹³ Marx therefore believed that some sort of coercive state apparatus was necessary for the transition from capitalism to socialism.

In response to Bakunin's claim that it was impossible for all workers to be part of the government, such that to speak of the proletariat as "the ruling class" was in reality to speak of "the despotism of the ruling minority," Marx relied on his theory of historical materialism. He argued that specific political forms, including the so-called dictatorship of the proletariat, are determined by "the economic basis," such that the proletariat, as the ruling class, "during the period of struggle to overthrow the old society, still acts on the basis of the old society and consequently within political forms which more or less belong to that society."¹¹⁴ Where "the industrial proletariat" was not sufficiently developed to constitute itself as the ruling class, the "economic prerequisites" for "a radical social revolution" simply did not exist.¹¹⁵

The anarchists maintained, to the contrary, "that the State organization, having been the force to which the minorities resorted for establishing and organizing their power over the masses, cannot be the force which will serve to destroy these privileges."¹¹⁶ Furthermore, if a coercive state apparatus is not necessary to abolish capitalism, neither is it necessary to wait for the development of an industrial proletariat to abolish the state. The anarchists did not accept Marx's view that political forms are the product of a particular stage of technological and economic development, such that the transformation of the economic base was necessary before the state could be abolished.

Marx's response to Bakunin's point that once a small number of workers assumed positions of power, "they will no longer represent the people but themselves and their own pretensions to govern the people,"¹¹⁷ highlights the degree to which Marx regarded authority relationships as arising from existing technology. If only Bakunin "understood at least the position of a manager in a co-operative factory, all his illusions about domination would go to the devil."¹¹⁸ Engels expanded on this point in his essay, "On Authority," in which he argued that modern industry could not function without "imperious authority," subjecting individual workers "to a veritable despotism independent of all social organization."¹¹⁹ This was consistent with Marx's comments in Volume 3 of *Capital* that "the realm of freedom actually begins only where labour which is determined by necessity and mundane considerations ceases . . . beyond the sphere of actual material production."¹²⁰

With respect to Bakunin's concern that the peasantry would be ruled over "by the urban and industrial proletariat," Marx did not deny that this would be the case, but argued that the proletariat, "functioning as the government must take steps that will directly improve" the position of the peasants.¹²¹ Marx saw the proletariat as "the natural trustees" of the peasants' interests.¹²² As for Bakunin's view that the best way to win the peasants over to the cause of the revolution was to let them take over the land, Marx claimed this would simply reinforce private property by enlarging

the peasants' small holdings to include "the larger estates."¹²³ The important point is that it is the proletariat, as the governing power, which will be responsible for implementing reforms beneficial to the peasantry, rather than the peasantry acting for themselves.

From Collectivism to Communism

While Bakunin and other anarchists believed there could be revolutions in countries lacking a large industrial working class, they did recognize that the level of economic development would have an impact on what sort of economic system would replace capitalism. For example, Bakunin's associate, James Guillaume, argued in 1874 that after the revolution, at first workers would be remunerated "for the labour performed" by them, given the existing state of economic development.¹²⁴ But "within a few years of the Revolution," with "the advances of industrial and agricultural science" that would result, production would come to outstrip "the needs of society," putting an end to any need for the "scrupulous measuring of the portion due each worker: each of them will be able to dip into the abundant social reserve, to meet all of his requirements," marking the material realization of the communist principle, "From each according to ability; to each according to needs."¹²⁵ These views are similar to those expressed by Marx in *The Critique of the Gotha Programme*,¹²⁶ with the primary disagreement being over whether a coercive state apparatus was necessary during the transition from capitalism to socialism, and then from socialism to communism.

ANARCHIST COMMUNISM

From the mid-1870s to the early 1880s, a number of prominent anarchists came to adopt anarchist communism, including Elisée Reclus, Carlo Cafiero, Errico Malatesta, and Kropotkin. Cafiero and Kropotkin went a step beyond both Guillaume and Marx, arguing that communism should be the immediate result of the social revolution, such that there was no need for a transitional phase from socialism to communism. As Cafiero argued, even where there was not an abundance of goods, such that some items would need to be rationed, "the rationing should be carried out not according to merit but according to need."¹²⁷ Other anarchist communists agreed with Guillaume that communism required a certain level of economic and moral development and, furthermore, that people would have to work out for themselves the economic forms of a free society.

When anarchists started moving toward a communist position, they did so on libertarian grounds. Where everyone may freely take what they need from the common wealth, Kropotkin argued, people will be

free to “choose the branch of activity which best suits their inclinations” instead of being compelled by economic necessity to work in whatever position they can find.¹²⁸ Cafiero argued that the “individual distribution of products would re-establish not only inequality between men, but also inequality between different kinds of work,” for some would earn more than others, thereby acquiring “more wealth,” while others would have to do the lower paying “dirty” jobs.¹²⁹ Instead of “vocation and personal taste” deciding “a man to devote himself to one form of activity rather than another, it would be interest, the hope of winning more in some profession” that would be the motivating force, replicating the maneuvering for competitive advantage found in capitalist societies.¹³⁰

Furthermore, with modern “mass production and the application of machinery on a large scale” constituting an “ever-increasing tendency of modern labour to make use of the labour of previous generations,” it was impossible to determine “the share of the product of one and the share of the product of another.”¹³¹ As Kropotkin argued, “one thing remains: put the needs above the works” by implementing communism.¹³²

Kropotkin’s Critique of the Labor Theory of Value

By the time Kropotkin wrote his critique of the wage system in 1888, the most prominent socialist proponents of a wage system were Marxist Social Democrats, who envisaged state ownership of the means of production and individual remuneration (wage labor). Drawing on the distinction made by Marx in *Capital* between complex and simple labor, they also advocated wage differentials, with skilled professionals to be paid more than ordinary workers. Kropotkin objected that this would divide “society into two very distinct classes—the aristocracy of knowledge placed above the horny-handed lower orders—the one doomed to serve the other.”¹³³ Kropotkin argued that this distinction flowed from Marx’s reliance on a labor theory of value, according to which “goods are exchanged in proportion to the quantity of work socially necessary for their production.”¹³⁴ Kropotkin noted that “without this premise . . . it is impossible to formulate the theory of surplus value.”¹³⁵ Thus, Kropotkin’s theory of anarchist communism was developed in opposition to Marx’s economic theory, not as an anarchist variant of it, in contrast to Cafiero, who cited *Capital* repeatedly in his arguments for anarchist communism.¹³⁶

Kropotkin made this clear by rejecting the labor theory of value: “Labour is not the measure of Value. . . . Under the capitalist system, value in exchange is measured no more by the amount of necessary labour,” something which “was true only in the tribal stage of mankind.”¹³⁷ Thus, “the evils of the present day are not caused by the capitalist appropriating for himself the ‘surplus value,’” although capitalist exploitation was

unacceptable, “but by the fact itself that . . . millions of men have literally nothing to live upon, unless they sell their labour force and their intelligence at a price that will make . . . ‘surplus value’ possible.”¹³⁸ For Kropotkin, the primary reason why millions of people had to “sell” their “labour force” at the lowest price in order to survive was because there was a coercive state apparatus in place, which enforced private property rights and punished people for violating them.

The Means of Action

The anarchist communists agreed with Bakunin that the state must be abolished immediately and, with him, rejected the need for any transitional government to abolish capitalism. Instead of political parties seeking to exercise coercive political power in order to speed the transition to communism, they advocated direct action and “propaganda by the deed,” by which they did not mean individual acts of terrorism, but exemplary actions designed to inspire the people to overthrow their oppressors.¹³⁹ When some anarchists later resorted to assassinations and bombings, Kropotkin argued that such acts did not constitute propaganda, “for you do not kill a man to make propaganda—you kill him because he is a viper and you hate him.”¹⁴⁰

Whether anarchists should form specifically anarchist groups to promote and instigate the social revolution remained a matter of debate. Bakunin had been a proponent and practitioner of “dual organization,” the idea that through specifically anarchist groups united by a common program anarchists would be better able to influence the direction of mass organizations, particularly revolutionary, or “syndicalist,” trade unions, and spur them, and the people as a whole, on to revolution.¹⁴¹ Other anarchists favored more fluid forms of organization, particularly during periods of increased state repression. Still others, the so-called anti-organizationalists, argued against any ongoing organization, whether an anarchist group or a revolutionary trade union, on the grounds that, in Luigi Galleani’s words, all such organizations are “based on delegation and representation.” Inevitably, “the card carrying members” will be forced to “submit for the sake of discipline” to decisions and measures “even though they may be contrary to their opinion and their interest,” and may impede rather than further the social revolution.¹⁴²

Other anarchists sought to expand upon Bakunin’s idea that revolutionaries “should foster the self-organization of the masses.”¹⁴³ The Spanish anarchist, Antonio Pellicer Paraire, acknowledged that, given the existing state of the workers’ movement, “parallel or dual organization has to be accepted,” with the anarchists maintaining their own revolutionary groups, but argued that the primary focus must be on creating libertarian

workers' federations in which each worker is an equal and active participant, so as to prevent the development of a trade union bureaucracy and a de facto executive assuming control of the organization. Each organization must in turn retain "their autonomy and independence, free of meddling by other groups and with no one having methods, systems, theories, schools of thought, beliefs, or any faith shoved down his throat."¹⁴⁴ Only through the self-activity of the masses can an anarchist society hope to be achieved.

By the mid-1880s, anarchist communism had become the prevalent doctrine among anarchists, with the exception of Spain, where a majority continued to support an anarchist form of "collectivism," where individuals would be remunerated on the basis of their contribution to production. For the Marxist social democratic parties that were emerging in Europe, communism was becoming a distant goal, prompting Engels to publish Marx's 1875 *Critique of the Gotha Programme* in 1891 to remind them that state socialism was but a means to the final end of communism.

Anti-Parliamentarianism and Council Communism

That the workers had need of political parties to abolish capitalism and to complete the transition from socialism to communism remained a fundamental tenet of Marxism until the advent of council communism in the aftermath of the Russian Revolution. It was on the basis of their opposition to participation in bourgeois politics that the anarchists were excluded from the Second International in 1896.¹⁴⁵

During the Russian Revolution some anarcho-syndicalists began advocating factory committees or councils as revolutionary organs, concerned that the soviets were being co-opted by the Bolsheviks.¹⁴⁶ Similar approaches were embraced by anarchists in Italy and Germany in 1919–1920, working with more radical Marxists, who came to describe themselves as council communists. However, the council communists remained committed to a Marxist interpretation of history, criticizing the anarchists for their "ahistorical" and "voluntarist" approach.¹⁴⁷ Anarchists were to continue their criticisms of Marx's theory of historical materialism, and to develop a critique of the council communists' theory of workers' self-management as too narrow.

While the council communists criticized the anarcho-syndicalists for allegedly wanting to replace the state with a trade union bureaucracy, anarcho-syndicalist unions generally had few if any full-time union officers, utilizing a federalist model of organization with local craft or factory groups sending delegates subject to imperative mandates and immediate recall to meet with delegates from the other federated groups to coordinate their activities. The anarcho-syndicalists were not

opposed to factory councils or committees, but rather saw them as the base units of the federations of workers. At the founding congress of the anarcho-syndicalist International Workers' Association in early 1922, the delegates called for "the establishment of economic communes and administrative organs run by the workers in the fields and factories, forming a system of free councils without subordination to any authority or political party."¹⁴⁸ Noam Chomsky has therefore argued that the "radical Marxism" of the council communists in fact "merges with anarchist currents," leading Daniel Guérin to describe the confluence of the two traditions as "libertarian communism."¹⁴⁹

With respect to the concept of workers' self-management, many anarchists went beyond the council communists by arguing for self-management in all areas of life, not just the workplace. Since the time of Proudhon, various anarchists had advocated interlocking federations of functional groups of producers and consumers, self-managed professions, such as teaching, and communal and regional groups. Anarchist communists, such as Kropotkin, advocated what Colin Ward later called "horizontal federations," complex networks of voluntary associations organized "for all imaginable aims; ever changing, ever modified," which "constantly assume new forms which answer best to the multiple aspirations of all."¹⁵⁰ For Ward, the key is that the federated groups "are voluntary, functional, temporary and small."¹⁵¹ One must guard against organizations "which have outlived their functions," to prevent them from coming only to serve "the interests of [their] office holders." The groups "should be small precisely because in small face-to-face groups, the bureaucratic and hierarchical tendencies inherent in organization have least opportunity to develop."¹⁵²

Despite the adoption of libertarian communism by the majority of anarchists after Bakunin, and the antiauthoritarian approach of some Marxists, such as the council communists, important differences remain not only between anarchists and libertarian Marxists, but between the anarchists themselves. In many ways, there are now more similarities between so-called class struggle anarchists, who trace their lineage back to Bakunin,¹⁵³ and council communists, than there are between the former and contemporary anarchist currents that emphasize process, assembly forms of organization, particularly in the 2011 Occupy movements, and the creation of a decentralized ecological society without hierarchy, representation, mediation, or domination, merging with poststructuralist currents in anarchist thought.¹⁵⁴

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151. Colin Ward, “Anarchy as a Theory of Organization,” in *Anarchism: A Documentary History of Libertarian Ideas*, vol. 2 (Montreal: Black Rose Books, 2009), 371.
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CHAPTER 2

The Split in the International and the Origins of War

Paul Blackledge

INTRODUCTION

On August 4, 1914, social democratic deputies in both the German Reichstag and the French Chamber of Deputies voted unanimously for war credits. Whatever else these votes signified they revealed just how far the leaderships of these nominally revolutionary parties had become integrated into the structures of their respective states. Among those who voted on that day were deputies who had, less than a week earlier, met together under the auspices of the Socialist International to champion peace. The initial antiwar posturing of these representatives reflected the International's declared policy as articulated at its Stuttgart conference in 1907 and reiterated at its Basle conference of 1912. This policy included not only the demand that Social Democrats should "exert every effort to prevent" war, but also the requirement that they should "utilize the economic and political crisis created by the war to rouse the masses and thereby to hasten the downfall of capitalist class rule."¹

Despite these unanimously agreed guidelines the French and German deputies were not alone in voting to support their governments' war efforts in the first week of August. Two days earlier Belgian socialists voted to align themselves with their state in an act that was repeated shortly afterward by the Labour Party representatives in the British parliament, albeit after the removal of the party's antiwar leader. Meanwhile Austrian and Hungarian socialists who had been denied the opportunity of a vote made up for this by publishing an outpouring of bellicose literature in their press.²

It is not that there was no opposition to this rush to patriotism. In fact, 14 of the 92 German socialist deputies who met in a closed session on August 3 were opposed to voting for war credits. However, norms of party discipline meant that these opinions were not expressed on the floor of the Reichstag—and ironically it was one of the 14 antiwar deputies, Hugo Haase, who read out the party's pro-war statement to the Reichstag. Unfortunately, this suppression of antiwar voices was typical within the International. Discounting the tiny Bulgarian and Serbian organizations, among socialists in the belligerent states the only group with a mass base to stand out against the war was the Russian party. For the leadership of the German Social Democratic Party (SPD), undoubtedly the center of gravity within the International, the vote for war credits was partly justified as a means of entry into the inner sanctum of power: it was hoped that this vote and, in particular the unanimity of the vote, would make the party respectable. Whether or not the SPD succeeded in these terms, the vote certainly killed the Socialist International, and it did so in a way that was immediately recognized by contemporaries as a "seminal moment in the history of socialism."³

Whereas the International had previously sought to organize the entirety of the socialist Left (excepting anarchists), the events of 1914 meant that this was no longer possible. In a sense, the split between pro- and antiwar sections of the Left was a practical refutation of an approach to politics that had roots going back to Marx. When the International was launched in 1889, its organizers initially followed the general approach taken by Marx at the founding of the International Working-Men's Association (First International) in 1864. When confronted with leftists of a plurality of different national and political traditions, Marx wrote a set of rules that were intended to, and largely succeeded in, maintaining the broadest possible unity across the movement. He wagered that as the movement deepened and broadened through upcoming struggles the general framework that he and Engels had formulated in the 1840s would increasingly become hegemonic within it.⁴

The almost fatalistic optimism of this perspective reflected Marx's failure to develop a coherent theory of working-class reformism.⁵ The consequences of this weakness were magnified over subsequent decades as working-class reformism especially as institutionalized through the labor bureaucracy grew in strength. If 1914 proved to be a cruel judge of the tendency within Marxism that had become enmeshed with the labor bureaucracy, Lenin made the most sustained attempt to overcome the limitations of this interpretation of Marxism. He responded to the votes for war credits by joining those voices calling for the creation of a new, third international to replace the now defunct Socialist International.⁶ Lenin supported this call with a sharp political explanation of the demise of the Second International: "overcome by

opportunism" its leadership "betrayed" the working class: "the Second International is dead," he wrote, "long live the Third International."⁷

Lenin based this perspective on a new conception of Marxist politics that he articulated through a root and branch critique of Second International Marxism. Pace both Perry Anderson's and Lars Lih's contrasting interpretations of Lenin's mature Marxism, this approach is best understood neither as a voluntaristic inversion of Second International fatalism nor as a mere application of Second International theory to Russian conditions.⁸ Though Anderson is right to locate voluntaristic tendencies among the critics of the vote for war credits, and while Lih is correct to point to the continuities across Lenin's oeuvre before and after 1914, neither standpoint adequately captures the novelty of Lenin's contribution to Marxism.

Lenin's mature thought is best understood as paralleling but significantly deepening Rosa Luxemburg's powerful political critique of fatalistic tendencies within Second International Marxism. Her claim, made in *The Junius Pamphlet* recalling a comment made by Engels in *Anti-Dühring*, that the alternatives for humanity were "socialism or a regression into barbarism" marked a profound shift from the tendency within Second International Marxism, including within her own pre-war writings, to view socialism as the inevitable outcome of the contradictions of capitalism.⁹ Similarly, Lenin's mature thought involved a profound break with fatalism while avoiding the trap of voluntarism. He did this in part by conceptualizing socialist practice in a way that effectively renewed the sublation of materialism and idealism that Marx articulated in the 1840s. In particular, he raised theory to the level of his practical critique both of Second International fatalism and of the more general tendency to cover political passivity beneath radical rhetoric. Specifically, his renewal of the missing category of the totality within Marxism informed his theory of imperialism as an internally contradictory stage of capitalist development. His subsequent political orientation aimed at realizing the socialist potential of these contradictions.¹⁰ In what follows I first sketch the limitations of Second International Marxism before outlining Lenin's alternative. I suggest that his general approach to politics has lost none of his pertinence over the last century.¹¹

1914 AND SECOND INTERNATIONAL MARXISM

In sharp contrast to Lenin's claim that the Second International betrayed the working class in 1914, S.F. Kissin argues that "the decision of the French Socialist Party to support the war and to enter the government is wholly understandable." He justifies this position through reference to Germany's demands not only that France declare its neutrality in the context of Russian mobilization but also that it hand over its fortresses

at Toul and Verdun as a pledge of such neutrality. By contrast, he points out that the French government had made no bellicose moves in the immediate pre-war context. Whereas it might be supposed that the logic of this argument would lead Kissin to criticize the SPD's vote for war credits, in fact he suggests that the Germans were also justified in voting as they did for they believed their government's claims that Germany was merely preparing to defend itself from Russian and French aggression. Interestingly, Kissin approvingly cites Karl Kautsky's appeal to the authority of Marx and Engels to defend this argument.¹²

According to Kautsky, the "method used by Marx and Engels" did not start from either "supporting or opposing their own government under all circumstances; rather they had to examine the policy which had led to war and which was being pursued by means of war." For Kautsky, therefore, the correct socialist attitude to war should proceed by asking which country "provoked" war and conversely which country was its "victim." Kissin comments that "these were indeed the criteria Marx and Engels used when deciding whose victory to favour in a war."¹³

If Kissin thus challenges the Marxist credentials of Lenin's critique of the vote for war credits, Georges Haupt argues that Lenin missed his target when he criticized the leadership of the Second International for betraying the workers' movement in 1914 because they were, in fact, "helpless" in the face of war. Moreover, he suggests that it is too crude to blame the fatalistic resignation with which the majority reacted to the reality of war on their reformism, for even the minority of revolutionaries who took a stance against the war failed to offer concrete proposals to stop it.¹⁴ Haupt justifies this criticism of Lenin, in part, by reference to Lenin's own advice to communist delegates attending a peace congress at The Hague in 1922. In seeming contrast to his assessment of the Second International's betrayal of the workers in 1914, in 1922 Lenin suggested that "workers' organisations, even if they call themselves revolutionary organisations, are utterly helpless in the face of an actually impending war."¹⁵

For Kevin Callahan, Lenin's claim that the Second International betrayed the working class rests upon the false premise that the International was capable of preventing war through revolutionary agitation in 1914. Callahan argues that because the International was not a revolutionary body, it is wrong to berate it for refusing to act in a revolutionary manner.¹⁶ In a sense Kissin and Haupt share this perspective, though they approach it from different angles. In Kissin's case this assumption is implied by his failure, as we shall see later, to critically explore the coordinates of Kautsky's arguments in favor of the vote for war credits. Haupt's position is slightly different. He does link the claim that the International was helpless in 1914 to its reformism, but insists that the parallel failure of the revolutionary Left implies that the International's

helplessness cannot be blamed "solely" on its reformism.¹⁷ In so far as it goes this is an honest portrayal of the revolutionary Left in 1914. However, by limiting his analysis to the events leading up to 1914 Haupt paints a distorted portrait of the revolutionary Left. For although it is true that the revolutionary Left were caught unaware by the swift move to war and offered little by way of concrete proposals to stop it, this is perhaps best understood as a function of the way that they had allowed themselves, prior to 1914, to become enmeshed within what were de facto reformist organizations, albeit reformist organizations that bowed before revolutionary rhetoric. While 1914 exposed the revolutionary Left's failure to offer a political alternative to reformism, they subsequently differentiated themselves from the right-wing leadership of the International by their reaction to this experience. Most importantly, they learned the limitations of social democracy, and in particular the model of social democracy that was embodied in the SPD, and through this experience they began to theorize an alternative model of socialist political practice.

The SPD, which was by far and away the most important party within the International, had been created through a merger of existing Marxist and Lassallean groups at the 1875 Gotha Unity Congress, and in the wake of the collapse of the First International it was through this organization that Marx and Engels most directly influenced the European workers' movement. In 1889 this organization played a key role in the formation of the Second International and maintained its hegemony within that organization until 1914.¹⁸ Interestingly, Marx and Engels and then Engels alone after Marx's death criticized both the program that was embraced by the new party at the Gotha Unity Congress in 1875 and the revised version of the program that was voted on at the 1992 Erfurt conference. Commenting on the earlier document, Marx argued that because the program avoided the issue of "the revolutionary dictatorship of the proletariat" the SPD opened itself up to a possible evolution toward liberalism.¹⁹ He consequently opened *The Critique of the Gotha Programme*, which took the form of a letter to a number of his closest comrades in Germany, with the statement that "after the unity congress Engels and I are going to publish a short statement dissociating ourselves from the said programme."²⁰ Interestingly, in a letter written later that year, Engels explained why neither he nor Marx had found it expedient to break with the new party in the wake of its adoption of the *Gotha Programme*. He pointed out that the bourgeois press had in fact read into it his and Marx's views. More importantly, the workers had done the same, and "it is *this circumstance alone* which has made it possible for Marx and myself not to disassociate ourselves publicly from a programme such as this."²¹ In this context, Marx and Engels wagered that, despite the shortcomings of the party's program, the general superiority

of the perspectives of the party's Marxist tendency would lead to its eventual hegemony within the organization. This, in the medium term, was precisely the turn taken by events. Thus, Carl Schorske points out, as Bismarck "unleashed his fury" against the socialist Left in the period between 1878 and 1890 the party "became really receptive to Marxism."²² Bismarck's authoritarian turn coincided with the publication of Engels's *Anti-Dühring* (1878), in which he took up the fight for hegemony within the party, and which won over many of the organization's cadre to Marxism.²³ This process culminated with the revision of the party's program at the Erfurt congress of 1891.

Though Engels welcomed the Erfurt Programme as an improvement on Gotha, he repeated Marx's earlier criticism of the failure of the Germans to address the question of state power scientifically: "The political demands of the draft have one great fault. It lacks precisely what should have been said."²⁴ Noting that "opportunism" (reformism) was "gaining ground in large sections of the Social-Democratic press," Engels argued that it was incumbent upon the framers of the program to spell out clearly to the German workers that the transition to socialism could only come "by force."²⁵ He insisted that if the SPD did not make this clear then, in the long run, the party would go "astray:" "The forgetting of the great, the principal considerations for the momentary interests of the day, this struggling and striving for the success of the moment regardless of later consequences, this sacrifice of the future of the movement for its present, may be 'honestly' meant, but it is and remains opportunism, and 'honest' opportunism is perhaps the most dangerous of all!"²⁶ So, in a repetition of arguments he and Marx had put in 1875, in 1891 he reminded his comrades that socialism could be realized only through a revolutionary regime similar to the Paris Commune:²⁷ "our party and the working class can only come to power under the form of a democratic republic. This is even the specific form of the dictatorship of the proletariat."²⁸

Schorske points out that the Erfurt Programme essentially included two related messages to members of the SPD. To the revolutionary Left it said be "patient," while to the reformists it said "reforms are the first task. Pursue them. But remember, you must fight for them. And the faith in the bright new society is a weapon in your struggle. Do not ignore it." Schorske goes on to say that this compromise could hold so long as, on the one hand, the working class was maintained in its "pariah" status by the German state, while on the other hand, revolution was not on the immediate political agenda as economic growth gave rise to improvements in the living standards of the working class.²⁹

Whereas the unity of the various factions of the SPD was maintained on this basis in the decades up to the war, the tensions that exploded in 1914 had deep roots going back over the previous two decades. In

particular, economic boom from the mid-1890s underpinned a massive expansion of trade unionism, which in turn strengthened the social base of reformism within the Party.³⁰ This meant that within a few years of the party's formal embrace of Marxism at Erfurt, events conspired to draw it away from Marx's politics. It is an accident of history that the party's de facto reformism came to be justified theoretically by one of the two coauthors of the Erfurt Programme: Eduard Bernstein.

At the core of Bernstein's critique of Marxism was the claim that contemporary economic trends had disproved Marx's theory of crisis, thus making irrelevant his revolutionary politics.³¹ This argument was countered by Kautsky, the second coauthor of the Erfurt Programme, who pointed out that Bernstein's Marx was a caricatured version of the real thing.³² Unfortunately, by focusing on semantic issues about what Marx "really said," Kautsky's reply missed the key point that the force of Bernstein's arguments came not from their intellectual merits, but from the fact that they represented a real and growing tendency within the SPD, which Kautsky did nothing to address.

Indeed, despite formal victories over revisionism at party congresses, revisionist ideas became increasingly hegemonic within the leadership of both the SPD and the union movement. This new balance of forces became apparent in the years immediately following the formal defeats of revisionism at the SPD congresses of 1899, 1901, and 1903; defeats from which revisionism unflinchingly grew in strength.³³ At the 1905 SPD congress in Jena, the Left carried the party and won a formal acceptance of the mass strike policy. However, this policy stood in opposition to another motion adopted earlier in the year by the trade unions at their congress in Köln: here it was agreed that the mass strike could not even be discussed. The contradiction between these two statements was formally resolved at the 1906 party congress in Mannheim. Unfortunately, this solution to the rift between the party and the unions merely reflected the growing hegemony of the revisionist trade union leaders within the German socialist movement: it was simply declared that the contradictory Köln and Jena resolutions were not in contradiction.³⁴ While Kautsky celebrated this vote as a victory for the Left, in reality it amounted, as Massimo Salvadori argues, to a "historic victory of the trade-union bureaucracy and the retreat of the party before its show of force."³⁵ Schorske suggests that it was from this point onward that the passivity of Kautsky's Marxism became most apparent. He was happy to win a formal acceptance of his interpretation of Marxism at party conferences, while ceding the real leadership of the German workers' movement to the increasingly reformist trade union and party bureaucracy.³⁶

Kautsky acted in this manner because he feared that a split inside the SPD would harm the prospects for socialism. Rosa Luxemburg's contributions to the revisionist debate were politically sharper. She recognized

that revisionism was not merely a theoretical error in the context of economic expansion, but was deeply rooted in the structure of modern trade unionism. Indeed, she insisted that the characteristically capitalist separation between politics and economics was reflected in the labour movement through the division between parliamentary socialism and simple trade unionism.³⁷ Moreover, she claimed that Bernstein's revisionism was best understood as the theoretical expression of the interests of the trade union bureaucracy: a layer whose condition of life was, in many ways, divorced from that of the mass membership of the unions.³⁸ Schorske has confirmed the validity of Luxemburg's assessment of the trade union bureaucracy: "if we look back over the great issues on which the Socialist movement divided in the years 1906–1909, we discover that in all those in which the trade-unions threw their weight into the scales the reformist attitude was the one to prevail." He explains this, as did Luxemburg, by the conservative function and structure of the union bureaucracy.³⁹ Similarly, Salvadori notes that Kautsky failed to comprehend that which Luxemburg so clearly perceived: "a cleavage between a 'goal' that was socialist and a 'means' that was ever more thoroughly administered by a conservative and moderate bureaucracy, which was now concerned to fortify the organization solely within the dominant system."⁴⁰

This analysis of the conservatism of the trade union bureaucracy placed Luxemburg in a much more critical relationship to the trade union leaders within the SPD than was Kautsky. Or at least it eventually did so, for in the immediate aftermath of the Russian Revolution of 1905, and for a few years thereafter, Kautsky became much more critical of the conservatism of the leadership of the unions. Nevertheless, as Daniel Gaido points out, this moment of radicalism was short-lived and by around 1910 Kautsky had reverted to his earlier relationship to the trade unions.⁴¹

The rational core of Kautsky's tendency to bend in the face of the pressure from the revisionist wing of the SPD was built upon stronger theoretical foundations than his predilection for unity against fragmentation. Kautsky never fully accepted Marx and Engels's critiques of the Gotha and Erfurt Programmes. This became apparent in 1910 when a growing strike wave in Germany converged with the political struggle over suffrage. Luxemburg led the Left in the SPD during this period and did everything in her power to move the party to aid the radicalization of the class struggle. Conversely, the trade union leaders did everything they could to thwart her efforts. In the ensuing intra-party conflict, Luxemburg's call for a mass strike was censored throughout the party's press, including in Kautsky's *Die Neue Zeit*, while Kautsky himself rallied to the Right with an appeal for a return to parliamentary tactics.⁴² He did this not only because he saw the Left as the main threat to party unity, but also because his model of the coming socialist

revolution increasingly converged in practice with Bernstein's reformism.⁴³ It was from this point onward that Luxemburg broke politically with him: she argued that his conciliatory stance in the face of the party's shift to the Right reflected the practical convergence of his Marxism with revisionism.⁴⁴ Indeed, from around 1910 onward it appeared that Kautsky had finally embraced the parliamentarianism that was implicit to the Erfurt Programme, and which had been made explicit in Bernstein's revisionism.

Kautsky's assessment of imperialism, far from being an honest repetition of Marx's approach as Kissin implies, is best understood against this background. Not only does Kissin fail to mention that Marx and Engels moved to radically rethink their approach to a European war in the wake of Prussia's defeat of France in 1870,⁴⁵ he also skirts over the coordinates of Kautsky's revision of his own model of imperialism between 1911 and 1913. In 1907 and again in 1909 Kautsky had "rejected," in Haupt's words, "as outdated the theory of aggressive and defensive wars."⁴⁶ According to Schorske, Radek "observed correctly" that Kautsky's reasons for returning to what he had previously believed to be an obsolete theory was "not because imperialism had changed but because his Fabian 'strategy of attrition' could not be sustained by his earlier analysis."⁴⁷ Similarly, Salvadori notes that the "political purpose of Kautsky's analysis was to vindicate the possibility of Social Democracy pursuing its forward march along tried and true paths."⁴⁸ It seems reasonable to suppose therefore that Kautsky's relationship to the trade union leadership informed not only his increasingly moderate stance in respect of domestic politics but also an increasingly unrealistic assessment of the international situation. So by contrast with the revolutionary Left within the International who continued arguing against illusions in "Peace Utopias," Kautsky lent his intellectual prestige to those Reichstag deputies who focused their propaganda on proposals for disarmament, citing widespread support for this idea even within the ruling class itself.⁴⁹ This argument culminated in his theory of ultra-imperialism, according to which the strongest imperialist powers had an interest in coming together to form a "holy alliance of the imperialists" that would "renounce the arms race" so as to more adequately exploit the colonies.⁵⁰ So, just as war was looming, Kautsky threw his weight behind an increasingly utopian foreign policy that acted to obscure the real forces leading to war while simultaneously supporting those elements of the party who were dampening the one agency that had the power to stop the war: working-class militancy. This was no personal aberration, but followed the logic of his parliamentarianism: through his links to the labor bureaucracy his politics increasingly became tied to the capitalist state.

If Luxemburg's critique of the conservatism of the trade union bureaucracy immunized her against this perspective, her all too optimistic

pre-war model of how this layer would be “swept aside” during periods of revolutionary mass action left little room for anything other than a propagandistic model of socialist politics.⁵¹ R. Craig Nation is right to argue that this meant that though Luxemburg issued dire warnings about social democracy, these “never took the form of a comprehensive political challenge.”⁵² Lucio Colletti famously argued that this approach reflected a general failing of Second International Marxism: “its ‘fatalistic’ and ‘providential’ faith in the automatic progress of economic evolution gave it the certainty that its eventual rise to power would come about ‘in a spontaneous, constant, and irresistible way, quite tranquilly like a natural process.’”⁵³ Interestingly, while Luxemburg’s fatalistic view of how the workers’ movement would sweep this layer aside had roots in Marx’s failure to theorize the problem of working-class reformism,⁵⁴ the most powerful aspect of Bernstein’s revisionism was aimed at Kautsky’s earlier formulation of a similarly fatalistic model of political practice.

In an article first published in *Die Neue Zeit* in 1893, Kautsky infamously argued that “the Social Democratic Party is a revolutionary party, but not a party that makes a revolution.”⁵⁵ A year earlier in his commentary on the Erfurt Programme, he wrote that “socialist production must, and will, come. Its victory will have become inevitable as soon as that of the proletariat has become inevitable.”⁵⁶ By contrast with formulations such as these, by the late 1890s Bernstein suggested that Marxism’s political failings could in part be understood as a consequence of its simplistic deduction of political conclusions from economic premises. He claimed that this method betrayed the malign influence on Marxism of the Hegelian idea of the “self-development of the concept,” which all too easily lent itself to arbitrary deductions.⁵⁷

It was against the harmful consequences of the Hegelian dialectic that Bernstein famously called for socialists to embrace “Kant against cant.”⁵⁸ The cant to which he referred was the meaningless revolutionary rhetoric of what was in practice a reformist organization, while the interpretation of Kant with which he sought to replace it with included a combination of the championing of the workers’ movement with “a high degree of that scientific impartiality which is always ready to acknowledge errors and recognize new truths.”⁵⁹ Unfortunately, Bernstein wrote little of substance about his positive interpretation of Kant in *The Preconditions of Socialism* in 1899, though in one of the preceding essays he suggested that Marxists had been wrong to conflate bourgeois and civil society, for “the morality of developed civil society is by no means identical with the morality of the bourgeoisie.”⁶⁰ Developing this point in “How Is Scientific Socialism Possible?,”⁶¹ he highlighted a perceived contradiction between the implicit morality of Marx and Engels’s oft-repeated claim that capitalist production involved the exploitation of workers and their suggestion that this was not unjust. Against what he

believed was the incoherence of this position he argued that socialists, if they were honest, would be forced to engage with Kant to the extent that they asked what sort of society ought we to fight for.⁶² He claimed that it was as ridiculous to posit liberal, conservative, or socialist social sciences as it was to imagine similarly political variations of the natural sciences. Furthermore, he claimed that political conflicts arise atop a generally accepted and politically neutral social scientific foundation, and these conflicts are informed by differing ideas about what ought to be. Consequently, because socialist politics “carries within itself an element of speculative idealism” the label scientific socialism was best discarded.⁶³

Though Bernstein’s brief discussion of Hegel and Kant was far from sophisticated,⁶⁴ it did point to real limitations with the kind of materialism dominant within the Second International in the 1890s. The strengths and weaknesses of this form of materialism were evident in Kautsky’s reply to Bernstein’s neo-Kantianism: *Ethics and Materialist Conception of History*. Kautsky argued that because “action implies continual choice” it follows that “moral judgment . . . is unavoidable in the world of the unknown future—of freedom.”⁶⁵ Nonetheless, while he accepted Kant’s claim that the realm of freedom is the realm of moral law, he insisted that “the world of freedom . . . is no timeless and spaceless and no super-sensual world, but a particular portion of the world of sense seen from a particular point of view.” By radically separating the realms of freedom and necessity, Kant, or so Kautsky argued, closed off access to a true understanding of the moral law, such that if we were to hope to understand it then we must go beyond him.⁶⁶ Against Kant’s claim that the moral law should be imposed upon us by reason against our desires, Kautsky attempted to root the moral law in our nature as social animals.⁶⁷ Kautsky pointed out that it is precisely because it is our essence to be social that society and morality will have a history. A key problem with Kantianism from this standpoint is that it naturalizes modern individuality, and as such, confuses the relations between people at a certain moment in history with the universal relations between people throughout history.⁶⁸ Kant and the neo-Kantians also were blind to the way in which in class divided societies, differing and conflictual moralities emerge as class moralities. In fact, Kautsky claimed, although capital has created the “material foundations for a general human morality,” it undermines this by “treading this morality continually under its feet.” Alternatively, because the proletariat does not exploit any other class below it, when it fights for its particular interests it is capable of realizing this “general human morality.”⁶⁹ This, Kautsky insisted, was no abstract academic hope, but reflected the real evolution of the workers movement: “The content of the new moral ideal . . . does not emerge from any scientific knowledge of the social organism . . . but from a deep social need, a burning desire, an energetic will for something other than

the existing, for something which is the opposite of the existing." By its nature, therefore, the new moral ideal is a "negative" force, reflecting 'opposition' to the status quo. Thus, Kautsky concluded, while its "importance is recognised as the motor power of the class struggle," the negative character of the new moral ideal implies that it cannot "direct our policy," for policy must be formulated on the basis of a scientific analysis of social relations.⁷⁰

Commenting on this argument, Dick Geary observes that Kautsky did not believe that "moral judgements were irrelevant for a Marxist. . . . It was just that on its own it could not serve as the basis of socialist theory."⁷¹ Of course, despite the power of Kautsky's criticisms of the ahistorical nature of Kant's morality, by accepting the separation of facts and values he was at one with Kant and the neo-Kantians in being "equally far removed from the Hegelian origins of Marx's own thought."⁷² And, whereas Kautsky claimed that differing moral ideals represented differing social standpoints—Marxism the standpoint of the working class, Kantianism the standpoint of the atomized individual within civil society⁷³—he at no point attempted to uncover the social basis of revisionism. Instead, the structure of his argument suggested that he saw it merely as an intellectual error through which ethics rather than science was placed at the center of the socialist project. As for his own scientific understanding of the socialist project, the book closed with a contradictory denial that his own perspective was fatalistic alongside a reiteration of Erfurtian fatalism: "socialism is inevitable because the class struggle and the victory of the proletariat is inevitable."⁷⁴

LENIN'S RENEWAL OF MARXISM

Perhaps the most overlooked aspect of Lenin's response to the collapse of the Second International was his return to Hegel in an attempt to overcome the political limitations of Kautsky's fatalistic Marxism while avoiding the trap of voluntarism.⁷⁵ Though this project had roots in his ongoing attempt to raise theory to the level of the practical tasks facing the Russian Left, it also involved, pace Anton Pannekoek, an emergent break with his earlier attempts to philosophically underpin Marxism.⁷⁶ The beginning of this process is evident, for instance, in an early critique of the legal Marxist Peter Struve. Lenin argued that, while it was a weakness with traditional moral theory that it failed "to connect its 'ideals' with any immediate interests," Struve ran the "risk of becoming an apologist" for the status quo because he erred in the opposite direction by reducing materialism to its objectivist caricature. In opposition both to moral subjectivism and to economic objectivism, Lenin suggested that materialism, because it examined the contradictions of any social process, "includes partisanship . . . and enjoins the direct and open

adoption of the standpoint of a definite social group in any assessment of events."⁷⁷ The critique of dualism implicit in this argument was subsequently obscured through Lenin's infamous deployment of Kautsky's formulation of the relationship between spontaneity and consciousness in *What Is to Be Done?*

It is one of history's ironies that a core constituent of the myth of Leninism—constructed by the Stalinists from the mid-1920s onward to justify their own power and accepted by Western liberal intellectuals thereafter for their own ideological reasons—includes a key constituent part of the Bernsteinian revisionism, which Lenin fought from the outset: Bernstein's "patronizing treatment of the working classes."⁷⁸ According to what Lars Lih labels the "textbook interpretation" of Leninism, Lenin's contempt for the intellectual capacities of workers was reflected in his insistence on building a party of professional revolutionaries who would bring socialist ideas to the working class from without and subsequently lead this class in a top-down manner. By contrast with this myth, Lih shows that Lenin's underlying assumption in the text that is paradigmatic of the myth, *What Is to Be Done?*, was an optimism about the possibility of the growth of socialist consciousness within the Russian working class, combined with scathing criticisms of the weaknesses of Russia's radical intelligentsia generally and the Russian socialist movement specifically, which, he claimed, were in grave danger of failing the workers' movement in the coming revolution.⁷⁹

Most of the critical literature on *What Is to Be Done?* tends to focus on how, in theorizing this perspective, Lenin reproduced Kautsky's dualistic claim that "socialist consciousness is something introduced into the proletarian class struggle from without."⁸⁰ This is clearly a weakness with the text, but as we shall see it is a weakness that was overcome through Lenin's reading of Hegel in the wake of August 4, 1914. What has been less commented upon is the tension between Lenin's and Kautsky's conceptions of socialist practice prior to 1914. This is evident, for instance, in the gap between Kautsky's claim, noted earlier, that "the Social Democratic Party is a revolutionary party, but not a party that makes a revolution," and the argument of the penultimate chapter of *What Is to Be Done?* in which Lenin sought to theorize some form of practice that married the day-to-day socialist activities within the state with the eventual uprising against it. He suggested that "a network of agents that would form in the course of establishing and distributing the common newspaper would not have to 'sit about and wait' for the call for an uprising, but could carry on the regular activity that would guarantee the highest probability of success in the event of an uprising."⁸¹ Three years later he returned to this argument in response to criticisms made by Martynov, in an essay that drew on Kautsky's conception of revolution, that claimed he had forgotten that "Social-Democracy has always

and everywhere recognised that a people's revolution cannot be *timed* in advance, that it is not prepared artificially, but that it comes about of itself." Lenin's reply was devastatingly simple: yes a revolution can emerge only from below, but the uprising itself must be organized: "We are obliged to explain to Martynov that uprising must not be confused with people's revolution."⁸²

This simple point illuminates a tension between Kautsky and Lenin prior to 1914. This difference is obscured by those, for instance C. L. R. James, who posit a far too simple and absolute division between Lenin's Marxism pre- and post-1914.⁸³ Contra James, there was a distance between Kautsky and Lenin before 1914 and this distinction is perhaps best understood in terms of the register of their respective writings: whereas the former generally wrote at the level of broad generalization, the latter's writings had a much more concrete focus. To a certain degree this was merely a difference of emphasis. Nevertheless, this difference created a space in which Kautsky could mask his increasingly conservative practice beneath revolutionary rhetoric—what Trotsky would later call his "organic opportunism."⁸⁴ The practical bent of Lenin's Marxism, by contrast, helped him raise theory to the level of practice. Indeed, the concrete focus of his theory informed Lukács' claim that his work was characterized by a sense of the "actuality of the revolution."⁸⁵ Nevertheless, because Kautsky's opportunism emerged slowly and incrementally, the gap between his and Lenin's interpretations of Marxism was not immediately apparent. It took the shock of war and Lenin's subsequent reading of Hegel to make his split with his former teacher explicit and absolute.

Lenin's most important political responses to the war and the collapse of the International, his essays *Socialism and War*, *The Collapse of the Second International*, *The State and Revolution*, and *Imperialism, The Latest Stage of Capitalism* (the subtitle was revised to *Final Stage of Capitalism* only after his death),⁸⁶ provide the coordinates of a powerful alternative to Second International Marxism. On the one hand, he showed that the tendency toward war was immanent to the monopoly stage of capitalism, while on the other hand he renewed Marx's argument that modern states were capitalist states that had to be "smashed" as a prerequisite to the realization of human freedom. Moreover, he located the social basis for the capitulation of the leadership of the Second International in the benefits accrued from imperialism by the "labour aristocracy." At its strongest, in the theories of imperialism and the state, this model marked the most "serious attempt to develop a Marxist understanding of the form taken by capitalism at the beginning of the twentieth century."⁸⁷ If his attempt to theorize reformism was much less successful—Charles Post points out that Lenin's deployment of the concept of labor aristocracy, and indeed the labor aristocracy theory more generally, was "neither a theoretically rigorous nor factually realistic explanation of working-class reformism

or conservatism"⁸⁸—this is a weakness that can be overcome by reference to Luxemburg's account of the limitations of trade unionism and, in particular, the essentially conservative role of the labor bureaucracy as mediator of the sale of labor power.⁸⁹

Notwithstanding this weakness, Lenin's alternative to Second International Marxism was powerful and was underpinned by his return to Hegel in the aftermath of the vote for war credits. In notes taken from a close reading of Hegel's *Science of Logic* he expressed his break with dualism thus: "The activity of man, who has made an objective picture of the world for himself, *changes* external actuality, abolishes its determinates (=alters some sides or other, qualities, of it), thus removes from it the features of semblance, externality and nullity, and makes it as being in and for itself (=objectively true)."⁹⁰ Commenting on these notebooks, Stathis Kouvelakis points out that it is "particularly significant that Lenin ended the section on 'philosophical materialism' with a reference to the notion of 'revolutionary practical activity.'" For Lenin understood that subjective practical activity lay at the center of the objective world, and consequently insisted that social scientific laws should not be "fetishised" as things distinct from conscious human activity but instead be recognized as necessarily "narrow, incomplete, [and] approximate" attempts to frame political intervention.⁹¹ Consequently, whereas Second International theorists had interpreted Hegel's claim that to act freely meant to act in accordance with necessity in a reductive manner, for Lenin, as Day argues, "man's consciousness not only reflects the objective world but creates it."⁹² This is a far cry from John Holloway's claim that Lenin took Engels's "scientific" distortion of Marxism to its logical, undemocratic, conclusion when he posited the existence of a party of "knowers" who would impart their scientific knowledge from on high to the workers.⁹³ In fact, as John Rees suggests, in his *Philosophical Notebooks*, Lenin came to recognize that "practice overcomes the distinction between subjective and objective and the gap between essence and appearance."⁹⁴ By repositioning social practice at the core of Marxism, Lenin was able to recognize the affinity between Marxism and idealism: "Dialectical idealism is closer to intelligent [dialectical] materialism than metaphysical, undeveloped, dead, crude, rigid materialism."⁹⁵

Commenting on Lenin's contribution to Marxism, Georg Lukács argued that Lenin alone within the Second International held to "the original Marxist conception" against positivist and neo-Kantian alternatives.⁹⁶ For instance, Lenin conceived imperialism neither fatalistically as a moment in capitalism's supposed self-transformation into socialism nor voluntaristically as an abhorrent policy to be condemned from some abstract moral perspective. Rather, he explained it as a specific historical form of capitalism that created the potential for, and hence informed a politics that orientated toward, the emergence of a historically specific and socially concrete possible alternative: workers' power in the

metropolis in alliance with national liberation movements in the colonies. He thus pointed toward a model of political practice that unlike fatalism was really subjective and unlike voluntarism offered the potential of real social transformation. Nevertheless, though Lenin's fragmentary notebooks thus anticipated the themes of Lukács's *History and Class Consciousness*,⁹⁷ this latter book was by far and away the most sophisticated articulation of similar views to be published in the period around the foundation of the Communist or Third International. In a discussion of the revisionist criticisms of Second International orthodoxy, Lukács claimed that Bernstein's embrace of Kantianism did not overcome the fatalism of the Second International, but was merely its inversion: it "is the subjective side of the missing category of totality."⁹⁸ While Lukács agreed with Kautsky's criticisms of the formalism of Kant's ethics, he insisted that it was not enough to conclude that any moral imperatives derived from this perspective were an inadequate basis for socialist strategic thought. Rather, Kant's ethical formalism pointed back to the methodological problem of his concept of the thing-in-itself, which acted in his system as a fundamental limit to human knowledge of the world.⁹⁹ To overcome this problem, Kautsky's critique of Kant's ethical formalism should have led him to the concept of the totality. That it did not reflected the way in which Kautsky's dualism allowed him to talk revolution while abandoning the real practical leadership of the SDP to the reformists.

Lukács argued that whereas Kant naturalized contemporary social relations, because Hegel showed that these were a product of human history, he pointed beyond Kant's dualism, and by materializing Hegel's project Marx subsequently overcame the limitations of dualism. To separate free human actions from a necessarily given social world, as was done by the neo-Kantians, implied losing sight of the fact that both freedom and necessity existed in a dynamic relationship such that both the social world and the kind of people that we are, are products of history: in G. H. R. Parkinson's paraphrase "we are both producer and product of the historical process."¹⁰⁰ A consequence of this methodological movement was to unfreeze the concepts through which we aim to understand the world. As Martin Jay argues, "Being would then be understood as Becoming, things would dissolve into processes, and most important of all, the subjective origin of those processes would become apparent to the identical subject-object of history."¹⁰¹ Lukács suggested a key philosophical task "is to discover the principles by means of which it becomes possible in the first place for an 'ought' to modify existence. And it is just this that [Kant's] theory rules out from the start."¹⁰² Or as he put it in his defense of *History and Class Consciousness*, workers "must discover in reality the concrete role inherited by the proletariat as the subjective factor in history."¹⁰³

Unfortunately, *History and Class Consciousness* was an early casualty of Stalin's crusade against Trotskyism. For primarily political reasons Lukács's ideas were rejected within the Communist International in favor of a return to a variant of Second International orthodoxy.¹⁰⁴ Indeed, this was the period when, as part of their struggle against Trotsky, the triumvirate of Stalin, Zinoviev, and Kamenev attempted to justify their claims to power through the development of a cult of Lenin in which they, the old Bolsheviks, were to play the role of high priests. As part of this campaign *What Is to Be Done?* was represented by Stalin in *The Foundations of Leninism* (1924), by Zinoviev in *Bolshevism or Trotskyism* (1925), and by Kamenev in *Leninism or Trotskyism* (1925), as the textual bearer of a definitive and essential Leninism.¹⁰⁵ Subsequently, Stalin made cynical use of Lenin's deployment of Kautsky's dualistic formulation of the relationship between spontaneity and consciousness in *What Is to Be Done?* to justify his own semimystical role of leader of the communist movement.

Stalin's bastardization of Marxism incoherently combined a mechanical model of historical progress with a model of bureaucratic activity. The ideology of Leninism served a useful purpose here. Theory, as embodied in the party and in practice in the pronouncements of Stalin, acted as the ghost in the machine guiding Russia to liberation. As Nigel Harris put it, as a social theory Stalinism contradictorily combined "determinism for the masses, voluntarism for the leadership."¹⁰⁶ More concretely, Herbert Marcuse pointed out that whereas "during the Revolution, it became apparent to what degree Lenin had succeeded in basing his strategy on the actual class interests and aspirations of the workers and peasants . . . from 1923 on, the decisions of the leadership have been increasingly dissociated from the class interests of the proletariat." Indeed, Stalin's Marxism served not as a guide to working-class action, but as a justification for the actions already taken by the Soviet ruling class.¹⁰⁷ One manifestation of this transformation of Marxist theory was the reduction of the theory of imperialism to the status of an ad hoc term of abuse used to justify Russian foreign policy. At its most absurd this was apparent in Stalin's volte face in June 1941 when Germany's invasion of Russia suddenly led him to reclassify Britain's war aims as democratic rather than imperialist. Later, during the Cold War, Lenin's concept of imperialism came to be treated as a dogmatic article of faith within the communist movement even as the process of decolonization in particular demanded some form of revision at the very least.¹⁰⁸

CONCLUSION

If the Stalinist ideology of Leninism involved a return to the kind of dualism Lenin criticized in the *Philosophical Notebooks*, the very fact that

Lenin felt compelled to write these notebooks is evidence that his renewal of Marxism, pace Lih, involved much more than a return to a prelapsarian form of Kautskyism.¹⁰⁹ Lenin did contribute something new and important to Marxism after 1914, and this contribution went beyond his theories of the state and imperialism. His reading of Hegel set the political focus of his work upon firmer theoretical foundations. Though this political focus had roots going back to the 1890s, after 1914 he reconfigured socialist politics upon a firmly materialist conception of subjectivity.

Effectively, Lenin's journey through Hegel allowed him to renew the sublation of materialism and idealism characteristic of Marx's theses on Feuerbach. In the first of these, Marx famously wrote that "[t]he chief defect of all hitherto existing materialism . . . is that the thing, reality, sensuousness, is conceived only in the form of the *object or of contemplation*, but not as *sensuous human activity, practice*, not subjectively. Hence, in contradistinction to materialism, the *active* side was developed abstractly by idealism—which, of course, does not know real, sensuous activity as such." Later in the text he pushed this idea further to point to the historical co-ordinates of this mistaken way of conceiving the world: "[t]he highest point reached by contemplative materialism, that is, materialism which does not comprehend sensuousness as practical activity, is contemplation of single individuals and of civil society." By contrast with this standpoint, he claimed that "the standpoint of the new [materialism] is human society, or social humanity."¹¹⁰ And as he argued elsewhere, the concrete form of social humanity in the modern world is the standpoint of the working class.¹¹¹ During the period of the Second International this conception of subjectivity was split asunder in the context of a broader, if largely unacknowledged, shift away from Marx's ideas.

Whereas Bernstein's alternative to the Second International Marxism's degeneration into a form of pre-Marxist materialism merely inverted the error by returning to a pre-Marxist form of idealism, Lenin's reading of Hegel allowed him to overcome this opposition. The comments noted earlier that he made in 1922 to communist delegates to the peace conference in The Hague show him to be a realist. But, contra Haupt's interpretation of these comments, Lenin's realistic assessment of the prospects for the Left once war broke out had nothing in common with political fatalism. Lenin, as Michael Löwy put it, always "put politics in command."¹¹² This should not be confused with the claim that his was a voluntaristic variant of Marxism. In 1922, as in 1914, Lenin's analysis was intended to inform action. This, despite his use of the term "helpless" in 1922, is evident elsewhere in the document from which this comment is taken. Lenin wrote that "perhaps the most correct method would be to start with the sharpest refutation of" the claim made by

reformist politicians before the war that “[w]e shall retaliate to war by a strike or a revolution.”¹¹³ Lenin’s comment about the helplessness of the Left is best understood not as an excuse for fatalistic resignation before the facts but as a criticism of the pseudo-leftist posturing of those politicians whose radical talk masked practical passivity. He stressed the fact that once war broke out revolutionary socialists would be helpless to stop it, but this did not mean that there was nothing they could do. Rather, both in 1914 and in 1922 Lenin aimed at maximizing the effectiveness of the Left.

This perspective shows why it is far too simplistic to claim, as does Callahan, that the SPD’s vote for war credits in 1914 cannot be considered an act of betrayal because, among other things, it implies that “the International actually had the ability to stop the war.”¹¹⁴ Callahan’s argument overlooks the fact there were a large range of options between the Left voting for war credits on the one hand and stopping the war on the other. Nation is right to point out that “it was not the failure to prevent war, but the inability to muster resistance, that signaled the International’s *faillite*.”¹¹⁵ By deploying the term “betrayal” in 1914 Lenin was able to focus on the small thing that the Left could do with a view to building its influence before a subsequent challenge for power—including the process of theoretical and political clarification, which would provide it with the necessary tools to break with the old leadership of the International. Similarly, in 1922 his use of the term “helpless” was intended to focus minds on the small things that could be achieved rather than the big pipe dream that couldn’t. It is this relentlessly political focus of his work that set Lenin apart from other figures within the Second International, and subsequently informed the novelty of the communist movement he tried to forge out of the wreckage of the Second International.

Unfortunately, within months of Lenin’s death Stalin began the process of debasing his thought into the ideology of Leninism, which, unfortunately, continues to inform the hegemonic interpretation of Lenin’s Marxism both in academic circles and on the Far Left. Among its negative consequences, this interpretation of Lenin’s thought acts as a brake on the development of an honest reappraisal of the lessons both of the collapse of the Second International and of the early period of the Third International. This is important because the Third International, for a brief moment prior to the emergence of Stalinism, began to give political expression to what Marx and Engels called “the *real* movement which abolishes the present state of things.”¹¹⁶ It was able to do this, in part, because, in outlining the contradictory essence of contemporary capitalism, Lenin’s theory of imperialism provided a historically concrete economic aspect of the theory of praxis he had articulated in his *Philosophical Notebooks*.¹¹⁷ Alongside Luxemburg’s conception of the mass strike, Trotsky’s theory of permanent revolution and his own return to

Marx's theory of the state, this conception of praxis played a pivotal role in the renewal of Marxism by shattering Kautsky's fatalistic reification of Marxism.¹¹⁸

NOTES

1. John Riddell, *Lenin's Struggle for a Revolutionary International* (New York: Monad, 1986), 88.

2. David Kirby, *War, Peace and Revolution* (Aldershot: Gower, 1986), 30.

3. Geoff Eley, *Forging Democracy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 30; R. Craig Nation, *War on War* (Chicago: Haymarket, 2009), 22.

4. Henry Collins and Chimon Abramsky, *Karl Marx and the British Labour Movement* (London: Macmillan, 1965), 32, 39.

5. David Fernbach, "Introduction," in *Karl Marx: The First International and After*, ed. David Fernbach (London: Penguin, 1974), 9–72, 59, 63; John Molyneux, *Marxism and the Party* (London: Bookmarks, 1986), 31.

6. Richard Day and Daniel Gaido, "Introduction," in *Discovering Imperialism*, ed. Richard Day and Daniel Gaido (Leiden: Brill, 2011), 78–85.

7. Vladimir Lenin, *Collected Works*, vol. 21 (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1960–1970), 40, 241.

8. Perry Anderson, *Arguments within English Marxism* (London: Verso, 1980), 101; Lars Lih, "Lenin Disputed," *Historical Materialism* 18, no. 3 (2010): 158–165.

9. Michael Löwy, *On Changing the World* (New Jersey: Humanities Press, 1993), 96; Rosa Luxemburg, "The Julius Pamphlet," in *Rosa Luxemburg Speaks*, ed. Mary-Alice Waters (New York and London: Pathfinder, 1970), 269.

10. Neil Harding, *Lenin's Political Thought*, vol. 1 (London: Macmillan, 1983), 6.

11. This essay draws on arguments I put in my books *Marxism and Ethics* (New York: SUNY Press, 2012) and *Reflections on the Marxist Theory of History* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2006).

12. S. F. Kissin, *War and the Marxists*, vol. 1 (London: Andre Deutsch, 1988), 165.

13. *Ibid.*, 166.

14. Georges Haupt, *Socialism and the Great War* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1972), 235.

15. Lenin quoted in *ibid.*, 228.

16. Kevin Callahan, *Demonstration Culture* (Leicester: Troubador, 2010), 300.

17. Haupt, *Socialism and the Great War*, 223.

18. Wolfgang Abendroth, *A Short History of the European Working Class* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1972), 51–68.

19. Karl Max, "Critique of the Gotha Programme," in *Karl Marx: The First International and After*, ed. David Fernbach (London: Penguin, 1974), 355.

20. *Ibid.*, 339; see also Frederick Engels, "Letter to August Bebel (18–28 March 1875)," in *Marx-Engels Collected Works*, vol. 24, trans. Richard Dixon et al. (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1989), 71.

21. Frederick Engels, "Letter to August Bebel (12 October 1875)," in *Marx-Engels Collected Works*, vol. 45, trans. Richard Dixon et al. (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1991).

22. Carl Schorske, *German Social Democracy, 1905–1917* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1983), 3.
23. Manfred Steger, "Introduction," in *Selected Writings of Eduard Bernstein*, ed. Manfred Steger (New Jersey: Humanities Press, 1996), 3.
24. Frederick Engels, "A Critique of the Draft Social-Democratic Programme of 1891," in *Marx-Engels Collected Works*, vol. 27, trans. Richard Dixon et al. (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1990), 225.
25. *Ibid.*, 226.
26. *Ibid.*, 227.
27. Hal Draper, *Karl Marx's Theory of Revolution Vol. III* (New York: Monthly Review, 1986), 321.
28. Engels, "A Critique of the Draft Social-Democratic Programme of 1891," 227.
29. Schorske, *Germany Social Democracy*, 6.
30. *Ibid.*, 12ff.
31. Eduard Bernstein, *The Preconditions of Socialism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 79ff, 56ff.
32. Karl Kautsky, "The Revisionist Controversy," in *Karl Kautsky: Selected Political Writings*, ed. Patrick Goode (London: Macmillan, 1983).
33. Schorske, *German Social Democracy, 1905–1917*, 16–24.
34. *Ibid.*, 49.
35. Massimo Salvadori, *Karl Kautsky and the Socialist Revolution* (London: Verso, 1979), 113.
36. Schorske, *Germany Social Democracy*, 115; Salvadori, *Karl Kautsky and the Socialist Revolution*, 113.
37. Rosa Luxemburg, *The Mass Strike* (London: Bookmarks, 1986), 80.
38. *Ibid.*, 81, 87–88.
39. Schorske, *German Social Democracy, 1905–1917*, 108, 127.
40. Salvadori, *Karl Kautsky and the Socialist Revolution*, 144.
41. Daniel Gaido, "'The American Revolution' and the Theory of Permanent Revolution," *Historical Materialism* 11, no. 4 (2003): 109–110; Daniel Gaido, "Marxism and the Union Bureaucracy," *Historical Materialism* 16, no. 3 (2008): 115–136.
42. Schorske, *German Social Democracy, 1905–1917*, 182–183.
43. Dick Geary, *Karl Kautsky* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1987), 75, 77; Norman Geras, *The Legacy of Rosa Luxemburg* (London: New Left Books, 1976), 159.
44. Peter Nettl, *Rosa Luxemburg* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1969), 285.
45. Hal Draper, *Karl Marx's Theory of Revolution Vol. V* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 2005), 159.
46. Haupt, *Socialism and the Great War*, 25; see also Day and Gaido, "Introduction," 35.
47. Schorske, *German Social Democracy, 1905–1917*, 246.
48. Day and Gaido, "Introduction," 63; Salvadori, *Karl Kautsky and the Socialist Revolution*, 174.
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50. Karl Kautsky, "Imperialism (September 1914)," in *Discovering Imperialism*, eds. Richard Day and Daniel Gaido (Leiden: Brill, 2011), 773–774.

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CHAPTER 3

From the Dictatorship of the Party to the Dictatorship of the Market: The Capitalist Restoration in Eastern Europe

Catherine Samary

WAS THE SOVIET CENTURY A PARENTHESIS?

Dominant interpretations of the past suppress nonrecognized memories. This is particularly true of Eastern European history, which has suffered, and still suffers, conflicting national interpretations and ideological censorship or distortions.¹

The “official history” within the single-party system after the Stalinization of Soviet Union (SU) is, of course, one of them. But an older, more powerful one still exists: the ideological expression of relationships of domination between Western Europe’s core and the (semi)peripheral countries of the capitalist world system.² The collective and pluralist (re)interpretation of the past Eastern Europe must resist the censorship and distortions of both sides of the Cold War.

The immediate challenge is to oppose the ideological concept of a civilized Europe against other understanding of Europe that exist on the (semi)periphery. There was such an ideological Europe opposed to Barbarians in the past. But this opposition took a new form as part of the global conservative counterrevolution, poorly labeled the neoliberal turn, beginning in the 1980s. After the fall of the Berlin Wall, which radicalized this neoliberal turn, Eastern European countries were compelled to join Europe. Behind this formulation lies the ideological will to consider the

short Soviet Century³—from October Revolution in 1917 up to 1989—as an aberrant parenthesis on the normal path of evolution, modernity, and civilization that Western Europe or the European Union (EU) is supposed to incarnate.

The integration of the 10 Central and Eastern European Countries (CEEC) within the EU did not mean more attention was paid to their specific history.⁴ On the contrary, wars, colonial European empires, and fascism were forgotten in that rosy picture, while the Soviet past was reduced to the gulag. Antifascist movements led by communists in Eastern Europe (including the former Partisan movement led by the Yugoslav communists during World War II) are treated as antipatriotic, whereas Far-Right parties in collaboration with German Nazis or Italian fascists are rehabilitated. Revolutions and communism are criminalized, while any gains from anticapitalist resistances of the past are ignored and the capitalist restoration is presented as a democratic choice. This chapter aims at contributing to a collective alternative analysis, which could be called a Black book on capitalist restoration.⁵

Against dominant histories of the bipolar world, a particular attention needs to be paid to democratic popular workers movements in Eastern Europe, resisting relations of domination within and between the former countries of Real Socialism.⁶ We are confronted in those cases with the convergence of opposite ideological bias: official Stalinist and anticommunist versions of history. Both of them, for their own interests, wanted to present the events as pro-capitalist movements. We can take as a symbolic example of this dual bias the Hungarian anti-Soviet upsurges in 1956. These were characterized as pro-Western anticommunist in propaganda from both groups—which had to hide the key feature of workers' councils in those events, because such councils were both organically anticapitalist and antibureaucratic. They expressed spontaneous aspirations stimulated by single-party rule on behalf of the workers.⁷ I will comment later on other controversial interpretations of massive democratic movements before 1989. But we must understand the preconditions of that historical turning point.

Stalinization: Continuities and Discontinuities within the Soviet Century

For the Bolsheviks, the name given to the USSR did not mean that it was already a socialist society. It was meant to indicate the explicit aim of the new power. The Marxist debates of the 1920s between Preobrazhensky and Bukharin introduced the characterization of a postcapitalist “transformational society”⁸—neither capitalist nor socialist. The movement toward communism was dynamic and conflictual in a hostile capitalist environment, where the extension of the revolution was both an internal

socioeconomic, cultural, and political issue and part of an international concept of “permanent revolution.”⁹ The notion of workers’ state indicated the social basis of the new power.

After the huge international impact of the Soviet Revolution, the political defeats, especially in Germany, left the Russian Revolution isolated and provided the international context that facilitated the “Thermidorian” turn, as the Left Opposition led by Trotsky would call it. The external aggressions and internal conflicts legitimated accelerated industrialization and the priority given to heavy industry. This repressive trend was combined with impressive vertical social promotion: from poor peasants to workers, workers to employees, employees to cadres of the state apparatus. But subjective factors also facilitated Stalinization—the lack of experience on how to defend a revolution against internal and external threats.

The effect of the Bolshevik repression of the Kronstadt rebellion in the process of Stalinization is crucial here. Rosa Luxemburg, who criticized the suppression of the Duma and other repressive trends taken by the Bolsheviks, was the first supporter of the Russian Revolution.¹⁰ Contrary to dominant views on Lenin, his *Last Struggle*, as publicized by Lewin, shows that he was very concerned about the “bureaucratization of the workers’ state.”¹¹ Nevertheless, soon after his death the Soviet state was transformed into a totalitarian state through what Trotsky analyzed in *The Revolution Betrayed* as a bureaucratic counterrevolution within the revolution.¹² It was neither a capitalist restoration nor a new class stable society, but a crystallization of a bureaucratic caste, ruling on behalf of workers. Trotsky considered the future uncertain, dependent on the relationship between the fundamental classes at the international level. There could be a consolidation of the emerging bureaucratic class or a capitalist restoration if new international and national workers mobilizations could not get rid of the bureaucratic party/state.

The Crisis of Stalinism and the Extension of Revolutions

The building of socialism in one country could not resist the extension of the anticapitalist revolutions during and after World War II, even if the Kremlin tried to smash or control them. The Yugoslav case is a perfect example of a struggle on two fronts: the Yugoslav communists had first to keep hidden their conflict with the Soviet “great brother” because they were in “the same camp.”¹³ They also hoped to receive Moscow’s support. But they were not ready to accept the Yalta agreement’s concept of a “shared Yugoslavia.” According to the Yalta agreement the former Serbian Kingdom, which dominated the former Yugoslavia and repressed the Communist Party (CP), was supposed to return and allow the CP to enter the Parliament. Stalin criticized the Yugoslav Partisan movement

because it went “too far” with its “hammer and sickle.” The Yugoslav communists did not submit to the Yalta agreements and Stalin’s criticisms. Control of the popular army, distribution of lands to peasants, and establishment of an independent Yugoslavia based on the Anti-fascist Council of National Liberation of Yugoslavia (the AVNOJ) allowed the Yugoslavian communists to break with the former Serbian Kingdom before the end of the war.

Globally, World War II ended in a much more ambiguous way for the working class than foreseen by Trotsky. He had expected anti-Stalinist socialist victories and broad splits within the pro-Soviet CPs, which would ultimately join the anti-Stalinist Fourth International. After the break of the 1939 German/Soviet Pact and the invasion of the SU, the antifascist victories reinforced Stalin and the CPs. The extension of the Real Socialist-World-System permitted one-third of the planet to escape from financial dependence on the capitalist and imperialist core states. This opened a difficult phase for the anti-Stalinist Left, which was confronted with the increased influence of Stalinized CPs and social democrats, who took strength from a period of growth on both sides of the bipolar world open to reformist trends.

The Kremlin’s new great power logic continued to be demonstrated in Stalin’s repression of the International Brigadists (organized by Tito) in the ongoing antifascist struggle in Spain. It was demonstrated too in Stalin’s attempts to prevent any autonomous move toward a “socialist Balkan confederation” by severing direct contacts between the CPs of the region. Such trends contradicted the Yalta Agreements and therefore Stalin’s control. This was the real cause of Stalin’s decision to excommunicate the Yugoslav communists and to repress Titoist sympathy within CPs as treasonous. But the Yugoslav leaders were looking for support from the communist international movement to undermine their 1948 excommunication by Stalin’s and to ward against imperialist pressures¹⁴: they chose to consolidate the revolution through the introduction of self-management, with ideological references to the Paris Commune, and the (re)appropriation of Marx against Stalin. Therefore a new phase of the Soviet Century was opened that could not be reduced to a consolidation of Stalinization, nor to an artificial buffer zone under the Kremlin’s control. Real anticapitalist revolution had occurred led by CPs, which would produce the first splits within the international Stalinized communist movement—first in Yugoslavia and later in China, even if they reproduced similar feature of single-party rule. The anticapitalist dynamics in the world were stimulated by the Yugoslav and Chinese revolutions, an influence confirmed by the subsequent Cuban and Vietnamese revolutions and by the major event of the second half of the century: decolonization.

At the same time, a number of people’s democracies were becoming integrated as a buffer zone in the new Eastern Europe—from Rumania to

Poland and Czechoslovakia. Even where the Red Army, rather than mass popular upsurges, played a key role in establishing new communist regimes, all CPs consolidated their rule through similar social transformations and mechanisms as the Stalinized SU.

A Partial Conclusion on the Soviet Century

The USSR displayed conflicting features significant of any postcapitalist society, including bureaucratic features not foreseen by Marx.¹⁵ But how to evaluate the Stalinization of SU?

The international consequences of the Stalinization of SU included Soviet military interventions in sister countries and the permanent attempts to subordinate independent social and political emancipatory movements to the Kremlin's control. Nevertheless, repression was not a way of ruling. It had to be combined with the social contract and with the direct support that the SU gave (under specific political conditions) to anti-imperialist resistances during the Soviet Century. This explains why the popularity of the "Fatherland of Socialism"—and of the CPs that supported it—was high for decades.

Everywhere, selective repression and single-party rule were always combined with what Lebowitz has called the "social contract" of the "Vanguard" party that ruled on behalf of workers.¹⁶ Workers were proclaimed the official owners—but their self-organization or the right to strike was forbidden, for how could workers go on strike against themselves? In such a context, job security at the micro level (and not only full employment as the result of expansive forms of growth and shortages) represented an alienated form of sharing property rights: this was taken as the official proof that socialism was established. It was a lie. Yet this was not "hidden unemployment," as many Western economists often describe it: economic firing was forbidden and employment was a right, part of the social contract as was universal access to fundamental goods and services, either free or highly subsidized. This feature led to regular shortages, sometimes derided as hidden inflation. But it can be understood as an organic feature of systems where (contrary to any capitalism), money had no active role, while planning mechanisms within specific social and political relations led to the combination of extensive growth and shortages.¹⁷ Workers' "political economy" as Lebowitz calls it¹⁸ meant a right to protection and improvement of life, job security, and equality within a system that declared the workers as the source, and therefore, the owners of new value produced.

This was identified with a communist threat—the obsession of reactionary forces within the United States, explaining witch-hunting and international alliances with the worst dictatorships against the communist evil. The pressures of the Cold War on capitalism was captured by

Keynes: welfare state interventionism against market liberalism was both a theoretical criticism of the failures of the free market and a political concern to save capitalism from communism. Such a concern disappeared with the Soviet Union's collapse, which permitted an increase of global neoliberal offensives against workers' gains made during the previous era.

The International Financial Institutions (IFIs) have since described the capitalist restoration as "the transition towards market economy." The formulation indicated that they knew what the future was supposed to be despite its deliberately vague content (what is a market economy?). The real goals of the liberal program were never proclaimed because they meant the radical destruction of the social contract—while the workers wanted its improvement through more freedoms: both aspects tell a lot on the nature of the former system.

Capitalism, markets, and privatization were abstractions to the people. Nevertheless, these very same people did react very concretely when the party tried to introduce partial market rules or incentives in the 1970s within Real Socialism: they considered that the practical effects of these reforms were in contradiction with recognized rights, even if those rights were bureaucratically distorted. Remembering the contradictions of previous attempts at reform helps us in understanding the nondemocratic way in which the capitalist restoration had to occur, and the specific articulation between the internal deadlocks and external factors in the historical turning point of 1989. This was neither a sudden event nor a preconceived scenario.

FIRST SIGNIFICANT EXPERIENCE OF MARKET: THE REFORMS OF THE 1960s WITHIN REAL SOCIALISM

The attempt at complete control over all decision making under Soviet planning was a political turn and not a theoretical Marxist concept. The reforms discussed (in the SU, Hungary, or Czechoslovakia) in the 1960s were launched by part of the party apparatus and economists that wanted to increase productivity and the quality of products by implementing the law of value (through market mechanisms and stimulants).¹⁹ This was opposed in Cuba by Ernesto Che Guevara, supported by Ernest Mandel against Charles Bettelheim, in the "great debate of political economy and revolution."²⁰

The market reforms of the 1960s (outside Yugoslavia) consisted in the combination of planning for strategic industrial branches and partial market mechanism for consumer goods. Material stimulants and more autonomy were introduced as incentive for managers to reduce costs. The reforms were unpopular among workers who saw them as contradictory to the egalitarian values and rights they considered theirs in the context of

the dominant ideology. They were also rejected by sectors of the state apparatus, where they threatened privileged positions, made elites accountable for managing factories with a bad competitive position, or introduced job instability.

In Czechoslovakia, these kinds of reforms had been proposed by the economist Ota Šik and discussed within the party between 1962 and 1968, since the rate of growth had been stalled by inefficiencies in the bureaucratic planning system. They were supported by the reformist wing of the party led by Alexander Dubček. The opponent wing, led by Novotny, organized meetings in the factories to criticize the reforms. It was in order to overcome or neutralize the emerging resistance that the reformists decided to open the doors to more freedoms. This was the beginning of Prague's Spring in 1968. Popular and intellectual movements from below asked for the abolition of censorship and a whole set of demands for a "socialism with human face," intending to surpass the limits of the single party's reforms. The eruption of such spontaneous mass movements always coincided with the times when splits in the party apparatus appeared—and this would reoccur under Gorbachev's reforms.

The reforms in Yugoslavia during this period (what has been called market socialism) are interesting to analyze because they were not only proposed but also implemented; and they illustrate more broadly the conflicting logics in Real Socialism. In Yugoslavia, a more radical move toward the market and the suppression of any planning had occurred in 1965.²¹ Different kinds of actors and arguments were behind these developments. Firstly, liberal economists were in favor of the supposed efficient market laws; secondly, the richest republics complained that planning exploited their resources and argued that they could be more efficient for the whole system through decentralization. But one should not underestimate the influence of anarcho-syndicalism here, which agitated for workers' self-management rights to be increased at the level of the factory, the market being used instead of any central organs of the planning system. In that period, the Titoist political wing of the apparatus withdrew from the public debate. But the social contract was still behind the reforms, which in the postrevolutionary multinational Yugoslavia had both social and national content. The reforms did increase decentralized rights for workers self-management (to hire and fire managers and control a larger part of the factory income) and republics (confederalization of the system); but this was done on the basis of more radical market mechanisms, even though the right to strike was tolerated.

In practice, a decentralized banking system replaced the social funds, which channeled the surplus and distributed it according to planned priorities. A process of increased management autonomy at banks and factories produced a *de facto* form of capitalist accumulation. In the meantime,

market competition increased inequalities between branches, factories, and regions, combined with vertical conflicts within factories: hundreds of strikes and independent trade union activity occurred.

The Left Marxist intellectuals organized around the Review Praxis had discussed a sophisticated set of demands during the summer schools organized in Korčula's island arguing that market socialism had been a way to avoid a socialist democratization of the self-management system: they asked for self-managed planning, chambers of self-management at all levels of the system, and direct associations of citizens and workers to manage services. Slogans were put forward against group property, the red bourgeoisie, corruption, inequalities, and privileges within the party. The Yugoslav June 1968 and its student occupations in Belgrade's universities were less known internationally than the events occurring in Czechoslovakia in the same period. There, in front of the whole world, thousands of young and older supporters of Prague's Spring freely gathered in favor of a "Socialism with Human Face."

In Moscow, in spite of initial support for the reforms, the political apparatus became afraid of radicalization and contagion. The Kremlin mobilized Warsaw Pact troops, aiming at strong dissuasion and pressure on Dubček. But the arrival of tanks only mobilized the population who came toward the soldiers (as seen on televised footage) and argued pacifically with them: they had been sent to Czechoslovakia, officially, to defend socialism. What is much less known is that during the Autumn 1968, in nearly 200 factories, more than 800,00 workers reacted to the Warsaw Pact's invasion by establishing workers councils.²² The movement spread and organized its first national conference in January 1969—six months after the arrival of the tanks. By March there were 500 councils: a massive political movement. Workers councils were often supported or even launched by factory cells of the Czechoslovak CP and of the trade union (ROH), which at that time emancipated itself from the bureaucratic apparatus of the state. Their leaders were often elected at the head of the councils. A new project of law and economic reform based on the ideal of self-management rights was elaborated and presented to the government, still, at that time, led by Dubček. Such proposals had already been rejected by the pro-Ota Šik reformists before 1968 and Dubček was looking for compromises with the Kremlin. The dynamic of the workers councils was broken by pressure and direct repression. Afterward, Dubček was pushed aside and real normalization began.

The market reforms were blocked everywhere. Here, the specificity of the Yugoslavian experience must be stressed again. The Moscow-led intervention into Prague was used by Tito to launch a popular patriotic mobilization for a popular army having the duty to resist invaders. Arms were distributed and kept in barracks for all the citizens engaged in military exercises, except for the intellectuals of the Marxist Left, who remained

isolated and partially repressed. Tito implemented a typical combination of repression and concessions. Yet all independent movements that occurred in this period had conflicting demands: the Left Marxist current criticized the market reforms, whereas the Croatian Spring (besides its democratic and cultural dimensions) asked for the right to keep at the republican level income from foreign trade. At the same moment, Albanians demonstrated for the status of Republic for Kosovo. The Albanian regime, like the Yugoslav one, condemned the Soviet-led military intervention in Prague, which facilitated acceptance of Albanian demands in Yugoslavia (in particular, the use of Albanian language in the Pristina University in Kosovo).

Thus, the new Constitution in 1974 combined contradictory features. After the repression of the leaders of different movements, the Constitution increased rights both for workers and for the Republics and Provinces—expressing again the original roots of Tito's legitimacy in social and national promises. The basic organs of workers' self-management at the level of factories could be involved in a cooperative self-managed planning, while the autonomy of banks was legally broken. Specific chambers were created to represent self-management's organs—but only at municipal and republican levels—while a new definition of social property was opposed both to state and group property.²³ In order to try and satisfy national demands the system became more confederated, but also more open to international market pressure: foreign trade and currencies were put under the control of the republican powers. A new phase opened where the repressed intelligentsia turned its back on workers, while the new credit facilities for self-managed organs and republican powers encouraged a high rate of investments in the 1970s.

THE 1970s: THE DEBT CRISIS INSTEAD OF REFORMS

The 1970s had been a decade marked by a combination of shocks that struck at Western states in the capitalist center. The imperialist defeats in Vietnam and strong antiwar movements in the United States, Nixon's decision to put an end to the gold standard, and the Bretton Woods agreement, along with the oil shocks, acted as catalysts for a crisis of profit and world order. The same decade saw the relative stagnation in the SU when Kosygin's reforms had been pushed back and the old guard around Leonid Brezhnev clamped down. But in Central and Eastern Europe, this was a period of growth based, for several countries, on increasing debt linked to both sides of the bipolar world. The high rate of growth in the South and the East, compared to the stagflation in the core capitalist countries, was attractive for Western banks: they increased their international loans in those two directions, looking to use the deposits they had received in

dollars from Arab countries after the price of oils was increased in a profitable way.

A radically new situation occurred within the East European Real Socialist worldsystem, which had largely been autarkic within the Council of Mutual Economic Assistance (CMEA), also called Comecon, up to then.²⁴ On one hand, the East European countries remained dependent on the economic support of the USSR, which took the form of a debt toward Moscow in nonconvertible rubles. But for the first time in their post-World War history this was now coupled with a second debt denominated in hard currencies. The USSR was not involved in this debt, as it was still subject to Cold War sanctions imposed by the United States since 1949. As this embargo was less stringent on Eastern European countries, some of their ruling parties, after having blocked the 1960s reforms, wanted to import attractive Western consumer goods with the aim of reducing mass discontent, along with some new technologies to improve the quality and output of production. Yet bureaucratic conservatism did very little to make the technological imports effective, while exports to the Western countries were reduced by the slowdown in growth in the 1970s. The second oil shock and rising interest rates in the United States at the beginning of the 1980s (having an international impact on the main foreign debts) were additional external causes of a specific debt crisis in hard currencies in several Eastern European countries (Yugoslavia, Hungary, Rumania, Poland, and East Germany/DDR)—while normalized Czechoslovakia was kept under Soviet tanks and material aid up to 1989. The five indebted countries of that region had experienced different politico-economic trends all of which played a decisive part in the transition toward a new system at the start of the 1980s.

The Yugoslav Federation was under pressure from the International Monetary Fund (IMF) from the beginning of the 1980s.²⁵ During the 1980s the federation was paralyzed by social and national conflicts (with increasing gaps of GDP by inhabitants and unemployment between republics) and by three-figure hyperinflation, reflecting the loss of overall coherency in the system. After the death of Tito and other historical leaders at the beginning of the 1980s, there was no longer any Yugoslav leader supporting the two basis elements of the Titoist social contract: equalitarian social and national rights. Hundreds of strikes occurred without progressive resolution. But there was no unified Yugoslav bourgeoisie, either. Each republican power and potential new bourgeoisie had first to get rid of social ownership through the consolidation of independent states, offering national protection against the others instead of social rights. Territorial ethnic cleansing against minorities was combined with redefinitions of nations in ethnically mixed republics. International pressures in favor of market competition and privatizations increased internal disintegration: the most developed republics declared their independence in 1991. The

United States used the Yugoslav crisis as a step toward an extension of North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) toward all Eastern European candidates for the EU.²⁶

Hungary was also confronted with an external debt in foreign currency at the beginning of the 1980s. But the Hungarian communist leaders were unique in deciding to respond to it by selling the country's best enterprises to foreign capital, which made Hungary the principal host country for foreign direct investment (FDI) in the first years of the following decade of transition.²⁷ The Hungarian government also helped to bring down the Berlin Wall with some financial reward. Conversely, in Rumania, the dictator Ceausescu attempted to pay back the foreign debt of his country on the backs of his people—an act that Romanian *nomenklatura* finally rejected as too explosive. This group subsequently instigated a pseudo revolution, which included the execution of the dictator at the end of the 1980s.²⁸

The Polish case corresponded to another context and scenario: it was the only country where some accumulation of workers struggles in the past decades (workers councils in 1956 and important strikes at the end of the 1960s with the support of intellectuals) led to spontaneous strikes and the establishment of a broad independent trade union at the beginning of the 1980s—Solidarność with more than 10 million workers, members or not of the leading party. It held a democratic congress in 1981, but was repressed at the end of that year by the Polish general Jaruzelski—a repression that opened the door for the introduction of liberal shock therapy in Poland (we will come back to that experience shortly).

Finally, we must also emphasize later in this chapter the absorption of East Germany by the Federal Republic of Germany after the collapse of the Berlin Wall. This opened a radical historical turning point at the heart of neoliberal globalization, European construction, and the capitalist restoration in Eastern Europe.

THE ARMS RACE AND ITS EFFECT ON SOVIET UNION

The SU indirectly suffered from the debt crises of the brother regimes because it increased their difficulties in reimbursing debt in the nonconvertible ruble. But a more direct external pressure came through a new phase of arm race, launched by President Reagan after the Soviet intervention in Afghanistan in 1979. This extreme phase in the arms race had opposite effects in each socioeconomic system. This Cold War peak gave the United States the opportunity to take the offensive in several aspects of its own multidimensional crisis: public spending financed by huge fiscal deficit (with decreasing taxes on capital) was used for research and innovation on military weapons and equipment, which recharged an economy that had started the decade in recession. At the same time, on an international level

the United States began the first phase of a broad-reaching resurgence of the military-industrial complex and technological hegemony, which would be enforced by the military interventions of the following decade. This technological revolution in the United States and in the greater part of the capitalist world was an essential element in the ability of the ruling classes to restructure social relations and the world order at the expense of workers' rights.

In contrast, this phase weighed heavily on the USSR in the first half of the 1980s: the social conservatism of the productive apparatus prevented the system from integrating the high level of scientific research and technological developments involved in the Star Wars military competition throughout its many branches. But a direct offensive against the workers was not at stake. The Brezhnev period is known as stagnation and golden age for social protection with increasing social income (flats, hospitals, and other advantages in kind associated with jobs in big factories) aimed at stabilizing workers. The modernization of equipment and infrastructure was sacrificed, however. The decrease in productivity contrasted not only with the technological revolution occurring within the capitalist world, but also with the attacks against trade union bastions and protective labor codes, led by Thatcher and Reagan, that accompanied it.

For the first time since World War II, the gap between the United States and the SU widened. This expressed the main contradiction of the single party's rule on behalf of workers: its inability to reproduce itself while transforming an extensive mode of growth (the creation of new units of productions and jobs) into an intensive one (able to produce better and more with existing means of production and labor force). Democratic socialization of management—transferring real ownership responsibility to workers (and not only juridical rights)—was the only consistent source of efficiency that could protect social rights. But the single party's rule needed workers within an alienated social contract that could last only with expansive growth. The resistance of the workers to reforms based on market incentives for managers was a resistance to the mechanism and criteria of efficiency, which threatened to undermine the social contract through job insecurity and increasing inequalities. Liberal economists understood this as the main obstacle to overcome. From the point of view of classical Marxism, the social relationships of production were becoming an absolute obstacle to a significant development of productive forces, which expressed the contradiction between workers juridical ownership and bureaucratic management or real property rights. It was the demonstration that the bureaucracy could not stabilize itself as an independent new class.

At the very moment the debt crises in foreign currencies in Eastern European countries had allowed major external pressures to weigh on these regimes, the USSR of Gorbachev (1985) was turning toward internal

reform needing a pacific coexistence with the capitalist system. The reforms launched to modernize the stagnating Soviet economy first needed a restructuring (Perestroika) of the economy. Perestroika was to win popularity through “Glasnost” (transparency, reduction of censorship)—which mirrored the process of how more freedom had been necessary for Dubček to try and win popularity in Czechoslovakia, or how market socialism in Yugoslavia could not have been introduced without increased workers’ rights. To push away decades of conservatism, Gorbachev’s Glasnost opened the doors for new social initiatives and fronts, including workers’ collectives and pluralism within the party.²⁹ But Gorbachev’s hope was to also reduce the cost of the arms race and to use Western modern technologies to improve productivity. These aims required new relations with Western countries to obtain credits and technologies.

The third pillar of Gorbachev’s reforms was therefore international disengagement. This meant a sharp reduction in Soviet material aid (e.g., to Cuba). Within the CMEA and the immediate sphere of Moscow’s direct military control this withdrawal led to a relaxation of support to unpopular single-party regimes—the first one being Honecker in Eastern Germany. This resulted in an uncontrolled domino effect.

THE SCENARIOS OF THE CAPITALIST RESTORATION

Ambiguous Refolutions

After the fall of the Berlin Wall, Timothy Garton Ash used an interesting neologism—“*refolution*”³⁰—a kind of revolutionary change of systems through reforms from above. This can be generalized to analyze the ambiguities of the historical transformation that put an end to the bipolar world. However, one must go behind the ideological discourses on the 1989 democratic revolutions to take in full account two important parallel features. Firstly, the geostrategic importance of both Germany and Poland for the whole region, for Moscow’s disengagement from Berlin was as fundamental as the need for the United States to win Solidarność over to a liberal turn to propel capitalist restoration. Secondly, the end of single-party rule, behind which a broad part of the former apparatus was transformed into an emergent bourgeoisie through the invention of mass privatizations without capital. Who decided upon the main contours of this transformation is a question that the rosy pictures on the democratic revolutions of 1989—or even later Rainbow Revolutions³¹—does not raise.

The First GeoStrategic Step of Capitalist Restoration: German Unification

There is no doubt about the popular enthusiasm for the fall of the Berlin Wall and the end of the Honecker regime. Yet the images of the East

German demonstrations against the Wall, while being a symbol of the democratic revolution, masked the far less democratic processes regarding the reunification.

The fall of the Berlin Wall was not only accepted but was also partially prepared by Gorbachev's negotiation with Federal Germany's leaders. He was rewarded for his acceptance of nonintervention by credits and financed repatriation of Soviet troops. The deal included also a neutral Germany concerning the two military pacts of the Cold War: they were supposed to be dismantled through the pacific coexistence of the two systems in a European Common House that the French president, Mitterrand, was ready to support. Yet nothing of these promises happened and Gorbachev had no means to resist the dominant choices made by the United States and the West German government. The reunified Germany became member of NATO, which remained in place after the dissolution of the Warsaw Pact in 1991.

The other question raised by reunification was the question of ownership: who was entitled to privatize East German factories? They belonged, officially, to the workers. Bruni De La Motte explains well how this point was initially recognized then rapidly dropped and the consequences of this transformation:³²

Once the border was open the government decided to set up a trusteeship to ensure that "publicly owned enterprises" (the majority of businesses) would be transferred to the citizens who'd created the wealth. However . . . the idea of "publicly owned" assets being transferred to citizens was quietly dropped. Instead all assets were privatised at breakneck speed. . . .

In July 1990, when the GDR still existed, a hasty "currency union" was introduced with the result that the GDR economy was plunged into bankruptcy. . . . GDR export products rose in price by 450% overnight and were no longer competitive; the export market (39% of the economy) inevitably imploded.

Large numbers of ordinary workers lost their jobs . . . (And as) a result of the purging of academia, research and scientific establishments in a process of political vetting, more than a million individuals with degrees lost their jobs. . . .

Of course, comments De La Motte:

unification brought with it the freedom to travel the world and, for some, more material wealth, but it also brought social breakdown, widespread unemployment, blacklisting, a crass materialism and an 'elbow society' as well as a demonisation of the country.

Therefore, De la Motte concludes:

since the demise of the GDR, many have come to recognise and regret that the genuine ‘social achievements’ they enjoyed were dismantled: social and gender equality, full employment and lack of existential fears, as well as subsidised rents, public transport, culture and sports facilities.³³

The Second GeoStrategic Step of Capitalist Restoration: Poland

The capitalist restoration in Poland is both unique and significant given that it was the only country with a huge independent organized workers movement. Evidence seems to show that the workers got rid of the workers state. Is that true?

In 1980 general strikes across all industries expressed social and political demands—the most important being the legalization not only of strikes but also of an independent trade union: *Solidarność* (Solidarity). The workers were strong enough to win this right and could therefore organize its congress openly and democratically: international observers were present and watched the emergence of a new and functioning real popular power.³⁴ Political and social programs were set out in September 1981 by several hundred delegates and 80 percent of the organized Polish labor force.³⁵ Socially managed TV broadcast the debates of the congress to the factories throughout Poland. The strength and visibility of catholic beliefs at the congress—also explicit in the program’s references—and the failing credibility of the ruling party could be taken as proof of anti-communism. The word “socialism” was certainly less clear for the Polish workers at the congress than the idea of “justice” expressed in the program’s introduction: *“Our aim is to rebuild a just Poland.”* But what was meant by a just Poland? The program was eclectic, expressing hope in an economic and social system that combined planning, autonomy, and the market.³⁶

But an examination of the adopted program illustrates at least two fundamental issues that the capitalist restoration would certainly not satisfy. Firstly social rights, for instance:

The right to work must be guaranteed, and the wage system overhauled.

Workers should have their health and safety ensured.

The union demands that the people’s basic rights to housing are respected.

The union should ensure that all workers have free time to raise their cultural level.³⁷

Secondly, there was general emphasis placed on the project of “a self managed Republic” where self-management was to be introduced in regional structures, cultural fields, and education. Here, “Genuine workers’ self-management” was to be placed as “the basis of the self-governing republic.”³⁸ This movement then was much closer to the Hungarian or Polish workers councils of 1956, to Prague’s autumn of workers councils in 1968, and to the Yugoslav experience of self-management, as opposed to the liberal shock therapies that took place during 1989. So why then did *Solidarność* become an instrument of a profoundly antiworker policy?

Many Polish trade unionists were freed after several years in jail by the law of amnesty. But in 1989, there was a radical sanction vote against the ruling party, huge financial pressures on the government, and behind the scenes negotiations on the burgeoning national debt with various foreign banks and governments, which had reached \$42.3 billion by 1989 (64.8% of GDP). A decade of negative growth; demobilization; the hope that Western support and economic experts would offer more freedom and economic efficiency; and the desire for revenge against the ruling party—these were key motivators for *Solidarność*’s leaders to accept as advisers the most radical opponents to the former system. In August 1989, the neoliberal economist and Prime Minister Leszek Balcerowicz presented a program to rapidly transform Poland to a market economy. This program fitted well with the IMF’s orientations: price and trade liberalization, fiscal restraint and reduction of wage protections against inflation.³⁹ The IMF therefore granted Poland a stabilization fund of \$1 billion and an additional stand-by credit of \$720 million, followed by additional credits from the World Bank. The whole program legitimized the cancellation of the Polish debt decided by the US Congress.

The reduction of subsidies for basic products increased their new market prices immediately by 179.7 percent over the level of the previous month.⁴⁰ As a consequence, in real terms, over the whole year wages fell to 75.4 percent and real consumption to 81.6 percent, while industrial output fell to 75 percent of the 1989 level because of falling demand. The second cause for depression was the breaking of the CMEA: now, all the payments had to be made in hard currency. This produced a radical shift in trade relations, an increase in the prices of imports, and the collapse of exports to Russia.⁴¹ A new peripheral insertion in world market economy had begun.

THE BENCHMARKS OF CAPITALIST RESTORATION

The rapidity and facility of the capitalist restoration has been judged by two main benchmarks: pluralistic elections and privatization. The first corresponded with the end of the single-party system and was easily achieved. However, there was no independent expression of self-organized workers. Instead, the introduction of political pluralism was

dominated by liberal coalitions and by the choices made by important segments of the former single-state apparatus to turn toward neoliberal policies and privatize, for themselves, what they could.⁴²

The introduction of pluralism began in the SU at the end of the 1990s under Gorbachev and gained momentum when it appeared that there would be no Soviet intervention in Germany. Members of the CPs were of different kinds: some shared communist ideals, but many used their membership purely instrumentally and had no ideology other than their material interest. They were now keenly interested in new opportunities to transform their weakening privileges based on their nomination as members of the *nomenklatura* (which was now politically insecure) into real, private property rights. Former communists could be quickly made the most ardent of anticommunist ideologues within liberal, Christian Democrat, or nationalist parties. Many others wanted to keep some continuity with the past—becoming new Socialists or Social Democrats asking for membership in the Second International while keeping control of the former apparatus. They were (wrongly) called the “continuators” while social liberalism was on the International agenda.

In the first pluralist elections there were several variations: sometimes the continuators stayed in power, both thanks to their still strong control of the new political life and to real popular fears about the future; elsewhere (like in Central Europe), the dominant cry for sanctions against those who had been in power led to votes first for liberal parties or coalition, but without full knowledge of their economic program. This was combined with a naive confidence in their economist advisers who were supposed to know (scientifically) how to lead the economy. But in that last case, between 1992 and 1996 the former communist continuators came back either with a majority (Lithuania, Poland, Hungary, Bulgaria) or with significant minority votes (East German Länder, or under CPs titles in Czechoslovakia and the Russian Federation). All this appeared disconcerting—especially, in Poland, which was supposed to be anticommunist—for those who reduced the former system to its repressive features. The vote expressed the popular discovery of what the liberal policies meant and the hope to keep both freedoms and something of the former social contract. Precisely for these very reasons, Western governments had first high suspicions against those continuator parties and considered the transition to democracy to have been accomplished only when clear liberal parties had been elected. But—like the population, though with opposite appreciations—these observers soon discovered that those supposedly Left parties were the most efficient means to push forward privatizations and support of NATO.

Generalized privatization was needed in order for these states to be recognized as market economies by international institutions and creditors: they were to prove the break with former system—the dogmatic belief being that it would guarantee efficiency, without specifying the criteria. The small privatization (small businesses and goods/service providers)

raised no big problems, even if they could be fragile. The real issue for capitalist restoration was the big privatizations of the industrial core of the system, counting for the majority of GDP and of employment. But this aim was confronted with two specific difficulties inherited from Real Socialism: the social contract that the workers wanted to improve, rather than destroy—and the lack of accumulated national capital. Of course, especially in the SU since the 1980s, an increasing black market and economic criminality had developed to become a feature of the process of privatization.⁴³ But, the stake was to generalize the privatization. With what money and with what source of legitimation could the juridical legalization of privatization be made?

Privatization could be in favor of insiders (factory workers' collectives and managers) or outsiders (other national investors or foreign ones). The IFIs preferred selling to foreign capital because they feared a lack of real restructuring in the other cases. But they accepted all kinds of privatization, which would simply destroy the former system. If the choice to sell the best factories to foreign capital was the first possibility, it was only taken up by the Hungarian communist leadership during the 1980s as a response to their debt crisis. The gradual aspect of that policy turned into a more radical transformation in the 1990s.⁴⁴ Besides Hungary, in the entire region, the Baltic states (especially Estonia), were the only ones to decide early on to privatize their economy by radically opening up to FDI⁴⁵: this was supported by a strong popular national feeling against Russian past domination, looking for new relations in Northern Europe. Elsewhere the new powers were reluctant to sell the best factories to foreign capital, which would not have been popular.

A problem of the square circle appeared: how to rapidly privatize all industry—the bulk of the former regime—without capital and confrontation with workers?

Besides some MEBO (manager/employee buy out), in Poland especially, the dominant innovation to solve the problem was mass privatizations also called direct privatization without capital but with a majority of shares in favor of insiders or the state.⁴⁶ In Eastern European languages of that period, the word privatization has been used to describe any changes in legal property rights, whoever be the new real owner or the process by which this legal question was decided. The mass privatization was firstly a juridical transformation of the former public factories (with its social capital divided into shares, therefore open to commodification) and the transformation of the workers and the population into shareholders. They received vouchers as a purchase power (which could be the equivalent of one year income), permitting them to buy shares of the factories through different kinds of procedures—often auctions. The state was to become the holder of what had not been sold. While the former property has been often described as state property, the direct privatization could

give to the new state real ownership powers, which it had not in the past: the legal right to restructure and then sell parts or the whole enterprise.

The first experience of vouchers was introduced in Czechoslovakia, with a special fund established to implement the operation.⁴⁷ In Russia it began with a law passed in June 1992, under Yeltsin.⁴⁸ The employees could prefer to sell their vouchers to other shareholders in order to have an income in the context of sharp reductions in wages. Such procedures permitted a radical but opaque transformation illustrated in the Russian example (detailed below): a rapid concentrations of vouchers in the hands of the real new owners, be they oligarchs or outsiders. As stressed by Myant and Drahokoupil, immediately after the mass privatization, workers' share of the whole privatized assets of their enterprises counted for 43 percent, it had fallen to 22 percent in 2006 while the manager's share grew from 10.4 up to 28 percent—to which one should add the outsider's share growing from 9.4 percent to 45 percent.⁴⁹ The same source indicates that foreign investors remained marginal in those enterprises (from 0 to 2% in the same period), while the state's share fall from 35.8 to 4 percent.

As Martin Myant and Jan Drahokoupil emphasize:

Russian voucher privatization did not end the transfer of state property. At first, the most important enterprises—oil, gas, and other raw material producing and processing enterprises—were held back, in view of their strategic importance. Their ultimate disposal helped create the new group of business leaders that, in terms of wealth and power, had no analogy in other state Socialist countries.⁵⁰

The juridical transformation of ownership and mass privatization without capital could thereby occurred (with variables according to concrete situations) at an incredible speed in the first half of the 1990s.⁵¹ Different scenarios and variants of mass privatizations occurred throughout the entire region during the 1990s.⁵² Everywhere these privatizations took place there was a field of intense and sometimes violent struggle for the control of ownership, involving financial operations, clientelism, and scandals—even in the countries that were put forward as models like Poland or Hungary, the Czech Republic or Slovenia.

The specific case of the Russian Federation must be stressed however because of its size, its historical importance, and its international weight. Firstly, an unexpected phenomena appeared after mass privatizations during the Yeltsin's period through the 1990s: the *de facto* development of barter relations as the dominant form of exchanges when wages and taxes were not paid.⁵³ The very weak Russian state (which was the initial aim of neoliberal policy for Russia at that time) was confronted by the increasing power of regional oligarchs: their nonpayment of taxes behind concentration of property led to a huge fiscal deficit (public bonds being sold to

international investors). This lasted up to the Russian state bankruptcy in 1998—following the East Asian financial crisis—when Moscow stopped paying back its debt.⁵⁴

This crisis was a turning point. The change in the policy of exchange rate that occurred in its aftermath sought to protect national production. A new phase opened where the circulation of money increased, and taxes and wages began to be paid again—which helped Putin’s new strong state to try and submit oligarchs to its power. But the return to monetary normality would also permit attacks on former social protections over the next decade, be they through subsidized basic prices or in the Labor code: the capitalist transformation of Russia no longer meant the destruction of a strong power. Besides the bloody wars against Chechen separatism and open military conflicts with Georgia, Russia has tried to reinforce its position through a regional reorganization in order to resist both Chinese and the EU in different parts of the Euro-Asiatic region.⁵⁵

TRANSITION: THE FIRST 10 YEARS

The World Bank (WB) Transition Report (TR) of 2002 offered “Analysis and Lessons for Eastern Europe and the Former Soviet Union” covering the first 10 years of the transition period.⁵⁶ Up to the beginning of the 2000s, the transition countries followed a general scenario: several years of deep transitional recession (also called systemic or transformational crisis) followed by more or less rapid recovery (defined as a return to positive growth rates). The TR found that all states went through a transitional recession that caused real GDP to dip from its 1990 levels by nearly 15 percent in the Central and Southeastern Europe and the Baltics (CSB) and by more than 40 percent in the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS).⁵⁷ The report comments:

The magnitude and duration of the transition recession was, for all countries, comparable to that for developed countries during the Great Depression, and for most of them it was much worse.

The CIS had an average of 6.5 years of declining output, resulting in the loss of half the initial level of measured output. Even at the end of the decade, the CIS had recovered only 63 percent of its starting GDP values [while the CSB] recovered their 1990 GDP’s level by 1998, and exceeded that level by 6 percent in 2000.⁵⁸

Poland had the shortest and mildest recession: a 6 percent drop in production over two years. But the WB omitted the aid received by Poland that reduced the recession period, just as it omitted the resistance to neoliberal policies in Slovenia during the 1990s that helped reduce the destructive features of the transition recession.⁵⁹ In terms of the Czech

Republic—often presented as a model up to 1997—the WB Report had to notice a severe crisis in 1997–1999, which meant that this country “was the only (one) in Central Europe that had not reached its 1990 GDP level by 2000.”⁶⁰ The WB figures for the Southeastern Europe did not take in account the Yugoslav Federal Republic whose crisis was particularly severe during the 1990s but it did note that growth in Bulgaria and Romania was “sharply interrupted by serious macroeconomic crises” in the mid-1990s, which meant that their GDP in 2000 stood at four-fifths of its 1990 level.⁶¹

The WB conceded that everywhere “the initial fall was larger than anticipated.” In particular it found that the three Baltic countries had the longest (5–6 years) and deepest (35–51%) recessions among the CSB. In this, they were much closer to the average of the CIS than to other CSB countries. In the CIS Armenia, Georgia, and Moldova saw the steepest declines—Georgia, an astonishing 80 percent fall in output, largely a result of the long internal turmoil—while Belarus and Uzbekistan had mild declines.⁶² Taken as a whole, the TR reveals that there was no clear success story of liberal policies to be found behind the figures. Moreover, as the data generally compares GDP levels after 1990 because of break in price systems and statistics, this underestimates the loss of social income and access to services.

The comparison that the WB report makes to the Great Depression means something. But it does not capture the main difference: the cause of the postcommunist crisis was the destruction of the former system, something that would have lasting social consequences.

EFFECTS OF THE SYSTEMIC DESTRUCTION

The WB documented the global effect of the introduction of market rules and pricing that showed that many sectors and enterprises were not viable after price liberalization.⁶³ The social dimensions of the shock were dramatic, leading to fundamental increases in inequality and poverty and deterioration of life expectancy and general health. The WB’s Report reminds us that the states of Europe and Central Asia started the process of transition with some of the lowest levels of inequality in the world. Yet since then, “inequality has increased steadily in all transition economies and dramatically in some of them. Countries such as Armenia, the Kyrgyz Republic, Moldova, and Russia are now among the most unequal in the world, with Gini coefficients (a standard measure of inequality) nearly twice their pre-transition levels.”⁶⁴ At the same time, poverty rose sharply. Whereas in 1988 fewer than 1 in 25 lived in absolute poverty (measured at \$2.15 per day), by 1998 this figure had risen to one in five people throughout the region.⁶⁵ This rise in inequality and poverty were accompanied by high mortality increases (particularly for males) and estimates of the number of premature deaths that accompanied the transition vary

between 3 and 10 million.⁶⁶ Similar findings have also been documented by UNICEF *Women in Transition* Report of 1999.⁶⁷ UNICEF describes that while women in the region began the transition process “with relatively good health status and adequate access to basic health services,” the most clear measure of the worsening health conditions throughout the region are located in date of life expectancy. Here, of the 23 countries for which data are available, female life expectancy decreased in 16 and male life expectancy in 22. In Russia, women lost 3.2 years of life expectancy, and men 6.3 years, due to stress, poor nutrition, increased alcohol and substance abuse, and violence.⁶⁸

Fearing social explosion, liberal reforms in the CIS could not immediately destroy the complex social role formerly played by the big factories. As Myant and Drahokoupil’s study on transition economies highlights, communist welfare regimes were organized around employment as a basic social rights and obligation, and they included universalistic social services with provision linked to the workplace.⁶⁹ Yet, as stated earlier, in Russia, barter relations developed during the first decade of transition. Fearing the failures of such large enterprises and the mass unemployment this would bring, the government did not introduce punitive fees for delayed payments, nor an effective bankruptcy framework. The enterprises “opted out the money economy” in both the early 1990s and again in the Ruble Crisis of 1998, instead “exchanging by barter and often paying wages in kind” with employees continuing to gain access to social provisions (often housing) provided by the enterprises. For Myant and Drahokoupil, this reveals that “new social needs were to some extent handled by an informal continuation of the old Soviet-style system of welfare provision through enterprises.” In terms of employment and wages, Russia and other countries of the CIS adjusted to the economic downturn through “large, real-wage reductions and substantial wage arrears.” While, as a result they experienced only modest employment decreases relative to GDP contractions, the average real wage in Russia, for example, at its lowest point in August 1998, was less than a third of its December 1991 level.⁷⁰

The tolerance to a deformed continuity of the big factories in the 1990s turned the employees toward corporate protections within the big factories instead of class resistance that the official trade unions were incapable of organizing. In Eastern Europe other than in the CIS, the will of the new powers to adapt to Western market model, and the external pressures to do so, was stronger while official trade unions were (in general) not prepared to defend employees against the market competition. But some Western kinds of welfare protection for wage losses were introduced while employment fell sharply in Eastern Europe as the region adjusted to transition shocks through employment shedding.⁷¹ The rate of unemployment was between 10 and 18 percent, even when the growth became

positive again⁷²—with two exceptions. The first was the Czech Republic with less than 7 percent unemployment up to its crisis in 1998,⁷³ and Slovenia where, after the initial crisis, unemployment stabilized around 7 percent.⁷⁴ It is no coincidence that Slovenia was the only case in Eastern Europe where the old trade unions had transformed into active ones from 1991.⁷⁵ Despite these two exceptions, in all the transition countries there occurred a sharp decrease of official labor participation (part of the whole population above 15 years old, having or actively looking for jobs)⁷⁶ through emigration⁷⁷ and, though difficult to estimate, increasing levels of prostitution—a by-product of marketization in Eastern Europe.⁷⁸

Health services and education were more difficult to privatize because of popular support for universal rights to access to basic health care and education that had developed as part of the social contract of the old, socialist model. A universal strategy was put forward by the IFIs to spearhead this transition. On the one hand, there were pressures for austerity policies aimed at reducing public financing of those services to equilibrate decreasing taxes on high incomes that, of course, was accompanied with deteriorating effects on the quality of those services. On the other hand, in light of popular dissatisfaction with existing levels of services, to try and convince people of the need for a private sector. A genuine example of this second part of the strategy can be seen in the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development's (EBRD) *Transition Report* of 2007.⁷⁹ At the same time, as public budgets deteriorated the so-called silent revolution on pensions took place that brought with a partial privatization of pension system influenced by three-pillar pension system of the WB.⁸⁰

FROM CATCHING UP TO THE GLOBAL CRISES: THE 2000s

Ten years after German reunification, the EU (and its liberal partners in the East) was confronted with instability both in the Balkan countries, with NATO's war on Kosovo (March–June 1999), and elsewhere with difficulties establishing stable liberal majorities in various parliaments. To consolidate pro-European parties against increasing anti-European nationalisms of different kinds, the decision was taken at the end of the 1990s for a broad integration in the EU of the 10 candidates from Central and Eastern Europe.⁸¹ This had to occur before the 2004 European elections.⁸² In the meantime, a Euroatlantic stabilization was offered to Western Balkan countries: throughout the 2000s, while being under different kinds of international protectorates, they could enter into a specific process of negotiation for European integration.⁸³

This process facilitated a shift in the CSB countries that were more open to foreign capital. The transformation of the banking system, whereby the majority of banking assets became foreign-owned, had begun first in the

Baltic states in the late 1990s.⁸⁴ This process became a general one in Central and Southeastern Europe at the beginning of the 2000s.

In the second half of that decade, from 60 percent to more than 90 percent of private banking assets became foreign-owned—except in Slovenia.⁸⁵ The eastward enlargement of the EU encouraged high flows of FDI and of credits from the Western bank subsidiaries and it also gave to the new middle class and impoverished households feelings of safety in taking out loans. After the transition recession and recovery periods, this new financial turn initiated a third period in the capitalist restoration in Eastern Europe: catching-up. It meant that the rate of growth (measured by GDP growth) was not only positive, but also higher in the new Europe than in the old Europe where it stagnated around 2 percent, against more than 4 percent in the Central and Eastern Europe and above 8 percent in the years 2006 to 2008 for the Baltic states, Croatia and Montenegro.

Yet this demand and credit-led growth produced higher increased foreign trade and current account deficits combined with important private debts in foreign currency. In several countries, Western bank subsidiaries played on exchange rates (often in Swiss Franc) and interest rates to make attractive offers of credits, that later turned into disastrous reversal trends.⁸⁶ Financial operations stimulated loans for housing (sometimes resulting in real estate bubbles as in Croatia or Montenegro) or loans for consumer goods after decades of impoverishment (as in the Baltic states). Against this credit-led growth, the start of the financial crisis and sharp recession in the United States and the Western Europe in 2007 seemed not to affect the stability of Eastern Europe up to the second half of 2008. But a fourth period began in 2009 (and earlier in Hungary) when the recession struck the region. The 2008 EBRD *Transition Report* gave a worrying account:

In central eastern Europe and the Baltic states and south-eastern Europe, where foreign banks dominate, support from foreign parent banks is likely to be reduced as their balance sheets and capital adequacy are tested by the market.⁸⁷

Responding to this test of the market, though with little publicity, the Vienna Initiative was organized in January 2009. This included the European Central Bank and all the national and international banks and IFIs involved in the region.⁸⁸ But even if the Western subsidiaries could be in the short term stabilized, the EBRD seemed to suggest that little could be done: net capital outflows from the transition region in late 2008 and the first quarter of 2009 were generally more moderate than expected but output declines were sharp. Countries with larger pre-crisis credit booms (from foreign-owned or national banks) and higher levels of private external debt at the end of 2007 suffered larger declines.⁸⁹ In 2008–2009, the output decline in the Baltic states was about 15–20 percent (against 4–6% as average in Central and Southeastern Europe); a similar profile occurred

in Montenegro and Croatia but with a much more difficult recovery since then. Albania and, with a larger economy, Poland kept a positive rate of growth during the crisis. Both were not so much dependent on financial bubble and exports as other countries—but the situation in Greece and Italy weakens much Albania.

In stark contrast to its former principles, since 2011 the EBRD now recommends:

Developing local currency finance is key to both vigorous and less volatile growth in the transition region.⁹⁰

But, globally, in spite of a second Vienna Initiative, the 2012 WB *Transition Report* has observed “a significant worsening in the external environment” for the transition region as a whole. The region’s banks have “lost significant external funding” as eurozone banks have withdrawn financing from their subsidiaries in transition countries. This has in turn further “depressed credit growth” and “contributed to slower output expansion.”⁹¹

EASTERN PERIPHERY CONFRONTED TO THE GLOBAL AND EUROPEAN CRISIS

The very uneven recovery that has taken place since 2009 has been mainly export-led: the rapid increases in unemployment and decrease in wages meant weak internal demand behind better competitiveness for exports and slowing down of imports. In 2012 the rate of growth in the Baltic states rose again much above the European average. But the euphoria of the catching up has vanished. The households in the region have had to reduce consumption, particularly for essentials such as staple foods and health care, where 38 percent of households in the transition region reported declines, compared with only 11 percent in Western Europe.⁹² Similarly, reported job losses were twice as high as in Western Europe.⁹³

Already in 2007, the WB Report Enquiry on “People and the Transition” in 2007 had to conclude that “[d]espite relatively low levels of trust in government institutions, many people in the transition countries appear to trust markets even less.”⁹⁴ But after the crisis had hit, an Hungarian journalist wrote in *The Guardian*, “[D]isillusionment with post-1989 life has tempted some to turn against democracy, not just neoliberal economics,”⁹⁵ leading to growth in neo-fascist and xenophobic currents.

The different countries followed different paths, with three dominant uncertainties for the future: the recession already threatening the EU and therefore exports there; the fiscal constraint that is imposed to the public policies in Europe in spite of the fact CSB countries are generally far from the EU’s norms; the control of the banking system. As the IMF states, “there is little doubt that the era of generous parent-funding for

subsidiaries is over."⁹⁶ But the IMF's hope is that parent bank deleveraging will not translate into a reduction of bank credit in "emerging Europe," as long as parent banks reduce exposures gradually (which the Vienna Initiative tends to control) and domestic deposits "and local financial markets fill the void."⁹⁷ Therefore, private credits and export-led growth is still the dominant line.

But Slovenia where domestic and state assets are dominant has resisted in the past the neoliberal-dominant orientation—and shared in the recent period the financial, clientelist, and housing crisis, which in turn did not affect the Czech republic. It means choices and controls are possible. Therefore, the question at stake is threefold, like it could also be stressed in the Greek crisis: What has been and is the socioeconomic orientation of the national dominant political and social forces and their behavior within the state and banking apparatus? What are the European mechanisms (fiscal and budget policies, treaties) responsible of the crisis? What are the choices—even within the existing system and beyond it to protect social rights, human dignity, and environment?

Trade and financial integration of the CSB countries within the EU is now dominant. Whereas export of raw material has been essential in the CIS countries, the CSB countries have rapidly been able to export manufactured goods generally produced through foreign-owned multinational corporations (MNCs)—with a specific articulation with the German car industry in Central Europe. Since the 1990s the forms of new dependences have changed and are diverse: manufacturing subcontracting to MNCs—often dominant in the 1990s; increasing FDI in the 2000s from export-oriented MNCs looking for cheap and qualified labor, flexible labor codes, and low taxes—but also for short-term profits when it took the form of subsidiaries of Western banks, which control more than the half of the banking system in the region now; dependence on remittances of emigrant workers; financial inflows and aid.

But, more deeply, altogether, an organic interaction occurred between the institutional and economical transformation of the European Economic Community into the European Union after the Maastricht Treaty (1992) and the systemic transformation of Eastern Europe beginning with the German reunification: while the EU became more and more a single market, inequalities could only increase between and within each countries, covered by global catching up indicators. Eastern Europe was to attract FDI through social and fiscal competition, offering competitive advantages on wages and taxations. But the whole process is affecting new working poor everywhere—including in Germany. Credits and external unbalance have boosted a fragile growth: "foreign-owned companies appears as substantial importers," which was not balanced by exports "in the cases of retailing, construction, parts of manufacturing or finance";

and “the initial capital inflow was also gradually balanced by an outflow of repatriate profits.”⁹⁸ The crisis in 2009 revealed those weaknesses. But the issue of fiscal policies, democratic control on choices, and protection of social services and human rights is a general one that the European construction has consolidated, in a way, as a European issue.

In spite of the social shocks produced by the crisis since 2008, the EBRD has found that while this has led into a “slow-down in reform,” unlike the 1998 crisis in Russia, “it has not triggered a major reversal.”⁹⁹ Rather, in parallel with the EU, there has been a general shift towards “ordo-liberalism” (neoliberalism with strong rules and institutions as in Germany). This upholds the combination of ideologies under the notion that successful transition requires market mechanisms and the private sector but with “effective interaction between the state and private sectors and high-quality state institutions.”¹⁰⁰ The EU’s ongoing recession and crises does not mean any return to the welfare state, let alone socialism.¹⁰¹ Strong states are needed to impose markets against increasing revolts and to socialize risks taken by the financial sector. As Ursula Huws has surmised, the crisis has opened an opportunity for new accumulation through public service commodification¹⁰² whilst the criteria of competitiveness produces more of the working poor.

Therefore Eastern European countries combine features and crisis of the global neoliberal financial capitalism, increased by the unbalanced European construction and by the sociopolitical destruction of the former social contract. While the revolutions and social transformations of the 20th century meant to break with financial and trade dependence from core capitalist Western countries—Germany, UK, and France, mainly—the people in the Balkans were both fighting for national and social liberation, and resisting fascism and foreign occupation. Nationalism and xenophobia was not the answer, yesterday like today. The new Balkan Social Forum, meeting in 2012 in Croatia, wanted to overcome artificial divisions among members or nonmembers of the eurozone or even of the EU. They claimed the public sphere and urban space to articulate their demands. They placed, once again, the “issue of ownership and democratic management” as the “crucial question of our future” with “[r]eal, ever-deepening and radical democracy” as “the ideal of progressive and leftist forces around the world.”¹⁰³ This sounds very much like an echo of Milan Kundera’s judgment in 1968 during the Autumn of workers councils that resisted the Moscow-led occupation in Prague. Kundera’s statement provides an appropriate assessment of the possibilities that lay ahead:

Socialism, the logic of which is to identify itself with freedom and democracy, cannot but create a kind of freedom and democracy that the world has never known.¹⁰⁴

NOTES

1. Eastern Europe is used here in a geopolitical and inclusive sense: it covers, without exceptions, all the countries which claimed to be socialists as opposed to Western Europe. The World Bank (WB) distinguishes Central and Southeastern Europe and the Baltics (CSB) and the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), which regrouped 12 out of the 15 Republics of the USSR—the three Baltic states being out—with different status. In 2009, Georgia left it.

2. I use here Immanuel Wallerstein's World System's concepts and theory, like expressed in *The Modern World System II: Mercantilism and the Consolidation of the European World-Economy, 1600–1750* (New York: Academic Press, 1980). But I interpret the revolutions that occurred in the 20th century as a break with the domination of core imperialist countries—which opens the debate on a new kind of peripherization since 1989.

3. Moshe Lewin, *The Soviet Century* (London: Verso, 2005).

4. They are now called new member states (NMS): eight became members in 2004—the Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Slovenia, and the Slovak Republic, joined by two additional members, Rumania and Bulgaria, in 2007. The next candidates are from the “Western Balkans,” among which Croatia has joined the EU in July 2013.

5. The elaboration of such Black book should be organically linked with collective intellectual and social initiatives resisting to official histories of past and present dictatorships.

6. I will use this expression for the countries claiming to be socialists. It leads to questioning the way they legitimize this claim and the gap between their claim and the reality of social relations.

7. I share Michael Lebowitz's methodology as presented in *The Contradictions of Real Socialism. The Conductor and the Conducted* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 2012).

8. See Ernest Mandel's *Works* in Internet Archives (<http://www.ernestmandel.org/en/works/index.htm>) on the Soviet economy and debates and “The Soviet 1920s Debate on the Law of Value—A Critical Review and Update” in Catherine Samary, Notebook no. 7/8, *Plan, Market and Democracy*, (Amsterdam: IIRE, 1988), 38–58. <http://www.iire.org/en/publications>.

9. Leon Trotsky, *The Permanent Revolution* (1931). As this one, Trotsky's texts and debates within the Trotskyite movement can be found on <http://www.marxists.org/archive/trotsky/1931/tpr/index.htm>.

10. Rosa Luxemburg, *The Russian Revolution/Leninism or Marxism* (Ann Arbor: University Michigan Press, 1961).

11. Moshe Lewin, *Lenin's Last Struggle* (New York: Random, 1968).

12. Trotsky, *The Revolution Betrayed* (1936: Archives, note 9).

13. See Vladimir Dedijer, *The Battle Stalin Lost. Memoirs of Yugoslavia—1948–1953* (New York: Viking, 1972). On recent resistance to new official history look at <http://uneventment.blogspot.fr/>

14. John C. Campbell, *Tito's Separate Road* (New York and Levenston: Harper & Row, 1967).

15. Ernest Mandel, *On Bureaucracy* (London: IMG, 1973).

16. Lebowitz, note 7, 67–87.

17. Janos Kornai, *The Economics of Shortage* (Amsterdam: North Holland, 1980); Włodzimierz Brus, *Socialist Ownership and Political Systems* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1975).

18. Lebowitz, 142–146.

19. Moshe Lewin, *Political undercurrents in Soviet Economic Debates. From Bukharin to the Modern reformers* (London: Pluto, 1975).

20. See http://www.ernestmandel.org/fr/ecrits/txt/1965/le_grand_debat_economique.htm and Samary, “Mandel’s Views on the Transition to Socialism,” *Europe-Solidaire-Sans-Frontières*, 1997, http://www.europe-solidaire.org/spip.php?page=article_impr&id_article=2807

21. See Samary, “‘Market socialism’—The Yugoslav Experience 1965–1971,” *Plan, Market and Democracy*, note 8, 28–37.

22. See Vladimir-Claude Fisera and Jean-Pierre Faye, *Prague: La révolution des conseils ouvriers. [The Revolution of Workers Councils] 1968–1969* (Paris: Robert Laffont, 1978).

23. Edvard Kardelj, *The Contradictions of Social Property in a Socialist System* (Belgrade: STP, 1981).

24. Marie Lavigne, *International Political Economy and Socialism* (Cambridge, Paris: Cambridge University Press, Maison des Sciences de l’Homme, 1991).

25. On the Yugoslav crisis, see Suzan Woodward, *Balkan Tragedy. Chaos and Dissolution after the Cold War* (Washington, DC: The Brookings Institution, 1995); Catherine Samary, *The Yugoslav Fragmentation*, Notebook n°19–20, (Amsterdam: IIRE, 1992), <http://www.iire.org/en/publications>

26. See Peter Gowan, “*The Twisted Road to Kosovo: The Origin of NATO’s Attack on Yugoslavia*,” *Labor Focus on Eastern Europe*, n° 62, 1999.

27. See *Labor Focus on Eastern Europe’s Archives 1980s and 1990s*, <http://labourfocus.gn.apc.org/archive.html>

28. *Ibid.*

29. See David Mandel, “Economic Reform and Democracy in the Soviet Union,” *Socialist Register*, Vol. 24, 1988 Problems of Socialist Renewal. East and West, <http://socialistregister.com/index.php/srv/article/view/5915#.URJnOjaPw4>; Patrick Flaherty, “Perestroika and the Soviet Working-Class,” *Studies in Political Economy*, 29, Summer 1989, <http://spe.library.utoronto.ca/index.php/spe/article/view/13170>

30. Timothy Garton Ash, *We the People* (London: Penguin, 1993).

31. Vicken Cheterian (dir) *From Perestroika to Rainbow Revolutions* (London: Hurst Publishers, 2013).

32. Bruni de la Motte, “East German lost much in 1989,” *The Guardian*, November 8, 2009, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/commentisforce/2009/nov/08/1989-berlin-wall/print>

33. *Idem.*

34. I was sent to the congress by the University’s teachers union.

35. Versions of the program were published in *Labor Focus on Eastern Europe*, Vol. 5, Nos. 1–2, Spring 1982. Broad parts have been reproduced on: http://www.bolshevik.org/Pamphlets/Solidarnosc/solidarnosc_appendix.html

36. Program’s Thesis 1 (note 38).

37. *Ibid.* Program’s Thesis 9, 10, 11, 17.

38. *Ibid.* Program’s Thesis 20.

39. See Martin Myant and Jan Drahokoupil, "Poland's Shock Therapy," in *Transition Economies. Political Economy in Russia, Eastern Europe and Central Asia*, 93–94 (Hoboken: John Wiley & Sons and Library of Congress, 2011).
40. *Ibid.*, 58.
41. *Ibid.*, 59.
42. See Eyal Gill et al. *Making Capitalism without Capitalists—The New Ruling Elites in Eastern Europe* (London: Verso, 1998); Georges Mink and Jean-Charles Szurek, *La grande conversion. Le destin des communistes en Europe de l'Est* (Paris: Le Seuil, 1999).
43. Gilles Favarel-Garrigues, *Policing Economic Crime in Russia: From Soviet Planning to Privatization* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011).
44. Janos Kornai, *From Socialism to Capitalism* (Budapest: Central European University Press, 2008); Tamás Kraus and Péter Szigeti, eds., *Ezmelet/Consciousness. Selected Essays in English* (Budapest: Eszmélet, 2005).
45. On different national choices, see Nicole Renee Lindstrom (PDF), "Economic Nationalism in the New Europe" (London: Nanovic Institute for European Studies, London, Conference "European Identities?" October 17–18, 2008), <http://nanovic.nd.edu/research-publications/conference-papers/europea>
46. Maria Jarosz, ed., *Ten Years of Direct Privatization* (Warsaw: Institute of Political Studies 2000).
47. See Myant and Drahokoupil, *Transition Economies*, 238–244.
48. *Ibid.*, 96–98.
49. *Ibid.*, 292.
50. *Ibid.*, 249–250.
51. *Ibid.*, 235–258. About the Russian transformations see Peter Reddaway, *The Tragedy of Russia's Reforms* (Washington, DC: United States Institute of Peace Press, 2001).
52. *Idem*, Ch. 13, "Privatization," 237–257.
53. Sophie Brana et al., *La transition monétaire russe. Avatars de la monnaie, crises de la finance (1990–2000)* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2002).
54. Jacques Sapir, *Le Krach russe* (Paris: La Découverte, 1998).
55. See European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD), *Transition Report 2012 ("Integration across Borders")*, ch. 4, pp. 62–78.
56. World Bank (WB), *Transition: The First Ten Years*, Transition Development Report, Overview, xv.
57. *Ibid.*, xv. On CBS and CIS see note 1.
58. *Ibid.*, 3.
59. See Nicole Renee Lindstrom, note 48.
60. WB, *Ibid.*, xv.
61. *Ibid.*
62. *Ibid.*, "How Did the Transition Economies Perform?" 3.
63. For example, see the comments on the pricing of oil in Russia in 1992. *Ibid.*, xvi.
64. *Ibid.*, Box 1. "Increased Inequality," xiv.
65. *Ibid.*
66. *Ibid.*, 187.
67. UNICEF, *Women in Transition—A Summary*. UNICEF, Regional Monitoring Report Summary no. 6 (1999), <http://www.unicef-irc.org/publications/pdf/monee6/cover.pdf>

68. *Ibid.*, 13–14.

69. Myant and Drahoukupil, *The Transition Economies*, 28–31, 185–212.

70. *Ibid.*, 188–189.

71. *Ibid.*, 189.

72. *Ibid.*, Annex, Table A4.

73. *Ibid.*, 190.

74. *Ibid.*, Annex Table A4.

75. See Chris Den Hond and Lucien Perpette, “Impressive Mobilisation at the Edge of Capitalist Europe,” February 2008, *International Viewpoint*, January 11, 2008. <http://internationalviewpoint.org/spip.php?article1412>

76. Myant and Drahoukupil, *The Transition Economies*, 186, Figure 10.1.

77. *Ibid.*, 190–191.

78. See Jelena Bjelica, *Prostitution: l’esclavage des filles de l’Est* (Courier des Balkans/Paris Méditerranée: 2005).

79. EBRD’s TR2007, v. <http://www.ebrd.com/downloads/research/transition/TR07.pdf>

80. See Myant and Drahoukupil, *The Transition Economies*, 194–199, 194–196 and Box 10.2.

81. See note 4.

82. G. Buster “From Poverty to Misery,” *International Viewpoint*, May 6, 2002, <http://www.internationalviewpoint.org/spip.php?article455#nb16>

83. “Western Balkan” in the EU’s terminology includes Albania and the former Yugoslav republics, except Slovenia. On NATO and EU in the Balkan see Jean Arnaut Dérens et al. “Quelles perspectives pour les Balkans?” (Cahiers de l’IDRP, juin 2009), 14–30. www.institutidrp.org/institut/CAHIERS_idrp_062009.pdf

84. See EBRD Transition Reports Archives, Country Reports with data on banking. <http://www.ebrd.com/pages/research/publications/flagships/transition/archive.shtml>

85. See Lindstrom, note 48.

86. See Catherine Samary, “Towards a social and banking tsunami in East/West Europe,” April 2009. <http://www.europe-solidaire.org/spip.php?article13710>

87. EBRD TR 2008, 6.

88. On Vienna Initiative One (in 2009) and Two (since 2011), see <http://vienna-initiative.com/>

89. EBRD TR 2009, 6.

90. EBRD 2010, 4.

91. EBRD 2012, 4.

92. EBRD TR 2011, 6.

93. *Ibid.*, 3. “Household hit hard in the crisis.”

94. EBRD TR 2007, 7.

95. Gyula Hegyl, “How Capitalism Let Hungary down,” *The Guardian*, November 6, 2009. <http://www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/series/1989-year-of-revolutions>

96. IMF report on line, June 13, 2012. <http://blog-imfdirect.imf.org/2012/06/13/lost-found-in-eastern-europe-replacing-funding-by-western-europes-banks/>

97. *Ibid.*

98. Myant, Drahoukupil, “The Pros and Cons of Foreign Ownership,” *Transition Economies*, 252–253.

99. EBRD TR 2009, 6.

100. Ibid.

101. On EU crisis, see Henri Wilno, "Europe: Facing the 'Crisis of Our Time,'" *International Viewpoint*, August 7, 2012. <http://internationalviewpoint.org/spip.php?article2717>

102. Ursula Huws, "Crisis as Capitalist Opportunity: The New Accumulation through Public Service Commodification," *Socialist Register* 48 (2012): 64–85.

103. "Another Balkans Is Possible!" Subversive Festival: The Utopia of Democracy, Zagreb, June 4, 2012. <http://www.subversivefestival.com/newsiteml/3/104/en/the-1st-balkan-forum-another-balkans-is-possible>

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CHAPTER 4

The Rise of the Red Dragon: China as the New Superpower?

Alexander L. Vuving

INTRODUCTION

When the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) emerged victorious from the Chinese civil war and established the People's Republic of China (PRC) in 1949, it proclaimed that "the Chinese people have stood up." A century earlier, China was defeated at the hands of a few Western powers that were regarded as barbarians by the Chinese. The century that followed was ingrained in the Chinese collective psyche as a "century of humiliation." It has been the dream of generations of Chinese patriots that their country will one day regain its lost power and status. Chinese communism was born in this dream.¹

The history of the PRC is a history of attempts to rapidly catch up with the world's top powers and of the power struggles that ensued if the attempt failed. The first attempt—the Great Leap Forward—was launched by Mao Zedong in 1958 to boost agricultural and industrial production at an unprecedented pace. Its slogan was to "catch up with and surpass Britain in fifteen years." Carried out in distrust of technical knowledge, it resulted in a great leap backward, causing the deaths of tens of millions of people. The catastrophe dealt a huge blow to Mao's position, and in 1959 he was forced to resign as president of the PRC. Losing power and prestige following the Great Leap Forward, Mao engaged in restless power struggles with his critics, launching the destabilizing Cultural Revolution in 1966, which ended only after his death in 1976.

The second attempt—Reform and Opening—was initiated by Deng Xiaoping in 1978. Like with the Great Leap Forward, the primary aim of Reform and Opening was also a rapid rise of Chinese power and

ultimately the restoration of China's top place in the society of countries. As a daughter of Deng explained, "In the mid-1970s, my father looked around China's periphery, to the small dragon economies [Singapore, Hong Kong, Taiwan, and South Korea]. They were growing at eight to ten percent per year and these economies had a considerable technological lead over China. If we were to surpass them and resume our rightful place in the region and ultimately the world, China would have to grow faster than them."² Contrary to the Great Leap Forward, Reform and Opening stressed pragmatic adaptation and respected technical knowledge. By liberalizing the country's productive forces and opening it to the outside world, this second attempt has brought China to an unprecedented growth path. More than three decades of rapid economic growth have catapulted China from the largest poor country to the second largest power in the world. Today China is second only to the United States in terms of the main indicators of power—gross domestic product (GDP) and military expenditures.

Will China be the new superpower? Will it be able to rival the United States for the top place in the international arena? The rise and fall of the great powers in the last 500 years suggests that a state's power relative to other states ultimately rests on its economic capacity.³ To answer the preceding questions, this chapter examines the growth prospects of the Chinese economy and compares them with those of the United States. I argue that China will most likely be the new superpower. However, the success of China also bears the seeds of its failure. The growth model that catapults China to a peer competitor to the United States will likely collapse rather than be restructured to a more sustainable one. There is a good chance that China will overtake the United States as the world's largest economy but there is an equally large chance that Chinese economic primacy will be a transient phenomenon.

This chapter is organized into three sections. The first examines the drivers of Chinese growth. The high speed and long duration of China's economic growth is explained by the ability of the communist regime to pursue a cult of investment at the expense of personal consumption and marry it with a capitalist and globalizing economy. An important feature of China's rise is that it rests on extreme imbalances, the economically most important of which are the super-high level of investment and super-low level of personal consumption as a proportion of GDP. The second section looks at the limits of Chinese growth. These include the natural limits set by demographics and the political economic limits set by the growth model itself. The combined effect of these structural limits will make major crises in the Chinese economy inevitable. Based on this analysis, the third section estimates the future of Chinese growth. I compute three scenarios—the best case, the worst case, and the most likely case—of China's economic growth and compare them with the growth prospects of the United States.

THE DRIVERS OF CHINESE GROWTH

Throughout the last three and a half decades, the Chinese economy expanded nearly 10 percent a year. Such a long period of very high growth in a large country has no precedent in world history. In two other economic miracles, Japan's high growth period lasted only two decades, from the early 1950s to the early 1970s, while South Korea's takeoff stage lasted for 34 years, from 1963 until 1996, with an average annual rate of 8.3 percent. What are the drivers of China's stellar economic rise? The growth of any economy can be attributed to the increase in one or more of the three factors—labor, capital, and productivity. According to Dwight Perkins and Thomas Rawski's estimates, the contribution of labor, computed as education-enhanced labor hours, to China's GDP growth has diminished from 24.2 percent in the period 1978–1990 to 10.8 percent in the period 1990–2005. They also estimate that China's workforce will peak in the mid-2010s and thereafter decrease more sharply than it has risen.⁴ Labor growth has contributed marginally to the rise of China in the last decade, and it will further become less important in the decades to come. China's economic growth in the last decades has resulted primarily from growth in capital investment and total factor productivity (TFP) and it will remain so in the future.

Since its inception the PRC has persistently poured huge amounts of capital into the economy. Led by the ambition of rapidly catching up with the more advanced countries, China seems to follow a cult of investment in its economic policy. Data of the Chinese National Bureau of Statistics exhibit a long-term trend of ever-rising shares of gross fixed investment in GDP throughout the six decades of the PRC. Many other countries also have a long-term trend of rising investment ratio, but China is exceptional in two aspects. Its capital investment rose faster and the rise kept going for longer. India, for example, started at about 10 percent in the early 1950s and reached 25 percent in the mid-2000s. China also started at about the same level as India did in the early 1950s but it already reached the 25 percent range by the mid-1970s, and in the mid-2000s its level was 40 percent. Among the Asian Tigers, the country with the highest historical investment rates was South Korea. But South Korea's upward trend lasted only four decades and the shares exceeded the 33 percent level for only one decade. In China's case, investment has remained higher than 33 percent of GDP for more than three decades now, and it does not seem likely to fall under that level any time soon. During the global recession of 2009–2012, China's investment ratio surged to nearly 50 percent, a record figure by international standards. By comparison, the historical peak of Japan's investment rate (reached in 1973) was 36.4 percent of GDP, that of South Korea (1991) 38 percent, and that of Thailand (1991) 41.6 percent.⁵

The cult of investment is made possible by robust domestic savings. China's savings rate is extremely high by both international standards and historical experience. It has never fallen under 30 percent of GDP since

1985 and has been over 50 percent since 2006. By comparison, those of Japan and Korea have never risen above the 40 percent level.⁶ There is a high propensity to save by all sectors of the Chinese economy—the household, the corporate, and the government. In the pre-reform era, the rate of investment was a government decision realized by its ability to generate high savings through high monopoly profits in the industry.⁷ In the reform era, the high investment rate has stemmed mostly from huge savings on the part of the private households, retained profits of enterprises, and since the late 2000s, also from government savings.⁸ Although China is a top destination of foreign direct investment (FDI), this external source never exceeded 18 percent of China's total fixed investment. The share of FDI inflows in China's capital formation started to surge in 1992, peaking at 17.1 percent in 1994 and gradually decreasing to 7 percent in the mid-2000s.⁹

A key feature of China's approach to economic development is that it sacrifices personal consumption in pursuit of the cult of investment. A long-term trend in the Chinese economy is the decline of the consumption ratio. This does not mean that consumption did not rise. Household and government consumption grew in absolute terms, but while government expenditures largely kept pace with GDP growth, household consumption rose far more slowly than GDP, resulting in a decline of its share in GDP. From over 60 percent of GDP in the early 1950s, household consumption fell to around 50 percent in the late 1970s, only to drop further to the 35 percent range in the late 2000s. By contrast, Japanese personal consumption never fell under 50 percent of GDP. Also, South Korea's and Taiwan's private consumption reached the lowest historical point at 49.1 and 47.2 percent in 1988 and 1986, respectively.¹⁰

Sacrificing personal consumption in pursuit of the cult of investment has been the PRC's consistent approach to economic development throughout its existence. The same approach led, however, to very different results. The average growth rate in the three decades of the pre-reform period (1950–1979) was 4.5 percent a year. In the past three decades of the reform era (1980–2012) it was 10 percent. The reason for this vast difference lies in the ability of the Chinese state and economy to innovate and boost productivity.

China's productivity has been enormously improved in the last three decades chiefly by two structural changes and two openings. The structural changes were the processes by which hundreds of millions of former farmers became industrial workers and labor and other resources were reallocated from state-owned enterprises (SOEs) to public-private hybrids and nonstate companies. Working under harder budget constraints while freer in making decisions, the latter generally outperform SOEs in productivity.¹¹ The two openings refer to China's integration with the world market and its acceptance of FDI. The integration with

the world market brought in innovation and enhanced efficiency through the effects of a larger market, the international division of labor, and the exposure of domestic firms to the discipline of greater market forces. The inflow of FDI introduced the Chinese to new technologies, management skills, business practices, access to foreign markets, and other intangible assets. The role of FDI in technology transfer and market access is reflected in the fact that by the mid-2000s foreign-invested enterprises accounted for nearly 60 percent of China's foreign trade and almost 90 percent of its high-tech-related exports.¹²

In addition to the structural changes and international openings, the Chinese government's aggressive policy of technology promotion is a source of China's productivity growth. The government creates ample incentives for technology transfer and research and development (R&D) on Chinese soil. Foreign investors in high-tech industries are given preferential treatment. The government directs large amounts of resources into selected industries that are high-tech-based and innovation-intensive, such as information technology, computer science, new materials, alternative energy, nanotechnology, biotechnology, aerospace, and oceanography. Illustrative of China's aggressive R&D policy are the 863 and 973 programs, named after the time of their launch, March 1986 and March 1997, respectively, in which the government supports innovative research in themes determined by experts.¹³

THE LIMITS OF CHINESE GROWTH

The rise of China in the past three decades resulted chiefly from the country's extraordinary ability to save and invest, the massive allocation of labor and resources from agriculture to manufacturing and services and from the state to the nonstate sector, and the influx of foreign technology and know-how. These sources drove up growth by enormously reducing the costs of capital, labor, and technology and optimizing the use of resources. China's rise has not come to an end even after more than three decades of high growth—an unprecedented phenomenon—mainly because the potentials have been gigantic. Yet these sources will not last forever. When they are exhausted, China will face a systemic slowdown. When will the turning point arrive?

The main triggers of this slowdown process could be two structural shifts in China's demographics. The first shift occurs when the pool of surplus labor from the rural areas dries up and, as a consequence, wages rise immensely. The rising costs of labor will make the country's products less price competitive, leading to a systemic slowdown in economic growth. This shift is known as the Lewis turning point, which has been experienced in many countries, including Japan, Korea, and Taiwan. The turning point is actually a period, stretching from the first turning point,

when the growth of labor demand exceeds the growth of labor supply, to the second, when wages in both agriculture and manufacturing are determined by their respective marginal productivities of labor.¹⁴ Many commentators in the debate over “the end of cheap Chinese labor” did not pay due attention to these details, causing unnecessary controversy.¹⁵ More careful studies suggest that China has already crossed into the Lewis turning period, with the first point occurring in 2004.¹⁶ The experiences of Japan, Korea, and Taiwan suggest that a systemic slowdown will arrive in the second decade after the first Lewis turning point. In the case of China, its gigantic and fragmented labor market and its *hukou* (household registration) system may stretch its Lewis turning period longer than international standards, but on the other hand, they will let the wage effects come earlier. Ross Garnaut and Yiping Huang estimated that the Chinese economy would be structurally transformed as a result of the Lewis turning point by 2020.¹⁷

When the cost advantages of cheap labor, cheap capital, and cheap technology largely disappear, China’s high-growth phase will come to its natural end. This will occur when the process of catching up to advanced foreign technology is virtually complete, urbanization draws to a close, and the effect of the Lewis turning point reaches a critical mass. These processes do not necessarily reach their endpoint at the same time, but historical experience suggests that they usually come together. Perkins and Rawski have observed that Japan, Taiwan, and South Korea all entered the systemic slowdown, in 1971, 1990, and 1992, respectively, when their per capita GDP in purchasing power parity (PPP) terms passed \$13,000 in constant 2005 prices.¹⁸ It is reasonable to assume that this level will also mark the end of the era of cheap labor and cheap technology in China. According to the World Bank’s World Development Indicators, China’s GDP per capita in PPP terms in constant 2005 prices was \$6,819 in 2010 and had grown at an annual rate of 10.32 percent between 2002 and 2010. China’s GDP in market prices during the same period exhibited a real growth rate of 10.78 percent per year. If these figures are reliable and supposing that China will grow at an average rate of 8.5–9.5 percent a year between 2010 and the end of its high-growth phase (i.e., 1–2 percentage points slower than in the preceding decades), China’s watershed year, when the country passes the \$13,000 level, will be 2018. In a pessimistic scenario, a political or economic crisis can bring down the growth rate significantly. The experiences of South Korea and Indonesia with the financial crisis of 1997–1998 suggest that such a crisis can reduce the average growth rate by 2–2.5 percentage points for a decade. If China’s growth rate in the 2010s is averaged 7 percent a year, a further 2 percentage point lower than the 9 percent level, the country’s takeoff phase will come to an end in 2020. These estimates are remarkably consistent with Garnaut and Huang’s estimates for the Lewis turning point.

The second demographic shift that will structurally curb growth occurs when a shrinking working population lives alongside a growing retired population. Expected to take place beginning from 2013, this situation will start having a devastating impact on growth sometime between the late 2010s and the early 2030s by vastly reducing both savings and the ratio of the productive workforce to the nonproductive population.¹⁹ China's high rate of savings has multiple causes, the most important of which include strong economic growth, a low dependency ratio, and the pressure to save, both created by the one-child policy and the cult of investment.²⁰ This implies that China will be unable to maintain high savings rates when there are substantially fewer working persons to support nonworking ones. In China's rapidly aging society the retirement-age population will reach a critical mass by the early 2030s. When Reform and Opening was launched in 1979, there were about seven working-age persons to every retirement-age one. This ratio shrank to 5.5 to 1 by the early 2010s and is expected to fall below 2.5 to 1 by mid-2030s.²¹

When the Chinese economy will slow down systemically is determined by the natural limits set largely by demographics. The above analysis suggests that China's high-growth period will come to an end sometime in the late 2010s or the early 2020s. Starting from the late 2020s or early 2030s, China's growth rates will be further drastically repressed by the effects of a rapidly aging society.

How the Chinese economy will slow down is determined primarily by the political economic limits set by its growth model. China's super-high growth is due in large part to its ability to maintain super-high investment and super-low consumption. These imbalances have troubling economic and social implications. High dependence on investment spending has created huge industrial overcapacity, eroding economic efficiency and requiring increasing amounts of capital to deliver diminishing returns. The accumulation of bad debts over decades of investment-intensive growth may shrink the Chinese economy into a long period of stagnation. Beside this economic downside, a social implication of China's investment-intensive model is the wide gap between rich and poor, which is already one of the world's widest. China's Gini coefficient, the indicator of the country's income inequality, stood above 0.47 in 2012, down from a peak of 0.49 in 2008 but still higher than the 0.4 mark, which is viewed by experts as the point at which social dissatisfaction may come to a head.²²

Although the need to correct the imbalances was already recognized in the 1990s and the objective of rebalancing has been set as a guiding mission in the national development plans since the mid-2000s, there are forceful factors that continue to keep the Chinese economy on the investment-driven and export-led path of growth. In general, strong incentives for investment continue to exist in the form of cheap costs of labor, capital, and technology. Workers' wages are subdued by the unlimited supply of labor from the countryside. Bank lending rates, which

reflect the cost of capital, are kept significantly lower than the rates of return on capital.²³ Intellectual property rights are poorly enforced while the government aggressively subsidizes technology enhancement. Coupled with China's low currency exchange rates, these cheap costs not only encourage more investment but also ensure that Chinese products are price competitive in the world market. Raising these costs to cool down investment is not an approach the Chinese government can pursue. Although imbalances are threatening China's sustainable development, high growth remains the most effective way to satisfy its more immediate needs, which range from maintaining international competitiveness to preventing social unrest. This dilemma is described by David Beim as "a timing problem: raising wages will impact export competitiveness immediately, but the benefit of wealthier consumers buying more may take many years to evolve. The old model must be disadvantaged well before the new model can take hold."²⁴

In addition to the cost and timing problems, there are two political constellations that ensure that any efforts to rebalance the Chinese economy will hit a brick wall. The first concerns the local governments, whose revenue comes in half from price difference in land transfer as land in China is state property.²⁵ It is thus in the core interests of local governments to promote the volume rather than the quality of investment. The second constellation involves the SOEs, through which the state exercises control of the economy. The Chinese government has made clear that the state must have absolute control in key industries deemed to be essential to national security and the economic lifeline of China. These critical industries include finance, media, energy, telecommunication, and transportation, among others. The government's view is, as State Assets Supervision and Administration Commission (SASAC) chairman Li Rongrong clarified, that "central SOEs should become heavyweights" and "state capital should play a leading role" in these sectors. He declared, "In these sectors, State-owned assets should expand in volume and optimize in structure, and some key enterprises should grow into leading world businesses."²⁶ However, SOEs are inherently inefficient due to their role as a political tool of the state, their monopolistic position in some sectors, and their public ownership. Receiving more than three-quarters of total investment, they produce only one-quarter to one-third of the country's output.²⁷ In any case, the state-controlled banks have to pour vast monies into the SOEs, either to expand the profitable firms or to bail out those making losses. In addition to this propensity, there exists at the local level an intricate relationship that favors extending loans to SOEs on a policy or even personal rather than commercial basis. One report describes: "Local officials have enormous leverage over the banks, because they administratively supervise the local branches of the state banks, they negotiate with the central bank over the amount of loan quota the local banks can lend, they decide

how much of the existing loans to the local SOEs are to be repaid, and they are in a position to assist the banks in such matters as hiring, housing, and education of bank employees' children."²⁸

The results of the 11th Five-Year Plan have clearly shown how effectively these tendencies defied even the top leaders' political will. Already in 2005, the 11th Five-Year Plan set the target for the economy to grow at an annual rate of 7.5 percent for the period 2006–2010. In the report that promoted this target, Prime Minister Wen Jiabao acknowledged that "slow change in the pattern of economic growth" and "imbalance between investment and consumption" were among the "main problems" in China's economic development. He stressed that the Chinese government needs "to work hard to solve all these problems."²⁹ Despite the political will to rebalance, China's investment rate surged from the 40 percent range at the beginning of the 11th Five-Year Plan to the vicinity of 50 percent at the end of the period. During the same time, the consumption ratio plunged from 40 percent of GDP to a few percentage points over 30, while annual GDP growth rates remained over 9 percent.

Resting on extreme imbalances, China's growth model is unsustainable in the long run. However, due to the structural impediments identified earlier, the change to a more sustainable model will have little chance of being realized until the investment-intensive model actually collapses—under the heavy weight of bad debts accumulated over decades of overinvestment, on the thin layer of household consumption, and intensified by the bursting of social dissatisfaction. A major socioeconomic crisis is awaiting China down the road. After the collapse of the current model, it will take the country several years, possibly even more than a decade, to establish a new normalcy.

THE FUTURES OF CHINESE GROWTH

The future trajectories of China's GDP fall within a wide range according to how severe and how long the crisis of the current model and the transition period to a new normalcy are. To estimate this amplitude, I shall compute three scenarios—the best case, the worst case, and the most likely case—of China's economic growth in the next three decades.

The benchmarks for computing these scenarios are the Japanese and South Korean growth paths. Japan and South Korea are selected because of their growth models' similarity with China's—all are state-led, investment-intensive, and heavily relied on big conglomerates. Also, both Japan and South Korea experienced a major economic crisis at the end of their high-growth period. As China's imbalances are more extreme than Japan's and Korea's, its crisis should be expected to be more severe than those of the other two. Japan's average growth rate was 9.1 percent in the last decade of the high-growth period, 4.5 percent in the first decade of

the slowdown period, and 4.5 in the second decade after the high-growth period. The rates for these three decades in South Korea were 8.9, 5.8, and 3.7 percent, respectively. As if in a regression to the mean, the average growth rates of Japan and South Korea for the two decades that evenly straddle the watershed between the high-growth and slowdown period are 7.2 and 7.3 percent, respectively. Also, Japan's and South Korea's average growth rates for the two decades after the high-growth period are 4.6 and 4.7 percent, respectively.

When compared internationally, these real growth rates must be adjusted to the appreciation or depreciation of the country's currency against the U.S. dollar, which is mainly driven by the Balassa-Samuels effect. In this respect, I use the appreciation (or depreciation, for that matter) of the Chinese yuan and the South Korean won against the U.S. dollar in the decades from 1986 to 2011 as a benchmark. Again, the South Korean experience is selected because of its similarity to the Chinese case. South Korea suffered a major crisis during 1997–1998, in the first decade of its slowdown period, and the country also aged rapidly during the systemic slowdown. The Chinese yuan appreciated by 4.5 percent a year in the decade 2001–2011, whereas the Korean won rose by 5.5 percent a year in the decade 1986–1996. In the decade 1991–2001, the Korean won depreciated by 2.4 percent a year against the U.S. dollar. It also fell by 1 percent a year in the decade 1996–2006, but rose by 1.3 percent a year in the decade 2001–2011.

In the best-case scenario, I assume that China's GDP grows at an average rate of 8 percent during the 2010s. This rate is sufficient to keep unemployment and inflation not too high, while giving some room for boosting consumptions and correcting the wealth gap between rich and poor. A major crisis will still occur in the 2020s but thanks to the corrections made in the previous decade and a competent leadership, the severity of this crisis is only slightly worse than those in Japan and South Korea at the end of their respective high-growth period. For the 2020s and 2030s, therefore, I assume that China's year-on-year growth rate are 5 and 3 percent, respectively. For the Chinese currency, I assume that the yuan appreciates by 5 percent per year in the 2010s, only to fall by 2.5 percent in the crisis decade of the 2020s and rise by 1.5 percent in the recovery decade of the 2030s.

In the most likely case, the crisis of the current development model will brew for more than half a decade before its final outburst at the end of China's high-growth period. The brewing years hold the growth rate down by 2.5 percentage points below the usual 10 percent, making the average rate about 8 percent in 2010s. In the first decade of the slowdown period, the crisis worsens, whereby the Chinese economy grows at a rate similar to that of Indonesia in the decade following its 1997 crisis. As Indonesia actually grew at 2 percent during that decade, I assume that China's growth rate in the 2020s is 3 percent. In the 2030s, the second decade after the crisis, China will slowly recover but the second demographic shift (see the

previous section) will hold the annual growth rate down to 3 percent. For the Chinese currency, I assume that the yuan appreciates by 5 percent in the 2010s, only to fall by 3.5 percent in the 2020s and rise by 1 percent in the 2030s.

In the worst-case scenario, economic turmoil interspersed by popular revolt will dominate the scene in China for a decade after the collapse of the current development model. The severity of the crisis falls in the middle between the ones following the high-growth period in Japan and South Korea and the one following the collapse of communism in Russia. To compare, Russia's growth rate was 4.9 percent in the 1990s and 5.5 percent in the 2000s. For China, I assume that its GDP will expand at an average rate of 7.5 percent in the 2010s, only to stagnate at 0 percent in the 2020s and grow at 4 percent in the 2030s. For the Chinese currency, I assume that the yuan appreciates by 3.5 percent a year in the 2010s, depreciates by 4.5 percent in the 2020s, and rises by 1 percent in the 2030s.

Compared with the growth prospects of China, those of the United States are far easier to estimate. A highly advanced industrial country, the United States faces a virtual ceiling to its rate of growth. Since 1980, for example, there has hardly been a decade in which the U.S. economy grew more than 3.5 percent a year. The experience of the last three decades also suggests that the United States is unlikely to grow more than 3 percent a year for several decades. From 1980 until 2010, for example, the U.S. economy expanded 2.7 percent a year. On the other hand, it faces a far softer demographic constraint than China and most other great powers do. Thanks to a large number of immigrants, by the 2030s, the United States will have a younger and more vigorous workforce than China will. For the sake of simplicity, I compute only one scenario for the GDP of the United States. The projected growth rate of the United States is averaged at 2.3 percent annually for the 2010s, 2.7 percent for the 2020s, and 2.4 percent for the 2030s.

Table 4.1
GDP projections, 2010–2040

| Scenario | Real GDP (trillion U.S. dollars) | | | |
|-------------------------|----------------------------------|------|------|------|
| | 2010 | 2020 | 2030 | 2040 |
| China, best case | 5.9 | 20.7 | 26.2 | 40.9 |
| China, most likely case | 5.9 | 20.7 | 19.5 | 30.5 |
| China, worst case | 5.9 | 17.2 | 10.8 | 17.7 |
| United States | 14.4 | 18.2 | 23.7 | 30.0 |

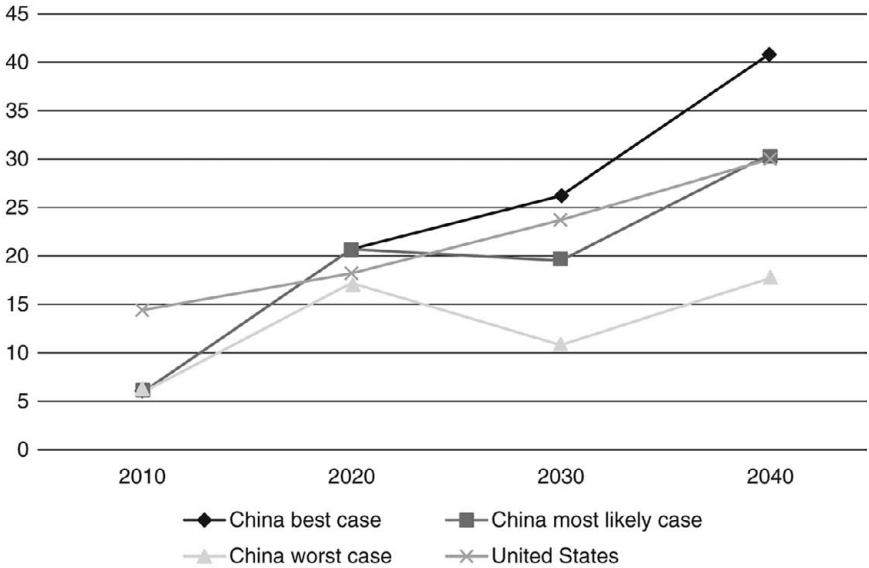


Figure 4.1. GDP projections, 2010–2040 (deflated, in trillion U.S. dollar)

Table 4.1 and Figure 4.1 give us a numerical and visual representation of the scenarios of China's GDP in comparison with that of the United States in the next three decades. They give us an approximate sense of the range of the trajectories of China's economic output and how it will likely stand relative to that of the United States. The estimates suggest that the 2010s will witness one of the most spectacular and momentous catch-up games in history. There is a great chance that by the end of the decade China will overtake the United States as the world's largest economy. But the odds are also high that China's lead over America will be marginal and temporary. However, it is most likely that the game of catch-up between China and America will continue for several decades. In any case, China will be the new superpower, with an annual economic output on par with America's for at least half a decade.

CONCLUSION

The central motive of modern Chinese politics is the aspiration of restoring China's place at the top of the world. Communism was adopted as a means to achieve that dream. For China, communism is not a goal but a vehicle to advance national ambitions. Good materialist as they are, the CCP understands that this is best achieved by increasing the country's economic power. From very early on and incessantly, the PRC has been engaged in major efforts to catch up with the world's economic

powerhouses. The high determination of the Chinese leadership is reflected in drastic measures such as a cult of investment and the one-child policy, which contribute enormously to the longest, fastest, and largest economic growth in history. These drastic measures are, however, only half of the success story. The other half is what China's communist leaders realized after three decades of pursuing self-strengthening, in the late 1970s: that the country must be opened to the capitalist world and compete with it from within, not without.

China's growth model is unsustainable in the long run, however. The most important reason is that it is built on extreme imbalances. Demographic implications of the one-child policy have spurred growth in the last decades but they will impede growth in the coming ones. The cult of investment is pursued at the expense of personal consumption. The result is not just a rapid expansion of economic output but also a wide gulf between rich and poor and a mountain of bad debts, which promise the eventual outburst of social and economic turmoil. China will likely rise to the top of the world but it is also likely that it will stay there only for a short period of time.

Nonetheless, China is most likely to be the new superpower and the next decades will be a time of intense competition between the new superpower and the old one, the United States. It is important to note that an analogy between the emerging Sino-U.S. rivalry and the previous superpower competition between the Soviet Union and the United States can be misleading. The USSR was long on military and ideology but short on economics, whereas the PRC will be long on economics and military but short on ideology.

It is also important to note that in the contest for supremacy, being the world's largest economy is important, but it is not all that is important. Chinese communists certainly know Lenin's dictum, that "in the last analysis, productivity of labor is the most important, the principal thing for the victory of the new system."³⁰ The crux of China's dramatic economic expansion has been the country's ability to mobilize vast amounts of cheap labor, cheap capital, and cheap technology. When these resources dry out and the ability to innovate is the key, China is likely to fall into a wide-ranging socioeconomic and political crisis. The same structures that have enabled China to rise so rapidly in the past decades are forcefully resisting the change to a more sustainable growth model. The moment when China reaches economic primacy in the late 2010s and early 2020s may also be the start of its decline.

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CHAPTER 5

An Enduring Paradox: The Sources of North Korea's Survival and Longevity

Bruce Cumings

INTRODUCTION

The very idea that the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) would persist well into the 21st century would have surprised most of the scholars, government officials, journalists, and pundits who wrote about it in the 1990s, at least in the United States and South Korea. Most of their work and commentary alternated between two extremes, two *idee fixe* that were inherently contradictory: North Korea was on the verge of collapse, and might implode or explode; North Korea possessed nuclear weapons and might sell them to terrorists, or even lash out against the South Korea or Japan. These two dictums were also the Central Intelligence Agency's (CIA) mantra throughout the 1990s, and typically would come up any time, for example, Cable News Network (CNN) featured news about the DPRK: a rogue state on the verge of collapse, armed with nuclear weapons.

In the second decade of this century these remain the two themes that dominate media coverage of North Korea in the United States, in spite of the lengthy time that has passed since the Berlin Wall fell, or the many years since the North demonstrated that it did, indeed, have nuclear weapons. Logic would tell us that there should be a statute of limitations on decades-old predictions of collapse that have been dead wrong, and logic tells us that states acquire nuclear weapons primarily for deterrence, since the use of such weapons inherently risks retaliation by other nuclear powers—and in the case of the DPRK, utter annihilation by the United States (turning it into a “charcoal briquette” to use Colin Powell's metaphor). When

pressed, collapsists will say that China has been propping up the North, or that the North “can’t eat plutonium” (Colin Powell again), that is, their nuclear weapons have gotten them nothing.

What is missing in all this is the nature of the North Korean political system—apart from the endlessly reiterated trope that only a draconian totalitarianism keeps this regime in power (which begs the question of why most other communist systems collapsed). The DPRK has survived in part because it has diverged so fundamentally from Marxism-Leninism, recuperating an older political culture that first took the form of leftwing corporatism, then a ruling doctrine embodying a philosophy that harks back to neo-Confucianism and that has stood Marx on his head, and is now evolving into a modern form of monarchy that, along with the fourth largest military in the world, provides the glue that has kept the DPRK politically stable through the collapse of the Soviet Union and Western communism, a prolonged and dangerous confrontation with the United States over nuclear weapons, the effective collapse of its own industrial and agricultural economy in the mid-1990s, a resulting famine in 1997–98 that killed at least 600,000 people, and the deaths of founding leader Kim Il Sung and his successor son, Kim Jong Il. I will examine all this after assessing some alternative arguments about this regime’s demise and the logic and meaning of the nuclear crisis. And we should always keep in mind that the Korean War, which devastated the North much more than the South, remains unfinished, suspended in an armistice: to collapse is to lose that war, which puts the DPRK in a very different position than East Germany or other Eastern European communist regimes.

“THE COMING COLLAPSE OF NORTH KOREA”

On June 25, 1990, the anniversary of the outbreak of the Korean War 40 years earlier, Nicholas Eberstadt of the American Enterprise Institute wrote an editorial in the *Wall Street Journal*, titled “The Coming Collapse of North Korea.” I cut it out and pasted it to the wall of my study, since I had been making the opposite argument—no collapse—since the Berlin Wall fell; life would teach us who was right. After a number of other such articles, Eberstadt elaborated on his reasoning in his 1999 book, *The End of North Korea* (when a *New York Times* reporter asked John Bolton what the George W. Bush administration’s policy was on the DPRK, he strode to his bookshelf and handed him Eberstadt’s book: that’s our policy, he said). During a conference at the University of British Columbia in 2009, a leading scholar of Korea told the group (all Koreanists) that “we all thought the North would collapse.” I blurted out, “not me.” But he correctly put his finger on the consensus among scholars.

Perhaps this is a normal part of academic life: we all get things wrong from time to time. What is more daunting—and even frightening—is that

bad thinking and bad predictions about the North have lodged at the highest levels of every Democratic and Republican administration since 1989. In 1990 Eberstadt merely expressed the view of the George H.W. Bush administration, and Assistant Secretary of Defense Paul Wolfowitz said it for the George W. Bush administration again in June 2003—"North Korea is teetering on the brink of collapse." In between we heard Gen. Gary Luck, commander of U.S. forces in Korea, say in 1997 that "North Korea will disintegrate, possibly in very short order"; the only question was whether it would implode or explode. In this he was plagiarizing another American commander in Korea, Gen. Robert Riscassi, who was never tired of saying Pyongyang would soon "implode or explode" (Riscassi retired in 1992).¹

This ritualistic thinking has even led to scenarios of how to force the collapse of the DPRK—which, in my view, is to ask for the next, and even more catastrophic, Korean War.

The passage of decades and the DPRK's recalcitrant refusal to collapse and erase itself has little seeming impact on collapsists. Within days of Kim Jong Il's death in December 2012 (and before it was clear how he had died), a knowledgeable Korea scholar who also served in the second Bush administration confidently asserted in the *New York Times* that "North Korea as we know it is over." Whether it comes apart "in the next few weeks or over several months," Victor Cha wrote, "the regime will not be able to hold together after the untimely death of Kim Jong Il." If it somehow managed to persist anyway, it would be because it had become, in effect, "China's newest province."²

Here the argument seems to be that the DPRK has survived only because China does not want it to collapse. There is no question that in recent years North Korea has become heavily dependent on trade with China, and food aid; in 2011 China accounted for more than 53 percent of its total trade.³ But this is also a direct result of the collapse of trade with South Korea after the advent of the hard-line Lee Myung Bak government in 2008; the North's dependency on trade with China was 32 percent at that time, according to IMF figures, while 22 percent was with the South (the Lee government cut off trade in 2010). But let's assume that China has been propping up the North. Why did that hardly insignificant assumption not figure into the logic of nearly a quarter-century of predictions of the North's coming collapse? Kim Il Sung began his guerrilla career by teaming up with Chinese comrades, even if, as scholars like Han Hong-gu have shown, 80 or even 90 percent of the Chinese Communist Party in Manchukuo in the 1930s was made up of Koreans. Korean radicals participated in the Northern Expedition and the Canton Commune in the 1920s, the Long March in the 1930s, and contributed tens of thousands of soldiers to the Red Army in the Chinese Civil War. Mao Zedong then bailed Kim's chestnuts out of a very hot fire (the Korean War) in the late fall of 1950. Kim Il Sung was very close to both Mao and

his long-term successor, Deng Xiaoping, and subsequent Chinese leaders kept in close touch with Kim Jong Il. Why would the current Chinese communist leaders want a border with the Republic of Korea, with its large military (650,000) not only being a virtual replica of American military practices, but with 28,000 U.S. troops still in Korea and frequent joint war games directed not just at the North, but at China as well?

These are elementary facts that should be known to anyone who claims expertise on the North; furthermore, for the North to become a “province” of China would contradict everything the North has stood for since 1945; notice how, very recently, Pyongyang got so bent out of shape when some scholars in China tried to claim that the ancient Korean kingdom of Koguryo was not Korean, but Chinese.

In the case of Nicholas Eberstadt, who first distinguished himself with closely researched studies of population demography in the USSR, which later proved to be true (and harbingers of the even worse situation in post-Soviet Russia), you again have the wrong model in play. He is well informed at the factual level—he understands North Korea to be an industrialized economy in an urban society, unlike the frequently quoted ignoramuses who compare it to Albania or Cambodia or Somalia. Although routinely denounced as Stalinist, North Korea, he wrote, “has too few farmers to permit a policy of ‘squeezing the countryside’ any realistic chance of success” (i.e., a key aspect of Stalin’s rule). Likewise, unlike dozens of others, Eberstadt does not pretend to know how many North Koreans died as a result of the late-1990s famine, citing claims of two to three million but suggesting that it might be closer to the DPRK’s official figure of 200,000.⁴

Eberstadt’s index of comparison, however, is Western communism. Repeating the Cold War mantra that Moscow saw everything in the world through the Marxist-Leninist doctrine of “the correlation for forces” (*sootnoshenie sil*), Eberstadt argues that this is also the basis of North Korea’s global strategy.⁵ If so, Pyongyang should have folded its hand and cashed in its chips in 1989; no other state faced such an incredible array of enemy forces and seemingly insurmountable crises since then, with little help from anyone and universal hopes that it should simply disappear. But here we are more than two decades later, and if you give the DPRK another few years, it will have been in existence for as long as the entirety of the Soviet Union.

Professor Cha and Mr. Eberstadt touch on themes that have framed policy at the highest level. Donald Rumsfeld, secretary of defense in the second Bush administration, knew so astonishingly little about Beijing’s relationship with Pyongyang that he actually called for a joint U.S.-China program to topple the North Korean government; more reasonable American officials, on a bipartisan basis, have frequently tried to get Beijing to bring enough pressure on the North to put an end to its nuclear program.

Secretary of State Hillary Clinton's frequent invocation in 2009–11 of power struggles in the DPRK apparently also derives from an Eberstadt-like communist model of what happened in the USSR after Stalin died, or in China after Mao died. Utterly ignored is what happened when Kim Il Sung died in 1994: nothing.

In 1997 the CIA invited Eberstadt and other outside experts to join a panel of government officials to assess the DPRK's prospects, which concluded that it was likely to collapse within five years. Kim Jong Il, the assembled CIA experts thought, was likely to have just "a brief window of time" to cope with all his difficulties before suffering a probable "hard landing." Without major reform, some "catalyst" would come along "that will lead to collapse." The majority of the group doubted that Kim's regime could persist "beyond five years," yielding a "political implosion." Yet many of them expressed surprise that in spite of the degraded economy and the beginnings of a famine that would soon grow much worse, somehow the "delusionary" (their word) Kim Jong Il "remained firmly in control."

Robert A. Wampler, who obtained this report under the Freedom of Information Act, noted senior Foreign Service officer David Straub's observation that one expert after another came through the Tokyo Embassy in the early 1990s, "pontificating on their prognoses for the inevitable collapse of the North Korean regime, giving odds that allowed Pyongyang anywhere from a few months to perhaps two years before falling."⁶ That did not faze these assembled experts. Among those outsiders whom the CIA invited to this exercise besides Eberstadt were academics Kenneth Lieberthal and Robert Ross, and Daryl Plunk and James Przystup from the Heritage Foundation. No academic experts on North Korea were there (Lieberthal and Ross are China experts), but more surprisingly, neither was anyone from Brookings or the Carnegie Endowment—the liberal anchors of the (remarkably narrow) spectrum of Beltway opinion. Here was the CIA under the Clinton administration reaching out to the right for guidance on "North Korea's coming collapse."

Successive administrations and Beltway pundits get North Korea so wrong because they know next to nothing about its origins, view it through the lenses of Soviet behavior, and cannot come up with any North Korean interests that they deem worthy of respect. For many, it is an outrage that the regime continues to exist at all (this was the dominant opinion in the second Bush administration). But in the end, what difference does this make? Is the DPRK going to erase itself because the CIA or the American Enterprise Institute thinks it should? Eberstadt eventually got tired of predicting the DPRK's collapse and decided to do something about it: in 2004 he argued that America and its allies should waltz in and, in his Reaganesque flourish, "tear down this tyranny."⁷ At the time he had excellent backing for such views in Vice-President Dick Cheney's entourage,

and especially Paul Wolfowitz, John Bolton, and Robert Joseph (Director of Nonproliferation at the National Security Council [NSC]). With the demise of the Bush vision, if one can call it that, enthusiasm for such a course has waned. But it was the preferred policy of hard-liners for several years, amid what Mike Chinoy called the “internal civil war” that shaped Bush’s policies toward North Korea—where most meetings turned into raging shouting matches. After the 9/11 terrorist attacks, for example, Donald Rumsfeld suggested preemptive nuclear strike on rogue states and when it momentarily appeared that the invasion of Iraq would move quickly to victory, he demanded revisions in the basic war plan for Korea (called Operations Plan 5030) and also sought money for new bunker-busting nukes from Congress.⁸ The strategy, according to insiders who have read the plan, was “to topple Kim’s regime by destabilizing its military forces,” so they would overthrow him and thus accomplish a “regime change.” The plan was pushed “by many of the same administration hard-liners who advocated regime change in Iraq.” Unnamed senior Bush administration officials considered elements of this new plan “so aggressive that they could provoke a war.”⁹

In 1995 CIA director John Deutch told Congress that “it is no longer a question of whether North Korea would collapse, but when”; within 48 hours the commanding general of the North Korean army retorted that “it is no longer a question of whether there will be another Korean war, but when.” This tit-for-tat exemplifies the joining together of “coming collapse” with another terrible war on this peninsula. The assumption of Eberstadt, Rumsfeld, and Bolton is that if this regime won’t collapse, it should be forced to collapse. The only assumption that is warranted, in my view, is that if this regime goes down it will go down fighting, with catastrophic consequences for Northeast Asia. The Korean civil war is what distinguishes this situation from those of the USSR and Eastern Europe. Octogenarian officers who fought in this war still hold ultimate power. They know that if the DPRK collapses and is folded into South Korea, like East Germany into West Germany, they will not only have lost this war, but will also have their own place in history erased. For Koreans who take history, family, and genealogy with the utmost seriousness, such an outcome is to be resisted at all costs.

THE NUCLEAR CRISIS: ITERATION AND REITERATION

As it happened the second Korean War was only narrowly avoided in another June, in 1994. President Clinton and his advisors were set on a preemptive strike against the North’s Yongbyon plutonium facility, in full knowledge that this would most likely lead to a North Korean invasion of the South; they were willing to accept this risk, because they thought a nuclear-armed DPRK was a worse outcome. Former president Jimmy

Carter's last-minute intervention not only avoided a new war but also resulted in Kim Il Sung's agreement to a complete freeze of Yongbyon, which lasted for the next eight years.¹⁰

In October 2002 a second nuclear crisis erupted, a virtual rerun of events that transpired eight years earlier—played on fast-forward. The North Koreans pulled out their playbook and began running a very predictable sequel, except they sped it up. What took them more than a year to do in 1993–94, they mostly accomplished in December 2002: the DPRK again kicked the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) inspectors out, took the surveillance cameras, and seals off and reopened their 30 megawatt plutonium reactor and soon began loading new fuel rods. They again castigated the IAEA for being a tool of Washington (most of the IAEA's intelligence on North Korea comes from American agencies), announced their withdrawal from the Non-Proliferation Treaty, and said that any Security Council sanctions would be interpreted as "a declaration of war."¹¹ In the spring of 2003 they frequently threatened to reprocess the 8,000 fuel rods that they recovered from the IAEA, the same ones they removed from their reactor in May 1994, but at the time no one seemed clear on whether the rods were still encased in the concrete casks that the IAEA provided, or whether their reprocessing plant was up and running. Again the North played an elaborate game of braggadocio and bluff about whether it had nuclear weapons or not.

In the United States, it is almost routine now to say that the North cheated on the 1994 agreement, and that it always were intent on acquiring nuclear weapons. But if we designate Pyongyang as Team Blue and Washington as Team Green—rather than Team Red and Team White—we see a different logic: that anyone in the North's predicament at the time would have worked feverishly to gain a nuclear deterrent. In September 2002 the NSC released a new Bush doctrine moving beyond the Cold War staples of containment and deterrence, toward preemptive attacks against adversaries that might possess weapons of mass destruction. This doctrine came out of Dick Cheney's shop, but Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice tried to parse its meaning for the press: preemption is "anticipatory self-defense," that is, "the right of the United States to attack a country that *it* thinks could attack it first."¹² In the document itself we read that other nations, however, "should [not] use preemption as a pretext for aggression." When actually implemented against Iraq in March 2003, it turned out to be a strategy of preventive war, with goals of "regime change," liberation, and rollback. Just in case including the DPRK in the "axis of evil" did not get Pyongyang's attention, someone in the White House leaked Presidential Decision Directive 17 in September 2002, which listed North Korea as a target for preemption.

In the lead-up to the Iraq War Colin Powell noted the "Pottery Barn" dictum, that is, "if you broke it, you own it." A few weeks after tabling

the preemptive doctrine Bush sent James Kelly, a State Department functionary, to Pyongyang to accuse them of harboring a second nuclear program utilizing highly enriched uranium (HEU), and in the immediate aftermath of this visit Bush broke the precious piece of pottery called the 1994 Framework Agreement, which had kept the North's Yongbyun plutonium complex frozen for eight years. The North reacted by taking back the plutonium complex, as we have seen, and got busy manufacturing an unknown number of nuclear weapons—and, in spite of much Bush administration bluster to the contrary, faced no significant penalties short of a slap on the wrist (pursuing a tiny bank in Macau, mostly unenforced UN sanctions, etc.). In October 2006 the North blew off a small plutonium device, and then in May 2009 another one of significant power, in the four to five kiloton range. It is entirely possible that this would have happened sooner or later, regardless of American actions. But history will record that the North's full stock of plutonium was frozen under round-the-clock IAEA surveillance for eight years, which has an import for North Korean motives that cannot be denied (i.e., unlike Iran they were willing to trade their nuclear capability for normalized relations with the United States), and that the Framework Agreement of 1994 was purposely torpedoed by the Bush administration, amid direct threats of preemptive attack that any government would have to take with the utmost seriousness. Here again, the lesson is that the Korean War and the always-tense conflict situation on the peninsula in the past 60 years should be uppermost in the minds of American policymakers; instead they rattle threats of war on a bipartisan basis.

THE NORTH KOREAN SYSTEM

Karl Marx was an analyst and a critic of capitalism. Even when it came to socialism and communism, he was still more interested in explicating capitalism. He thus offered little guidance and no clear political model for a future socialist state, only a highly opaque set of prescriptions (mainly in the *Critique of the Gotha Programme* and some scattered remarks on the dictatorship of the proletariat). It was Lenin who turned Marxism into a political theory, making the dictatorship of the proletariat into the dictatorship of the politburo, and, some argue, transforming Marxism into a voluntaristic practice that left open the possibility of the extreme statism of Stalin, in which politics from on high became the agency for engineering an entire economy and society. But the political vacuum in Marxism-Leninism also opens the way to an assertion of indigenous politics, and this may even be demanded by the very paucity of political models.

In an era of revolution that now seems almost archaic, Marxism-Leninism seemed to be a talisman that made all things possible, rapid and millennial change that would wipe away the past. Recent history has

demonstrated that Marxism-Leninism had far less transformative effect than either its proponents or its opponents cared to admit. We all know how hard it is to change old habits; when those accumulate into a general practice—a culture—they prove far more recalcitrant than revolutionaries can know. Thus 20th-century revolutions were grafted onto existing, long-standing roots and, while seeking to transform the roots, were themselves transformed as peoples and societies rendered them intelligible to their lives. This has proved truer in Korea than perhaps any place else, precisely because of the very unfamiliarity of the setting to this fundamentally Western set of ideas. Korea had a minuscule proletariat, the beginnings of capitalism, and far too much internationalism (capitalist-style) by 1945. It therefore took from Marxism-Leninism what it wanted and rejected much of the rest. This is a tightly held, total politics, with enormous repressive capacity and many political victims—although no one really knows how repressive it is, how many political prisoners there are, and the like, because of the exclusionism and secrecy of the regime. (Since the mid-1970s reports have suggested as many as 100,000 people are held in prisons and reform-through-labor camps, and more recently defectors have validated these reports; if and when the regime falls we will probably learn of larger numbers and various unimaginable atrocities, as with the other communist states.) But over time a unique political system evolved within the Marxist-Leninist crucible and is fully in place today. Under Kim Il Sung it can best be compared to varieties of corporatism around the world or in the past, a kind of socialist corporatism.

Corporate doctrines of politics have a venerable tradition, particularly in Iberian and Iberian-influenced states. Conservative corporatism sought to recapture an idealized, bygone past of communitarianism and realize it in an organic politics, and was a prevalent ideology in the 19th-century among romantic anticapitalists, and antiliberals. It idealized hierarchy, fixed social position, commonly shared values (usually vectored through the Catholic church), and closed communities. The metaphor of the body (often Christ's body) extended to the body politic, idealization of a father-figure as leader, and past and present united in a great chain of being. As Roberto Unger put it, "Forgetful of history, [corporatism] proposed to resolve the problems of bureaucracy by reviving the very forms of social order whose dissolution created these problems in the first place."¹³ Its most recent examples are the decades-long rule of Franco in Spain and Salazar in Portugal.

Less well known are leftwing versions of corporatism. Political theorists like Robert Michels, Vilfredo Pareto, and the Rumanian Mihail Manoilescu moved from a sophisticated and interesting corporate conception of socialism to more-or-less egregious sympathy with 1930s Fascist regimes. Their doctrine of neosocialist corporatism has interesting similarities with North Korea. Their fundamental departure from Marxism was to

substitute nation for class and to develop a conception of a world system of advantaged and disadvantaged (or bourgeois and proletarian) nations. For Manoilescu, "the organic, 'productivist,' vertically structured metaphors of a harmonic political-economic order" at home had their corollary in a hierarchical world at large. The international division of labor had distributed rich nations here, poor nations there; the proletarian nations of what we would now call the periphery should structure themselves vertically at home (to accumulate power) and horizontally abroad to redress their positions in the world economy.¹⁴

Other neosocialists thought no practical Marxism could continue to avoid the problems that nations and nationalism posed for class analysis: class was for the 19th century, whereas "the concept of the nation would be the key concept of political organization in the twentieth century."¹⁵ Such thinking led neosocialists into strong support for protectionism and the type of autocentered development associated with Stalinism in the 1930s. Neosocialist corporatism perhaps had its most profound recent statement in the work of Roberto Mangiaberra Unger, who proposed a movement toward a corporatism embodying equality of conditions, democracy, and the overcoming of liberalism and individualism through a new conception of organic groups. Unger's proposals also sought once again to introduce the family as either a refuge from liberal politics or a metaphor for transcending liberalism. He wrote that the family "comes closest to [the ideal of] community of life in our experience. . . . The modern family forever draws men back into an association that . . . offers a measure of individual recognition through love."¹⁶ Thus, we have come full circle: the logic of corporatist disgust with liberalism leads progressives to rediscover the family as a model for politics, something that the traditionalists never abandoned.

It has rarely occurred to Asian thinkers to abandon the family as metaphor or reality: only Mao's China during the Great Leap Forward assaulted the family structure and even this monumental effort was dropped rather quickly. The family has been the centerpiece of Asian corporatism, the pre-eminent example of which was interwar Japan and its failed attempt to fashion a "family state." The three corporatist images of political fatherhood, a body politic, and the great chain were pronounced in interwar Japan: the emperor was the father of all the people, the people were united by blood ties, and the blood "running through the veins of the race . . . has never changed" since time immemorial.¹⁷ Masao Maruyama, seeking out the unique in what he called "Japanese fascism," wrote that it rested upon "the family system extolled as the fundamental principle of the State structure." The nation was "an extension of the family; more concretely, a nation of families composed of the Imperial House as the main family and of the people as the branch family. This is not merely an analogy as in the organic theory of the State, but is considered as having a substantial meaning."¹⁸

The ideology of Kim Il Sung resonated loudly with this history of corporatism. Kim's theories, just like Mihail Manoilescu's, substituted the nation for the proletarian class as the unit of historical conflict, and argued that former colonies, dependencies, and peripheral socialist nations should unite horizontally in common cause. He was always known as the fatherly leader, and organic metaphors of nation and blood were pronounced. Even in the 1940s, when the Worker's Party was formed, it was said to be a mass party, in a nation united as one rather than divided by class. But Kim did not have to read European or Japanese theories to arrive at his native conception: long before his time, Korean neo-Confucians saw the human body as an organism, which required a proper physiological harmony; still it was just one organism, an integral part of a unitary world:

an individual human body was simply one network of functional interactions within the cosmic pattern of interrelating and interdependent networks. Disharmony within the body's physiological processes could be either a reflection of disharmony in the cosmos at large, or it could itself be a cause of such disharmony.¹⁹

This organic political thought was embodied in Kim's endlessly trumpeted "Juche idea," as Pyongyang renders it in English. *Chuch'e* seems at first glance to be readily understandable. It means self-reliance and independence in politics, economics, defense, and ideology; it first emerged in 1955 as Pyongyang drew away from Moscow, and then appeared full blown in the mid-1960s as Kim sought a stance independent of both Moscow and Beijing. One can find uses of the term *chuch'e* before 1955 in North and South, but no one would notice were it not for its later prominence. But from the inception of the regime Kim's rhetoric rang with synonymous language; a variety of terms translating roughly as self-reliance and independence structured Kim's ideology in the 1940s: *chajusông* (self-reliance), *minjok tongnip* (national or ethnic independence), *charip kyôngje* (independent economy). All these terms were antonyms of *sadaejulûi*, serving and relying upon foreign power, which had been the scourge of a postcolonial people whose natural inclination was toward things Korean. Added up, these ideas were the common denominators of what all the colonized peoples sought at mid-century: their basic dignity as human beings.

It is often said in Asian culture it is important not to lose face. It is a word better translated as dignity, or honor. In North Korean eyes, the prestige of the nation is bound up with the visage of the leader. On the way in from the airport in 1981, as we sped by various Kim Il Sung billboards, my friendly guide had one solemn admonition: please do not insult our leader. (I hadn't planned to, lest I jeopardize my exit.) Scholar of Korea Gari Ledyard has written that the second character of *chuch'e*, when joined to the word for nation—*kukch'e*—was used in classical discourse to

connote the national face, or dignity. As Ledyard wrote, “The *kukch’e* can be hurt, it can be embarrassed, it can be insulted, it can be sullied. The members of the society must behave in such a way that the *kukch’e* will not be ‘lost.’ This sense of the word resonates with emotions and ethics that spring from deep sources in the traditional psyche.”²⁰ Anyone who has visited the North will recognize that this idea is still alive and well—too often in overweening pride and grandiose monuments, but at bottom, in an insistence on national dignity.

The real meaning of *chuch’e* might best be translated as, put things Korean first, always: a type of nationalism, in other words. But it also substituted for the old classics, for Confucianism. The aim of the ubiquitous study halls where attendance was required—in every one, rows of chairs lined up with a white bust of Kim on the podium—was to create a state of mind. In the intensity of study, rote repetition and almost sacred atmosphere, it resembled Confucian learning. In its exaltation of the power of ideas over material reality, it is closer to neo-Confucianism than to Marxism. When Kim Jong Il became the effective ideological leader in the 1980s, he made this emphasis pronounced: “ideas determine everything” was a favorite slogan. Here is Kim Jong Il expounding on “Abuses of Socialism.” After a tour through the history of socialism and the causes for its collapse in “some countries” (which happened mainly because of a failure to indoctrinate the young, in his view), Kim Jong Il says,

Consciousness plays a decisive role in the activity of a human being. . . . The basic factor which gives an impetus to social development must always be ascribed to ideological consciousness.²¹

This corporate system and its hero-worship are instinctively repellent to anyone who identifies with the modern liberal idea, or indeed with the modern Marxist idea. The DPRK’s simple adherence to such ideas would be one thing, but by trumpeting them far and wide it merely gets back widespread disbelief and ridicule. All this is deeply embarrassing to many Koreans in the South, who understand all too well where it comes from, but would rather that foreigners not hear such foolish things. Nonetheless the system is different, it has its own logic, and once you understand it North Korean behavior becomes much more predictable than if you thought it were merely another puppet of Moscow (that one went out after 1991), rogue state, or totalitarian nightmare imposed on a people groaning for Western freedoms.

REVOLUTION, THERMIDOR, MONARCHY

On my first visit to North Korea in 1981, I flew in from Beijing and hoped to go out through the Soviet Union, on the Trans-Siberian Railway. Consular

officials said I should obtain a visa at the Soviet Embassy in Pyongyang. When I duly arrived at its doorstep, a friendly (read KGB) counselor sat me down, offered me cognac, and inquired as to what I might be doing in Pyongyang. More cognac, more discussion, and then he asked what I thought of Kim Jong Il, who had just been officially designated as successor to Kim Il Sung at the Sixth Party Congress in 1980. "Well, he doesn't have his father's charisma," I said. "He's diminutive, pear-shaped, homely. Looks like his mother in fact." "Oh, you Americans," he said, "always thinking about personality. Don't you know they have a bureaucratic bloc behind him, they all rise or fall with him—these people really know how to do this here. You should come back in 2020 and see *his* son take power."

It proved to be the best prediction I've ever heard about this hybrid communist state-cum-dynasty, except that Kim Jong Il's heart attack at the age of 69 merely hastened the succession to Kim Jong Un by a few years. The basis of this prediction, no doubt, was this official's open-mouthed awe at the way in which the DPRK had diverged from Soviet practice, and the degree to which native political culture had overwhelmed the communist system. Kim Jong Il took his father's corporate politics and invested the system with the trappings of monarchy, such that the royal Kim family and the clans loyal to it constitute ultimate power in the DPRK. The North Korean people have known only millennia of monarchy and a century of dictatorship—Japanese from 1910 to 1945, where in the late stages of colonial rule Koreans had to worship the (Japanese) emperor, and the hegemony of the Kim family for the past seven decades. Monarchy, colonial rule, then an anticolonial revolution, then that odd term, *thermidor*, that Crane Brinton and others used to describe the reaction against the French Revolution—and finally monarchy.

Korean culture is steeped in the ceremony, ritual, literature, poetry, lore, and gossip of royal families—and especially, which son would succeed the king. Many did so at a young age. The greatest of kings, Sejong, under whom the unique Korean alphabet was promulgated, took office in 1418 at the age of 21, assisted by the regency of his father. Like Kim Jong Un, he was the third son; the eldest son was banished from Seoul for rudeness, and the middle son became a Buddhist monk. Kim Jong Nam, Kim Jong Il's first son, embarrassed everyone by getting caught entering Japan under a pseudonym (hoping to visit Disneyland, it is said), and prefers to reside in Macao, the gambling capital of the world. Virtually nothing is known about the middle son, and neither appeared at their father's funeral in January 2012.

The penultimate Korean king, Kojong, was a mere 11 when he took the throne in 1864, guided by his father—a powerful regent known as the Taewôn'gun—until he reached maturity. During his regency the father reenergized the dominant ideology (neo-Confucianism), practiced a strict seclusion policy against several empires knocking at the Korean door, and

fought both France (1866) and the United States (1871) in serious wars; two years later the new Meiji leadership in Japan came very close to invading Korea. This was the Hermit Kingdom at its height, and *kukch'e* was a particularly prominent concept under the Taewôn'gun's exclusionary foreign policy. But when Kojong came of age he sought modern reforms, signed unequal treaties opening Korea to commerce, and tried to play the imperial powers off against each other. It worked for a quarter-century, and then it didn't: opening up merely staved off the eventual and predictable end—the obliteration of Korean sovereignty in 1910. At the Revolutionary Museum in Pyongyang, fronted by a 60-foot statue of Kim Il Sung, visitors witness a paean of praise to the Taewôn'gun, stone monuments from his era meant to ward off foreign barbarians, and breast-beating tributes to Korean victories against the French and the Americans. After 1989 Kim Jong Il, as we have seen, opined many times that communism had fallen in the West because of the dilution and erosion of ideological purity, a formulation that the Taewôn'gun's neo-Confucian scribes would have liked.

Ordinary Koreans often call their leader *wang*, that is, king, and the Kims have frequently indicated their affinities for monarchs. Kim Jong Il told Secretary of State Madeleine Albright, when she met with him in Pyongyang in October 2000, that he found the Thai monarchy quite interesting. The Thai king is different from, say, the British royal house in genuinely being revered by his people, with laws against insulting him (the British, to the contrary, take delight in mocking the royal family). Thailand has swung between constitutional monarchy and military coups, but the king abides. A more salient example, perhaps, was Kim Il Sung's close relationship with Prince Norodom Sihanouk. They were very close friends, more than any other foreign figure for Kim it seems, and of course he set up a big villa near Pyongyang for Sihanouk during his long exile. The latter was one of the most knowledgeable leaders in the world; I still remember seeing him at a televised press conference in Beijing after he had gone into exile, and some American reporter asked him about "the state of freedom" in Cambodia under Pol Pot. Sihanouk let out a high-pitched giggle, and said in a polite way that the question itself was an absurdity. Whatever Americans might think, both Sihanouk and Kim were generally revered by their people. And, I suppose, it takes one king to know another.

North Korea is a bundle of contradictions, because its leaders are pregnant with ideas that can't really be voiced in our time. Lenin and his successor Stalin, not to mention Mao Zedong, provided no reliable guidance on the mechanisms of leadership transition in a communist system—it was more a matter of who controlled the gun. Pyongyang has filled that political vacuum with monarchical succession and has done so reliably twice, with no evident instability; but it cannot say this out loud because it smacks of feudalism. The North's philosophy of rule bears close

resemblance to what Koreans traditionally said about their kings—or what Hegel said about the German monarch—but they cannot admit that, either. When we read a recent account of Hegel’s theory of the monarch, the resonance with North Korea’s ideology is marked. As Eli Diamond put it, “the general intention of Hegel’s justification of the hereditary monarchical principle is to provide an institutional corrective to a purely liberal standpoint. . . . The immovable unity of the state is embodied in the undivided unity of the monarch’s rule, in contrast to the insuperable division of civil society.” Diamond goes on to say that “the monarch is a *subjectivity* that makes decisions that are to a large extent arbitrary, in a way that is tolerable to citizens, since it is done from a perspective beyond the political fray. . . . This moment of arbitrary decision is necessary, because there are always various possible ways of looking at any practical matter, and opposed opinions on these matters can create deep divisions within government. At the same time, as belonging to the well-informed thinking will of the monarch, these decisions will not be wholly arbitrary and devoid of human reason.”²²

Juche began as a predictable form of anticolonial nationalism, but it slowly evolved into an idealist metaphysic that bears close resemblance to Korean neo-Confucian doctrines, and again, to Hegel’s philosophical idealism. Or as high-level defector Hwang Jang-yop put it simply, the two Kims “turned Stalinism and Marxism-Leninism on their heads by reverting to Confucian notions.”²³ To put the matter slightly differently than Hwang did, North Korea has turned Marx on his head—or put Hegel back on his feet—by arguing that “ideas determine everything.”

It is not clear that anyone, including Hegel himself, quite understood what he meant by the constant invocation of the term *subjectivity*, but that is the usual dictionary definition of *chuch’e* in South Korea and Japan. And further for Hegel, “the organic unity of the powers of the state itself implies that it is one single mind which both firmly establishes the universal and also brings it into its determinate actuality and carries it out.” With this, and especially with his endless emphasis on mind (“the nation state is mind in its substantive rationality”), and the identification of “one single mind” with the monarch,²⁴ Hegel merely expresses a mid-19th-century German version of an ancient Korean truth.

In his “Philosophical Rebuttal of Buddhism and Taoism” the famous philosopher and architect of 14th-century Chosôn dynasty reforms, Chông To-jôn, wrote that “The mind combines principle and material force to become master of the body . . . [principle] is also received by the mind and becomes virtue. . . . Principle is truly embodied on our minds.” In the same discourse, Kwôn Kûn wrote, “Only after one is able to embody humanity, make complete the virtue of his mind, and constantly maintain without fail the principle with which he is born, can he be called human without being embarrassed.”²⁵

The human condition is none other than virtue, embodied in mind (conceived organically as brain, heart, and body integrated); virtue-in-mind is what makes us different from animals. Not only that, it is the “cause by which material force comes into existence,” according to Chông. Now if we make the postmodern stipulation that we are all subjective creatures (not objective rational actors), and that we construct our own realities and call them things, then Chông To-jôn does seem to be saying that humans create their universe. But not just any human, only those humans who, through long study, have cultivated the virtues that are the *sine qua non* of having the capability to judge, to decide, to lead, to teach, and thus to create. At the apex, of course, is the monarch, a perfected human being, “the supreme mind of the nation” (a common designation for Kim Il Sung), and woe be it to the person who challenges his authority or denies that he can walk on water.

Just like Korean philosophers, Hegel overcomes the difficulty of deciding who should be king by relying on bloodlines; for practical political reasons, he thought, the monarch’s accession to the throne has to be hereditary: “It is the hereditary principle of succession that guarantees this unmoved quality, the *majesty* of the monarch. An elected head of state, and hence the state itself, is associated with one political perspective to the exclusion of others, and generally turns the state on its head, compromising the majesty of the monarch by grounding the sovereign’s legitimacy in the attitudes and opinions of the masses, rather than having the sovereign be self-grounded and the source of the rights of the people.”²⁶

It was none other than Karl Marx who cut his intellectual teeth by ripping these justifications for monarchy to shreds, and he no doubt flips in his grave to hear the monarchical Koreans call themselves communists. “Hegel thinks he has proven,” Marx wrote in 1843, “that the subjectivity of the state, sovereignty, the monarch, is ‘essentially characterized as *this* individual, in abstraction from all his other characteristics, and this individual is raised to the dignity of monarch in an immediate, natural fashion, i.e., through his birth in the course of nature.’ Sovereignty, monarchical dignity, would thus be born. The *body* of the monarch determines his dignity. . . . Birth would determine the quality of the monarch as it determines the quality of cattle. Hegel has demonstrated that the monarch must be born, which no one questions, but not that birth makes one a monarch.” Or to put the point simply, for Marx if a man becomes monarch by birth, this “can as little be made into a metaphysical truth as can the Immaculate Conception of Mary.” And even more simply: “The body of [the King’s] son is the reproduction of his own body, the creation of a royal body.”²⁷ Because of the emperor system in Japan and the monarchy in Korea, Hegel’s thought was always influential on scholars in both countries; indeed An Ho-sang, the Education Minister under the First Republic in the

South, had studied Hegelian philosophy in prewar Germany and was a life-long exponent of his own idiosyncratic version of *chuch'e*.

A SINGLE, THIN STRAND OF THE PAST

In his book *Splendid Monarchy* Tak Fujitani shows in engrossing detail how the post-1868 Meiji elite invented what came to be known as Japanese tradition, as part of a newly engineered centralization of power in Tokyo amid a multitude of mostly independent domains. It was a self-conscious design to build a modern nation and weld a mostly peasant society to the new idea that they were part of something called Japan, and to create a new and potent nationalism. In the course of this argument, he remarks that "believability can be engineered by dominant groups."²⁸ North Korea's entire history is testimony to this truth.

Japan's parcelized sovereignty was not a problem in Korea, in that almost everything important had been centralized in Seoul for centuries, and millennia of kings and queens had come and gone, creating a vast cultural panorama of ruling practice, royal stories, poetry, lore, and gossip. By contrast, in Japan the emperor was "taken out of the cupboard and dusted off;" for most inhabitants of these four islands, he had not been an important figure: one emperor was murdered in exile, another escaped to a remote island hidden "under a load of dried fish," and so on. No one could ever say that about Korean monarchs, and when the last effective king died in 1919, Kojong's place in the heart of his people detonated the March First Independence Movement against the Japanese, the touchstone of Korean nationalism ever since.

Fujitani makes the important point that this is a modern politics, not feudal as Maruyama Masao had written; the emperor system was not part of an incomplete or backward modernity, but was a form of modernity itself; think, for example, of the British monarchy. However, much Americans may find the North Korean regime loathsome, it too is a form of modernity. The Japanese emperor is also presumed to represent an immortal, perfect, unsullied monarchy tracing back to the mists of time, having neither youth nor old age, only health and no disease, representing "the immutability of the political order." The Japanese, suffused in neo-Confucian doctrine just like Koreans, underlined the benevolence, beneficence, and even love of the emperor: "there is nothing better for the well-being of the state than to make the people love the ruler," one scribe wrote. An intimacy between ruler and ruled should be cultivated "to make it unbearable to part from the ruler." The male royal gaze even becomes motherly, as soldiers during the Pacific War took comfort in the "loving, forgiving, all-embracing" imperial image.²⁹ Then the ruler's family becomes an object of worship, too, to insinuate power into

the living room, so to speak (and the bedroom: when is the princess ever going to produce a son?, etc.). The family is the core building block of the state, the ruling family its symbol, its gendered model, and also the alter-ego of the citizenry, the charismatic object of attention, curiosity, gossip—Princess Diana was the epitome of all of this (and the North Koreans put out a postage stamp with her face on it). Think also of the global media attention to Prince William's recent wedding—it nicely illustrated Bagehot's observation in 1867 that "a princely marriage is the brilliant edition of a universal fact, and as such, it rivets mankind."³⁰

The venerable city of Kyoto, Fujitani wrote, was the singular core place in Japan that "embodied the authentic history, that single and thin strand out of the past that the regime certified as significant."³¹ For North Korea, the single, thin strand was Japan's establishment of Manchukuo as a second Korea, its biggest colony, on the bitterly redolent date of March 1, 1932, and the resistance it immediately spawned, symbolized by their ubiquitous revolutionary opera, "The Sea of Blood." This is the point at which Kim Il Sung began his guerrilla activities; after murderous Japanese counterinsurgency campaigns, a decade later only a few hundred Korean guerrillas remained—but they were the ones who took power in the North in 1948, and they and their families have held it ever since. Thus the North Korean elite draws a straight line from 1932 down to the present; this founding moment is also the fount of their legitimacy, the original source from which all honor and power flows. Historians who point out that this moment is saturated with myth and exaggeration are right, but they miss Fujitani's point about how power engineers its own myths. But think also, for example, about Kim Il Sung's decade-long fight against the Japanese in the bitterest imaginable conditions, as compared to Castro's attack on the Moncada Barracks, or John F. Kennedy's heroism in saving much of the crew of his PT 109: the North had much more to work with, much more with which to make myths. But what is amazing about this regime, seemingly, is that they prefer myths and lies to what would be an eminently useful truth regarding Kim Il Sung's genuine guerrilla record against the Japanese. Perhaps they learned too well something that historians tend to forget: power chooses its own history, its own heroes, and the sacred truths that serve its purposes; what actually happened makes little difference to engineered believability.

All modern states privilege one kind of history, and engage in the erasure of others and the subjugation of alternatives; it's just that North Korea does it so obviously, with barely any attempt to conceal its intent, and what appears to be a morbid fear of alternative histories; much of its propaganda would insult the intelligence of a 10-year-old. Partly this is because it is, of course, a solipsistic dictatorship, but also because modern Korea has been divided since 1945, with a top-to-bottom set of histories, alternatives, and erasures in the South—and because Koreans take history

so seriously; to become history in the curious American sense, of oblivion and irrelevance, is to imagine the disappearance of one's self and its connection to parents, ancestors, and progeny—a rupture in the “great chain of being” that promises permanent, irreparable oblivion.

THINK ABOUT WHAT WE SEE

Michel Foucault once wrote that Napoleon's face “loom[ed] over everything with a single gaze which no detail, however minute, can escape.” His gaze was so strong as “to render useless both the eagle and the sun.”³² The emperor's gaze carries immanent power: the people see the emperor, and he sees them—he is watching them, he embodies correct behavior, he expects their correct behavior—and thus the awesome and also unnerving sight of hundreds of thousands of people marching through Pyongyang, or playing intricate card games in unison at the 150,000-seat Kim Il Sung stadium. It is almost unnecessary to point out that Kim Il Sung's gaze is the first thing babies see when they are born, the face on the wall of every home when babies are born, and the last face seen by the dying. Like Maruyama, however, Foucault assumes that Napoleon is part of the ancient fabric of France, whereas Fujitani sees this, too, as another instance of modern forms of power.

To know that the North Korean regime is unlikely to collapse any time soon, we don't need an exegesis on Korean and Japanese monarchical history. We just need to observe the leadership stability that followed on the death of Kim Il Sung, and the symbolism of Kim Jong Il's funeral procession on a wintry January day. Kim Jong Il's brother-in-law, Chang Song-t'aek, walked behind Kim Jong Un; Chang, 66, has long been entrusted with command of the most sensitive security agencies. Behind him was Kim Ki-nam, a man in his 80s who was a close associate of Kim Il Sung. Three generations walking solemnly alongside the vintage mid-1970s armored Lincoln Continental carrying the coffin of Kim Jong Il, and strolling on the other side of the limousine, top commanders of the military in what has to be modern history's most amazing garrison state, with the fourth largest army in the world.

On the grandson's birthday, January 8, 2012 (his birth year still seems to be a secret, but it was 1983 or 1984), Pyongyang television ran an hour-long documentary bathing him in every North Korean virtue and identifying him with every salient place or monument visited by Kim Il Sung, but especially White Head Mountain, the vast volcanic peak on the Sino-Korean border, mythical fount of the Korean people, site of some of Kim's anti-Japanese guerrilla battles in the 1930s, and purported birthplace of Kim Jong Il in 1942. Most interesting, however, was Jong Un's body language: tall, hefty, grinning, pressing the flesh, already

a politician, a hearty individual seemingly at home with his sudden role as beloved successor. Erased was the dour, dyspeptic, cynical, and ill-at-ease Kim Jong Il, swaddled in a puffed-up ski jacket, his face hidden behind enormous sunglasses. Most important, in visage and personal style, Jong Un is the spitting image of his grandfather when he came to power in the late 1940s, even to the point of shaving his sideburns up high (the documentary pointedly featured photos of Kim Il Sung with the same haircut). It is as if the DNA passed uncontaminated through son to grandson—and no doubt that is what the regime wants its people to believe.

These rituals were markedly similar to those when Kim Il Sung died, but it will be interesting to see if Kim Jong Un follows the same three-year mourning ritual—so far he has not, visiting military units and appearing publicly elsewhere. Certainly it is in his interest to lay low and gain experience, while the seasoned old guard runs the country. But Jong Un has unquestionably (if instantly) become the face of the regime, one much more agreeable to the public than Kim Jong Il's.

Still, my Soviet informant was right and I was wrong about the significance of bodily appearances: regardless of what he looks like, the king can do no wrong—he can even shoot several eagles on his first golf round as Kim Jong Il's acolytes claimed. In a classic book, *The King's Two Bodies*, Ernst Kantorowicz wrote that there were two kings: the frail, human, and mortal vessel who happens to be king, and the eternal king who endures forever as the symbol of the monarchy.³³ The latter is a superhuman presence, an absolutely perfect body representing the God-king, maintained through the centuries as an archetype of the exquisite leader. In death the body natural disappears, but the soul of the God-king passes on to the next king. In Pyongyang this translated into Kim Il Sung's seed bringing forth his first son, Jong Il, continuing the perfect blood lines that his scribes never tire of applauding—and now, a fortiori, Jong Un. The family line becomes immortal, explaining why Kim Il Sung was not just president-for-life, but remained president of the DPRK in his afterlife.

The Koreans made the dead Kim Il Sung president for eternity, all imperfections erased, and now his elaborate mausoleum is the most important edifice in the country. His own body has now morphed into three—the three Kims' bodies. But Jong Un's mimetic face, one imagines, will make the population quickly forget about Kim Jong Il, whose 17-year reign was one of flood, drought, famine, the effective collapse of the economy, mass starvation leading to hundreds of thousands of deaths—the time-of-troubles expected to follow on the death of the dynastic founder. Kim had one singular, if dubious achievement: the acquisition of nuclear weapons. (But here a lot of credit goes also to the ignorantly provocative Bush doctrine.)

North Korea is a modern form of monarchy, realized in a highly nationalistic, postcolonial state. Americans have such trouble understanding this because most have not subjected their own liberal assumptions and beliefs, their own subjectivity, to a thorough inquiry and self-criticism. "The social unity expressed in the 'body of the despot,'" Fredric Jameson pointed out, is political, but also analogous to various religious practices. That the favored modern practice of former colonies should be embodied nationalism (the resistance leader's body, the body politic, the national body) is also entirely predictable. But the Western Left (let alone liberals) utterly fails to understand "the immense Utopian appeal of nationalism;" its morbid qualities are easily grasped, but its healthy qualities for the collective and for the tight unity that postcolonial leaders crave, are denied.³⁴ When you add to postcolonial nationalism Korea's centuries of royal succession and neo-Confucian philosophy, it might be possible to understand North Korea as an unusual but predictable combination of monarchy, anti-imperial nationalism, and Korean political culture.

We who live in Western liberal society have our subconscious automatically (if imperfectly) produced from birth and we take for granted the relatively stable societies that we join as adults, so that we do what is expected without necessarily thinking about it. Civil society is thus internalized and reproduced, as an outcome of centuries of Western political practice. The creation of such habits, however, the spontaneous production of good citizens and good workers, loyal subjects who are also afforded the opportunity of disloyalty, appears as an opaque mystery where it does not exist—how can social exchange be so open, so fluid, so simultaneously orderly and threatening even to the powers, and yet so stable? "The ways by which people advance toward dignity and enlightenment in government," George F. Kennan wrote, "are things that constitute the deepest and most intimate processes of national life. There is nothing less understandable to foreigners, nothing in which foreign influence can do less good." It is our blindness, our hidden complex of unexamined assumptions, that constitutes the core of Kim-hating—what makes him simultaneously so laughable, so impudent, and so outrageous; we revile him, while he thumbs his nose at us and our values and gets away with it. We have proved over seven decades that we do not understand North Korea, cannot predict its behavior, and cannot do anything about it—however much we would like to. We can do something about our prejudices.

What is entirely predictable, in my view, is that North Koreans will welcome the only handsome face of authority that all but the most elderly Koreans have known, the founder of the country, the fatherly leader, now reincarnated. He may not yet be 30, but if my Soviet interlocutor was right (and he has been for three decades), we are going to see Kim Jong Un's face for a long, long time—in our 21st century.

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

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CHAPTER 6

Beyond the Vietnam War: Vietnamese Socialism Today

Thaveeporn Vasavakul

INTRODUCTION

The Socialist Republic of Vietnam is one of the last remaining nation-states committed to socialism as an official state ideology. This persistence is largely a result of Vietnam's success in using socialism as a solution for anticolonialism and national liberation; first in the resistance to French colonialism (1858–1954) and later to American intervention that became known as the Vietnam War (1954–1975). Vietnamese nationalists used Marxist and Leninist ideologies to both organize resistance against French suppression and provide themselves with a state-building model while striving for national reunification. While the post-Vietnam War period was a time when the Vietnamese Communist Party (VCP) tested the socialist model on a nationwide scale in reunified Vietnam, it was also a period in which the party was subsequently compelled to rethink the implications of this model for nation and state-building. Its updated motto, “rich people, strong country, and civilized society,” is an echo of Ho Chi Minh's socialist dictum: “socialism as a stage where people have enough to eat, warm clothes, and do not exploit one another.” Following the collapse of the Soviet Bloc in the late 1980s and subsequent political and economic transformation of socialist countries throughout the 1990s, a question has arisen about how the ideology of socialism may support Vietnam's nation and state-building efforts and how the VCP might proactively apply socialism today, in the 21st century. This chapter explores the development of socialism in Vietnam since the end of the Vietnam War in 1975, a process that is known as *doi moi*. The reconfiguration of the socialist state and the subsequent redefinition of intra-state and state-citizen relations will be

highlighted. Specifically, this chapter will take a close look at how property rights, state ownership of capital, economic central planning, and one-party rule—the basic principles socialism—have evolved and transformed. The focus of this chapter is on how *doi moi* has shaped Vietnam's postwar ideology of socialism.

This chapter consists of four sections, the first of which focuses on the forces that drove the development of state socialism and its reform in Vietnam. The second focuses on the changing role of the socialist state, while the third focuses on the expansion of democratic space and emerging systems of accountability under one-party rule. The final section discusses challenges related to performance and legitimacy as Vietnam continues to search for a new model of governance within its socialist framework. It is argued that the process of *doi moi* has brought about a notable transformation in Vietnam's state socialist system. The institutionalization of a multisector economy, the initial separation of state management from economic management, and a restructured one-party system have given rise to a new form of executive socialist state with its own resources and logic of operation in the transition to decentralized planning. This *doi moi* state is fragmented; its authority and power is dispersed among its various levels and sectors with substantial authority delegated to subnational levels. Executive power is checked by an enhanced, though by sector and locality still uneven, democratic space encompassing multiple forms of citizen involvement operating under a rubric of transparency, consultation, participation, and supervision. Though dominated by the VCP, the *doi moi* party-state is not synonymous with, or the residual of, the VCP. The process of reform and new governing mechanisms has brought about positive economic growth, reduced poverty, and supported Vietnam's postwar international integration. All these factors buttress the goals of this new socialism to foster "a rich people and strong nation." Positive changes notwithstanding, accountability mechanisms to check executive abuses of power and various forms of exploitation have developed at a slower pace. While Vietnam successfully used socialism as a solution for its anticolonial and national liberation goals, its reconfigured socialist tenets in a postwar, globalized era continue to be tested.

FROM STATE SOCIALISM TO A SOCIALIST-ORIENTED MARKET ECONOMY

The history of socialism in Vietnam suggests a symbiotic relationship between socialism and nationalism. Leninism was brought to Vietnam as an anticolonial solution by Nguyen Ai Quoc/Ho Chi Minh.¹ While drawing inspiration from Marxism and to some extent Maoism, Ho Chi Minh asserted in his writing, "The Path That Led Me to Leninism" that it was patriotism that drove him especially toward the Leninist ideology. From the

very beginning, Ho Chi Minh assigned the Vietnamese communist movement the task of liberating Vietnam from French colonialism. At the time, the Indochinese Communist Party could not have survived successive French suppressions had it not exploited Leninist organizational tactics, and the Vietnamese nationalist movement, after 1945, could not have consolidated its newly won independence without the reliance of the socialist camp. During 1945–1946, Ho's diplomatic efforts to secure national recognition from the United States and the West failed. France, with the assistance of Britain, the United States, and the Kuomintang Chinese, returned to Cochin China and Tonkin. The self-proclaimed Democratic Republic of Vietnam (DRV) could not have gained its enthusiastic support for the national liberation war nor could it have tapped the rural resources necessary for state building had it not advocated a socialist revolution. The twin goals of national liberation and socialist egalitarianism underscored the legitimacy of the Vietnamese communist movement and gained it popular support—both in the North and in the South. These two goals became the party's ideological weapons in combating noncommunist political organizations: French colonialism, the French-backed State of Viet Nam, and finally the U.S.-backed South Vietnamese government.²

The socialist state in the North that eventually became the Democratic Republic of Vietnam followed mixed models drawn from the Soviet Union and China with a considerable degree of institutional adaptation. Predominant economic features were state control of the means of production and central planning. Under state socialism, civil society was brought under state control through policies such as land reform, collectivization, economic central planning, and nationalization of industrial production. The social classes of the prerevolutionary regime were redistributed into new socioeconomic sectors and became agricultural cooperative farmers, state farm workers, enterprise managers, workers, and technocrats. Central planning became the management mechanism whereby inputs were controlled, outputs determined, and prices regulated. In rural Vietnam, socialism gave rise to cooperatives, which replaced the peasant family as the basic work unit. In industry and trade, state control gave rise to the concept of *chu quan*, or owning agency, whereby each government agency became responsible for formulating the economic policies of its sector. This included directly managing sector and state-owned enterprises, production, oversight, and guaranteeing of distribution. Operating within this hierarchy, all production was linked vertically with upper echelons through planning mechanisms but separated horizontally from other similar units. This situation at times caused competition for resources from above.³

The socialist state system that developed in North Vietnam consisted of four basic political components: the party, the state, the National Assembly, and mass organizations. Founded in 1930 as the Indochinese Communist Party, the party was renamed the Vietnam Lao Dong Party in 1951 at

the Second Party Congress. During the Democratic Republic of Vietnam (DRV) period, especially after 1954, the party intervened extensively in affairs of state, switching from merely providing guidelines in the earlier period to intervening directly in day-to-day operations. It controlled the state apparatus through its corresponding party organs. Governments and ministries as well as other high-ranking directors primarily answered to party committees. The prime minister's power as the head of the government was downplayed, and the functions of economic decision making were assumed by the party apparatus. The National Assembly in the DRV served more as a symbol of unity than a proper legislative body or accountability agency. Although Vietnam was divided into northern and southern zones between 1954 and 1975, a number of assembly seats were reserved for representatives from the South, the Republic of Vietnam. One study commented that the National Assembly was a legal secretary for laws written by the party. Mass organizations formed another component of the political system with the Fatherland Front the most broadly based. Other organizations included the Vietnamese Confederation of Trade Unions, the Women's Union, the Ho Chi Minh Youth Union, and the Peasants' Union. Mass organizations had a dual function of implementing party and government policies and, to a certain degree, providing a means to transmit information to the party.⁴

As the Lao Dong Party became increasingly involved in state operations, its centralized form of socialism was challenged. In the mid-1950s, it was criticized by a group of dissident intellectuals, the *nhân văn giai phẩm*, who followed Ho Chi Minh but disagreed with the party's adoption of Maoist intellectual and ideological discourse as well as similar approaches to land reform policy. In the 1960s and 1970s, the adopted neo-Stalinist model of development that equated socialism with the development of heavy industry (under an assumption that accumulated industrial investment would be supported by both foreign aid and the extraction of domestic surpluses) created tension between the centrally planned sectors. In the agrarian economy of Vietnam, this generated friction between the state and the peasants, its major ally. Despite this friction, the goal of nationalism sustained the socialist state framework and there was no coercive Great Leap Forward to force collectivization. In addition, being a late socialist developer, Vietnam benefitted from foreign assistance from the Soviet Bloc and China. These resources helped take economic pressure off of the rural population who would otherwise have been compelled to extract resources from the agricultural sector to serve industrialization undertakings like in other socialist states.⁵

Pathways from Central Planning

Vietnam reunified in 1975. Immediately, popular resistance to the imposition of state socialism precipitated a move from central planning and

partial reforms enacted by the party-state. Following the reunification of North and South Vietnam, the VCP (a political continuation of the Lao Dong Party) moved to impose the DRV model on the newly liberated South with the grand aim of socialist development for the entire country. In the Mekong Delta region, the DRV model met with large-scale local resistance arising from socioeconomic and cultural factors, the most important of which was the size of the middle class, its values, and its perceptions. The region had a high percentage of middle class, a product of the Viet Minh 1940s land reforms, the National Liberation Front for South Vietnam's land policies, and the U.S.-supported land to the tiller program in the 1970s. Lavish American military spending and the rise of entrepreneurs engaged in services and retail trade also contributed to middle class discontent. During this phase, popular resistance from southern Vietnam, especially from the middle class in the Mekong Delta region, was the crucial driving force.⁶

Between 1979 and 1988 a number of policies were piloted to address the national crisis. A resolution of the Sixth Plenum of the Fourth Congress in 1979 endorsed a free market to operate within the planned economy. A subcontract system was permitted in agriculture, small-scale businesses were allowed to sell on a free market, international trade relations with nonsocialist countries expanded, and state-owned industries were granted autonomy to produce for the market after fulfilling assigned targets. The partial reform policy frameworks were preliminary steps toward a multisector commodity economy, bilateral and multilateral economic relations, and a renovation of state management. They were confirmed in 1986 when the Sixth Party Congress officially launched *doi moi*. Vietnam's transition from central planning was further reinforced two years later when the VCP issued Resolution 10, which had the effect of decollectivizing rural Vietnam.⁷

During the same period, the move from central planning also involved participation from Vietnam's provinces. Ho Chi Minh City became well known for its success in converting state-owned enterprises into accountable, manageable systems. It also became known for facilitating the development of nonstate industries, opening up a commercial sector, expanding imports and exports, and for securing sufficient food supplies via market-based business instead of compulsory purchases and distributions. The cities of An Giang and Long An replaced compulsory purchase and distribution with market-based trading of foods, farm products, materials, and consumer goods. Hai Phong City implemented a new contract system in agricultural cooperatives, directly contributing to the framework of Directive 100. These local experiences helped reinforce reformers who sought a shift away from central planning.⁸ "Fence-breaking" and "bottom-up pressure" became some of the phrases used by writers to characterize this period. Fence breaking, a phrase used by Vietnamese economists examining the transition from central planning, refers to the phenomenon

whereby socialist production units began to exchange at market prices within the framework of the partial reform put forth from 1979 to 1989. Overall, forces from below: members of agricultural cooperatives, industrial production units, and trading agencies formed a bottom up pressure that pushed the *doi moi* process to the top.

In 1989 the two-priced system was abolished, thus completing the transition period. This final phase was precipitated by favorable domestic and international factors; the existence of a vital private capitalist sector in the South, on the one hand; and increasingly constrained assistance from a Soviet Bloc also undergoing reform, on the other. The termination of aid from the Soviet Bloc was a crucial factor in ending central planning. Vietnam's move away from central planning notwithstanding, economic institution-building continued to be debated throughout the 1990s and the first decade of the 21st century. The VCP and different state economic sectors continued to be biased in favor of the state's predominant role in the economy. They continued to associate socialism with a prominent role of the state sector. Within this context, some specific issues were how to tailor enterprises and investment laws so that they would be applicable to all economic sectors and how to make the best use of strategic adjustments to liberalize market forces, attract foreign direct investment, restructure, and improve state-owned enterprises, and eliminate party management from business. As Vietnam became a middle income country, there emerged various constellations of groups and interests entrenched within the state apparatus or that had links with it. Behind the rhetoric of "rich people, strong country, and civilized society," these interest groups were engaged in everyday politics to advocate their vested interests.

RECONFIGURED ONE-PARTY STATE

Doi moi institutionalized the reconfiguration of the one-party state in the 1990s and the first decade of the 21st century through various programs that focused on economic restructuring and public administration. It involved two related processes, the redefining of party control over the government and the strengthening of state management capacities. While the former focused mainly on rethinking the role of the VCP in governance, the latter involved strengthening governing capacities at the central and local government levels and the reconsideration of state economic and service delivery responsibilities.

Following the abolition of central planning, the VCP streamlined its control of the government apparatus. Specialized committees under the Central Committee of the VCP were reduced. Increasingly, the role of the VCP in policymaking and implementation was compromised by a strengthened concept of the rule of law. While party directives continued to serve as a compass, they were also turned into various legal documents

to be passed by the National Assembly or elaborated upon by the prime minister and his ministries. This process had the effect of gradually shifting decision-making power from the VCP to the executive branch of the government.⁹

Rise of a Strong Executive

One of the key areas strengthened was the reorganizing of the government apparatus at the central level, the reforming of the planning system, and the redefining of the relationship between central and local government agencies. While these aspects were technical in nature, the driving forces for the reorganization were primarily political. State socialism had generated a complex bureaucracy to take charge of day-to-day management of all aspects of Vietnamese life. The reduced economic role of the state automatically dictated a restructuring at the central level. As planning was a device that governed the relationship between central and local government agencies as well as among sectors, the rethinking and planning signified some level of reconfigured relationship. Finally, at the local level, provinces had been active in the process of experimenting with various levels of innovation. Weak authority relations resulting from fence-breaking during the transition period was a consideration behind the reorganization of the government structure.¹⁰

At first, measures to strengthen the executive state focused on streamlining the central government apparatus along the lines of a multisector and multifunctional ministry model. The objective was to reduce the number of intermediaries (*dau moi*), that is, the number of administrative units as well as the number of civil servants in leadership positions. The process began at the inception of *doi moi* in 1986 and continued through the 1990s and the first part of the 21st century. By 2007, the total number of Vietnam's ministries and ministerial-level agencies were reduced from 26 to 22 and the number of agencies under the government was reduced from 13 to 8. The current Ministry of Planning and Investment, for example, is the result of a reorganization of the State Planning Commission and the investment and assistance cooperation sector, formerly under the jurisdiction of the old Ministry of Foreign Economics. Later, the General Bureau of Statistics was added to the ministry. The Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development is the result of a series of mergers over the last three decades. With this process, at the central level, decision making and implementation concentrated within a small number of central-level positions.

Vietnam's move away from central planning and the reconfiguration of its relationships can also be seen in the process of planning itself. To reach socioeconomic development objectives, central agencies continued to rely on different types of plans: strategies, zone plans, master plans

(*quy hoạch*), and five-year plans (*ke hoạch*), with the latter the most reliable device for achieving development objectives. Nonetheless, in the 1990s and 2000s, this planning process was partially reformed. The Ministry of Planning and Investment switched from a purely top-down approach to one that was more bottom-up. It now issued guidelines that stated the main content of the plan, while ministries and local governments would determine their specific objectives, contents, and lists of investment programs. There was a consultative process for horizontal coordination between central government agencies and between the Ministry of Planning and Investment and local governments. In addition to altering the degree of participation in the planning process, planning reform focuses on method and content. The system of targets and indicators had also been modified. Most targets were indicative; only two imperative and mandatory targets remained: the state budget and state investment expenditure. Indicators became more qualitative than numerical and concrete, causing a shift from growth and macro-economic stability to social development and poverty reduction indicators.¹¹

Finally, in parallel with the reorganization of the central government, the reestablishment of executive power involved a redefinition of central and local authority relations. Two institutional legal policy measures had particular implications for local governments. The first was the improvement of normative legal documents promulgated by local government agencies. The second was the universalization of the one-stop shop (OSS) at all three local-government levels. The OSS is a mechanism whereby administrative procedural services for citizens are handled in a single place. These moves indicated a shift toward a rule of law as opposed to a rule by decree. They also fostered transparency when it came to government regulatory requirements. In the context of management decentralization, one key measure redefined the functions and responsibilities of local governments. In 2004, Resolution 08 clarified the allocation of administrative responsibilities between the central, provincial, and municipal governments in six management areas: natural resources and state properties, income-generating public services, planning and development investment, budgetary spending, state-owned enterprises, and lands and personnel. For example, administrative procedures on investment and state management of foreign investment were decentralized to province-level administrations and the management board of industrial and export-processing zones. The Ministry of Planning and Investment also delegated decision making on questions of basic infrastructure investment to this level. Within the local government structure, the chairman of the province-level People's Committee, depending on certain conditions, could now give the district-level People's Committee the authority to determine investment projects within local budgets with a certain capitalization ceiling. The commune-level People's Committee is also given the authority to determine investment projects valued under a certain ceiling.

The 2002 Budget Law maintains that both the Ministry of Planning and Investment and the Ministry of Finance are responsible for budgetary allocations. The former is responsible for investment budgets, while the latter is responsible for current expenditures. The 2002 Budget Law decentralized the budgetary process to some extent. Provinces now receive block grants and Provincial People's Councils have the power to allocate resources and decide how much of the money is to be transferred to the districts. Provincial People's Committees can set some norms to be followed by districts and communes. Only a few requirements are imposed on local governments. Townships and cities that are part of a province are responsible for the construction of public schools, lighting, water supply, sewage, urban traffic, and other public infrastructure. Local governments are mandated to spend a certain amount on education and training in line with state budget expenditures in these same areas. The central government still retains the authority to introduce new taxes and regulate use fees. Provinces can borrow, but only in domestic markets. Resources raised with a loan can be used only to finance capital expenditures, and only for projects which are approved by a People's Council. A province's stock of outstanding debt cannot exceed 30 percent of its annual budget. This limit does not include contingent liabilities associated with the debts of provincially owned state enterprises.¹²

Recruitment and training continues to be centralized. The Ministry of Home Affairs determines the civil servant staff size in public administration units at national and local levels, while provinces and municipalities are allowed to determine the size of the professional staff working in service delivery sectors, such as education and health care. The Ministry of Home Affairs has allocated to the ministries, and province-level People's Committees, the responsibility for recruiting public officials and civil servants. The Department of Home Affairs oversees the recruitment of administrative staff while decentralizing the recruitment of workers in public service delivery agencies, like education and health, to provincial departments, districts, and towns. All recruitment follows regulations stipulated by the Ministry of Home Affairs. Training and retraining have also been decentralized.

A small-scale survey of organizational structuring provides an overall picture of the configuration of the executive state. Financial decentralization under the Budget Law of 2002 was strictly followed. A high percentage of respondents confirmed that their provinces promoted financial self-management rights (90.5%) and decentralized budget estimations and execution (88.1%). Decentralization of investment decisions and management among local administrative levels was less common. Only 69 percent, or around two-thirds, of the respondents answered that the province had decentralized investment construction to districts and communes. This implies that decision making and resources were still concentrated at provincial levels in this area. Decentralization in the area of

personnel management was comparatively more limited in scope than financial decentralization. Only 69 percent of the respondents confirmed any decentralization of staff recruitment for service delivery units while only 50 percent confirmed decentralization of recruitment for local government officials.¹³

From an organizational perspective, *doi moi* has brought about a considerable change in commune-level administration. During the central planning period, the commune's authority was weak. Most economic and administrative functions were in the hands of the production cooperative. Between 2004 and the present, public administration reform guidelines have institutionalized commune-level administrations as well as a system of public officials. The restructuring of commune-level management also clarified the status of units below the commune level. The hamlet unit in rural areas and the residential unit in urban areas are not an administrative level but a self-managed unit of the local community. This is the level where the principle of direct democracy applies. Administratively, this level is under the management of the commune; *doi moi* still allows the central and provincial government to have a firm hold at the grassroots level.

State Role in Business and Service Delivery Management

Administrative strengthening was also linked with a separation of economic management and service delivery functions from state administrative tasks. Under central planning, the state had been the provider of public goods and was the investor and manager in production and business. It managed state-owned enterprises in three respects: defining their tasks, ensuring their financial resources, and managing their personnel. *Doi moi* called for a change in the state's role through a reduction of economic management and public service functions.

The separation of economic management from state management required a rethinking of the concept and practice of *chu quan* (owning unit) to determine how to use state capital efficiently and how to reform state enterprises through privatization and corporation. The Law on Enterprises of 2005 stipulated that the state would exercise ownership rights over capital only in its capacity as investor. In practice, the concept of *chu quan* changed slowly. In 2005, the State Corporation for Investment Capital (SCIC) was set up to serve as the representative of state capital in state-owned enterprises. Nonetheless, the SCIC managed only a small percentage of state capital. Major state corporations continued to be placed under ministries.

A number of measures were put forth for the separation of public services from state management. There were moves to apply varying financial mechanisms to state-run public service delivery units. One legal

framework of decentralization granted public service delivery units autonomy in deciding their own functions, salaries, staff, and organization. The Law on Cadres and Civil Servants passed by the National Assembly in 2008 separated public service delivery professionals from civil servants. Those excluded from the category of civil servant were professionals working in education, health care, research, information technology, culture, arts, and sports. Those working in public service units were considered civil servants if they were recruited and appointed to leadership positions. Finally, the Vietnamese government advocated the socialization of services, allowing the private and civil society sectors to take part in the provision of services as well as cover service expenses. Effectiveness of these measures varied from sector to sector.¹⁴

Overall, the *doi moi* process has redefined the role of the Vietnamese state in the economy. It has differentiated the notion of state ownership and the role of state economic management. There have also been moves to redefine the responsibilities of the state and society regarding public service delivery. These changes signify a major departure from the former system of central planning where ownership and management were one and where public services were fully subsidized.

Political and Economic Power of the *Doi Moi* State

The process of *doi moi* has created a relatively strong executive apparatus compared to its predecessor under central planning. This apparatus continues to control law-making and policymaking processes while delegating small-scale decision making and a substantial amount of management work to the provincial level. At the subnational level, power is concentrated mainly in the province and municipality. The province is responsible for planning and budgeting and, to some degree, controlling local level recruitment. A hierarchy was set up and the emphasis on the rule of law under the rubric of institutional reform has effected a gradual standardization of local government operations.

Overall, the executive has continued to be involved in economic management, albeit to a reduced degree. Ministries, sectors, and localities formulated various types of national, local, and sector plans. The executive's connections with the state sector and its enterprises involved in the planning process unavoidably created policies in favor of the state sector. A close relationship between owning units and state-owned enterprises fostered discrimination against both the private sector and other state-owned sectors. Additionally, this connection generated financial mismanagement risks in various forms. Under *doi moi*, the executive switched its management method from command over the whole economy to applying bureaucratic mechanisms to the state-owned enterprises. It switched the form of subsidy from subsidy in kind to financial support. Within this

context, the practice of asking and giving (*xin cho*) was consolidated in the state sector. *Xin cho* ranged from land management and capital investment management to regular expenditures of state budget and state-owned enterprise financing. Ultimately, this connection generated inefficiency. Owing units' intervention in the management of state-owned enterprises also had a negative impact on their reform toward a self-managed and market-oriented path.

ENHANCED DEMOCRATIC SPACE

The transformation of the government went hand in hand with a redefinition of the government–citizen relationship, namely, the reinforcement of popular participation. Participation was now channeled through elected bodies like the National Assembly and local People's Councils. It was also present in various types of popular organizations. In addition, local level participation was channeled through the framework of grassroots democracy. The expanded democratic space had the effect of promoting transparency, consultation, and intervention in governance. Owing to certain constraints however, popular participation was not yet an effective mechanism to hold government agencies and officials accountable.

Role of Elected Bodies

Doi moi broadened space for elected bodies to strengthen legislation as well as perform checks and balances. To promote rule of law, as opposed to rule by party decree, the National Assembly became active in law making. Increasingly, its responsibility was extended to include following-up on the government's performance. The role of elected bodies at the subnational level similarly increased, although to varying degrees across the provinces. Local councils endorsed plans and budgets for local governments, ensured local legal document compliance to central documents, and conducted monitoring on plan implementation in selected sectors. Deputies met more often with voters and, through VFF facilitation, gathered citizens' opinions to assist their inquiries into local government performance.

Overall, there remained certain institutional and organizational challenges. Elections at both levels continued to be noncompetitive. The legislative role of elected bodies remained constrained. While the National Assembly reviewed, discussed, and passed legislation, most legal drafts were prepared by the government. At the local level, the most important legislative responsibility of local councils was to ensure the legal correctness of local documents. Both national and local elected bodies were assigned the responsibility of supervising government work. In practice, there was no legal framework that helped enforce postmonitoring work.

There were also limitations on meet-with-voter sessions. The key challenge was that those present at these sessions tended to be representatives of voters and not the voters themselves. The percentage of voters who attended these sessions was small compared to the number of votes cast. Responses to the concerns of voters and reporting on the implementation of voter recommendations were not always effective.¹⁵

Popular Organizations

Popular organizations emerged in Vietnam quite early. The first were mass organizations set up by the Indochinese/Vietnamese Communist Party. These mass organizations were later placed under the umbrella of the Vietnam Fatherland Front, founded in 1955. In addition to the Fatherland Front and party-affiliated mass organizations, other party-sponsored popular organizations were set up. To mobilize support from intellectuals, the Indochinese Communist Party set up in 1943 the Cultural Association for National Salvation, which was, in 1957, turned into the Vietnam Union for Literature and Arts Association. In the 1950s and 1960s, more professional associations developed for legal affairs, medicine, pharmacology, history, mathematics, mining, and economics. Reasons for the creation of these associations varied. The Association for Vietnamese Lawyers, for example, served mainly to represent the Democratic Republic of Vietnam in international forums that discussed legal issues related to Vietnam and was placed under the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The Vietnam Economic Association was founded as a result of the need for Vietnam to send a nongovernmental economic delegation to attend an international economic conference. In 1983, 15 existing scientific and technological associations were placed under the umbrella of the Vietnam Union for Science and Technology Associations (VUSTA). As *doi moi* progressed in the early 1990s, the Vietnam Chamber of Commerce and Industry (VCCI) was set up to represent the business sector. While popular organizations functioned to represent professionals and intellectuals from wide ranging fields, umbrella organizations functioned to connect them together while also overseeing their activities.

The process of *doi moi* encouraged the expansion of political space where ideas and interests interacted, albeit with some restrictions. In addition to traditional popular organizations, other nongovernmental organizations entered the scene. There also emerged frameworks for various types of organizations to participate in public governance. Forms of engagement multiplied, ranging from policy advocacy, implementation, and monitoring to the provision of service delivery and the representation of citizens' voices. The party-state's socialist predilection, nonetheless, dictated the way in which the party-state viewed the position of popular organizations. The terms "civil society" and "civil society organizations,"

translated as *xa hoi dan su* and *to chuc xa hoi dan su*, respectively, were not permitted to be used in official documents. The party-state commonly used the terms “citizens” or “society” in lieu of “civil society,” and existing legal documents classified collectives and organizations into various types of sociopolitical organizations, sociopolitical professional organizations, associations, and nongovernmental organizations. Throughout the 1990s and the first decade of the 21st century, the term civil society was at times used in conjunction with peaceful evolution, itself referring to the subversion of the regime by hostile forces. Drawing a boundary for popular organizations was an on-going process within the larger context of governance reform.

Newly emerging nonstate-affiliated organizations were granted a space to operate, although their role and their operational boundaries continued to evolve. Government regulations on the establishment of associations became better defined. Over the years, the role of associations changed from providing policy inputs to delivering public services. In the 1990s, both state-affiliated and nonstate-sponsored organizations were active in policy debates. A legal framework issued in 2010 allowed specific associations, subsidized by the government and endorsed by the prime minister, to function as contact points for the mobilization of specialists and members to perform socioeconomic and cultural development tasks and to serve in advisory and appraisal roles. This same document extended service provisions to include delivering vocational training, professional training, and professional licensing.

Within the current one-party rule framework, popular organizations of various types were able to expand their social and, to some extent, political space. The size of the space varied from one policy area to another. Various types of popular organizations also had access to different state-society dialogue channels. Still, the existing legal framework favored traditional organizations, such as the Vietnam Fatherland Front, mass organizations, and umbrella organizations, like the Vietnam Chamber of Commerce and Industry and the Vietnam Union for Science and Technology Associations. Most of the smaller popular organizations tended to operate through umbrella organizations.¹⁶

Direct Citizen Participation

Legal documents on grassroots democracy highlighted the necessity for popular participation at the commune and hamlet level and on issues directly related to the livelihood and rights of local inhabitants. The concept of direct citizen participation was a response to popular unrest that had taken place in the late 1990s. According to the legal framework, grassroots authorities were required to publicly inform local inhabitants about decisions that would directly affect the local community. Local inhabitants

would be asked to discuss, decide upon, and participate in locally funded projects, village codes and convention writing, village population internal affairs, construction project supervisory boards built with the people's contributions, protection of production and business, maintenance of security, order, social safety, and environmental issues. Local inhabitants would be asked to comment on some of the documents before the local authorities promulgated them. Finally, local inhabitants would be involved in the direct supervision of certain government activities, judicial oversight, and some finances. The direct supervision of certain government activities included commune administration, sociopolitical organizations, and social and professional organizations in the communes. Local participation was also channeled through two commune-level popular units, the People's Inspectorate and the Committee for the Monitoring of Public Infrastructure Investment. The People's Inspectorate Unit would ensure the compliance of the local administration to laws and policies, while the Committee for the Monitoring of Public Infrastructure Investment was set up specifically to monitor local investment projects. It had mainly focused on projects funded by the community in the past, but later expanded its work to cover all types of projects regardless of budget source.¹⁷

A 2012 survey of provincial Vietnam Fatherland Front units, which asked about the relationship between government and citizens, observed that the degree and scope of transparency, consultation, participation, and supervision varied from one mechanism to another and among activities within each mechanism. Transparency and consultation could be considered moderate. The degree of consultation was comparatively lower than disclosure and varied across activities. The survey results also showed a moderate percentage of citizen monitoring practices. The survey results indicated that the level of interaction and exchange of government–citizen relations varied considerably both by the form of participation and within each type of participation. The level of practice for each of these activities also differed while monitoring seemed to be the weakest area in government–citizen relations.¹⁸

Popular Participation and Public Accountability

The opening up of democratic space under *doi moi* had crucial implications. The three forms of participation that have been discussed so far—elected bodies, nongovernment organizations, and direct popular participation—had the potential to support the development of public accountability under one-party rule. These entry points addressed different accountability dimensions and involved different sets and levels of citizen engagement.

While popular participation brought about the preliminary effects of enhancing transparency and fostering dialogue channels between government agencies and citizens, it was not sufficiently systematic as an

effective accountability mechanism. One major problem stemmed from the overlapping nature of the party, the state, political institutions, and popular organizations. In the case of elected bodies, elected deputies were assigned the responsibility of holding government officials accountable for their performance. However, there remained a lack of clarity on to whom deputies might be accountable. Both national and local elected bodies consisted of a substantial number of deputies who were also government officials, raising questions about their duty to their superiors and their duty to voters. Party hierarchies within the government and elected body structures through the system of party committees or the presence of party cadres at the leadership level further complicated the question of accountability.

The ability of popular organizations to hold the government accountable was similarly conditioned by their organizational structure and personnel. In most cases, popular organizations were not neatly separated from the state structure. Especially at the early stage of organizational development, leaders with high social standing and a well-connected relationship with the state were crucial—even more than the vision, organizational mission, program, or financial credibility. Many popular organizations retained close connections with the state, while many recruited retired state officials or received state budget for state-assigned work. Within that context, the accountability of popular organizations became blurred.

PERFORMANCE, CRISIS, AND WAYS FORWARD

Ho Chi Minh defined socialism as the system in which “people have enough to eat, are dressed warmly, and do not exploit one another.” The Socialist Republic of Vietnam, in the post-central planning era, strives to achieve the goal of creating a “rich people, strong nation, and civilized society.” Does Vietnam need socialism in order to reach these goals? Or to put it differently, will socialism enable Vietnam to reach its goals?

At one level, Vietnam’s success in eradicating hunger and reducing poverty (i.e., people having enough to eat and dressing warmly) and economic growth (i.e., a rich people and a strong nation) during the *doi moi* era is well documented. Measured in current dollar terms, Vietnam doubled its per capita GDP of \$413 in 2001 to \$836 in 2007, and passed the \$1,000 milestone ahead of the target date set by the Socio-Economic Development Plan of 2006–2010.¹⁹ Vietnam’s transition from central planning has undoubtedly contributed to the goals of socialism in crucial ways. On another level, the record of Vietnam’s commitment to political reform and its plan for political renewal should be observed in light of some rather peculiar phenomena that have developed. In the 1990s, local newspapers discussed *diem nong*, or “hot spots,” that erupted in rural areas. The term

referred to a phenomenon of popular resistance to the process of land grabbing or land clearing. In the late 1990s and early 2000s, there emerged corrupt economic practices and abuses of power. It is not an exaggeration to say that the state itself, with its renewed power as a result of *doi moi*, had become a large marketplace where various types of unconventional economic transaction, malpractice, and exploitation took place. It is this side of *doi moi* that casts doubt on whether Vietnam will become successful in curbing exploitation and uncivilized social practices.

In the years to come, the Leninist regime in Vietnam will be faced with two political and ideological options. The first will be to follow the paths taken by other developing countries. As a late developer, Vietnam may learn from past experiences in the region and elsewhere. The second option will be to creatively adapt Marxist-Leninism to new conditions. The key question will be how to institutionalize socialist ideals in a world where socialism is no longer a competitive ideology.

In the medium term, and within the rubric of one-party rule, the answers on how to institutionalize socialist ideals may be found in Vietnam's current governance reform frameworks themselves. The starting point is to rethink post-central planning sociopolitical alliances. It has become clear that *doi moi* has generated the unplanned effect of restructuring the political position of the socioeconomic sectors and groups once considered key allies of the party-state. The reform brought about a major change in the position of the Vietnamese peasants, who gained economically but were weakened politically. De-collectivization, which was enforced in 1988 and expanded rapidly in the 1990s, gave rise to the household as an economic unit outside the state, turning cooperative members into individual and independent producers. After de-collectivization, the peasants lost both political and economic bargaining power as they lacked organizational support to help them advance their particular interests. Vietnam observers have also noted that during the economic reform period workers' bargaining power vis-à-vis management declined. In the past, the power of enterprise managers over workers had been constrained by the Marxist-Leninist discourse. Under the new market system, the working class has become socially fragmented. Rural-urban migration has further exacerbated the situation, as it has provided enterprise managers with a pool of first generation workers from rural areas. From an ideological point of view, any reform policies that address the interests of these increasingly marginalized groups under *doi moi*, as opposed to the mere focus on business, will contribute to balancing growth with equality. An emphasis on women as a class alliance, a key concern of the communist movement and the socialist state, should also continue.

Secondly, socialist ideals could be concretized in Vietnam's approach toward the reform of state institutions. Vietnam may continue to strengthen its public administration apparatus so that it facilitates and serves, rather

than commands and controls. Given that governance challenges in Vietnam are largely a result of the merger of politics with economics, anticorruption principles could be integrated into the overall institutional reform process. Improving the integrity of the party-state will address tensions between the government and society, as well as alleviate abuses of power between government–citizen contacts. To concretize socialist ideals, Vietnam also needs to invest its efforts in the improvement of public services, especially those fundamental to the development of human potentials and social safety nets. In the era of *doi moi*, there were indications that access to education and health care was becoming increasingly problematic. In the 1990s, the *doi moi* state had difficulties in providing education and health care services owing to budget constraints. Today, Vietnam is able to achieve steadier economic growth and to allocate more funds for education and health care. Nonetheless, a portion of financial responsibility has been transferred to citizens-cum-clients under the rubric of socialization—defined as society’s contribution to public services. While socialization has become a standard practice within the public service system, it has had an unintended effect of damaging the principle of equal access to public services. Citizen payments, either legitimately or through informal fees to public service providers, incentivizes service providers to give those who pay better treatment. It also makes public services unaffordable to many who cannot pay. Additionally, it also undermines the functioning of the service system as a whole; governments may turn a blind eye to problems caused by underfunding and poor allocation. To revive socialist ideals, priorities may be given to a renewal of the commitment to the provision of equal and quality education and health care.

Thirdly, socialist ideals may be concretized in the development of socialist democratic space. Specifically, the legal frameworks governing elected bodies could be further improved, despite a tacit understanding that the legislative branch will continue to have a limited function under the rubric of one-party rule. Debates on the role of popular organizations so far have focused on the relationship between these organizations and the state, whether and how much state management is needed, or whether and how much autonomy these organizations should have. In the long run, the question of socialist democracy may shift to how their participation may bring about a better quality of governance. Socialist ideals may also be reflected in Vietnam’s implementation of grassroots democracy. In the future, the grassroots democracy framework may be extended from focusing on limited policy areas to a broader range of issues. There will be a need for regulations, work rules, and procedures to guarantee and facilitate various forms of direct popular participation, especially popular discussion and monitoring.

Finally, socialist ideals may reemerge as Vietnam rethinks its post-central planning ideological values. The disintegration of central planning

has raised the question of the cultural foundations of the new state. Prior to *doi moi*, while waging the war of national liberation, the DRV regime had adopted a peasant-based socialist ideology whose cultural discourse focused on egalitarianism and antiexploitation. The cultural and ideological foundation of the *doi moi* state, however, has been different. During the past 20 years, the *doi moi* state has drawn cultural capital from two key sources: the old values inherited from the socialist period; and the traditional cultural values of social connectedness and reciprocity re-emerging in rural Vietnam. Values inherited from the socialist period²⁰ were related to the political principles of collective leadership, the idea of patronage stemming from and reinforced by the practice of “owning/line ministries” (*chu quan*) and the culture of asking and giving in economic matters. Under *doi moi*, economic reform precipitated the reemergence of traditional Vietnamese cultural practices following the collapse of the collective economy and the rise of household, family, and clan relations. With them came renewed ritualistic practices that bound individuals and groups together, such as ancestor worship, the preservation of family records, the organization of lineage rules, and individual life cycle rituals. The old and new values served as a foundation for personal and social relations that supported political patronage networks.

The entrenched rule of social relations developed under *doi moi*, which has had the effect of giving birth to many uncivilized or exploitative practices, does not rule out alternative political cultural values. For Vietnam, integrity in the public sector is not new. Ho Chi Minh even had a teaching regarding integrity as, “*can kiem liem chinh, chi cong vo tu*” (industry, thrift, integrity, willfulness, and impartiality). These political and cultural traits can support the development of emerging political values including the rule of law, efficiency, meritocracy, accountability, and transparency. Improving the integrity of the party-state will not only address tensions between the government and society but will alleviate abuses of power in government–citizen contacts.

The history of the Vietnamese socialism shows that Vietnam was pragmatic and adaptive in using Marxism and Leninism as a solution for its nation- and state-building objectives. If it is successful, Vietnam will contribute to the history of Marxism-Leninism in an innovative way.

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in Vietnam's Provinces: Pathways toward Inclusive Growth and Poverty Reduction," a report commissioned by the Embassy of Norway, Hanoi, December 2012. It is expected to be published in 2014 with permission from the Embassy.

NOTES

1. Huynh Kim Khanh, *Vietnamese Communism, 1925–1945* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1980), ch. 1.

2. For details, see *ibid.*; George Kahin, *Intervention: How America Became Involved in Vietnam* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1986); and Thaveeporn Vasavakul, "Viet Nam: The Changing Model of Political Legitimation," in *Political Legitimacy in Southeast Asia*, ed. Muthiah Alagappa (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1995), 257–287.

3. For details on land reform, see Christine White, "Agrarian Reform and National Liberation in the Vietnamese Revolution: 1920–1957," Ph.D. Thesis, Cornell University, 1981; Edwin Moise, *Land Reform in China and North Vietnam: Consolidating the Revolution at the Village Level* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1983); and Andrew Vickerman, *The Fate of the Peasantry: Premature "Transition to Socialism" in the Democratic Republic of Vietnam*, Monograph Series no. 28, Yale University Southeast Asia Program, 1984. On the development of central planning, see Christine White, "Agricultural Planning, Pricing Policy and Co-operatives in Vietnam." *World Development* 13, no.1 (1985): 97–114; Adam Fforde and Suzanne H. Paine, *The Limits of National Liberation: Problems of Economic Management in the Democratic Republic of Viet Nam with a Statistical Appendix* (London: Croom Helm, 1987); and Adam Fforde, *The Agrarian Question in North Vietnam, 1974–1979: A Study of Cooperator Resistance to State Policy* (Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe, 1989). On regime legitimacy and resistance, see Thaveeporn Vasavakul, "Viet Nam: Sectors, Classes, and the Transformation of a Leninist State," in *Driven by Growth: Political Change in the Asia-Pacific Region* (revised edition), ed. James W. Morley (Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe, 1999), 59–82; Thaveeporn Vasavakul, "Viet Nam: The Changing Model of Political Legitimation," in *Political Legitimacy in Southeast Asia*, ed. Muthiah Alagappa (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1995), 257–287; and Benedict Kerkvliet, *The Power of Everyday Politics: How Vietnamese Peasants Transformed National Policy* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2005).

4. For details, Dang Phong and Melanie Beresford, "Authority Relations and Economic Decision-Making in Vietnam: An Historical Perspective," no. 38, 3–9. NIAS Report Series, Copenhagen, 1988.

5. Vasavakul, "The Changing Model of Political Legitimation."

6. *Ibid.*; Melanie Beresford and Dang Phong, *Economic Transition in Vietnam: Trade and Aid in the Demise of a Centrally Planned Economy* (Cheltenham: Edward Elgar, 2000); Melanie Beresford, *National Unification and Economic Development in Vietnam* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1989).

7. For details, see Dao Xuan Sam and Vu Quoc Tuan, eds., *Renovation in Vietnam: Recollection and Contemplation* (Hanoi: Knowledge Publishing House, 2008); Adam Fforde and Stefan DeVylder, *From Plan to Market: The Economic Transition in Vietnam* (Boulder, CO: Westview, 1996).

8. Gareth Porter, *Vietnam: The Politics of Bureaucratic Socialism* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1993); Dao Xuan Sam and Vu Quoc Tuan, eds., *Renovation in Vietnam: Recollections and Contemplations* (New York: Knowledge Publishing, 2008).

9. The number of studies on the VCP has remained limited.

10. For the discussion in this section, see the Thaveeporn Vasavakul's following writings: "Politics of Administrative Reform in Post-Socialist Viet Nam," in *Vietnam Assessment: Creating a Sound Investment Climate*, ed. Suiwah Leung (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 1996), 42–68; "Rethinking the Philosophy of Central-Local Relations in Post-Central Planning Vietnam," in *Central-Local Government Relations in the Asia-Pacific Region*, ed. Mark Turner (London: Macmillan, 1999), 166–195; "Public Administration and Economic Development in Viet Nam: Remaking the Public Administration for the 21st Century," A report commissioned by the UNDP-Hanoi, 2009; and "Governance Arrangements in Vietnam's Provinces: Towards Inclusive Growth and Poverty Reduction," A report commissioned by the Royal Norwegian Embassy, Hanoi, 2012.

11. Ngo Thang Loi and Vu Cuong, eds., *Doi moi cong tac ke hoach hoa trong tien trinh hoi nhap* (Reform of Planning in the Process of Integration) (Hanoi: Lao dong-Xa hoi, 2007).

12. For budgetary decentralization, see Le Chi Mai. *Phan cap ngan sach cho chinh quyen dia phuong: thuc trang va giai phap* (Budgetary Decentralization to the Local Government: Situation and Solutions) (Hanoi: Chinh tri Quoc gia, 2006). A good summary in English can be found in World Bank. *Vietnam Development Report*, Hanoi, 2005.

13. The survey was conducted in April and May 2012. A survey was sent to relevant officials in 63 Vietnamese provinces. Approximately 60 percent of those receiving the survey form answered. See Vasavakul, "Governance Arrangements in Vietnam's Provinces: Towards Inclusive Growth and Poverty Reduction."

14. For further information, see Thaveeporn Vasavakul, "Public Administration and Economic Development in Viet Nam: Remaking the Public Administration for the 21st Century"; Thaveeporn Vasavakul, "Corruption in the Health Sector: Management of Service Delivery and Impact on Poverty Reduction in Vietnam." A report commissioned by the Embassy of Sweden for the Government of Vietnam-Donor Anti-Corruption Dialogue, Vietnam, 2009; and Thaveeporn Vasavakul, "Thực hiện chủ trương xã hội hóa trong ngành giáo dục tại TP Hồ Chí Minh: TP Hồ Chí Minh cụ thể hoá quan hệ đối tác công—tư như thế nào? (Implementation of Education Socialization in Ho Chi Minh City: How Has Ho Chi Minh City Concretized Public-Private Partnership?). A report commissioned by the PAR Project, HCM City, Hanoi, 2010.

15. Regarding the National Assembly, see Pham Duy Nghia, Nguyen Duc Lam, Truong Quoc Hung, and Kelvin Deveaux. "Gui moi lien he cua dai bieu dan cu voi cu tri o Viet Nam: Thuc trang va kien nghi" (Maintaining Connections between National Assembly Deputies and Voters in Vietnam: Situation and Recommendations). Hanoi, 2008; For local councils, see Thaveeporn Vasavakul, "Report and Analysis of Vietnam's Current Legal Framework for People's Councils: The Experience of Rural Districts in Ninh Thuan Province." A report commissioned by Oxfam-GB, Vietnam, 2010 and "Report on the Analysis of Vietnam's Current Legal Framework for People's Councils: A Perspective from Ninh Thuan." A report commissioned by Oxfam-GB, Hanoi, 2008.

16. For further information, see the following writings by Thaveeporn Vasavakul: "From Fence Breaking to Networking: Popular Organizations and Policy Influence in Post-Socialist Vietnam," in *Getting Organized in Vietnam: Moving In and Around the Socialist State*, eds. Benedict Kerkvliet, Russell Heng, and David Koh (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 2003), 25–61; "Law on Associations." A report commissioned by the UNDP-Hanoi, 2005 (with Mark Sidel); "Report on the Study on Support for an Official Mechanism for Dialogue between Vietnamese Government Agencies/the National Assembly and Civil Society Organizations in Vietnam." A report commissioned by SDC, Vietnam, 2008.

17. See Vasavakul, "Governance Arrangements in Vietnam's Provinces."

18. *Ibid.*

19. Vasavakul, "Public Administration Reform and Economic Development."

20. Shuan Malarney, *Culture. Ritual and Revolution in Vietnam* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2002); and John Kleinen, *Facing the Future, Reviving the Past: A Study of Social Change in a Northern Vietnamese Village* (Singapore: ISEAS, 1999).

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CHAPTER 7

The Mexican Commune

Bruno Bosteels

What is the Commune, that Sphinx so tantalizing to the bourgeois mind?
—Karl Marx, “The Civil War in France”¹

MISSED ENCOUNTERS

In Mexico, the destiny of communism—like almost everything else after that fateful year of 1910, marking both the first centennial of the nation’s independence and the onset of armed conflict—is intimately bound up with the history and theory of the Mexican Revolution. Curiously, for the most part, this intimacy has merited only one-sided treatments, with both sides following parallel tracks that only rarely meet. Even in those seldom instances when an actual crossover takes place, this happens only with the greatest difficulty and still leaves us in the end with the sense of a missed encounter.

A quick comparative glance at the secondary literature immediately confronts us with a major discrepancy between, on the one hand, those authors who study the history of communism in Mexico, connected to the origins of the Partido Comunista Mexicano (PCM); and, on the other, those who study the history and ideology of the Mexican Revolution, mainly focused on the key figures of Emiliano Zapata and Francisco “Pancho” Villa, if not more conservatively on the representatives of the new bourgeois state that was to emerge victoriously out of the prolonged civil war: Venustiano Carranza, Álvaro Obregón, and Plutarco Elías Calles. The reasons for this divergence are not purely chronological—the PCM having been founded late in 1919, when the process of the Mexican Revolution had already begun to wind down with the military defeat of both Zapata’s Liberation Army of the South and Villa’s Northern Division.

When the PCM was officially brought into existence in November of 1919, Zapata was already dead, having been murdered on April 10 of that same year in the Chinameca hacienda in Morelos; and Villa, after suffering crushing military defeats at the hands of Obregón's Constitutionalist forces had retreated to the state of Chihuahua from where he launched a series of desperate and bloody guerrilla attacks until finally laying down arms on June 26, 1920.

By the end of 1919, in other words, the window of opportunity had already passed for what could have been a truly historic encounter of the revolution with the ideas and dreams that inspired the small membership of the newly formed PCM. Aside from the temporal lag, however, there are also deeper ideological causes for the missed encounter, which otherwise need not have been inevitable, insofar as much of the groundwork already would seem to have been laid for a Mexican-styled communism many years prior to the official foundation of the PCM—prior, even, to the beginning of the Mexican Revolution.

Before the onset of armed conflict, between 1860 and 1910, Mexico indeed had already witnessed the rise of various forms of socialism—whether utopian or humanist, libertarian, or anarcho-syndicalist—reaching a peak in the 1870s with the emergence of the workers' organizations La Social and the Gran Círculo Obrero as well as the periodical *El Socialista*, where in 1884 the Spanish translation of *The Communist Manifesto* was to be published. A wide variety of ideological influences left their imprint on this first broad movement toward socialism in Mexico. Suffice it to recall the words of Julio López Chávez, the leader of a peasant rebellion in Chalco, in Mexico State, that was to be viciously repressed by the regime of General Porfirio Díaz. "We are scorned as liberals, branded as socialists and condemned as human beings," López Chávez proclaimed on April 20, 1869 in his *Manifiesto to All the Poor and Oppressed of Mexico and the World*. He continued: "We must look beyond the present and raise our hearts around the sacred banner of the socialist revolution—the banner which proclaims from the heights of the Republic: *Abolish government and exploitation!*"² Similar statements proliferated in the 1870s both in the provinces and in the capital of Mexico City, until the 1880s and 1890s when under the thin veneer of the so-called *Pax Porfiriana* the country would see a fierce consolidation of capitalist development, accompanied as always by new rounds of state-led repression against all signs of popular unrest.

Furthermore, in the first decade of the 20th century, Ricardo Flores Magón had also instigated a liberal-anarchistic form of socialism from the pages of his periodical *Regeneración*, published from exile on the other side of the U.S.-Mexico border. After having founded the Mexican Liberal Party (PLM) in 1906, originally meant to ignite a left-wing return to the liberal Constitution of 1857, Flores Magón, too, would hedge

closer to an insurrectionary form of socialism as the contradictions over capital, labor, and land intensified to the point of an antagonistic explosion. With the end of the Porfiriato now coming in sight, even a left-wing radicalization of the 19th-century ideas of liberal reform would no longer suffice. Instead, uprisings such as the PLM-inspired strikes in Cananea and Río Blanco in June 1906 and January 1907, respectively, seemed to herald a greater movement toward socialism as a possible outcome of the overthrow of Porfirio Díaz. As Adolfo Gilly writes in his Marxist history of the Mexican Revolution, first published in Spanish in 1971 with the title *La revolución interrumpida* (*The Revolution Interrupted*): “The period of bourgeois peace, opened by the defeat of the Paris Commune in 1871, was drawing to a close. It would not be long before the Díaz regime, which had sprung up and matured in the years between the Paris Commune and the Russian Revolution of 1905, began to feel the shock waves.”³ Henceforth, though, it would still be a long road filled with obstacles toward anything resembling a socialist political agenda or action plan—with the risks of liberal-bourgeois recuperation by the state constantly impinging upon the slightest expression of peasant-proletarian autonomy. In “A los proletarios” (“To the proletarians”), published in September 1910 in *Regeneración*, Flores Magón thus warned his readers:

So then, if you revolt with the purpose of overthrowing the despotism of Porfirio Díaz, something which you will undoubtedly achieve, as that triumph is certain; if things go well for you after that victory you'll get a government that will put in effect the Constitution of 1857; and with that you'll have obtained, at least in writing, your political liberty. But in practice you'll be slaves every bit as much as you are today, and like today you'll have only one right: that of being worked to death.⁴

Combined with the lessons learned from the experiments of Mexico's early socialism in the second half of the 19th century, Flores Magón's role as an ideological instigator during the years leading up to the revolution suggest that, long before the official founding of the PCM, the stage was set for an explosive encounter between the ideas of socialism and communism spreading from Europe to the New World and the armed revolutionary struggles of the Mexican poor peasantry and the urban working class. Some people even spoke of the Mexican Revolution as the first Bolshevik revolution in the world and referred to its leaders, whether pejoratively or not, as red or socialistic ideologues. Lenin's famous words, speaking in 1907 about Marx's admiring analysis of the Paris Commune, promised to become a reality in the land of Zapata: “The pedants of Marxism believe this is all ethical nonsense,

romanticism, and absence of realism! No, gentlemen, this is a union of theory and practice of the class struggle."⁵

In actual fact, no such longed-for union or fusion between communist or socialist theory and revolutionary practice ever happened in Mexico. And just as Lenin showed very little to no interest in the possibility that the Mexican Revolution could play an exemplary role for Bolshevism, so too did Villa and Zapata, in favorite and often-rehashed anecdotes, prefer to mock the bookish ideas of socialism and communism spread by some of the autodidact peasant generals or petty-bourgeois intellectuals who had crossed lines to strengthen the cause of the revolutionaries. "I have read the books you gave me with great attention, and I've listened with great interest to your explanation of communism," Zapata replied to his then-secretary, Serafín M. Robles, in one such anecdote. "These ideas seem fine and human to me, but I must tell you that it's not our job to carry them into practice. That will be up to future generations, and who knows how many years will be required for them to take root."⁶ Later, in the postrevolutionary period, the vague use of the epithets red and Bolshevik, whether as insults or as titles of honor pragmatically accepted by the bourgeois government's newly anointed leaders such as Obregón or Calles, only highlighted the absence of a genuinely autonomous socialist or communist program within the so-called revolutionary camp. Worse, the false analogy between the Mexican and the Russian revolutions also enabled the consolidation of a top-down authoritarian link between the bourgeois state and the masses that had effectively taken the stage during the decade-long armed conflict.⁷

Given the mostly divergent paths of communist ideology and revolutionary struggle in early 20th-century Mexico, it should not come as a surprise to find also a strict division of labor in the treatment of this important segment of the national archive among historians. Thus, as I suggested, histories of the communist cause in Mexico are centered almost exclusively on the official narrative of the PCM, including such favorite topics as its origins and early years; the impact of the Communist International on its policies, nefarious in their ongoing calls to support the so-called progressive sectors of the national bourgeoisie; the rise of various Trotskyist, Spartacist, Maoist, and Guevarist parties, groups, or leagues as alternatives to the dogmatic sclerosis of the PCM; the fate of the Mexican New Left in the wake of the student-popular movement of 1968, ending in the massacre of Tlatelolco on October 2; and, finally, the impact in Mexico of Perestroika, the fall of the Berlin Wall, and the collapse of "really existing socialism."⁸ Most of these studies measure the strengths and weaknesses of communism in Mexico by the standards of the Soviet experience, at best supplemented with the theoretical acumen of Western Marxists, the intellectual contributions of exiles from the Spanish Republic, the unique experience of the Cuban Revolution,

the failed hopes of Euro-communism, and the slow campaign of de-Stalinization. By contrast, the—far more numerous—histories of the Mexican Revolution tend to place the emphasis on the unique ideological formations that, aside from Magonism, accompanied the armed conflict between 1910 and 1920, principally in the guise of Zapatism, as Pancho Villa never developed an ideological profile of matching depth; and on the bourgeois state's systematic appropriation and ideological mediation of the original revolutionary ideas, such as the agrarian reform proposed in the 1911 Ayala Plan.⁹ Any socialist potential contained in such plans, in effect, was curtailed and swallowed up in the gradual process of the revolution-made-government, especially after 1927 under President Calles, with the formation of a single-party regime headed by the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI), which would reign uninterupted until 2000.

ANARCHISM AND SOCIALISM

The deeper reasons for the missed encounter behind the Mexican Revolution are best understood in terms of an unresolved conflict between communism and anarchism, or as a result of the ongoing tensions between so-called authoritarian and antiauthoritarian forms of socialism. The dominant ideological trends in the first stages of the struggle for socialism in Mexico always tended to be more anarchist-libertarian than socialist or communist in an orthodox sense. This is certainly the case with socialist experiments in the latter half of the 19th century: "The dominant ideological strands informing Mexican worker activities in the forty years before the 1910 Revolution were various versions of anarchism, libertarianism, and radical liberalism."¹⁰ But the same is still true for the period in the first decades of the 20th century: "Anarchist and libertarian precepts still dominated the most radical sector of a working class that was still only partially organized and in which liberalism and mutualism were still significant influences."¹¹ Not until later, under the Comintern, would we begin to see a strong presence of communist intellectual debate and political argument in Mexico.

And yet, there is a twofold problem with many of these interpretations of the influences of socialism and anarchism upon the revolutionary process in Mexico. On one hand, such interpretations tend to judge the situation from the point of view of the (lack of) direct knowledge or influence of ideas reaching the country from abroad—whether from Soviet Russia or from Western Europe. This holds for socialism and for communism, which are then frequently equated with their definitions in the writings of Marx, Engels, Lenin, Stalin, or Trotsky. The same goes for anarchism, which is typically studied in terms of the influence of ideas from Proudhon, Bakunin, or Kropotkin. In both cases, influence is

supposed to be one-directional, from center to periphery, and tied to easily identifiable texts and traditions. On the other hand, the ideological and political traditions in question, ready to be imported from abroad, often tend to be described as becoming confused or overly eclectic in Mexico, but only because their corresponding sources are usually presumed to have reached a principled maturity in Europe.

In reality, it may well be that the question of anarchism and socialism in Mexico cannot be addressed unless we abandon the one-sidedness of the approach that tackles this question merely in terms of influences. Not only should we consider the possibility of unique combinations of anarcho-syndicalism, socialism, agrarian communism, and indigenous communalism in the case of Mexico; conversely, we should consider that what appears to be an eclectic or insufficiently scientific development in the periphery, in hindsight, may shed new light on the process of ideology-formation in the center as well. A closer study of the coming into being of proletarian class-consciousness in 19th-century Europe, instead of being the straightforward expression of socioeconomic factors, shows that Fourierist, Saint-Simonian, or Marxian socialisms and communisms—in the plural—were likewise the result of multiple uneven developments.

In Mexico, the communist intellectual José Revueltas had already warned against some of the most tempting misconceptions in the study of the theory and ideology of the Mexican Revolution. In his manifesto-like *Ensayo sobre un proletariado sin cabeza* ("Essay on a Headless Proletariat"), Revueltas mentions two mirroring forms of interpretive extremism. There is not only the tendency of affixing a limited set of pre-established labels to the recalcitrant realities of Mexico, but also the opposite tendency, which, in an effort to correct the inevitable misgivings of the first, ends up promoting an enthusiasm for local singularity that is no less blinding than the dogmatism of imported universality. This oversingularization of the local furthermore explains why it is not just the intellectuals and ideologues behind Zapata or Villa, but also the new national bourgeoisie who have a knack for affirming the existence of "some kind of immanent ideology, borne from within the revolution itself and elaborated, not in theoretical thought but from the end of a rifle, by the drama's own protagonists and without the need for the latter to subject themselves to a libretto that would have been written beforehand."¹² Finally, in contrast to the historical inexistence of a genuine communist party as the much-needed head of the proletariat, the specter of anarchism is frequently invoked in this context either to describe the general libertarian and antiauthoritarian impulse behind autochthonous ideologies such as Zapatism and Magonism or else to serve as a name for the limited outcome of insurrectionary armed struggle, incapable of embracing a wider

socialist political platform geared toward the takeover of state power in Mexico.

Even Gilly searches for the socialist potential in the decade-long conflict on the basis of an explanatory scheme that, for all its detail and specificity, cannot shed the impression of being imposed from the outside. The Marxist lens, in particular, forces him to focus on the presence or absence of alliances between the peasantry and the industrial working class. Only the latter, according to an interpretation handed down from Marx all the way to Trotsky, could have given the uprising a broader political character on a nationwide scale. The strategic assumption behind this interpretation holds that without proletarian leadership the peasants overwhelmingly tend to limit their goals to the question of ownership of the land, which by definition remains local. From this point of view, even the radicalization of agrarian reform would prove to be insufficient: "The Ayala Plan did not, then, answer the crucial question of state power. Taken as a whole, it encapsulated the contradiction between peasant ideology and the revolutionary action of the armed peasantry."¹³

Along the same path, Gilly returns time and again to the tensions and contradictions between peasants and proletarians as the key to understand the socialist promise of the Mexican Revolution and its eventual failure. Ultimately, in the absence of an enduring alliance between the struggles of the industrial proletariat and the regional initiatives of Zapata or Villa, the latter tended to drown in their own particularism and, except for the long-term goal of agrarian reform to be taken up two decades later under Lázaro Cárdenas, produced little more than short-lived outbursts of anarchic violence, emblemized with special force in the series of guerrilla attacks against the Constitutionalists in both Zapata's home state of Morelos and Villa's Chihuahua. "For any real answer had to rise above a local or particularist level to take up the national question of the state: the decisive factor, in the end, was not revolutionary land seizures, but control of the centralized state power," concludes Gilly. "The exercise of power demands a program. The application of a program requires a policy. A policy means a party. The peasants did not have, could not have had, any of these things."¹⁴

We see that from a Marxist-informed perspective, too, the question of communism in Mexico can be couched in terms of an unresolved conflict between socialism and anarchism. This conflict, in turn, can be understood in several ways. In terms of temporal and historical character, only socialism is here seen as capable of inspiring a long-term agenda for the class struggle, whereas anarchism is said to be limited to punctual flares of insurrectionary violence; in terms of spatial or geographical distribution, socialism would have a national, if not also international, orientation, whereas the anarchic struggles remain local and site-specific;

finally, at the level of organizational forms of appearance, anarchism is accused of favoring spontaneous uprisings and attacks as part of its ideology of direct action, to which only a socialist class-consciousness, aimed at state power, is said to lend the necessary organization of an enduring political movement.

THE POLITICAL FORM AT LAST DISCOVERED

However, there is one political form in which anarchists and socialists—even in Mexico—seem to be able to find a common ground: the form of the commune. Not only historically did the Paris Commune bring together Proudhonists, Blanquists, and Bakunists with Marx's followers in the International Workingmen's Association, but later too the political form of the commune has remained sufficiently open to attract anarchists, socialists, and communists both utopian and scientific, libertarian and Marxist-Leninist. This expansiveness was remarked on from the very beginning, in Marx's own analysis of the Paris Commune. "The multiplicity of interpretations to which the Commune has been subjected, and the multiplicity of interests which construed it in their favor, show that it was a thoroughly expansive political form," Marx wrote in *The Civil War in France*. And, volunteering himself to solve the enigma of the meaning of the Commune, he famously added: "Its true secret was this. It was essentially a working-class government, the produce of the struggle of the producing against the appropriating class, the political form at last discovered under which to work out the economical emancipation of labor."¹⁵ Only afterward do we see the famous split become pronounced between the followers of Marx and Bakunin, but still without ever breaking the feverish enthusiasm of both orientations for the experiment's expansive political form. Anarchists and socialists found themselves standing shoulder to shoulder on the barricades for a little over two months during the Paris Commune. No doubt this was a shaky ground to stand on, less a foundation than a barricade literally or figuratively made up of cobblestones and sandbags. Nonetheless, it was also a common ground and a temporary zone of indistinction between socialism and anarchism, under the shared watchword of the commune.

In Mexico, too, we could write a secret history of the last century and a half in the name of an underground current of mass mobilizations around the notion of the commune. The Mexican Commune would be the general name for this *other* history—a people's history that is not secret so much as it has been actively silenced, being only intermittently allowed to rise to the surface of our official histories. As one collective recently put it, from the other side of the Atlantic: "The real history of the Commune is the history of the masses themselves, struggling for fundamentally different conditions of existence, and not primarily the history of its leadership. Seen

in this light the history of the Commune has still to be written."¹⁶ What follows in the next pages, then, are merely a few episodes from this *other* history, still to be written or no sooner written than silenced and forgotten, in the case of Mexico.

FROM PARIS TO MEXICO, 1871–77

Unless we were to reach further back for the primitive communism that even Marx late in his life began studying in the context of communal land ownership in Germany, Russia, and pre-Hispanic America, any history of the Mexican Commune has to begin with the reception of the original Paris Commune of 1871 in the land of Porfirio Díaz.¹⁷ In fact, as early June 28, 1874, a journal began to appear in Mexico City precisely under the title *La Comuna* ("The Commune"), lasting for 20 issues, until September 20, 1874. Its first issue contains a fiery speech that an old unnamed communard had pronounced during a public celebration in honor of the journal's founding:

As long as there is a man or a woman alive, the Commune will continue to exist, because great principles are immortal and, without exotic aid, they manage to push their way through, put an end to the lies and shine forth like a sun of eternal truth. The Commune is alive in France as in Mexico, in the United States as in Germany, in China as in Arabia; but we must come together as people of good will to work for the consolidation of our principles, to give rise to a new Kościuszko for the emancipation of Poland, a Kosuth for the freedom of Hungary, a Garibaldi for Italy, a Bakunin for the world; a great man for every ideal, to wipe out the borders between peoples, to demolish the thrones and the governments, to exchange the sentences of hatred for peaceful kisses; to replace the torch with a beacon of our own; so as to substitute the thundering of the canons with a grandiose and eternal hymn for having obtained a single nation, the world; a single religion, work; a single god, freedom.¹⁸

From September 24, 1874, onward, *La Comuna* changed its name to *La Comuna Mexicana* ("The Mexican Commune"), lasting for another 28 issues, until January 24, 1875. Henceforth, one of the journal's explicit goals was to insist on the fact that it would never be possible to put the idea of socialism into actual practice without an expansion from Europe to America. Thus, in a call to arms on November 16, 1874, we read that "as long as all the powers of the International reside in Europe, the emancipation of workers will not be put into practice, for America ends up being excluded from the positive workshops of socialism" and "the persecutions that are the work of the monarchies curtail the development that the International

may know in republican countries."¹⁹ Corresponding to this contrast between the despotic effects of centuries of monarchical rule in Europe and the new liberties afforded by the recently established republics in Latin America, the style of political organization would also have to change as part of the internationalization of the idea of the commune.

We should note that Marx himself had predicted the dissemination of the commune. Not only did he insist on the fact that the 1871 Paris Commune opposed the narrow chauvinism of the Second Empire, for example, by appointing foreigners among its top ranking officials or by destroying a symbol of imperialism in the Vendôme column. He also indicated the promise that one day the rest of the world would adopt and develop the model of the commune. Paris, brief though its experience had been, was to serve as a model for the rest of France: "In a rough sketch of national organization which the Commune had no time to develop, it states clearly that the commune was to be the political form of even the smallest country hamlet."²⁰ And France, in turn, was to serve as a model showing the world how to enable the self-emancipation of labor by restoring the legitimate functions of authority and government, which hitherto lived off the people like a parasitical excrescence, to the responsible agents of society. Marx thus anticipated the possible spread of the commune as "the political form at last discovered" for the worldwide emancipation of all producers from the yoke of the exploiters. He even went so far as to envisage the possibility that, had it been given the chance, the commune would have become the watchword of the revolution in America as much as in France: "Instead of sending the hackneyed old intriguer a-begging at all courts of Europe, it would have electrified the producing masses in the old and the new world."²¹

Aside from its geographical expansiveness, the Paris Commune also presented Marx with challenges of a temporal and historical nature, referring both to the timing of the events and to their place in the larger history of political forms of struggle against capital. "It is generally the fate of completely new historical creations to be mistaken for the counterpart of older and even defunct forms of social life, to which they may bear a certain likeness," Marx admitted. "Thus, the new Commune, which breaks the modern state power, has been mistaken for a reproduction of the medieval communes, which first preceded, and afterwards became the substratum of, that very state power."²² Contrary to the historical mode of analysis that he deployed with great sarcasm in *The 18th Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*, however, in *The Civil War in France* Marx insists not so much on the farcical effects of repetition and disguise as much as on the absolute novelty of the Paris Commune.

Yet, insofar as the Paris Commune was only a brief sketch that lasted for just 72 days, the self-emancipation of the exploited would have to wait for other examples in distant regions to revitalize its promise. In

Russia, for example, Lenin famously danced in the snow when power was held in Moscow in 1917 for one day longer than had been the case in Paris in 1871. "Thus, Lenin's Bolshevik party is certainly the active bearer of an assessment of the failures of the Paris Commune," Alain Badiou writes in *Theory of the Subject*. "It is the rupture of October that periodizes the Paris Commune, turning a page in the history of the world."²³ In addition to the debates over its geographical expansion and temporal duration, we thus acquire a useful principle for the historical periodization of the form of the commune. This periodization operates across different regions by way of the interplay between a past of haunting failures and a future of promising resurrections. No longer just an enigmatic Sphinx, tantalizing to the bourgeois mind, the Paris Commune comes to resemble a mythical Phoenix, capable of rising time and again from its own ashes.

In Mexico we can perceive this logic of periodization as early as in August 1877, in a text called "La comuna americana" ("The American Commune"), written by the Greek libertarian socialist Plotino Rhodakanaty for the journal *El Combate*. "The Commune has exploded in America," Rhodakanaty proclaims, referring in the first place to recent events in the United States: "A simple strike by the railroad workers has been the germ that has led to the Commune in Erie. The greatest fires always begin with a spark that, seemingly by chance, drops like a combustible or penetrates into the arsenal of gunpowder, the explosion of which wreaks terrible havoc."²⁴ Following this logic of periodization, one day there undoubtedly would also emerge a commune in Mexico:

Thus, we believe that according to the infallible law of analogy, the Commune which has been extinguished in Paris, at least in appearance, after germinating throughout Europe and transmigrating to the United States of America, will not fail to visit us in a short while, like a migrating bird hovering above the corrupt villages, to purify them and to devour the tyrants that infest them, just like the fateful vulture lands on the hut of the sick person, attracted by the putrefaction, singing the hymn of death.²⁵

If we follow Adolfo Gilly's analysis in *La revolución interrumpida*, we can say in hindsight that it will take an interval of almost 40 years for this idea of a Mexican Commune to become realized in the land of Zapata. Indeed, even though he takes most of his information about the episode in question from John Womack's authoritative study *Zapata and the Mexican Revolution*, first published in 1969, the Argentine Mexican historian gave the name of the commune to the radical experiment in agrarian reform and self-government that the Zapatists sustained for a whole year in the towns and villages around Cuernavaca in southern Mexico.

MORELOS, 1914–15

Focusing on this episode also means dramatically shifting the location of the peak of the Mexican Revolution. Gilly rejects the official story, supported by decades of single-party rule under the PRI, which places the culmination at the signing of the Constitution in February 1917: “The peak will not be the ratification of the 1917 Constitution, as it is for the institutional, state-centered optic of official histories, but the point when the strength and mobilization of the armed peasant masses culminated in the occupation of Mexico City. It will be the victory of December 1914.”²⁶ The culminating moment of the revolutionary process would come with Zapata’s and Villa’s momentous first meeting on December 4 just south of Mexico City, and their triumphant joint entrance two days later into the nation’s capital, a victory lap captured for eternity in a deservedly famous photograph depicting the peasant leaders inside the National Palace—with Villa jokingly occupying the presidential seat while to his left Zapata cannot hide his profound discomfort at doing the same.

For all its revisionist force in taking attention away from February 1917, though, such a view still confirms an understanding of politics based on national sovereignty and the centralization of state power. “Everything appears to be at stake and up for grabs within the temporal frame of the interregnum,” Gareth Williams observes in *The Mexican Exception* with reference to the power vacuum in December 1914. “But sovereign power appears to be almost preordained in its ability to structure and define the grounds of political action,” as ciphred in the tensions between the attitudes of the two peasant leaders toward the presidential chair, to be occupied or not: “Villa’s was a decision for the continuity of the sovereign imperium. Zapata’s was a gesture for the freedom of all.”²⁷ Even within the pages of Gilly’s history of the Mexican Revolution we can locate a more radical displacement away from the official story if we accept that the true peak of the Mexican Revolution happens just afterward and outside of Mexico City—during the Morelos Commune. This also implies that we flee the heavy focus on the state, on sovereignty, and on centralized power. After all, just as we can find a gesture of freedom in Zapata’s mythical exclamation in front of the presidential chair: “We should burn the chair to end ambitions,” so too we should recall that Villa’s dream, as evoked in John Reed’s *Insurgent Mexico*, was not for him one day to become president but rather to retreat from the central power of the state altogether. Villa is quoted as saying: “My ambition is to live my life in one of those military colonies among my *compañeros* whom I love, who have suffered so long and so deeply with me. I think I would like the government to establish a leather factory there where we could make good saddles and bridles, because I know how to do that; and the rest of the time I would

like to work on my little farm, raising cattle and corn. It would be fine, I think, to help make Mexico a happy place."²⁸

Upon bidding farewell to Villa's Northern Division when both armies left Mexico City on December 9, 1914, Zapata and his troops did not just retreat from the nation's capital in order to tend to business as usual on their farms in the state of Morelos. The situation was actually far more complex, for what the armed peasants of the Liberation Army of the South returned to in their home territory constituted an ongoing experiment in self-government, combining military and administrative control of the villages with the radical agrarian reform inaugurated by Zapata's Secretary of Agriculture Manuel Palafox: "In their home territory, the Zapatists created an egalitarian society with communal roots (very different from the individualist utopia of 'rural democracy'), and they maintained it until they finally lost power."²⁹

To be sure, in telling the story of the Morelos Commune, Gilly hesitates somewhat between reinvoicing the heroic memory of the Paris Commune and heightening the novelty of the Zapatist experiment. Adopting the fiery motif of extinction and resurrection, he at times suggests a direct influence of 1871 Paris: "The fire the Commune lit in Mexico continued to smolder beneath the surface, covered but not extinguished by defeat and the *Pax Porfiriana*. Thus Octavio Jahn, a veteran of the Paris Commune, later took part in the Mexican Revolution. Indeed, everyone who had kept alive the memory of the Commune would join the revolution in its early stages."³⁰ At other times, by contrast, Gilly privileges the idea of the Morelos Commune as a truly unprecedented event. Yet, even in such instances, he follows the Mexican revolutionary leaders in drawing parallels with other experiences in world history:

The Paris Commune, which had taken nationalization measures, armed the people, and introduced citizens' government, was a remote and fleeting episode. Its world echo did, to be sure, reach Mexico. Yet there is no evidence that it had more than a faint impact on Zapata, not to mention the peasants of Morelos. Perhaps some history of the Commune had figured in the reading of Palafox or other Zapatist intellectuals. But their rhetoric, even the choice of the name "Convention," harked back more to the Great French Revolution.³¹

In the context of 20th-century political experiences, finally, it is not the storming of the Winter Palace so much as what subsequently would come to be known as the council communism of the Soviets that serves as a possible point of reference for understanding the Morelos Commune: "Basing themselves on old traditions and the practice of collectively discussing

community problems, the Zapatists created forms of organization and government not unlike the soviets the Russian Revolution was then reviving on the other side of the world."³² Even if, from a Eurocentric point of view, it may well be the rupture of the Russian Revolution that periodizes the Paris Commune, from the point of view of the Zapatists in Morelos this is not because of the takeover of centralized state power so much as thanks to the potential for local self-rule and autonomy.

What makes the Morelos Commune all the more attractive to the Trotskyist in Gilly is the promise of its momentarily having solved a familiar problem regarding the class composition of the revolutionary subject. From Marx we learn that only a proletarian basis could provide the leadership needed during the revolutionary process. "*It was only the working class that could formulate by the word 'Commune'—and initiate by the fighting Commune of Paris—this new aspiration,*" he had posited in *The Civil War in France*. "*Only the proletarians, fired by a new social task to accomplish by them for all society, to do away with all classes and class rule, were the men to break the instrument of that class rule—the state, the centralized and organized governmental power usurping to be the master instead of the servant of society.*"³³ Gilly appears to be uncritically accepting of this orthodox point of view, insofar as he too believes that the peasantry alone could not have brought about a socialist agenda: "*If there had been no working class linked to the peasantry in the Zapatist region, the traditional organization would not by itself have been able to generate forms of centralizing the struggle, and, above all, would not have had a social base for the socialist ideas expressed in various measures taken by the southern revolution.*"³⁴ Nevertheless, this view should not pose a problem for the hypothesis about the establishment of a commune in Morelos. What sets this region apart is precisely the promise of a strong unity between the peasants, focused on agrarian reform, and the increasingly proletarianized workers of the sugar mills, attracted by the Zapatist proposal to collectivize their industry. This peasant-worker alliance enabled the most radical wing of the Zapatist army, grouped around the Ayala Plan, to give its struggle an increasingly anticapitalist orientation. In Morelos, Gilly goes on to say, "*this wing not only embodied the continuity of the whole revolutionary cycle, but for a whole period of time—longer than the Paris Commune of 1871 or the Berlin and Hungarian communes of 1919—evolved a form of popular power that has been ignored in all the official histories.*"³⁵

Seen in this light, the peak of the Morelos Commune—and thus of the Mexican Revolution as a whole—comes in the guise of the Zapatist laws of October 1915, proposing both state ownership of the centers of industrial production and peasant ownership of the redistributed lands. However, as Gilly also insists, the Morelos Commune in the end proved unable to extend on a nationwide scale its accomplishments between

October 1914 and October 1915: "In that crucial twelvemonth, Morelos had carried out the deepest revolution in Mexican history; and yet, all the efforts of the Zapatist leadership had been unable to discover a national way forward."³⁶ For reasons already mentioned, the peasant followers of Zapata in the South, like those of Villa in the North, remained overly tied to the territorial control of their respective regions. Autonomy at a distance from the state, in other words, was both the principal strength and the inevitable weakness of the armed peasants. Instead of moving forward, they withdrew. And this withdrawal, in turn, allowed the new bourgeoisie to tighten its grip on the entire state apparatus, now—and for several more decades to come—cynically legitimated in the name of the revolution.

CHIAPAS, 1994

Given Gilly's predilection for comparing the peak of the Mexican Revolution to the Paris Commune, it may seem surprising at first that he would not return to this nomenclature and its Marxian framework in his later analysis of the 1994 uprising in Chiapas. If the culmination of the original Zapatist movement came in 1914–15 in the form of a commune in Morelos, why would the neo-Zapatist rebellion, 80 years later, not deserve the same label? Was not this, too, a creative attempt at local self-government based on long-standing traditions of communal decision making and consultation from below? Why, then, should we have to wait for the analysis of yet another collective on the other side of the Atlantic to announce the possibility that what started on January 1, 1994, if not already earlier, with the indigenous revolts of the 1970s and 1980s, leading up to the foundation of the Zapatista Army of National Liberation (EZLN), amounted to something like a commune in Chiapas?³⁷

Gilly's reluctance to apply the hypothesis of the commune to his analysis of the events in Chiapas is all the more surprising insofar as he had planted the seeds for such an interpretation as part of his overarching approach to Mexican history in *La revolución interrumpida*. This book's narrative construction depends on the motif of a cyclical or intermittent return of the people's capacity for autonomous self-government, exemplified in the Morelos Commune. Not only would Mexican history never again be the same after the death of Zapata, but also new social forces in the future could rekindle the fire of the Zapatist experiment in Morelos:

The southern peasants understood the full meaning of this event: the loss of their leader finally interrupted their revolution. New forces, new efforts, new struggles, and new organizational forms would be necessary to revive it in the future. Thrown back on their structures and relations of social life, on the conquests and the experience

incorporated in their consciousness through ten years of revolution, they would nevertheless stubbornly defend their material gains with all the means at their command, preparing to unite in their villages to face the difficult era ahead. At the same time, they would patiently begin to weave in everyday life the social tissue of future revolutionary stages.³⁸

Woven into this social fabric, we could easily perceive the guiding thread of future events that would begin to unravel decades later in Chiapas.

Moreover, taking advantage of his book's English-language translation, Gilly allows himself the benefit of hindsight by retroactively inserting the Chiapas experience into his narrative about the achievements of Zapata's troops in Morelos. "Feeling themselves to be the subject, and no longer the mere object of history, they stored up a wealth of experience and consciousness that altered the whole country as it is *lived* by its inhabitants," Gilly concludes in the new Epilogue written in 2005 for *The Mexican Revolution*. "It was impossible to ignore or depreciate this change in the eventful century that followed, up to the Zapatista Indian armed rebellion in Chiapas in 1994, and after."³⁹

Despite these retroactive anticipations, the fact of the matter is that between 1971, when he completed the first Spanish edition of *La revolución interrumpida*, and 1995, when he began composing the essay published two years later as *Chiapas: la razón ardiente* ("Chiapas and the Rebellion of the Enchanted World"), Gilly's work as a historian underwent a veritable paradigm shift, which I believe forbade him the continued use of the nomenclature of the commune. The idea is still to make Chiapas part of Mexico's revolutionary history, but doing so now requires at the same time a complete overhaul of the theoretical and methodological underpinnings of one's style of history-writing. Instead of in Marx or Trotsky, Gilly now finds his sources of inspiration in E. P. Thompson, Ranajit Guha, or James C. Scott. The result is not a change in tone—if anything, Gilly is even more enthusiastic about 1994 than he was about 1914—so much as a change in civilizational outlook or world view: instead of a Marxist analysis of anticapitalist struggle, we find a subalternist critique of modernity; instead of the study of political economy, an inquiry into the moral economy of peasant revolts; and instead of a self-proclaimed scientific investigation of objective power relations, we obtain an openly romantic valorization of subjective, cultural, and symbolic factors such as habits, gestures, beliefs, myths, and rituals that conform a community's imaginary identity.

This overarching shift in focus from science to culture and from class to community seems to have voided the usefulness of the vocabulary derived from the Paris Commune. Like other referents hearkening back to the French Revolution that Gilly still gladly invoked in his reading of

the Mexican Revolution, it appears as if Marx's framing of the 1871 Paris Commune were too closely tied to the modern liberal-enlightened tradition of Western Europe. And the same can be said of the overly Hegelian-Marxian binary of civil society/state that Gilly now abandons in favor of a study of the practices of command and obedience in everyday life which constitute *la comunidad estatal mexicana*, or Mexican state community.⁴⁰

At its most sweeping, Gilly's analysis of the Chiapas rebellion is an essay on the limits of modernity and the negated other of modern reason, but unlike what happens for example in the late work of Theodor W. Adorno, the leverage for such a critique of instrumental reason is to be found not in high art but rather in the deep historical substrate of the originary community, denied but never annihilated by modern society. This also entails a complete role reversal in our understanding of the relation between the rural and urban populations. Whereas previously no socialist agenda could emerge directly out of the primitive agrarian commune without at least some alliance with the most advanced sectors of the industrial working class, now all initiative goes directly to the agrarian community. This allows us once more to punctuate the entire history of Mexico—this time in terms of a millenarian tradition of ongoing, if also still intermittent, communal revolts:

The agrarian community, with its hierarchies, its beliefs, its values, and its networks of internal relations, is the subject and author of rebellion. This has been proven empirically in rebellion after rebellion in Mexican history, from the "Tzeltal Republic" of 1712 and the rebellion of 1869 in Chiapas, through the revolution of Emiliano Zapata between 1911 and 1920, to the indigenous *neozapatista* rebellion in Chiapas from 1994 forward.⁴¹

Only from this revised perspective can the neo-Zapatist uprising in Chiapas be said to be *el último resplandor* ("the last glow") of the Mexican Revolution:

I consider that the indigenous rebellion of 1994 in Chiapas, together with the civil insurgency of Cardenism in 1988, complete the cycle of the Mexican revolution which, beginning with the revolts headed by Ricardo Flores Magón in 1907, covers almost the entire twentieth century. These reappearitions would come to close the circle of the revolution interrupted in 1920 and, toward the end of this cycle, to redefine the ideas, aims and aspirations that the subaltern classes saw in it from the Magonist revolts onwards.⁴²

The image of the circle should not make us overlook the qualitative leap that has taken place over the course of a century-long cycle—a qualitative leap summed up in the reversal of priorities between the

subalternist-indigenous perspective, focused on the originary community, and the Marxist perspective, derived from the 1871 Paris Commune. Alternatively, we could say that the commune is restored to its traditional, peasant, and agrarian roots, rather than being left to depend on the extraneous input of liberal-enlightened or socialist ideals coming from the metropolis and anchored in references to the centralized nation-state.

Finally, there may be yet another reason why Gilly shies away from calling the Chiapas uprising a commune. This is because, by 1994, the indigenous communities that take up arms obviously already have at their disposal a historical memory and a vocabulary of their own, referring back—among other events—to the 1914 peak of the Mexican Revolution. Thus, even though he no longer uses the word, Gilly nonetheless sees the radical utopian potential of Zapata's Morelos Commune as having been revived in the experience of *neozapatismo* in Chiapas:

The rebellion's right to invoke *zapatismo*—so many other times invoked from other quarters—was based in a fact: entire Indian communities had organized an army. And they affirmed that right through many gestures: for example, since 1993 dictating a body of "revolutionary laws" for their territory, just as the Liberation Army of the South had done in Morelos. In a new way such gestures, tied to a reality and not to a text, address both the present and Mexican memory.⁴³

As part of this same memory, it would take little more than a decade for us to see the next rebirth of the old Phoenix, this time resurrected in the city of Oaxaca in southern Mexico.

OAXACA, 2006

Up to this point we have seen a number of instantiations of the Mexican Commune, but only as the effect of a name imposed from the outside. For Marx, though, perhaps the most important aspect of the 1871 Paris Commune was its capacity to bring itself into existence, beginning on March 18, as if based on the sheer power of its own name: "The great social measure of the Commune was its own working existence. Its special measures could but betoken the tendency of a government of the people by the people."⁴⁴ More recently, Alain Badiou has given us a philosophical formalization of the same principle. "What exactly is this beginning, March 18, as an object?" Badiou asks in *Logics of Worlds*. "The answer is: the appearance of worker-being—up until then a social symptom, the brute force of uprisings or a theoretical threat—in the space of political

and governmental capacity.”⁴⁵ This is what makes the Paris Commune into such an exemplary site for politics: “It is this initiative which will turn the object ‘March 18’ (a day), such as it is exposed in the world ‘Paris in Spring 1871,’ into a site. That is, it will turn it into that which exposes itself in the appearing of which it is a support.”⁴⁶ In Mexico, however, this effect of self-nomination of the commune—to give existence to its own being in the world of appearing—did not come into play until early in the 21st century, when a section of the powerful teachers’ union and then the population at large in the capital city and state of Oaxaca rose up in revolt to demand the ousting of the governor Ulises Ruiz Ortiz.

The chronology of events known as the Oaxaca Commune is fairly well established. It all started when on June 14 the annual teachers’ strike and occupation of the city’s *zócalo*, which had been initiated in May by members of Section 22 of the National Educational Workers Union (SNTE) with the usual demand for higher salaries and other material benefits, was viciously repressed by the police. The outrage over the incredible brutality of this repression promptly mobilized large sectors of the population to sympathize with the teachers and, on June 17, a democratic structure for self-governance was formed, gathering over 350 organizations into the Popular Assembly of the Oaxacan Peoples (APPO). Also brought into existence was a printmaking collective, the Assembly of Revolutionary Artists of Oaxaca (ASARO), whose brave founding act consisted in laying down a *tapete* or carpet of sand and flower petals at the feet of a heavily armed row of Federal Police. In the following months, the city would become the site of countless street battles, police raids, and much politicking-as-usual. Mega-marches, the occupation of public radio and television stations, intermittent negotiations with local and federal authorities, tactical retreats into the university near the historic center, electoral gambles, popular barricades—all were answered with never-ending waves of intimidation, repression, imprisonment, torture, and even the active disappearance of individual suspects. On October 20, with Ulises Ruiz still firmly in power, leaders of the teachers’ union unilaterally called for a return to classes while in the eyes of many the APPO, barely capable of hiding its internal fractures, abandoned the people to their own fate on the barricades or, worse, joined in on the reactionary chorus blaming hooligans for the destruction of private property and for the general disarray that was driving away much-needed tourists. However, even after this betrayal the marches and the street fighting would continue, as would the police repression. November 25, in particular, will be remembered as one of the darkest days in Oaxaca’s history, with the Federal Preventative Police (PFP) provoking a veritable massacre both on the ground and from the air, leaving several people killed and causing countless activists to flee the city. As a result, much of the APPO’s remaining activity thereafter would be concentrated on

juridical matters, calling for the release of prisoners and denouncing the human rights abuses.⁴⁷

If the chronology of events is well known, by contrast much less clear is what meaning we should attribute to them. Many of the questions that since then have been asked with some regularity remain unanswered to this day. What exactly was taking shape on or near the barricades in Oaxaca? Was it an urban riot, a mass festival, a proto-party, a new social movement, or a general assembly of indigenous-communitarian ascendancy based on the *usos y costumbres* that have legal authority for 412 out of 570 municipalities in the state, now combined with the horizontalism of an antiglobalization movement of movements? Similarly, as the movement has continued after 2006 well beyond the control of the APPO with its influence extending into the long wake of the 2008 financial collapse, there emerges a much broader question: of what worldwide crisis might Oaxaca have been the anticipated symptom?⁴⁸

On July 25, 2006, in a column for the Mexican newspaper *La Jornada* titled “La comuna de Oaxaca” (“The Oaxaca Commune”), Luis Hernández Navarro began answering some of these questions and in the process set the tone for what would soon thereafter become the prevalent name for the uprising in Oaxaca. Like Gilly in his reading of the Morelos Commune, Hernández Navarro too tried to combine national experiences with iconic references from abroad—also preferring the precedent of the 1905 Soviets to the 1917 Bolsheviks:

There are social struggles that anticipate conflicts of major importance. They sound the alarm that alerts a country to grave political problems that remain without a solution. The strikes in Cananea and Río Blanco constitute one of the recognized antecedents of the Mexican Revolution of 1910–17. The revolt of 1905 in Russia showed the way that would be traveled, a dozen years later by the Bolsheviks during the October Revolution.⁴⁹

This comparison sets the stage for an ambitious interpretation of the conflict in Oaxaca:

The mobilization of teachers and the popular masses that since May 22 shakes Oaxaca is an expression of this kind of protests. It has laid bare the exhaustion of a certain model of command, the crisis in the existing relation between the political class and society, and the path that popular discontent may follow in the near future throughout the country as a whole.⁵⁰

What started as a fairly common act of civil disobedience, in other words, by early summer had already turned into a nascent commune in Oaxaca,

whose effects threatened to undermine the very foundations of clientelism and corruption on which the parasitical Mexican state apparatus was erected.

The idea of an Oaxacan Commune, however, has met with much skepticism, paradoxically coming from both the Left and the Right. Thus, to the left side of the APPO, some Trotskyists argue that the Oaxaca Commune, like its illustrious Parisian precedent, lacked the party organization that alone could have given it lasting strength. After all, in "Lessons of the Paris Commune," Trotsky had not minced words in talking about the fatal weakness of the working masses on a par with their heroism:

The Commune shows us the heroism of the working masses, their capacity to unite into a single bloc, their talent to sacrifice themselves in the name of the future, but at the same time it shows us the incapacity of the masses to choose their path, their indecision in the leadership of the movement, their fatal penchant to come to a halt after the first successes, thus permitting the enemy to regain its breath, to reestablish its position.⁵¹

Certain Trotskyists in Mexico adopted this analysis as their blueprint for arguing that, in the absence of a genuine proletarian party, it was perhaps tempting but still too early to speak of a Commune in Oaxaca: "Nothing of the kind exists in Oaxaca, at least not yet. It is 'music of the future' that we can aspire to and for which we communists can struggle. But confusing our desires with actual reality would be fatal for the future development of revolutionary struggle in Mexico."⁵² Ironically, the skeptics would soon be joined by mainstream journalists and right-wing intellectuals all too happy to conclude that, unable to lift itself up onto the national stage with a party platform ready for the electoral-parliamentary game, the Oaxaca Commune was reduced to little more than a particularly bloody and destructive episode of youthful hooliganism and anarchy. "Oaxaca wanted to be a revolutionary commune but ended up in a sixties-kind of *hippie* commune, a lumpen commune, or a political *zona franca* of sorts dominated by anarchist tendencies," the journalist Carlos Ramírez concludes in *La Comuna de Oaxaca*, pleading instead for the pact of governability that he helped write. "The solution, therefore, would lie in the construction of a new political system, with its institutional scaffolding and its delimitations of power, and in the definition of a new *social contract* with its correlated agreements on matters of principle."⁵³

Last but certainly not least, there are those who would like to overcome the stifling alternative: if not socialism, then pure anarchy. Among these interpreters, the most original ones look back at the Oaxaca Commune and also see in it a return, not just of the notorious Marxist category of primitive communism but rather of centuries-old traditions of

communalism and assemblyism, owing to the vital indigenous presence in this movement of movements. Thus, in *Oaxaca: Más allá de la insurrección* (“Oaxaca: Beyond Insurrection”), the journalist Sergio de Castro Sánchez concludes:

The struggle of the peoples of Oaxaca for their land and the way of life that goes with it has taken diverse roads, but perhaps the most significant is the one that can be found in those communities ruled by *usos y costumbres* where the land has a communal character. Here we see most clearly how the territory is not only an essential element for their physical survival but also an essential base for their cultural identity, including forms of sociopolitical organization based on “communality” as a way of implementing autonomy.⁵⁴

As in Gilly’s changing interpretations of Morelos and Chiapas, such a reading of the Oaxacan situation also conveys a set of lessons about the Commune that are quite different from Trotsky’s, including a potentially damning verdict about most forms of socialist and communist politics inspired by Marxism-Leninism.

CONCLUSION: LESSONS OF THE MEXICAN COMMUNE

Mexico City in 1874–77, Morelos in 1914–15, Chiapas in 1994, Oaxaca in 2006: Our brief chronology of the Mexican Commune apparently contains a major gap, as the intervallic periods all of a sudden widen considerably, leaving almost 80 years without any significant experiment to speak of between the heroic episodes of Morelos and Chiapas.⁵⁵ In fact, I would argue that between the 90th anniversary of the Paris Commune in 1961, when Revueltas began to write his *Ensayo sobre un proletariado sin cabeza*, and its first centennial in 1971, when Gilly finished *La revolución interrumpida*, this apparent gap was filled by something like a meta-commune, that is, a collective endeavor in which historians, philosophers, sociologists, and militants alike laid the groundwork for the critical reevaluation of Mexico’s revolutionary history in light of the commune. After the Tlatelolco massacre of October 2, 1968, in particular, President Gustavo Díaz Ordaz unwittingly seems to have had a major hand in creating the ideal space for precisely this kind of theoretical experimentation—bringing together some of the nation’s foremost intellectuals with leaders of the student-popular movement—behind the prison walls of Lecumberri.

In a long endnote in *The Mexican Revolution*, Gilly recalls one episode in particular from this period that seems to have provided him with a welcome stimulus to write a history of revolutionary Mexico in terms of the commune. “When I was in Lecumberri Prison, I met Fernando Cortés Granados, born in 1910, who joined the Communist Party in 1930 and

had been arrested in 1968. One night, he told me the following story in his cell," writes Gilly, before proceeding to retell the story in the words of his fellow inmate—a story that ties together almost every thread in our genealogical tapestry of the Mexican Commune:

Although I was still very young, my mother began to talk to me about revolution. In 1875, when barely four years old, she had seen her father hold a meeting with other craftsmen in their home, and had heard them discuss the experience of the Paris Commune. My grandfather and mother later joined Flores Magón's Liberal Party. In 1914, while they were planning a pre-revolutionary uprising in Tapachula, my grandfather and his comrades were discovered, arrested and shot. Shortly afterwards, my mother separated from my father, because he had thrown the concealed weapons into the river when he heard about my grandfather's arrest. From then on, she alone educated us children. She always used to say with pride: "I'm from the year of the Commune," having been born in 1871. In 1930, when I was already a union organizer for the Soconusco Regional Workers and Peasants Federation, she gave me some Communist underground papers and suggested that I join the Communist Party. "That's the workers' and peasants' party," she said. "It'd be a different story today if we'd had something like that during the Porfirio Díaz dictatorship. Join, and you will only leave it when you die." My mother died a Communist in Chalpas, at 94 years of age.⁵⁶

With this anecdote, we have come full circle in our history of nearly one century and a half of experiments with the Mexican Commune. Passed down from generation to generation, the same utopian ideal comes back again and again, mixing the foreign and the local, the old and the young, peasants and proletarians, men and women, communists and anarcho-syndicalists. And yet, by suggesting the image of a seamless continuum, the anecdote in question also risks concealing the deeper transformations and discontinuities that the commune underwent during its bumpy ride through the land of Zapata.

Chiapas, in particular, marks a clear fork in the road, running along the lines of the two major inflections of the commune that we have seen taking shape in Mexico: one Marxist-Leninist and the other indigenous-subalternist. Sometimes this fork in the road is referenced in terms of the difference between communism and communalism; other times analysts still think they can find all the references they need within the corpus of Marx's writings, albeit in very different sets of texts: *The Civil War in France*, for those who favor the founding model of the Paris Commune, or the *Ethnological Notebooks* and the letter and drafts to Vera Zasulich, for those who wish to understand the persistence of the agrarian commune. Finally,

in tandem with the lessons learned as part of this displacement—from Commune to commune so to speak—more and more attention has been paid over the last decades to the pivotal role of indigenous communities and ethnic groups. And this role, in turn, seems to have coincided with and strengthened larger trends toward horizontal, nonhierarchical, and autonomous forms of self-organization in the struggle against neoliberalism.

Where some see an ominous fork in the road, others may stand still and find a precarious meeting ground. When the EZLN was formed in Chiapas, for example, the organization included not only a majority of indigenous people but also a small nucleus of Maoist survivors from the urban guerrillas of the 1970s who were part of the National Liberation Forces (FLN) that had fled to the Selva Lacandona. “Two processes of obstinance are united: one centuries long, the obstinance of communities determined to persist; the other short, a decade long maybe, the obstinance of a few refugees from the 1970s,” Gilly muses about this encounter in his essay on Chiapas. And again, in another formulation: “Here two different (not necessarily contrary) ways of perceiving the crisis of the State intersect: that of the experience of the communities (and of the population in general) and that of the leaders and organizers of the revolutionary left.”⁵⁷ What we have seen happen time and again in our brief underground history is that throughout the 20th century both these forms of obstinacy and both these forms of crisis of the state—like the old bifurcating paths of anarchism and socialism—have been able to find a tenuous common ground in the many deaths and resurrections of the commune in Mexico.

NOTES

1. Karl Marx, *The First International and After: Political Writings*, vol. 3, ed. David Fernbach (London: Penguin, 1974), 206.

2. Quoted in Gastón García Cantú, *El socialismo en México: Siglo XIX* (Mexico City: Era, 1969), 61. Unless otherwise indicated, all translations are my own. See also José C. Valadés, *El socialismo libertario mexicano (siglo XIX)*, ed. Paco Ignacio Taibo II (Sinaloa: Universidad Autónoma de Sinaloa, 1984); and Carlos Illades, *Las otras ideas: Estudios sobre el primer socialismo en México 1850–1935* (Mexico City: Era, 2008).

3. Adolfo Gilly, *The Mexican Revolution*, trans. Patrice Camiller (New York: The New Press, 2006), 39.

4. Ricardo Flores Magón, “To the Proletarians,” in *Dreams of Freedom: A Ricardo Flores Magón Reader*, ed. Chaz Bufe and Mitchell Cowen Verter, trans. Chaz Bufe (Oakland: AK Press, 2016), 161.

5. V.I. Lenin, “Preface to the Russian Translation of Karl Marx’s Letters to Dr. Kugelmann,” *Collected Works*, vol. 12, ed. Julius Katzer, trans. George Hanna (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1970), 107. The slightly more condensed version I am quoting is drawn from Alexander Trachtenberg, “Marx, Engels and Lenin on the Paris Commune,” *The Workers Magazine: a Communist Magazine* (March 1926): 137.

6. Quoted in Gilly, *The Mexican Revolution*, 383 n. 16.

7. Beatriz Urías Horcasitas, "Retórica, ficción y espejismo: tres imágenes de un México bolchevique (1920–1940)," *Relaciones* 101 (2005): 261–300. See also Daniela Spenser, *The Impossible Triangle: Mexico, Soviet Russia, and the United States in the 1920s* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1999).

8. See Karl M. Schmitt, *Communism in Mexico: A Study in Political Frustration* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1965); Donald L. Herman, *The Comintern in Mexico* (Washington DC: Public Affairs Press, 1974); Barry Carr, *Marxism and Communism in Twentieth-Century Mexico* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1982); Paco Ignacio Taibo II, *Bolcheviques: Historia narrativa de los orígenes del comunismo en México (1919–1925)* (Mexico City: Ediciones B, 2008); Daniela Spenser, *Stumbling Its Way through Mexico: The Early Years of the Communist International*, trans. Peter Gellert (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2011); Carlos Illades, *La inteligencia rebelde: La izquierda en el debate público en México 1968–1989* (Mexico City: Océano, 2001); Barry Carr and Steve Ellner, eds., *The Latin American Left: From the Fall of Allende to Perestroika* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1993); and the recent compilation *El comunismo: otras miradas desde América Latina*, ed. Elvira Concheiro Bórquez, Massimo Modonesi, and Horacio Crespo (Mexico City: Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, 2007).

9. Aside from Gilly's work, other classic histories of the Mexican Revolution are John Womack Jr., *Zapata and the Mexican Revolution* (New York: Vintage, 1968); Friedrich Katz, *The Life and Times of Pancho Villa* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998).

10. Barry Carr, "Marxism and Anarchism in the Formation of the Mexican Communist Party, 1910–19," *The Hispanic American Historical Review* 63, no. 2 (1983): 279.

11. *Ibid.*, 288.

12. José Revueltas, *Ensayo sobre un proletariado sin cabeza*, ed. Andrea Revueltas, Rodrigo Martínez and Philippe Cheron (Mexico City: Era, 1980), 114–115.

13. Gilly, *The Mexican Revolution*, 73.

14. *Ibid.*, 73, 148.

15. Marx, *The First International and After*, 212.

16. P. Guillaume and M. Grainger, "The Commune: Paris 1871," pamphlet written for the UK collective Commune. www.thecomune.co.uk.

17. See Lawrence Krader, ed., *The Ethnological Notebooks of Karl Marx* (Assen: Van Gorcum, 1974); Marx's drafts and letter to Vera Zasulich in Teodor Shanin, *Late Marx and the Russian Road: Marx and "the Peripheries of Capitalism"* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1983).

18. Quoted in Valdés, *El socialismo libertario mexicano*, 85.

19. *Ibid.*, 86.

20. Marx, *The First International and After*, 210.

21. *Ibid.*, 244.

22. *Ibid.*, 211.

23. Alain Badiou, *Theory of the Subject*, trans. Bruno Bosteels (London: Continuum, 2009), 20.

24. Plotino C. Rhodakanaty, "La comuna americana (una apreciación contemporánea)," in *Obras*, ed. Carlos Illades (Mexico City: Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, 1998), 62–63. Rhodakanaty is referring to the great 1877 strike on the Erie Railroad. For context, see Philip S. Foner, *The Great Labor Uprising*

of 1877 (New York: Monad Press, 1977). For an intellectual biography of Rhodakanaty, see Carlos Illades, *Rhodakanaty y la formación del pensamiento socialista en México* (Barcelona: Anthropos/Universidad Autónoma Metropolitana Iztapalapa, 2002).

25. Rhodakanaty, "La comuna americana," 63.

26. Gilly, *The Mexican Revolution*, 328.

27. Gareth Williams, *The Mexican Exception: Sovereignty, Police, and Democracy* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 49, 62.

28. John Reed, "The Dream of Pancho Villa," in *Insurgent Mexico* (New York: International Publishers, 1969), 145–148, 161. There may also be a pun involved here, as the Spanish word *silla* can refer both to a horse's saddle and to a regular chair to sit on, even the presidential one in the National Palace.

29. Gilly, *The Mexican Revolution*, 254. Gilly's hypothesis has recently been heralded as the path to follow, from a Marxist point of view, all the way to the present. See Pablo Langer Opinari, Jimena Vergara Ortega, and Sergio Méndez Moissen eds., *México en llamas (1910–1917): Interpretaciones marxistas de la Revolución* (Mexico City: Ediciones Armas de la Crítica, 2010).

30. Gilly, *The Mexican Revolution*, 355 n. 36.

31. *Ibid.*, 253.

32. *Ibid.*, 271.

33. Marx, *The First International and After*, 249–250.

34. Gilly, *The Mexican Revolution*, 296.

35. *Ibid.*, 331–332.

36. *Ibid.*, 257.

37. See *A Commune in Chiapas? Mexico and the Zapatista Rebellion*, a pamphlet first published in *Aufheben* magazine in the United Kingdom and subsequently reprinted in the United States and Canada. *Aufheben, A Commune in Chiapas? Mexico and the Zapatista Rebellion* (Toronto: Abraham Guillen Press & Arm the Spirit, 2002).

38. Gilly, *The Mexican Revolution*, 288.

39. *Ibid.*, 339.

40. Adolfo Gilly, *Chiapas: la razón ardiente. Ensayo sobre la rebelión del mundo encantado* (Mexico City: Era, 1997), 31. In English as Adolfo Gilly, "Chiapas and the Rebellion of the Enchanted World," in *Rural Revolt in Mexico: U.S. Intervention and the Domain of Subaltern Politics*, ed. Daniel Nugent (Durham: Duke University Press, 1998), 261–333.

41. Gilly, "Chiapas and the Rebellion of the Enchanted World," 265–266.

42. Gilly, *Chiapas: la razón ardiente*, 13. This passage is from the book's preface not included in the English translation.

43. Gilly, "Chiapas and the Rebellion of the Enchanted World," 309.

44. Marx, *The First International and After*, 217.

45. Alain Badiou, *Logics of Worlds: Being and Event*, 2, trans. Alberto Toscano (London: Continuum, 2009), 364.

46. *Ibid.*

47. See *La APPO vive, Cronología del movimiento popular de la Asamblea Popular de los Pueblos de Oaxaca* (n.p., 2008).

48. Gustavo Esteva, "Presentación," in Sergio de Castro Sánchez, *Oaxaca: Más allá de la insurrección. Crónica de un movimiento de movimientos* (Oaxaca: Ediciones ¡Basta!, 2009), 7–20. In English, see also Gustavo Esteva, "The Asamblea Popular

de los Pueblos de Oaxaca: A Chronicle of Radical Democracy," *Latin American Perspectives* 34, no. 1 (January 2007): 129–144.

49. Luis Hernández Navarro, "La Comuna de Oaxaca," *La Jornada* (July 25, 2006). In English, see Nancy Davis, *The People Decide: Oaxaca's Popular Assembly* (New York: A Narco News Book, 2007); as well as *Teaching Rebellion: Stories from the Grassroots Mobilization in Oaxaca*, ed. Diana Denham and C.A.S.A. Collective (Oakland: PM Press, 2008).

50. Hernández Navarro, "La Comuna de Oaxaca."

51. Leon Trotsky, "Lessons of the Paris Commune," *New Internationalist* 2 (1935): 43–47.

52. See the discussion available online by the Grupo Internacionalista de la Liga por la IV Internacional, "¿Una Comuna de Oaxaca?" *El Internacionalista* (November 2006).

53. Carlos Ramírez, *La Comuna de Oaxaca* (Oaxaca: Universidad Autónoma de Ciudad Juárez, 2010), 80, 97.

54. Castro Sánchez, *Oaxaca: Más allá de la insurrección*, 136.

55. Paco Ignacio Taibo II speaks of an "Acapulco Commune" in reference to the 1921–1923 red mayorship of Juan R. Escudero of the Workers Party of Acapulco (POA), which was deeply influenced by the anarchist-socialist ideas of Flores Magón, in "Las dos muertes de Juan R. Escudero," *Arcángeles: Doce historias de revolucionarios herejes del siglo XX* (Mexico City: Planeta, 1998), 15–62. Another bridge to the present could be found in the 1915–16 Magonist Commune of Edendale, near Los Angeles. In 1988, Benjamín Maldonado Alvarado wrote a column about this short-lived experiment, "La comuna magonista de Edendale," published in the supplement *Etcétera* of the Oaxacan newspaper *Noticias* (October 9, 1988) and reprinted in *La utopía magonista* (Oaxaca: Colegio de Investigadores en Educación de Oaxaca, 2004), 77–80.

56. Gilly, *The Mexican Revolution*, 355 n. 36.

57. Gilly, "Chiapas and the Rebellion of the Enchanted World," 299, 303.

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CHAPTER 8

Cuba after the Castros?

Sandra Rein

INTRODUCTION

For a variety of political and ideological reasons the Cuban Revolution has held the attention of both the Right and the Left since its declared triumph in 1959. Also, and for various reasons, critique and condemnation have been leveled from both sides of the ideological spectrum. Since the official transfer of power from Fidel Castro to his long-time comrade and brother Raúl Castro, speculation about the future of Cuba runs rampant. To even begin to speculate about Cuba's future(s), though, requires an engagement with the foundations of revolutionary practice, which evolved from the 1959 "triumph of the Revolution," and also a serious examination of the significant restructuring that has marked the post-1989 environment. The Cuban Communist Party held a Congress in 2011, for the first time since 1997, which specifically addressed the need to restructure the Cuban economy in light of a global financial crisis and to address growing domestic inequalities. The Congress was the final step in a public consultation that was open to all Cubans and focused around a series of proposals, *Guidelines for Economic and Social Policy*, which, once fully enacted, have the potential to rewrite Cuban society in fundamental and unalterable ways. The National Assembly adopted the slightly revised *Guidelines* in July 2011.

In order to begin to imagine the future(s) potentially open to Cuban society, this chapter first critically examines the foundations established by the 1959 Revolution with particular attention to the consolidation of power, primarily in the person of Fidel Castro. Understanding the power of both personal leadership and revolutionary institutions provides an insight into the pressures and opportunities that were afforded to Cubans in the post-1959 period. The strength of the social solidarity that

continues to define Cuban society is largely produced by the nationalist sentiment of the early revolutionary regime, which was closely bound to Guevara's call for the "new socialist man" and Fidel's construction of the nationalist project. However, as important as the foundations of the revolution are for understanding and projecting a future for Cuban society, one must also examine the significant social stresses that attended the demise of the Soviet Union and the declaration of a Special Period in a Time of Peace beginning in 1991, which forced sudden and severe austerity on the Cuban population. Such austerity did not simply manifest itself in food shortages and other material deprivations, but also forced the Cuban government to reorient its development program to industries that would garner foreign currency—particularly, tourism. Cuba's abundance of beautiful beaches and lively culture make it a natural destination for sun-seekers from Canada and Europe. Not surprisingly, as with any monoculture, the reliance on tourism distorts some of the possibilities for other routes of social development and intensifies class relations that were to be overcome by the revolution. And, of course, both these historical considerations and the current period are marked by the continuing strained relationship with the United States, which has strictly enforced one of the most punitive embargoes in modern history.

Studied in combination, the current pressures and strains facing Cuba and the historical commitment to national independence and social solidarity lead to several possible trajectories for radically different futures in Cuba. This chapter concludes by tracing out some of the possibilities for transformation; however, if there is one continuity in Cuban history, it is for the Cuban people to undertake surprising and unanticipated turns in their self-governance and development. One cannot simply look to other former communist states to try to anticipate what the Cuban transition will look like. Yet, suggesting that Cuba is unique does not mean that it is unimportant in understanding how states navigate entry into global neoliberal capitalism via different development paths. In the final analysis, it may be the case that the external pressures and the growing internal pressures for change will prove too powerful to resist, and that Cuba will be remade in the image of other Caribbean and Latin American countries that hold a distinct and lower place in the global hierarchy of nations—even when endowed with material wealth. Still, I would be reluctant to bet against Cuba just yet. While I remain critical of the political structures that have evolved in Cuba—and, although one can make a strong argument that the economic structures have always been state capitalist on the island—I cannot discount the strength of national unity and social solidarity that defines Cuban society and that has led to strong communities that view the success of one being dependent on the success of all. Ultimately, the revolutionary tradition must be read dialectically: can Cuba rewrite the objective and subjective conditions of Cuban society such that other

alternatives may be possible? One may reasonably speculate that an alternative can exist, challenging the path-dependency of neoliberal capitalism, opening the possibility—no matter how slim—that Cuba could be entering its most revolutionary phase rather than witnessing the vanquish of the revolution.

REVOLUTIONARY FOUNDATIONS

The story of the triumph of the revolution in Cuba is well known and particularly well rehearsed among Cubans and an international Left that has looked to Cuba for inspiration for more than 50 years. Likewise, there is a historical narrative that is attached to a Cuban diaspora that has largely established itself as an exiled opposition, often seeking the aid and assistance of the United States. Rather than attempting a dialogue between these histories, this chapter draws from the historical narrative those elements that can be usefully applied toward our goal of speculating about Cuba after the Castros. In other words, history here serves to establish the ground for both the 1959 Revolution and the available trajectories for social transformation in the 21st century.¹

As Richard Gott's excellent *Cuba: A New History* so eloquently recounts, the foundations for oppositional political movements on the island have been present from the earliest days of colonial discovery. In introducing the uninitiated to Cuban history, Gott tellingly reveals: "Conquest, resistance, piracy, slave rebellions, freebooting invasions and frustrated wars of independence and abortive revolutions succeeded each other with scant breathing space in between. Up until 1959, Cuban politics were decided by the gun."² The arrival of Diego de Velázquez in 1511 forever changed the internal politics of Cuba, transforming the violence and dispossession that had existed between indigenous tribes to a more globalized violence that introduced slavery as a social institution and made Cuba one of the pawns in inter-European political rivalries. Arguably, the colonial period, which lasted into the 20th century, is key not only to understanding Cuba's difficult and complex relationship with the United States, but importantly introduced the class, racial, and gendered segregations that created (and continue) significant social stratification in Cuba. For the purposes of speculating about Cuba's future(s), it is important to recognize the role and importance of racialization in Cuba's history and to engage the class distinctions that attended such racialization. Although the 1959 Revolution promised the end of racism and gendered discrimination, current-day Cuba remains a society with significant inequalities that can be traced to racial and sexual discrimination.³ This being said, it must be acknowledged that the attention paid to questions of race and gender by the revolutionary leadership in the early 1960s gave the movement a progressive character that was not

always apparent in other Left movements at the time; in fact, women's liberation was only coming into its own post-1968 in Western Europe and North America. This progressive character attracted the support and participation of women activists from outside Cuba, Margaret Randall's memoirs of the early years of the revolution beautifully recount both the hope of realizing a new society and the shortfallings of the Cuban state between 1969 and 1980.⁴

Cuba's precolonial history tells a story of indigenous peoples who populated the island, sometimes engaging in territorial wars. Until recently, scholarship on Cuba's indigenous populations has reproduced the narratives of dispossession and extinction through disease, suicide, and massacre; however, there is significant anthropological evidence and historical records that indicate Cuba's indigenous populations survived conquest and were incorporated in the mestizo population; there are even reports of indigenous villages surviving into the 20th century. Not insignificantly, the presence of Indian peoples and their resistance to the colonial enterprise lends Cuban history the heroic figure of Hatuey—a Taíno *cacique* (chief) who escaped Hispanolia for Cuba in 1503. Hatuey's brave resistance and execution were contained in Las Casas's *A Short History of the Destruction of the Indies*. In post-1959 Cuba, Hatuey's image appears as a national symbol of resistance to imperialism. From a racial perspective the indigenous population was often viewed through the lens of mestizo populations as an argument to dispossess former black-slave populations. As Gott recounts: "those who promoted *indigenismo*, and sought to praise and promote Cuba's Indian heritage, were usually conservative racists who wanted to glorify the Indian past and downgrade the contribution of the black African element in the population."⁵ And, since the indigenous were no longer present, they could not make claims to lands or other rights against Spanish settlers—imbuing the mestizo with these rights over and against the black population.

Cuba's complex racial past indicates that struggles against, and contestation of, colonial practices were from the outset racialized in the Cuban context. The importation of black slaves from Africa clearly marks modern-day Cuba in terms of religious and cultural practices, particularly in the Oriente region of the country. Likewise, the abolition of the slave trade and slavery caused Spanish industrialists and plantation owners to seek Chinese migrant labor between 1853 and 1874.⁶ The presence of migrant labor and former slaves did render a population that could be drawn upon to oppose Spanish colonialism and to be mobilized in the independence movements—even in the case where significant white racism existed. Moreover, even in instances where black or "*mulatto*" Cubans were influential, the post-independence and post-revolution phases have not successfully answered the race question in Cuba.

Taken as a long and complex whole, Cuba's colonial history stretches from conquest (1511) to the so-called Republican phase (ending in 1952 with Batista's coup), which witnessed the adoption of the humiliating Platt amendment and several instances of direct U.S. involvement in governance and outright occupation of Cuba. In the midst of the war of independence, Martí had warned Cubans of the power and imperial designs of the United States, which continues a complicated and fraught relationship with Cuba to the present. Politically, Cuba's colonial past and Republican period produced numerous movements, a progressive constitution in 1940, and sowed the seeds for a further revolutionary transformation in 1959. While a detailed account of this period is beyond the scope of this account, the culmination of a long history of resistance and revolt produced serious political actors, not the least of which were Fulgencio Batista and Fidel Castro. Notably, many revolutionary, liberal democratic and student-based political parties formed in the course of the early 20th century to challenge state corruption and stand for election. Perhaps somewhat ironically, the Cuban Communist Party operated legally after reaching a deal with Batista in 1939 and supported the new progressive Constitution in 1940. When Batista took power through a military coup on March 10, 1952, "[t]he Communist response . . . was, at best ambiguous."⁷ The party was also not in favor of armed insurrection and would subsequently criticize the armed option advocated by Fidel Castro and the 26th of July Movement. It is only a result of significant changes in the party structure and membership that allowed Fidel Castro to recast a different Communist Party as a revolutionary organization in the 1960s—but one that was subject to his direction and leadership. Moreover, the mere naming of a communist party as the political organ in revolutionary Cuba does not, in and of itself, prove the goals of the revolution to be communist or its underlying ideology to be socialist.

A NEW REVOLUTIONARY MOVEMENT EMERGES

The most orthodox and well-known histories of Cuba's 1959 Revolution trace the extremes of corruption that attended the Republican period and Batista's regime. But the revolution began in earnest with the attack on the Moncada military barracks in Santiago de Cuba, launched under the leadership of Fidel Castro on July 26, 1953. The attack on Moncada was for the most part an unmitigated disaster for the would-be revolutionaries, resulting in the torture and death of more than 60 of the combatants.⁸ The brutality of the Batista regime was laid bare for all Cubans as images of the bloody and dismembered bodies of the insurgents were televised across the island.⁹ Although he initially escaped from Moncada, Fidel was captured several days later and faced trial. Famously, Fidel mounted his own defense, reproduced later as "History Will Absolve

Me." In this speech, he not only indicted the regime for its corruption, but tied the 26th of July Movement to the heroic, anti-imperialism of José Martí and made explicit "[that] fundamental matters of principle are being debated here, the right of men to be free is on trial, the very foundation of our existence as a civilized and democratic nation are in the balance."¹⁰ Fidel used the speech to outline the five revolutionary laws that would have been proclaimed had the Moncada action been successful. Largely drawn from the progressive 1940 Constitution, the five laws proclaimed the sovereign authority of the people; proposed progressively redistributing land ownership and creating workers' cooperatives in industrial enterprises; granted sugar planters a 55 percent share in production; and, would have confiscated all holdings of ill-gotten gains.¹¹ Moreover, Fidel identified the six core problems facing Cuba: "the problem of the land, the problem of industrialization, the problem of housing, the problem of unemployment, the problem of education; and the problem of the peoples' health: these are six problems we would take immediate steps to solve along with restoration of civil liberties and political democracy."¹²

Although Castro was sentenced to 15 years in prison, the sentence was commuted after two years through a general amnesty extended to political prisoners. Fidel and his brother Raúl, fearing for their lives, sought exile in Mexico in 1955, their intention being to continue organizing the 26th of July Movement in order to return to Cuba with an armed cadre to overthrow Batista's corrupt and oppressive regime. While much attention is often given to Fidel's introduction to Ernesto Guevara in Mexico, less attention is given to the importance of his studies during his incarceration and exile. Fidel was not uniformed with regard to leftist political and revolutionary thought; nor was Guevara the only thinker or theorist in the movement. Rather, their introduction and subsequent collaboration appear to be a true meeting of the minds. However, two arguments about Fidel's ideological commitments can be generally discerned from academic literature. On the one hand, he is viewed as a radical ideologue influenced by and drawn to communism early on, partially by his brother's influence and partially by Guevara. On the other hand, it is argued that he was virtually forced into the arms of the Soviet communists by U.S. policy, holding no real ideological commitments of his own. Both interpretations can be drawn upon to serve any number of ideological purposes. Moreover, such treatments obscure a broader and significant problem: that is, how does one classify and explain the Cuban Revolution? As recent work by Samuel Faber suggests, understanding its origins and trajectories is a complicated and often controversial discussion. The question of the communist character of the revolution and the state that emerged after 1959 remains a key question, which has important theoretical implications for creatively imagining a postcapitalist future.

In an early interview with a reporter from *L'Unita*, Fidel made clear his familiarity with thinkers like Marx and seems to relent under international pressure, saying the reporters should feel free to call the revolution socialist but highlights that this is not communism:

You newspapermen are crazy for definitions and neat schemes. . . . You're impossibly dogmatic. We are not dogmatic. . . . At any rate, you wish to write that this is a socialist revolution, right? And write it, then. . . . Yes, not only did we destroy a tyrannical system. We also destroyed the philoimperialistic bourgeois state apparatus, the bureaucracy, the police, and a mercenary army. We abolished privileges, annihilated the great landowners, threw out foreign monopolies for good, nationalized almost every industry, and collectivized the land. We are fighting now to liquidate once and for all the exploitation of man over man, and to build a completely new society, with a new class content. The Americans (Cubans say just that, *los americanos*, to mean the United States) the Americans and the priests say that this is communism. We know very well that it is not. At any rate, the word does not frighten us. They can say whatever they wish. There is a song, which is popular among our peasants, that goes more or less like this: "Bird of ill omen—of treason and cowardice—that are throwing at my joy—the word: communism!—I know nothing about these 'isms'—Yet, if such a great welfare conquest—which can be seen by my own eyes—is communism, then—you can even call me a communist!"¹³

However, by his May Day speech following the failed Bay of Pigs invasion, Fidel fully embraced the idea of a socialist revolution, promising a new constitution and taking clear aim at U.S. imperialism and capitalism:

To those who talk to us about the 1940 constitution, we say that the 1940 constitution is already too outdated and old for us.¹⁴ We have advanced too far for that short section of the 1940 constitution that was good for its time but which was never carried out. That constitution has been left behind by this revolution, which, as we have said, is a socialist revolution.¹⁵ We must talk of a new constitution, yes, a new constitution, but not a bourgeois constitution, not a constitution corresponding to the domination of certain classes by exploiting classes, but a constitution corresponding to a new social system without the exploitation of man by man. That new social system is called socialism, and this constitution will therefore be a socialist constitution.¹⁶

Although one can spend a great deal of time analyzing Fidel's discussions of socialism, it should not be overlooked that the key content of such speeches in this period focuses on themes of anti-imperialism (for obvious reasons), but also weaves together the heroic acts of self-sacrifice made by Cubans—Cubans identified as peasants, women, negroes, for example—to build an identity that is first and foremost Cuban. That identity is also tied to the revolutionary call for a new society and significant redistribution of social wealth further imbues it with a progressive character. But there can also be detected warning signs here, in particular, Fidel resists calls for elections and turns to the Populist Socialist Party (later to be renamed the Cuban Communist Party) as an institutional mechanism to further the revolution's goals and programs. The promised socialist Constitution is unrealized until 1976. Clearly, the Bay of Pigs experience hardened Fidel's thinking and actions—more pronounced in the ensuing missile crisis. While there was apparent affinity for the redistributive politics of communism, practical political expediencies also had to be taken into account. For more than 50 years, Fidel straddled these potentially contradictory pressures.

CONSOLIDATING POWER AND FIDELISMO

Recent work by Linda Klouzal on women's participation in the insurgency period of 1953–1959 draws a strong critique of standard scholarly accounts of revolutions that fail to engage with the real life stories of insurgents, but instead focus on structural conditions (derived from the Skocpol tradition) or great leaders as sufficient explanation for revolutionary activity. As she notes: “[t]he tendency to focus on the ideas and messages of leaders obscures how their influence often depends on the movement's ties to the local community.”¹⁷ Although Klouzal's point is well taken and her work an important contribution to thinking about and recovering agency in revolutions, it is impossible to understand Cuba without acknowledging the consolidation of political power in the leadership of Fidel Castro. In fact, it is impossible to separate the post-1959 Cuban state from Fidel. In the revolutionary period of 1953–1959, the young men and women who committed to the 26th of July Movement were clear that they were supporters of Fidel. This loyalty left room, however, for an array of political ideologies ranging from liberal democratic to communist to be represented in the movement. Fidel's political rhetoric from the period demonstrates affinity with liberal democratic commitments and more populist aspirations tied to significant land reform. The five revolutionary laws enunciated in “History Will Absolve Me” laid the foundation for a significant (but not wholesale) redistribution of social wealth in Cuba. The identification

of the six problems also spoke to questions of just distribution but fell short of taking up anticapitalist rhetoric or projecting an anticapitalist program. In fact, there is considerable sympathy in the speech for small businesses and landholders—what we could reference as Cuba's petty-bourgeoisie.

The broad tent nature of the 26th of July Movement and Fidel's ambiguity about his own ideological commitments have led to long-standing controversy over the character and goals of Cuba's revolutionaries. However, what is not in dispute is Fidel's clear linkage to the anti-imperialist message of José Martí and the assertion of the need for an independent national Cuban identity.¹⁸ In its first articulation, then, one can observe linkages to a populist message and the vesting of authority in Fidel himself—Fidel masterfully built widespread support for the revolution without drawing from the Marxist-Leninist tradition demonstrated by the Bolshevik experience in Russia.¹⁹ Ironically, perhaps, Fidel only declared the revolution socialist and Marxist-Leninist in the face of deteriorating U.S. relations and on the eve of the Bay of Pigs attempted invasion. One could be tempted to read these declarations as purely strategic, driven by Cold War politics and the need to defy U.S. pressure so as to preserve the progressive elements of the revolution (or to assure Fidel's exercise of nearly authoritarian power). Such a reading, though, ignores the radical elements and the communist influence that were present in the very foundation of the 26th of July Movement—not least of which rested in the influential roles played by Raúl Castro and Ernesto "Che" Guevara. Thus, the defining ideology and politics of the revolution in the immediate aftermath of January 1959 is complicated by various commitments and expediencies. Moreover, the revolutionaries clearly felt the pressures to realize their promises quickly while public support remained strong—or are at least strong enough to force the exclusion of moderating influences (as was witnessed by the departure of the liberal moderates of the first government). One can also acknowledge the historical benefit the revolution reaped from the Bay of Pigs failure: The United States had made apparent its willingness to support destabilizing attacks against the Cuban government. However, the ineptitude displayed by the U.S. government served to solidify the revolution and garner even more public support for an increasingly radical program for the social restructuring of Cuba.

In the months and years following the Bay of Pigs, the revolution consolidated its social institutions (e.g., the Cuban Communist Party, key mass organizations, and government ministries) and its relationship with a new financial benefactor, the Soviet Union. The historical record discloses three important features of the Cuban state: (1) a state capitalist economy, similar to the Soviet model but with an emphasis

on the social indicators of public health and literacy rather than rapid industrialization; (2) the concentration of political power in the Revolutionary Armed Forces (FAR); and, (3) the realization of socialist *conciencia* among the population with particular emphasis on preserving the Cuban nation in the face of the overwhelming threat posed by the United States. Each of these elements is particularly significant when contemplating the future of Cuba. Each is discussed in more detail later in this chapter.

State Capitalism

The analysis of communist states from a critical Marxist position was developed largely by Trotskyist groups in the United States and Europe in the 1940s in an attempt to answer the Russian question. Although much of the analysis could be grouped under the notion of bureaucratic collectivism, a small minority of thinkers suggested that the Russian Revolution had effectively transformed into its opposite and could be understood as state-capitalist rather than socialist. A very notable contributor to this debate was Raya Dunayevskaya, who extended her critique of the USSR to other state-capitalist projects, for example, Maoist China and Cuba. Dunayevskaya challenged the notion that the Soviet Union was a workers' state (or a degenerated workers' state, as argued by Trotsky), resting her analysis on a humanist reading of Marx's use of the Hegelian dialectic. What Dunayevskaya found through empirical analysis of the Russian economy was that the law of value was very much at work in the Russian system, even though it was a centrally planned economy resting on nationalized state enterprises. Planning was not sufficient to overcome the law of value and the necessary extraction of surplus value required for capitalist accumulation. The replacement of many individual owners by the state as single owner, as was clearly discussed by Marx, was also not sufficient to overcome the social relations of production that attend capitalistic production. In the post-1959 period, Dunayevskaya was also critical of the Cuban Revolution, not for the admirable goals that it seemed to espouse, but because the model that was implemented was state-capitalist, defaulting to excessive and authoritarian planning combined with excessive militarization. Although Fidel claimed to be acting in accordance with the will of the people, Dunayevskaya argued that the revolution was not founded on a theory of revolution or a guiding philosophy to guard against a turn to state capitalism and authoritarian government. As part of her discussion of the deficiencies of the New Left in the late 1960s and 1970s, a Left that was enamored of Cuba, Dunayevskaya cited Guevara's influential essay on the ideology of the Cuban Revolution, in which Guevara writes:

This is a unique Revolution which some people maintain contradicts one of the most orthodox premises of the revolutionary movement, expressed by Lenin: "Without a revolutionary theory there is no revolutionary movement." It would be suitable to say that revolutionary theory as the expression of social truth surpasses any declaration of it; that is to say even if the theory is not known, the revolution can succeed if historical reality is interpreted correctly and if the forces involved in it are used correctly.²⁰

The failure to hold to a theory (or philosophy) of revolution, for Dunayevskaya, consigned the Cuban Revolution to repeat the state-capitalist errors of the Soviets while attempting to export the military *foco* when there was little evidence that guerrilla tactics could be successfully used to displace mass revolutionary politics.²¹ To a certain extent, Klouzal's insistence on studying the grassroots and mainstream appeal of the message of the Cuban Revolution supports, in part, the critique that Dunayevskaya was making against the Cuban revolutionaries who failed to link early critiques of the Batista regime to a broader philosophy of revolution and social transformation.²²

The postrevolutionary leadership of Fidel firmly placed the state in control of Cuba's most significant industries, nationalized production, and ultimately instituted production quotas in an effort to raise workers' productivity. The state-capitalist turn (and failure) was most apparent in the 10 million tons sugar harvest of 1970. Gott describes the event as "one last episode of . . . revolutionary spontaneity."²³ In her personal memoirs of living in Cuba during this period, Margaret Randall reflects on the social pressures exerted on Cubans to support Fidel's declared goal of harvesting 10 million tons of sugar: "The plan was to dramatically jumpstart Cuba's ailing economy in the only way a one-crop nation could imagine possible. . . . The price of sugar on the world market was high just then. . . . If we could make ten million tons, those who devised the scheme argued, it would be a great boon. . . . Following the Party line became a matter of patriotism. Few wanted to be seen as doubters. Those experts who insisted this was not a good idea were demoted and relegated from view."²⁴ At the end of the harvest period, the Cuban state had failed to reach the 10 million ton goal and significant damage had been done to other productive areas of the economy as labor was drained away in hope of realizing the quota, which seemed to be more or less arbitrarily announced by Fidel.²⁵

The state-capitalist approach followed by the Cuban state was not successful in reorienting economic activity away from the same cash crops that had typified the island's inclusion in the global economy prior to the revolution. Perhaps ill advisedly, Cuban planners did not make a significant

attempt to diversify the Cuban economy, but did pay some attention toward a more complete redistribution of social wealth than that which typified the prerevolutionary economy. The Cuban government found itself vacillating between periods of economic liberalization (of sorts) and restriction. Moreover, as was the case throughout the colonial and Republican periods, the Cuban state found itself dependent on the financial assistance of another state, this time the USSR. In spite of the nationalist bent of the revolution, Cuban governments and Fidel had, of necessity, to subject Cuba to external powers. While acknowledging this historical necessity, it must also be acknowledged that Fidel was the most adept Cuban leader at forging a somewhat autonomous path—sometimes to the chagrin of the Soviets.

The Consolidation of Political Power in the FAR

In the wake of the success of the 1959 Revolution, it is undisputed that Fidel emerged as the maximum leader. However, his rise to supremacy has been a source of controversy and rampant speculation, focused on the political machinations that assured his supremacy in Cuba. It is clear that Fidel was not the typical Latin American strong man, and he wisely entrusted several comrades with creating the institutional structures necessary to ensure that the revolutionary program could be implemented. Notably, Ernesto Guevara was the first architect of Cuba's state-capitalist economic program (Guevara resigned all his government posts in 1964 to go to the Congo, dying in Bolivia in 1967), but it is after 1968 under the theme of the revolutionary offensive that self-employment is further restricted and state control is extended to almost every facet of Cuban life.²⁶ With the economy firmly in the hands of Guevara in the early days of the revolutionary government, Raúl was entrusted with creating a disciplined RAF and security apparatus for the revolutionary state. As noted military historian Hal Klepak writes in his superb study of Raúl's military career, Raúl was not elevated to positions of power in the revolutionary government because he was Fidel's brother; rather, he "was a proven commodity, a commander of valor, skill and value recognized even by the rank and file of the rebel army who sought to find ways to serve under him."²⁷ The organization and deployment of a revolutionary armed forces was particularly important to the early stages of the revolution, not simply because there were significant internal and external threats (as was made evident by the Bay of Pigs invasion), but because the military was judged to be the best vehicle for delivering the revolutionary program quickly. Again, as Klepak recounts:

In order to implement such a program [of relief in areas of rent and electricity prices and to realize agrarian reform], however, [Fidel] needed trusted cadres of people who could manage large schemes.

And this was not available in any sector of the Cuban population of the time given the flight of so much of the managing class. . . . What its officers, NCOs and even soldiers lacked in administrative skills they more than made up for, in the eyes of Fidel, with their loyalty to him personally and their devotion to the cause of deep reform of the Cuban polity.²⁸

If one can agree that Fidel was not a typical Latin American strong man, it must also be agreed that the military forces organized by Raúl also differed significantly from other Latin American experiences and that Raúl was also no typical Latin American military man.²⁹ Again, we find that Cuba's unique history can be drawn upon to explain the differences that the Castros pursued in Cuba. Klepak notes that the colonial history of Cuba was "truly exceptional" and that Cuba was the only colony of Spain never to have had a "civilian governor even in peacetime."³⁰ Its militias were first dominated by Spain and then the United States, such that Klepak concludes the "US domination of the forces remained total and was reinforced by successive military interventions and occupations."³¹ Thus, 1959 represented the first real opportunity for Cuban independence to be asserted through its military, when Cuban society was accustomed to the presence and interventions of the military in everyday life. What the FAR promised was a military committed to serving the Cuban people as a whole, rather than enriching domestic or foreign elites.

As the revolution was consolidated and the FAR transformed from a rebel army to a professional fighting force, the role of the armed forces was utilized both externally (Cuba participated in a number of international actions) and internally. One of the more controversial programs adopted by Fidel as part of the revolutionary offensive was the creation of the UMAP camps (Military Units to Aid Production), which were effectively forced labor camps that were intended to re-socialize antirevolutionary elements, such as homosexuals and religious and political dissenters. The camps were in operation primarily from 1965 to 1968 and have been roundly criticized for their infringement of human rights. The camps are one of the more dramatic demonstrations of a closing of Cuban society and an increasing use of repression to control dissent. However, the army's dual role (defense and domestic control) took a new turn in the late 1980s (notably ahead of the collapse of Soviet subsidies). As Mora and Wiktorowicz recount, "[i]n the late 1980s, Raúl initiated a program that saw a number of high-ranking FAR officers travel to Western Europe to study new business methods and practices that could be applied to military and civilian industries in Cuba."³² Faced with the economic collapse of the state in the wake of the fall of the Soviet Union, Raúl again transformed the armed forces, this time creating the conditions for a self-financed force and effectively directing production and tourism in Cuba through a

wide variety of enterprises.³³ In the post-Soviet environment, the relatively autonomous and self-financed FAR remains loyal to Raúl but one can detect growing Cuban resentment as officers enjoy privileged access to goods and services that are outside the reach of average Cubans.³⁴ The concept of a peoples' revolutionary armed forces was arguably a key imaginary for Fidel's nationalist and revolutionary project; however, its exercise of control over whole sectors of the Cuban economy, subject to little or no democratic oversight, must raise alarm bells and certainly points to potential problems after Raúl's departure from Cuban politics.

Conciencia

Although it is possible to accuse the Cuban revolutionaries in 1959 of lacking a theory and philosophy of revolution around which to build a new society, attempts to remedy that situation appear largely in the writings of Guevara. Guevara (and Fidel) believed that the best mechanism to motivate Cuban society to fulfill the revolutionary project was through moral impetus rather than material incentives. For Guevara and Fidel, this meant creating social conditions that produced among Cubans a new socialist consciousness, what they called *conciencia*, which committed Cubans to sacrifice for the preservation of the revolution. As Guevara wrote in "Man and Socialism in Cuba": "During the October Crisis and at the time of hurricane Flora, we witnessed deeds of exceptional valor and self-sacrifice carried out by an entire people. One of our fundamental tasks from the ideological standpoint is to find the way to perpetuate such heroic attitudes in everyday life."³⁵

The new socialist man in Cuba was expected to live up to the "*Patria o Muerte*" slogan. Yet, as Randall notes, the emphasis on patriotism "is double-edged. . . . Fed by nationalism, it develops along a steep curve. It can be a force for independence and creativity but also promotes an insular and defensive disconnection, a smug sense of superiority, energetic controls, withering of openness, and unwillingness to allow access to a free-flowing exchange of ideas."³⁶ The process of creating the new socialist consciousness often took on a brutal and authoritarian face, targeting social deviance and promoting re-education. Samuel Farber recounts these repressive measures, beginning in 1962, which targeted homosexuals and what remained of the petty-bourgeoisie.³⁷ Despite this authoritarianism, the revolutionary government was successful in creating a sense of social solidarity—no doubt aided by the very real external threat posed by the United States. Perhaps a greater irony can be observed, though: Cubans built a social unity, in part, by defying the imposition of revolutionary morality through actions such as worker absenteeism, workplace theft, and resistance to productivity increase drives.³⁸

The United States, the USSR, and New Benefactors

The relationship between Cuba and the United States is a narrative that is woven throughout any account of Cuban efforts to resist imperialism. With the first inauguration of Barack Obama, the feeling among many Cubans was hopeful—many believing that the end of the embargo was imminent, that families would be reunited, that consumer goods would flow freely, and the famous Cuban Five would be returned.³⁹ However, it quickly became apparent that the new president was unlikely to reverse the course on Cuba in any wholesale fashion, his own rhetoric barely distinguishable from any previous president, “the Cuban people are not free. And that’s our lodestone, our North Star, when it comes to our policy in Cuba.”⁴⁰ Obama’s second term seems unlikely to pursue a significantly different approach; however, outside of an official end to the embargo, sales of agricultural products, educational exchanges, and the regular arrival of people, goods, and dollar remittances have accelerated in the past few years. A recent NACLA Report concludes that “the US stands on the sidelines, disengaged and increasingly irrelevant to the changes underway on the island.”⁴¹ The recent activation of an undersea Internet cable provided by Venezuela has also raised the hopes of Cubans that their isolation from information and communications networks will soon be ended.

In the face of the U.S. trade restrictions, Cuba was in need of new economic partners in the 1960s and the ideologically friendly USSR proved to be a good match. The relationship, which included preferential trade relations, exchange of military goods and training, as well as technological, cultural, and educational exchanges, is well documented—as are the instances when Cuba defied Soviet edicts (not least of which was Fidel’s dismissal and critique of Glasnost and Perestroika). However, the economic and political collapse of the Soviet Union between 1989 and 1991 caused extreme hardship in Cuba.⁴² Fidel declared a Special Period in Time of Peace and attempted to manage a severe economic contraction on the island. The end of Soviet subsidies forced Cuba to look for new economic partners who would not be swayed by U.S. pressure. Venezuela and China stepped in. Venezuela’s Hugo Chavez saw Fidel as the father of his own socialist project in Venezuela, and wealthy with oil revenues, introduced goods and services exchanges (rather than cash purchases) to assist the growth of the Cuban economy and advocated the ALBA process to create a non-U.S. sphere of trade and exchange among like-minded states in Latin America. In addition to Venezuela, China has become a significant economic player in Cuba. The Chinese model of development promises no political interference and has seen China become Cuba’s second-largest trading partner.⁴³ Tellingly, though, China is interested in promoting its development model, which focuses on building industrial

infrastructure ahead of social transfers: “[u]nder the leadership of Raúl Castro since 2008, the Cuban government has begun to heed this advice as it seeks to open the island’s economy in a controlled manner. . . . These developments suggest that the Cuban government is distancing itself from Fidel Castro’s 50 year-long rejection of capitalism.”⁴⁴ Whether or not Cuba will adopt the Chinese model is an open question and some commentators are suggesting that China is growing impatient with the slow pace of change in Cuba. Ultimately, a move to the market was embodied in the *Economic and Social Policy Guidelines*, which advocated private ownership of property, self-employment, access to capital for small enterprise loans, and the phasing out of both the ration card and the double-currency—even if this move falls short of Chinese expectations.⁴⁵

Although China and Venezuela are clearly playing the role of new benefactors in Cuba, it is not entirely clear that the Cuban state, under Raúl, is playing the same game. There does appear to be a much more concerted effort to develop a broad array of partners, rather than becoming too reliant on a single state. However, economic diversity cannot be easily pursued in a context of failing infrastructure and state policy that still fluctuates between protecting the revolution and liberalizing the economy. Raúl has a long history of bringing coherence to Cuban institutions, but the role of the FAR in developing the new economy raises questions about the concentration of political power and decision making that has yet to be engaged by Cubans but is certainly an ongoing theme among dissidents on and off the island.

AFTER THE CASTROS

The end of the Cuban Revolution has been announced on more than one occasion; however, it is inarguably the case that the end of the Soviet subsidies and ideological support revealed many of the structural (and ideational) weaknesses of the Cuban regime. Yet, while many of the former Eastern bloc countries were subjected to brutal shock therapies intended to foster their speedy integration into the global capitalist economy, Cuba was able to preserve a certain degree of independence that forced tremendous austerity on the domestic population, but did not result in large-scale revolt. Some have suggested that this is proof-positive of the absolute authoritarian nature of the state; however, such an argument discounts the willingness of many Cubans to engage in heroic acts of self-denial in order to preserve the nationalist project that committed Cubans to “Patria o Muerte.” It also ignores the deeply held socialist commitments of many Cubans, even if the actual policies and practices of the state can be seen to constitute a form of state capitalism. In order to speculate about Cuba’s futures, then, it is imperative that the links of social solidarity (sometimes established through the

subversion of state practices) and the indelible mark of socialist rhetoric be taken into consideration, even as the state advocates the restructuring of Cuban society in the mold of neoliberal capitalism. Given current circumstances, globally and domestically, one can easily foresee at least three possible scenarios for Cuba's future.

Scenario 1: A Managed Transition

Given the decisions of the April 2011 Cuban Communist Party Congress, it is clear that the state is engaged in a managed form of transition. Yet the question, "a transition to what?," is clearly unanswered. It can be argued that this transition pre-dates the current period of crisis and is linked to some of the more spectacular failures of the Cuban government, such as the Million Ton Sugar Harvest. However, processes of rectification in the past have often communicated very mixed messages to the Cuba population, alternating between encouraging small enterprise and then closing the opportunities just when they are embraced by the Cuban people on an expanded scale. The peaceful and orderly transfer of power from Fidel to Raúl can be read as the first stage in a managed transition to a political and economic structure that is less tied to the personal dictates of a supreme leader or a specific revolutionary institution. However, even in the case of a managed transition, it is clear that there are going to be various social demands made on the Cuban state, notably there is a demand for increased political participation and freedoms, including demands to address sexism, homophobia, and racism; Cuba is facing a serious demographic problem as the population is aging at a rate that will mean it has one of the oldest populations in the hemisphere; and the increases in inequality have exacerbated class divisions as Cubans with access to disposable income are willing to pursue their economic opportunities even at the expense of terminating state-provided services, which is clearly not in the interest of those Cubans without purchasing power. The dark shadow over all demands in Cuba is twofold: internally, it is the centralized control and authority of the FAR and externally, the looming economic power of the United States.

In order for a managed transition to proceed through the current economic crisis, and to slowly withdraw services from Cuban society without seeing a complete social collapse, it is arguable that Raúl is a key ingredient. However, his age and a seeming disinterest in politics as a public activity leaves open the question if he will be in a position to see the transition through to its completion. Moreover, it is difficult to foresee any scenario in a managed transition that is reliant on foreign capital that does not completely reintegrate Cuba into the usual practices of global capitalism, solidifying the growing social inequalities

within the country. And, the question of who will lead in the absence of Raúl is real. The 2011 Communist Party Congress, in the eyes of many Cubans, simply retrenched the old guard without showing a mechanism for a renewed politics in Cuba. The conclusion to this scenario, in the event of Raúl leaving the leadership question open and unanswered and a FAR leadership with very vested (and increasingly private) interests in the Cuban economy, is that the core revolutionary values and institutions will not survive the transition process. Massive migration and departures of the educated and professional strata of Cuban society can be expected (the beginnings of which are occurring now with the recent changes to Cuban immigration rules). Unemployment is likely to become a growing problem and a disaffected youth is going to be primarily from the black Cuban population with little access to foreign remittances or opportunities.

Scenario 2: Forced and Sudden Transition

Imagine waking up to the news that Raúl Castro has died. After a short period of national mourning, a new political leadership drawn from former and current FAR officers declares that the Cuban state is forced to obtain loans from the International Monetary Fund (IMF) in an attempt to strengthen the country's faltering economy. While Cuba has been able to manage its economy through loans and exchanges with Venezuela and China, the rigidity of state-managed capitalism has created layers of inefficiency and dampened productivity across various sectors of the economy. Furthermore, the state is no longer able to be the largest employer or to provide the basic foodstuffs that have ensured Cuban's a basic standard of living. The result is massive layoffs, unemployment, and a general decrease in the quality of life for Cubans. The return to IMF-financed debt also places Cuba in the position of having to subject itself to externally mandated restructuring and open its industries to foreign multinational corporations. In a further turn, the Cuban state is forced to recognize the property rights of those corporations and individuals whose property was nationalized in 1960. The United States declares an end to its embargo and U.S. interests purchase Cuban state enterprises on the cheap.

Socially, a Cuba subjected to IMF structural adjustment is likely to see decreased social services, specifically in areas of health care and education. The turn from public spending to private spending would further shift the burden of providing social goods from the government to private citizens. Those with access to foreign remittances would be better positioned to purchase privately provided goods; however, one would anticipate that the flow of foreign dollars (primarily from the United States) would also lead to inflationary pressures and further suppress the buying power of individual Cubans.

Politically, the Cuban state would be relinquishing significant control over the economy and the development path of the country as a whole. It is likely that the IMF restructuring policies would also mandate a political commitment to good governance on the part of the Cuban state. Although good governance models can mandate multiparty, contested elections and the opening of space for dissent, the more likely scenario is that the overall legitimacy of the state and its apparatuses would be weakened, creating a vacuum in key institutions and significant political instability across the country. The Cuban state would not have to deal with the issues of capital flight that distress other developing states; however, it is likely that such a scenario would further drive Cubans to seek livelihoods outside of Cuba. However, it is unlikely that the United States would continue to welcome Cubans with preferential immigration rules, terminating a safety-valve to control civil dissent that the Cuban state has used to good effect in the past.

Effectively, both a managed transition and a forced and sudden transition lead Cuban society to the same place—massive social dislocation, the loss of core social services, and an unclear political structure. Cuba's history suggests that violence has always attended massive social change, and it is possible that wide-scale violence could appear once again. However, the more likely scenario is that violence would appear in the form of criminal acts against private property as people become desperate and access to opportunities disappear. Class and racial distinctions that have remained in spite of the revolution's commitment to their eradication could be expected to intensify.

Scenario 3: The Most Revolutionary Moment

There is a third scenario possible in the Cuban context: that the Cuban people force the revolution to live up to its initial promise. A key marker of Cuban society that is fundamentally different from most other states facing significant economic transformation is that the population is generally well educated, universally literate, and healthy. Even under the leadership of Raúl, Cuba has demonstrated a fierce independence and an unwillingness to simply adopt the development path recommended by China, for example. Cuba is also relatively unencumbered by the demands and dictates of international financial institutions, which leaves open critical space to attempt to side-step the demands of neoliberal capitalism. However, for such a scenario to be possible, the Cuban state would have to radically reorient itself, open space for debate and dissent, and embrace alternative forms of organization among Cubans. This could mean the formation of political parties but also the formation of workers cooperatives in specific enterprises (there is experimentation with this in agriculture, but it would have to be extended across the island; especially in areas of tourism that are currently used to finance the FAR).

For the revolution to be realized in this moment is to ask Cuba, once again, to stand against a global tidal wave that pushes all states and peoples to subject themselves to the logic of capitalist accumulation, with the vague hope that wealth will trickle down. Other states, such as Bolivia, are attempting to carve out development paths that are not subject to these dictates, but the fear is that they will end up replicating the errors of state capitalism (a project that has already failed in Cuba), valorizing nationalized property and centralized state planning over and against a radical, creative democratic politics—the likes of which were called for in the last writings of Rosa Luxemburg at the very moment the Bolsheviks were turning away from revolutionary promises to authoritarian state capitalism.⁴⁶ In essence, Cuba faces its greatest challenge and the most significant opportunity to realize a revolution beyond the scope of the largely nationalist project of 1959.

CONCLUSION

As I pen this conclusion, I am again living in Santiago de Cuba, for the third time since 2009. Anecdotally, the changes that are pushing Cuba to a new future are obvious across many facets of Cuban society. For example, the mobile phone, virtually unheard of when I first travelled to Cuba in 1997, is ubiquitous today. Although still expensive and difficult to obtain, the mobile is a link for Cubans to places beyond the island and a mechanism for efficient communication that was virtually impossible to realize with traditional phone lines. During Hurricane Sandy and its immediate aftermath, phones remained disconnected for many weeks (some have never resumed normal service here); but Cuba-Cell service was virtually uninterrupted. In fact, the aftermath of Sandy for the Oriente region is likely to have political effect for some time to come. Many friends here recount tales of fear and a confusion that the government appeared so unable to respond to the disaster, to provide basic relief when electricity and water systems failed. The appearance of cholera further confirmed for many Cubans that core services (and the core of the revolutionary program) no longer function as intended or promised. It is also obvious that the reductions in government employment (the euphemism used here translates “to be made available” rather than laid off) have reduced many families to single sources of income at precisely the same moment when the government is reducing rations and services. The licensing of self-employment, hastened by economic necessity, has made legal many services (e.g., taxis, hair salons, esthetics, and tattoo parlors) and expanded the *paladares* around the city. But these endeavors rely on tourist dollars, provision of materials from families abroad, and a domestic market with some buying power—all conditions that are precarious and subject to the vagaries

of decisions made outside of Cuba. Moreover, the decision to legalize the sale of houses has created a new market through which wealthy foreigners purchase the most desirable housing (via a Cuban citizen). However, this new market has at least two detrimental effects: (1) it reduces the housing available to Cubans and (2) it creates inflationary pressures on housing prices, which are already outside the reach of average Cubans. There is a further sign of change, though, one that is more difficult to quantify. That is the growing restlessness among young Cubans, particularly those who are entering the workforce. Four years ago it would have been shocking to hear a young Cuban say that “the embargo is just an excuse” or to express publicly disappointment with the state. Today, it is nearly a daily occurrence.

While change is unavoidable and many processes of economic and social transformation are well underway, Cuba remains an important touchstone for those committed to thinking about alternatives to capitalism. Understanding the history and trajectory of the revolution, its colonial and even precolonial roots opens the possibility for rethinking what a socialist revolution can mean in the 21st century.

NOTES

1. In this regard, the accounts included are selective rather than comprehensive, highlighting key moments that are important in setting the stage for thinking about future trajectories for Cuba.

2. Richard Gott, *Cuba: A New History* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004), 5.

3. See Mayra Espina Prieto, “Changes in the Economic Model and Social Policies in Cuba,” *NACLA Report on the Americas*, July/August, 2011, 13–15; Carmelo Mesa-Lago and Jorge F. Pérez-López, *Cuba’s Aborted Reform: Socioeconomic Effects, International Comparisons, and Transition Policies* (Miami: University of Florida Press, 2005); Alejandro de la Fuente, “The New Afro-Cuban Cultural Movement and the Debate on Race in Contemporary Cuba,” *Journal of Latin American Studies* 40 (2008): 697–720.

4. See Margaret Randall, *To Change the World: My Years in Cuba* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2009).

5. Gott, *Cuba: A New History*, 23.

6. *Ibid.*, 69.

7. *Ibid.*, 159.

8. Ted A. Henken, *Cuba: A Global Studies Handbook* (Santa Barbara: ABC-CLIO, 2008), 98.

9. *Ibid.*, 98.

10. Fidel Castro, “History Will Absolve Me,” trans. Pedro Álvarez Tabío and Andrew Paul Booth, Marxists Internet Archive (2001). <http://www.marxists.org/history/cuba/archive/castro/1953/10/16.htm>.

11. *Ibid.*

12. *Ibid.*

13. Arminio Savioli, "L'Unita Interview with Fidel Castro: The Nature of Cuban Socialism" *L'Unita* 32, No. 1 (1961), Marxists Internet Archive (2000). <http://www.marxists.org/history/cuba/archive/castro/1961/02/01.htm>.

14. This is a reference to the claim of the invaders that they were returning to uphold the 1940 Constitution.

15. This declaration was made on the eve of the Bay of Pigs invasion, April 15, 1961.

16. Fidel Castro, "May Day Celebration: Cuba Is a Socialist Nation," Marxists Internet Archive (2000). <http://www.marxists.org/history/cuba/archive/castro/1961/05/01.htm>.

17. Linda Klouzal, *Women and Rebel Communities in the Cuban Insurgent Movement: 1952–1959*, Kindle edition (Amherst: Cambria Press, 2008), loc 496 of 5919.

18. Julia Sweig argues that the Cuban revolutionaries were not, for the most part, motivated by anti-American sentiment, citing that many were educated in the United States and fully immersed in American culture and its cultural products. It is important, though, to distinguish between an anti-imperialist message and anti-Americanism. The turn to a strong anti-American position following the successful take-over of the Cuban state is rooted in the a priori commitment to independence and resistance to imperialist practices—practices that are not necessarily American in origin. Julia E. Sweig, *Cuba: What Everyone Needs to Know*, Kobo edition (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 16.

19. Interestingly, Klouzal argues that analysis of the Cuban Revolution has been overly vested with vanguardism and the *foco*. But such an argument departs from a Marxist-Leninist notion of vanguardism and ignores Guevara's own insistence that the Cuban contribution to revolutionary thinking derives from being free of such a theory of vanguardism. See Klouzal, *Women and Rebel Communities in the Cuban Insurgent Movement*, loc 463 of 5919; Ernesto "Che" Guevara, "Socialism and Man in Cuba," Marxists Internet Archive (2005). <http://www.marxists.org/archive/guevara/1965/03/man-socialism.htm>.

20. Ernesto "Che" Guevara, "Notes for the Study of the Ideology of the Cuban Revolution," Marxists Internet Archive (2002). <http://www.marxists.org/archive/guevara/1960/10/08.htm>.

21. Raya Dunayevskaya, *Philosophy and Revolution: From Hegel to Sartre, and from Marx to Mao* (Maryland: Lexington Books, 2003), 276–277.

22. Klouzal, *Women and Rebel Communities in the Cuban Insurgent Movement*, loc 521 of 5919; Dunayevskaya, *Philosophy and Revolution*, 276.

23. Gott, *Cuba*, 240.

24. Randall, *To Change the World*, 74.

25. Samuel Farber, *Cuba since the Revolution of 1959: A Critical Assessment* (Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2011), 23.

26. *Ibid.*, 22.

27. Hal Klepak, *Raúl Castro and Cuba: a Military Story* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 12.

28. *Ibid.*, 16.

29. *Ibid.*, 17.

30. *Ibid.*, 18.

31. *Ibid.*, 19.

32. Frank O. Mora and Quintan Wiktorowicz, "Economic Reform and the Military: China, Cuba, and Syria in Comparative Perspective," *International Journal of Comparative Sociology* 44, no. 2 (2003): 105.

33. *Ibid.*, 107.

34. See Henken, *Cuba*.

35. Guevara's writings are fascinating to read. He demonstrates both a strong and clear-minded engagement with Marxist theory and an unashamed willingness for reinterpretation to suit the goals of the Cuban Revolution. Moreover, there is almost a mysticism attached to the remarkable personae of Fidel in his works: "Fidel is a past master at this, his particular mode of integration with the people can only be appreciated by seeing him in action. In the big public meetings, one can observe something like the dialogue of two tuning forks whose vibrations summon the new vibrations each in the other. Fidel and the mass begin to vibrate in a dialogue of growing intensity which reaches its culminating point in an abrupt ending crowned by our battle cry." See Guevara, "Socialism and Man in Cuba."

36. Randall, *To Change the World*, 48.

37. Farber, *Cuba since the Revolution of 1959*, 210.

38. *Ibid.*, 153.

39. From personal experiences and conversations when I lived in Santiago de Cuba.

40. Lars Schoultz, "Benevolent Domination: The Ideology of US Policy toward Cuba," *Cuban Studies* 41 (2010): 9.

41. Irrelevance today does not discount that the embargo (in several guises, not the least of which was the extra-territorial extension under Torricelli and Helms-Burton) has had a significant and lasting effect on Cuba's development. The devastating effects of the embargo can be clearly demonstrated and have been tracked annually by a variety of groups; however, a double-reading of the embargo is possible—that is, the U.S. withdrawal from the Cuban economy in the 1960s allowed Cuba the opportunity to exercise a level of independence that had not been possible for earlier governments because of the significant presence of U.S. interests in every facet of the Cuban economy. William M. Leogrande, "Making-Up Is Hard to Do: Obama's 'New Approach' to Cuba," *NACLA Report on the Americas* July/August (2011), 41.

42. Carmelo Mesa-Lago and Pavel Vidal-Alejandro, "The Impact of the Global Crisis on Cuba's Economy and Social Welfare," *Journal of Latin American Studies* 42 (2010): 692.

43. Adrian H. Hearn, "China, Global Governance and the Future of Cuba," *Journal of Current Chinese Affairs* 1 (2012): 157.

44. *Ibid.*, 163.

45. *Ibid.*; República de Cuba, *Lineamientos de la Política Económica del Partido y la Revolución* (Havana: República de Cuba, 2011).

46. Rosa Luxemburg, *The Russian Revolution*, Marxists Internet Archive (1999). <http://www.marxists.org/archive/luxemburg/1918/russian-revolution/index.htm>

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CHAPTER 9

The Communal System as Venezuela's Transition to Socialism

Dario Azzellini

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this chapter is to explore practices in the Bolivarian Revolution in Venezuela linked to the idea of a transition to socialism through the construction of communal production and consumption cycles controlled by workers and communities. The envisioned transition combines local self-administration and workers' control of the means of production. The present work concentrates mainly on the experiences of local self-administration. Current processes of social transformation, along with official government declarations, envision communal councils as the base for multilevel self-government. These nonrepresentative structures for local self-administration—based on assemblies, direct democracy, spokespeople, and higher levels of coordination (the communes and communal cities)—are the way to build the communal state. In the longer term, the communal state should replace the bourgeois state. This chapter analyzes the aim of the communal state and the movements struggling for it. I interpret the process of social transformation as construction from two sides: from the constituent and constituted power.¹ This chapter also illustrates some of the conflicts that have arisen from the contradictions inherent to this specific modality.

The Bolivarian process of social transformation, a reference to anticolonial fighter Simón Bolívar, began as an anti-neoliberal movement calling for the strengthening of civil and human rights and for the building of a

“participatory and protagonistic democracy” as a proposed “third way” beyond capitalism and socialism. Because of the structural impossibility of carrying out the desired changes within the existing political and economic system, organizational needs, together with the radicalization of social movements, pushed the process further to the left.² While libertarian, socialist, and communist tendencies have always been part of the Bolivarian process, Venezuelan president Hugo Chávez referred to socialism as the only alternative for bringing about the necessary transcendence of capitalism for the first time in early 2005. Beginning in 2007, the idea of participation was officially defined in terms of popular power (*poder popular*), revolutionary democracy, and socialism. Because of the obvious difficulties in defining a clear concept of what socialism might mean today, the objective is defined as socialism of the 21st century and is considered a work in progress.

The transformation process sees wide popular self-organization as fundamental. This cannot be decreed from above, although the state supports and accompanies it. It has to be built by the people themselves. Government policies, particularly in the sectors of education, health, and production, are aimed at strengthening the construction of social networks and community organization. The “construction from two sides,”³ combining bottom-up and top-down strategies, has both advantages and risks, which can be seen in the contradictions emerging as the process unfolds. While strategies from above that are linked to the state, institutionalism, and sovereignty can coexist with representative democracy, strategies from below are associated with autonomy and self-government, rejecting representation and representative democracy. What is at issue, then, is the relationship between constituent power and constituted power. Constituent power should be the determining power and the creative force for what is new. An obvious question is whether (and up to what point) it is possible for the state and its institutions to overcome their own structurally inherent logic of control and interact with the movements from below accepting the movements’ priorities and whether structures of mass organization initiated, promoted, or sponsored by the state can become sufficiently independent of it in order to transform it. After all, it should be kept in mind that this happens within a framework of global capitalism and a national political system, which, albeit in transformation, remains mostly representative.

Most popular movements and organizations view Chávez as a point of reference without being controlled by the president, his party (PSUV), or the government. Nevertheless, the role of the state is deeply ambivalent. On one hand, the tendency of a rentist oil state with huge financial resources is to create vertical structures that favor the subordination of movements under institutional interests. On the other hand, the Chavista discourse has also strengthened the self-confidence of many people and

popular organizations, especially women, Afro-Venezuelan and indigenous movements. The state has played an important role with regard to the transformation of consciousness which, over the long term, can contribute to cultural change and organizational autonomy.⁴

A key normative idea in the Bolivarian process is the priority of constituent power, not understood as a temporary moment of delegating power and/or sovereignty, but rather as a permanent creative collective force of the people, which imposes itself, in turn, on constituted power (the political authorities). The notion of a separation between civil society and political society—between the ones who govern and the ones who are governed—is thus rejected. The idea that society and politics are separate spheres is a fundamental notion of capitalism and the bourgeois state. Instead, the focus in Venezuela is on fostering the potential and direct capacity of the popular base to analyze, decide, implement, and evaluate what is relevant to their lives. Historically, constituent power has been, and is, the source of legitimacy for every revolution, democracy, and republic. Nevertheless, it has always been subordinated to constituted power immediately after the first exercise of legitimating its existence. Defining constituent power as the creative and revolutionary force, as is being done in the Bolivarian process, means to define revolution not as the act of taking power, but rather as a broad process of creation and invention.⁵

The idea of a constituent power not subordinated to constituted power points toward the institution of councils. Future Venezuelan socialism is thought to be built based on various council structures that cooperate and converge at a higher level so as to transcend the bourgeois state and replace it with a communal state.⁶ Different types of popular power councils (local councils and councils of workers, students, peasants, and women, among others) are part of this structure and are being developed and experimented with. The 1999 Constitution recognizes decisions of neighbors' assemblies as binding for authorities.⁷ The Constitution also established forms of local government such as the Local Councils for Public Planning (CLPP)⁸ and the transfer of municipal and regional services to organized communities and groups (if they want to be in charge and are able to do so).⁹ In some municipalities the city council and movements launched municipal constituent assemblies. The construction of communal councils started in 2005. From 2007, students', artists', fishermen's, and workers' councils began to be established. Since January 2007, Chávez has proposed going beyond the bourgeois state by building the communal state. He has picked up and applied more widely a concern originating with antisystemic forces, meaning the movements and political forces that assume that the state form has to be overcome. The basic idea is to form council structures of different kinds, especially communal councils, communes, and communal cities, which

will gradually supplant the bourgeois state.¹⁰ The state is not conceived as a neutral instrument that can simply be taken over (the communist parties' approach), nor is it seen as an autonomous entity (as in the bourgeois or social-democratic tradition). Instead, it is viewed as an entity shaped by capitalism and therefore as having to be transcended. As was proposed in the constitutional reform that was rejected in the 2007 referendum, the future communal state must be subordinated to popular power¹¹ that can replace bourgeois civil society. This would overcome the rift between the economic, social, and political spheres—between civil society and political society—which underlies capitalism and the bourgeois state. It would also prevent, at the same time, the overarching role of the state that characterized “real socialism.”¹² The organs and organizations of popular power would be able to intervene directly in institutional and state affairs, overcoming the division between social and political society.

The state, being a relic of the past, is not seen as the central agent of change. The principal agent of change is understood to be constituent power. The state's role is seen to accompany social movements and the people; to be the facilitator of from below, so that constituent power can bring forward those steps needed to transform society. The state has to guarantee the legal and formal conditions as well as the financial and technical support that the realization of the common good requires. The idea of the communal state is shared by most popular movements, including the Urban Land Committees (Comités de Tierra Urbana, CTU) promoted by the government since 2002, the Ezequiel Zamora National Peasant Front (FNCEZ),¹³ many communal councils, and the movement for workers' control. Nevertheless, the practices of many institutions differ a lot from this supposed orientation.

The Commune as a Construction Site for Socialism

The declared strategy of transformation in Venezuela focuses on the development of local sociopolitical and economic organizations, following the idea of communal socialism. Venezuela's Left has been influenced by many diverse political, social, and cultural movements since the 1960s, many of which were antiauthoritarian, linked to socialism's council tradition and to dissident voices within Soviet-oriented party communism. The influences included Guevarism, Mariateguism, Trotskyism, Italian Operaism, and European autonomism. Additionally, revolutionary Bolivarianism, which started to be developed in mid-1960s, formulated the experiences of indigenous and Afro-Venezuelan resistance as central elements, together with the legacy of Simón Bolívar, Simón Rodríguez, and Ezequiel Zamora, the peasant general from the Federal War (1859–1863).¹⁴

However, the ideal of communal socialism has a longer history still. It can be traced back to Marx and Marxist theory, as well as the experiences of council communism, libertarian socialism, and anarcho-syndicalism. Yet at the same time, communal socialism also connects with historical popular, indigenous, and Afro-American experiences throughout Latin American history and to traditional forms of indigenous collectivism and communitarianism, specifically the historical experiences of the Maroons, former Afro-American slaves who escaped to remote regions and built self-administered communities and settlements called *Cumbes* in Venezuela and *Palenques* or *Quilombos* in different Latin American countries.¹⁵

Various currents of Latin American socialist and Marxist thinking have consistently referred to some kind of communal socialism. Simón Rodríguez (1769–1854), a Venezuelan philosopher, pedagogue, and Bolívar's teacher, had frequented utopian socialist circles in France in the early 19th century. In 1847 he proposed that the best form of government would be a local self-government of the people that he called "toparchy" (from the Greek *topos*, meaning place). According to his ideas, government should be formed by a confederation of local self-governed communities, in which the power of the church, the wealthy, and the military was abolished. This form of direct local government was regarded as the only effective measure against despotism.¹⁶ Similarly, the Peruvian Marxist philosopher, activist, and politician José Carlos Mariátegui (1894–1930) advocated in favor of an original Latin American socialism and a transition to it based on traditional indigenous collective practices and forms. He rejected the idea of the indigenous community based on abstract principles of law or sentimental traditionalism but analyzed the communities as a concrete form of social and economic organization based on collectivity. He also rejected the characterization of the indigenous economy as a primitive economy (according to the different stages of society set up by Marx and Engels) that was displaced gradually by a more modern one. Rather, he found it was the semifeudal *latifundium* that was incapable of technological progress.¹⁷ Communal socialism has a long tradition, especially in Latin America, and contemporary debates and practices in the southern continent reconnect with them. As Chávez highlighted:

In history, we have great examples that must be useful as objective references. The Commune of Paris, the experience of the agrarian commune in China; the indigenous Venezuelan, Colombian, Paraguayan communards are all models that offer keys for us to do what we have to; being original, as the socialist Master of America, Simón Rodríguez, who proposed an original toparchy (small dominion) for our America.¹⁸

The central theoretical reference for the concept of a communal system in Venezuela is István Mészáros¹⁹ who traced his basic ideas for a transition to socialism in his book *Beyond Capital*.²⁰ Mészáros views capital and capitalism as different from each other, with capitalism being just one historically possible variation of the realization of capital. Since revolutionary experiences of the 20th century did not recognize the difference between capital and capitalism, they could not overcome capital's mode of social metabolic reproduction.²¹ Capital as a mode of alien control was fundamentally uncontrollable.²² The modern state and the rule of capital emerge in the same historical process and "capital's socioeconomic base and its state formations are totally inconceivable separately."²³ Capital is the social metabolic foundation of the state and the modern state "is the comprehensive political command structure of capital," or "the necessary *prerequisite* for the transformation of capital's at first fragmented units into a *viable system* and the overall framework for the full articulation and maintenance of the latter as a *global system*."²⁴ But since capital is uncontrollable, it is permanently undermining efforts of control by a command structure (for Mészáros this is also the reason why the Soviet Union—not overcoming capital—finally failed). He writes:

Thus the socialist enterprise had to be defined as a radical *alternative* to the social metabolic mode of control of the capital system as a whole . . . the socialist project had to define itself as the *restitution* of the historically alienated function of control to the social body—the "associated producers"—under *all* its aspects. In other words, the socialist project had to be realized as a *qualitatively different mode of social metabolic control*: one constituted by the individuals in such a way that it should not be *alienable* from them.²⁵

Mészáros criticizes the commodity-producing society and aims for the construction of a postcapital society that has the satisfaction of human needs as its goal (without transforming the use value into a commodity). Mészáros proposes a communal system, creating communal production and consumption cycles:²⁶

Accordingly, in striking contrast to commodity production and its fetishistic exchange relation, the historically novel character of the communal system defines itself through its practical orientation towards the *exchange of activities*, and not simply of *products*. The allocation of products, to be sure, arises from the communally organized productive activity itself, and it is expected to match the directly social character of the latter. However, the point in the present context is that in the communal type exchange relation the primacy goes to the self-determination and corresponding organization of the

activities themselves in which the individuals engage, in accordance with their need as active human beings. The products constitute the subordinate moment in this type of exchange relation, making it therefore possible also to allocate a radically different way the total disposable time of society, rather than being predetermined and utterly constrained in this respect by the primacy of the material productive targets, be they commodities or non-commodified products.²⁷

Democratization of the Control of the Means of Production

According to the general idea of social transformation that orientates the Bolivarian process, the control of the means of production by workers and communities is central for the transition toward socialism. Since 1999, a variety of initiatives have been implemented to effect structural changes to the economy and to democratize relationships of property, work, and production, resulting in the nationalization of hundreds of production sites and banks.²⁸ Some initiatives have also aimed at the abolition of the division between manual and intellectual work, with the goal of overcoming capitalist relations. Other initiatives simply aim for a democratization of capitalist relations. But despite all of the problems concerning the feasibility of achieving real workers' participation without integration into capitalist production cycles, a variety of cooperatives and other alternative company models have arisen over the years.

At first, the government promoted the construction of cooperatives,²⁹ then different models of co-management with mixed ownership (workers' cooperative and private owner or workers' cooperative and state ownership). From 2008 onward, government institutions mainly promoted direct social ownership of the means of production. This applied to nonstrategic production sites in which enterprises are considered social property and managed directly by workers and communities. This model is supposed to be applied in local production sites, expropriated factories, and newly built "socialist factories."³⁰ But apart from a few exceptions, almost all of these factories are under state control.

The only social property enterprises really under the control of workers and communities are the communal cooperatives, the so-called enterprises of communal direct social property, which have been promoted since 2008.³¹ These are meant to take over local services, such as the distribution of liquid gas for cooking³² and local transport, as well as setting up local production. The core idea of such direct social property is the communalization under direct and collective community control of services formerly privatized or never offered to the marginalized communities. Moreover the construction of community controlled productive cooperatives aims not only at providing the communities with work and income, but also

at having the communities producing for their own needs. The decision about the form and administration of the companies lies in the hands of the communities, via the community councils, who also decide who is to work in the community managed companies. This enterprise model was started by the National Superintendence of Cooperatives SUNACOOOP in 2008 after experience showed that previous traditional cooperatives did not automatically work in benefit of the community. Yet this practice already existed in some communal councils.³³ The promotion of the model was then adapted by other institutions and by the state owned oil company PDVSA (Petróleos de Venezuela S.A.).

Nationalizations in the industrial production sector began only in 2005, and were initially a response to the pressure and mobilizations from workers.³⁴ A systematic policy of nationalization, primarily in the production, processing, and marketing of food, began only in 2007/2008. This did not change the social relations of production or abolish capitalist exploitation, however. The vast majority of direct social property enterprises in Venezuela are not administered by workers and communities as they should be, but rather by employees of state institutions with varying levels of competency. At the same time, the internal organizational and working structures of these enterprises showed little or no transformation. The workers experiences of the state's incapacity to guarantee efficient production or for altering the social relationships of production has contributed to a reinvigorated movement for workers' control. In the end, this contradiction has fostered class struggle where it did not previously exist. In nearly all companies nationalized by the state, one can find ongoing conflicts around real workers' participation in decision making and even workers' control.

Workers have fought throughout history, in all forms of government and political systems all over the world for participation in the decision-making processes in their workplaces and have tried to develop co- and self-management or workers' control.³⁵ Collective administration of work places through assemblies or other mechanisms of direct democracy and horizontal relationships have emerged in many cases as an inherent tendency of workers' rank and file, even without explicit prior knowledge about the formation of councils. What emerges clearly from the work of historical and contemporary supporters of workers' control is the emancipatory character of workers' control in transforming a situation of capitalist alienation and authoritarianism into one of democratic practices.³⁶

All historical experiences are different, but the core task has always been to oppose the form of the production process, the backbone of any society, and to build elements of the future classless society without exploitation through councils and self-management structures. In this sense, a unique combination of characteristics makes the Venezuelan

case very special. The starting point in many workplaces fighting for workers' control has not been a situation of the reduction or collapse of production, something that could oblige the workers to assume production. Rather, there is the government's stated intention and societal goal of introducing workers' control, although in practice the logic of power inherent to bourgeois institutions works against workers' control. Moreover, there is no common position in the government on the characteristics of the proposed workers' control, nor within the varieties of leftist groups converging in the Bolivarian process. But it is also due to the power of private economic interests inside the PSUV and the state that are obviously incompatible with workers' control, since workers' control ideally means the abolition of any privileges. As a consequence, different institutions have different practices concerning workers' control. In addition, the new enterprise models that are promoted by the national government and different state institutions are in a process of continuous change. The institutional structure of a bourgeois state is not designed to accomplish social equality or even social revolution but to maintain the status quo and preserve private property. The Venezuelan government however has struggled since 1999 to achieve the envisioned societal changes. After it failed to accomplish the changes through the existing institutions, it started creating parallel institutions (the social programs called missions), to create new institutions, and reorganize the existing ones completely. New ministries have been founded and the responsibilities of the ministries have been reorganized several dozen times since 1999.³⁷ During the past 14 years different government institutions also adopted different models of collective ownership and management of the means of production and models of work place organization they promoted.

All of this reveals that the government and its institutions are permeated by contradictions. On the one hand, the government has called for workers to recover workplaces abandoned by their owners or those producing significantly below their capacities. Chávez and others speak openly of worker control, while the expropriations and nationalizations show the political will to structural transformations. On the other hand, institutions leave little room for workers' initiatives after nationalization. Once the state officially assumes control of an enterprise, managers—either sent by the state institution in charge of administering the enterprise or still in charge but responding to the new boss following traditional hierarchical patterns—usually try to prevent workers from maintaining or obtaining control over production. The struggle for workers' control in Venezuela, then, encounters resistance not just from private entrepreneurs, capitalists, and the management structures of the companies, but also from certain union sectors and parts of the government. This is not surprising. Almost all historical experiences of

workers' control, especially workers' councils, have inevitably clashed with political parties, unions, and state bureaucracies—from the Russian Revolution to struggles in Italy during the 1970s, in Poland in the 1950s and 1980s, or currently in Argentina, South Africa, and India.³⁸

Nevertheless, despite these contradictions, the movement for workers' control has grown significantly since it was proposed in 2006. But it faces strong institutional resistance to workers *actually* taking control of production. For example, while Chávez, the national government, and workers' from Venezuela's basic industries in the eastern region of Bolívar have elaborated the "Plan Guayana Socialista 2009–2019," to restructure the state owned iron, steel, and aluminum industries and develop workers' control,³⁹ the administration of the Venezuelan state holding of basic industries CVG⁴⁰ does not support the plan at all. The Bolivarian regional government of Bolívar (where mining and basic industries are) is controlled by a faction of the PSUV with strong economic interests linked to the state-subsidized basic industries, and who therefore opposes workers' control totally since it would prevent them from continuing to profit from the appropriation of state subsidies, corruption, and lubrication fees from intermediaries and business partners. The interest groups around the governor of Bolívar Francisco Rangel Gómez have their allies in the reformist Bolivarian union Frente Socialista Bolivariano de Trabajadores y Trabajadoras (FSBT), which actively sabotages processes of workers control.⁴¹ Finally also the Ministry of Basic Industries and Mines, the main official government agency responsible for implementing the "Plan Guayana Socialista 2009–2019" did not do much in order to advance restructuring and has maintained a rather low profile in the ongoing conflicts around workers' control.⁴²

Chávez himself had also picked up and launched the organizational proposal for Socialist Workers' Councils (CST) in 2007. The CST have been created and promoted from below. Approximately two years after Chávez called for workers councils, and following growing pressure from below, several institutions started to promote workers councils in state enterprises. In Caracas, for example, CST were promoted in the expropriated garbage collection companies and the Ministry for Light Industries promoted CST in some nationalized factories. But in most cases the state institutions in charge of administering nationalized enterprises try to impose a model with very limited or no workers' participation to prevent the constitution of an organic workers council.⁴³ As a consequence, and motivated by the workers interests, they have often turned into sites of struggle. How workers use the CST to fight against the growing Bolivarian bureaucracy, and how the experiences of institutional obstruction lead to radicalization and self-organization of the CST, can be observed especially in the state institutions promoting workers' participation on one hand and trying to co-opt it on the other in

many of the nationalized enterprises.⁴⁴ The CST are an arena of conflict between the vision of moving toward workers' self-management and workers' control and the institutional logic of containing and structuring social processes in order to neutralize its constituent force. They are also the arena in which some unions use CST to reproduce their own role as mediator between the rank and file and the administration and management of companies and institutions. Nevertheless, though the absence of a legal framework to ensure the formation of CST has hindered their creation,⁴⁵ their numbers are steadily growing. That a certain practice exists before any law is sanctioned is not uncommon in Venezuela and also happened, for example, in the case of the local self-administration structure of the communal councils: A micro practice was developed on a small scale from below; the practice spreads slowly, Chávez picks it up, promotes it, and turns it into a normative orientation; then it is picked up by different government institutions promoting it actively, while the law follows later. Yet, following their own interests and logic, the institutions in charge of promoting new practices or procedures spread and support them, but they also distort the new practices. At some point, a law regulating the practice usually develops. But the real development of the practice is fought out on the territory between organized people and institutions in charge of promoting and implementing the procedures. Most of the over 200 community councils I visited did not fully follow the law of the communal councils. Some had more meetings than established before the first election of spokespeople, some had fewer or more families than the number of families established by the law, and all of them organized the elections of their spokespeople during a whole day as secret elections with ballot papers and ballot boxes instead of electing the spokespeople during a neighborhood assembly as the law establishes. The state institutions working with the communal councils had no other choice but to accept the community led practices.⁴⁶

Venezuela's Structures of Local Self-Administration

As of 2012, the Venezuelan structure of local self-administration encompasses three different levels: communal councils, communes, and communal cities. It is a bottom-up structure of direct and participatory democracy, as opposed to representative forms. Communal councils began forming in 2005 without any law, but as an initiative from below.⁴⁷ In January 2006, Chávez adopted this initiative and began to promote it. In April 2006, the National Assembly approved the Law of Communal Councils, which was reformed in 2009 following a broad consulting process of councils' spokespeople. The communal councils in urban areas encompass 150–400 families; in rural zones, a minimum of 20 families; and in indigenous zones, at least 10 families. At the heart

of the communal council and its decision-making body is the Assembly of Neighbors. The councils build a nonrepresentative structure of direct participation that parallels the elected representative bodies of constituted power. The communal councils have become the most advanced mechanism of self-organization at the local level. In early 2013 there were already more than 44,000 communal councils established throughout Venezuela.⁴⁸

The communal councils are financed directly by national state institutions, thus avoiding interference from municipal organs.⁴⁹ The law does not give any entity the authority to accept or reject proposals presented by communal councils. The relationship between communal councils and the different institutions and institutional levels (central state, regional and local government) in charge of supporting and financing the communal councils, however, is not exactly harmonious; conflicts arise principally from the slowness of constituted power in responding to demands made by communal councils and from their attempts to interfere with the communal internal processes. Communities appropriate the communal councils and adapt them, in form and content, to their needs and abilities. The law of communal councils provides an important orientation, especially for many who have no previous organizational experiences. But it is not seen as an immovable rule; but is seen by the people in the communities as something malleable. The creation of an effective operating structure for the communities is in the foreground. The community exists before, but it is also developed through, work with the community council: it is an act of social construction. As communities change, both collectivity and solidarity assume increasing importance. This is due to the experience of overcoming the own marginalization through self-organization and that improvements in the community are accomplished through collective action. The construction of community is an affect-based active process that strengthens social ties.⁵⁰

Previous research has shown that community experience with planning and project implementation is mostly positive even when serious problems are frequently encountered.⁵¹ The delay and retention of finance by the state institutions in charge to receive and finance projects of the communal councils, however, is seen to represent serious contempt of the communities' collective process and can lead to frustration and reduced participation. This reflects how conflicts between constituent and constituted power has migrated into the institutions: The support for and the promotion of communal councils is coming from the same state institutions constraining the process of local self-administration. This is due on one hand to the different political orientations inside the institutions but on the other also to the inherent logic of institutions and the state to exercise control over social processes in order to preserve and reproduce their power.

State funding raises the danger of turning communal self-administration into a mere administrative entity; it favors institutional instrumentalization of the community organization; and can also lead to financial abuse. Yet the prospect of funding is also a dynamic factor in the constitution and development of community self-administration. Most of the organized communities have proposals to solve their own problems and improve their neighborhoods but do not have the necessary resources that they then demand from the institutions responsible to accompany and finance the communal councils. And although obviously the economic resources as such do not generate popular power, the decentralization and socialization of economic resources is a fundamental step in strengthening the communities' autonomy. Without it any talk of building popular power would be only a farce.

The construction of communes began two years before the law on communes, which was approved in the National Assembly at the end of 2011.⁵² At a higher level of self-government there is the possibility of creating socialist communes, which can be formed from various communal councils in a specific territory. The communal councils decide about territorial boundaries of the commune. These communes can develop medium- and long-term projects of great impact for their locales, while also the decisions concerning the commune continue to be made in the neighborhood assemblies of the communal councils that are part of the commune. Communes can develop projects and planning on a bigger scale. Various communes can form communal cities, with administration and planning from below, if the whole territory is organized in communal councils and communes.⁵³ The mechanism of building socialist communes and communal cities is flexible, and the communities themselves are the ones to determine which tasks they will assume. The construction of self-government can begin around what the population itself considers most important, necessary, or desirable. While a law for communal cities still does not exist, organized communities have already started to build communal cities. The communal cities existing and under construction are rural and structured around agriculture, such as the Ciudad Comunal Campesina Socialista Simón Bolívar in the southern state of Apure or the Ciudad Comunal Laberinto' in the northeastern state of Zulia. In this way, the construction of communes and communal cities is expected to be supported by the Ministry of Communes created in March 2009. This task has also been taken on by grassroots organizations. For example, while the Ministry accompanies the construction of more than 250 communes, the Ezequiel Zamora National Peasant Front accompanies the process in more than 70 of the communes and is even engaged in the construction of a few communal cities. Another 80 of the communes are organized in the autonomous communes' network Red Nacional de Comuneros y Comuneras (RNC).

Following the Bolivarian process' guiding idea of a primacy of constituent power and to ground the development of local self-administration in local experience and knowledge, the state institutions that are all supposed to support the construction of popular power should only accompany the communities and not impose any practices on them. This policy was explained by Carmelo González from the local Autonomous Municipal Institute for the Communes during a community workshop to support the building of a commune in a barrio in Barinas, South-East Venezuela, organized by the FNCEZ:

Water, electricity, telephone and the establishment of the EPS (social production company)—these are matters which are supposed to be managed by the assembly. This is your power and not ours as administrative officials. You have the possibility to acquire the power. This is something new. This is the creation of a new kind of socialism in which there is a real participation, which doesn't exist anywhere so far. If the commune becomes a reality in the whole country, in Barinas, in Venezuela then we can attempt to construct a communal government in transition towards socialism, towards the new geometry of power. All of these forums and talks are also meant to bring the information into your communities . . . because discussions create participation. And the participation will enable you to create government. The government is not who has the power. The power is in your hands, in the possibility that you could build, create, the establishment of governments and therefore create this model of socialism. . . . We intend to learn collectively from what you know, because that is more than we do. It's the knowledge of the people which is expressed right now.⁵⁴

However, González's approach is not the rule among institutional employees. Often, they try to impose certain mechanisms and they rarely place themselves at the service of communities and popular organizations, as happened in this case in Barinas. The relationship between communities and constituted power is often a relationship of cooperation and conflict. The state's initiative and the support work of state institutions have proven essential to the dissemination of the community councils. It has made it possible to reach many communities that otherwise would have had little or no access to the resources which enable them to start a process of self-organization toward self-administration. In the actual work, however, state institutions involved in supporting and financing projects of community councils often have a role that slows down and hinders the organic process. Even if it is decided on a political level that the constituent power has to take the lead, institutions—through their inherent logic—aim at extending their range of power and influence and

at controlling social processes. The logic of institutions is to reproduce and extend their power and control of social processes in order to prove their importance, perpetuate their existence, and consolidate their role. The bureaucracy and apparatus created to carry out the assigned tasks also becomes a reason in itself for the reproduction of its own existence.

Most state institutions have become yet another site of class struggle. It is not rare that the Venezuelan institutions—on a local, regional, and national level—on one hand, organize support in the form of accompaniment and workshops to promote self-determination and autonomy in social and productive processes, while on the other, they try to prevent the communities or workers from taking total control. For example, after the nationalization of an enterprise the ministry or other state institution responsible for its administration organized trainings about Venezuelan history, politics, workers control, and co-management for the workers.⁵⁵ The teams in charge often do a good job and sympathize with the workers. But once the workers start claiming a broader participation the same institution usually denies it.⁵⁶ Most of the times workers have to struggle even for minority participation in the provisional directors' board of the nationalized enterprise in charge to organize the transition of the enterprise from private to supposed social property.⁵⁷ Despite these limitations, growing self-confidence, experience, and determination over the years have enabled many communities to define their needs and desires autonomously and to organize to reach their goals as can be seen in many communal councils⁵⁸ and with several autonomous networks analyzed in the next section.

In the context of the construction of communes and communal cities, it is important to distinguish analytically between (absolute) politico-administrative space and socio-cultural-economic (relational) space.⁵⁹ Communes reflect the latter; their boundaries do not necessarily correspond to existing politico-administrative spaces. The different spaces overlap and do so with different relations to power and dominance. As the different spaces do not cease to exist, the institutionalization of the communal councils, communes, and communal cities develop and shape the socio-cultural-economic space.⁶⁰ Thus, the idea of council-based, nonrepresentative local self-organization creates a "new power-geometry." The concept of power in human geography, as elaborated by Doreen Massey, has been put "to positive political use" following the "recognition of the existence and significance, within Venezuela, of highly unequal, and thus undemocratic, power-geometries."⁶¹ In this frame, the council structure shows "how both the very nature of power-relations and the geography of those relations might be changed."⁶²

The community councils and communes have a large impact on the state model. The foreseeing and caretaking role of the state is not assumed anymore by a specialized bureaucracy, but by transferring public financial

and technical resources to the communities.⁶³ However, local autonomy is neither isolated from state power nor a counterweight to it. Rather, it is self-administration and networking that tends to transcend the division between political and civil society (i.e., between those who govern and those who are governed). Liberal analysts who support the division between those who govern and those governed view the communal councils in a negative light, arguing that they are not an independent civil society organization, but linked to the state. However, the communal councils constitute a parallel structure to the institutional apparatus of liberal democracy. Through the communal councils and communes power and control is gradually drawn away from the state in order to build communal self-administration.

During the first years of the Chávez government the economic development of communities concentrated on promoting cooperatives according to the traditional model where the enterprise belonged to the cooperative members. But after the experience that the internal solidarity and horizontal social relations would not spread automatically from the cooperative to the rest of the community—and that the cooperatives did not necessarily follow the interests and needs of the communities—the state began to develop models of community-based and controlled enterprises. In 2008, communal cooperatives, which means cooperatives controlled by structures of local self-administration like community councils and communes, started to be promoted in communities first by the National Cooperatives' Supervision Sunacoop and later by other state institutions. Since 2011 this type of collective ownership and administration of means of production is known under the name enterprises of communal direct social property (EPSDC).

The model of the EPSDC aims at creating local production units or service enterprises for the communities. These enterprises are the collective property of the communities through the *consejos comunales* or communes, which also decide about the organizational structure of their enterprise, the workers employed, and the use of eventual earnings. Several state enterprises and institutions started promoting the EPSDC in organized communities. The communities responded by constructing communal enterprises in different branches. Most of the EPSDC produce food or construction materials, or offer services to the community such as transport or liquid gas. The focus of activities chosen by the communities is directed to give response to the most urgent problems in the majority of marginalized communities, which make up almost 80 percent of the country.

Several of the nationalized cement companies have encouraged communities to establish EPSDC for the distribution of construction materials and *briquetas* (cement blocks for the construction of houses). This step proved to be effective in reducing both speculation and the price

of *briqueras* by eliminating business intermediaries. Similarly, the state-owned oil company, PDVSA, built a community controlled distribution network for liquid gas called Gas Communal. The community-based resellers are EPSDC. Liquid gas is very cheap in Venezuela as it is a by-product of the oil extraction process, yet its distribution used to be controlled entirely by private companies that sold it at high prices. Prices for gas cylinders by Gas Communal are about 80 percent cheaper than the commercial price set by private gas enterprises. PDVSA also created a new type of gas cylinder made of durable plastic that is much lighter than metal cylinders used by private companies and supports communities to build and administer refilling centers. PDVSA provides the gas stored in tanks, while communities are responsible for distribution. Communities themselves decide collectively whether to supply gas free of charge to people in a difficult economic situation. Fifty community-controlled refilling facilities have been set up since PDVSA started the program Gas Communal in 2008 and cover 87 percent of the national liquid gas demand.⁶⁴

By the end of 2009, 271 EPSDC had been created and, in another 1084 enterprises, communities were sharing the administration with the state.⁶⁵ By 2012, more than a thousand EPSDC had been created. While in the beginning, EPSDC were mainly small-sized production companies or local services (e.g., transport), since 2011 the construction of productive EPSDC with 20–100 workers producing doors, carpentry products, tiles, and so on, has begun. The government proposal “Guayana Socialista 2013–2019,” presented on the occasion of the 2012 presidential elections by Chávez, stated the goal of building 30,000 productive EPSDC by 2019.⁶⁶ Generally, the community-controlled enterprises have managed a better balance between cost, efficiency, and social needs than the state or privately administered enterprises.⁶⁷

Communism as Real Movement

Following Marx's and Engels's affirmation that, “Communism is for us not a state of affairs which is to be established, an ideal to which reality [will] have to adjust itself. We call communism the real movement which abolishes the present state of things. The conditions of this movement result from the premises now in existence.”⁶⁸ We have to take a closer look at the social sectors engaged in the concrete construction of practices, struggles, mechanisms, and structures linked to the idea of the communal state (as network and coordination from the bottom-up of local and workplace self-administration). In Venezuela we can identify four popular movements as the most consolidated and best organized: The peasants' movement and its periphery,⁶⁹ the “movement of settlers” MDP,⁷⁰ the movement for workers' control,⁷¹ and the network

of communards RNC.⁷² All are an integral part of the Bolivarian process in Venezuela, however, their structures are self-organized, their discussions and decisions, autonomous. All are in a relationship of cooperation and conflict with the constituted power at all institutional levels (although there are also examples of good cooperation at all levels also). In this context, it is of interest to highlight that two of these movements (CTU and RNC) were originally initiated by the state but have since been entirely appropriated from below, creating a space of autonomy. All these popular movements share the goal of building the communal state.⁷³

This section of the chapter focuses on the case of the RNC since it is the popular movement, which is most linked to the concept of the communal state. The analysis of the RNC will evidence how concrete practices are abolishing the present state of things and pointing toward the construction of a socialist society.

The RNC was launched by the Ministry of Communes in 2008 as a national network of communes under construction. After a year, the network separated from the ministry claiming organizational autonomy. The RNC declared: "Our programmatic axis is socialism with its two central elements: The construction of the communal state and of the communal economy of transition to socialism."⁷⁴ The network aims at building the communal state democratically from below, relying on council structures and promoting a popular constituent process, and strengthening the constituent character of the people. The RNC has continued to grow and in 2013 had more than 120 communes participating in the network and which organized at least two national meetings per year. Regional meetings of communes' spokespeople take place between the national meetings and the network also has working committees that explore questions of communication or specific themes.⁷⁵ One of these work committees is developing a project for a national communards' school, a training facility self-organized by the communes and responding to their needs. Based on the experiences of popular education, and revolutionary praxis, the communes of the RNC aim toward

developing a popular education model in order to promote the birth of the new man and woman with class consciousness, contributing with this to the transformation of the current education system, which still is conservative and reproducing the logic of capital.⁷⁶

In July 2011, the RNC also agreed to continue developing its own structure through the creation of a National Council of Communards and national, regional, and local commissions on organization, communication, training, planning, and community projects, as well as military defense. In regard to the latter, the communes declared their intention to "take

over security and territorial defense by forming the militia and a body of comunard fighters to ensure the strategy to occupy, produce and defend."⁷⁷ The communes of the RCN are, as we can see, determined to acquire and develop every faculty needed to move toward an autonomous self-administration.

The "IV National Meeting of Communards," from July 29 to 31, 2011, in the Municipality of Torres (Lara) was attended by some 300 people from approximately 70 communes and Cumbes (as communes of Afro-Venezuelan communities in the region of Barlovento call themselves in reference to the communes set up by runaway slaves in the late 18th century). About 15 spokespersons from FNCSB communes also attended. The FNCSB unites over 80 communes and eight communal cities, several of which already function as such, although the ministry continues classifying them as "under construction." Among these is the Peasants' Communal City Simón Bolívar in the state of Apure, composed of 39 communal councils and 10 communes. The comunards of the FNCSB announced their participation in the RNC.

The RNC is completely autonomous but has specific institutional support. The annual meeting in the municipality of Torres was supported by municipality, which facilitated the venue and sound equipment.⁷⁸ Torres's previous mayor, Julio Chávez, belonged to the pioneers supporting the construction of popular power away from institutions.⁷⁹ The local institutions only welcomed the comunards in the opening assembly and did not interfere any further. Usually, however, relations with institutions are more conflictual. Almost all communes participating in the IV National Meeting of Communards reported conflicts with state institutions and how institutions have to be pressured to support the popular construction processes the way the communes want them to. After years of experience the general understanding among the communes is that the contradictions between constituent and constituted power has to be understood as a structural problem and not as a question of good or bad government employees.⁸⁰ The RNC is perceived by many state institutions working with communes as a threat or as a disruptive factor. This is obviously not declared publicly since the official political orientation, and especially Chávez's position, views the construction of the communes and the network at the forefront of the transformation process. Nevertheless, following the logic of control inherent to institutions of constituted power, the self-organization of the communes represents a threat, since it moves agency from the institution to the communes, what tends to make the communes unpredictable and uncontrollable. This is especially the case for the Ministry of Communes, since the self-organized RNC is able to coordinate and bring together more communes in a network than the ministry with its resources. But the ministry controls the financial resources and tries to impose certain

ways of organizing, or the kinds of projects that can be developed, that responds to the political interests of the PSUV faction leading the ministry rather than the needs and desires of the communes. This does not mean there is no interest from the RNC and its participants in working with the Ministry of Communes or institutions—just the opposite. For example, the RNC has the goal to “actively participate in the creation of the new Revolutionary Laws and Regulations required by the Popular Movement.”⁸¹ But the RNC decides its agenda autonomously and follows its self-defined discussions, interests, and decisions. The institutions are expected to follow the agenda set by the communes and not to try to impose a different agenda on them.

The overall goal of the RNC is to build the communal state and abolish the existing state. It seeks to

- Remove progressively the liberal bourgeois state through the construction of a new form of government of the people, the Communal Socialist state that resembles us and retrieves the historical project truncated in 1498 with the arrival of the Spanish conquistador.
- Develop self-management skills as central element in order to exercise the revolutionary communal self-government, the government, in which decisions are taken collectively and democratically.⁸²

Today’s communes work in order to:

Assume the planning of the production cycle (production, processing and distribution and also promote cultural change of patterns of consumption and consumerism). . . . Accumulate technical and organic strength to pass means of production gradually under control of workers (workers’ councils) and communes at their various levels of aggregation, and to develop the communal economy, in transition to Bolivarian Socialism.⁸³

This is a challenge most institutions do not engage with, even if it is in line with official government declarations. Discussions among the participants of the annual RNC meeting in 2011 gave testimony that the communards do not expect the bourgeois state and its institutions to build popular power, autonomy or the communal state. The participants were clear about the fact that either it will be built from below or there will be neither socialism nor a communal state. This represents a remarkable difference compared to similar meetings a few years earlier when it was more common to compile lists of needs and wishes to give to the institutions, and then wait for them to be fulfilled. This marks an important change in Venezuela’s political culture. It shows a growing

consciousness and a political maturation process. Socialism becomes a practice and a goal.

CONCLUSION

The Bolivarian process explicitly identifies with the socialist councilist tradition and the collective and horizontal practices coming from the African American and indigenous historical experiences in the Americas. This is, without doubt, a novelty compared to the practices of self-proclaimed socialist countries or those who claimed socialism as their goal. Also new is the centrality of constituent power and the fact that the state is not seen as the central agent of transformation, but is supposed to help facilitate its own obsolescence. Nevertheless, the postulated construction from two sides encompasses several problems since there is a power asymmetry favoring the constituted power.

The most active agents of change in Venezuela have been—and continue to be—the inhabitants of the urban barrios and the rural communities. By adapting and promoting an existing form of self-administration developed by grassroots actors, the state could contribute significantly to the organizational process of the communities. The communal councils and communes have the potential to be institutions of the constituent power (but do not have to be, nor always are). Within the communal councils, constituent power can acquire and develop the mechanisms it requires for the creation of self-government and update them constantly through processes of direct democracy. The construction of structures of self-government from people's own experiences and approaches means the construction of popular power. The communal councils and communes are spaces in which the class constitutes itself as a community. The construction of self-government at different levels, with the communal state as a goal, is definitely a struggle for a different system, with logics and an operational mode opposed to the ones of bourgeois society and capitalism. The different levels of communal self-administration are to be considered spaces from which class struggle develops.

Building workers' councils has been much more difficult because of many Venezuelans' weak identification with industrial work—a consequence of the rentist economic model based on petroleum revenues—and because of the higher direct financial interests at stake, which also produce a strong institutional resistance to workers' control. This is due to the widespread private appropriation of public finances and resources by clientelistic and criminal networks, which is also a consequence of the rentist economy. Since the most reliable instrument to break the patronage networks and make a domestic productive development possible is the control of the means of production by workers and communities, it is met with strong opposition in the institutions.

After 13 years of social transformation, the biggest challenge for the Bolivarian process is the structural contradictions between constituent and constituted power. These contradictions are grounded in the difference between institutional and social logics and intensify in times of structural change—when all institutions are questioned—and tend to consistently prove their own importance and inalienability. One important challenge to the Venezuelan transformation process is that the institutions themselves would have to work toward eliminating their own existence (e.g., the Ministry of Communes), or at least completely transform their functions and reduce them in favor of the organized communities. Following an inherent logic, no institution does that on its own. For example, if an institutional employee's job as community promoter—and the existence of the institution he works for—are guaranteed only by the dependence of communal councils on them, then the interest of the institution and its employees in having independent communal councils will be minimal. Conversely, the individual civil servant, as well as the institution as a whole, will present advances and positive results, but always explain that the communal councils, communes, and other instances of self-administration, in whatever sector, need the support of the corresponding institution. In fact, the Ministry of Communes turned out to be one of the biggest obstacles to the construction of communes and most of the communes under construction complain about the Ministry, as described by almost all communes present at the IV Encuentro Nacional de Comuneros y Comunerías.⁸⁴ With regard to co-management or workers' control, the contradictions are similar and even more pronounced, reflecting how contradictions and class struggle have begun to move into the institutions. On the one hand, institutions train the workers of expropriated or newly formed state enterprises in socialist politics, co-management, workers' control, and the construction of workers councils. On the other hand, once the workers reclaim more participation in decision making or control, they are confronted with institutions trying to maintain control.

The conflicts around workers' control and the transformation of the social relations of production shows who in the Bolivarian process—particularly, who in the government—is willing to be a part of the democratic construction of a new society, and who acts in order to perpetuate the old model of a capitalist rentist state. The conflict is an expression of class struggle. And it is exactly the tension between constituent and constituted power that reflects the emancipatory potential of the Bolivarian process. Government sectors opposed to workers' control and to socialism are trying to prevent both using whatever means they can, and when they do not succeed they try to make initiatives of workers' control fail by favoring private enterprises and imports over national workers' controlled enterprises. These sectors have provoked severe setbacks to the construction of workers' control in state industries, especially in the heavy industries in deficit, whereas a Chávez-led government plan

and a strong workers organization has aimed at restructuring production under workers' control as agreed in the "Plan Guayana Socialista 2009–2019."⁸⁵ But even if they slowed down the expansion of workers' control, they could not succeed in stopping or reversing the general tendency. In fact, the reluctance or hostility of many institutions is what often has provoked workers' struggles.

This is once again the case with the Socialist Workers' Councils (CST), which in many instances are used by institutions in order to try to institutionalize, limit, and control the struggles of workers. The institutional attempts to deviate the councils' function have provoked conflicts around participation and workers' control in almost every state institution and enterprise. The CST turned into an ulterior vehicle for the struggle for workers' control and contributed to the growth of the movement for workers' control.

Especially since 2007, the government's ability to reform has increasingly clashed with the limitations inherent in the bourgeois state, the capitalist system and rentist logic. The movements and initiatives for self-management and self-government geared toward overcoming the bourgeois state and its institutions, with the goal of replacing it with a communal state based on popular power, have grown. But simultaneously, because of the expansion of state institutions' work, the consolidation of the Bolivarian process, and growing resources, state institutions have been generally strengthened and have become more bureaucratized. As mentioned earlier, institutions of constituted power aim at controlling social processes and at reproducing themselves. Since the institutions of constituted power are at the same time strengthening and limiting constituent power, the transformation process is very complex and contradictory. Nevertheless, the struggles liberated by constituent power in Venezuela are often struggles for a different system and not within the existing social, political, and economic system. In this context, it is interesting to underline that some grassroots organizing mechanisms were originally initiated and promoted by the state—such as the CTU or the RNC—succeeded in developing a relative autonomy (regarding organization, debate, and decisions) from the state, which is a central condition enabling them to transform the state.

Does this bring Venezuela any nearer to socialism? If we consider socialism as a movement and not a condition following a premeditated concept, then there is little doubt that Venezuela represents a novel attempt at initiating a process of the transition toward socialism. While 14 years ago the idea of socialism had little support in Venezuela, currently more than half of the population identifies as being in favor of a socialist society (whatever that may mean to them).⁸⁶ The institutional resistance to workers' control and the conflicts between state bureaucracy and workers have contributed to strengthening the movement for workers' control, as well as creating and promoting class struggle where none existed before. Meanwhile, communities could also set up community-controlled

enterprises through the enterprises of direct communal social property. The process of constructing a concrete alternative, based on self-government through the organization of councils, has made huge advances. It has progressively been emancipated from institutional influence, defined its own agenda, and is able to set up pressure on the constituted power. The RNC, for example, mobilized and managed to pressure the Ministry of Communes to register some 20 communes at the end of 2011.⁸⁷ The contradictory political tendencies have maintained themselves in the same process of social transformation for 14 years now, something considered impossible by most observers. Contrary to most known revolutionary experiences, the movement has not been eliminated or forced into submission by the institutions of constituted power, but are more organized and have more clarity than a decade and a half ago.

POST SCRIPTUM

Hugo Chávez died of cancer on March 5, 2013. His death sparked fear for some on the future course of the transformation process. Former foreign minister Nicolás Maduro won the presidential elections in April of 2014, promising to carry on Chávez's legacy. It is still too early to comment on his overall politics. Nevertheless, he campaigned with the slogan "Communes or Nothing" and has appointed a new minister of communes, Reinaldo Iturriza, removing his predecessor who had been widely criticized. The new minister changed the approach of the Ministry of Communes, recognizing the limitations of the ministry and the primacy of the constituent power organized in communes. His efforts have been welcomed by the comunards. A communal census carried out in September 2013 revealed the existence of 40,035 *Consejos Comunales* and 1,401 existing communes or popular efforts toward their construction.

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

This chapter is based on intense field work in Venezuela during six to eight months a year since 2003, conducting workshops for spokespeople of *consejos comunales* from September 2007 to April 2008, and workshops about co-research in factories, as well as more than 100 formal interviews with activists and institutional employees. During this fieldwork I visited around 150 *consejos comunales* and a half dozen *comunas*.

NOTES

1. Constituted power is represented by the institutions. It is a delegated power. Its legitimacy is based on the constituent power.

2. Dario Azzellini, *Venezuela Bolivariana. Revolution des 21. Jahrhunderts?* (Köln: Neuer ISP Verlag, 2007); Dario Azzellini, *Partizipation, Arbeiterkontrolle und die*

Commune (Hamburg: VSA, 2010); Gregory Wilpert, *Changing Venezuela by Taking Power* (London/New York: Verso, 2007).

3. Raúl Zibechi, "Movimientos sociales: nuevos escenarios y desafíos inéditos," *OSAL* 21 (2006): 227.

4. Steve Ellner, "Las tensiones entre la base y la dirigencia en las filas del chavismo," *Revista Venezolana de Economía y Ciencias Sociales*. 1, no. 14 (2008): 49–64.

5. Antonio Negri, *Il Potere Costituente* (Carnago: Sugarco Edizioni, 1992): 382.

6. Asamblea Nacional—Dirección General de Investigación y Desarrollo Legislativo, *Ejes Fundamentales del Proyecto de Reforma Constitucional, Consolidación del Nuevo Estado* (Caracas: Asamblea Nacional Dirección General de Investigación y Desarrollo Legislativo, 2007); Hugo Chávez, *El Poder Popular* (Caracas: Ministerio de Comunicación e Información, 2008), 38.

7. Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, *Constitution of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela* (Caracas: Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, 1999), article 70, <http://venezuelanalysis.com/constitution>.

8. Consejos Locales de Planificación Pública, *ibid.*, article 182.

9. *Ibid.*, article 189.

10. Chávez, *El Poder Popular*.

11. Asamblea Nacional—Dirección General, *Consolidación*.

12. Chávez, *El Poder Popular*, 67.

13. Frente Nacional Campesino Ezequiel Zamora.

14. Dario Azzellini, "Bolivarianism, Venezuela," in *The International Encyclopedia of Revolution and Protest. 1500 to the Present*, 8 vols., ed. Immanuel Ness (Malden/Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009), 412–416.

15. Dario Azzellini, "Andresote and the Revolt against the Guipuzcaona (1731–1733)," in *The International*, Ness, 162–164; Dario Azzellini, "Chirinos, José Leonardo (d. 1796)," in *The International*, Ness, 737; Dario Azzellini, "Venezuela, Negro Miguel Rebellion, 1552," in *The International*, Ness, 3451–3452; Maria Cristina Navarrete, *Cimarrones y Palenques en el Siglo XVII* (Cali: Universidad del Valle, 2003); Alvin O. Thompson, *Flight to Freedom: African Runaways and Maroons in the Americas* (Kingston: University of the West Indies Press, 2006).

16. Simón Rodríguez, *Obras Completas de Simón Rodríguez, Tomo II* (Caracas: Ediciones de la Presidencia de la República, 2001), 542.

17. José Carlos Mariátegui, "7 Ensayos de Interpretación de la Realidad Peruana. El Problema de la Tierra," in *Mariátegui: Política Revolucionaria. Contribución a la Crítica Socialista, Tomo II*. (Caracas: El Perro y la Rana, 2010), 75–122.

18. Hugo Chávez, "Bolívar and 'The Mysterious Unknown. . .'" *Venezuelanalysis.com* (June 1, 2009), <http://venezuelanalysis.com/analysis/4489>

19. Mészáros has been extensively cited by Chávez and has published, honored, and invited to speak in Venezuela. His works have won several prizes in Venezuela. *Beyond Capital* was translated into Spanish in 2002 and *The Challenge and Burden of Historical Time: Socialism in the Twenty-First Century* in 2008 and won the "Premio Libertador al Pensamiento crítico" in the same year.

20. Istvan. Mészáros, *Beyond Capital. Towards a Theory of Transition* (London: Merlin Press, 1995).

21. This is what Marx in *Grundrisse* calls a "system of general social metabolism" (1973, 158–159). As Marx explains, "Individuals are subsumed under social

production; social production exists outside them as their fate; but social production is not subsumed under individuals, manageable by them as their common wealth." (1973, 158). "Capital's mode of social metabolic reproduction" refers to the system of hierarchic division of labor subordinating vital functions to capital. Capital existed before the generalization of commodity production (e.g., as mercantilism) and exists after capitalism (e.g., in the Soviet Union, where capitalism was abolished but not capital's mode of social metabolic reproduction).

22. Mészáros, *Beyond Capital*, 818–837.

23. *Ibid.*, 58.

24. *Ibid.*, 65.

25. *Ibid.*, 33.

26. *Ibid.*, 759–770.

27. *Ibid.*, 759–760.

28. Dario Azzellini and Oliver Ressler, *Comuna under Construction* (Berlin: good!movies, 2011), Film-DVD; Azzellini, *Venezuela Bolivariana*.

29. Dario Azzellini, "From Cooperatives to Enterprises of Direct Social Property in the Venezuelan Process," in *Cooperatives and Socialism. A View from Cuba*, ed. Camila Piñeiro Harnecker (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 259–278.

30. The concept of socialist factories was launched 2008 in occasion of the start of a program to build 200 new factories (food industries, chemical products, machines and tools); electronic equipment and material (computers, cell phones, and others), plastic, tires, and glass; clothes, and recycling. Most of them are built with knowledge transfer and technology from Belarus, China, Iran, Russia, and Argentina. Later the concept started to be applied to all new factories and also to some nationalized factories. Socialist factories are supposed to be of social property. That means they should be under the control of workers and communities or at least heading toward this goal. Workers for the socialist factories are recommended by the communal councils in the areas where they are built. While specialized workers are at the beginning provided by the state, the idea is to pass the socialist factories step by step to the control of workers and communities. Dario Azzellini, "Venezuela's Solidarity Economy: Collective Ownership, Expropriation, and Workers Self-Management," *WorkingUSA* 12, no. 4 (2009): 171–191.

31. *Empresas de Propiedad Social Directa Comunal, EPSDC*.

32. Through a community controlled reseller network for liquid gas from the state owned petrol company PDVSA.

33. I visited community controlled cooperatives in 23 de Enero, Caracas and Baruta in 2007.

34. Azzellini, *Participation*, 230–233.

35. Immanuel Ness and Dario Azzellini, eds, *Ours to Master and to Own. Workers Councils from the Commune to the Present* (Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2011).

36. Pablo Cormenzana, *La batalla de Inveval. La lucha por el control obrero en Venezuela* (Madrid: Fundación Federico Engels, 2009); Karl Korsch, *Revolutionary Theory* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1977); Carlos Lanz Rodríguez, *Consejo de Fábrica y Construcción Socialista. Antecedentes teóricos e históricos de un debate inconcluso* (Ciudad Guayana: Mibam/CVG Alcasa, 2007); Lavaca, *Sin Patrón: Fábricas y empresas recuperadas por sus trabajadores. Una historia, una guía*

(Buenos Aires: Cooperativa de Trabajo Lavaca Ltd, 2004); Ernest Mandel, *Control Obrero, consejos obreros, autogestión* (Mexico City: Era, S.A., 1974); Ness and Azzellini, *Ours to Master*; Anton Pannekoek, *Arbeiterräte: Texte zur sozialen Revolution* (Fernwald: Germinal Verlag, 2008); Programa Facultad Abierta, Facultad de Filosofía y letras de la Universidad de Buenos Aires and Secretaría de Investigación / Secretaría de Extensión Universitaria, *Las empresas recuperadas en la Argentina. Informe del tercer relevamiento de empresas recuperadas por sus trabajadores*, (Buenos Aires: Ediciones de la Cooperativa Chilavert, 2010); Julián Rebón, *Desobedeciendo al desempleo: La experiencia de las empresas Recuperadas* (Buenos Aires: La Rosa Blindada, 2004); Julián Rebón, *Empresas recuperadas. La autogestión de los trabajadores* (Buenos Aires: Capital Intelectual, 2006); Andrés Ruggeri, Carlos Martínez and Hector Hugo Trincherro, *Las empresas recuperadas en la Argentina: informe del Segundo relevamiento del Programa Facultad Abierta* (Buenos Aires: Facultad de Filosofía y letras/SEUBE, 2005); Marina Sitrin, *Horizontalism: Voices of Popular Power in Argentina* (Oakland/Edinburgh: AK Press, 2006); Trabajadores de CVG/Alcasa, *Control Obrero, publicación de trabajadores de CVG/Alcasa* (September 16, 2009). <http://www.aporrea.org/en/dogeno/a86731.html>.

37. Solidarity or communal economy, for example, was first assigned in 2004 as responsibility of the newly created Ministry of Popular Economy (Ministerio de Economía Popular, Minep). In 2007 the Ministry's responsibilities were reorganized and the ministry renamed Ministry of Communal Economy (Ministerio de Economía Comunal, Minec) and in 2009 its working areas were integrated into the newly created Ministry of Popular Power of the Communes (Ministerio del Poder Popular de las Comunas, Minppec).

38. Ness and Azzellini, *Ours to Master*.

39. Ministerio del Poder Popular para las Industrias Básicas y Minería, "Plan Guayana Socialista 2009–2019," http://www.sidor.com/images/noticias/documentos/p_guayana.pdf.

40. Corporación Venezolana de Guayana.

41. Elio Sayago, "Entrevista con Elio Sayago, presidente de CVG Alcasa." *Lucha de Clases* (October 25, 2011). <http://www.luchadeclases.org.ve/lucha-obrera-left-menu-166/7118-entrevista-elio-sayago>.

42. Dario Azzellini. "De la Cogestión al Control Obrero. Lucha de clases al interior del proceso bolivariano" Ph.D. thesis, Benemérita Universidad Autónoma de Puebla, 2012).

43. Nationalized enterprises and new state-owned business are administered by state institutions according to the sector. The Ministry for Ground Transportation, for example, administers the national bus company SITSSA, while the Ministry for Water and Air Transportation administers the national airline Conviasa and the state-owned ferries to Margarita island; the new Ministry of Industries—born out of a merge of the Ministry for Light Industries and the basic industries formerly administered by a Ministry for Basic Industries and Mining—administers all factories; some local administrations might administer expropriated or newly created local services like garbage collection or local transport routes.

44. Jorge Martín, "Venezuela: Revolutionary vignettes. Part 2: Workers' councils sabotaged by the bureaucracy," *Defence of Marxism* (August 4, 2011). <http://www.marxist.com/venezuela-revolutionary-vignettes-2.htm>.

45. Greti Richard, "Sobre los Consejos de Trabajadores y Trabajadoras. Entrevista al sociólogo Alberto Bonilla," *Aporrea* (February 9, 2011). <http://www.aporrea.org/actualidad/a117385.html>.

46. Azzellini, *Partizipation*, 275–278.

47. For a detailed analysis of origins and development of the communal councils, with an in depth study of seven *consejos comunales* in Caracas, see Azzellini, *Partizipation*.

48. El Correo del Orinoco, "Viceministra Margaud Godoy: más de 44 mil 400 Consejos Comunales hacen vida en el país," *El Correo del Orinoco* (January 31, 2013). <http://www.aporrea.org/poderpopular/n222461.html>.

49. The communal councils receive state financing out of different state funds. Among the finances the communal councils receive there is, for example, 30 percent of the money distributed through the interterritorial decentralization fund. The oil revenues from the Orinoco belt go entirely to the communal councils. The main counterpart of the communal councils and communes is the Ministry of Communes created in 2008. But all ministries and all different representative administration levels—municipalities and regional governments—are called to finance projects presented by the communal councils. Therefore it is difficult to quantify the exact amount of finances transferred to communal councils and communes every year. But if we consider only the finances flowing through the central financial fund created exclusively for communal councils, and the Ministry of Communes, it is clear that the state allotted \$2.79 billion in 2007, \$3 billion in 2008 and between \$3 and \$7 billion in the following years. See Azzellini, *Partizipation*, 278–281.

50. Azzellini, *Partizipation*, 301–349.

51. *Ibid.*, 271–349.

52. Asamblea Nacional de la República Bolivariana de Venezuela (ANdRBV), *Ley Orgánica de las Comunas* (Caracas: ANdRBV, 2011).

53. Chávez, *El Poder Popular*, 37–70.

54. Azzellini and Ressler, *Comuna*.

55. On the different company models promoted by the state and regarding the measures of state support adapted see Azzellini, *De la Cogestión al Control Obrero*, 135–229; Dario Azzellini, "Workers' Control under Venezuela's Bolivarian Revolution," in *Ours to Master and to Own. Workers' Councils from the Commune to the Present*, eds. Immanuel Ness and Dario Azzellini (Chicago: Haymarket Books): 382–399, Azzellini, *Partizipation*, 216–246; Dario Azzellini, "Venezuela's Solidarity Economy: Collective Ownership, Expropriation, and Workers Self-management," *WorkingUSA*, no. 6 (2009): 171–191.

56. This was the case for the assistance program for single mothers. Misión Madres del Barrio, in the state-owned TV channels VTV and Ávila TV, and even in the Ministry of Work and different institutions belonging to the Ministry of Communes as the finance entity, Fundacomunal, or the National Institute for Socialist Instruction and Education Inces (Instituto Nacional de Capacitación y Educación Socialista), which should have taken the lead in setting up CST. See Azzellini, *De la Cogestión al Control Obrero*, 181–187. For a detailed example see the experience with the expropriated garbage collection companies administered by the city of Caracas in *Ibid.* 188–191.

57. Nationalized enterprises and newly created factories are supposed to be direct social property. That means they are administered directly by communities

and workers. But most of the factories stay administered by state authorities. Dario Azzellini, "Economía solidaria en Venezuela: Del apoyo al cooperativismo tradicional a la construcción de ciclos comunales," in *A Economía Solidária na América Latina: realidades nacionais e políticas públicas*, ed. Sidney Lianza and Flávio Chedid Henriques (Rio de Janeiro: Pró Reitoria de Extensão UFRJ, 2012), 147–149.

58. Azzellini, *Partizipation*, 271–349.

59. David Harvey, "Space as a Keyword," in *David Harvey: A Critical Reader*, ed. Noel Castree and Derek Gregory (Malden: Blackwell, 2006).

60. *Ibid.*

61. Doree Massey, "Concepts of Space and Power in Theory and in Political Practice," *Doc. Anál. Geogr* 55 (2009): 20.

62. *Ibid.* 21.

63. Fundación Centro Gumilla, I. *Estudio de los Consejos Comunales en Venezuela* (May 29, 2009). <http://www.gumilla.org/files/documents/Estudio-Consejos-Comunales01.pdf>.

64. Agencia Venezolana de Noticias (AVN), "PDV Comunal cubre 87% de la distribución de gas doméstico en el país," *AVN*, (September 24, 2012). <http://www.avn.info.ve/node/133994>.

65. Aurelio Gil Beróes, "Los Consejos Comunales deberán funcionar como bujías de la economía socialista," *Rebellion* (January 4, 2010). <http://www.rebellion.org/noticia.php?id=98094>.

66. Hugo Chávez, "Propuesta del Candidato de la Patria Comandante Hugo Chávez para la Gestión Bolivariana Socialista 2013–2019," (September 15, 2012). <http://www.chavez.org.ve/Programa-Patria-2013-2019.pdf>.

67. Azzellini, *De la Gestión al Control Obrero*, 160–162.

68. Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *Werke (MEW)*, Vol. 3 (Berlin: Dietz Verlag, 1969, first published in 1845), for an English version see Karl Marx, *The German Ideology*, <http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1845/german-ideology/ch01a.htm>.

69. And here especially the FNCEZ. The FNCEZ has defended and expanded its organizational autonomy and built its own revolutionary current within the Bolivarian movement, the Revolutionary Current Bolívar and Zamora (Corriente Revolucionaria Bolívar y Zamora, CRBZ). This is formed by the FNCEZ, the National Communal Front Simón Bolívar (Frente Nacional Comunal Simón Bolívar, FNCBS), which comprises communal councils, communes, and communal cities, the Center for Social Studies and Education Simón Rodríguez (Centro de Formación y Estudios Sociales Simon Rodríguez, CEFES), and the Movement Workers' Popular Power (Movimiento Poder Popular Obrero, MPPO).

70. Movimiento de Pobladores. The MDP encompasses de Urban Land Committees CTU originally initiated for the legalization of urban housing ground and meanwhile active in planning housing and living environment, the Pioneer Camps made up of families without house struggling for urban land to collectively build their houses on, the Tenants' Network mobilizing against evictions, and the janitors' movement.

71. Since 2004, there have been different workers' networks in favor of workers' control. The movement consolidated its structure definitely during the "First National Encounter for Workers' control and Workers Councils" in May 2011. A coordinating "National Collective for Workers' control" was formed.

72. Red Nacional de Comuneros y Comuneras.

73. Dario Azzellini. "De la Cogestión al Control Obrero. Lucha de clases al interior del proceso bolivariano" (PhD thesis, Benemérita Universidad Autónoma de Puebla, 2012), 71–112.

74. Red Nacional de Comuneros y Comunereras, "Manifiesto de los Cachicamos. Aportes de la Red Nacional de Comuneros y Comunereras al Plan Patria y Segundo Plan Socialista de la Nación 2013–2019," (Declaration, September 9, 2012). <http://rednacionaldecomuneros.blogspot.com/2012/09/manifiesto-de-los-cachicamos.html>.

75. Examples of these thematic meetings include the "communal socialist productive economy" or the "organizational structures of the RNC, and the National Council of Communards and the communal state." Ibid.

76. Red Nacional de Comuneros y Comunereras, "Culminó con Éxito IV Encuentro Nacional de Comuneros y Comunereras" (Declaration on the IV. National Meeting, August 1, 2011). <http://rednacionaldecomuneros.blogspot.com/2011/08/culmino-con-exito-iv-encuentro-nacional.html>.

77. Red Nacional, "Culminó."

78. I participated in the IV Encuentro Nacional de Comuneros y Comunereras, July 29–31, 2011.

79. Azzellini, *Partizipation*, 266.

80. This becomes evident in the approach to politics of the RCN and is constantly repeated in debates and meetings, as during the IV Encuentro Nacional de Comuneros y Comunereras, July 29–31, 2011. It also lies at the very core of the RCN's existence since the construction of the communal state is considered necessary because the envisioned transformation cannot be accomplished by trying to transform the existing state. Red Nacional de Comuneros y Comunereras. See also Red Nacional, *Manifiesto de los Cachicamos*.

81. Red Nacional, "Culmino."

82. Ibid.

83. Ibid.

84. I participated in the IV Encuentro Nacional de Comuneros y Comunereras, July 29–31, 2011.

85. Ministerio del Poder Popular para las Industrias Básicas y Minería, "Plan Guayana Socialista 2009–2019." http://www.sidor.com/images/noticias/documentos/p_guayana.pdf.

86. According to a survey conducted by Jesuit research institute Centro Gumilla 52 percent of the Venezuelans prefer socialism to capitalism. 71.4 percent agree that a socialist system guarantees public welfare. "Gumilla: 52% prefiere el socialismo al capitalismo." *Últimas Noticias*, October 13, 2011.

87. For that the communes had even to set up the registration sheet since the Ministry of Communes not only did not register any commune in the first almost three years of its existence, but one year after the law on communes had been released, it had not even created an official procedure for the registration of communes.

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CHAPTER 10

Radical Working-Class Socialism in the Early 21st Century

David Camfield

INTRODUCTION

The dream of a society without divisions of rich and poor is a very old one. A “collectivist tendency without democracy”¹ can be identified long before the development of capitalism. But as a political movement, communism first emerged at the close of the 1700s. Since that time, a number of distinct political currents can be identified as part of the communist lineage broadly understood. Radical working-class socialism is one such current. It is distinguished by its identification of mass working-class struggle as the path to a revolutionary transformation of society that would open the road to communism; its belief that such a transformation requires taking political power; its rejection of reformism; and its refusal of political approaches that give primacy to the agency of small radical minorities, such as terrorism and conspiratorial insurrectionism.

This chapter aims to provide a historically contextualized account of this particular political current in the early 21st century, one that explains why it remains so weak in spite of global capitalism’s crisis and the limited but real revival of anticapitalist politics since the mid-1990s. This explanation can also inform thinking about the possible future prospects of radical working-class socialism. To this end, it opens with a sketch of this current from its emergence in Western Europe in the 1840s through its subsequent mutations up to the end of the 20th century. This allows us to make sense of the weak state of radical working-class socialism today, which is documented through an attempt at a global overview of its principal forces that fills a gap in existing research on Left politics. Following

this survey, the chapter offers an analysis of why radical working-class socialism did not benefit more from the global wave of radicalization that began in the middle of the last decade of the 20th century, suggesting that this is best explained by the combination of the contemporary crisis of politics induced by neoliberalism, the enduring impact of the collapse of the Communist bloc, the decline since the mid-1970s of the working class as a political force, and certain specific characteristics of this marginal political current.

FROM THE 1840s TO THE END OF THE 20TH CENTURY

Communism as a political force first came into existence in France in 1795 as a group of plebeian radicals around Francois-Noel (better known as Gracchus) Babeuf.² They represented “the communisation of Robespierism,”³ aiming for the common ownership of social wealth and a return to the 1793 Jacobin constitution (which had never been implemented). This was to be achieved by an insurrection that they, organized as a conspiracy, would orchestrate. The insurrection would establish an educational dictatorship over the masses that would be maintained until the people were ready to live under the regime of universal adult male suffrage of the 1793 constitution. Communist societies in this conspiratorial tradition revived in the 1830s, “fused with the new experience of the proletariat in the capitalist society of the early industrial revolution.”⁴ Auguste Blanqui was the best-known figure in this current, whose politics spread to Germany via German exiles in France, some of whom later fled to Britain and elsewhere.

One group in the radical German diaspora, the League of the Just, influenced by British Left-Chartists, Owenites, and trade unions, evolved away from conspiratorial politics and the other, quasi-religious, strain of contemporary communism. Other radicals were independently moving in a similar direction under the influence of early working-class organizing, such as the French socialist-feminist Flora Tristan.⁵ By 1846 the League had converged politically with the Brussels Communist Correspondence Committee, which Karl Marx and Frederick Engels had helped to found. The following year its members changed the group’s name to the Communist League. Marx and Engels joined it, contributing to the process of political rethinking in the course of which the slogan “Workers of all countries, unite!” replaced “All human beings are brothers!” Marx was given the task of producing the political declaration published in 1848 as the *Manifesto of the Communist Party* (the *Communist Manifesto*).⁶

This marked the birth of a new political current on the Far Left of the emergent European workers’ movement, a new communism. Breaking with conspiratorial insurrectionism and “spiritual inspiration”⁷ as roads to a classless society, its supporters looked instead to mass struggle by

the working-class movement, “the self-conscious, independent movement of the immense majority, in the interest of the immense majority.”⁸ This was radical working-class socialism. It is a tradition for which the working class is the central agent or political subject in the struggle for “the conquest of political power,”⁹ in some cases in an alliance with other class forces, the precise nature of which has been a matter of debate within the tradition (as has the question of who should be considered part of the working class). As a broad current, it is politically demarcated on one side by its refusal of conspiratorial insurrectionism and terrorism as represented by, for example, Blanqui in the mid-1800s, Luigi Galleani (a leading anarchist proponent of “propaganda of the deed”) at the end of the 19th century and in the early decades of the 20th century, and the Red Brigades in Italy in the 1970s. On another, it is distinguished by its rejection of reformism. In most cases this has not meant a rejection of struggles for reforms within the existing social order (though a small minority has also spurned them), but rather of politics whose strategic horizon is limited to achieving reforms—what reformism’s able critic Rosa Luxemburg termed “the method of legislative reform *in place of and in contradistinction to* the conquest of political power and social revolution.”¹⁰

These basic political demarcations were not immediately and permanently established on the left wing of the workers’ movement in the mid-1800s. Nor were they always treated by socialist activists as the fundamental political commitments that would distinguish their organizations from others. For example, most parties affiliated to the Socialist (Second) International before 1914 contained significant and openly reformist currents.¹¹ Outside those parties there were socialists who were neither reformists nor insurrectionists but who were excluded from, or chose not to join, parties of the Second International.¹² Noteworthy here were those anarchist socialists who championed what Michael Schmidt and Lucien van der Walt call “mass anarchism”¹³ as well as those syndicalists who were not anarchists.¹⁴ In its early years, the Communist (Third) International (Comintern) united many but not all socialists who rejected reformism and insurrectionism.

Nevertheless, it is possible to discern the existence of a political current demarcated by belief in the centrality of the working class in the struggle for socialism and a rejection of reformism and insurrectionism. These are arguably key dimensions not of a disembodied intellectual lineage or a coherent unitary tradition whose descent can be traced in revolutionary continuity (akin to apostolic succession in Christianity) but of an often discontinuous but nonetheless identifiable trend of radical political activity present in societies around the world from the middle of the 19th century to the present. Within this current, there have been a range of important divisions. The most significant of these is different positions with respect to the working class’s role in transforming society

and the relationship between socialists and the working class: socialism from below, whose guiding principle is workers' self-emancipation, and socialism from above, for which socialism is "*handed down* to the grateful masses in one form or another, by a ruling elite which is not subject to their control in fact."¹⁵ Other major disagreements have centered on the character of revolution, the appropriate form of socialist political organization, and socialist participation in elections to the existing institutions of government. Yet, in spite of these disagreements, from the perspective of the social history of politics we can identify the existence of a political current made up of people whose shared reference points have made such points of contention meaningful differences among themselves, rather than lines of demarcation between fundamentally different currents.

The break with conspiratorial insurrectionism was reinforced with the development in Europe in the 1860s of

a new type of working-class politics, the independent mass party of labor: independent, because it organized separately from liberal coalitions; mass, because it required broadly based public agitation; labor, because it stressed the need for class-based organization; and a party, by proposing permanent, centrally organized, programmatically coordinated, and nationally directed activity.¹⁶

Most supporters of radical working-class socialism were active in such parties, but many members of these parties were proponents of reformism, as became increasingly clear in the late 1800s. At the close of the century, Edward Bernstein's explicitly reformist "evolutionary socialism" and the "Millerand Affair"¹⁷ were hotly debated on the working-class Left.¹⁸ However, the political debates over reformism within the Second International in the years before World War I rarely led to organizational splits; for example, the 1909 expulsion of radicals from the Social Democratic Workers' Party in the Netherlands¹⁹ was an exceptional case. It was not until after 1914 that most of the forces of radical working-class socialism began to split organizationally from reformism.²⁰

While most of the former rallied to the Third International (the Comintern) after its launch in 1919, a minority did not. Some of the dissenters were affiliated to the International Working Union of Socialist Parties (the "Two and a Half International") between 1921 and 1923, or in the 1930s with the London Bureau (the Three and a Half International) formed in opposition to the Second International and the, by-then Stalinist, Comintern. The expulsion of supporters of the Left and Right Oppositions from the Comintern at the end of the 1920s further complicated the map of radical working-class socialism. So too did the continued existence of anarchist socialists and non-anarchist syndicalists.

The ongoing presence of the Second and Third Internationals as the two main centers of the Left competing for workers' loyalties subsequently masked the important move of the parties of the Comintern away from radical working-class socialism. The 1935 adoption of the Popular Front strategy by the Comintern "as a pragmatic response to the urgent requirements of Soviet foreign policy"²¹ was the turning point. The drive to build popular fronts stretching from Communist parties to any portions of ruling classes that favored diplomatic alliances with the USSR against Nazi Germany made Comintern leaders "more openly concerned with class collaboration than most social democrats."²² Communist Party (CP) reformism would be demonstrated on many occasions in the following decades,²³ perhaps most famously during the massive student and worker movement of May–June 1968 in France of which that country's CP was "a conscious opponent."²⁴ Not all CP members followed their leaderships into reformism (or, in the case of China, a strategy of armed struggle for national liberation that marginalized working-class political agency²⁵), but henceforth support for radical working-class socialism within CP ranks usually took the form of inchoate minorities.²⁶

This trajectory in part explains why the resurgence of radical working-class socialism that took place between the mid-1960s and the late 1970s happened largely outside the CPs.²⁷ Much of the new radical Left of that era did not see working-class agency as central—for example, insurrectionists like India's Naxalites and Latin American Guevarists²⁸ as well as many New Left trends. However, a significant portion of it represented new incarnations of the radical working-class socialist tradition. These included small but significant semi-Maoist, Maoist, and Trotskyist organizations in Europe,²⁹ South America,³⁰ and the United States³¹ as well as other tendencies, such as Italian *operaismo*³² and elements of the Christian Left in Latin America.

However, the resurgence was relatively short-lived.³³ Every kind of Left radicalism was greatly weakened by the counterattack of dominant classes against the struggles of workers and oppressed groups that began in the mid-1970s and continued in the era of neoliberalism; defeats dealt to workers' movements reduced the appeal of radical working-class socialism, whose supporters looked to their struggles as evidence demonstrating the validity of their politics. The fall of the Communist regimes in the USSR and Eastern Europe and the Chinese CP's economic turn³⁴ was demoralizing for the majority of radical working-class socialists who saw these countries as in some way socialist, on the road to socialism, or at least progressive in comparison with capitalism. More important for the future of this political current, including those of its adherents who did not see the Stalinist regimes as progressive, was the dominant popular interpretation of the collapse of the East bloc: socialism had failed and no alternative to capitalism was possible.

The most important new radical working-class socialist organization to come on the scene in the late 20th century, swimming against the stream globally but in synch with a rising wave of struggle and self-organization in its national reality, was the Workers' Party (PT) in Brazil. Formed in 1980, the party initially rejected reformism. However, its leadership moved to the Right as a result of the decline of social struggles, the coming of neoliberalism to Brazil, and the further discrediting of socialism in the wake of the collapse of the USSR. By the time the PT won the presidential election in 2002, it had become not simply reformist but a new "Party of Order."³⁵

The global wave of protest and resistance against neoliberalism that began with the Zapatista uprising in Mexico in 1994 and included the global justice (anti-/alter-globalization) movement and "movement of movements" visible at World Social Forums generated a new radicalism, much of it anticapitalist.³⁶ Yet unlike previous waves of radicalization since the 1840s, this one did not produce a widespread resurgence of radical working-class socialism, a point to which I will return. The rising tide of struggle in Italy did push the Party of Communist Refoundation (PCR) (launched in 1991 by many former members of that country's CP and other Marxists after the CP renamed itself the Democratic Party of the Left) in a radical direction from 2000 to 2003.³⁷ Yet this change in the party turned out to be shallow: "in the end it was sucked back into the fundamental framework of its own political tradition."³⁸ This was just one of the setbacks experienced by radical working-class socialism after the beginning of the War on Terror in late 2001.

RADICAL WORKING-CLASS SOCIALISM TODAY

Without an attempt to document the actual state of the forces in question any account of this current today will inevitably be extremely thin, leaving most readers without any grounded sense of its material³⁹ existence. Unfortunately, radical working-class socialism as a political movement has received very little attention in recent research. As a result, any brief global survey of its principal forces will be hampered by both the scale of the subject and the poor quantity and quality of published sources. Within these constraints, the following examination surveys radical working-class socialism on the three continents in which its principal forces exist and, briefly, in the rest of the world. The organizations discussed are those which are most significant in terms of either their absolute number of members or their relative influence in their respective geographical contexts.

Asia

The largest organization today that can be considered to fall within the broad political demarcations of the radical working-class socialist current

is the Communist Party of India (Marxist-Leninist) Liberation (abbreviated as CPI [ML] Liberation),⁴⁰ which claimed 114,000 members as of its last congress in December 2007, up from 75,000 in 2002.⁴¹ This party comes out of the insurrectionist tradition of Naxalism, which, between 1967 and 1972, saw tens of thousands of people throw themselves into attempts at rural guerrilla warfare that usually involved assassinations (the so-called annihilation of class enemies), animated by interpretations of the Maoist experience in China.⁴² The original Naxalite CPI (ML) formed in 1969—"a movement as much as a party"⁴³—but soon split into an assortment of groups.

In 1977, one such group with a significant base of support in the state of Bihar, CPI (ML) Liberation, began a critical reevaluation of the original Naxalite strategy. Moving away from armed struggle, this party "gradually entered legality"⁴⁴ while retaining an underground organization for some time. In place of rural guerrilla war, the party adopted a strategy based on the mobilization of poor farmers and rural wage-laborers, urban workers in the formal and informal sectors, women, students, and other young people on the one hand, and participation in elections on the other. It created the All-India Central Council of Trade Unions (AICCTU), All-India Agricultural Laborers Association, All-India Peasants' Coordination Committee, and similar party-led mass organizations for women, students, and youth. Its armed units, which had to contend with the reactionary private rural militias of landowning castes as well as the armed forces of the state, were likely disbanded before the end of the century.⁴⁵

Today the party claims its primary social base as being among the rural poor and agricultural workers. In the urban population it has more of a presence among informal sector workers than those in formal wage-labor. Its regional areas of strength are the states of Bihar and Jharkand.⁴⁶ The AICCTU has been granted official state recognition as one of the country's central trade union organizations. Since 2010, the CPI (ML) Liberation has been part of an All-India Left Coordination with three other organizations that share a rejection of both the "class collaboration" of the country's two largest self-identified Communist parties⁴⁷ and the "left adventurism" of the armed struggle-oriented Maoists.⁴⁸ At the ballot box, the CPI (ML) Liberation scored over 10 million votes in the 2009 general elections (down approximately 18% from its 2004 total), which amounted to 0.25 percent of total votes cast.⁴⁹ In Bihar, the party had between five and seven representatives in the state assembly between 1990 and 2010 but, despite garnering over half a million votes (close to its 2005 total), elected none in the 2010 elections.⁵⁰

In Pakistan, there exists a smaller but still noteworthy radical working-class socialist organization, the Labor Party Pakistan (LPP). This organization formed in 1997 and has grown to around 7,000 members in spite of the very difficult conditions in the country. It comes out of a political

tradition that has historically been very weak in South Asia, except in Sri Lanka, namely Trotskyism. While it was a group of Trotskyists who launched the LPP, along with former CP members, the LPP defines itself as simply Marxist, with an anti-Stalinist understanding. One consequence of this heritage is the LPP's rejection of the practice of creating so-called mass organizations, which are, in reality, subordinate appendages of political parties. "If, in its eyes, only a common front between left parties and social movements can ensure the strengthening of struggles, this alliance must [for the LPP—DC] take place in a transparent fashion, respecting the independence of the social movement."⁵¹ In Bangladesh, there are supporters of radical working-class socialism within the multiparty Democratic Left Alliance; through the struggles of party-linked unions and mass organizations they have won a degree of "mass support among workers and peasants."⁵²

In East Asia, only in South Korea is radical working-class socialism of any significance; its single largest organized expression is All Together, a Trotskyist organization.⁵³ In Southeast Asia, the current has a significant presence in the Philippines. Most of its forces are descended from splits in the early 1990s from the country's largest organization commonly identified with the radical Left, the Communist Party of the Philippines.⁵⁴ Two of the largest groups, the Party of the Laboring Masses and the Labor Party, are based mainly in the greater Manila region and Luzon and concentrate their activity among unionized workers and the urban poor. The third, the Revolutionary Workers' Party-Mindanao, is, as its name suggests, based on the southern island of Mindanao. Its politics are the most clearly anti-Stalinist of these groups and its activity is mostly among the rural poor and indigenous people.⁵⁵

South America

Turning now to the continent where the forces of the moderate and radical Left have grown considerably since the late 1990s as a result of social struggles and widespread revulsion of neoliberalism,⁵⁶ we can observe that radical working-class socialism as a specific current has not benefited dramatically. For example, the cycle of explosive urban and rural social struggles in Bolivia from 2000 to 2005 that toppled neoliberal governments and propelled Evo Morales to the presidency radicalized many people but did not lead to the emergence of a significant radical working-class socialist current.⁵⁷

In Brazil, the Party of Socialism and Freedom (PSOL), formed in 2004 by former members of the radical wing of the PT, is officially pledged to building a broad anticapitalist alternative to the PT. However, in reality it operates more as an alliance of tendencies than a united party. With close to 80,000 members and a core of some 3,000 activists,⁵⁸ its presidential

candidate won nearly 900,000 votes and 0.9 percent of the popular vote in 2010, down from the 6.8 percent won by PSOL's Heloisa Helena, who ran as the candidate of a multiparty Left Front in 2006.⁵⁹ PSOL has three members in the federal Chamber of Deputies and two in the Senate. It has some influence in unions, particularly in the public sector and especially in education, and also among students and youth. The other organization in Brazil that deserves mention, the Unified Socialist Workers' Party (PSTU), was formed by a Trotskyist current expelled from the PT in 1992. It is politically narrower and has many fewer activists than PSOL. Nevertheless, the PSTU is highly organized and has a not insignificant influence in union and social movement struggles and through the central it leads Conlutas.⁶⁰

Venezuela received considerable international attention in the first decade of the new century as criticism of neoliberalism and imperialism by Hugo Chavez's government grew louder. Chavez declared himself for "Twenty-First Century Socialism" in 2005. The United Socialist Party of Venezuela (PSUV), formed in 2007 at Chavez's initiative, is not a party of radical working-class socialism. Rather, it is, as Roland Denis puts it, "an electoral machine, in which there are internal battles for access to power within the bureaucratic-corporatist state;" it is dominated by government figures.⁶¹ However, there are supporters of radical working-class socialism within the ranks of the PSUV,⁶² along with larger numbers of socialists and radicals of other stripes, reformists, and people who are members simply for opportunistic reasons.⁶³ It is very difficult to assess how much support each of the various political currents has among active PSUV members.

In Argentina, most of the radical working-class socialist forces are Trotskyist, a series of groups descended from the Movement for Socialism, a sizeable Trotskyist organization torn apart by splits in the late 1980s. Some of the groups have grown somewhat since the 2001 uprising against the country's financial crisis. Three of them, including the largest, the Workers' Party with close to 3,000 members,⁶⁴ formed an electoral alliance for the 2011 presidential elections. This Left Front scored 2.3 percent of the popular vote.⁶⁵

Europe

On the continent in which radical working-class socialism first arose, its forces have lost some of the numbers and modest influence they attained at the height of the global justice movement (or "movement of movements") in 2001. However, they still possess more members and a higher profile than socialists in other regions in the Global North.

The crisis of Greek society, deepened by austerity policies demanded by international capital but rejected by most of the population,⁶⁶ has led

to a remarkable growth in support for the Coalition of the Radical Left (SYRIZA). SYRIZA's membership of approximately 15,000⁶⁷ is made up of a majority of anti-neoliberal reformists and a minority of radical socialists.⁶⁸ "Though the dominant forces in SYRIZA are indeed relatively moderate, the other forces are not mere appendages. The stances that emerge are the result of complex forces within the organization as well as from external pressures."⁶⁹ In the first parliamentary election of 2012, SYRIZA's share of the popular vote leaped to 16.8 percent; in the second, its support rose to 26.9 percent.⁷⁰ There is also a smaller alliance made up purely of radical working-class socialists, Anti-Capitalist Left Cooperation for the Overthrow (ANTARSYA), with close to 4,000 members.⁷¹ ANTARSYA secured 1.2 percent of the popular vote in the first election of 2012, only to see its vote collapse in the second.

Denmark does not have the reputation of being a bastion of radicalism, but in this small country the Red-Green Alliance (RGA) won 6.7 percent of the vote (and 12 seats) in the 2011 parliamentary elections⁷²—the best score for a European party of radical working-class socialism since the Portuguese Left Bloc's 9.8 percent result in 2009.⁷³ The RGA, "the first broad and pluralist anti-capitalist party in Europe to develop out of the changed political landscape after the fall of the Berlin Wall" (it was formed in 1989), had over 5,500 members before the elections, though the level of activity of the membership is low.⁷⁴ The RGA has a greater national influence than the only other noteworthy organization in Scandinavia, Norway's Red Party, which scored 1.3 percent in the 2009 elections.⁷⁵

Portugal's Left Bloc was launched a decade after the RGA, but it is also a pluralist anticapitalist party originally formed by the coming-together of several socialist groups and, crucially, many other unaffiliated leftists. With roughly 9,000 members in 2011,⁷⁶ its result in Portugal's legislative elections that year was 5.2 percent (and 8 seats).⁷⁷ The Left Bloc has recently played a leading role in struggles against austerity measures and in the protests of precariously employed and unemployed workers. Its approach strongly emphasizes concrete demands: "We are not a party that makes abstract propaganda for socialism."⁷⁸

In 2009, the New Anti-Capitalist Party (NPA) was launched as a broad pluralist anticapitalist party to considerable fanfare in France and internationally. It initially united nearly 3,000 members of the Revolutionary Communist League (LCR), the main group in France of Trotskyist heritage, and close to 6,000 other individuals. Most of the new members had no previous political affiliation and had been attracted by the political message of the LCR's candidate in the 2002 and 2007 presidential elections, whose popularity exceeded the 4 percent of the vote he received both times.⁷⁹ However, it was not long before the party went into crisis and began to lose members. The unanticipated emergence of the Left

Front (formed by the CP, the anti-neoliberal Left Party and a little group of former LCR members) presented the NPA with the challenge of how to relate to this larger, broader and less radical left-wing electoral alternative to the social-liberal Socialist Party. Internal political disagreements about what kind of organization the NPA should be also contributed to its crisis.⁸⁰ Its membership has fallen to around 2,500.⁸¹ The other notable radical working-class socialist organization in France is Workers' Struggle, an ultra-disciplined orthodox Trotskyist sect of some 2,000 activists that is very focused on workplace activity.⁸²

Straddling Europe and Asia, Turkey has radical working-class socialist forces worthy of mention. The largest group, the Freedom and Solidarity Party (ODP), has declined in size and political diversity but still has around 3,000 members; the main tendency within it is Revolutionary Solidarity, which has Guevarist origins. The ODP is well rooted in a peasant movement against hydroelectric power station construction. There is also the Labor Party, which has close links to the Kurdish nationalist movement, and the smaller Socialist Party of the Oppressed; both are of Stalinist ancestry, although the latter is evolving politically.⁸³

In Italy, radical working-class socialism is much weaker than in neighboring Greece; the largest group, Sinistra Critica, scored close to 0.5 percent of votes cast in the legislative elections of 2008.⁸⁴ In Germany, most of its splintered forces are found within the reformist Left Party.⁸⁵ Ireland's numerically small socialist groups experienced an electoral leap forward in 2011, when five candidates of the United Left Alliance (a socialist-led formation) were elected to parliament.⁸⁶

Radical working-class socialism continues to have a visible presence on the British Left, but a "sorry history of sectarianism, demagoguery and opportunism"⁸⁷ has prevented the development of a unitary framework and reduces the influence of its supporters. Two main Trotskyist organizations exist: the Socialist Workers Party (SWP) and the Socialist Party of England and Wales (SP). The SWP claims some 7,000 dues-paying members, while the SP claims around 2,000. Both groups have a degree of influence within the country's public sector unions. The SWP is more of a force among students than the SP. In Scotland, the Scottish Socialist Party (SSP) (not aligned with the SP) and Solidarity (the product of a 2006 split that seriously weakened the SSP) together have slightly over 1,000 members.⁸⁸

Elsewhere

Outside of Asia, South America, and Europe, radical working-class socialism is today, with few exceptions, a negligible current whether its forces are considered in relation to their size and influence in their context or in absolute terms. One exception is Mexico, where an array of radical working-class socialists have a presence in the Workers' and People's

Political Organization formed in 2011 by around 1,000 delegates brought together at the initiative of a militant electrical workers union.⁸⁹ Another is Tunisia, where among the political organizations able to emerge from the underground after the 2011 uprising that toppled that country's ruler were the Workers' Party, a Stalinist organization that won three seats in constituent assembly elections,⁹⁰ and the Movement of Democratic Patriots, a party of semi-Maoist heritage that garnered one seat.⁹¹ In Morocco, there is a noteworthy socialist organization named Democratic Way.⁹² In Egypt, radical working-class socialist forces are active both independently and within two parties formed after the uprising of early 2011, the Socialist Popular Alliance Party and the Workers' Democratic Party.⁹³ In Mauritius, the very small group Lalit (Struggle) has an influence far greater than its membership size would suggest, as the population of the island state is only slightly over one million people and the group is heavily involved in unions.⁹⁴

This overview of the contemporary condition of the principal forces of the current with which this chapter is concerned suggests that radical working-class socialism has not recovered from the setbacks it suffered from the mid-1970s onward as a result of the ruling-class counteroffensive against the social movements and radicalization of the previous decade, out of which neoliberalism developed. The demoralization of most of the radical Left that followed the collapse of almost all of the Communist states and the ensuing strengthening of capitalist hegemony still affect the fortunes of radical working-class socialism. If the growth of CPI (ML) Liberation membership reinforces its status as the largest radical working-class socialist organization in absolute terms, it is in Europe that this political tradition continues to have the most influence, such as it is. Yet this influence remains weak even in the European countries where its forces are strongest. Although global capitalism has been in crisis since 2008,⁹⁵ leading to an intensification of austerity measures across Europe, "Not only is the radical Left too weak to be seen as an alternative, but it has not managed to consolidate itself and strengthen qualitatively more than it had in the previous period."⁹⁶

ANALYZING EXPERIENCES SINCE 1994

In order to understand why radical working-class socialism is in the weak state documented earlier, it is necessary to analyze its recent history in more depth. This examination can also inform thinking about the future prospects of a current that first arose in the 1840s. However, I offer no predictions; it is impossible to accurately predict the future of a political current due to the complexity of the forces that can condition its fortunes and the degree of indeterminacy involved in how social experiences are politically articulated.

With hindsight, it is possible to identify an international wave of left-wing radicalism that began with the Zapatista uprising in Mexico in 1994 and subsequently spread and grew globally in an uneven way through 2001.⁹⁷ The War on Terror launched after the terrorist attacks in the United States on September 11, 2001—both “a bid to advance US hegemony internationally” and to “restructure relations of force domestically, tilting them in favor of business and a strong coercive state . . . in numerous advanced capitalist states”—“constituted a major setback for the anti-systemic movements that had been developing since the late 1990s.”⁹⁸ The radicalization did, however, continue in South America through until 2006.⁹⁹

The wave of radicalism associated with Zapatismo and the global justice movement, which denounced neoliberalism (and sometimes capitalism) and drew enormous attention with very large and militant protests in Seattle, Genoa, and other cities, had a significant political impact on popular consciousness on a mass scale. Indicators of this include the popularity of books like Naomi Klein’s *No Logo*,¹⁰⁰ which was published in two dozen languages,¹⁰¹ and the vote by over 10 million people in Italy in favor of extending protection against unjust dismissal to workers in workplaces with fewer than 16 employees in a 2003 referendum championed by the PCR (then in its short-lived radical phase) and other left-wing forces.¹⁰²

Nevertheless, this radicalization did not produce a resurgence of radical working-class socialism. In this it was different from the international wave of radicalism associated with the Russian Revolution, the wave driven by class struggles and anti-Fascist movements in the years 1934–1939, and the global radicalization from the mid-1960s through the mid-1970s for which the national liberation struggle in Vietnam was a central reference point.¹⁰³ In comparing Latin America in the early 21st century with the region in the years 1960–1980, Claudio Katz makes the point clearly: “It is not the intensity of the social conflicts, the willingness of the oppressed to struggle, or the capacity of the oppressors to control that has substantially changed, but the visibility of—and confidence in—a socialist model.”¹⁰⁴

Other radical political currents were the main beneficiaries of the most recent global wave of radicalization. Prominent here were varieties of anarchism and autonomism that did not seek to replace capitalism with socialism, along with forms of anarchist socialism that rejected both the centrality of working-class struggle and the aim of taking power in order to begin the socialist transformation of society, both of which continue to be distinguishing elements of radical working-class socialist politics.¹⁰⁵ Of even more importance is the fact that in many places militant mass struggles against neoliberalism since the mid-1990s have not led to the rise to a much higher level of lasting influence of any organized political forces to the left of reformism. Bolivia is a case in point.¹⁰⁶ Argentina in the years since the uprising of 2001 is another.¹⁰⁷ A third example is France.¹⁰⁸ Why

did radical working-class socialism not benefit more from the radicalization that began in the mid-1990s? Here it is important to bear in mind the dangers of an “epistemology of absence,”¹⁰⁹ of seeking to explain what did not happen rather than what did. However, considering a number of features of contemporary societies sheds some light on why the degree of radicalization that has taken place in the late 20th and early 21st centuries has not put more wind in the sails of this political current. This analysis can inform speculation on its future prospects.

Neoliberal capitalism has contributed significantly to producing a general crisis of politics. This has been registered by a range of analysts. For example, McBride and Whiteside write of “democratic malaise during the neoliberal era”: “a growing condition of generalized cynicism and apathy . . . along with lowered expectations with respect to the extent and nature of support offered by the state.”¹¹⁰ More fundamentally, politics “as a form of being together, acting together and thinking together,”¹¹¹ rather than the mere management of the status quo within extremely narrow ideological parameters, has declined.¹¹² This crisis is, in part, the result of

a change of the spaces and times in which politics was thought and acted. Where is the function of politics situated if the spaces of action and the lengths of its effects overflow its modest mastery in every sense? This feeling of powerlessness before occult mechanisms or anonymous powers is without any doubt the background to the discrediting of politics and policies.¹¹³

This crisis affects all of political life, but it is especially disabling for political currents that challenge neoliberalism from perspectives that entail reducing or eliminating the regulation of social life by capitalist market imperatives.

Another important factor has been the way in which the collapse of the Communist regimes in the USSR and Eastern Europe has had a lasting impact on the ideological terrain globally, including on the language of politics. It strengthened the grip of “capitalist realism”: the widespread sense that not only is capitalism the only viable political and economic system, but also that it is now impossible even to *imagine* a coherent alternative to it.¹¹⁴ The fall of those regimes specifically discredited the ideas of socialism, communism, and Marxism. This effect is entirely independent of the question of how the Communist societies ought to be characterized;¹¹⁵ even if one considers them as nonsocialist, what matters politically on a global scale is that so many people have associated them with socialism and continue to do so. The ensuing disrepute in part explains why so many radical impulses since the mid-1990s have flowed not into any kind of socialism but elsewhere. A notable feature of the neoliberal era is that there have been few revolutions or prerevolutionary situations involving

high levels of working-class self-organization, such as the wave of unauthorized strikes and workplace occupations in France in 1968. Such events have historically given radical working-class socialism its greatest appeal; in their absence, this political current is more likely to be associated with the past, not the present, especially when its symbols, language, and favorite references are linked to long ago events and persons that are no longer meaningful for many left-wing people. Even in Latin America, where the most subaltern radicalization has taken place in recent years, Katz notes that

the present generation of Latin Americans did not grow up like their parents in a context marked by revolutionary triumphs. This absence of a successful anti-capitalist reference—close to their immediate personal experiences—explains their spontaneously distancing themselves further away from the socialist project.¹¹⁶

The insurrectionary upheavals in Bolivia between 2000 and 2005¹¹⁷ stand out as a rare exception, as they featured a great deal of self-organization by urban and rural workers, but they did not culminate in a “revolutionary triumph” that would probably have helped supporters of radical working-class socialism globally to make a more persuasive case for their political alternative. For some socialists, Venezuela under Hugo Chávez¹¹⁸ has been a source of inspiration or even a model. However, Venezuela has not given this current anything close to the degree of political magnetism that it gained internationally as a result of the Paris Commune, the Russian Revolution, or, to a lesser extent, events in the second half of the 20th century, including those in France in 1968 and the Portuguese Revolution of 1974–1975.¹¹⁹

The paucity of dramatic episodes of intense self-organized working-class struggle is itself part of a larger reality: the decline of the working class as a political force since the mid-1970s. The existence of working-class movements as militant independent political actors has been crucial for radical working-class socialism since the 1840s. It is such movements that have coupled aspirations for the goal of anticapitalist social change with the means of working-class collective action. In the neoliberal era, working-class formations have experienced a great deal of decomposition¹²⁰ as a result of the dominant class’s attacks and capitalist restructuring; witness, for example, how in manufacturing industries the reorganization of labor processes, mass layoffs, plant closings, and the construction of new factories in areas with weak union traditions have eroded workplace and social solidarity and some of the conditions in which solidarity has historically been forged.¹²¹ Working-class movements have been weakened, with their activist bases often depleted even more than their formal organizations. So too have the broader infrastructures of dissent that have historically

produced organizers and provided a social environment conducive to radical political activity.¹²² With working-class political agency much reduced, the appeal of radical working-class socialism has been sapped.

Finally, it is essential to recall that the actually existing forces of this political current are in most countries extremely small and marginal. Not only that, they are also frequently fragmented, more committed to self-preservation than other political goals, and incapable of much practical collaboration. As mentioned earlier, their cultural forms often refer to histories that are no longer living even for most people who are consciously anticapitalist. The internal life of many socialist organizations is undemocratic, leading to additional difficulties in attracting and retaining members, on whom great demands are sometimes placed. These characteristics all have the effect of reducing the appeal of these political forces not only to people open to socialist ideas but also to convinced socialists.

FUTURE PROSPECTS: A CONCLUDING SPECULATION

What, then, do these contemporary realities suggest about the future prospects of radical working-class socialism? Clearly its supporters face daunting obstacles as well as opportunities created by the global economic and ecological crises that have removed much of capitalism's allure and are fueling the development of new movements of protest and resistance. One obvious implication of the experience of the last several decades is that an outbreak of widespread and intense self-organized workers' struggle in at least one country would probably be a necessary precondition for an international revival of this current. However, such an outburst would not guarantee a socialist resurgence, given the global crises of politics in general, working-class movements, and confidence in the idea of socialism as alternative. Silver's argument that "the late-twentieth-century crisis of labor movements is temporary" and that "we should expect to see . . . emerging labor movements in the leading industry/industries of the twenty-first century"¹²³ is plausible, with the caveat that new workers' movements may be organized outside the sphere of the paid workplace as well as within it. But new militant working-class movements alone would not resolve the crisis of politics or give this current the kind of political magnetism that it once enjoyed among people who want radical social change. If a resurgence of radical working-class socialism occurs, it will very likely be as a renewed movement with a language and political culture dramatically different from those of the socialist forces that exist today.

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NOTES

1. Hal Draper, "The Two Souls of Socialism," in *Socialism from Below*, ed. Ernest Haberkern (Atlantic Highlands: Humanities Press, 1992), 5.
2. Ian H. Birchall, *The Spectre of Babeuf* (Houndsmills: Macmillan, 1997).
3. Bernard H. Moss, "Marx and the Permanent Revolution in France: Background to the Communist Manifesto," *The Socialist Register* (1998): 153.
4. Eric J. Hobsbawm, "Marx, Engels and Pre-Marxian Socialism," in *The History of Marxism*, vol. 1, ed. Eric J. Hobsbawm (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1982), 7.
5. Flora Tristan, *Union Ouvrière* (Paris: Editions d'Histoire Sociale, 1967).
6. Rob Beamish, "The Making of the Manifesto," *The Socialist Register* 34, (1998): 218–239.
7. *Ibid.*, 226.
8. Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *Manifesto of the Communist Party* (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1986), 44.
9. *Ibid.*, 47.
10. Rosa Luxemburg, *Reform or Revolution* (London: Bookmarks, 1989), 75. Reformists have occasionally adopted radical phraseology and dubbed "a condensed series of reforms" revolution. See Luxemburg, *Reform or Revolution*, 74. A recent example is the 2010 call of France's anti-neoliberal Left Party for a "citizens' revolution through the ballot box." See Parti de Gauche, "Le Parti Que Nous Voulons Pour la Revolution Citoyenne," December 10, 2010, <http://www.lepartidegauche.fr/qui-sommes-nous-textes-congres-du-man-2010>.
11. William A. Pelz, *Against Capitalism: The European Left on the March* (New York: Peter Lang, 2007), 45–51.
12. The Second International's congresses in 1891, 1893, and 1896 all saw debates over "political action." At the latter two congresses, the majority of delegates voted not to recognize socialists opposed to political action (as defined at the Zurich congress in 1893) as delegates. However, a few such socialists participated as delegates from unions. See Julius Braunthal, *History of the International*, vol. 1 1864–1914, trans. Henry Collins and Kenneth Mitchel (New York: Frederick A. Praeger Publishers, 1967), 249–254; G. D. H. Cole, *The Second International, 1889–1914*, vol. 3, part 1 of *A History of Socialist Thought* (London: Macmillan, 1967), 18–29; James Joll, *The Second International 1889–1914*, 2nd ed. (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1974), 71–72, 74–75.

13. Michael Schmidt and Lucien van der Walt, *Black Flame: The Revolutionary Class Politics of Anarchism and Syndicalism, vol. 1 of Counter-Power* (Oakland: AK Press, 2009).

14. I agree with Schmidt and van der Walt that the historical evidence clearly demonstrates that the common “tendency of scholars to juxtapose the terms anarchist and socialist” is problematic, although I am not persuaded by their case that socialist or communist anarchism, a tradition containing competing insurrectionist and mass anarchist streams, “is the only anarchism.” See Schmidt and van der Walt, *Black Flame*, 45, 19.

15. Draper, “The Two Souls of Socialism,” 3.

16. Geoff Eley. *Forging Democracy: The History of the Left in Europe, 1850–2000* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 39.

17. French socialist Alexandre Millerand’s participation in the government formed in 1899 by the liberal republican Pierre Waldeck-Rousseau, which also included the Marquis de Galliffet who had played a prominent role in the crushing of the Paris Commune.

18. Eley, *Forging Democracy*, 87–91.

19. John Paul Gerber, *Anton Pannekoek and the Socialism of Workers’ Self-Emancipation, 1873–1960* (Amsterdam and Dordrecht: International Institute of Social History and Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1989), 51–52.

20. I consider radical working-class socialism as encompassing both the center and revolutionary Left tendencies within early 20th-century Marxian socialism, whose leading figures included Karl Kautsky and Rosa Luxemburg, respectively.

21. Fernando Claudin, *The Communist Movement: From Comintern to Cominform*, trans. Brian Pearce and Francis MacDonagh (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1975), 182–183.

22. Duncan Hallas, *The Comintern* (London: Bookmarks, 1985), 143.

23. Ian H. Birchall, *Workers against the Monolith: The Communist Parties since 1943* (London: Pluto Press, 1974).

24. Daniel Singer, *Prelude to Revolution: France in May 1968*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge, MA: South End Press, 2002), 280.

25. Nigel Harris, *The Mandate of Heaven: Marx and Mao in Modern China* (London: Quartet Books, 1979).

26. Internal critics of reformism were liable to be expelled, as was notably the fate in 1969 of the Il Manifesto group inside the Italian CP, “the one force within it which responded positively to the new social movements among workers and students.” Tobias Abse, “Judging the PCI,” *New Left Review* 153 (1985): 16.

27. CP support for, and identification with, the USSR’s foreign policies and social model was, of course, also important.

28. Jairus Banaji, “The Ironies of Indian Maoism,” *International Socialism* 128 (2010), <http://www.isj.org.uk/?id=684>; Vijay Prashad, *The Darker Nations: A People’s History of the Third World* (New York: The New Press, 2007), 161–162; Achin Vanaik, *The Painful Transition: Bourgeois Democracy in India* (London: Verso, 1990), 182–185.

29. A. Belden Fields, *Trotskyism and Maoism: Theory and Practice in France and the United States* (New York: Praeger, 1988); Chris Harman, *The Fire Last Time: 1968 and After* (London: Bookmarks, 1988); Hans Petter Sjøli, “Maoism in Norway,” *Scandinavian Journal of History* 33, no. 4 (2008): 478–490; Jan Willem Stutje, “Trotskyism

Emerges from Obscurity: New Chapters in Its Historiography," *International Review of Social History* 49 (2004): 279–292.

30. Daniel Gaido and Lucas Poy, "New Research on the History of Marxism in Argentina," *Historical Materialism* 19, no. 1 (2011): 267–283.

31. Max Elbaum, *Revolution in the Air: Sixties Radicals Turn to Lenin, Mao and Che* (London: Verso, 2012).

32. Steve Wright, *Storming Heaven: Class Composition and Struggle in Italian Autonomist Marxism* (London: Pluto, 2002).

33. The crisis of the radical socialist Left in this period has not been adequately studied as such. Harman's brief discussion is useful but narrow (e.g., it does not appreciate the significance of the feminist challenge to the Far Left in the 1970s). Harman, *The Fire Last Time*, 345–350.

34. David Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005).

35. Ricardo Antunes, "Trade Unions, Social Conflict and the Political Left in Present-Day Brazil: Between Breach and Compromise," in *The New Latin American Left: Cracks in the Empire*, trans. Jeffrey Webber and Barry Carr (Boulder, CO: Rowman & Littlefield, 2012).

36. This can be glimpsed in, for example, Notes from Nowhere, eds. *We Are Everywhere: The Irresistible Rise of Global Anti-Capitalism* (London: Verso, 2003).

37. Fabio Ruggiero, "Rifondazione's U-Turn," *International Socialism* 105 (2005), <http://www.isj.org/uk/index.php4?id=56>. As reflected in, for example, Fausto Bertinotti, "Reformist Social Democracy Is No Longer on the Agenda," *The Guardian*, August 11, 2003, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/politics/2003/aug/11/globalisation.world>.

38. Salvatore Cannavo, "Italy: A Failed Refoundation," in *The Resurgence of Latin American Radicalism*, ed. Fred Leplat (London and Amsterdam: Resistance Books and the International Institute for Research and Education, 2011), 117–144.

39. I have attempted to identify those radical working-class socialist organizations that meet at least one of two criteria: a membership of over 1,000 people; a discernible (even if extremely small) degree of popular support on a mass scale in a particular nation-state context as measured by electoral results and/or influence in social movements.

40. The appellation "Liberation" refers to the party's monthly publication of this name, to distinguish the party from other political organizations in the country that call themselves Communist Party of India (Marxist-Leninist).

41. John Percy, "CPI (ML) Builds Stronger Party in India," *Direct Action* 5 (2008), http://directaction.org.au/issue5/cpi_ml_builds_stronger_party_in_india. Membership figures for socialist political organizations need to be treated with caution. Some leaderships exaggerate the size of their organizations. In addition, criteria for membership vary, with some organizations limiting membership to people who not only agree with the organization's politics but also maintain a certain standard of activity (this is common among self-styled Leninist groups, to varying degrees) and others having no such limitation. Thus membership figures are not comparable in a straightforward way.

42. Vanaik, *The Painful Transition*, 182–184; see also Banaji, "The Ironies of Indian Maoism," 2010.

43. Vanaik, *The Painful Transition*, 183.

44. Nicolas Jaoul, "Naxalism in Bihar: From Bullet to Ballot," in *Armed Militias of South Asia: Fundamentalists, Maoists and Separatists*, eds. Laurent Gayer and Christophe Jaffrelot, trans. Cynthia Schoch, Gregory Elliot, and Roger Leverdier (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009), 26.

45. *Ibid.*; Nicolas Jaoul, "Manju Devi's Martyrdom: Marxist-Leninist Politics and the Rural Poor in Bihar," *Contributions to Indian Sociology* 45, no. 3 (2011); Banaji, "The Ironies of Indian Maoism."

46. Jaoul, "Manju Devi's Martyrdom"; Kavita Krishnan, personal communication, October 20, 2011.

47. These are the Communist Party of India (Marxist) and the Communist Party of India. On these parties and the Indian Left more broadly, see Achin Vanaik, "Subcontinental Strategies," *New Left Review* 10 (2011): 100–114.

48. Dipankar Bhattacharya, "The All India Left Coordination: Towards Realignment of Left Force and Radicalisation of the Left Movement," *Liberation* (September 2010), http://www.cpiml.org/liberation/year_2010/sep_10/cover_feature_1.html

49. Communist Party of India, "Poll Campaign and Our Performance: A Preliminary Note," *Liberation* (June 2009), http://www.cpiml.org/liberation/year_2009/june_09/feature.html

50. Communist Party of India, "Bihar 2010," *Liberation* (December 2010), http://www.cpiml.org/liberation/year_2010/dec_10/editorial.html; Jaoul, "Naxalism in Bihar," 28.

51. Pierre Rousset, "A Look at the Experience of the LPP and the Pakistani Left," *Inter-national Viewpoint* (May 2010), <http://www.internationalviewpoint.org/spip.php?article1873>.

52. Danielle Sabai, "The Left and Social Movement Struggles in Bangladesh," *International Viewpoint* (November 2011), <http://www.internationalviewpoint.org/spip.php?article2372>.

53. Seongjin Jeon, personal communication, December 4, 2011.

54. The CPP is committed to a Maoist strategy of prolonged people's war (surrounding the cities from the countryside), conducted by its New People's Army. In this strategic perspective, working-class political agency is peripheral. The CPP is a highly sectarian organization that has killed former members and members of other socialist organizations. See Pierre Rousset, "A New Letter of Concern," *International Viewpoint* (February 2005), <http://www.internationalviewpoint.org/spip.php?article409>.

55. Pierre Rousset, "The Revolutionary Workers' Party-Mindanao (RPM-M) and the Left in the Philippines," *International Viewpoint* (November 2010), <http://www.internationalviewpoint.org/spip.php?article1945>; Alex De Jong, personal communication, November 8, 2011.

56. Jeffrey Webber and Barry Carr, eds., *The New Latin American Left: Cracks in the Empire* (Boulder, CO: Rowman & Littlefield, 2012).

57. Jeffrey Webber, *From Rebellion to Reform in Bolivia: Class Struggle, Indigenous Liberation and the Politics of Evo Morales* (Chicago: Haymarket, 2011a); Jeffrey Webber, *Red October: Left-Indigenous Struggles in Modern Bolivia* (Leiden: Brill, 2011b).

58. PSOL is an example of a political organization that does not require a significant level of activity of its members.

59. Manuel Álvarez-Rivera, "Election Resources on the Internet," <http://electionresources.org>.
60. Sean Purdy, personal communication, November 15–16, 2011.
61. Roland Denis cited in Susan Spronk and Jeffrey Webber, eds., "The Bolivarian Process in Venezuela: A Left Forum," *Historical Materialism* 19, no. 1 (2011): 253.
62. Their viewpoints are visible in, for example, some of the material published on the widely read Venezuelan socialist website aporrea.org.
63. Jeffrey Webber, "Venezuela under Chavez: The Prospects and Limitations of Twenty-First Century Socialism, 1999–2009," *Socialist Studies* 6, no. 1 (2010), <http://socialiststudies.com/index.php/sss/article/view/110/100>.
64. Lucas Poy, personal communication, November 7, 2011.
65. Elecciones Nacionales 23 de Octubre, "Elecciones Nacionales 2011—Presidente—Total País," <http://www.elecciones2011.gob.ar/paginas/paginas/dat99/DPR99999A.htm>.
66. Stathis Kouvelakis, "The Greek Cauldron," *New Left Review* 72 (November–December 2011), <http://newleftreview.org/II/72/stathis-kouvelakis-the-greek-cauldron>.
67. Aris Vasilopoulos, personal communication, July 13, 2012.
68. Panos Petrou, "The Making of SYRIZA," [Socialistworker.org](http://socialistworker.org/2012/06/11/the-making-of-syriza) (June 11, 2012), <http://socialistworker.org/2012/06/11/the-making-of-syriza>.
69. Richard Seymour, "Syryza Rising," *In These Times* (July 6, 2012), <http://www.inthesetimes.com/article/13472>.
70. Álvarez-Rivera, "Election Resources on the Internet."
71. Aris Vasilopoulos, personal communication, July 13, 2012.
72. Álvarez-Rivera, "Election Resources on the Internet."
73. *Ibid.*
74. Michael Voss, "The Red-Green Alliance in Denmark," in *New Parties of the Left: Experiences from Europe*, ed. Fred Leplat (London and Amsterdam: Resistance Books and the International Institute for Research and Education, 2011), 51, 61.
75. Álvarez-Rivera, "Election Resources on the Internet."
76. Alda Sousa and Jorge Costa, "Starting Anew with the Left Bloc," in *New Parties of the Left: Experience from Europe*, ed. Fred Leplat (London and Amsterdam: Resistance Books and the International Institute for Research and Education, 2011), 178.
77. Álvarez-Rivera, "Election Resources on the Internet."
78. Sousa and Costa, "Starting Anew," 179.
79. Alain Krivine, "The New Anti-Capitalist Party," in *New Parties of the Left: Experiences from Europe*, ed. Fred Leplat and trans. Rick Hatcher (London and Amsterdam: Resistance books and the International Institute for Research and Education, 2011), 44.
80. Murray Smith, "What Has Happened to the NPA," Unpublished Manuscript (17 November, 2011); Jason Stanley, "France: The NPA in Crisis," *Against the Current* 156 (January–February 2012).
81. Member of the NPA leadership, personal communication, July 10, 2012.
82. Krivine, "The New Anti-Capitalist Party," 43; The Independent Workers' Party, an organization of Trotskyist heritage, is now "totally embedded in the folds of the confederal apparatus of the CGT–Force Ouvrière and subsidiarily in the leadership of the Freethinkers and in certain circles of Freemasonry" (Vincent

Presume, "Pierre Lambert: 1920–2008," *Revolutionary History* (2008), <http://www.revolutionaryhistory.co.uk/allobits/lambert.html>. As such, it is no longer really part of the radical working-class socialist movement but a different phenomenon.

83. Uraz Aydin, personal communication, December 5, 2011.

84. Paolo Chiocchetti, personal communication, August 22, 2011.

85. Klaus Engbert, "The Rise of Die Linke in Germany," in *New Parties of the Left: Experiences from Europe*, ed. Fred Leplat (London and Amsterdam: Resistance Books and the International Institute for Research and Education, 2011), 115.

86. Dick Nicholls, "Ireland: United Left Alliance Confronts Big Challenges," *Links: International Journal of Socialist Renewal* (July 2011), <http://links.org.au/taxonomy/term/519>.

87. Alan Thornett and John Lister, "Broad Parties and the Fight for Left Unity in Britain," in *New Parties of the Left: Experiences from Europe*, ed. Fred Leplat (London and Amsterdam: Resistance Books and the International Institute for Research and Education, 2011), 100.

88. Neil Davidson, personal communication, November 28, 2011; Gregor Gall, personal communication, December 3, 2011.

89. Edgar Sanchez, "The OPT, A Proletarian Alternative to the Crisis of Political Parties," *International Viewpoint* (November 2011), <http://www.internationalviewpoint.org/spip.php?article2378>.

90. The Tunisian Communist Workers Party National Leadership, "Studies VII: The PCOT and Electoral Performance," *The Moor Next Door* (November 2, 2011), <http://themoornextdoor.wordpress.com/2011/11/02/studies-vii-the-pcot-and-electoral-performance/>.

91. Gilbert Achcar, personal communication, December 14, 2011.

92. *Ibid.*

93. Mostafa Omar, "The New Shape of the Struggle in Egypt," *International Socialist Review* 78 (July–August 2011), <http://www.isreview.org/issues/78/analysis-egypt.shtml>.

94. Andy Wynne, personal communication, December 20, 2011.

95. David McNally, *Global Slump: The Economics and Politics of Crisis and Resistance* (Oakland: PM Press, 2011).

96. Pierre Rousset, "On the European Union Crisis and the Dynamics of Resistance," *International Viewpoint* (November 2010), <http://www.internationalviewpoint.org/spip.php?article2367>.

97. David McNally, *Another World Is Possible: Globalization and Anti-Capitalism*, 2nd ed. (Winnipeg: Arbeiter Ring Publishing, 2006); Notes from Nowhere, ed. We Are Everywhere.

98. Richard Seymour, "What Was That All About?" *Overland* 204 (2011), <http://overland.org.au/previous-issues/issue-204/feature-richard-seymour/>.

99. Webber and Carr, eds., *The Resurgence of Latin American Radicalism*. The global economic crisis has led to a series of mass social protests and revolts, particularly since early 2011 (see McNally, *Global Slump*; for a more recent journalistic account see Paul Mason, *Why It's Kicking Off Everywhere: The New Global Revolutions* (London: Verso, 2012)). The political articulation of these upheavals is complex, especially in countries in the Middle East where the Left has been very weak; they may be producing a new international wave of left-wing radicalization. This chapter does not attempt to analyze this nascent process.

100. Naomi Klein, *No Logo* (Toronto: Random House, 2000).

101. Naomiklein.org, "Publication Information for No Logo," <http://www.naomiklein.org/no-logo/publication-info>

102. Livio Maitan, "Defeat of the Referendum," *International Viewpoint* (September 2003), <http://www.internationalviewpoint.org/spip.php?article133>; The referendum was unsuccessful because, although over 87 percent voted in favor, turnout was 25.7 percent, well below the participation threshold of 50 percent+1 of all eligible voters that is required for a referendum to enact a change in Italian law. See Maitan, "Defeat of the Referendum."

103. On radical working-class socialism and these three waves of radicalization, see sources cited in the first section of this chapter.

104. Claudio Katz, "Socialist Strategies in Latin American," *Monthly Review* 59, no. 4 (September 2007), <http://monthlyreview.org/2007/09/01/socialist-strategies-in-latin-america>.

105. Chris Dixon, "Building 'Another Politics': The Contemporary Anti-Authoritarian Current in the US and Canada," *Anarchist Studies* 20, no. 1 (2012); Barbara Epstein, "Anarchism and the Anti-Globalization Movement," *Monthly Review* 53, no. 4 (September 2001), <http://monthlyreview.org/2001/09/01/anarchism-and-the-anti-globalization-movement>; David Graeber, "The New Anarchists," *New Left Review* 13 (January–February 2002), <http://newleftreview.org/A2368>. Two theoretical expressions of influential ideas in these currents are John Holloway, *Change the World without Taking Power: The Meaning of Revolution Today* (London: Pluto Press, 2002) and Cindy Milstein, *Anarchism and Its Aspirations* (Oakland and Washington: AK Press and the Institute for Anarchist Studies, 2010).

106. Webber, *From Rebellion to Reform*; Webber, *Red October*.

107. Emilia Castorina, "Crisis and Re-Composition in Argentina," in *The New Latin American Left: Cracks in the Empire*, ed. Jeffrey Webber and Barry Carr (Boulder, CO: Rowman & Littlefield, 2012).

108. It is beyond the scope of this chapter to explore why many militant mass struggles in recent years have not benefitted any radical Left force in any lasting way. However, the crisis of politics and the impact of the collapse of "communism" discussed later are important realities that deserve serious considerations in explaining this pattern.

109. Margaret Somers, "Class Formation and Capitalism: A Second Look at a Classic," *European Journal of Sociology* 37, no. 1 (1996), 181.

110. Stephen McBride and Heather Whiteside, *Private Affluence, Public Austerity: Economic Crisis and Democratic Malaise in Canada* (Halifax: Fernwood Publishing, 2011), 95; Wolin registers the crisis of politics in the United States: Sheldon Wolin, *Democracy Incorporated: Managed Democracy and the Spectre of Inverted Totalitarianism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008).

111. Daniel Bensaid, *Le Pari Mélancolique* (Paris: Fayard, 1997), 84. Author's own translation.

112. This is not to suggest that political life was universally dynamic before the neoliberal reorganization of capitalism. My point here is simply to register the impact of the latter.

113. *Ibid.*, 108. Author's own translation.

114. Mark Fisher, *Capitalist Realism: Is There No Alternative?* (Winchester: Zero Books, 2009), 2.

115. For a survey of theories, see Marcel van der Linden, *Western Marxism and the Soviet Union: A Survey of Critical Theories and Debates since 1917* (Chicago: Haymarket, 2009).
116. Katz, "Socialist Strategies in Latin America."
117. Webber, *Red October*.
118. On which see Webber, "Venezuela under Chavez."
119. Colin Barker, ed., *Revolutionary Rehearsals* (London: Bookmarks, 1987).
120. David Camfield, "Re-Orienting Class Analysis: Working Classes as Historical Formations," *Science and Society* 68, no. 4 (2004–2005): 421–446.
121. Holly Gibbs, Belinda Leach and Charlotte Yates, *Negotiating Risk, Seeking Security, Eroding Solidarity: Life and Work on the Border* (Halifax: Fernwood Publishing, 2012); D. W. Livingstone, Dorothy E. Smith, and Warren Smith, *Manufacturing Meltown: Reshaping Steel Work* (Halifax: Fernwood Publishing, 2011); Meg Luxton and June Corman, *Getting By in Hard Times: Gendered Labour at Home and on the Job* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2001).
122. David Camfield, *Canadian Labor in Crisis: Reinventing the Workers' Movement* (Halifax: Fernwood Publishing, 2011); McNally, *Global Slump*, 149–50; Allan Sears, "Creating and Sustaining Communities of Struggle: The Infrastructure of Dissent," *New Socialist* 52 (July–August 2005); Beverly Silver, *Forces of Labor: Workers' Movements and Globalization since 1870* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003).
123. Silver, *Forces of Labor*, 171.

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Communism in the 21st Century

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Communism in the 21st Century

Volume 3

*The Future of Communism:
Social Movements, Economic Crises,
and the Re-imagination of Communism*

SHANNON BRINCAT, EDITOR

Foreword by Terrell Carver



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These volumes are dedicated to my brother, Dustin Brincat, who upon reading the *Communist Manifesto* for the first time remarked that the communist ideal is the sensible choice given our world's problems, despite the array of asocial behaviors conditioned by contemporary capitalism seemingly opposed to it. By dedicating this series to him, I hope to convey the depth of my gratitude for all his years of support and the esteem I hold for him.

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Preface to Volume 3

The final volume of *Communism in the 21st Century* is concerned with the future of communist theory and practice in the context of contemporary global social movements, the recurrent crises of capitalism, and the various re-imaginings of the communist project for, and in, this new century. Its analysis follows the trajectory of communist ideas and the possibilities for emancipatory change in a number of interrelated areas: how communist ideas have echoed across the globe in the Arab Spring, the nebulous Occupy movement, and the ongoing alter-globalization protests; how they have influenced, and have been influenced by, developments in the World Social Forum (WSF) and novel ideas of assembly, militancy, and demand; and in the resurgence of communist ideas in the critique of political economy that have emerged, once again, as a real alternative in the wake of the devastation of the ongoing Global Financial Crisis (GFC). The volume situates communism within the locus of a number of contemporary problems—many of which were unknown to earlier manifestations of radical socialist thought—such as digital technologies and media, the global commons, and the question of the necessity for new forms of organization to meet the needs of this new century. In addition, the volume explores a number of key theoretical engagements, such as between feminism and critical theory, helping to push forward these emancipatory discourses toward a greater understanding of their relations and differences.

As the themes of the volume are explicitly future-focused raises the danger of speculative analysis. Nevertheless, there were a number of strategies adopted to prevent the content from slipping into the prognostications of futurism. To overcome this potential limitation, many of the authors adopt dialectical approaches in their analyses of movements,

crises, and transformation. In their unique ways, each chapter offers an examination of particular contradictions within global social life and within the social totality, from which emerges various—and sometimes conflicting—accounts of the negative stimulus of societal change. Similarly, as part of this dialectical method, each chapter takes a relational approach to their subject matter that permits a wider analysis of the forces that permeate our social dynamic and which inform long-term patterns of change that are otherwise lost to strict positivist approaches.

In addition to these methods, this volume was organized around four themes to help situate its analysis of the future of communism immanently, that is, within existing conditions. These include: social struggles and protests; commons and value; theoretical developments, and; organization and praxis. The opening chapters examine social struggles within the GFC, the WSF, and the Syrian Revolution, and explore their global implications for communist theory and practice. Locating his analysis within the ongoing GFC that began in 2007, De Angelis posits this is not merely an economic crisis but one of social stability. He discusses four plans that could be deployed to meet this crisis based on the historical dynamics of the last 30 years: neoliberalism, Keynesianism, fascism, and what he calls commons and democracy. Taking an historical approach, Teivainen explores the formation and development of the WSF that has opened a radical space for the creation of postcapitalist alternatives. In particular, he offers an account of how communist ideas of internationalism—or what he prefers to call it commonist—could be rethought for the new transnational context of today's global struggles. In stark contrast to the optimism that emanates from the WSF, Massouh exposes the failed expectations of the global Left in response to the Syrian Revolution. Despite the ongoing civil conflict and its relation to emancipatory social struggles, this movement is yet to receive sustained or effective support from the Left. This glaring contradiction between the Assad regime's exploitation of the peasantry and working classes and the secular Left's fear of Islamofascism that prevents it from contesting the oppression of Assad, remains unresolved.

The volume then engages with the problem of value and the possibilities of the commons, two perennial issues throughout the history of socialist thought. Despite the typical economic categorization of the commons, both Eden and Dean draw out the fundamental social relations at play within contemporary dynamics. Eden asks us to question the relation of capitalist exchange rather than struggles over conditions of sale—of making demands—that, he posits, while being important, should not be mistaken for the real tasks of solidarity, autonomy, and the unity of the class. Dean, on the other hand, examines the convergence of capitalism and democracy through networked media that has subsumed communication such that it no longer provides what she calls a critical outside. As an

example of a new form of expropriation of the common and the commons, these illuminate processes of exploitation specific to communicative capitalism. It is this division, Dean argues, that we must seize to overcome.

Departing from these more practical concerns of struggle and the commons in the future of communism, the volume also engages theoretical developments with Power and Bonefeld offering reflections on two engagements in radical Left theory. Power looks to a future Marxist-feminism that neither subsumes nor postpones women's interests as separate concerns from the revolutionary Left. Bonefeld, on the other hand, engages with the question of the means and ends of communism through a reading of Walter Benjamin's *Theses on History*. His account views struggle as the attempt to stop the process of historical time, riddled as it is with the "muck of the ages," positing that it must come to a standstill to found society anew.

From these theoretical concerns, the volume then turns to dimensions of praxis specifically pertaining to matters of organization in contemporary radical Left movements today. Nunes argues for a new type of militant, one that is nonvanguardist but revolutionary, one that could prevent the mobilizations of 2011—whose indeterminate nature made concerted action difficult—from dissipating. In the context of ongoing global struggles, Nunes explores new organizational means to sustain polycentric, wide-scale, systemic challenge to global capitalism. Taking a similar view, Milburn looks at another aspect of organization from within the 2011 protest wave: the assembly. He suggests that its capacity for collective self-analysis and periodic moments of rupture were insufficient, and instead looks to a processual form of organization for the future. Combining the themes of organization and struggle, Holloway provides a fitting conclusion to the entire series, calling for us to communise. For Holloway, a form of social organizing that is self-determining cannot possibly be contained inside the noun communism. Over rigidification, he places as central notions of process, movement, and change through the verb communising. Yet, as it is we who are the crisis of capital, the latency of another world is present within us: communism is then not something in the future but a multiplicity of communisings taking place in the now.

These four themes—of contemporary struggle, the commons, theoretical developments, and questions of organizational praxis—ensure that the content of this volume moves decidedly away from speculation. By focusing on this array of forces the volume reveals some of the ways in which communism is being practiced and thought of anew in the conditions of the early 21st century. As all of the chapters attest to, in the context of contemporary struggles and the ongoing re-imagining of communism, the possibilities for an emancipatory future look bright.

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Shannon Brincat
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CHAPTER 1

Crisis and the Commons Today

Massimo De Angelis

INTRODUCTION: ONE WORD, MANY MEANINGS

While I was growing up in 1970s Italy, the word “communism” echoed many realities and horizons. There was obviously the Communist Party, the largest in Western Europe, with its bureaucratic structure and its parliamentary opposition to the Christian Democrats until the governments of National Solidarity (1979) that introduced austerity policies and draconian antiterrorist laws. There were the Red Brigades, with their secret cells, shootings, and homicides of foremen, trade union members, and magistrates, culminating in the kidnapping and killing of Aldo Moro, a leading figure of the Christian Democrats, in 1978. There were the myriad of little parties and organizations of the extra-parliamentary Left, each with its distinctive politics and, often, sectarian attitudes. There were the archipelago of collectives and informal groupings in schools, factories, universities, and neighborhoods. There were also those who had found a way to mix their Catholic roots with communist ideas, the so-called Catto-communists. Finally, there were the plethora of unleashed dogs, individuals who, while not belonging to any particular organization, were surfing the movement to find in it the source of some conviviality and sociality. There was one word, communism, and many meanings, many organizational forms, often in open conflict with one another. In all these very different cases, people would have defined themselves first as communist, and then as a particular type of communist, belonging to this or that organization, this or that strand of communist thought. Different groups held a different selection of the founding fathers’ thought to which they were inspired: Marx- Engels, Marx-Engels-Lenin, Marx-Engels-Lenin-Stalin, Marx-Engels-Lenin-Stalin-Mao, Marx-Engels-Lenin-Trotsky, Marx-Engels-Lenin-Gramsci, and, maybe among the Metropolitan Indians with

some achievement in urban struggle, the influence of the Marx brothers was also visible.

This just asserts the obvious: that ideas and organizational practices of communism are and have been many, and even more so in international contexts. How do I then distill from so many practices and theories a meaning of communism that advances our critical knowledge of the present and help us construct an emancipated future? Disfavoring communism as type of future society, or a particular type of human action, I prefer to stick to two broad classical indications, both coming from Marx. I use these two coordinates as a way to conceive emancipatory praxis at different scales and in particular contexts. The first coordinate is the understanding of communism as “the movement that abolishes the present state of affair”¹; the second, as the “community of free individuals.”² These two coordinates give me a communism that is a combination of struggle and negation, while at the same time a creative constitution of new social relations, a social doing based on democracy and emancipation. Once I extend the reach of association of free producers to also include the realm of the unwaged and of social cooperation, I translate this form of communism in terms of what I call *Plan C&D*, or Commons and Democracy. This is the name I give to the sense-horizon of a social force that is distinct from capital. In today’s context, capital seems stuck in different versions of what I term *Plan A* (neoliberalism) and unable to shift to a renewed orthodoxy of *Plan B* (Keynesianism), while perhaps trying to co-opt elements of *Plan C&D*, but most likely combining more strictly with elements of *Plan E&F* (exclusion and Fascism). But in order to give some depth to these assertions, we need to discuss a few things.

In the first section, I review with large brushes the class meaning of the current capitalist crisis and its origin with the establishment of the neoliberal era in the 1980s and the end of the Keynesian class deal of the postwar period. In the second section, I discuss how the current crisis corresponds to a situation of impasse for capital—a moment in which capital must find ways to recover accumulation through readjustment of strategies. This impasse, however, is also a condition of emancipatory movements and struggles that need to coalesce and direct social cooperation in new ways for the creation of alternatives. In the third section I discuss the meaning I give to *social forces*. Borrowing here from social systems theory, I define social forces as social systems that coordinate action and strive to expand their social realm. In this sense, capital can be understood as a social force in that its systemic circuits of accumulation seek expansion. All the same, commons could be understood as a social force, to the extent that their specific circuits of social cooperation seek expansion. Borrowing terminology from system theorist Niklas Luhmann, in the following section I then discuss the notion of Plan as the particular sense-horizons of a specific social force in given times. By the term “Plan” I mean an

orienting plane within which a particular strategic direction is undertaken by the social force given other forces. Thus, neoliberal and Keynesian orthodoxies are two examples of these capitalist plans. I then broadly outline the state of current plans, which include neoliberalism plus (Plan A), Keynesianism plus (Plan B), Communism plus (Plan C&D), and Fascism plus (Plan E&F).

2008-?: CAPITALIST CRISIS

The 2008 subprime crisis was an epochal moment, one of those moments after which the world is no longer what it seemed just a few months earlier, or at least what the world as seen through neoliberal eyes seemed to be. The global crisis that followed *prima facie* indicated the end of the neoliberal era as it had emerged in the late 1970s. To contextualize the avenues open to different social forces, we need to write a brief historical outline of the dynamics of the last 30 years interpreted in the old framework of class struggle. Neoliberalism, in fact, arose as a response, first by U.S.-UK capitalists and then generalized to the globe, to a three-fold profitability problem that had resulted from the planetary struggles of the previous two decades: the anticolonial, women's, student, black, and labor movements that occurred around the world in the 1960s and 1970s. In the West these movements shook capitalist planners. The plurality of struggles left little room for capital to enact countertendencies to the falling rate of profit at the global level within the postwar deal. He latter, also known as Keynesianism, attempted to institutionalize and co-opt wage struggles into mechanism of economic growth, pledging to pursue full employment, growing wages (also in the social components such as social spending for housing, health, education, transfers to the poor or, in the Global South, food subsidies), and an horizon of betterment under capitalist growth. In the 1970s it was soon realized that this was no longer possible. The struggles in the streets within many Western democratic nations stood in the way of sacrifices that were necessary to reestablish profitability and restart growth.³ Thus, for capital the three-fold problem was:

1. How to cut the social wage (wages plus social benefits) received by the working class, and at the same time
2. Allow in some way the reproduction of the working class and their aspiration of betterment, while
3. Intensifying their working lives to increase extraction of surplus value?

The recent subprime experiment was the last of many moments taken by the neoliberal strategy to deal with this threefold problem. The first one

was in 1979, the year in which Paul Volker—then chairman of the Federal Reserve—officially launched the neoliberal era with a sudden 1 percent increase in the interest rate, precipitating a global recession. The latter, in turn, created the conditions for neoliberal reforms such as financial market deregulation, union busting, cuts in social entitlements, tax cuts for the rich, and intensified free trade. The massive explosion in debt and financial markets (of which the subprime crisis is the latest expression) were a major consequence of this. Excessive public spending was identified as the major source of inflation and unemployment, together with excessive wage demands. With the election of Margaret Thatcher in the United Kingdom in 1979 and Ronald Reagan in the United States in 1981, a new consensus started to consolidate among world rulers that the wage, in its totality, had to be reduced. This meant not only wages received directly in exchange for labor power, but also the social component in the form of transfers and public spending.

With the opening up of capital markets, Western governments decreed the abandonment of their commitments to full employment and began dismantling the social safety net, the central piece of the post-World War II deal. Economic and social policies must henceforth please financial capital markets. If governments granted popular concessions that redistributed resources from capital to the working class, financial capital would go off shore, thus inducing a fall in exchange rates, an increase in interest rates, a downturn in business, and a rise in unemployment. In the view of neoliberals, a stable economy meant accommodation to the desires of international financial capital, which started to act as a disciplinary device at the service of capital accumulation. Capital markets started to exert heavy pressure on conditions of work—whether waged work in factories or offices, or unwaged work of raising children and reproducing lives in the home—through capital's increased ability to migrate from place to place, pitting conditions of working-class reproduction against one another. Governments now competed against one another to cut public spending that was part of the social wage: education, health, housing, to mention just a few.

In the Global South, which did not have advanced capital markets through which to impose the discipline of global capital, the same effects were obtained through the management of what became known as the Third World debt crisis, precipitated by Chairman Volker's interest rate increase. In the event of a liquidity crisis in a debtor country, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) forced Structural Adjustment Programs (SAP) on all countries in crisis with little variation: devalue the currency, thus making imports more expensive and enforcing a cut in real wages; privatize water, education, health care, and other national resources, thus opening them up to restructuring and raising the level of precarious employment as well as, in the early phase, unemployment; cut social

spending; cut subsidies on necessities such as food and fuel; open up markets to foreign investors; and promote competitive exports to help repay debt. In the case of basic resources such as water, privatization resulted in attempts to make poor people pay for access at prices they often could not afford. This wave of new enclosures⁴ was resisted by millions of people across the world,⁵ often slowing down the process of privatization, sometimes even stopping it. But, like financial liberalization in the Global North, the management of debt crises became an opportunity to enclose common resources and make people more dependent on the market. In both the North and the South, through financial deregulation and free trade, neoliberal capital aimed to turn the class war of the 1960s and 1970s—when capital's power faced challenges in communities, factories, offices, streets, and fields around the world—into a planetary civil war. A civil war fought through pervasive competition, a way of life that pits each community against every other, which in fact meant shifting costs away from capital and onto the environment, communities, and human bodies, where they no longer count as economic costs. It has done this also by policing the divisions between global wage hierarchies, for example, through the management of borders with detention camps, deportation, and the criminalization of migration in both North America and Europe.

In this context, the development of information and communication technologies, together with the drastic reduction in the monetized (but not the environmental) cost of global transport, has offered capital a major opportunity to restructure global production and construct a system that facilitate its flows from high cost (high struggles) into low cost (low struggles). This global restructuring, developed in the last few decades, along with financial speculation and the use of debt, has allowed a reduction in the value of labor power of Global North workers without a proportional decline in living standards. This was achieved, simply, by lowering the price of commodities that enter in the wage basket of these workers. For example, the planetary expansion of sweatshops in global commodity chains means U.S. workers can buy low-priced pants or digital radios at Walmart. Because of cheap service labor from the South and East the result of massive poverty caused by SAP households in Europe and the United States now hire Filipina, Mexican, or Eastern European women to take care of children and aged grandparents.

In the South, meanwhile, this process has made it possible to discipline new masses of workers into factories and assembly lines, fields, and offices, thus extending enormously capital's reach in defining the terms—the what, the how, the how much—of social production. In both North and South, the enclosure of resources means an increased dependence of working class communities on markets to reproduce livelihoods, less power to resist the violence and arrogance of those whose priority is only

to seek profit, less power to prevent the market from running their lives and, broadly, a generalized state of precarity, where life is precarious and nothing can be taken for granted. Indeed, both North and South workers were systemically linked. This is revealed by a pattern in global finance that some describe as Bretton Woods II⁶ and is expressed by the enormous U.S. trade deficit and correspondent surplus in China and other exporting countries. The systemic link between surplus and deficit countries allows the creation of new debt instruments like the one that resulted in the subprime crisis. The ongoing recycling of the accumulated surpluses of countries exporting to the United States, such as China and oil-producing countries, is what has allowed financiers to create new credit instruments in the United States.

This global system saw the integration of a series of deals, made nationally, with the working classes of various countries.⁷ For example, the (informal) deal offered by elites in the United States to its working people has been to buffer the reduction in money wages with access to cheaper consumption goods, access to credit, and a renewal of the illusion that gains in terms education, health, pensions, and social security could be made through the speculative means of rising stock markets and housing prices. In turn, to allow the reproduction of labor power of 250 millions of unemployed, underemployed, and dispossessed Chinese, the communist leaders need double digit rates of growth, and therefore they need both Western markets and their capital, know-how, and technologies. It is for this reason that they have been willing to recycle back to the United States their enormous trade surpluses, thus contributing to the liquidity necessary for the expansion of many forms of debt in the United States. This is a vicious cycle that locks everybody into an endless rat race.

At the same time in China and other zones in the Global South, people are being offered a different sort of deal: industrial employment at wages that, while very low by international standards, are still substantially higher than anything obtainable in the impoverished countryside. But attached to this there is the promise that, through their link to global markets, their conditions of living will gradually improve. While over the last few years wages in many such areas seem to be growing thanks to the intensification of popular struggles (particularly in China), such gains are impossible to generalize. What is being offered to the South is the promise to expand the existing urban middle classes who already model their lifestyle and consumption patterns on northern ones. Although an understandable longing for betterment is at the basis of what has been sold as the American dream, what makes it a dream is precisely the fact that, even in the United States, it has never meant eliminating wage hierarchies, but reshaping them. This is a game in which there must, necessarily, be losers.

At the global level, however, this is impossible to generalize for two reasons. First, environmentally speaking, no matter how much we recycle

or how many energy-efficient light bulbs we use, it would still require several planets to accommodate an American dream way of life modeled on high energy and individualized consumption patterns for six billion people. Second, precisely because this way of life requires the further expansion of competition of all against all, of borders and property regimes, of enclosures and dispossession, it must always necessarily be dependent on hierarchy and exclusion and must be premised on a massive devaluation of capital and labor demanded by the crisis. In other words, middle-class betterment is an illusion, constructed between the Scylla of ecological disaster and the Charybdis of poverty. The only thing this model of development can create is gated communities comprised of whatever is left of middle-class families, accessing privatized social services within the borders of their patrolled walls, surrounded by hordes of poor with little access to public services. The entrance of the working poor through the gates of those enclaves will be managed for the purpose of serving those gated middle-class communities. But as we will see, capital plan A still insists this is the way forward.

It is in this context that we must read the crisis of 2008. The crisis followed a series of burst bubbles and Federal Reserve interventions on interest rates, which kept inflating the American and global economy with debt used to fund speculation, but also to pay for housing, for education, for consumption and, for many, bare essentials. In the late 1990s, the dot-com bubble burst and high-tech stocks crashed, opening a recession. After the 9/11 attacks there were widespread fears of financial collapse as employment kept dropping through July 2003 (in spite of the recession being officially over in November 2001). Between January and December 2001, the Federal Reserve System (commonly known as Fed) cut its benchmark interest rate 11 times, dropping the key lending rate from 6.5 percent to 1.75 percent. This led to negative real interest rates (when inflation was factored in), which meant that banks borrowed money to make loans and, in real dollars, repaid less than they had borrowed. Cheap credit was a strategy to avoid and delay financial collapse and a consequent global meltdown, but it is also how the Fed created the next bubble. It was also a strategy to sell the American dream to the poorest in the context of declining real wages.

After the dot-com crash, the era of easy credit led to speculation on the housing market. Home mortgage debt began to show double-digit growth, settling at around 16.6 percent a year in the period between 2000 and 2005, compared to about 9.2 percent a year in the 1990s. This added to other working-class indebtedness, which grew through the last three decades. Loans were made available to working-class people who would not have qualified previously because of low incomes or inadequate assets, and lenders did not seem interested in checking borrowers' statements. This was not only due to cheap credit, but also the way mortgages

were packaged into more complex debt instruments (which led to the international ramifications of the crisis).

The novel aspect of the new mortgage market was the banks' offloading of risk to the market through securitization, that is, repackaging of these mortgages into securities that combined a wide range of risks and promises of repayment by a variety of agents; investments that were sold off to hedge funds, pension funds, and back to commercial banks themselves. All these factors, plus the contradictory systems of incentives for different agents in their efforts to maximize profit, caused drastic increases in home prices, which almost doubled in the 2000–2005 period.⁸ This was fundamental to allow working-class people to turn into speculators and compensate their falling wages with capital gains on their houses. Ultimately however, this bubble burst because debt must be paid back, with interest. And this is not always possible, if the cost of repayment increases above what the borrower can afford. One factor contributing to the wave of defaults was the Fed's interest rates hikes 17 times between June 2004 and June 2006. The higher rates affected a variety of borrowers, but especially the more vulnerable ones with adjustable rate mortgages.

In July 2007, according to some estimates, a month before the official opening of the subprime crisis, home foreclosures were almost 100 percent above the previous year. The increase in foreclosures in turn contributed to a fall in further lending and a drop in home prices. By March 2008 average home prices had fallen by almost 20 percent from their peak in June 2006.⁹ A fall in house prices in turn prevented many homeowners from playing the speculator's game (borrowing against the rising value of their houses) for the purpose of maintaining their livelihoods.

What followed from the crisis was a multimillion dollar state intervention to save banks too big to fail in the sense that their bankruptcy would threaten the stability of global finance capital and, more generally, the entire capitalist system in its current form. States have not been shy from Keynesian policy, with Obama attempting some stimulus to get the economy growing, with little success. The expectations of profitability are too low for investors to restart the economy, and the accumulated debt is too high. The crisis turned from a private debt crisis into a sovereign debt crisis, with countries such as Greece, Spain, Ireland, Italy, and Portugal on the firing line of unpleased financial capital for spending too much in debt services owed to banks. Strong austerity policies are now back in fashion in Europe again, the same type of policies the cycle of neoliberalism that started more than four decades ago.

IMPASSE

Today economic crisis is a capitalist crisis of social stability, not a simple recession. It is a crisis that requires a realignment and reconfiguration

of class relations and new systems of governance in order to reestablish growth and accumulation.¹⁰ The last two times a real change in capital's governance occurred was the embracing of Keynesianism in the post-World War II period and neoliberalism in the late 1970s. Both followed periods of intense social struggles that developed senses and perceptions guiding and orienting social movements toward alternative socio-economic arrangements. When this happens, capital, fearing that ideas grip the masses, is suddenly willing to shift governance paradigm, absorb some of the struggles with appealing deals to some sections of the struggling movement, and displace the cost of doing so onto other communities, sections of the working class, and the environment across the globe. Division of the social body has always been a strategy of capital development.¹¹

Yet this time, things have become more economically complex. With no world war that would allow massive devaluation of capital; a mass of debt that prevents re-inflating the economy through further debt; levels of economic growth that are insufficient to repay existing debt; and a planet that is warming up dangerously, in facing this crisis of social stability, capital is actually facing an impasse. By "impasse" I mean a crucial moment in the growth of a social system. It is a moment in which vital support for this system is not forthcoming in sufficient amounts, neither in terms of expectation of profit nor social acceptance.

This support is not forthcoming in sufficient amounts, especially from the environment of the capitalist system. Capital, understood as social force organizing social cooperation for the purpose of accumulation, has a twofold environment. One, constituted by social systems that reproduce the various facets of life in a noncommodified way and in which access to money is, at most, only one contingent aim. This is the universe of social cooperation which is, at most, connected to capital circuits through what Marx describes as "selling in order to buy" and for which money is only a means through which needs are satisfied (and not an end in itself as it is for capital). When the purchased commodities exit the sphere of circulation into these noncapitalist spheres of social cooperation (households, associations, networks, etc.), they often enter the culturally and politically variegated sphere of the commons for which money is foremost a means, not an end. The cultural and physical reproduction of labor power, the value-creating commodity so critically important for capital, occurs in such a sphere, outside capital but, of course, strictly coupled to it.

The other system that capital must seek support from is the ecological system upon which all forms of social organization depend on. This has its own mechanisms through which it absorbs and processes the externalities of capital. This impasse can be seen in the fact that micro and macro systems of social reproduction, devastated and atomized, made flexible

and precarious by the reduction of wage and welfare of the last 30 years, strangled with debt, with no prospect of betterment given the current course of the economic crisis, or shattered by the resource enclosures that have devastated many communities in the Global South, find it increasingly difficult to support capital with further absorption of its cost-shifting externalities, since to do so would undermine their own reproduction. At the same time, the ecosystem is showing an increasing inability to support capital in its endless quest for more resource extraction and its use of the atmosphere as bottomless greenhouse gas sink.

The imperative question becomes whether capital can renew itself as a social force of creative destruction and transformation, and break this impasse on its own terms (with all the negative externalities that any new phase of capitalist growth would bring about), or whether another social force can emerge by fostering social cooperation in a direction that breaks the impasse, fights the chains of the old, and constitutes the new. If it is the latter, is this a social force that can be understood as communist? Before addressing these questions we need to enquire about the meaning of social force.

SOCIAL FORCES

I understand social forces to be social systems that seek their own expanded reproduction through their operations at whatever scale of social action, and by doing so influence, clash or couple with, contaminate, subsume, transform, or destroy other social systems, making them the means of their own development. They are coagulations of a plurality of social powers around particular types of values, practices, and relations. Insofar as their social reproduction is concerned, they articulate social subjects and ecologies through value-specific and coordinating operations. For example, capital has clearly been a social force in the last few hundred years. It is a social system based on subsystemic circuits of accumulation that expand, connect, weave, and reshape society to its images and priorities.¹² The commons have also been a social force, in the sense that the pluralities that have formed communities of struggles (in the shape of trade unions, committees, networks, etc.) have claimed different types of social wealth as common resources (education, health, social security, communication, etc.) and also struggled for inclusive and deep democratic practices for their access and co-governance (commoning).

In situated and historical contexts, however, social forces need plans. They need specific ways to coagulate and channel social action in order to force-out, outflank, or co-opt other social forces and overcome the barriers they are facing. Since we are not talking about a rigid command structure in which these social forces operate, this coagulation of social powers and cooperation is produced through moments of situated selections about what is good and what is bad, and of actual actions based on these

selections, which are practices of social cooperation that produce value. The repetition of these selections into clusters and patterns acts through a strengthening of bonds among different nodes of social cooperation. This strengthening of bonds corresponds to a clustering of a diverse range of value practices around a shared sense-horizon. Social forces are thus coagulations of productive, reproductive, affective social power around a sense-horizon that orient action in a particular direction. It is when this shared sense-horizon is coupled with the materiality of the exercise of social power that we have a social force capable of transforming reality. I call a "plan" the sense-horizon that a social force must possess in order to be constitutive of the new.

Let us clarify what we mean by sense-horizon. I use the term here to build on Niklas Luhmann's concept of sense. This shared sense is always a construction by a system, hence "it can also be defined as a selection within the horizon of what is possible."¹³ It is what is considered possible from within the perspective of system's reproduction. Sense-horizon provides an orientation plane, a measure between the actual and the possible. Luhmann makes the example of a ship, which through its movements uses the horizon for orientation. The direction chosen by the ship (the actual) is just one selection within a range of possible direction provided by the horizons. So, the sense-horizon of capital in general, that is, independent of actual conditions, is very clear: accumulation. Every corporation in every epoch has this bottom line as an ultimate objective, which is not so much an ethical stand, but a drive, a conatus of self-preservation qua capital as social system.¹⁴ All the same, at the macro level, this also implies growth as capital's horizon.

Different schools of thought, writers, interpreters, commentators, policy makers, and economists may of course cluster in different paradigms and have differing views of how profit or growth can be achieved. They may, of course, have distinct views about the socially or ethically acceptable costs for achieving it. But these opinions or paradigms are particular selections within a given common sense-horizon, that of accumulation. However, sense-horizons and actual selections within horizons can be contested. In social systems, it is not only the specific selections within horizons that can be contested but also the horizon of what is possible. While the former case corresponds to a meaning of conflict that reproduces a social system, it is in the latter case that social systems are challenged by other social systems as social force. Let us take an example. Let us imagine for example that water provisions for some given urban neighborhoods are delivered by communities of residents who pool together their resources and organize common labor to dig wells, build aqueducts, and distribution systems to households, and manage maintenance of the water system. Let us say that people participation is the most effective and convenient way to bring safe and clean waters to homes, since the public

water system does not have resources to deliver to the poorer districts and the private providers would deliver at very high prices. While providing for their own water, communities also talk about other problems, and possible ways to deal with them. They also constitute associations that bring together all the water associations to manage resources across different areas and distribute them when they are most needed, but also to constitute a political front vis-à-vis state and corporations for claiming more resources or resisting pressures of subordination to capital. We have here a social system (the systems of water associations) whose sense-horizon is not accumulation, but reproduction of the community and of the resources needed to reproduce this community through commoning, the social cooperation of the community that decide the what, the when, the how, and the who of social reproduction. There is an expansive logic here as well, in that the communities working cooperatively seek to reach out to those sections of the poor who are still paying huge prices for poorly delivered water by private providers, until one day the government decides to privatize all water, not just public water, but also community-run water systems. Multinational corporations with their sense-horizon that seeks accumulation now descend into the poor communities of Cochabamba (a real case regarding the water wars of 2001) to put up water meters on community-built infrastructure in order to calculate payments due to them. This is a clear clash among social systems and correspondent sense-horizons.

The general terms of the water example can be mapped into any struggles: in factories, in offices, in neighborhoods, along rivers and mountains in which communities fight against their enclosures, against the construction of dams or high-speed trains, in land seized by landless movement, in cyberspace struggles against the enclosure of knowledge, and so on. In all these cases, in different forms and through different means, we witness at clashing social forces. We witness clashing social powers and sense-horizons.

PLANS

In a given situation, at the micro or macro scale, we can call Plans the strategic selections around which different social forces coalesce. At the macro scale, there are today two main Plans around which contemporary capitalist forces can hope to recover into a social force in order to deal with the impasse. I call these Plan A and Plan B. These plans include the type and scope of selections of policies, social relations, institutions, procedures, and so on, within the range of what is believed make accumulation—capital's drive and sense-horizons—possible. These two plans are neoliberalism plus and Keynesianism plus. In both cases, the strategic selections are like a path toward the horizon coinciding with the dominance of

capitalism, and hence with an “end of history” perspective typical of Francis Fukuyama.¹⁵

There are also two alternative plans—alternatives that may be seen as compatible with capital in the short run in the sense that they take it as a starting point, but that in the long run see themselves as social forces of transformation beyond capital. These are Plan C&D and Plan E&F or communism plus, and Fascism plus. In a phase of impasse, a range of operational options that become contingent to a particular political economic situation constitutes each of the following Plans:

Plan A (neoliberalism plus): Plan A seeks to coalesce social cooperation around the need of capital accumulation through the attractors of markets, livelihood-threatening competition, a system of minimization of social protection and public investments, and the strong hand of disciplinary finance and debt. In this plan, the state is not dissolving, but acquires the function of supporting markets with reforms that either promote markets or replace markets in some specific cases with the view of promoting social cooperation through the market. In some versions, civil society also plays a complementary role to absorb shocks. In others, government is heavily downsized to its policing and military functions.

Plan B (Keynesianism plus): Plan B seeks to coalesce social cooperation around the need of capital accumulation through the triple attractors of markets, states, and, in different degrees, civil society. The state is seen as an active agent not only promoting a right environment for economic growth (accumulation) but in some cases also directing the type of growth and industries, the concentration of wealth produced by the markets through redistribution, and the implementation of counter-cyclical policies in the hope of reducing unemployment. An active role of organized labor and civil society, like unions and nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), is fundamental to mediate between different interests in society, although this requires these interests to share the horizon of capitalist development.

Plan C&D (communism plus): Plan C&D (commons and democracy) seeks to coalesce social cooperation around the expansion and rhizomatic integration of alternative modes of social cooperation based on shared resources and their horizontal government by communities, with the goals of social justice, freedom, and emancipation. This plan is centered on the commons, not only through the making of new social practices, but also through democratization of markets and state functions, which is to say, through their communalization. Capital accumulation and the existing state apparatuses are here only a given condition of departure, the disastrous social effects of which are now visible *ad hominem*, not a goal to be pursued in the long run.

Plan E&F (Fascism plus): Plan E&F (exclusion/emergency and Fascism) seeks to coalesce social cooperation not around the expansion of

capitalist accumulation (which may become an instrument, not a goal), but around the greatness of a nation, an ethnic group or a community, purified against what are perceived as “contaminants,” whether social (foreigners, migrants) or value cultural (gays and lesbians, particular religions). As in Plan C&D—and disturbingly so—this plan requires the active participation of the community, but in close organic connection to a hierarchical state that does not hesitate to use force against any form of otherness.

The four Plans are not mutually exclusive. The Bush years have seen a remarkable realignment between Plan A and Plan E&F, especially around the so-called War on Terror. The same can be said of the management of borders in the neoliberal period in Europe, the United States, and many other parts of the world. It is equally visible in the increasing securitization of our lives. In the Keynesian postwar period, elements of Plan A (including a functional use of welfare to return to market work) were heavily used in the middle of a full-fledged Plan B orthodoxy. So were the early experiments of Plan A, as in New York fiscal crisis in the mid-1970s. Plan C&D was unhappily married with Plan E&F and elements of Plan B during Stalinism. The Plan A of the neoliberal period since the late 1970s was often coupled with elements of Plan B, as in the Reagan expansionary military Keynesianism of the early 1980s, and the mild-fiscal stimulus of the post-2008 crisis in the United States, accompanied by the bailing-out of banks considered too big to fail.

STATE OF THE PLANS AFTER 2008

What is the state of these Plans after the crisis of 2008? For the purpose of this analysis, I deal only with the first three of these Plans, leaving the discussion of Plan E&F to another occasion. But this should not be taken as implying that this Plan is unimportant. Conditions of deep crisis and hopelessness do create a fertile ground for fascism to arise, for modes of exclusion to emerge and prosper. The growing neo-Nazi influence in poor neighborhoods in Greece is a clear example. Also, I am looking at these emerging Plans only as global in reach, insofar as they could be adopted by social forces that aspire to mobilize and order social cooperation at the global level.

Capitalist Plans: Plans A and B

In summer 2008, when the full blow of the subprime crisis hit the news, many critics thought that neoliberalism was finished; that it was clear that the regime of globalized markets and financialization had come to an end; and that it had imploded under the weight of its own contradictions. Even some of the dominant figures responsible for the management

of global Plan A began to voice doubt. The most remarkable admission coming from Alan Greenspan, who in Congressional testimony on October 23, 2008, acknowledged that he “found a flaw and was partially wrong to oppose regulation of derivatives.”¹⁶

This of course did not happen. What happened was a concerted effort to save the “too-big-to-fail” banks and the continuation of the regime of neoliberal capital. As the public purse took over the responsibility to inject public money into failing banks, thus tactically modifying Plan A, and the effect of the financial crisis began to result in terms of recession and unemployment, many governments around the world began to implement heavy austerity policies for the rest of us. In a move that bit the hands that saved it, financial capital started to attack sovereign debt, the debt held by sovereign states. Bonds issued by governments to raise finance to cover the holes of state administration (including the payment of previous debt) were sold at increasing cost to the states and in return for clear commitments to debt reduction (including cuts in public services, pensions, health care, and education). In the Eurozone, European Union, IMF, and European Central Bank (ECB)—the now infamous troika—were at the forefront of the management of this imposition of austerity with the Greek government. In Italy, the technical government of Mario Monti found support across the parliament to implement the austerity cuts that not even the much-ridiculed Berlusconi government could have dreamed to be able to implement. In the autumn 2011, the spread—the deviation between interest rates paid by southern European government bonds and Germany’s bonds—began to increase to a point that interest rates in the periphery of Europe became unsustainable, forcing governments into a vicious cycle of austerity cuts to please financial markets and liberate resources to pay debt, which reduced growth, which in turn increased the need for external borrowing, which in turn necessitated austerity cuts to please financial markets. In this mechanism financial markets are never pleased, they never have enough. What is appearing in this crisis is the most basic function of financial markets, which underpinned the logic of their liberalization in the 1980s, though it is seldom spelled out with clarity in finance textbooks: their disciplinary role. In the realm of currencies and government bonds, the function is disciplinary in the sense that they govern what is considered socially necessary in terms of the general conditions of reproduction of a country. They perform the great equalizing game of public expenditures in social services and the cost of bureaucracies, not in relation to an evaluation of the actual needs of a country, but in relation to the productive capacities of those countries, as measured by its international competitiveness. In other words, social reproduction is subservient to production for profit, not the other way around.

There are actually two broad Plan As. Plan A1 is pretty much patching up the contradictions of the crisis and continue with the policy trend of the last 30 years of neoliberalism. Plan A2 is to be very serious about downsizing governments and free markets. In Europe for example, Plan A1 can be summarized in the current range of policy attempts to save the euro, that is, the sharing of the cost of debt across the Eurozone, but in view of some form of heavy structural adjustment in the countries under attack. The basics of Plan A1 are the continuation of austerity policies in the hope of restoring growth at some point. What the sources of this growth might be is not clear since all emergent economies are slowing down. In Europe, Plan A1 takes a range of ad hoc policies and proposals from issuing Eurobonds (the most contested proposal) to the ECB instituting Outright Monetary Transaction schemes, in which ECB would offer to purchase Eurozone short-term bonds in exchange for fiscal and structural reforms. This reduction of national state authority will reduce even more the already much eroded scope of political representation at the national level and govern austerity from distant Brussels.

The European Plan A1 is the mirror of global Plan A1, essentially continuing things as if the 2008 crisis has not happened. The plan here is to link any aspects of social reproduction to the capacity of people and institutions to borrow money, and hence to repay debt. From this follows the engineering of a commitment to a life of work (often precarious and with little social security entitlements) at the service of capital accumulation. But the limits of Plan A1 are clear. The system has reached a point at which it may not be able to deliver the growth necessary to recover debt, and invest in new rounds. Recession and austerity can drag for years with its accumulating string of social and environmental problems and contestations, while global capitalism approaches a steady state that was the nightmare of classic political economists.

There is an alternative to Plan A1 however, one that shares basic tenets of neoliberal philosophy, but changes the scope and impetus through which it may be applied. Plan A2 can, paradoxically, take onboard some of the slogans from the streets against the use of public money to rescue banks such as end the bail out now. Cut against a horizon of fairness, it says: let the big banks fail.¹⁷ Let them pay the price of their own bad decisions. And since the conditions of business and social reproduction are so strictly tied to financial systems, their failure will also imply a chain of bankrupted businesses and the collapse of social security (e.g., pensions). The supporters of this approach have no doubt that the recession will be shorter (three to five years) and very, very painful, but the result will be to avoid 20 or 30 years of stagnation and will create the conditions for heavy restructuring—and to recover growth. Of course, the recession will also be an opportunity for deeper cuts in government spending and to downsize government. Plan A—in all its variants—is not really appealing from

the perspective of social reproduction. The horizon is further marketization of life activities, further erosion of publicly funded services, entitlements and rights, further precarization of jobs, further dependence of people on debt, and further concentration of social wealth in fewer and fewer hands.

Let us move to Plan B. Plan B shares with Plan A the horizon of the end of history; of capitalism as the horizon within which selections are made. However, Plan B wishes for an interventionist state to deal with what is essentially seen as a problem of effective demand, demonstrated by the stagnation of employment in most sectors across the world. If only governments were to inject massive amount of money into the economy through public spending, unemployment would fall, and a recovery would be triggered. The deficits ensued would be cleared out by the increased tax revenues. Obviously, there are plenty of sectors that would benefit from such an injection of demand, from infrastructure investment to green technology, from military expenditures to health and education. In this sense, Plan B, like Plan A, does not have a particular political color, it is not necessarily Right or Left, it is not necessarily a green new deal, or a socialist new deal like in Venezuela. It could also be a Fascist new deal since it is only a sense-horizon within capitalism. Such a program, however, would need to meet some preconditions. In the first place, it requires some strong degree of coordination among the major economies around the world, especially in view of productive capital's ability to fly to places with lower wages, lower costs, and lower taxes for the rich. Second, in conditions of financial capital mobility, the effect of such policies would be offset by capital flying out from countries with high deficits, which would imply that higher—hence depressing—interest rates had to follow in order to keep capital. Point one would require accompanying Keynesian policies to some sort of productivity deals that make it profitable for capital to produce domestically. But the current class compositions of most countries lack the degree of homogeneity and structured representations that would allow for such a period, as precarity is now pervasive and union membership has generally been declining in the last 30 years.

In conditions of global competition and downward wage stickiness, proponents of Plan B evoke the need for competitive devaluations. So for example, the Greek crisis could be dealt with, for some Keynesians, through Greece exiting the Euro while managing its exchange rates to maintain a rate favorable to Greek export (such as tourism and some agricultural products and not much else).¹⁸ In this vein, Paul Krugman urged countries in southern Europe to follow the path of Argentina that, after the crisis in 2001, defaulted on debt and renegotiated its burden, decided to break the parity of the peso with the U.S. dollar, embarked on interventionist policies to manage competitive exchange rates and

sustain wages, and created schemes for channeling income to poor.¹⁹ The result, using the standard measure of capitalist accumulation horizon, seems impressive as real GDP picked up from 14 percent in 2002 to about 8 percent in between 2003 and 2008 on average. GDP then collapsed to +0.9 in 2009 as a result of the global crisis in 2008 to recover to 7.5 in 2010. But when one digs a bit further, we discover that inflation statistics with which to calculate real GDP have been elaborately manipulated by the government to conceal the rise in inflation, to the point that even *the Economist* noticed.²⁰ With inflation rates of 24.4 percent, three times higher than the current official rate of 9.7 percent, real GDP growth may have dissipated. Another side of the story involves the countries record on poverty reduction during the success years after 2001. While the poverty rate peaked at 57.5 percent in 2002 after the initial impact of the financial crisis, it has since only declined to the 1990s levels of around 30 percent. This is not a real solution. The reduction has concentrated in areas like the South where the incidence of poverty was lower. Boosted real wages also recovered to the level of the 1990s average (\$3135), but only for employment in the formal sector and the cooperative sectors (there are about 10,000 cooperatives in Argentina). The informal sector in Argentina is massive. With no access to social security, informal workers represent 39 percent of the economically active population in Argentina. The great majority of these workers (52%) are employed in a small microenterprise of no more than three workers. In these microenterprises the owner is a worker who undertakes a job similar to that of the other workers, but exercises some leadership over the others. The capital of these microenterprises is the workers, tools and instruments, but there is no specific return to capital as in a traditional enterprise. These are not enterprises that operate under the logic of capital plus work, but on a relation of work plus work.²¹

Plan B in Argentina, therefore, does not offer much in terms of a horizon of emancipation from poverty. The gains that have been made with respect to the 2001 crisis are gains that are concentrated in some areas and sectors (waged sectors) and in any case are only comparable to conditions before the crisis—these being dark years of development. Finally, government interventions and deals with unions involve only about half of the working population. Perhaps the only success story in Argentina during the crisis was the wave of factory occupations and self-management in 2001. But this, of course, is part of Plan C&D, not Plan B.

Plan C&D

If there is one thing that characterizes Plan C&D, it is thought and practice from below. The demands of structural reforms that may come from it do not have the pretense to govern the capitalist economy, only to refuse

to accept cuts in the social wage, to extend the realms of commons and the deepening of democracy. Plan C&D's primary ground for development is to refuse the intensifying crisis of social reproduction that Plans A and B will promote and/or attempt to govern. As with the other plans, some of its elements will also be meshed with and intersected to other plans. In Venezuela, for example, a policy of redistribution and transfer to the poor (Plan B) is associated with strong involvement of grassroots groups and organizations in communalizing aspects of social reproduction. At times, this is done to guarantee the survival of life systems through deals, and the quality of these deals depends on power relations. At other times, it is a matter of resistance to cuts that preserve elements of Plan B inside a Plan A (as for example some rights and entitlements of the welfare state that were set up while Plan B was the orthodoxy during the 1970s in many countries in the West).

At the micro level, there are two sources to Plan C&D. First, Plan C&D finds its roots in the fertile soil of communities engaged in different forms of daily life reproduction. In city neighborhoods, shanty towns, and villages across the world, there are a variety of patterns of participation where, to various degrees, resources are shared and communities are engaged in forms of participatory democracy to decide the what, the how, the when, the why, and the who of social reproduction. The organization of an event such as a *fiesta* or *sagra* in a Spanish or Italian rural province, a street party in a English town, the maintenance of a community vegetable garden in a neighborhood in New York, of water systems by a community water associations in a Bolivian town, the creation of alternative economies to distribute potatoes or the guaranteeing a self-managed health service in an occupied hospital in crisis ridden Greece, in the day-to-day governance of a volunteer-run ambulance service in a mountain community in Italy are all modulations of the same thing. In these interactions, communities are formed and sustained through the sharing of some resources and participation in the governance of the commons—governance that often also involves direct social labor, which I call *commoning*.²² The furthering of the crisis and the deepening of austerity and reduction in social spending, in spite of social resistance to it, will push communities to come together and be reshaped through sharing projects such as community gardens, care of children and the elderly, greater participation in school educational projects, solidarity networks, labor cooperatives, time bank networks, barter systems, and even self-management of companies left by their bankrupted owners. The commons, in other words, will increasingly become a necessity of social reproduction.

These fertile soils for Plan C&D indicate that in these occasions of community engagement in daily-life activities resides the social substance for the creation of a new world. To be more precise, within the often-limited boundaries of these social systems, we have alternative modes of

production highly distinct from those promoted by capital. Unlike the reproduction of capital systems, which was based on endless accumulation, here resources and communities are brought together by a commoning activity that allows the reproduction and sustainability of both communities and shared resources.

The second source of Plan C&D is struggle that pushes the boundaries of capital and the state. In this sense, social movements that have been developing since the mid-1990s (i.e., in the late neoliberal era) have not only been opposing various instances of Plan A, but have also developed organizational forms that seek to reinvent people's participation in movements, focusing on the commons. These movements have been quite distinct—from indigenous people in Chiapas to community struggles against dams in India, from the indignatos in Spain to the Occupy movements in the United States, from the reclaim the street in the United Kingdom in the late 1990s to the democracy movement in northern Africa in 2011. Notwithstanding fundamental differences in contexts, social composition, and political language, all these movements are organized upon a 24-hour round-the-clock bodily presence that seeks “to put an end to the separation between the personal and the political; between political activism and the reproduction of everyday life.”²³ This often follows the occupation of a public space and the turning of that space into a commons, as in the case of Occupy or Tahrir.²⁴ Other times it follows the defense of an existing commons, and the opening up of opportunities for development through cross-contamination during political struggle, as in the case of the struggle of Zapatistas communities in Chiapas since the mid-1990s, or the water wars in Bolivia in 2001. Other times it involves the reclaiming of a private space as commons, as in the case of factories in Argentina in 2001. As waves in an ocean of subjectivities turning desires into situated needs, these movements pull back from visibility and consolidate into new institutions or dissipate through the social systems of daily life. It seems that no victory is achieved, and to a large extent, this is so. But if seen from the perspective of the present, the glass seems half empty, from the perspective of historical possibility, it may well be half-full. The future new world may well be accounting these outbursts as the historical movement of its own actualization. Sometimes the institutions created by these struggles must find ways to engage with markets to survive, and enter its competitive circuits, as it is for Argentinean cooperatives. Some other times, they dissipate into new spaces of protest, as in the case of the Occupy movement that is now occupying the front gardens of residences to prevent house repossessions by bailiffs. For some others, their energies are directed toward the construction of new institution of self-governance, as in the case of the Zapatistas.

These two sources, life reproduction through commons and commons through social movements, are by and large quite separate today. That

is to say that there are vast areas of social life that are governed through commons, yet it is not politicized; it is not connected to a critical understanding of capital and to a politics of emancipation from it. On the other hand, there are vast amounts of political energies that are still wasted in struggles for power without an organic connection to commons, which is the very source of social power. There is much thinking and organizational practice that needs to be done in order to articulate these two sources effectively into a Plan C&D, which is able to contrast capital and acquire hegemony on a global and coordinated level. The novelty of current movements, however, is to have brought these two dimensions (commons and struggle) together for the current time. Bringing together these two dimensions, not just in the form of a movement—say, that of an occupation—requires us to establish some life in common to sustain it (and therefore to experiment with form of direct democracy and governance of the occupied common space). The movement has coalesced social forces around a sense-horizon in which commoners—the famous 99 percent of the Occupy movements—are an active force in the constitution of social systems (whether a political system or economic system). For example, the massive student struggles in Canada against fees (and in the United Kingdom and United States) are pointing at a different education system. The Occupy movement in the United States and of the Indignatos in Spain are pointing to a different economic system; the struggle in Tahrir Square, to a different political system. In all cases, the struggles point at a different notion of democracy, one in which people have the power to veto (or in the language of grassroots assemblies based on consensus) to block some government decisions (like the increase in education fees in Quebec) or practice (like the lax systems of regulatory practices that facilitates bank frauds at the expenses of pensions and savings). These struggles are struggles of a plurality that see the state as a distorted commons that need to be communalized and that fight the corruption of money through deep democratic means.

CONCLUSION: WHAT HAS TO BE DONE?

The D in Plan C&D is thus not only an adjunct to the C of commons. The commons that emerge in the squares and streets of contemporary struggles are often democratic in the deep, participatory sense. By deep democracy I mean not a particular model of democracy—like representative versus direct democracy—but a sense-horizon that urges us to select direct democratic means whenever it is possible. The D stands for democracy as a weapon for the communalization of property, whether in the hands of the state or in the hands of individual capitalists—that is, especially, for user communities to seize and control the right to manage, redefine, and enlarge the boundaries of inclusions of productive and

reproductive systems. In this sense, in the eyes of the 1 percent democracy becomes too much when it infringes its right to rule over our lives. From a C&D perspective, the first act of democracy occurs when a plurality far greater than the 1 percent claims ownership of a resource, in that it claims the rights of exclusion and management, two rights within that bundle of rights called property, which are the necessary condition to actualize a resource as a commons.²⁵

Thus, to turn into a commons (communalize) a factory, a university, a water system, a park, a public administration, or whatever, a plurality must claim back the right to manage. This explosion of management corresponds to a sudden increase in the volume of social cooperation and the corresponding release of playful energies that follows a breakdown of management systems and the scattering—to different degrees—of management functions into the social body. These energies can be channeled into the cyclical time of system sustainability (reproduction) through deep democratic forms of governments, that is, institutions of the commons. Democracy and the commons are two sides of the same coin. The extent of communalization is not possible because of power relations and insufficient organizational reach, but a plurality of commoners can start to claim a resource (or an institution) as a commons from which they are excluded and cannot manage. The very act of claiming is the first step of an organizational journey that it is necessary to undertake to actually turn the resources that are claimed as commons into an actual commons system.²⁶ One thing that is certain is that Plan C&D requires the enthusiastic participation and the intelligence of everybody.

NOTES

1. "Communism is for us not a *state of affairs* which is to be established, an *ideal* to which reality [will] have to adjust itself. We call communism the *real* movement which abolishes the present state of things. The conditions of this movement result from the premises now in existence." Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, "The German Ideology," in *Marx-Engels Collected Works*, vol. 5, trans. Richard Dixon et al. (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1975), 51.

2. "A community of free individuals, carrying on their work with the means of production in common, in which the labour power of all the different individuals is consciously applied as the combined labour power of the community." Karl Marx, *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy*, vol. 1, ed. Frederick Engels and trans. Samuel Moore and Edward Aveling (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1958), 82–83.

3. Michel Crozier, Samuel P. Huntington, and Joji Watanuki, *The Crisis of Democracy: Report on the Governability of Democracies to the Trilateral Commission* (New York: New York University Press, 1975). For a discussion of the rise and fall of Keynesianism in relation to class struggle, see Massimo De Angelis, "Marx and Primitive Accumulation: The Continuous Character of Capital's 'Enclosures,'" *The Commoner* 2 (2001). <http://www.commoner.org.uk/02deangelis.pdf>

4. With reference to this period, the term was coined by Midnight Notes Collective, "New Enclosures," *Midnight Notes* 10 (1990). <http://www.midnightnotes.org/newenclos.html>. Subsequently, a series of different analyses have mushroomed to refer to the role and concept of primitive accumulation in advanced capitalism. See for example, Werner Bonefeld, "History and Social Constitution: Primitive Accumulation Is Not Primitive," *The Commoner* 1 (March 2002). <http://www.commoner.org.uk/debbonefeld.pdf>; De Angelis, "Marx and Primitive Accumulation"; Massimo De Angelis, "Separating the Doing and the Deed: Capital and the Continuous Character of Enclosures," *Historical Materialism* 12, no. 2 (2004): 57–87; David Harvey, *The New Imperialism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003).

5. See, for example, John Walton and David Seddon, *Free Markets and Food Riots* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1994).

6. See, for example, Michael Dooley, David Folkes-Landau, and Peter Garber, "An Essay on the Revised Bretton Woods System," Working Paper 9971, National Bureau of Economic Research, Cambridge, MA (September 2003).

7. For a conceptualization of deals as a control grid within which class struggle is regulated, see Midnight Notes Collective, "A Conceptualization of the Law in the Manifold of Work," *Midnight Notes* 5 (1985). <http://www.midnightnotes.org/outlawnotes.html>

8. Calculated from the Case-Shiller Home Price Index. <http://www.standardandpoors.com>

9. Calculated from the data provided by U.S. Census Bureau. www.census.gov/const/uspricemon.pdf. The global trend is still downward. See Deniz Igan and Prakash Loungani, "Global House Prices Still Showing Down Trend," *IMF Survey Magazine: IMF Research*, September 17, 2012. <http://www.imf.org/external/pubs/ft/survey/so/2012/RES091712A.htm>

10. For a discussion of crisis of social stability as opposed to other forms of crisis, see Massimo De Angelis, *The Beginning of History* (London: Pluto, 2007).

11. For an historical and theoretical discussion of how Keynesianism was founded on particular deals with sections of the working class, see Massimo De Angelis, *Keynesianism, Social Conflict and Political Economy* (London: Macmillan, 2000). For a theoretical discussion of the relation between capitalist development and social stratification, see the interventions in *The Commoner*, "Value Strata, Migration and 'Other Values,'" *The Commoner* 12 (2007). <http://www.commoner.org.uk/?p=27>. For a discussion of the current crisis along the lines proposed here, Midnight Notes Collective and Friends, "From Crisis to Commons," 2009. www.midnightnotes.org/Promissory%20Notes.pdf.

12. With this I mean circuits based on the M-C-M formula (i.e., money-commodity-more money) that Marx discusses in Chapter 3 of *Capital*. For a discussion of contemporary capitalism following Marx's circuits analysis, see De Angelis, *The Beginning of History*.

13. Hans-Georg Moeller, *Luhmann Explained: From Souls to Systems* (Chicago: Open Court, 2006).

14. De Angelis, *The Beginning of History* (London: Pluto, 2007).

15. Incidentally, when in the past the possible was also perceived as a system of different nature, as noncapitalist, like in the era of the 19th-century revolutions, the nuclear arsenal of the Cold War contributed to making sure it was kept at a

distance. The thesis of the end of history was first proposed by Francis Fukuyama, *The End of History and the Last Man* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1992).

16. See, for example, the report in the *New York Times* by Edmund L. Andrews, "Greenspan Concedes Error on Regulation," *The New York Times*, October 23, 2008. <http://www.nytimes.com/2008/10/24/business/economy/24panel.html>

17. In the United States, this view was taken by a milieu comprising diverse people like Senator Richard Shelby, top Republican on the banking committee, Representative Ron Paul, multimillionaire commodity traders, like Jim Rogers, and the bulk of Austrian economists, who would also favor the replacement of the fiat system with a stable dollar backed by precious metals or commodities, thus limiting overall debt creation.

18. See for example Costas Lapavistas, "Greece Must Default and Quit the Euro: The Real Debate Is How," *The Guardian*, September 19, 2011. <http://www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/2011/sep/19/greece-must-default-and-quit-euro>.

19. See Paul Krugman, "Down Argentina Way," *New York Times*, *The Conscience of a Liberal Blog*, May 3, 2012. <http://krugman.blogs.nytimes.com/2012/05/03/down-argentina-way/>.

20. See *The Economist*, "The Price of Cooking the Books," *The Economist*, February 25, 2012, <http://www.economist.com/node/21548229>

21. See Patricio Millan-Smitmans, "Poverty and Informal Employment in Argentina," No. 208, IED Discussion Paper Series, Boston University (May 2010). <http://www.bu.edu/econ/files/2012/11/dp208.pdf>

22. Peter Linebaugh rediscovered the use of this verb among the 13th-century English commoners describing their activities in the forest commons. See Peter Linebaugh, *The Magna Carta Manifesto: Liberties and Commons for All* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008).

23. Silvia Federici, "Feminism and the Politics of the Commons," *The Commoner* (January 2011). <http://www.commoner.org.uk/?p=113>

24. As noted by Caffenzis, "A public space is ultimately a space owned and opened/closed by the state, it is a *res-publica*, a public thing. A common space, in contrast, is opened by those who occupy it, that is, those who live on it and share it according to their own rules. The worldwide movement of occupiers (through their practice) is demanding common spaces where they can live in order to give body to their political thoughts. That is why the first acts of the Occupations involve housework: where are we to sleep, eat, urinate, defecate, clean up, and so on? This is not trivial, for in discovering the power of bodies that present themselves instead of being re-presented by others, their continued presence multiplies that power and momentum. This is what the government and Wall Street especially hate about the occupations and why there has been so much violence unleashed against them: they prefigure another way to organize society and to create a new commons. The parliaments and council chambers are temples of absence, while the Tahrir Squares of the world are places where a general will is embodied and in action." See George Caffenzis, "In the Desert of Cities: Notes on the Occupy Movement in the US," *Reclamations Blog*, January 27, 2012. <http://www.reclamationsjournal.org/blog/?p=505>

25. "Groups of individuals are considered to share communal property rights when they have formed an organization that exercises at least the collective-choice

rights of management and exclusion in relationship to some defined resource system and the resource units produced by that system. In other words, all communal groups have established some means of governing themselves in relationship to a resource." Elinor Ostrom, Boudewijn Bouckaert, and Gerrit De Geest, *Private and Common Property Rights*, Vol. 1 (Cheltenham: Edward Elgar, 2000), 342. See also Elinor Ostrom, *Governing the Commons: The Evolution of Institutions for Collective Action* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990).

26. This is, for example, the campaign for water as a commons in Italy that ended with a victorious referendum against privatization in 2011, but also was unable to stop corporate management of water systems.

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CHAPTER 2

Brazilian Socialist Roots and Global Communist Horizons in the World Social Forum

Teivo Teivainen

INTRODUCTION

Emerging with the new millennium, the World Social Forum (WSF) boosted hopes of creating postcapitalist alternatives for our world. As thousands of activists converged for the first forum in Porto Alegre, Brazil, in January 2001, the hangover some of the Left had experienced with the fall of the Berlin Wall and the end-of-history thesis seemed to be fading away. Thereafter, the WSF has expanded to various continents. Apart from the main forum currently organized every second year, the WSF has become a process that has mushroomed into a myriad of local and thematic events. It has also encountered various kinds of frustrations and contradictions. Some of these contradictions are related to debates between a more hierarchic logic of transformation, which, within the Left, is often associated with traditional communist parties, and a more horizontal logic, often associated with autonomist and anarchist tendencies.

The Brazilian socialist educational theorist Paulo Freire once stated that in order to change the world we must first know that it is indeed possible to change it.¹ This helps explain why, during its first years, the WSF experienced spectacular growth and provided so much inspiration for social movements and other actors engaged in processes of democratic transformation. The apparently simple WSF slogan “another world is possible” caused enthusiasm because it helped undermine the demobilizing influence of another simple slogan, generally attributed to Margaret Thatcher, according to which “there is no alternative” to the existing capitalist order.

The alternatives promoted through the WSF are so many that it sometimes seems like a bazaar of loosely connected ideas. A significant difference with many earlier attempts to articulate strands of Left-leaning movements is that in a social forum no one is supposed to represent or lead the multitude of actors that come together. The WSF has thereby strongly rejected the idea of a vanguard, traditionally associated with Leninist parties. From the perspective of traditional communist certainties, the WSF may feel like a pluralist chaos.

The WSF could be considered an attempt to transform the globalization protest movements of the 1990s into global democratization movements of the 21st century. Instead of merely protesting against the global capitalist institutions, the WSF was created to propose concrete alternatives. As has often happened in the history of radical movements, moving from protest to proposals proved to be a complicated task. According to the WSF principles, no specific alternatives should be proposed by the forum as a whole, but they were to emerge out of its many internal spaces and processes. An important dimension in the debates about the another world—which the WSF claims is possible—has been how this possible world connects with historical socialist and communist alternatives. For some participants, one obvious difference with the state socialisms of the past is that the WSF's visions of the future have a global scope.² Others emphasize the role of the local community as an alternative to capitalist globalism. The debate is, of course, not only about the scale of the visions.

As wildly contested concepts, socialism and communism have also had multiple meanings inside the social forums. Communism has been resignified and rehabilitated by successful seminars and street-credible books in recent years, but for many it still carries the connotations of Soviet-style authoritarianism. Coming from a country, Finland, where a particular geopolitical relationship with the USSR contributed to a close association between the radical wing of the communist movement and an attachment to the Soviet model, I find it difficult to liberate the language of communism from its Stalinist baggage. In order to refer to nonstate-centric attempts at commons-based democratic alternatives that resonate with the WSF, I would rather change one letter: to commonism.³

Inside the WSF, we can refer to a communist tradition when a militant of the Communist Party of India (Marxist-Leninist) promotes state-led industrialization in a panel intervention, but prefer to use the term commonism when an anarchist collective organizes meals in a WSF youth camp. Insofar as they claim to replace capitalist economy with a more democratic alternative, both can be considered expressions of socialism. Many of the participants in these activities may, of course, use different terminology. The meaning of communism is sometimes expanded to cover a wide variety of rebellious attitudes, whereas socialism is sometimes reduced to the really existing kind.

Even if in principle one should not represent a political party inside the WSF, many of its prominent activists have well-known affiliations. Militants of various communist parties have played an important role in the process, such as the members of the Indian parties since the preparations for the Mumbai Forum of 2004 started. According to one count, there were representatives of 30 communist parties in the WSF of 2005 in Porto Alegre.⁴ While Trotskyism is a label sometimes used rather loosely, various organizations claiming to represent or build the true Fourth International in the spirit of Leon Trotsky have been visible in all forums. Members of different social democratic parties have also participated actively in the process, some of them connected to trade union movements. Hard-core Maoists, especially the ones with sympathies toward armed struggle, have often considered the WSF a hopelessly revisionist or bourgeois operation. Various forms of antiparty anarchism have been highly influential in the whole process, but there have been few explicitly anarchist people in the main councils and committees of the WSF.

The relationship of the WSF with political parties has had many twists and turns. I will focus mainly on the relationships that played a key role in the emergence of the WSF in Brazil. The Brazilian context was crucial in the birth of the WSF and the drafting of the principles that still guide its operations. In the late 1990s and early 2000s, it was a country with some of the world's most vibrant left-wing political parties and movements. The way the Brazilian Left interpreted and reformulated tenets of the communist tradition of the past had an impact on how the WSF became an inspiration for future attempts to create a world beyond capitalism. There have, of course, been many other factors, including the Mexican Zapatista rebels who have not had much direct involvement in the WSF, but are often recognized as an important source of inspiration. However, the role of the Brazilians has been fundamental. In this chapter, I will first briefly explore some of the origins of the social forum process, analyzing mostly the way socialism and communism has been reinterpreted among the Left in Brazil. More specifically, the focus will be on the ideological evolution of the Workers' Party PT (Partido dos Trabalhadores). I will then analyze what kinds of ideological elements were enshrined in the Charter of Principles of the WSF and how they have been interpreted in the social forum process. Finally, I will reflect on what the social forum process may tell us about socialist and communist futures.

SOCIALIST RENEWAL IN THE WORKER'S PARTY: BEYOND VANGUARDISM

The emergence of the WSF in Brazil was made possible by a combination of various historical processes. Prominent among these were the dynamism and transnational connectivity of Brazilian social movements and a

context in which a socialist political party, the PT, had experienced significant growth, while in most other parts of the world socialist projects had entered a crisis. Even when the WSF has grown far beyond its Brazilian roots, many of its elements can be comprehended only by analyzing the particular context in which it first emerged.

In order to situate the WSF in historical and ideological context, it is useful to understand the evolution of the PT. One of the particularities of the PT among the world Socialist Left is that it grew significantly in strength during the period of the final crisis of the Communist Eastern European states. From the perspective of the present, after the PT has been a governing party in Brazil for over a decade, it must also be remembered that holding state power has taken an ideological toll. Radical socialist visions of the past have been gradually, though not totally, replaced by the practical dilemmas of confronting the capitalist world economy.

One of the keys to the successful growth of the PT in the 1980s and 1990s was its mode of connecting with social movements. The party expressed socialist politics that must, at least in principle, include respect for diversity.⁵ It became increasingly critical of the vanguardist ideas of the previous radical Left organizations in Brazil.⁶ According to Gianpaolo Baiocchi, there were initially two opposing positions about civil society within the PT. The vanguardist minority position stated that the PT activists should “occupy positions in social movements and ‘bring them along’ ideologically.” The other position, different from the main traditions of socialist parties, was that the PT ought to be the reflex of social movements, assuming the society is always already organized.⁷

Some of the later formulations on the nondeliberative nature of the WSF came to bear an ideological resemblance with the increasingly anti-vanguardist inclinations of the PT. The causality should, however, not be considered unidirectional. Over the years the PT’s ideological reformulations were also influenced by the surrounding social movements. The party’s impact on social movements was intertwined with the movements’ influence in the party. The fluidity of the party–movement relationship made it relatively easy for the Brazilian Left to adopt nondichotomous conceptions, in which party politics and movement activism could be seen as complementary dimensions of transformative practices. This also differentiated the PT from many other Latin American Left parties.

In some of the neighboring countries one of the problems of the Left has been the fragmentation into various small parties that fail to convince the electorate or create a significant mass base. The PT managed to construct an alliance of groups that had relatively significant ideological differences but were nevertheless willing to work within one party. The influence of Antonio Gramsci’s theories on Brazilian Marxism and on PT in particular provided an important ideological justification for a “broad political coalition inclusive not only of Marxist tendencies but also bourgeois

social democratic elements.”⁸ The Gramscian theoretical influence would later be visible also in the WSF Charter of Principles, which I analyze later in the chapter. The official internal tendencies of the PT have ranged from Trotskyist supporters of the Fourth International to more social-democratically minded groups. Even if some of the tendencies sometimes resembled independent parties, all in principle accepted that the PT is not simply an electoral alliance. This extraordinary capacity for articulation was also a practical source of inspiration for the construction of the WSF as a coming-together of diverse groups.

From early on, the PT took distance from the traditional Soviet-style ideology. In its international positions, this was reflected in the 1980s in the expressions of support to the *Solidarność* group in Poland, which was struggling against the Soviet-supported government. Commonalities with the striking workers in Gdansk were later remembered by Lula da Silva when in 2011 he received the Lech Walesa prize and commented to Walesa that “regardless of regime, we both strove for a responsible working class, for solidarity and democracy.”⁹ Among the PT supporters, *petistas*, the most-cited example of a successful revolutionary process before the 1990s was the ideologically heterodox Sandinista revolution in Nicaragua.¹⁰ The party has also expressed support for Cuba, though often more for general anti-imperialist sympathies than a desire to repeat the model of Cuba. In these and other issues, one of the most remarkable features of the PT is that it has been able to articulate tendencies that may at times have significant differences. The dominant moderate tendency of the party, represented most visibly by Lula da Silva, has always faced an internal left-wing opposition. Even if support for the WSF did not cause major discrepancies within the party, of the various tendencies the left-wing *Democracia Socialista* was from the beginning the most active in the WSF. *Democracia Socialista* formed part of the Trotsky-inspired United Secretariat of the Fourth International, member organizations of which in other countries, especially France, also became visibly active in the global WSF process.

In its first national congress in 1991 in São Bernardo do Campo, the PT debated conceptions of the democratic revolution that was defined as the party’s main goal. The increasing acceptance of the rules of the existing democratic arrangements led to ruptures with some of the groups with Marxist-Leninist tendencies. *Causa Operária* (1990) *Convergência Socialista* (1992) departed, or were forced to leave, the party.¹¹ The latter soon merged into a new party, the United Socialist Workers’ Party (*Partido Socialista dos Trabalhadores Unificado*, PSTU), that would accuse the PT of creating a dichotomy between movements that focus on struggles and the party, which focuses on elections. According to the PSTU, the dichotomy has led to an ever-growing distance between the PT party elite, the rank and file, and the movements.¹² After Lula’s electoral victory of 2002, this

distance became highly contested and caused increasing disillusionment among the social movements, as well as further splits from the party, including a group of the Democracia Socialista militants leaving and forming a new party. As some of the most active Brazilian WSF organizers were affiliated with the Democracia Socialista tendency, the split occasionally implied tensions also inside the forum.

In its second national congress, in 1999 in Belo Horizonte, the PT program of democratic revolution was reaffirmed, and the leftist tendencies such as Democracia Socialista continued in the minority. According to the resolutions of the congress "socialism is not inevitable,"¹³ even though the construction of a radically different society was maintained as the main goal. The ideological move from the inevitability toward the possibility of a different world also prepared ground for the enthusiasm with which the Brazilian organizers of the WSF received the slogan coined by Ignacio Ramonet of *Le monde diplomatique*: "another world is possible." Even if some participants and groups in the WSF have stated that another world is not only possible but also necessary, they tend to refer to a moral and political necessity of transformation rather than a set of historical laws that would make a noncapitalist future inevitable.

As there were many other actors involved, the role of PT in the emergence of the WSF should not be exaggerated. Nevertheless, it is fair to say that without the PT the WSF would not have emerged in Brazil. The city of Porto Alegre, where four of the first five main WSF events took place, was in many ways a showroom of the PT's manner of governance. The participatory budget planning of Porto Alegre, which had started with the party's first electoral victory in the late 1980s, was one of the achievements that the PT was proud to show the world as an example of democratic socialism. As the WSF was a civil society space, the PT did not participate officially in the forum bodies, but in practice its presence was significant. During the emergence of the WSF there was no significant challenger to the PT inside the Brazilian radical Left, the Partido Comunista do Brasil (PCdoB) probably being the most significant contender, although it also allied itself to the PT in federal elections. This also meant that the presence of the PT did not lead to major party-political struggles.

As most of the first WSF organizers had some kind of relationship (not always as party members) with the PT and there were no other parties of the same caliber involved, there was not much space for party-political struggle about the control of the WSF. The PT could to a certain extent take the WSF support for granted, and therefore it did not need to make an effort to have formal involvement in its governing organs. Somewhat paradoxically, the important role of the party helps explain why the original Brazilian organizers of the WSF were able to keep the forum as a formally nonparty space and why no major struggles over political representation became visible. This can be contrasted with the organization

of the fourth WSF in India in 2004. As various Indian communist parties were active around the forum, the involvement and struggles over representation of parties became a major concern. Without delving deeper into counterfactual history, had the WSF first emerged, for example, in India, the conception of a civil society space supposedly uncontaminated by political parties would have been different.

THE IDEOLOGICAL BOUNDARIES OF THE CHARTER OF PRINCIPLES

When the first WSF had proven much more successful than expected, the Brazilian organizers together with friends and collaborators from elsewhere, especially France, decided during the first months of 2001 that it would be important to ground the process in new arrangements. These included writing down its basic principles and establishing an International Council.

The ideological and organizational boundaries of the WSF were most clearly codified in its Charter of Principles.¹⁴ Within the Brazilian Organizing Committee, the main responsibility in writing the first draft of the Charter of Principles was given in early 2001 to Francisco Whitaker, of the Brazilian Justice and Peace Commission. Since Whitaker's conception of the WSF was that of purely a space and against any concessions toward vanguardism, the other key person of the Brazilian Organizing Committee encouraged to take part in the drafting was João Pedro Stédile, of the Landless Rural Workers' Movement MST. Stédile's movement-oriented position was assumed to balance that of Whitaker.

The first draft of the Charter of Principles was discussed and accepted by the Brazilian Organizing Committee on April 9, 2001, in São Paulo. Two months later it was submitted for discussion and approval at the founding meeting of the WSF International Council, also in São Paulo. On the basis of the debate of the IC meeting, in which I was present in representation of Network Institute for Global Democratization, a final version was produced. In principle and on the official records, the final version was accepted consensually in that IC meeting on June 10, 2001. In practice, the final formulations were decided mostly by the Brazilian Organizing Committee during the following weeks, without any formal procedures for getting the consent of all the IC members but taking into account the discussion of the IC founding meeting.¹⁵

The Charter of Principles is the main constitution-like mechanism of the WSF. Its role has been emphasized by the fact that the WSF does not officially produce other collective declarations. Unlike many real constitutions, the Charter of Principles contains no guidelines on how the charter itself could ever be amended. The charter makes clear that who gets to define civil society at least in principle gets to decide who can take part in

the WSF, because the WSF “brings together and interlinks only organizations and movements of civil society from all the countries in the world.”¹⁶ The standard definition of civil society offered by the charter states that it is “a plural, diversified, non-confessional, non-governmental and non-party context.”¹⁷

Despite the often repeated lip service to the WSF as an open civil society space, it is by no means open to all kinds of social movements and nongovernmental organizations. There is no strict ideological litmus test to screen the participants, however. Rather than strict boundaries, the ideological orientation that the participants are supposed to have constitutes frontier zones in which many such organizations that may not be committed to all the elements spelled out in the Charter of Principles can in practice take part in the process. The boundaries have been paid more attention when deciding on who becomes member of the governance bodies of the WSF, such as the International Council, but in the main WSF events it is fair to assume that not all participants are committed to all of the WSF principles.

According to the WSF Charter of Principles, the organizations that can participate in the Forum are defined as

groups and movements of civil society that are opposed to neoliberalism and to domination of the world by capital and any form of imperialism, and are committed to building a planetary society directed towards fruitful relationships among humankind and between it and the Earth.¹⁸

This definition situates the WSF within a broad leftist position, adding an environmentalist dimension. Apart from the broad Left prose, the Charter also has elements that can be considered an attempt to take distance from stereotypically traditional communist ideologies. In a seldom mentioned part of the charter, it is stated that the WSF is “opposed to all totalitarian and reductionist views of economy, development and history.” Whereas I have never heard anyone refer to this as a reason to oppose anyone’s role in the forum, it was mentioned by various Marxist-Leninist groups opposed to the WSF 2004 in Mumbai. One example was an open letter by Jose Maria Sison, leader of the Communist Party of the Philippines, a Maoist party engaged in armed struggle. Strongly criticizing the counterrevolutionary character of the WSF, Sison stated that “in accordance with its pro-imperialist ideological and political bias so evident in its charter of principles, it maligns armed revolutionary movements as ‘totalitarian’, ‘reductionist’, ‘violence to the people’, ‘inhuman’ and ‘uncivil.’”¹⁹

Of the main traditions of Marxian-inspired theories, the charter has perhaps been most clearly influenced by the ideas of Antonio Gramsci.²⁰

The Gramscian tone of many of the WSF statements is not surprising if we take into account that during the past decades the intellectual influence of Gramsci has been particularly important in Latin America, especially among the Left in Argentina and Brazil.²¹ The influence of Gramsci has also been significant on some of the key organizers of the WSF in Brazil, such as Cândido Grzybowski who explicitly uses the term civil society.

in its Gramscian sense as the set of relations and processes through which human groups forge their own social identity, their citizenship and political culture, constituting subjects and social actors acting in specific movements and collective organizations.²²

Do the ideological boundaries of the WSF ultimately boil down to a question of Left and Right and does the WSF, in this sense, continue to reproduce rather traditional political ways to define its identity? My own attitude is that while the ideological lines and objectives expressed in the Charter of Principles can be considered to correspond to a broadly understood leftist position, it is also perfectly possible to use some other terminology (such as radically democratic) to define the ideology professed by the WSF. The key organizational difference with traditional left-wing politics is the exclusion of political parties and party-style collective declarations. The key ideological difference is that the WSF emphasizes various forms of domination and resistance without pretensions to build a collective transformative subject based on traditional definitions of class identity. This also helps explain the part of the charter that states that the WSF is “opposed to all totalitarian and reductionist views of economy, development and history” as an attempt to distinguish it ideologically from such (Marxist-Leninist) perspectives that are often regarded by other leftists as class-reductionist or authoritarian.

There exists a deliberate ambiguity in many official WSF documents about whether the WSF is opposed (only) to neoliberalism or (also) to capitalism. According to Virginia Vargas, who represents the *Articulación Feminista Marcosur* in the WSF International Council, the actors that participate in the WSF all agree on the need to oppose neoliberalism, but no similar consensus exists about opposing capitalism.²³ On the other hand, the Charter’s declared opposition to “the domination of the world by capital” seems to give it a decidedly anticapitalist tone. I would argue that the anticapitalist dimension has become more explicit in the WSF process over the years. One of the reasons for this is that as time passes after the fall of the Berlin Wall, Marxist-sounding terminology that includes capitalism has decreasing connotations with Soviet-style hierarchic models.

In the debates on what anticapitalism means in the context of the WSF process, there is often confusion between two different, though interrelated, dimensions. On the one hand, it is a question of defining the social

arrangements that one is opposed to. In this sense, anticapitalism means giving certain epistemological or political priority to capitalism, instead of generalized oppression or some other phenomena, in the intellectual definition of the nature of the world. In this sense the WSF can be considered somewhat anticapitalist, even if it is also opposed to other forms of domination that cannot be reduced to capitalism. On the other hand, there are different answers to the question of what does being “opposed to the domination of the world by capital” mean. Does it imply a plan to destroy, transform, reform, or avoid capitalism? Apart from the Charter of Principles, there has been no attempt to produce a shared position within the WSF about these questions, and it would therefore be incorrect to consider the WSF a unified counterhegemonic bloc in the full Gramscian sense.

EXCLUSION AND PRESENCE OF POLITICAL PARTIES AND GOVERNMENTS

One of the most controversial issues in the WSF boundaries has been that political parties are not supposed to directly participate in it. According to the Charter, the WSF is a “non-party context.” This means that no one should participate in the WSF in representation of a political party, even if it is certainly accepted that the participants can belong to parties. Various members of the International Council, Secretariat, and the organizing committees are affiliated with political parties, but they do not officially represent their parties in the WSF. The way parties’ exclusion is formulated reflects the more general evasion of questions of representation in the WSF, even if their exclusion is also legitimated by attempts to establish dichotomies that posit parties as archaic or hierarchical forms of organization in comparison to the more horizontal realm of civil society.

According to José Corrêa Leite, representative of ATTAC-Brasil in the WSF governance bodies and himself until late 2005 member of the PT, one of the main reasons for excluding political parties in the Charter of Principles was the fear that it would lead to similar decadence as had happened to the São Paulo Forum of Latin American leftist parties.²⁴ While the perceived decadence of the parties, and of representational politics more generally, has been a key factor in this exclusion, it remains a relatively vague justification.

One variant of the decadence argument is that the exclusion is justified because parties are “hierarchic organizations,”²⁵ as if many of the civil society organizations that legitimately participate in the WSF are inherently less hierarchic. It would be difficult to argue, for example, that Greenpeace is, in its internal organization, significantly less hierarchic than all political parties.²⁶ More generally, the main rationale for excluding political parties has been to avoid traditional politicking inside the WSF. In order to create new politics, the WSF founders wanted to disassociate itself from the old

politics of the parties. Some of the Brazilian organizers thought that presenting the WSF as a new kind of initiative would sound more convincing to wide sectors of the society if the parties were excluded.²⁷ While this is partially a question of the image, the WSF organizers wanted to project as creators of something new, the fears about the old practices related to parties are not totally unjustified.

It is often assumed that the presence of parties might imply attempts to hegemonize the WSF process and create undesirable struggles for representation. The organization of the European Social Forum in 2004 in London is frequently cited as an example of the attempt of a party, the Socialist Workers Party (SWP), to conquer the forum process through undemocratic means. While I tend to sympathize with much of the criticism of the way the SWP acted in the process,²⁸ it is possible to argue that the main problem was not that the actor in question was a political party but rather that it was a particular kind of party that acted in ways that were sometimes in contradiction with the democratic principles of the WSF. The counterargument is that this kind of action is something inherent to political parties, and therefore they must be kept out.

The doubts about the role of political parties are widespread among many forum activists because of the disillusionments with the strategy of changing the world through parties that aim at conquering state power. The particular context of left-wing politics and the corresponding party-movement relations in Brazil, as analyzed earlier, also contributed to the exclusion of parties. As the PT was in many ways already present in the organizations and individuals that initiated the WSF process, the formal exclusion never became an issue of major controversy inside the Brazilian Organizing Committee nor inside the PT. In the context of informal presence, the formal exclusion did not make the representatives of the PT feel totally left out. When the WSF process has expanded to contexts where no similarly influential party connected to the social movements exists, the formal exclusion of parties has raised more controversies.

These controversies surfaced, for example, in the WSF International Council meeting of Bangkok in August 2002. The members of the Brazilian Organizing Committee expressed strong criticism of the Italians' plan to invite representatives of political parties to officially take part in the European Social Forum to be held in Florence. The Italian delegates present in the Bangkok meeting responded by accusing the Brazilians of hypocrisy. Referring to the role of the PT in the WSF process in Brazil, the Italians claimed that the "open violation of the Charter by the Brazilians" had always been accepted by the participants in the WSF and therefore the Brazilians "should not get upset if minor political parties play a small role in a regional forum."²⁹ The Rifondazione Comunista party, especially, continued to be involved in the Florence ESF, but the pressure of the Brazilians contributed to its profile being kept lower than initially planned.

A similar controversy emerged during the preparations of the WSF to be held in January 2004 in Mumbai. From the beginning, the two main left-wing parties of the country, the Communist Party of India and the Communist Party of India (Marxist), got intimately involved with the Indian WSF organizing process. In various meetings with the WSF International Council and the Brazil-based International Secretariat, the issue was debated and a mutual understanding was finally reached that the parties should avoid formal involvement in the process. In practice, the presence of the parties was quite visible in the venues of the Mumbai WSF, but the earlier doubts of a possible open violation of the Charter of Principles were diminished since the parties had no formal representation in the Indian Organizing Committee.

Of the exclusions defined by the organizational form of the WSF, the one concerning political parties is the most problematic one. This is mainly because the boundary between a political party and other kinds of political movement can sometimes be difficult to draw, especially in the case of parties that are not in government and do not even necessarily aim at representation in state machineries. The debates on the role of political parties and their difference from other kinds of political movements have generally been waged under state-centric assumptions. In a process that is explicitly global, the organizational forms of political agency need to be conceptualized in ways that transgress some of these assumptions.³⁰ In transnational times, the defining feature of a political party may no longer be whether it focuses on conquering the state.

While many social movements and other nonstate actors have changed their scale of actions and become increasingly transnationalized, political parties are generally assumed to remain within the boundaries of the territorial state. This somewhat dichotomous assumption can be challenged in two different ways. On the one hand, and more empirically, there have been and still are political parties that belong to international networks and federations, some of which may be considered international party formations. Some parties, such as the Greens in many countries, have even emerged with an explicitly transnational or global identity even if often rooted in a particular country. According to the Charter of Principles and the current practice of the WSF, it is possible to conclude that the attitude toward these kinds of global parties will depend on the attitude toward traditional state-centric parties.

More difficult questions emerge if we seriously rethink what the functional equivalents of state-centric political parties may be in the global arena. The political-party-likeness of world-political actors should not be assessed only by comparing their attributes to traditional state-centric parties, or by analyzing genealogically whether they have been constituted through articulations between such parties. At what point should a transnational political organization that aims at radically changing the

world be considered a political party? Does it fall outside the boundaries of the WSF process the moment it decides to participate in elections anywhere or when it competes for political posts? What posts should be considered political? Even if the exclusion of political parties has probably been a strategically rational decision that has contributed to the success of the WSF process, these questions open challenges to the future boundaries of the WSF process that may not be easily answered with simply defining that it a nonparty context.

Similar to the exclusion of political parties, the Charter of Principles defines the forum as a “non-governmental context.” The wording of the charter, however, also suggests a slight difference between these exclusions. Whereas it is categorically stated that party representatives shall not participate in the forum, “government leaders and members of legislatures who accept the commitments of this Charter may be invited to participate.” According to the Charter, this participation is to take place in a personal capacity, even if in practice this clause is mostly nonsense: no president or governor that has appeared in the WSF events has participated, or been perceived to participate, solely in a personal capacity.

The left-wing turn in Latin American electoral politics during the first years of the 2000s revived debates on the potential importance of progressive governments as allies. Lula da Silva and Hugo Chávez have participated as government leaders in various WSF events. The attitude of the social movements within the WSF toward them has never been that of unanimous support, and especially in the case of Lula, there was a significant change of mood after it became clear his government was not going to meet the expectations of radical transformations. In the 2005 WSF in Porto Alegre, among the more radical participants much of the enthusiasm that Lula had received in the earlier editions of the forum was transferred toward Hugo Chávez. In his speech in Porto Alegre, Chávez called the WSF “the most important political event in the world.” While many of the WSF participants had become disillusioned with the politics of the PT government, for some of them, Chávez represented the possibility to support a more outspoken form of radical transformation through the state.

In the first WSF in 2001, the visible presence of representatives of the Cuban government raised mixed feelings. In the closing ceremony, the Cuban delegation received the strongest applause from the audience, comparable only to those of the MST and of the French peasant activist José Bové.³¹ Even if open disapproval of the Cuban government’s participation came mostly from outside the meeting, particularly from the local press, its visible presence in the official ceremonies of the WSF was annoying to some of the organizers as well. In the state of Rio Grande do Sul, during the electoral campaign of 2002, the opposition repeatedly claimed that the PT state government wanted to transform the state into “another

Cuba.” For the electoral strategy of the PT it was important to create an image that would not dissuade potential moderate voters. It was therefore not surprising that the Cuban governmental representatives no longer had a prominent official role in 2002, even though the total Cuban delegation was more numerous than the year before.³²

EXCLUSIONS OF ARMED STRUGGLE

In Latin America, where guerrilla tactics have traditionally formed part of the repertoire of radical resistance, it was not unexpected that the relationship with armed struggle would become one of the issues taken into account in defining the boundaries of the WSF. From the beginning it was evident for most of the organizers that violence was contrary to the spirit of the process, but the concrete mechanisms of excluding armed struggle were subject to various debates.

When the Charter of Principles was drafted, soon after the first WSF in Porto Alegre, there were different opinions about the way armed struggle and use of violence should be excluded. The first draft of the Charter, prepared by the Brazilian Organizing Committee on April 9, 2001, stated that:

The meetings of the WSF are always open to all those who wish to take part in them, except organisations that seek to take people’s lives as a method of political action.³³

Two months later, this clause originated a debate in the founding meeting of the International Council in São Paulo on June 10, 2001. One of the participants of the meeting, François Houtard, reminded that he had taken part in the resistance movement against the Nazis during World War II in Belgium, and absolutely prohibiting the use of violence would have been counterproductive in that context. After modifications, the new, and for the time being final, version of the Charter stated that “neither party representations nor military organizations shall participate in the Forum.”³⁴

During the first WSF in 2001, when the Charter of Principles did not yet exist, the direct and indirect representatives of the Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia (FARC), an armed movement historically allied with the Communist Party of Colombia, received sympathy and support from some participants, even if the FARC spokesperson Oliverio Medina was prohibited from participating by the Federal Police of Brazil.³⁵ Among the Brazilian Left, anti-U.S. sentiments have often been reflected in solidarity toward Colombian rebels, and there were even extra-official recruitment efforts to create internationalist brigades to travel to Colombia. Not all the participants, however, were happy with the presence of a group accused of committing atrocities, and the controversial experience

with FARC representatives influenced the way military organizations were defined out of the WSF.

After the Charter of Principles was approved in June 2001, between the first two annual forums, FARC representatives were not officially allowed to register as participants. In the International Council meeting that formulated the clause on military organizations, it was explicitly mentioned that the formulation means that the FARC could not participate in any future forums. Also the registration of alleged members of Basque armed organizations was cancelled in the WSF 2002 as soon as their identity was determined by the Brazilian Organizing Committee.³⁶ This was intended to send a clear message to any military organizations: keep out of *our* civil society.

The prohibition on military organizations has caused some criticism, almost always by radical Left groups. In Latin America, the exclusion of the FARC has been subject to various debates, though the more ambiguous case of the Mexican Zapatistas is also sometimes referred to. One of the issues implicitly at stake in changing the wording of the Charter of Principles from the original draft's prohibition on "organisations that seek to take people's lives as a method of political action" to the revised and final version's prohibition on "military organizations" was that the former might have left the door more open to the Zapatistas, whereas the latter formally excludes them.

Even if the issue was never explicitly debated in the WSF International Council, emphasizing the ideological attitude toward taking lives might have allowed the inclusion of the Zapatistas, who are often considered ideological mentors of the spirit of Porto Alegre. Defining the boundaries in organizational terms, however, led to their exclusion because of their self-definition as the Zapatista Army for National Liberation (Ejército Zapatista de Liberación Nacional, EZLN). But in a broader sense, Zapatistas have been active participants in the WSF process. Networks that actively support the Zapatista uprising have been particularly active in the Intercontinental Youth Camp of the WSF, and the legitimacy of their participation has never been seriously questioned. Before the Caracas WSF of 2006, a group of well-known activists of the WSF sent an open letter to the Zapatista Communities, published in Mexican newspapers, in which they asked the Zapatistas to take more active part in the WSF process. This also led to an initial intention of two *comandantes* of the EZLN to travel to the Caracas WSF, but just before the planned journey, having already bought air tickets, they decided not to go.³⁷

During the WSF 2004 in Mumbai the parallel activity of Mumbai Resistance, in which various Maoist groups were active, included groups that criticized the WSF for "excluding certain forms of resistance." One of the main organizations that initiated the Mumbai Resistance was the Communist Party of the Philippines, itself engaged in armed struggle. In India

much of the debate on the exclusion of armed groups was erroneously based on the original draft of the Charter of Principles, which was the version that until late 2003 circulated most widely in India, even though it had been replaced by the revised and official version in June 2001.³⁸

The exclusion of armed groups has also motivated accusations of a hypocritical attitude. It is sometimes claimed that a double standard exists in the way the boundaries of the WSF are produced. According to some critics, while the WSF has strictly excluded armed civil society, its boundary toward armed states has been more ambiguous. One of the critics put it in the following terms in late 2003:

If people linked to FARC and other armed resistance groups are excluded, why does the WSF not exclude non-governmental organizations that are directly financed by states like Spain and the UK that wage imperialist war in Iraq?³⁹

The Charter of Principles is opposed to the “use of violence as a means of social control by the State,” but it has generally not been interpreted in ways that would prohibit the participation of organizations that receive money from violent states. This is one expression of a broader question about the relationship of the WSF with state machineries. It is supposedly an autonomous civil society space, but in practice it is connected to various kinds of governmental institutions through funding, security, visa regulations for the participants and many other issues. These links make it very difficult for any global political events and processes to be organized truly autonomously from the state. Even if the nonstate commonist tendencies within the WSF may sometimes claim to be free from state interference, sidestepping state structures is not easy.

FUTURES IN THE FORUM

Even if it is often depicted as an open space in which all flowers may bloom, the WSF has to deal with various kinds of boundaries. As seen earlier, some of these boundaries are connected to the state. Their analysis reveals that the WSF is not as autonomous from governmental structures as some of its participants and principles seem to assume. Commonist ideals often meet statist realities.

The WSF also has ideological boundaries that make it possible to locate it vis-à-vis historical movements and tendencies of the Left. The most concrete expression of these boundaries is the Charter of Principles of the WSF, which defines the WSF as a space for movements and groups that are “opposed to neoliberalism and to domination of the world by capital and any form of imperialism.” I have argued earlier that the WSF can be considered an example of moving from globalizations protests toward an emphasis on

global democratization. Does this mean that it can be regarded as a continuation or reincarnation of the internationalism of the Left?

Within the WSF sphere of intellectual influence, Peter Waterman has been one of the most vocal proponents of a new internationalism, particularly in relation to a new global labor solidarity. He locates the new labor solidarity, expressions of which can be found in the global justice movements and the WSF, "amongst many other social-movement internationalisms." One of its key elements, as compared to the old-style internationalisms, is the emphasis on recognizing workers beyond those in the traditional union organizations as equal contributors. As examples of the other movements that are building new internationalisms, Waterman lists "women's, ecological, non-fundamentalist religious, indigenous and precarious workers, rural, urban and other movements."⁴⁰

As with many previous articulations of transformative or antisystemic movements, it has been easier to formulate what the forum is opposed to than what the desired future world looks like or how we are supposed to get there. Some principles, however, apply to the WSF method of transformation. Compared to previous transnational alliances seeking radical change of the world system—such as the early trade-union-based movements or Communist-Party-based internationals—many of today's globalization protest movements seem to take more seriously the idea that democratic change needs to be generated through democratic forms of action. This is reflected in the emphasis on horizontal networks rather than hierarchic organizations. One of its manifestations is the idea of an open space, which has become a catchword of the social forums.

The open-space idea has many democratic implications. One of them, expressed also in Waterman's new internationalism, is that no particular movement should be able to claim that its aims have intrinsic strategic priority over others. The class contradictions that your movement is facing should have no priority over the gender contradictions we confront. My sexual identity is no less important than your ethnicity. This democratic coexistence in the open spaces created by the movements has been refreshing and empowering. At the same time, its relativistic undertones can become frustrating for the task of devising effective strategies to change the world.⁴¹

Some of the WSF debates on the relativism implied by the horizontal emphasis of the social forums have also been voiced in the discussions around the protests and movements that emerged after the financial crisis erupted around 2008. Arab revolutions, Occupy Wall Street, and Indignados have all had their particular debates on the role of political parties and dilemmas of leaderless horizontal strategies. Often with more communist than communist inclinations, trying to change the world and avoiding statist strategies and logic of representation has not proven an easy task. There is, however, a constant process of learning.

One of the dimensions of the open space method on which there exists confusion is the consensus principle. A visible interpreter and participant of the Occupy Wall Street movement, David Graeber, has pinned it down in following terms:

*Consensus is not a set of rules. It's a set of principles. Actually I'd even go so far to say that if you really boil it down, it ultimately comes down to just two principles: everyone should have equal say (call this "equality"), and nobody should be compelled to do anything they really don't want to do (call this, "freedom").*⁴²

Graeber's commentary on Occupy Wall Street can also be applied to the principles of the WSF. The equality principle means that no single movement should be considered more equal than others. This principle usually has the connotations of avoiding the risk of domination by Eurocentric male labor movements or state-centric communist movements. Considering the current fragility of both of these movements, avoidance of domination by them may sometimes rely on simplified straw-man arguments, but as I explained previously, the principle has more general democratic (and potentially relativistic) implications. One expression of the freedom principle described by Graeber is the way the WSF has avoided making statements that could be taken to represent the opinion of all of its participants.

Even if their participants may often have few connections, some of the dilemmas the WSF and Occupy Wall Street face are similar. One of the differences is that many of the newer protest movements have been more locally focused in their aims and tactics than the grand schemes of the WSF. As their methods of networking have been based on more autonomous conceptions, relatively few new spaces or nodes for interaction and articulation between the new protest movements have become visible. In contrast, the WSF has been dealing with more internationalist concerns.

For the WSF, one of the big challenges is to what extent it can be useful in the articulations between these new processes. In July 2012 a group of activists from Occupy Wall Street participated as observers in the International Council meeting of the WSF in Monastir, Tunisia. Apart from the formal seminars, there were evening events in which Occupy activists exchanged ideas with new African movements, including the Arab region as well as important new groups such as the Yen a Marre ("Enough Is Enough") youth movement from Senegal. The logic of these interactions was obviously different from traditional communist internationalisms, in the sense that the mechanisms of representation were often unclear.

As many of the newer protest movements, especially in Europe and the United States, avoid creating representative structures, it is sometimes

challenging to understand how they can form articulations between themselves. The open space method of the forums and autonomist nonstate conceptions of the commons which makes more sense in local settings, but processes involving transnational mobility organizing normally need to engage with states, at least if crossing controlled borders, and somehow deal with issues of representation or delegation if sending members to a meeting.

During its first years of existence, the WSF tried to evade the questions of structured procedures and simply cling to an open-space discourse. This sometimes led to paradoxical situations. For example, when the International Council had been established in 2001, the question of enlarging the council membership soon emerged. As the WSF was supposedly an open space and, as an open space supposedly has no structured procedures, there was no mechanism to process membership applications that started arriving from interested organizations in different parts of the world. So the strict application of an open space methodology, which implied that no procedures were needed, actually led to a closure of the space, since there were no mechanisms of inclusion either. This situation went on for over a year and resulted in embarrassments for the internationalist image of the WSF. It was gradually understood that open space should not mean the total absence of structure—and rules for processing International Council membership applications were drafted.

Avoiding questions of representation was one of the explicit operational principles of the WSF Organizing Committee during the first years of the forum. As explained earlier, this was not so difficult in the Brazilian political context, but once the forum started its global expansion issues of representations were bound to appear. Dealing with the low numbers of representatives from Africa in the International Council was one concrete issue that demanded solutions in which representation could not be totally avoided. While relying on spontaneous self-organizing may be easier in a social center, internal decision making mechanisms of the WSF have a global scale and demand more detailed procedures.

CONCLUSION

Rather than an embryo of any future world, the WSF should be seen as an experiment in creating the conditions for learning, networking, and organizing between social movements in relatively transnational and global contexts. It has not always practiced what its principles preach, as evidenced by the tensions between its nonstate communist leanings and state-centric realities. The learning and the dilemmas have been similar to those of many more locally based new social movements, but the specific nature of the WSF as an explicitly global process articulating a wide variety of concerns is still unique. Whatever its own organizational future, the

WSF is likely to remain an important example of the attempts to create a democratic world through democratic means.

NOTES

1. Paulo Freire, *Pedagogia da indignação. Cartas pedagógicas e outros escritos* (São Paulo: UNESP, 2000).

2. On the cosmopolitan dimensions of the WSF, see Giuseppe Caruso, *Cosmopolitan Futures: Global Activism for a Just World* (Helsinki: Into, 2012).

3. Even if the attempts by Michael Hardt and others to “reclaim the common in communism” are fascinating, in this chapter I prefer the term “commonism”—with an “o”—for nonstate-centric attempts at commons-based democratic alternatives. I will mainly use the term “communism”—with a “u”—to refer to the ideological tradition associated with Soviet-style state-centrism. I consider socialism to be a broader term, covering various kinds of aspirations of democratic transformations of the capitalist economy, including both revolutionary and reformist tendencies. See Michael Hardt, “The Common in Communism,” *Rethinking Marxism* 22, no. 3 (2010): 346–356 and Nick Dyer-Witheford, “Commonism,” *Turbulence* 1 (2007): 28–29.

4. John Catalinotto, “Communist Parties at World Social Forum,” *Workers World*, February 13, 2005. http://www.workers.org/2005/world/wsf_cp_0217/index.html.

5. For an account of the early ideological history of the PT, see Michael Löwy, “A Red Star Is Rising over Brazil,” *Monthly Review* 43, no. 11 (1992): 51–56.

6. André Singer, *O PT* (São Paulo: Publifolha, 2001), 40.

7. See Gianpaolo Baiocchi, “The Party and the Multitude: Brazil’s Workers’ Party (PT) and the Challenges of Building a Just Social Order in a Globalizing Context,” *Journal of World-Systems Research* x, no. 1 (2004): 199–215.

8. Philip Roberts, “Importing Gramsci into Brazil,” *For the Desk Drawer*, March 11, 2013. <http://adamdavidmorton.com/2013/03/importing-gramsci-to-brazil/>

9. Benjamin Barber, “As President Lech Walesa Said to President Lula Da Silva,” *Huffington Post*, October 3, 2011. http://www.huffingtonpost.com/benjamin-r-barber/as-president-lech-walesa_b_992913.html.

10. Singer, *O PT*, 36.

11. *Ibid.*

12. Partido Socialista dos Trabalhadores Unificado, *Venha para O PSTU. É hora de um Partido de luta, de classe, revolucionário e socialista*. São Paulo: PSTU, 2003.

13. Singer, *O PT*, 39.

14. Charter of Principles of the World Social Forum. <http://fsm2011.org/en/wsf-2011>

15. It has caused some confusion that the first draft accepted in April remained on the official WSF homepage, administered by the Brazilian Organizing Committee, for weeks after the São Paulo meeting of June 2001. Especially in India, the first draft circulated widely for more than two years as if it had been the final version. Some of the most impassioned debates on the Charter of Principles were

based on the wrong version. One of the differences between the two is the way it has limited the participation of groups engaged in armed struggle. See Jai Sen, "A tale of Two Charters," in *World Social Forum: Challenging Empires*, ed. Jai Sen, Anita Anand, Arturo Escobar, and Peter Waterman (New Delhi, Viveka Foundation, 2004), 72–75.

16. See *World Social Forum Charter of Principles*, São Paulo, June 10, 2001.

17. *Ibid.*

18. *Ibid.*

19. Jose Maria Sison, "Message of Solidarity to Mumbai Resistance 2004," *Brief Messages and Letters, 2001–Present*, January 17, 2004. <http://www.josemariasison.org/inps/Mumbaioresistancemsgsol170104.htm>

20. Antonio Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*, ed. and trans. Quintin Hoare and Geoffrey Nowell Smith (New York: International Publishers, 1971).

21. José Aricó, *La cola del diablo. Itinerario de Gramsci en América Latina* (Buenos Aires: Punto Sur, 1988); Evelina Dagnino, "Culture, Citizenship, and Democracy: Changing Discourses and Practices of the Latin American Left," in *Cultures of Politics, Politics of Cultures: Re-Visioning Latin American Social Movements*, ed. Sonia E. Alvarez, Evelina Dagnino, and Arturo Escobar (Boulder, Westview, 1988), 33–63.

22. Cândido Grzybowski, "Por que pensar o Fórum Social Mundial?," *Terraviva*, January 2003, 11.

23. Virginia Vargas, "Personal Communication," Miami, June 26, 2003. See also Giovanni Arrighi et al., *Antisystemic Movements* (London: Verso, 1989); La Haine, "No podemos participar en el Foro Social Mundial de Porto Alegre porque creemos que otro mundo es posible sólo destruyendo al capitalismo," Respuesta a la invitación del movimiento piquetero Barrios de Pié a participar en un taller sobre comunicación en el Foro Social Mundial de Porto Alegre 2003, *Rebelión*, January 10, 2003. <http://www.rebelion.org/hemeroteca/sociales/haine100103.htm>

24. For more arguments on how recent mobilizations have been "delegitimizing or even dismantling old organizational forms and political forces of the left," see José Corrêa Leite, "Fragmentation, Convergences and Strategic Goals: Some Pointers from the Thematic Social Forum," *International Viewpoint* IV447 (April 2012). <http://www.internationalviewpoint.org/spip.php?article2574>

25. For example, comments of Virginia Vargas in the roundtable on the Future of the Forum organized by the University of San Marcos in Lima on January 13, 2006.

26. For a view from inside that analyzes the hierarchical structure of Greenpeace, see Jack Mento, *Constructive Confrontation Strategies: Thoughts of a Greenpeace Activist* (Boulder, CO: Conflict Research Consortium Working Paper 15, 1994).

27. Antonio Martins, "Presentation in the Seminar on the World Social Forum" (organized by Conades, Lima, December 12, 2005).

28. As stated by an activist from Indymedia, UK: "We criticise the authoritarian control over the Forum process of a small number of groups: the Social Workers' Party, Socialist Action and Livingston's London Great Authority . . . Local authorities and political parties were dictating the (rules of the) Forum through the control of budget." Stefania Milan, "European Social Forum: Different Paths Emerge," *Inter Press Service*, October 25, 2004. <http://www.worldrevolution.org/article/1587>

29. "European Social Forum. Democratise the WSF [Interview with Vittorio Agnoletto]," *Weekly Worker* 447, September 12, 2002. <http://www.cpgb.org.uk/worker/447/agnoletto.html>

30. See Heikki Patomäki and Teivo Teivainen, "Conclusion: Beyond the Political Party/Civil Society Dichotomy," in *Democratic Politics Globally*, ed. Katarina Sehm-Patomäki and Marko Ulvila (Zed Books: London, 2007), 151–158.

31. "Bové termina como a estrela do Fórum Social," *O Estado de São Paulo*, January 31, 2001, A3.

32. João Domingos, "Guevara é mais lembrado no fórum," *Folha do Estado Cuiabá*, January 23, 2003, 4.

33. *World Social Forum Charter of Principles*, Clause 11.

34. *WSF Charter of Principles*, Clause 9. Even if the official Charter of Principles ends with the text "Approved with modifications by the World Social Forum International Council on June 10, 2001," not all of the final formulations were approved during the June 10 meeting. For example, at least for some participants the final formulation of the text on military organizations was not collectively arrived at during the June 10 meeting.

35. "Porta-voz das Farc é proibido de falar no Fórum," *Folha de São Paulo*, January 27, 2001, A5.

36. Contrary to Jai Sen's interpretation (which he claims is based on information supplied by me), the Basque groups were not excluded because of their Basque nationality but because the Brazilian Organizing Committee was convinced that their presence violated the clause on military organizations. See Sen, "A Tale of Two Charters," 72–75.

37. Confidential interviews in Caracas, January 26, 2006.

38. See Sen, "A Tale of Two Charters."

39. Personal communication by an activist during the Socialist Forum of Sweden, Stockholm, November 23, 2003.

40. Peter Waterman, "COSATU's Dispute with the World Social Forum: A 20th or 21st Century Labour Internationalism?," *Netzwerk IT*, July 12, 2009. <http://www.netzwerkit.de/projekte/waterman/cosat-dispute>

41. Teivo Teivainen, "Global Democratization without Hierarchy or Leadership?" in *Global Crises and the Crisis of Global Leadership*, ed. Stephen Gill (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2012), 181–198.

42. David Graeber, "Some Remarks on Consensus," *Occupy Wall Street* (n.d.). <http://occupywallstreet.net/story/some-remarks-consensus>

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CHAPTER 3

Left Out? The Syrian Revolution and the Crisis of the Left

Firas Massouh

INTRODUCTION

When mass protests erupted in Syria against Bashar al-Assad's regime in March 2011, attention turned toward intellectuals and cultural agents, especially those traditionally and broadly associated with the Left, or, those that are at least perceived to have leftist tendencies. In the minds of the Syrian youth calling for social change, equality, dignity, and freedom, there was an expectation that Left-leaning public intellectuals, academics, artists, and politicians—many of whom had criticized the regime's policies in the past—would eventually take a cue from the protestors and rise to the occasion, leading the charge to establish democracy and develop a comprehensive, principled, and popular program to bring about the fundamental changes in society that Syrians have long sought.

As of the present time, however, this expectation has not been met. The revolution has not received sustained or effective support from the Left, either within Syria or globally. True, some of the most active unconditional supporters of the revolution are on the Far Left of the political spectrum; in Syria they represent the avowedly Far Left sections of the Syrian opposition, namely the Syrian Revolutionary Left,¹ while regionally they tend to be Trotskyist parties, such as the Socialist Forum in Lebanon and the Revolutionary Socialists in Egypt, or Maoist parties, such as the Democratic Way in Morocco.² Such groups publish communiqués, produce literature, organize vigils and sit-ins, participate in demonstrations around the world in support of the Syrian Revolution, and act in the name of the internationalist Left and perpetual revolution. Yet, these groups have a

small membership and an even smaller impact, and while leftists, worldwide, have overwhelmingly celebrated the Tunisian and Egyptian revolutions, they have failed to grant the Syrian Revolution their unanimous support.

This reluctance is symptomatic of an influential current in international leftist politics that clings to the ideals of resistance and anti-imperialism at all costs; lending support to despotic regimes on the pretext of giving priority to the “national question.”³ At least in rhetoric, Syrian sovereignty is defined along Ba’athist ideological lines, and clearly, the Stalinist formulation of what constitutes a nation was one of the main pillars of the Ba’ath Party’s organization of the multitude of ethnicities and religious communities within Syria. Predicated on the belief in Arab cultural unity, the Ba’ath’s slogan “One Arab Nation Bearing an Eternal Message” falls in line with Josef Stalin’s definition of the nation as a “historically constituted, stable community of people, formed on the basis of a common language, territory, economic life, and psychological make-up manifested in a common culture.”⁴ In 1963, with the advent of The Syrian Arab Republic, the qualifier Republic came to serve an important ideological function in signifying antimonarchist sentiments directed at Arab monarchies long perceived to be in league with Western interests. Yet, as Yassin al Haj Saleh argues, “we find that most importance is attached to the qualifier ‘Arab,’ followed by ‘Syrian, with ‘Republic’ a poor third.”⁵ It was however, the party’s other main motto, “Unity, Liberty, Socialism,” that declared the Ba’ath’s socialist agenda, based on the assumption that Arab unity could be achieved only through a socialist system of property and development, uniquely capable of overcoming the social and economic legacy of imperialism and colonialism, and emancipating Syria’s workers and peasants. Many Syrian communists saw past this political rhetoric and believed Ba’athist socialism to be “nothing but anarchy, economic crisis and the constant retreat before the feudalists and the big bourgeoisie.”⁶

However, even if its socialist credentials were called into question, the Ba’ath, and the Assad regime by extension, was able to maintain credibility by prioritizing an anti-imperialist agenda, upholding pan-Arabism ideals and then gradually positioning itself as the lynchpin in the Iran-Syria-Hezbollah Axis of Resistance. It was thus successful in creating a narrative that appeals to pan-Arabists as well as anti-American, anti-Israel, third-worldist, and antiwar strains on the Left.

Today, this dubious position has arguably contributed to the international community’s inertia in the face of the continually escalating humanitarian crisis in Syria, but more significant for this discussion and for the future of Syria is the status of the Left as an oppositionary force within Syrian politics, a status which is far from assured. Political Islam increasingly represents a far more coherent and effective opposition to the Assad

regime. Some of the factors for this are the recent ascension to power of Islamist political parties in Tunisia and Egypt, which has given a boost to public support of Islamic resistance, and, the funding by Salafists in the Gulf of certain hard-line rebel groups that are advancing against forces loyal to Assad and are promoting pan-Islamic ideas in the areas they seize. The nature of the conflict and the role and character of the opposition is also misconstrued in the increasingly prevalent discourse in international mainstream media, claiming that the grassroots uprising has mutated, first into a “civil war,” and now into a “proxy war,” as Hillary Clinton recently stated.⁷ This misrepresentation of the situation confirms the regime’s narrative that there was never a genuine revolution, rather a sectarian insurgency aiming to destabilize Syria’s sovereignty, thereby serving the interests of monarchist Sunni regional powers in their fight against the Axis of Resistance.

However, is not the rise of Islamo-Fascism—as Slavoj Žižek ponders—primarily “the result of the Left’s failure, but simultaneously proof that there was a revolutionary potential, a dissatisfaction, which the Left was not able to mobilize”?⁸ Is not this inability to understand, mobilize and support the revolutionary current in Syria, the result of a failure on the part of some on the Left to recognize the Fascistic tenets of the Syrian Ba’ath? Indeed, as the conflict in Syria approaches its third year, and the eventual social, cultural, economic, and political fallout of the revolution remains far from predictable, it appears the Left has rather a lot to answer for. Arguably, the uncertainty that surrounds Syria today is nowhere more apparent than in what may, in general terms, be called the crisis of the Left.

Today, the Left is presented with a mixture of existential challenges; to imagine communism is to completely re-think its social project and recuperate its intellectual independence as a necessary condition for organizational and political independence, especially if the Left is “to remain relevant in the eyes of the masses whose basic interests it purports to represent.”⁹ In the context of the Syrian Revolution, many elements in the Left have opted out of this project in exchange for visions of imaginary ideal societies; visions that are marred by antiquated ideas of anti-imperialism, the limited framework of Cold War politics, and the support for a quasi-socialist, so-called progressive, authoritarian regime, all to the detriment of genuine revolutionary social movement.

This chapter begins by arguing that the discourse of these currents in the Left is not grounded in the material conditions of Syrian society and is reactionary as a result. I briefly outline some of the debates that have emerged on this issue over the last two years and in doing so demonstrate how some elements in the international Left have supported the revolutions in Tunisia and Egypt, but not in Syria. I then attempt to address the material conditions of Syrian society by looking at how, in Assad’s Syria,

leftist politics were crippled by ideological Balkanization, organizational hopelessness and feebleness, and political de-classing, and how much of its leadership has been marred by the morass of personal egotism, power-mongering, and political opportunism.

It is not tenable here to review in detail the power struggles and complex feuds that helped shape and form Syrian politics, or lack thereof. However, it will suffice to provide a brief overview of how the Ba'ath Party was "transformed," "inflated," and "de-ideologised," so as to "fit into the authoritarian format" of Assad's regime and to neutralize and break up the Left,¹⁰ all the while inculcating mistrust among Syria's diverse ethnic and religious communities. It is imperative to understand the role that Bashar al-Assad's regime played in marginalizing Syria's Sunni community, turning it into a demonized underclass. I contend that in order for the Left to reassert its relevance today, it must recognize, interrogate, and address the nexus between class and sectarian politics.

THE LEFT, THE ARAB SPRING, AND THE SYRIAN REVOLUTION

When the revolutions of the Arab Spring erupted, first in Tunisia in December 2010 and then in Egypt at the dawn of 2011, many leftist intellectuals, antiwar activists, staunch third-worldists, and self-proclaimed anti-imperialists gave two cheers to what they, and indeed many others, perceived to be popular uprisings against two of the most authoritarian, corrupt, and oppressive regimes in the Middle East/North Africa region. Despite having a foreign policy that was seemingly grounded in an awareness of the requirements to maintain their Arab and Muslim identity, Zine El Abidine Ben Ali and Hosni Mubarak's regimes were classically associated with Western interests in the region. In their respective foreign relations, both Ben Ali and Mubarak maintained a decidedly pro-Western path, particularly in regard to the Arab-Israeli conflict. Following a bloodless coup d'état that ousted President Habib Bourguiba in 1987, Ben Ali ascended to the presidency but retained his predecessor's outlook in "offering Israelis the promise of diplomatic recognition" and "engaged in behind-the-scenes assistance to further Israeli-Arab mutual recognition."¹¹

Similarly, Mubarak ensured that the Camp David Accords—the peace treaty signed in 1979 by his predecessor Anwar al Sadat and Israeli prime minister Menachem Begin under U.S. president Jimmy Carter's supervision—remained intact. Mubarak was especially criticized for his resoluteness in upholding the peace deal with Israel; the belief that his regime had betrayed the Palestinians was prevalent in Arab public opinion. Ben Ali, on the other hand, decided to break all diplomatic ties with Israel following the outbreak of the Second Palestinian Intifada in 2000.

The Israeli Foreign Ministry spokesman stated that “Israel is surprised at the Tunisian decision. It appears that Tunisia has elected to renounce its potential role as a bridge for dialogue between Israel and its neighbors, thereby harming the critical effort to promote regional peace.”¹² However, Tunisia’s voice in Arab politics was rather meek in comparison to Egypt’s political clout and Israel seemed much less concerned with the fate of Ben Ali than with that of Mubarak. During that tumultuous Egyptian January in 2011, Israel sought to “convince its allies that it is in the West’s interest to maintain the stability of the Egyptian regime.”¹³ Israeli prime minister Benjamin Netanyahu stressed that “the peace between Israel and Egypt has lasted for more than three decades and our objective is to ensure that these relations will continue to exist.”¹⁴ In the eyes of those who equate pro-Israel policies with the maintenance of the unequal economic, cultural, and territorial relationships between the populations of the region—especially where the Palestinian issue is concerned—Israel’s support for Mubarak at that particular juncture was reason enough for many on the Left to lend their support to the anti-Mubarak movement.

This is not to say that, as a whole, the international Left was only supportive of the Tunisian and Egyptian revolutions simply because they opposed pro-Western regimes; though this is nonetheless significant. Doubtless, it was recognized that what took place in Tunisia, for example, was “a veritable working class response to unemployment, uneven regional development and the suppression of liberties.”¹⁵ The movement was secular in nature, inclusive of everyone with political, economic, and social grievances against the government, and emphatic to the role that the working classes play. In ousting Ben Ali, “workers have shown the strength they have when they are organised. Tens of thousands of Tunisia’s poorest people came together to overthrow the regime.”¹⁶ Similarly, in Egypt, labor activist Hossam El Hamalawy stated that “the only social movement right now that is continuing the struggle is the labour movement [and not the Brotherhood]. . . . There are strikes daily and they are over bread and butter and political issues,” while Ahmed Ezzat, founder of the recently established Workers’ Democratic Party, argued that “Lenin’s ‘What is to be Done’ and ‘April Notes’ helped shape our strategy, as did Marx’s theories.”¹⁷ Moreover, the Revolutionary Socialists (RS), a Trotskyist organization that worked for years under the umbrella of the Center for Socialist Studies and was active through its participation in the Palestinian solidarity movement since 2000, was key in organizing and mobilizing protestors and in developing strategies for January 25, the moment of Tahrir. Leading RS member Sameh Naguib said:

We put workers’ class demands front and center in all of our literature and agitation. We talked to all of our contacts and allies in the

workers' movement, and we agitated for strikes to strengthen the revolution.¹⁸

The involvement of young socialists, their frequent reference to Marxist terminology, as well as their emphasis on the workers' struggle, was bound to excite international socialist commentators such as John Rees who, two weeks following Tahrir, wrote:

The Egyptian revolution is exceptional in the level of self-activity compared with most revolutions of the modern era. . . . Increasingly the organised workers played a role in the final days of the revolt, helping to tip the balance. Some of the strikes continue and they are one sign that the great example of the revolution is spreading and deepening below the surface.¹⁹

Similarly, British Pakistani veteran journalist and celebrated "Street Fighting Man" Tariq Ali argued that:

The show of popular strength was enough to get rid of the current dictator. He'd only go if the US decided to take him away. After much wobbling, they did. They had no other serious option left. The victory, however, belongs to the Egyptian people whose unending courage and sacrifices made all this possible.²⁰

In the eyes of Rees, Ali, and others—prominent figures who one "would have expected to know better," as Jamie Allinson chides²¹—no such victory is attainable for the Syrian people. Mousa Ladqani notes that, among many factors, "the weakness of the revolution" is attributable to the notion that it "erupted under the influence of the wider Arab revolution," without which "it would most likely have taken a few more years for the revolutionary movement to erupt on its own"; that the Syrian working class "did not, and still does not, have independent organizations of its own that it can use to express its class interests"; that many elements among the revolutionary forces have been "raising religious slogans, demands, and using a religious language," which has only served to confirm the regime's depiction of the revolution as a religious one; and that Syria's geopolitical location means that "it has become the place in which opposing interests in the region are being played."²²

And so it seems that even though there is "little support for the Assad clan . . . unconditional supporters of the revolution do not seem to be in the majority."²³ The Syrian Revolution is making the Left, "whether strictly Communist, tending towards Marxist, leftwing nationalist, radical or moderate—seem in disarray."²⁴ This is mainly because of all the arguments on Syria that have left political commentators mystified, one

question in particular has eclipsed, if not overtaken, all others: that of foreign intervention. For the most part, the more influential ideologues of the Stalinoid Left, who identify themselves as the only true anti-imperialist movement, turn a blind eye to the popular uprising and instead see the crisis in Syria in terms of Western/Turkish/Gulf-states-backed Sunni Islamist militants. They echo the regime's narrative to the letter: there are militants waging a jihad, a holy war, against a secular regime, and in doing so serving as pawns in imperialism's wager against the Axis of Resistance. There is no denying that the militant wing of the opposition to Assad's regime—mainly represented by the umbrella group, the Free Syrian Army (FSA), and certain jihadist battalions, such as Ahrar al-Sham and Jabhat al-Nusra (Nusra Front)—receives some funds and training from outside powers. However, foreign support for the rebels remains limited. Moreover, it is becoming more evident that the West never had an appetite for intervening in Syria the way it did in Libya, or in Mali most recently. Despite this, ideologues on the Left are committed to the narrative of geopolitical conspiracies. Rees writes:

it is wrong to mechanically separate geo-political concerns (imperialism) from the domestic dynamic of the revolution. There is a domestic current calling for intervention. . . . As in Yemen, as in Libya, the US will be looking to recreate a Western leaning regime minus its figurehead, an Assad regime without Assad.²⁵

In the process of pushing geopolitical concerns, these anti-imperialist ideologues are missing the smaller—or rather—the bigger picture. What is truly remarkable about the Syrian Revolution is that it erupted without a unified command center; rather, it was led by a range of distinct individuals and groups. A significant contingent was made up of young people working in the fields of culture and communication, such as freelance journalists and correspondents for foreign media outlets. The vast majority of these people were not affiliated with party politics. They tended to be secularists from the urban middle class, or young adherents of political Islam, and were mainly university students or graduates with skills in technology and the new media. Other instigators included members of the Muslim Brotherhood, groups of political activists and independent human rights activists, members of various organizations such as the Damascus Declaration, and certain leftist parties such as the Communist Labor Party, the Marxist Left movement, and the Democratic People's Party (but not the Syrian Communist Party), as well as some Syrian Kurdish groups. Having neglected to examine the local dimensions of the revolution, anti-imperialist ideologues have failed to understand it "in terms of class or as a revolt against injustice, repression, and censorship. Instead, their self-satisfying geopolitical reading sees only a struggle between a US-led effort

to impose imperialistic order and a last-ditch Arab resistance supported by Russia and China."²⁶

Moreover, anti-imperialist ideologues brazenly refuse to condemn Russian and Iranian support for pro-regime military forces and paramilitary groups, claiming this would amount "to an at least partial compromise with our own ruling class and its propaganda."²⁷ "Using tactics that vary from the overt to the insidious," Jess Hill aptly notes, "these ideologues are willfully twisting the narrative on Syria to score points against the 'imperialist West.' In the process, they are excusing and providing intellectual cover for the Assad regime."²⁸ Perhaps had the rebels been waving red banners, these ideologues may have joined the bandwagon. We may even imagine Rees, Ali, British MP George Galloway, or award-winning journalist John Pilger, appearing at benefits around world capitals, collecting donations for those in Syria who are singing "The Internationale." But, this was not to be. Instead, the rebels waved flags of many colors and now increasingly they wave the black-and-white flag of jihad. It should come as no surprise that the void left by the Syrian Left has been filled by Islamists; we have the Assad regime to thank for both the demise of the former and the rise of the latter. Rather than allowing themselves to be distracted by conspiracy theories, the anti-imperialist ideologues ought to take a lesson in Syria's modern history. If they were to come to understand the complexities of Syrian society, then they would recognize the revolution for what it is; a popular revolution; a chaotic and messy affair. "Whoever expects a 'pure' social revolution will never live to see it. Such a person pays lip-service to revolution without understanding what revolution is."²⁹

THE BA'ATH PARTY, ASSAD'S SYRIA, AND THE BALKANIZATION OF THE SYRIAN COMMUNISTS

Anthony Shadid noted that when Hafez al-Assad came to power in 1970, he put an end to a "volatile chapter in Syria's history that saw dozens of attempted coups" since the country's independence from French colonization, not through "the modernisation of infrastructure and education," nor through "his service to the poor and rural," but by inculcating "a suffocating cult of personality, buttressed by fear, often the most visceral sort."³⁰ Assad understood that every section of society would have to be under his control in order to ensure real security for his avowedly pan-Arabist, secular regime, and thus began to invade the public sphere. Former political prisoner and dissident author Yassin al-Haj Saleh writes:

No sooner had the man taken office that there were "patriotic anthems" praising him and "spontaneous popular marches" waving the picture of this "devoted son of the people." At the same time

the intelligence services began to make their presence felt in public life, and with them the military and paramilitary forces responsible for the regime's security. Propaganda and security have remained cornerstones of the regime to this day. The agency responsible for propaganda is closer to being a slightly chaotic priesthood: its only religion, indeed its only skill, being the sanctification of the president and maintaining his absolute exclusivity. The security branch is made up of a number of agencies whose task is to keep control over terrorism: to build high walls of fear around, or perhaps inside, the regime's subjects.³¹

"The existence of a 'Master of the Nation' in the form of the president," argues al-Haj Saleh, "abolishes the republic in one fell swoop, and with it, all equality between its inhabitants. It institutionalizes ties of personal allegiance and a culture of political appointments and privilege and divides society along sectarian lines."³² Indeed, Hafez clearly understood the sectarian dynamics of his country. He belonged to the Alawite sect, a heterodox Muslim group that accounts for 11 percent of the population, yet he maintained good relations with his Ba'athist comrades, many of whom were members of the majority Sunni sect, by giving them ministerial positions in his cabinet. With an eye on the economy, he was also swift in forging strong alliances with Syria's Sunni merchant class. Of equal importance was his success in neutering and co-opting his rivals on the Left: "Political competition was abolished, subsumed by the cult of worship around the president, not to mention swallowed up by the prisons and the ruling Progressive [National] Front led by the Baath-Party."³³ In May 1972 the Ba'ath Party formed the so-called Progressive National Front (PNF), a coalition of political parties over which it presided. The PNF was initially formed of four parties: the Syrian Communist Party (SCP) under the leadership of Khaled Bakdash; the Arab Socialist Union (ASU), which was originally the Syrian branch of Egyptian leader Gamal Abdul Nasser's party of the same name; and two parties that had defected from the Ba'ath Party in the early 1960s: the Movement of Socialist Unionists (MSU) and the Arab Socialist Party. The new coalition was rejected by the League of Communist Action whose small membership worked covertly toward undermining the Ba'ath by publishing and circulating explicitly antiregime pamphlets. The parties in the coalition, however, enjoyed a limited level of participation under the umbrella of the PNF but were also subject to a variety of restrictions. The coalition ensured the Ba'ath Party's oppressive control and meticulous monitoring of its rivals on the Left, who soon began to Balkanize.

In many ways, Hafez al Assad's ascension to power in 1970 marked the end of the First Syrian Republic, which was well on the path to disintegration ever since the Ba'ath Party's takeover in 1963. Paradoxically,

the same year saw the “end of the Ba’ath Party as an autonomous force, and even as a forum for serious debate.”³⁴ The promulgation of a new constitution in 1973 saw Syria’s transformation from Ba’ath state to Assad’s Syria. While the new constitution guaranteed the leading role of the Ba’ath Party in both state and society, it granted Hafez ultimate power in all domains. The Ba’ath was molded into a “powerful institution of political control that at the same time could confer an appearance of legitimacy upon his presidency.”³⁵ Its ideals were on their way to becoming the thin veneer that has barely covered the Assads’ familial domination over Syria’s affairs in the last four decades. This exacerbated the divides in Syrian politics; for example, in 1974 a faction split from the MSU and formed the Democratic Socialist Unionist Party but remained in the PNF.³⁶ However, the most significant of these fractures was the defection of a sizable group of communists from the SCP who refused to join the PNF. In 1973 the group renamed itself the SCP-Political Bureau, and in January 1974 elected Riad al-Turk as its secretary general.³⁷ It was initially reasonably effective in its opposition to the government and was popular among “the younger party cadre and new recruits who had expected some changes in the original Syrian Communist Party in both leadership style and substantive ideological positioning, particularly after its isolation following the breakup of the UAR in 1961 and the 1967 Arab-Israeli War.”³⁸ Such aspirations for structural and ideological change within the SCP caused concern both for the Ba’ath Party and for Khaled Bakdash, the SCP’s secretary general. Bakdash accused Turk of “leading a deviationist, adventurist clique,”³⁹ and as evidence of his standing with Ba’ath officials was successful in rallying the government to conduct a campaign of oppression against the SCP-PB. Turk was “imprisoned in 1974, freed in 1975 when he went underground, and was recaptured in 1978. Shortly after being released in 1980, he was imprisoned again and was not released until 31 May 1998.”⁴⁰

Also among the SCP-PB’s main concerns were Syria’s increasing militarism, and Assad’s nepotism and oppressive measures against his political opponents. In 1976 it was vocal in condemning Assad’s intervention in the Lebanese Civil War on the side of right-wing Maronite militias against leftist Lebanese and Palestinian rebel groups. But it was especially critical of Assad’s policies back home. In bringing more members of his family and sect to the center of power, Hafez was able to appoint individuals he could trust to positions in the military and intelligence services. Allegiance, he thought, was best fostered on familial and sectarian grounds. Indeed, the capricious powers of the *mukhabarat* intelligence and the favoritism enjoyed by Alawites in official appointments aggravated the Syrian branch of the Muslim Brotherhood, a group deprived of all legitimate outlets for political activity and which regarded the Alawites as socially inferior heretics.⁴¹ This was criticized by opponents of

Assad as a dangerous manoeuvre, which was bound to alienate the Sunni majority and elicit popular hostility against the Alawites. In 1980, during his brief time out of prison, Turk and his supporters participated in the formation of the National Democratic Gathering (NDG), a coalition created in response to the conflict between Assad's forces and Islamist militants (mainly members of the Muslim Brotherhood) who since 1976 had been carrying out a "campaign of assassinations of senior Alawi and regime figures and bombing of regime symbols."⁴² The NDG consisted of the SCP-PB with four other banned parties: the Democratic Arab Socialist Union, a faction headed by Jamal al-Atassi, which broke away from the ASU; the Movement of Arab Socialists; and two parties previously associated with the Ba'ath itself: the Arab Revolutionary Workers' Party, a Marxist offshoot of the Ba'ath from the 1960s, and the Democratic Socialist Arab Ba'ath party, a remnant of Salah Jadid's⁴³ leftist faction of the Ba'ath.⁴⁴ While the NDG was critical of the Islamist insurgency, its staunch criticism was directed more toward the regime's brutal response to the Muslim Brotherhood. Members of the NDG were arrested, along with members of the Muslim Brotherhood, by the thousands.

This particular episode in Syria's history should be read in the context of Islamic political activity in the region in the late 1970s and early 1980s; there was the rise of jihadism in Afghanistan, which was reinforced by the Soviet invasion of the country in 1979; the Islamic Revolution in Iran; the seizure of the Grand Mosque in Mecca by Islamists, who held it for two weeks before the Saudi military regained control; the assassination of Egyptian president Anwar al Sadat by members of the Muslim Brotherhood; and various other rebellions in North Africa. In the same manner that Islamist insurgencies were crushed in Saudi Arabia, Libya, Tunisia, and Algeria, political Islam in Syria became the quintessential nemesis of the state. This garnered Islamists overwhelming public empathy as they were seen as the most aggressive and antagonistic opponents of the regime's economic, social, and diplomatic failures, as well as its draconian policies in strengthening elite circles based on familial and sectarian ties. This did not mean that others weren't critical of the regime; even the SCP was banned in the early 1980s and was only restored to favor in 1986 as a concession to the Soviet Union. Yet the Islamists, consistently aiming to de-legitimize other political movements and currents opposed to the regime, saw themselves as its archetypal enemy. But they were also its primary victims. Syrian Law 49 of 1980 stipulates that membership of the Muslim Brotherhood is a capital offence. At certain stages in the campaign against the Brotherhood, the Defence Platoons, under the command of Hafez's now exiled younger brother Rif'at, "took to the streets and initiated a harassment of veiled women in an attempt to identify Brotherhood members."⁴⁵ The climax of Assad's reprisal against the Brotherhood was a three-week standoff in

the city of Hama in 1982, when the Assad army fought armed Islamists, flattened much of the city's historic center over the heads of its residents, and then combed the rubble, killing surviving rebels. This bloody chapter in the country's history saw the deaths of 30,000 people, according to some sources, and was subsequently shrouded in secrecy in Syria. Everybody understood the regime's message: "if you go against us then we will crush you," but beneath that lies another message, a far more useful one in terms of coaxing support from minority communities: "only we can protect you from the Islamist bogeyman." Even well after the events in Hama, the regime continued to oppress relatives of members of the Muslim Brotherhood who had been exiled, arrested, or killed.⁴⁶ Thus, the Assad regime succeeded in portraying any opposition to it as the voice of a Sunni Muslim underclass. Some leftists, meanwhile, kept a low profile or were sidelined, either absorbed into the Ba'ath's political machine or locked up in Syria's notorious prisons.

ASSAD'S SYRIA UNDER BASHAR, THE CIVIL SOCIETY MOVEMENT, AND THE REACTIVATED PNF

In 2000, Bashar al-Assad, who became heir apparent following his older brother Basel's death in a car crash in 1994, took the office of the presidency. He made a pretense of political reform to allow intellectual freedom. Already in the late months of Hafez's life, the political climate in Syria had loosened to some extent and the economy, which was experiencing its first stages of liberalization at the time, was being subject to open debate. While the fundamentals of the system "were still taboo," Alan George writes, "aspects of how it functioned—for example the inefficiencies of the bureaucracy—became permitted areas of discussion in the media and elsewhere."⁴⁷ Bashar brought into his administration younger and more dynamic personnel, and called for the reinvigoration of the PNF. But as exiled Marxist writer Subhi Hadidi argues, this was indicative of how the new president "conveniently ignored what every adult Syrian knows: that this Front was a dead body when it was first set up and has continued to decompose with an unbearable stench ever since."⁴⁸ Terms like "modernisation," "development," "constructive criticism," and "creative thinking" became hallmarks of Bashar's new-speak, eliminating the vocabulary of freedom, democracy, civil liberties, and so forth. Instead, Bashar described the PNF as "a democratic model developed through our own experience."⁴⁹ Bashar thereby made it clear that he was no liberal democrat but that under the auspices of the reactivated PNF, "Syria was entering a period of reforms and openings in all fields."⁵⁰

While dismissive of the PNF, some of Syria's leading intellectuals chose to be sanguine with what they could potentially achieve in this

new climate. Eminent thinkers, businessmen, and former political prisoners such as Michel Kilo, Riad Seif, Antoun al-Maqdisi, Sadiq Jalal al-Azm, Jamal al-Atassi, Burhan Ghalyoun, and Riad al-Turk, assumed a crucial role in establishing forums interested in reviving the “cultural and democratic movement in Syria.”⁵¹ Initially, informal forums were set up in private Damascene homes for the discussion of political and social matters; the most famous of these were the Riad Seif Forum and the Jamal al-Atassi National Dialogue Forum. In its renewed form, this movement, dubbed the Damascus Spring, was responsible for issuing communiqués—namely the Statement of 99 and the Statement of 1000—which stressed the need for the new government to end the State of Emergency Law; issue a public pardon to all political detainees; ensure freedom of assembly, freedom of the press, and freedom of expression; and allow for the participation of citizens in all aspects of public life.⁵² Subsequently, these salons formally established themselves as the Committees for the Revival of Civil Society in Syria, and within six months of Bashar taking office hundreds of salons appeared, mainly in Damascus, but also in other Syrian cities. However, as the activities of civil society forums intensified—Seif, for example, went as far as to announce his plans for an independent political party—so did the regime’s campaign to de-legitimize the civil society movement as “a collection of spies, fools or both, serving the malevolent interests of foreign states—for which read Israel and America.”⁵³ The Damascus Spring had to be crushed and the regime proceeded to ban discussion forums and to vilify the civil society movement in its media. Furthermore, the line of official argument did all it could to portray intellectuals as representative of an insignificant minority that was detached from the real wants and needs of Syrians. In contrast to the civil society movement, what Bashar offered was an economy first argument and as such advocated for a China-style economic liberalization.⁵⁴ Sadiq Jalal al-Azm maintains that this was simply a ruse, a cunning attempt to deceive the population that economic reforms are possible without political ones. He argues:

It’s not true that the Chinese are simply making changes in the economy and not making changes at a lot of other level. The entire ruling *équipe* has changed in China, while in Syria it’s still the same. The “old guard” is there. Secondly, in China you can delay the political changes and concentrate on the economy because there is a very high rate of economic growth. . . . This doesn’t apply to Syria at all. There is no flourishing economy that will bribe people into keeping quiet about the needed political, social and judicial reforms.⁵⁵

With Bashar adamant on pursuing his economic program, certain cosmetic alterations to the face of the intelligence apparatus were needed. He

presented himself as a president with “an everyman quality, frequenting restaurants and driving his own car.”⁵⁶ However, he simultaneously maintained an imperial sense of power through continued nepotism, corruption, and repression of political freedoms and censorship of independent journalism. Moreover, he did his utmost to sideline the civil society movement and warned that

[w]hen the consequences of any action affect stability at the level of a country there are two possibilities: . . . that the actor is an agent who is working against the interests of the state and he is either ignorant or doing it without intending to do so. The result is that in both cases the person will be serving the enemies of his country. And here, at the level of a country the results are addressed immediately. Here the person will be held fully responsible regardless of his intentions and backgrounds.⁵⁷

In August 2001 his tolerance for the Damascus Spring had run out and a crackdown against the civil society movement was justified on the basis that it aimed to “change the constitution by illegal means.”⁵⁸ Seif, Turk, and eight other activists received prison sentences between 2 and 10 years. Meanwhile, Bashar ensured that his father’s political relationships with key parties in the PNF, most notably the communists, remained intact. At this stage, the communists were split into two factions: the main communist party under Wisal Farha Bakdash, Khalid Bakdash’s widow who inherited her departed husband’s position; and its offshoot, the party of Yousef Faisal, which in 1986 broke away from the SCP over differing attitudes to Soviet perestroika, but which remained a member in the PNF. Both parties, having experienced political stagnation even by PNF standards, had much to benefit from Bashar coming to power; the privileges that the communists procured decades earlier under his father’s reign were not only going to be preserved, but potentially expanded under the patronage of the new president, so long as they remained within the confines of the reactivated PNF. The Ba’ath resolved that the parties of the PNF should be allowed not only to privately distribute their newspapers, as was the case up until Bashar’s inheritance of power, but also to place them on the newsstands. In early 2001 the SCP-Bakdash’s *Sawt al-Sha’b (Voice of the People)* and the SCP-Faisal’s *Al-Nour (The Light)* were launched. While both factions of the SCP may have had a historic opportunity to shake things up from within the PNF, both continued to assume the subordinate role given to them in the Ba’ath’s political establishment. Certainly, neither was ready to cross the red lines of Syrian journalism. Instead, their publications contained within them the typical reports one would find in most Arab newspapers on the Palestinian

struggle; abstract ramblings about class struggle, the unity of the Arab people, and anti-imperialism; criticisms of other parties in the PNF; and articles that celebrated the benevolence of the Assad family. In November 2001, a cable was sent by Lady Bakdash, which “extended to the President most sincere greetings of appreciation for the great role he plays in enhancing the country’s position in the Arab and international arenas.”⁵⁹ It was thanks to this kind of publicity that Bashar appeared not only as anti-Israel, anti-West, pro-Iran, and pro-Hezbollah, read pro-resistance, but also as the last true caretaker of Arab sovereignty, whose foreign policy was tinged with leftist ideals. In contrast, in *Al-Nour*, one could occasionally read exposés on the government’s economic misconduct and the rife poverty of Syrian neighborhoods. But faced with the Bakdash party’s brokering of Ba’athist interests, Faisal’s group was uninfluential and ineffective. Furthermore, the former accused the latter of departing from “Marxism as the basis of organisation,” disrespecting “democratic centralism,” and not adhering to “proletarian [principles] and Marxist theory.”⁶⁰ The Bakdash faction maintained a firm grip on Faisal’s party in order to further its political ambitions and ensured that any internal efforts to restore the role of communism in Syria as a vanguard of the working class were crushed. If the outcome of Riad al-Turk’s long struggle is any indication, it is evident “that there was no room for any ideological challenge either to the Syrian regime or Bakdash’s position vis-à-vis the regime.”⁶¹

THE RISE OF ISLAMISTS AND THE OTHERING OF SYRIAN SUNNIS

Throughout the 2000s, Bashar was able to withstand successive efforts to relaunch the civil society movement and to instigate regime change. This was largely due to the ideological disagreements and petty personal conflicts that took place among dissidents. In 2005, Riad al-Turk’s NDG, the Muslim Brotherhood, Kurdish and Assyrian parties, and members from the Damascus Spring, such as Michel Kilo and Riad Seif, issued a statement called the Damascus Declaration, which sought to unite the fractured Syrian opposition. However, almost from the outset, the initiative was riddled with problems that took place between some secularists and the Islamists. This was exacerbated when the Muslim Brotherhood joined the National Salvation Front of Bashar’s former vice president Abdul Halim Khaddam, who had defected in 2006.⁶²

Today, these feuds and rifts contribute to the lack of a “genuine revolutionary leadership with a clear economic, social, and political programme.”⁶³ These factors serve to undermine confidence in the relevance and efficacy of the opposition and have been further exploited by the west

in order to avoid committing to one political faction more than the other. This is because as Fredric Jameson writes:

Villainy in mass culture has been reduced to two lone survivors of the category of evil: these two representations of the truly antisocial are, on the one hand, serial killers and, on the other, terrorists (mostly of the religious persuasion, as ethnicity has become identified with religion, and secular political protagonists like the communists and the anarchists no longer seem to be available).⁶⁴

The West is increasingly adhering to this concept in the way it sees events in Syria. While *Nusra Front*, for example, is recognized as being the most organized and disciplined rebel group in the fight against Assad, it is also classified by the United States as a terrorist organization and is purported to have strong links with al-Qaeda in Iraq.⁶⁵ In generating a discourse that paints the struggle in Syria as one between two categories of evil—the Assad regime as the serial killer and the armed resistance to it as the terrorist—it essentially affirms the Assad regime's narrative to the detriment of genuine revolutionary action against tyranny. We should not expect any less from the West.

However, it cannot be denied that Islamists are increasingly proving to be the most aggressive element of the opposition. The Muslim Brotherhood has greatly expanded its influence through its penetration of the two main oppositionary umbrella groups, the Syrian National Council and the National Coalition for Syrian Revolutionary and Opposition Forces, as well as the brigades of the FSA. Furthermore, it coordinates with some of the more extremist groups such as the *Nusra Front* and *Ahrar al-Sham*.⁶⁶ Nevertheless, there is a tendency to reduce the debate around Syria to a tiresome minorities/majority dichotomy, that is, Sunni Muslims against the rest. This provides neither recourse nor respite for Syrians; there are many prominent figures of opposition who come from minority religious or ethnic communities. Further, there is a robust Sunni merchant class that continues to work hand in hand with the regime, and to facilitate its trade with its foreign allies. Certainly, the extent to which Syrians express and cultivate their antiregime sentiments is shaped by political and economic conditions in as much as it is shaped by local, ethnic, and religious ones; this can ultimately be read as a struggle for self-determination in which disparities in economic class play a significant role.

Nonetheless, an engagement with the nuances of Syrian society, particularly its religious and ethnic makeup, enables us to escape the space in which grand illusions prevail. The price of distancing oneself from the sectarian discourse that so many commentators fear—especially those who promote themselves as leftist, secular, or progressive—is to buy into the mythologized national self-image drawn by more than four decades of

the Assads' domination over state and society: the paradoxical image of a united, stable, unsectarian Syria where the minority sects dominate the majority sect.

To overcome this, indeed to interpret the meaning of no longer avoidable and disheartening facts, one has to draw on new concepts and engage with new ideas. A starting point is to recognize that particular episodes of Sunni contention under the Assad regime represent a distinctive expression of a broader pattern of state-society as well as class relations in modern Syria. Syrian Sunnis cannot be said to be an exclusively antiregime group, neither are they the sole contenders with the regime; they were always integral to the system of power relations in the modern Syrian nation-state. But if opposition to the regime is not particularly unique to Sunnis, then why is the regime so eager to *other* them, to privilege them as the contentious group par excellence? The following anecdote may help shed some light on this question.

In early August 2011, a Syrian state television reporter went to the city of Hama to interview its residents following the Syrian regime's siege of the city.⁶⁷ The siege was among the nation-wide crackdowns by security forces and came as a response to growing numbers of antiregime demonstrators. In July of that year, Hama saw more than 500,000 anti-regime protestors congregating in Martyrs Square, and on July 31, the eve of the holy Muslim month of Ramadan, the Syrian army with the aid of state-funded *shabeeha* paratroopers, stormed the city in an operation that led to the deaths of hundreds of protestors. This is a city simultaneously emboldened and embittered by months of state-sponsored violence, and its residents, reputed to be the most conservative Sunni Muslims in Syria, have collectively embodied three decades of trauma following the infamous 1982 Hama massacre. The normalcy that the reporter captured in his reportage had as much to do with his own intimidating presence as a representative of the regime's media machine as it did with the regime's ability to temporarily anaesthetize the protest movement. Neither interested in listening to the residents' testimonies nor concerned with their plight, the reporter is on a mission to achieve two things: first, to coerce interviewees into declaring that the army went in on the behest of the residents in order to rescue them from the vandals and armed gangs who are carrying out the "international conspiracy against Syria," and second, to identify those who may be inclined to speak up on camera against the regime. It is no surprise then that upon attempting to interview random bystanders, the reporter is met with disapproving eyes.

Some maintain that they stay out of politics, others avoid speaking to him and simply walk away, while at one stage a voice can be heard telling him, "God be with you, brother. Leave, just leave." He loiters around the remaining crowd and eventually manages to corner a few young men

with his microphone. A short time later the reporter tries to talk to two middle-aged men, one of whom is clearly reticent while the other seems to want to say something on camera. Initially, the second man is gently pushed away by his friend. Upon seeing this, the reporter reacts and starts to harass them, "Let him speak, will you. Or is this the kind of freedom that you seek?" The second man turns around and confronts the reporter. "Listen brother," he says apprehensively, "I know what you are going to ask me and I think that you already know my answer, but all I want to say is that it is a shame that this is taking place in this country." "And, why do you think this is happening here?" asks the reporter. "The nation is like a household; the state is like a father," the man provides a careful response, "and a father should be patient with his children. We hope that this father doesn't neglect his children." The reporter then deviously asks, "Well, if the father is a little negligent, does that make it alright for the children to throw rocks at him?" The man recognizes the reporter's false-hearted question and says, "Of course it is not alright, but it is the father's fault for not having raised his children well." He sneers at the reporter and walks away.

To think of the state, rather the regime, as the father invokes the dialectical discourse of the home as both motherland and fatherland. According to Ghassan Hage, when the home is construed as the motherland—this notion correlates to *umma*, the Arabic word for community, which is etymologically related to the word for mother—and, as internal space, as a womb, a nurturer and provider, a warm, safe container, this constitutes a relationship in which the national subject perceives a sense of belonging to the nation, or passive belonging. As the fatherland, however, the home protects the motherland; it enforces the law, defends the borders, controls external relations, expels, excludes, or subjugates the other. In this formulation the nation is perceived as belonging to the national subject, who identifies with upholding the national will, adopting the stance of governmental belonging.⁶⁸ The reporter's last question, then, in as much as it aimed at winning over the argument, fell short of adopting the regime's terminology; the Assad regime neither admits its negligence as a father nor views those who "throw rocks" as its children since it constantly tries to portray them as foreign gangsters. Nonetheless, the reporter's question contained within it both an accusation against those who only belong passively, and the idea that upholding the national will necessitates loyalty to the father figure, the regime.

While the regime indiscriminately targets whoever dares to challenge it, it is the Sunnis who feel the impact of the regime's wrath like no other social or religious group in Syria. The regime has defined the political crisis in sectarian terms and has, on a number of occasions, identified itself as the protector of minorities; Alawites, Shi'ites, Christians, and Druze. As a result, many Sunnis now believe that it is necessary for the Assad

regime to negate the humanity of the “rock throwing” majority, to *other* them, to deem them non-persons, in order to keep them outside of Syria’s “united yet diverse cultural mosaic,” and to therefore be able to subject them to the uncompromising force of its machinations, without compassion getting in the way. This is evident in one protest placard which asks “Does the protection of minorities require exterminating the majority?” Thus, in the field of “diversity,” Sunnis, as the preponderant *non*-community, has the least symbolic capital. This othering is synonymous with what Alenka Zupancic calls “bio-morality,” and leads to a grave problem in society:

success is becoming almost a biological notion, and thus the foundation of a genuine racism of successfulness. The poorest and the most miserable are no longer perceived as a socioeconomic class, but almost as a *race* of their own, as a special form of life. We are indeed witnessing a spectacular rise of racism or, more precisely, of ‘racization. This is to say that we are no longer simply dealing with racism in its traditional sense of hatred towards other races, but also and above all with a production of (new) races based on economic, political, and class differences and factors, as well as with the segregation based on these differences. If traditional racism tended to socialize biological features—that is, directly translate them into cultural and symbolic points of a given social order—contemporary racism works in the opposite direction. It tends to “naturalize” the differences and features produced by the sociosymbolic order.⁶⁹

Further, the *other* threatens the self, the home, the nation, because it is uncanny. Sunnis can be regarded as having an uncanny relationship with the other religious communities in Syria, because they are constructed as the “outside,” the “unhomely,” the “street persons,” the “rural.” But the uncanny is not simply the unfamiliar. For Freud the uncanny is frightening, but it “is in reality nothing new or alien, but something which is familiar and old-established in the mind and which has become alienated from it only through a process of repression.”⁷⁰ In this sense, Sunnis represent the *other* as the abject part of the Syrian self. Abjection, in Julia Kristeva’s definition, is “what disturbs identity, system, order”⁷¹; it is what leads Syrians to realize that sustained domination and myths about stability, unity, and social homogeneity had hitherto hidden the stubborn persistence of cultural, ethnic, or religious divisions. These divisions intersect with class divisions; however, it is important to note that they do not correlate precisely. Nevertheless, in the symbolic realm, the Syrian Sunni, perceived as *other*, reflects the “negativity, lack, dissatisfaction, [and] unhappiness,” which “are perceived more and more as moral faults—worse, as a corruption at the level of our very being or bare life.”⁷²

In Assad's Syria, society's discontents have been hitherto projected on the Sunnis.

CONCLUSION

The Syrian Revolution has been hindered by an ineffectual Left within Syria, which has betrayed its ideals and allowed for political Islam to usurp the revolutionary leadership. Nor has help been forthcoming from the dominant streams within the international Left. The ideologues of the Left today can be compared to Marx's dogmatists; utopian socialists whose brand of communism was merely "a dogmatic abstraction." The words of the young Marx are most salient here. He argued that "we must try to help the dogmatists to clarify their ideas," and that the task for the world and for us, above all, is "the self-clarification (critical philosophy) of the struggles and wishes of the age."⁷³ This is precisely why it is imperative to recognize that classic notions of class struggle alone are not sufficient for understanding Syria today, nor is the prevalent discourse of anti-imperialism. In this chapter, I have proposed a re-conceptualization for understanding the Syrian Revolution and the role of the Left both within and outside Syria in relation to it, drawing on Marxist and psychoanalytic approaches, in the hope of providing a fruitful framework for revolutionary practice.

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CHAPTER 4

To Make Demands: Instituting the Common or the Abolition of Value?

David Eden

INTRODUCTION

There are times when a single question seems to sum up all that is at stake politically and theoretically within given historical conjuncture. A single question marks the divide in the movement and poses divergent ways forward: Reform or Revolution?, The Party Question, War or Revolution, and “If the one divides into two, or if the two becomes one” are examples of these. What is at stake in these questions is the analysis of the nature of the terrain on which struggle takes place, and how immediate struggles link to broader questions of social transformation. They sum up debates about what militants should do.

It is my contention that in our present moment, on a global level, a similar question is being posed: this is the question of whether the new mobilizations, the various Springs and Occupations and camps in squares should or should not make demands. Should struggles aim to win victories within the context of capitalism as it exists (either as goods in themselves or as part of the constitution of revolutionary transformation), or is communist praxis by definition opposed to the world of capitalism as a whole and thus can't hope to win anything within this whole, without sacrificing what it means to be communist? In this sense, refusing demands is not simply a refusal of a tactic, but rather is seen to be a necessary part of communization. This debate, of course, echoes older struggles and theoretical shifts—the verdicts of previous debates inform and shape the thinking of

this new juncture. For example in Badiou we find the inheritance of May 1968 and in Negri we find 1977. The lessons and ideas of these experiences inform our understanding of today.

In retrospect, depending most often on our current positions and established thoughts, it often seems very obvious who was right and wrong and why. But in this moment, stuck in the middle of struggles, it is much harder to work these paths out. This is especially the case since both making demands and attempting communization, on a global level, appear to have reached an impasse—if struggles pose demands, they must be ones that cohere with the pervading social reality, that is, within a world that is organized on the basis of the accumulation of capital. Yet, we live in a time when processes of accumulation are in a seemingly inescapable condition of crisis. Whilst those that refuse to make demands, that pose directly the question of communism, seem unable to find traction with those outside the ranks of the already radicalized. They are left open a cycle of confrontations and provocations against an increasingly postliberal state.

There is however a third option: the politics put forward by elements of the largely Italian post-workerists based on a theory of the common.¹ This approach argues that the struggle for demands in the here and now is in fact the path forward for the realization of communism. These demands are, these authors argue, both possible and valuable in themselves and the struggle for them will lead to a radical transformation of society. This politics, which previously went under the name of exodus and now, perhaps, is called instituting the common, is attentive to the specific and novel features of contemporary capitalism. It is influenced by and influences current social struggles and can mobilize impressive intellectual resources. Its core demands are for a general social income and the forming of participatory democratic structures. In this chapter, I will argue that despite its appeal this post-workerist approach is deeply flawed. It is flawed because it does not grasp that the split between making demands or -not is actually a manifestation of the contradictory nature of the working class: between our existence as variable capital and the proletariat. The post-workerists miss this due to a misreading of the nature of capitalist society. Against this, I will draw on a different line of enquiry through an engagement with Marx. It is a line of enquiry that shares some common insights and a relationship of debate and dialogue, which we may (but perhaps shouldn't) call 'pen Marxism' or 'negative autonomism'.²

ON DEMANDS

While demands can, theoretically, be made to many different forces and actors to do very different things, in a capitalist-parliamentary society (such as Australia from where I write), demands are made normally by

social movements and organizations to either state or corporate forces: they call on these forces either to do something to address a social ill or, in the case of the latter, to stop doing something. In this sense they acknowledge, consciously or not, that the real power in a society exists not in movements but in the state and corporate actors. Of course, the diversity of these mobilizations means that the thinking about these questions is also very diverse. Let us consider the debate over demands from some communist perspectives.

Marcos Deserlis and Jodi Dean, focusing on the Occupy movement, argue that “the lack of demands reflects the weak ideological core of the movement.” For these authors, the inability to make demands arises from a number of problematic objections: a refusal of representation, the idea that that struggles should pose autonomous solutions to social problems, and a worry about the possibilities of co-option. Deserlis and Dean argue that the absence of demands, rather than being a radical move, leaves social struggles under the dominance of established Left neo-Keynesian politics. Rather, “the tactical use of demands creates opportunities for testing and learning from experiments in managing the commons.”³ They do not make it clear how such demands could actually function as demands—are these things that could be won within the present? The more obvious, but not necessarily correct, approach to demands might be seen in such examples as the OWS Demands working group’s call for “Jobs for All—A Massive Public Works and Public Service Program” or “Expand health-care and provide free healthcare for all (single payer system).”⁴ In other words, demands for the reviving of social democratic politics built around largely Keynesian economic ideas. This ignores that social democracy, as popular project, was both a form of a class deal capital offered to contain emancipatory struggle and only possible under distinct historical circumstances that have been terminated decades ago.⁵

Against this, authors who advocate communization argue that the very absence of demands is a mark of a struggle’s radicalism. For example, two communist groupings in Greece remarked, on the eruption of struggle in December 2008, that “there were no specific political demands and this, combined with their ferocity, made the riots all too threatening for the usual forces of recuperation and manipulation.”⁶ The absence of demands is seen as evidence that struggles themselves are moving beyond the boundaries of capitalist social relations and, most importantly, are creating radical subjectivities that see beyond capitalism. As Dauve argues, “Communist revolution is a joint rejection of the worst actually imposed by capitalism and of the best it offers and wants us to dream about.”⁷

For the Invisible Committee/Tiqun who are often cast in the role of banner carriers for an active version of communization, the rejection of demands is based on the barren exhaustion of capitalism as a society

and the irrepressible subjectivity of communist protagonists. The *Coming Insurrection* famously begins: “From whatever angle you approach it, the present offers no way out.” In their vision, the concept of decision, of choosing to make the radical break and to start constructing a conspiracy of communes, is crucial.⁸ As the *Endnotes* argues, such an approach seems to be a continuation of the kind of activist volunteerism that the *Invisible Committee* decries.⁹ *Endnotes* themselves reflect the other pole of communization along with *Théorie Communiste*, they posit a reading of capitalism as eventually hitting some endpoint that will force struggles that cannot be satisfied in reformism, struggles where workers are compelled to go beyond the limits of capitalism. They write:

If communization is presenting itself currently, it is in the palpable sense of an impasse in the dynamic of the class relation; that is an era in which the end of this relation looms perceptibly on the horizon, while capital runs into crisis at every turn and the working class is forced to wage a struggles for which there is no plausible victory.¹⁰

The struggle for demands gives you something to do: demands to make, campaigns to build, people to mobilize, organizations to organize, but it is not obvious that these efforts connect to communism, nor that these apparently realistic goals are actually realistic under the present conditions of capitalism. On the other hand, the refusal of demands swings between the extreme voluntarism of insurrectionary anarchism and the *Invisible Committee* or the strong historical determinism of *Théorie Communiste/Endnote*.

This seems to leave us in a sad place—fight for what we do not want to win, hurl ourselves at the state and a bemused world, or wait for the grind of history to produce the liberation we desire.

INSTITUTING THE COMMON

The post-workerist conception of “Instituting the Common” seems to offer a way out of this sad place. This approach rests on a complex and thorough attempt to understand the nature and lines of antagonism that make up and cut through capitalism today. Drawing on the original Copernican Inversion undertaken by Tronti, the argument runs that due to the struggles since the end of the 1960s capital has had to radically change.¹¹ Negri’s work is a particularly useful demonstration of attempts since the 1980s to understand and name these transformations.¹² These transformations, the post-workerists argue, have not only seen a radical reconstruction of class composition—that is, what work workers do, where and how—but that the very capital relation has changed. We live in, these authors attest, the “communism of capital”—that is, a situation in which the struggles

of the past have forced capitalism to realize in a perverse way many of the qualities of communism.¹³ The task for the multitude, which is the name the new composition of class and class struggle goes under, is to reorganize the living possibilities of labor and realize the “communism of the general intellect.” This struggle is “about collectively reappropriating produced social wealth and destroying the devices of subsumption and capitalistic command in permanent crisis.”¹⁴ The core to both capital accumulation and the struggle for communism is the collective creative and political abilities of the living labor of the multitude: the common.¹⁵ This leads to a fundamentally affirmative notion of class struggle.

The politics of instituting the common is a development of post-workerist ideas of “exit” or “exodus.”¹⁶ Broadly speaking, such an approach involves constituting new forms of democratic decision making that are nonrepresentative, external and hostile to the state, an “absolute democracy.” This would sever the capitalist rule that is imposed on living labor.¹⁷ Various articulations of this approach to emancipation have been discussed and developed for at least 30 years.¹⁸ The authors involved in post-workerism see demands as part of the struggle of the multitude to generate democratic spaces and practices of social organization, and realize the common against capital. The tone and tenor of the demands do shift from author to author. Marazzi writes:

The form and objectivities of the struggle “inside and against” crisis capitalism are at the same time local and global. The objectives of this struggle are clear: imposing, collectively and from the ground up, new rules to govern the market and the financial system, a social mobilization for starting anew investment policies in public services, education and welfare, the creation of public employment for the conversion of energy, a refusal to defiscalize high incomes, assert the right to wages, employment and social income and the construction of autonomous, self-determined spaces.¹⁹

Hardt and Negri make three interlinked demands—for a guaranteed basic income, for global citizenship, by which they mean the creating of democratic spaces and practices (“allowing everyone to become capable of participating in the constitution of society, collective self-rule, and constructive interactions with others”), and “open access to the common against the barriers of private property,” which, at its simplest, means the end of intellectual property rights over the products of immaterial and affective labor.²⁰ “Nothing Will Ever Be the Same,” a document described as “a choral contemplation” that “only partially synthesized” the understandings of two UniNomade seminars, makes similar demands.²¹ These are, again, demands for some form of general and guaranteed

social income and “the demand to access material and immaterial services that constitute the environment of social cooperation and general intellect . . .” as part of the construction of a commonfare, which would work “as an effective and real condition of human choice for freedom and equality.”²²

These demands are striking in that they are far more radical than social democratic demands, and certainly are not tied to Keynesian understandings of politics (though in the past many different kinds of politics have called for a general social income). These demands are not demands that are meant to be organized through the state, but rather to be won and realized by social movements—one assumes that it would be administrated by the new forms of democratic self-governance that supposedly should start to swamp and dissolve the state.

The underlying assumption of the post-workerists is that capitalism is no longer capable of serious reform. Unlike the 1930s, “in the current situation there are not any economic or political premises sufficient for a new social pact (or New Deal).”²³ This is because, the argument goes, capitalism has developed to a point in which labor exceeds the workday proper and value no longer operates as Marxian thought previously assumed (see later).²⁴ A New Deal-like offer of a social wage in exchange for increased productivity would undermine contemporary capital’s strategy of rule through precarity (as opposed to the social democratic harnessing of workers agitation to increase the subsumption of society by capital) and cannot respond to the new forms of productivity of the common. Indeed, as Vercellone points out, the state intervention that has followed the outbreak of the current global crisis has worked to “design the contours of a ‘social totalitarianism of capital’ at the service of the continuity of the neoliberal politics of expropriation of the common, as a tool to expand the parasitic nature of the commercial sphere and the precarious character of the labor-force.”²⁵ This is an accurate characterization of the bailouts, monetary policy, austerity budgets, appointed technocrats and commissions of audit that have been imposed on the peoples of the globe.²⁶

The struggle for demands, then, is not a project of the state but is rather about organizing and increasing the power of the multitude to fight for and win profound changes in how society is organized. This is laid out in “Nothing Will Ever Be the Same” as follows:

Between the “communism of capital” and the institutions of the common there is no speculation or linear relation of necessity: it is, in other terms, about collectively re-appropriating produced social wealth and destroying the devices of subsumption and capitalist command in permanent crisis.

In such a process, the autonomous role played by social movements is increasingly important, not only as a political program and action but also, and above all, as a reference point for those subjectivities, singularities or segments of (sic) class that are hit hardest and defrauded by the crisis.²⁷

Vercellone argues that such an approach “allows us to foresee an alternative scenario that social struggles, through a long positional war, could, by defining the contours, open a model of society and alternative development founded on two principle axes.” These axes are the core politics of exodus/instituting the common: “the democratic re-seizing of welfare institutions, based on the associative and self-organisations dynamic of labour through society” and the “creation of a universal Guaranteed Basic Income” that will function as the “common thread” of a “constituent dynamic” that will “transform the ‘socialism of capital’ into a process of re-socialization of money that puts the former at the service of the expansion of the common and the multiplication of the forms of access to income (from students to temporary workers), freed from unconditional wage labour.”²⁸ That is, social movements need to create spaces of democratic organizing to start taking over the administration and organization of social welfare and to generate a new form of salary for all members of society. I am yet to see it articulated if the latter means forcing the state to invent a new form of welfare payment based on incomes generated through taxation or the production of new social currencies by the democratic assemblies of the multitude itself, of the kind we have seen arise in Spain and Greece, for example.²⁹

Such victories wouldn’t just be desirable in themselves, but would start to gestate a new society in the shell of the old—evidence of the power the ideas of the IWW exert on the post-workerists and their predecessors.³⁰ For Vercellone, the first axis is not simply about attempting to guarantee the survival of those thrown into crisis, it is a step toward the “construction of an alternative social model founded on supremacy of the non-commodity logic and the man for man productions (sic),” that is, the decidedly communist forms of creativity and production aimed at securing human flourishing.³¹ Coupled with this, Vercellone argues that while a Guaranteed Basic Income rewards creativity that is excessive of wage labor, it also poses the possibility of labor’s “emancipation from the sphere of the production of value and surplus-value.”³²

The post-workerists certainly don’t imagine such a process to be either a smooth evolution or free of violence and conflict. At the end of *Multitude*, Hardt and Negri argue that “the extraordinary accumulations of grievances and reform proposals must at some point be transformed by a strong event, a radical insurrectionary demand.”³³ Struggles push capital

to a point of breaking where a more revolutionary move is needed. This approach, however, is very different from the older notions of revolutionary thought, because the role and conceptualization of violence in revolutionary struggle is refigured. Using the biblical story of Exodus as a metaphor, violence is understood not as an assault on the state to push through to a new society, but rather as “an active resistance, a rear-guard war against the pursuing powers of sovereignty” that are attempting to repress the new institutions of the common.³⁴

The appeal of this post-workerists’ argument is that it seems to fit with some of the contours of the struggles that have emerged in the crisis. The formation of assemblies in city squares and neighborhoods point toward the possibility of the post-workerist vision—these could be the very forms of participatory and democratic association and organizing necessary to establish a radically different society. Within the social struggles moving against austerity we can already find the kernel of a new world. Equally, these demands seems to connect directly to an immanent need—how to maintain a decent life with dignity in the face of the crisis.

LIMITATIONS—THE COMMON AND LABOR

At this point I am not so interested in the more obvious critiques of these ideas—what would the state have to face to allow a guaranteed basic income? Isn’t there a weird confusion about the nature of money here? Rather I want to dig into the post-workerists periodization of capitalism, which is not only erroneous in itself, but also evidence of a misunderstanding of what is radical in the condition of labor and thus how we get from this society to another one.

The post-workerist position rests on the idea that what is productive in capitalism is the common, and what is radical in the multitude is this very same common. Negri typifies the common as the “flesh” of contemporary capitalism and struggle as the efforts of the multitude to turn this common into a “body.”³⁵ The combined social, intellectual, and affective capacities of the common exists across society as a quality of living labor before it is put to work by capital: “the entrepreneurial power of productive labour is henceforth completely in the hands of the post-Fordist proletariat.”³⁶

Two conclusions can be drawn from this: firstly, the relationship between variable and constant capital has been reversed, and secondly, value, the core category of capitalist society, is no longer operative in the way Marx imagined. The post-workerists argue that profit has become, or is in a process of becoming, rent. The standard Marxian narrative is up-ended. Rather than capital purchasing labor power and setting it to work, and through its employment exploiting it, labor is seen as autonomous, and capital is a form of capture and command that imposes itself on this

autonomous creativity. Chicchi states “contemporary capitalism organises the excesses of value and the power of social cooperation (of the productive common) not by governing them, but rather, by inserting them into a variegated and complex control device that produces and imprints life in monetary measure.”³⁷ I have argued elsewhere that such an approach fails to understand how value operates—it is based on seeing value as the measurement of labor that takes place within the workplace, and since labor is excessive of the workplace, such a measurement is impossible. But this is not how capitalism functions. Value is the social existence that wealth takes in capitalism, due to the commodification of human creativity, the organization of social cooperation through monetary exchange, and the split between producers and between labor and capital.³⁸ For Marx, capitalist social relations take the forms of things in endless movement, for these authors capital is an apparatus of imposition.³⁹

One of the effects of this assumption is that the post-workerists do not grasp the split and contradictory nature of labor itself. The operation of value means the abstraction of labor—that is, since wealth takes the form of commodities, labor is counted in capitalism not because of the nature of the concrete labor processes, but rather because it becomes objectifications, crystallizations, of an abstract social substance. Labor thus has a dual character and, I would argue, it is this dual character that allows the possibility of emancipation (see later). But for the post-workerists this does not exist. Rather, there is just the common for, or beyond, capital. Labor, in all its multiplicities of existences, is a singular subject. Holloway, Matamoros, and Tischler have already identified the possibility that such an analysis leads to a radically democratic but perhaps not communist politics.⁴⁰ But what does this mean for demands?

The post-workerists grasp the contemporary exploitation of the multitude as the imposition of forms of control and command on an *a priori* autonomous multitude. But if we do not discard the idea of value, but grasp the continuation of the fetishism of social relations, then this *a priori* autonomous multitude is a fiction. This common, if that is the name which we use for intellectual and affect labor, is equally caught up in the process of commodification and such labor also takes a dual existence.⁴¹ This difference is effaced in the post-workerists conception of instituting the common. They argue for demands that seem to both break with capital (new forms of radical democracy) but also maintain it (more money, money being the purest form that value finds, and its continual existence in the post-workerist schema implies the continuation of exchange and commodities). As appealing as it is, without a rethinking it risks leading in a mistaken direction, unable to illuminate what kinds of activity might be more useful to undertake. This misreading of the nature of labor under capitalism hinders the development of politics that go to the root of our condition.

Here I want to trace some steps through Marx in an attempt to find a different approach to demands that recognizes the split and contradictory nature of our existence in capital.

MARX AND THE PROLETARIAT

What do we get if we turn to Marx? How can he help us in our specific and contingent moments and spaces of contestation? Marx and Engels famously wrote that:

Communism is for us not a state of affairs which is to be established, an ideal to which reality [will] have to adjust itself. We call communism the real movement which abolishes the present state of things. The conditions of this movement result from premises now in existence.⁴²

Communism, that is the condition of human freedom, exists already as the struggle against capitalism, as a real and living potential. Elsewhere Marx gives us two other metaphors to understand this: that capitalism, by creating a working class, “produces . . . its own gravediggers”; and that “within bourgeois society, the society that rests on exchange value, there arises relations of circulation as well as of production which are so many mines to explode it.”⁴³ Perhaps it is possible to read these as counterposed: the first is a force of people and the second as material productive structures. But it is possible to see them as two elements of a similar process: capitalism generates social cooperation, technical and human capacities that create the conditions of the possibility of a different form of life. These exist as an antagonistic possibility within capitalism and also the forms of rebellious social existence and subjectivity to realize these capacities. This is what Marx means by class—something so much more than the standard sociological use of it as simply a marker of difference and inequality.

This gives us our first point of orientation—the communist content of a struggle is the creation of forms of being and organization that start to realize these capacities “inside-against-and-beyond” the “social synthesis” of capitalism.⁴⁴ Understandably in conditions of capitalist normality these remain marginal elements of our lives. Communist militants, whatever name they work under, can orientate toward these moments and elements. Here it is important to flag that there is often a difference between communist militants and leaders of the working class: though we need to take a few more steps to grasp this.

So the potential for communism exists in the class—but Marx’s depiction of class is contradictory because over the arc of his writing he depicts the existence of the working class in capitalism and the potential

for emancipation in counterpoised ways. This counter-position arises, not from the incoherence of Marx's formulation but rather from the torn and antagonistic existence we have within capitalism.⁴⁵ The most obvious form of this juxtaposition is between a class in and for itself. For Marx:

Economic conditions had first transformed the mass of the people of the country into workers. The combination of capital has created for this mass a common situation, common interests. This mass is thus already a class as against capital, but not yet for itself. In the struggle, of which we have noted only a few phases, this mass becomes united, and constitutes itself as a class for itself. The interests it defends become class interests. But the struggle of class against class is a political struggle.⁴⁶

Thus, it is through struggle that the working class transforms itself from a class within capitalism, to an existence posed against capitalism. Hold that thought.

This division between class in and for itself is even greater when we read across Marx's work: we encounter a division between the proletariat as emancipatory force and labor power as variable capital (the wellspring of abstract labor that is the fetishised substance of value).⁴⁷ Despite Marx's best attempts these two narratives struggle to be reconciled.⁴⁸

In the introduction of *Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right* Marx theorizes a proletariat that is a force of universal emancipation because it exists in abjection as the "dissolution of society."⁴⁹ As Marx's work progressed the proletariat is no longer the explosive refuse outside of society, but rather both deep inside capital and also external to it. It is brought into capital as the source of value, but its exploitation, which is the alienation of humanity's historical and biological attributes, means a deep antagonism is also generated. The development of capitalism then is the development of the social force that will destroy it, and also a social force that due to its very exploitation can be the liberator of all of humanity. This is what Marx, with Engels, traces out in works such as the *1844 Manuscripts*, *The German Ideology*, and *The Communist Manifesto*.

However, Marx's critique of political economy also develops another narrative of labor. In the three volumes of *Capital*, labor appears most often as variable capital. Workers, as bearers of labor power, exchange this for wages, and then function as part of the labor processes, as the original source of surplus value and the lynchpin of accumulation. In Marx's critique of political economy (*The Grundrisse, A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy, Capital*) he draws a picture of a dynamic world in which, in its essence, workers are exploited by a social formation that

they constantly create and re-create, and that spirals upward in increasing complexity and absurdity.

These two depictions of class head in two totally different directions: one shows the creation of a growing mass of people posed against the accumulation of capital just about to realize human freedom; the other shows their increased subsumption by a world driven by its own internal and inhuman automatism. What are we to do with this? Does Marx solve this? There is of course *The Communist Manifesto* where Marx quickly explains this contradiction (and this was written before *Capital*) by the immiseration thesis, a deterministic prediction that capital's contradictions would propel the exploited into becoming their own liberators.⁵⁰ It is obvious to us that this was unfortunately wrong: we live the empirical evidence of its refutation.

Shortall makes the argument that *Capital* and, to a certain extent, *The Grundrisse* have to be grasped as incomplete. Not just in the sense that they are unfinished, but also in the sense that, by entering onto the terrain of political economy, Marx had to jettison the elements of his work that focused on the radical and subjective elements of struggle and take up a certain objective approach to portraying the motions of capitalism in the hope of exploding them from within. The effect was a focus on the apparently objectified movements of capital that closes off proletarian self-activity.⁵¹ This is similar to Lebowitz's argument that since Marx never wrote the book on wage labor we need to write it ourselves to complete the radical insight of Marx's work.⁵² It is here that the Tronti's "Copernican Inversion" is useful.

This leads us to two moves: just as it is advisable to take up *Capital* and use it as a tool to understand our world, it is also necessary to emphasize the hidden explosive possibility of proletarian self-activity. It is possible to find within *Capital* more subversive moments and then increase their emphasis to return class struggle to its place. We can do that by looking at another dual dynamic that Marx constructs—this is the dual character of labor.

Marx argues that labor in capitalism has a dual character: there is concrete labor and abstract labor.⁵³ Let's step back a second. Capitalism as a mode of life is organized by and for the "self-valorisation of value."⁵⁴ Wealth, that is actual products and services, is not produced as an end in itself, but only so it can be sold to realize value. Value, as we know, is the socially necessary labor time it takes to produce a commodity. But this labor time isn't the time of the actual material process of production. Value is not determined by concrete labor. Rather, it is through exchange that different noncommensurate forms of creativity are brought into comparison with each other and express different quantities of the same social substance, different quantities of the congealed labor of society. It is the commodification of wealth that creates the abstraction of labor. In a

capitalist society accumulation is possible because this abstraction of labor takes place in a specific matrix of social relations: social production takes place on a private basis, wealth takes the form of commodities, and workers are split from the means of production.⁵⁵

Of course, the processes of capitalist production means the constant revolutionization of the labor process—this shows that abstract labor works to shape and organize concrete labor. The constant speed up, breakup, intensification, or shut down of the labor process is governed by the movement and accumulation of value. Even those of us who don't produce commodities and whose labor isn't directly abstracted—since we may work for wages and/or exist in world where social wealth exists as commodities only accessible through money—also experience this abstraction. In addition, within a real existing capitalist society, a dense net of other relations, structures, and practices are necessary to keep the accumulation of capital churning along, such as gender, the police, and the production of ideology.

Here, we can follow Holloway and argue that the relationship between concrete labor and abstract labor is an antagonistic one.⁵⁶ In this antagonism, we can see again the contraction between the proletariat and variable capital, that is, between creativity and its abstraction. The antagonism between concrete and abstract labor is the diamond head of the antagonism between creativity as a living potential and capital as the endless accumulation of value. As Holloway identifies, this antagonism is one we live daily. In the everyday experiences of our lives, we live both as bearers and reproducers of variable capital, which we experience as fleshly personifications of labor power. We also misfit, rebel, and push against our reduction to this condition.⁵⁷

This is not an equal dynamic—as much as capital dominates us we exist as members of the class in itself. Most struggles happen as struggles that contest the conditions of sale and of reproduction of labor power and the capital relation more generally, but do not question the existence of this relation itself. Indeed, since the period of insurrections, marked by the Pairs Commune and the Russian Revolution, forced the existence of the working class as a reality in bourgeois thinking, capital has attempted to put to workers' struggle to use as a motor of development. In the social democratic period this was through the normalization of social democratic parties and trade unions, the provision of a social wage for increased productivity; and during the post-Fordist period, workers as individuals were offered consumption beyond the wage through the expansion of credit.⁵⁸

These struggles obviously matter—wages matter, access to health care and education matter, what you can consume matters—but that does not stop the limitations of these struggles that remain struggles of abstract labor, that is, struggles of the working class as struggles within capitalism.

Equally, the post-workerists demands, if realized, might make life better than it was before but that does not, by itself, equal emancipation, nor is it necessarily a stop on the road to emancipation. What is important is to try and detect the elements within these struggles and in daily life more broadly that seem to have a proletarian charge—those which offer the possibility of communism. In this sense, a working-class leader will seek to organize struggles for improved conditions of the working class—a communist militant will seek to increase the forms of activity that might lead to the self-abolition of the working class as a class and, with it, capitalism. There are times when these two forms of activity converge and times when they diverge—just as our interests as workers (I must live today in this world) and as proletarians (I wish to be free) sometimes converge and diverge. This distinction is a material reality not a moral judgement.

It is easy to find in daily life all the moments of dissatisfaction and disobedience that exist, and also point out those moments of social struggle that go beyond their often reformist expression. What is not known is how we move from these moments that are largely contained and normalized, into the creation of a force, a movement, and the production of a different world.

In this sense, right now, we exist in a world full of proletarian possibilities, but without the proletariat proper.

CONCLUSION

My guess is that what transform the working class into the proletariat are the relationships that are constructed by the class within itself. It is toward this that we can orientate ourselves with a new approach to radical knowledge and a new approach to practice—or perhaps an old one. Apart from arming ourselves with the critique of political economy, we need to turn toward the investigation of our condition, to find in our lived lives what are the fault lines at work, in the street, in the community, where the antagonisms between creativity and value offer to break through, to participate in these specific and contingent moments, to circulate the experiences and understandings, and to develop forms of organization and commons that arise from these moments.

So, finally, let us return to demands. Reading through the opposition of concrete and abstract labor, it is clear that demands for reforms within the current limits of capitalism operate on the level of abstract labor, so that at one level the call for demands remains firmly within capitalist logics. But since communist possibilities remain just that, possibilities, immersed in contradictions and necessities of daily life, it is this terrain we must fight on. Struggle has no consistent rhythm, sometimes it is glacially slow, and sometimes it races ahead. In the slow times, a process of investigation may produce certain specific demands, or in the face of austerity, the

starting point might be the demand of “No!” But these demands are not in themselves the issue. The issue is the accumulation of solidarity, defiance, autonomy, and unity of the class.

How do we do this on the ground? How do we speak in a way that can formulate an expression of specific moments of misfitting and refusal in a more generalized form that connects with popular and common desires? How do we speak in a way that explains that these demands are not what we ultimately want? As yet, we are in the process of creating the language, writing the poetry. We are inventing it. Attempts to understand our lives with clarity can help.

NOTES

1. It is important to acknowledge that I am writing about this group of authors from afar. This means that I may see similarities between writers when there are real differences and miss the important nuances only insiders can gain. Thus here I am very much, to follow on from Chiesa and Tascono’s comment, reading post-workerism in Brisbane. Lorenzo Chiesa and Alberto Toscano, “Introduction,” in *The Italian Difference: Between Nihilism and Biopolitics*, ed. Lorenzo Chiesa and Alberto Toscano (Melbourne: re.press, 2009), 5. There is a long-standing tendency to reduce the authors I will be looking at here to mainly appendages to the work of Toni Negri. There is good reason for this—Negri’s work is impressive and is easily accessible in English. In an attempt to address this I will try to use a wider range of authors. The primary source for this is a work that arose out of the Uni-Nomade seminars cf. Andrea Fumagalli and Sando Mezzadra, eds., *Crisis in the Global Economy: Financial Markets, Social Struggles and New Political Scenarios* (Los Angeles: Semiotext(e), 2010).

2. See Werner Bonefeld, Richard Gunn, and Kosmas Psychopedis, “Introduction,” in *Open Marxism*, ed. Werner Bonefeld, Richard Gunn, and Kosmas Psychopedis (London: Pluto Press, 1992); John Holloway, Fernando Matamoros, and Sergio Tischler, eds., *Negativity and Revolution: Adorno and Political Activism* (London: Pluto Press, 2009).

3. Marco Deseriis and Jodi Dean, “A Movement without Demands?,” Possible Futures (2012). <http://www.possible-futures.org/2012/01/03/a-movement-without-demands/>

4. Doug Henwood, “OWS Demands Working Group: Jobs for All!,” LBO News from Doug Henwood (2011). <http://lbo-news.com/2011/10/20/ows-demands-working-group-jobs-for-all/>

5. Midnight Notes Collective, “The New Enclosures,” in *Midnight Oil: Work, Energy, War 1973–1992*, ed. Midnight Notes Collective (Brooklyn, NY: Autonomedia, 1992), 318–321.

6. TPTG and Blaumachen, “Like a Winter with a Thousand Decembers,” libcom.org (2009). <http://libcom.org/library/winter-thousand-decembers-tptgblaumachen>

7. Gilles Dauve, “In This World, But Not of This World,” libcom.org (2011). <http://libcom.org/library/world-not-world-gilles-dauve%C3%A9>

8. The Invisible Committee, *The Coming Insurrection* (Los Angeles: Semiotext(e), 2009), 94.

9. Endnotes, "What Are We to Do?," in *Communization and Its Discontents: Contestation, Critique and Contemporary Struggles*, ed. Benjamin Noys (Wivenhoe/New York/ Port Watson: Minor Compositions), 37.

10. *Ibid.*, 38.

11. Mario Tronti, "Lenin in England," libcom.org (1964). <http://libcom.org/library/lenin-in-england-mario-tronti>. The classification of Tronti's work as a "Copernican inversion" of Marxism comes from Yann Moulier, "Introduction," in Antonio Negri, *The Politics of Subversion: A Manifesto for the Twenty-First Century* (Cambridge & Malden: Polity Press, 2005), 19.

12. For example, see Antonio Negri, *The Politics of Subversion: A Manifesto for the Twenty-First Century*, 2nd ed., trans. James Newell (Cambridge & Malden: Polity Press, 2005); Antonio Negri, *The Porcelain Workshop: For a New Grammar of Politics* (Los Angeles: Semiotext(e), 2008); Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Labor of Dionysus: A Critique of the State-Form* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003); Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Empire* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2000).

13. Christian Marazzi, *The Violence of Financial Capitalism*, new ed. (Los Angeles: Semiotext(e), 2011), 121.

14. Ten Thesis on the Financial Crisis, "Nothing Will Ever Be the Same," in *Crisis in the Global Economy: Financial Markets, Social Struggles, and New Political Scenarios*, ed. Andrea Fumagalli and Sandro Mezzadra (Los Angeles: Semiotext(e), 2010), 261.

15. See Negri, *The Porcelain Workshop*, 61–75. This notion of struggle rests on a fundamentally nondialectical understanding of materialism that combines Spinoza, Deleuze, and Foucault with Marx but leaves out Hegel.

16. See Paolo Virno, *A Grammar of the Multitude* (Los Angeles, CA and New York: Semiotext(e), 2004); Paolo Virno, "Virtuosity and Revolution," in *Radical Thought in Italy: A Potential Politics*, ed. Michael Hardt and Paulo Virno (Minneapolis & London: University of Minnesota Press, 1996); Immaterial Workers of the World, "What Did I Tell You?" (2007). <http://whatinthehell.blogspot.com/2007/01/03/did-i-tell-you-to-do/>; Antonio Negri, "Constituent Republic," in *Radical Thought in Italy: A Potential Politics*, ed. Paulo Virno and Michael Hardt (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 1996); Hardt and Negri, *Empire*; Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Multitude: War and Democracy in the Age of Empire* (New York: The Penguin Press, 2004).

17. Antonio Negri, "What to Do Today with What Is to Be Done?, or Rather: The Body of the General Intellect," in *Lenin Reloaded: Towards a Politics of Truth*, ed. Sebastian Budgen, Stathis Kouvelakis, and Slavoj Žižek (Durham & London: Duke University Press, 2007), 305; Virno, "Virtuosity and Revolution," 196–197.

18. See Felix Guattari and Antonio Negri, *Communists Like Us: New Spaces of Liberty, New Lines of Alliance*, trans. Michael Ryan (New York: Semiotext(e), 1990); Immaterial Workers of the World, "What Did I Tell You?."

19. Marazzi, *The Violence of Financial Capitalism*, 121–122.

20. Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Commonwealth* (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2009), 380–381.

21. Sandro Mezzadra, "Introduction," in *Crisis in the Global Economy: Financial Markets, Social Struggles, and New Political Scenarios*, ed. Andrea Fumagalli and Sandro Mezzadra (Los Angeles: Semiotext(e), 2010), 10.

22. Ten Thesis on the Financial Crisis, "Nothing Will Ever Be the Same," 260–261.

23. *Ibid.*, 254.

24. Carlo Vercellone, "The Crisis of the Law of Value and the Becoming-Rent of Profit: Notes on the Systemic Crisis of Cognitive Capitalism," in *Crisis in the Global Economy: Financial Markets, Social Struggles and New Political Scenarios*, ed. Andrea Fumagalli and Sandro Mezzadra (Los Angeles: Semiotext(e), 2010), 114.

25. *Ibid.*, 115.

26. In Queensland, Australia, where the impact of the crisis has been relatively minimal a form of preemptive austerity is being undertaken in the hopes of securing and bolstering the state's credit rating at great cost to the provision of social reproduction and the destruction of the livelihoods of at least 14,600 workers. cf. Workers' Audit, "Workers' Audit No. 1," Workers' Audit (2012). <https://www.facebook.com/notes/workers-audit/workers-audit-no-1/100810233400417>.

27. Ten Thesis on the Financial Crisis, "Nothing Will Ever Be the Same," 261.

28. Vercellone, "The Crisis of the Law of Value and the Becoming-Rent of Profit," 117.

29. Ariana Eunjung Cha, "Spain's Crisis Spawns Euro-Free Economy," *The Guardian Weekly*, September 7, 2012, 17.

30. Steve Wright, *Storming Heaven: Class Composition and Struggle in Italian Autonomist Marxism* (London and Sterling, VA: Pluto Press, 2002), 191–192.

31. Vercellone, "The Crisis of the Law of Value and the Becoming-Rent of Profit," 116.

32. *Ibid.*, 118.

33. Hardt and Negri, *Multitude*, 358.

34. *Ibid.*, 342.

35. Negri, "What to Do Today with What Is to Be Done?," 302.

36. Negri, "Constituent Republic," 216.

37. Federico Chicchi, "On the Threshold of Capital, at the Thresholds of the Common," in *Crisis in the Global Economy: Financial Markets, Social Struggles and New Political Scenarios*, ed. Andrea Fumagalli and Sandro Mezzadra (Los Angeles: Semiotext(e), 2010), 151.

38. David Eden, *Autonomy: Capital, Class & Politics* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2012); Dave Eden, "Angels of Love in the Unhappiness Factory," *Subjectivity* 5, no. 1 (2012): 15–35.

39. Karl Marx, *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy*, vol. 3, trans. David Fernbach (London: Penguin Books in association with New Left Review, 1991), 953–954.

40. John Holloway, Fernando Matamoros, and Sergio Tischler, "Negativity and Revolution: Adorno and Political Activism," in *Negativity and Revolution: Adorno and Political Activism*, ed. John Holloway, Fernando Matamoros, and Sergio Tischler (London: Pluto Press 2009), 7.

41. Giorgio Agamben, *Means without Ends: Notes on Politics*, trans. Vincenzo Binetti and Cesare Casarino (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2000), 84.

42. Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *The German Ideology, Part One*, 3rd ed. (New York: International Publishers, 1973), 56–57.

43. Karl Marx, *The Revolutions of 1848: Political Writings, vol. 1* (London: Penguin, 1993), 79; Karl Marx, *Grundrisse: Foundation of the Critique of Political Economy (Rough Draft)* (London: Penguin Books, 1993), 159.

44. See John Holloway, “In the Beginning Was the Scream,” in *Revolutionary Writing: Common Sense Essays in Post-Political Politics*, ed. Werner Bonefeld (Brooklyn, NY: Autonomedia, 2003); John Holloway, *Crack Capitalism* (London: Pluto Press, 2010).

45. For a longer reconstruction of this argument see Eden, “Angels of Love in the Unhappiness Factory.”

46. Karl Marx, *The Poverty of Philosophy* (New York: International Publishers, 1963), 173.

47. For an exploration of recent debates on the nature of abstract labor, see Werner Bonefeld, “Abstract Labour: Against Its Nature and on Its Times,” *Capital & Class* 34, no. 2 (2010): 257–276.

48. A longer reconstruction of this argument can be found in Eden, “Angels of Love in the Unhappiness Factory.”

49. Karl Marx, *Early Writings*, trans. Rodney Livingstone and Gregor Benton (London: Penguin Books in association with New Left Review, 1992), 256.

50. Marx, *The Revolutions of 1848: Political Writings, Vol.1*, 78–79.

51. Felton C. Shortall, *The Incomplete Marx* (Aldershot, England: Avebury, 1994).

52. Michael A. Lebowitz, *Beyond Capital: Marx’s Political Economy of the Working Class* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1992).

53. Karl Marx, *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy*, vol. 1, trans. Ben Fowkes (London: Penguin Classics, 1990), 131–138; Holloway, *Crack Capitalism*, 87.

54. Marx, *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy*, vol. 1, 255.

55. *Ibid*; Werner Bonefeld, “Abstract Labour: Against Its Nature and on Its Times”; Isaak Illich Rubin, *Essays on Marx’s Theory of Value*, trans. Milos Samardzija and Fredy Perlman (Montreal: Black Rose Books, 1973); Michael Heinrich, *An Introduction to the Three Volumes of Karl Marx’s Capital* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 2012).

56. See Holloway, *Crack Capitalism*.

57. John Holloway, *Change the World without Taking Power: The Meaning of Revolution Today* (London: Pluto Press, 2002). See also Holloway, *Crack Capitalism*.

58. Midnight Notes Collective and Friends, “Promissory Notes: From Crisis to Commons,” midnightnotes.org (2009). <http://midnightnotes.org/Promissory%20Notes.pdf>.

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CHAPTER 5

Communism and the Digital Commons

Jodi Dean

INTRODUCTION

The ideas of common and the commons come up frequently in the current discussion of communism. Michael Hardt uses the notion of the *common* to draw out the specificity of the neoliberal assault. For Hardt, neoliberalism is more than a policy entailing the privatization of public property and services. It is a seizure of what is common—knowledge, language, images, and affects.¹ Slavoj Žižek emphasizes the *commons* insofar as reference to the commons “justifies the resuscitation of the notion of communism: it enables us to see the progressing ‘enclosure’ of the commons as a process of proletarianization of those who are thereby excluded from their own substance.”² My interest in this chapter is in the ways that the common and the commons illuminate processes of exploitation and expropriation specific to communicative capitalism. I use them to highlight both new experiences of collectivity and barriers to the politicization of these experiences.

Communicative capitalism designates the convergence of capitalism and democracy through networked media.³ In communicative capitalism, democratic values take material form in networked communications technologies. Ideals of access, inclusion, and participation are realized in and through expansions, intensifications, and interconnections of global personal media. Changes in information and communication networks associated with digitalization, speed, and storage capacity impact capitalism and democracy, amplifying elements of each as they consolidate the two into a new formation. For example, over the last 30 years of neoliberal

capitalism's consolidation, participatory media has offered quick, easy, universal democracy: anyone with a mobile phone or access to the Internet can make his or her voice heard.

Communicative capitalism incites engagement and participation in order to capture them in the affective networks of mass personalized media.⁴ These networks materialize a contradiction. They produce a common, collective information and communication mesh of circulating affects and ideas. At the same time, they presuppose and entrench individualism such that widely shared ideas and concerns are conceived less in terms of a self-conscious collective than they are as viruses, mobs, trends, moments, and swarms, as if collectivity were nothing but an object of epidemiology—an idea or image with an impact goes viral. When communication is the means of capitalist subsumption, inequality increases as communicative action intensifies.

Hardt's conception of language, ideas, knowledge, and affects as themselves already common occludes antagonism. Highlighting the productive capacities of language rather than the inequality necessary for capitalism, it proceeds as if we did not speak multiple, incommensurable languages, as if referents and systems of meaning didn't clash with one another, as if knowledges did not emerge in and through conflict. Rather than avoiding or denying antagonism, we should occupy it and force it in a communist direction. Instead of appealing to the potentiality of capacities we all share, capacities of language, communication, and thought, we should emphasize again the epic and never-ending struggle of workers against owners and of many against few.

Because antagonism is an irreducible feature of our setting, division is common to communication. Division goes all the way down, separating speaker from utterance, utterance from meaning, and meaning from hearer, audience, and recipient. What resonates to one, what is available as a resource for thinking and relating to others, is always already distanced, dissipated, or bracketed—whether temporally, tribally, topically, or topographically. Communication is necessarily partial, filled with holes, inseparable from power and hierarchy, reliant on exclusion. Communicative capitalism mobilizes these parts and holes, these fragments in motion, filling them in with images and feelings and bits of enjoyment. Free-floating words and images are mashed up and recombined, recirculated, and redeployed, the fact of their transmission displacing previous models of message and response. How many page views? How many copies sold? The magnitude, the surplus of contributions, accumulates in data banks on server farms, potential information for spies and ad-men as soon as the quants and geeks figure out how to value it and put it to use. Perpetually engaged, we search and link, making the paths we follow—even as Google claims the traces as its own. We constitute the practices that constitute us.

We collectively determine our collective conditions, but not yet as the people, still as populations.

COMMUNICATION IS THE HIGHEST STAGE OF CAPITALISM

I begin with a brief sketch of the relationship between neoliberalism and communicative capitalism. Understood broadly, neoliberalism designates a particular strategy of class domination that uses the state to promote certain competitive dynamics for the benefit of the very rich. In Duménil's and Lévy's words, "Neoliberalism is a new stage of capitalism that emerged in the wake of the structural crisis of the 1970s. It expresses the strategy of the capitalist classes in alliance with upper management, specifically financial managers, intending to strengthen their hegemony and expand it globally."⁵ Less a strategy for production than for the transfer of wealth to the very rich, neoliberalism places the "needs of money . . . over those of production."⁶ Pursued through policies of privatization, deregulation, and financialization, and buttressed by an ideology of private property, free markets, and free trade, neoliberalism has entailed cuts in taxes for the rich and cuts in protections and benefits for workers and the poor, resulting in an exponential increase in inequality.

The relation between neoliberalism and communicative capitalism is historical and contingent. In principle, a convergence between capitalist and democratic ideals in networked communications could have accompanied Keynesian economic policies. In actuality, neoliberalism and communicative capitalism have been mutually reinforcing. Networked information technologies have been the means through which people have been subjected to the competitive intensity of neoliberal capitalism. Enthusiastically participating in personal and social media—I *have broadband at home! My new tablet lets me work anywhere! With my smartphone, I always know what's going on!*—we build the trap that captures us, a trap which extends beyond global use of mobile phones and participation in social networks to encompass the production of these phones and the hardware necessary to run these networks.

Investment in information technologies drove the 1990s dot-com bubble, feeding New Economy hype, generating excess capacity, and leading to no discernible increase in productivity apart from that in the high-tech industry. Technologies that elites told us were increasing productivity in fact directed the Internet away from what was heralded as its democratic and liberatory potential and toward its use as a means of social control and capital accumulation. Insofar as participation involved personalization, new opportunities for tracking, surveillance, and monitoring arose, much to the delight of marketers seeking deeper and more granulated access to customers.⁷ Likewise, the immediacy of networked media

accelerated competition to discover and capitalize on the next new thing, exerting pressure for ever faster trading in multiple markets. Even after the bubble burst, New Economy rhetoric continued to extol digitalization for enabling capitalism to overcome its contradictions. Doug Henwood indicts this discourse for appealing to utopian impulses in anti-utopian times: “Find capitalism too controlling? No, it’s spontaneous! Too inegalitarian and exploitative? No, it overturns hierarchies! Vulgar, brutal, deskilling, and mercenary? *Au contraire*, it’s creative and fun! Unstable? Nah, that’s just its miraculous dynamism at work!”⁸

Widely celebrated for making work fun, inspiring creativity, and opening up entrepreneurial opportunities, networked information and communication technology contributed to the production of new knowledge-based enterprises. Its more pronounced legacy, however, has been widespread deskilling, surveillance, and the acceleration and intensification of work and culture: the freedom of telecommuting quickly morphed into the tether of 24/7 availability, permanent work. Describing a key contradiction of communicative capitalism, Franco Berardi writes, “If you want to survive you have to be competitive and if you want to be competitive you must be connected, receive and process continuously an immense and growing mass of data,” and hence under constant soul-destroying pressure to keep up, stay alert, remain motivated.⁹ Communication technologies made capitalism acceptable, exciting, and cool, immunizing it from critique by rendering critics into outmoded technophobes. At the same time, these technologies provided the basic components necessary for neoliberalism’s acceleration of capitalism, not to mention a bunch of super-fun diversions enabling people to feel radical and connected while playing on their laptops.

Communication technologies contribute to the displacement and dispersion of critical energy such that even as inequality has intensified, forming and organizing a coherent opposition has remained a persistent problem—and this in a setting lauded for the way it provides everyday people with new capacities for involvement. Participatory media is personalizing media, not only in the sense of surveillance and tracking but also in the sense of the injunction to find out for oneself and share one’s opinion. Ubiquitous personal communications media turn our activity into passivity, capturing it and putting it into the service of capitalism. Angry, engaged, desperate to do *something*, we look for evidence, ask questions, and make demands. Yet the information we need to act seems perpetually out of reach; there is always something we misunderstand or do not know.¹⁰

The astronomical increases in information that our searching, commenting, and participating generate entrap us in a setting of communication without communicability. As contributions to circuits of information and affect, our utterances are communicatively equivalent; their content,

their meaning, is unimportant. On a blog, for example, gibberish written by an automated bot is as much a comment as any thoughtful reflection. The specific contribution has no symbolic efficiency; rather, it marks only the fact of its having been made. This decline in a capacity to transmit meaning, to symbolize beyond a limited discourse or immediate, local context, characterizes communication's reconfiguration into a primarily economic form. It produces for circulation, not use. As Hardt and Negri argue in *Empire*, communication "is the form of capitalist production in which capital has succeeded in submitting society entirely and globally to its regime."¹¹ Having become production, communication flows and circulates with little to no regard for transmitting meaning. Channeled through cellular networks and fiber optic cables, onto screens and into sites for access, storage, retrieval, and counting, communication merges with the capitalist circuits it produces and amplifies.

Capitalist productivity derives from its expropriation and exploitation of communicative processes. This does not mean that information technologies have replaced manufacturing; in fact, they drive a wide variety of mining, chemical, and biotechnological industries. Nor does it mean that networked computing has enhanced productivity outside the production of networked computing itself. Rather, it means that capitalism has subsumed communication such that communication does not provide a critical outside. Communication serves capital, whether in affective forms of care for producers and consumers, the mobilization of sharing and expression as instruments for human relations in the workplace, or contributions to media circuits.¹²

DIRECT APPROPRIATION OF THE SOCIAL SUBSTANCE

Marx's analysis of value in *Capital* helps explain how communication can be a vehicle for capitalist subsumption. Value, for Marx, derives from the social character of labor. What is common to different kinds of human labor is that they are all labor in the abstract, components of the larger homogeneous mass of human labor. Products of labor are "crystals of this social substance, common to them all," that is to say, values.¹³ Communicative capitalism seizes, privatizes, and attempts to monetize the social substance. It doesn't depend on the commodity-thing. It directly exploits the social relation at the heart of value. Social relations don't have to take the fantastic form of the commodity to generate value for capitalism. Via networked, personalized communication and information technologies, capitalism has found a more direct way to appropriate value. Perhaps paradoxically, ubiquitous media enable the immediate appropriation of value.

One of the clearest expressions of communicative capitalism's direct exploitation of the social substance is Metcalfe's Law: "The value of a

communications network is proportional to the square of the number of its users."¹⁴ The basic idea is that the more people using a network, the more valuable it is. Although not an accurate rendition of Robert Metcalfe's (inventor of Ethernet) actual argument, the law named after him became Silicon Valley gospel, in part because it was widely and enthusiastically preached by Republican entrepreneur George Gilder, becoming one of the core beliefs anchoring claims for the New Economy. During the dot-com boom, venture capitalists and Internet entrepreneurs invoked Metcalfe's Law like a mantra because it seemed to reveal the secret to success expressed in their vernacular of "'network effects,' 'first-mover advantage,' 'Internet time,' and, most poignant of all, 'build it and they come.'"¹⁵ There are multiple problems with Metcalfe's Law, including those of scale (larger networks may be more prone to crashes and delays) and the suppositions regarding the relations between the links (that all are active, say). More important is the fact that so many dot-com startups failed: there is a gap between the value of a network and the monetization of that value. The capitalists didn't know how to turn value into profit.

Nonetheless, the truth in Metcalfe's Law is its association of value with the communicative network itself. If the Web were just a bunch of pages, it would not have the value it has today. "It is precisely because every Web page can, in principle, link to any other page that the Web has grown as it has."¹⁶ Value is a property of the relations, the links, between and within pages. Google's PageRank algorithm, for example, is one of most successful information retrieval algorithms because it takes linking into account. John Markoff (in the business section of the *New York Times*) explains that "the basic technology that made Google possible, known as 'PageRank,' systematically exploits human knowledge and decisions about what is significant to order search results."¹⁷ For Markoff, what's interesting about PageRank and other such algorithms is their extraordinary potential for profit—they mine and extract common knowledge. The same point can be rendered critically: networked communications are the form of capitalism's subsumption of the social substance to its terms and dynamics. Matteo Pasquinelli thus argues that "Google is a parasitic apparatus of capture of the value produced by common intelligence."¹⁸ He treats the prestige that PageRank attends to (and reflexively enhances) in terms of the network value of any given link. Network value describes a link's social relations: How many other links is it related to? Are those links related to other links? How many? Google captures this value, the link's social substance, its place within a general system of social relations.

Communication in communicative capitalism joins together the communicative equivalence of contributions with the inequality of their network value. Rather than a setting where a speaker delivers a message to a hearer who has first to consider matters of intent and intelligibility (*why is she telling me this and does it make sense?*), communicative capitalism is

one where messages are contributions to a circulating flow of inputs. As contributions, messages are communicatively equivalent; their content, meaning, and intent are irrelevant. Yet this equivalence is accompanied by dynamic hierarchies and real inequality, a contradiction perhaps best expressed as “some contributions are more equal than others”—because of their links. Google search results tell us that networks recognize inequality. Money and influence make a difference. Results can be paid for, manipulated for a price. The already prominent and popular, the corporate-friendly and media-savvy, beat out the small and rare, a phenomenon I discuss later in terms of power laws. What matters here is that the contradiction between equivalence and inequality in communicative contributions repeats the “secret of the expression of value” that Marx describes in connection with commodities. Equality in circulation rests on a dominant relation of exploitation.

EXPROPRIATION AND EXPLOITATION IN COMMUNICATIVE CAPITALISM

We learn from Marx that increases in commodity production result in the loss of value of any given commodity. Capitalism, as commodity production, comes up against this limit—the very drive to produce more results in the diminution of the value of production. It’s no surprise that a globally unleashed capitalism would encounter the loss of an incentive to make things, that is, a decline in the willingness of capital to invest in the production of goods. In response, it has found unique ways to exploit the social substance, ways deeply imbricated with communicative capitalism’s injunctions to connect, participate, and share.

Cesare Casarino treats the self-reproducing excess of contemporary capitalism in terms of the common. For him, common is neither an attribute nor a thing. Like capitalism itself, the common is a dynamic process. It is production. Glossing Hardt and Negri, Casarino writes, “nowadays the common is virtually indistinguishable from that which continually captures it, namely, capital understood as a fully—that is, intensively and extensively—global network of social relations.”¹⁹ Casarino distinguishes this sense of the common as a global network of social relations from the idea of the commons. The commons is finite and characterized by scarcity. In contrast, the common is infinite and characterized by surplus. The common thus designates and takes the place of human labor power (Marx’s source of value), now reconceived in the broadest possible terms of the potential of creativity, thought, knowledge, and communication as themselves always plural, open, and productive.

Both common and commons are material and immaterial, natural and historical. Although the common indicates language, affect, thought, and knowledge—that is, communication—it is not detached from its materiality

and historicity. Casarino thereby clarifies what the term “immaterial labor” tends to occlude. Communication depends on a complex assemblage: satellites, fiber-optic cables, broad spectrum bandwidth, cellular networks, SIM cards, laptops, mobile phones, personal media devices, screens, protocols, code, software, search engines, radio signals, blogs, images, emotions, catch phrases, jingles, jargon, citations, archives, fears, omissions, comfort, denial. Installing breaks in this assemblage on the basis of an always questionable materiality closes off what the present opens, namely, the fecundity of communicative substance. Or, more bluntly put, not only does it make little sense to try to separate the material from the immaterial but the very effort to do so erases the convergences of language, affect, and systems, as things necessary for communicative capitalism.

The move from commons to common helps explain exploitation and expropriation in contemporary capitalism. As Marx made clear, at least one of the problems with the expropriation of the commons is that a few get a lot and some are left with nothing, having to sell their labor power. Privatization leaves them deprived of what they had. A contemporary version of this deprivation occurs through the widespread extension of credit—whether in the form of subprime mortgages, student loans, high interest credit cards, or leverage in investment banking. Such forms of credit privatize the future as they deprive the indebted of what they will have. The common is different. There is expropriation, but an expropriation that does not appear to leave many with little. There is more than enough, perhaps even too much. A question for the capture of the common in capitalism, then, is the crime or harm: If there is abundance or surplus, why is expropriation a problem? Or is the problem some kind of exploitation, and if so, what kind?

Networked communications provide multiple instances of expropriation and exploitation of the common. Here are six: data, metadata, networks, attention, capacity, and spectacle. Each of these is an interconnected yet distinct exploitation of the social substance. The notion of the common, with and against the idea of the commons, enables this exploitation to appear as exploitation. In other words, it enables us to grasp the precise ways in which communicative capitalism runs up against its own contradictions.

First, Facebook and Amazon, like many Internet companies, claim ownership of information placed on their sites. They claim as their own property the products of unremunerated creative, communicative labor. Profiting from the voluntary and unpaid labor of millions, they extend into society exploitative practices already coincident with networked communications. Google wouldn’t have started without free software—it relied originally on the Linux kernel. Building it from scratch would have taken roughly 270 developers, 11 years, and cost \$431 million.²⁰

A second kind of expropriation is of our metadata—our search patterns, friends, and relationships. User desire to navigate a rich information

field is exploited for the access it provides to the larger field of choices and links. As we already saw in Pasquinelli's account of network value, Google treats the traces left by searching and linking as its own potential resource to mine and market.

A third version of expropriation and exploitation of the social substance reiterates the division within the people, exposing this division as a matter of exploitation rather than exclusion. I call this network exploitation. It involves the structure of complex networks. Complex networks are characterized by free choice, growth, and preferential attachment. Examples include academic citation networks, the popularity of blogs and websites, as well as blockbuster movies and bestsellers, all of which can be explained in terms of power laws. As Albert-Laszlo Barabasi demonstrates, complex networks follow a power law distribution of links. The item in first place or at the top of a given network has twice as many links as the item in second place, which has more than the one in third and so on, such that there is very little difference among those at the bottom but massive differences between top and bottom. So lots of novels are written. Few are published. Fewer are sold. A very few become best sellers. Or lots of articles are written. Few are read. The same four are cited by everybody. The idea appears in popular media as the 80/20 rule, the winner-take-all or winner-take-most character of the new economy, and the long tail.

In these examples, the common is the general field out of which the one emerges. Exploitation consists in efforts to stimulate the creative production of the field in the interest of finding, and then monetizing, the one. Expanding the field produces the one (or, put in the language of network theory, hubs are an immanent property of complex networks). Such exploitation contributes to the expropriation of opportunities for income and paid labor, as in the collapse of print journalism and academic presses. We should recognize here a primary condition of labor under neoliberal capitalism. Now, rather than having a right to the proceeds of one's labor by virtue of a contract, ever more of us win or lose such that remuneration is treated like a prize. In academia, art, writing, architecture, entertainment, design, and increasing numbers of fields, people not only feel fortunate to get work, to get hired, to get paid, but ever more tasks and projects are conducted as competitions, which means that those doing the work are not paid unless they win. They work but only for a chance of being paid.

Thomas Hobbes's description of merit is helpful here. In *Leviathan* (Chapter 14), Hobbes explains that the one who performs first in the case of a contract merits that which he is to receive from the performance of the other. Because the first has performed (in accordance with the contract), the second is obliged to give the first what is due him. In the instance of a prize, we also say that the winner merits his winnings, but there is

a difference: the prize is the product of the event, the contest. The relation between the one awarding the prize and the winner depends on the goodwill of the giver. Nothing specifically links the winner to the prize. The implication of this shift from contract to contest, from wages to prizes (a shift the consent to which is currently being manufactured in part via so-called reality television competitions), is the mobilization of the many to produce the one. Without the work of the many, there would not be one (who is necessarily contingent).

The administration of U.S. president Barak Obama has made inducement prizes a key part of its "Strategy for American Innovation." Outlining its vision for a more competitive America, the White House announced that government "should take advantage of the expertise and insight of people both inside and outside" Washington by using "high-risk, high-reward policy tools such as prizes and challenges to solve tough problems."²¹ What went unmentioned are the characteristics of those in a position to take risks. Contests privilege those who have the resources to take risks as they transfer costs associated with doing work to contestants (furthering neoliberalism's basic mechanism of socializing risk and privatizing reward). For example, consider the 1996 Ansari X Prize in commercial spaceflight.²² The \$10 million prize was won by billionaire Paul Allen (one of the cofounders of Microsoft) and aerospace designer Burt Rutan. The 26 teams competing for the prize spent approximately \$100 million.²³ People paid to do work for which they would not be remunerated. It sounds like art, blogging, most writing, and most creative work. Work is done and then maybe paid for (the winner) and likely not (the losers).

In effect, each contestant faces the uncertainty typically associated with the capitalist who invests in production in the hope of realizing a profit. The difference is that rather than the outcome being determined through competition in the market, the outcome of the contest is determined by a judge. The only link between the work and the remuneration comes from the prize giver, who is now in a position of judge, charitable giver, or beneficent lord, and who has no obligation to any of the contestants. As a governmental policy, or approach to funding, the logic of the prize is extended into an acceptable work relation.

One might ask why inducement prizes are a problem: no one forces anyone to enter the competitions. The problem comes in with the shift in the approach to work, when prizes become a general practice. Those who don't choose to enter have fewer opportunities for contract-based work because the amount of contract-based work diminishes. The overall field changes such that people have little choice but to compete under these terms.

The next three instances of communicative expropriation and exploitation highlight the instability of the distinction between common and commons. These are attention, capacity, and spectacle.

The myriad entertainments and diversions available online, or as apps for smartphones, are not free. We don't usually pay money directly to Gmail, YouTube, Facebook, and Twitter. These don't cost money. They cost time. It takes time to post and write, and time to read and respond. We pay with attention and the cost is focus.

Our attention isn't boundless. Our time is finite—even as we try to extract value out of every second (we don't have time to waste). We cannot respond to every utterance, click on every link, read every post. We have to choose even as the possibility of something else, something wonderful, lures us to search and linger. Demands on our attention, injunctions for us to communicate, participate, share—ever shriller and more intense—are like so many speedups on the production line, attempts to extract from us whatever bit of mindshare is left.

Berardi theorizes these speedups as a supersaturation of attention: "The acceleration produced by network technologies and the condition of precariousness and dependence of cognitive labor, forced as it is to be subject to the pace of the productive network, has produced a saturation of human attention which has reached pathological levels."²⁴ He connects increases in depression, anxiety, panic disorder, suicide, and the use of psycho-pharmaceuticals to this acceleration, as human psyches and brains come up against their limits and oscillate between the hyperexcitation of mobilized nervous energy and withdrawal and disinvestment. Recent research in neuroscience confirms that the incessant injunctions to find out, know, choose, and decide are overloading and exhausting our basic cognitive-emotional capacities. As a summary of this research explained:

No matter how rational and high-minded you try to be, you can't make decision after decision without paying a biological price. It's different from ordinary physical fatigue—you're not consciously aware of being tired—but you're low on mental energy. The more choices you make throughout the day, the harder each one becomes for your brain, and eventually it looks for shortcuts, usually in either of two very different ways. One shortcut is to become reckless: to act impulsively instead of expending the energy to first think through the consequences. (Sure, tweet that photo! What could go wrong?) The other shortcut is the ultimate energy saver: do nothing. Instead of agonizing over decisions, avoid any choice.²⁵

The communicative circuits of contemporary capitalism are loops of drive, impelling us forward and back through excitation and exhaustion. The more contributions we make, the more we expand the field in which others have to decide: respond or ignore? Either way, a choice has to be

made and the more choices one is compelled to make, the more exhausted one becomes.

When we respond to the invitations and incitements in our media feeds, whether as part of our work, our play, our activism, or our consumer practice, our contribution is an addition to an already infinite communicative field, a little demand on someone else's attention, a little incitement of an affective response, a digital trace that can be stored—and on and on and on. The cost of the exponentially expanding circuit of information and communication is particularly high for progressive and Left political movements. Competition for attention—*how do we get our message across?*—in a rich, tumultuous media environment too often and easily means adapting to this environment and making its dynamic our own, which can result in a shift in focus from doing to appearing, that is to say, a shift toward thinking in terms of getting attention in the 24/7 media cycle and away from larger questions of building a political apparatus with duration. Infinite demands on our attention—demands we make on each other and which communicative capitalism captures and amplifies—expropriate political energies of focus, organization, duration, and will vital to communism as a movement and a struggle. It is no wonder that communicative capitalism is participationist: the more participation in networked media environments, the more traces to hoard and energies to capture or divert.

The limits of attention are not only the limits of individuals (and so can be resolved by distributing labor and crowdsourcing). They are the limits that make communication as such possible, as in, for example, distinctions between signal and noise as well as those characteristics of our habits, environments, and processes that direct our attention and thereby produce the circumstances of communication. The limits of attention are common. The common actualized in contemporary communication networks functions itself as a means of expropriation. Overproduction and overaccumulation of the common, then, are problems unique to communicative capitalism. As Christian Marazzi powerfully demonstrates, “the disproportion between the supply of information and the demand for attention is a *capitalistic* contradiction, an internal contradiction of the value form.”²⁶

The fact of attention's limits points to the division inseparable from communication: ideas and affects are not infinitely transferable, accessible, communicable. Hardt misses this when he argues that sharing ideas increases rather than decreases their utility. He argues that “in order to realize their maximum productivity, ideas, images and affects must be common and shared. When they are privatized their productivity reduces dramatically.”²⁷ If productivity means “capacity to circulate” or “transmissibility into a variety of sectors,” then increases in productivity (circulation) entail declines in specificity, accuracy, meaning, and registration. Present in ever wider and more differentiated settings, to ever more

varied audiences, ideas change. This is part of the pleasure in mashing together video and audio clips—sounds and images take on new meanings, becoming something different from what they were before. Brands, logos, images, and identities lose their unique signifying capacity when they extend too broadly, to too many different items with too many different valences—which is exactly why corporations fight to keep them private. If everything is Nike, then Nike doesn't mean anything. To be clear: I'm not defending property rights in ideas and images. Rather, I am pointing out that it is not their privatization that fetters capitalist production but the opposite, namely, their proliferation into a massive, circulating flow of increasingly valueless contributions insofar as each can command less and less attention. The contradiction is particular to communicative capitalism in that communication cannot be exponentially expanded as a form of capitalist production. It comes up against limits inherent to communication as such.

Casarino argues that potentiality is common. While potentiality is fully embedded within capitalism, it does not belong to capitalism. It doesn't belong to anybody. But Casarino moves too quickly to link potentiality to a common that exceeds capitalism's grasp. Communicative capitalism seizes excess, surplus, and abundance. Its drive impels us toward extra and more, new opportunities, unforeseen pleasures, chances and risks that if we don't take, someone else will, the very chances and risks that derivatives commodify and on which high finance speculates. Contemporary capitalism securitizes, monetizes, and privates potential. It does so through the excessive generation of debt (whether of individuals, households, or states); through the amplified role of speculative finance in generating corporate profit; through the premediation of events such that massive amounts of energy and attention are focused on what could or might happen; and through the incitement of creative work toward producing the one.²⁸ Potential is the gap in the actual, the difference worth exploiting and betting on, as illustrated by the arbitrage and high-speed trades on which so many hedge funds rely.

The fifth instance of expropriation and exploitation of the common/commons involves capacities. Just as industrial labor expropriated craft skill, breaking it into its smallest components and distributing these components via mechanization and assembly lines, so does communicative capitalism participate in the dispossession of our previously common knowledge and capacities. Computer chips and processors, mobile phones, and mp3 players are primary components of the expansion and acceleration of disposability. Computers are antiquated in under three years; mobile phones become old-fashioned (if not obsolete) in about 18 months. We don't learn how to fix them, forgetting that this is something we once might have known. Capacities to repair items of daily use have also diminished. The supposition is that we can just buy a new one. Of

course, this was already the case with the rapid expansion of domestic goods after World War II. Middle-class households in the United States and United Kingdom became less likely to make the things they needed—clothes, furniture—and bought them instead. Pressures on households to earn income, even while raising kids and participating in the care of others, have meant increased reliance on takeaway, fast, and frozen food, with a corresponding decrease in capacities to prepare and cook fresh food. Contemporary popular culture highlights the expropriation of capacities that many in the middle and former middle class currently experience. Television experts provide guidance in household organization, basic cooking skills, and how to get along with others.

Neoliberal trends in higher education extend these dynamics to the university: in a society without skills, who needs a degree? Capitalism no longer requires a skilled, educated middle class, so mass university education is no longer necessary. It doesn't take as many people as we have to service the top 1 percent, so most of us are not needed any more (except as the field out of which the one can emerge). In a setting that reduces education to knowledge, knowledge to information, and information to data, we are told that we can find out anything we want to know by googling it. In a nutshell: things do it for us so that we don't have to.²⁹ We don't need professors to tell us, or at least not very many—a couple of great universities can probably supply all the lawyers, scientists, bankers, and novelists a country needs (and if not, well, there is a global elite from which to draw). We've outsourced basic skills—or, they've been expropriated from us.

The sixth instance of exploitation and expropriation in communicative capitalism is spectacle. In *The Coming Community*, Giorgio Agamben presents the spectacle as “the extreme form of the expropriation of the Common.” Through spectacle, we are dispossessed of the “very possibility of a common good.” We are audience for, witnesses to, some dramatic event happening somewhere else, to someone else. Yet insofar as the very appeal, the affective charge, of the spectacle is its mass quality, the way it makes us feel connected to a larger we to which we belong, the spectacle returns to us our linguistic nature in an inverted form. It exploits our aspirations for common being, uses them against us as a mode of communicative power through which we are held captive while a very few profit, and yet offers a glimpse of the possibility of a positivity that might be used against it.³⁰

Agamben works from a dilemma expressed by Guy Debord: in the society of the spectacle, “the language of real communication has been lost” and a “new common language has yet to be found.” Debord writes, “Spectacular consumption preserves the old culture in congealed form, going so far as to recuperate and rediffuse even its negative manifestations; in this way, the spectacle's cultural sector gives over expression to

what the spectacle is implicitly in its totality—the *communication of the incommunicable*.³¹ Agamben responds to the expropriation of communicativity that Debord identifies by turning the problem into the solution. He uses the spectacle against itself. The incommunicable dissolves the gap between the language lost and the language to be found. It can be communicated. Insofar as the incommunicable is common, it persists beyond even the most extreme attempts at its expropriation. The spectacle thus contains its own overcoming. The expropriation of language in the spectacle opens up a new experience of language and linguistic being: “Not this or that content of language, but language *itself*, not this or that true proposition, but the very fact that one speaks.”³² Agamben treats communication reflexively: he turns from what is said to that something is said. Not only is a negative condition (estrangement from linguistic being) treated as a positive opening (new experience of belonging), but its positivity is a result of reflexivity. Language turns on itself. Freud discusses drive as precisely this turning round upon the self, a turning that involves a shift from activity to passivity. Agamben finds positive potential in the communication of incommunicability by replacing the active aim of saying something with the passive fact of having said. The movement from commons to common repeats the shift from active to passive, from desire to drive. The force of scarcity that characterizes the *commons* pushes action, decision, a choice for this rather than that. The communicative excess, the surplus *common*, suggests a field or milieu wherein activity has become passivity, a mode of capture or entrapment in the “not yet” or “perhaps.” Social media take our ensemble of actions and return them to us as an endless communicative common. Generation is for circulation as our images and affects, opinions, and contributions flow round and round, accumulating and distracting.

CONCLUSION

Hardt and Casarino appeal to an idea of the common as language, knowledge, and affect. They highlight what drives contemporary capitalism, what communicative capitalism expropriates and exploits. And they bring out emancipatory possibilities already present in our setting, in particular the common that exceeds its capture in capitalism and thereby holds out “the potential for an autonomous process that could destroy capital and create something entirely new.” Hardt argues that “through the increasing centrality of the common in capitalist production—the production of ideas, affects, social relations and forms of life—are emerging the conditions and weapons for a communist project.”³³ Insofar as each person is productive as an expressive, feeling, communicating being and insofar as all are productive in their communicative interrelations—together we produce the social substance that constitutes us—any ownership or profit

is clearly theft. Under communicative capitalism, such appropriation of the social substance is visible and undeniable—and thus a ground for arguments on behalf of global, guaranteed income: there is no one who does not contribute.

At the same time, however, the very communicative practices capitalism drives and exploits entrap us in circuits from which escape seems impossible: participation is personalization; the more we communicate, the less is communicated; expansions in expression and creativity produce the one rather than a collective of the many. The challenge, then, consists in breaking with current practices by insisting on and intensifying the division of, and in, the common. Continuing in the flow, persisting in the repetitions of drive, we over and over reconstitute capitalism's basic dynamic, perhaps generating "the possibility of another organization of social life" but also and at the same time hindering "that possibility from being realized."³⁴ Capitalism demands change, permanent revolution, crisis. Born out of opposition to planning, neoliberalism in particular thrives on shock and emergency, converging yet again with communicative capitalism in its mode of spectacle. To persist in the practices through which communicative capitalism exploits the social substance, then, is to fail to use division as a weapon on behalf of a communist project.

Division is common. We have to seize it.

NOTES

1. Michael Hardt, "The Common in Communism," in *The Idea of Communism*, ed. Costas Douzinas and Slavoj Žižek (London: Verso, 2010), 136.

2. Slavoj Žižek, "How to Begin from the Beginning," in *The Idea of Communism*, 213. In contrast, Nick Dyer-Witheford positions the common as an alternative to a communism reduced to a "centralized command economy and a repressive state." See Nick Dyer-Witheford, "Commonism," in *What Would It Mean To Win?*, ed. Turbulence Collective, Oakland (Oakland, CA: PM Press, 2010), 106.

3. Jodi Dean, *Publicity's Secret: How Technoculture Capitalizes on Democracy* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2002); Jodi Dean, *Democracy and Other Neoliberal Fantasies* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2009), ch. 1.

4. Jodi Dean, *Blog Theory: Feedback and Capture in the Circuits of Drive* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2010).

5. Gérard Duménil and Dominique Lévy, *The Crisis of Neoliberalism* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2011), 1.

6. Doug Henwood, *Wall Street* (London: Verso, 1998), 237.

7. Mark Andrejevich, *iSpy: Surveillance and Power in the Interactive Era* (Lawrence, KS: University of Kansas Press, 2009).

8. Doug Henwood, *After the New Economy* (New York: The New Press, 2005), 37.

9. Franco Berardi, *Precarious Rhapsody* (New York: Minor Compositions, 2009), 42.

10. For an elaboration of this condition of non-knowledge, see Jodi Dean, *Publicity's Secret*.
11. Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Empire* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2000), 347.
12. Eva Illouz, *Cold Intimacies* (Cambridge: Polity, 2007).
13. Karl Marx, *Capital* (abridged), ed. David McLellan (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 15.
14. Bob Briscoe, Andrew Odlyzko, and Benjamin Tilly, "Metcalf's Law Is Wrong," July 2006. <http://spectrum.ieee.org/computing/networks/metcalfes-law-is-wrong>
15. *Ibid.*
16. James Hendler and Jennifer Golbeck, "Metcalf's Law, Web 2.0, and the Semantic Web," June 2007. <http://www.cs.umd.edu/~golbeck/downloads/Web20-SW-JWS-webVersion.pdf>
17. John Markoff, "Entrepreneurs See a Web Guided by Common Sense," *New York Times*, November 12, 2006, http://www.nytimes.com/2006/11/12/business/12web.html?pagewanted=all&_r=.
18. Matteo Pasquinelli, "Google's PageRank Algorithm: A Diagram of the Cognitive Capitalism and the Rentier of the Common Intellect," *The Mathematical Intelligencer* 27, no. 2 (1990), 305–11.
19. Cesare Casarino, "Surplus Common," in *In Praise of the Common: A Conversation on Philosophy and Politics*, ed., Cesare Casarino and Antonio Negri (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2008), 15.
20. I owe this point to Marcell Mars, personal communication.
21. Executive Office of the President, National Economic Council, Office of Science and Technology. "Strategy for American Innovation: Securing our Economic Growth and Prosperity." February 4, 2011, www.whitehouse.gov/innovation/strategy
22. Annie Lowrey, "Prizewinning Policy," *Slate*, December 27, 2010, http://www.slate.com/articles/business/moneybox/2010/12/prizewinning_policy.html.
23. See the X Prize foundation website, <http://space.xprize.org/ansari-x-prize>.
24. Berardi, *Precarious Rhapsody*, 71.
25. John Tierney, "Do You Suffer from Decision Fatigue?," *New York Times Magazine*, August 17, 2001, <http://www.nytimes.com/2011/08/21/magazine/do-you-suffer-from-decision-fatigue.html?pagewanted=all>.
26. Christian Marazzi, *Capital and Language*, trans. Gregory Conti (Los Angeles, CA: Semiotext(e)), 2008, 141.
27. Hardt, "The Common in Communism," 136.
28. Richard Grusin, *Pre-mediation: Affect and Mediality after 9/11* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010).
29. See Gijs van Oenen, "Interpassive Agency," *Theory & Event*, 14, no. 2 (2011), http://muse.jhu.edu/journals/theory_and_event/toc/tae.14.2.html
30. Giorgio Agamben, *The Coming Community*, trans. Michael Hardt, Minneapolis (Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 1993).
31. Guy Debord, *The Society of the Spectacle*, trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith (New York: Zone Books, 1999), 133.

32. Agamben, *The Coming Community*, 83.
33. Hardt, "The Common in Communism," 143.
34. Moishe Postone, "Rethinking Marx (in a Post-Marxist World)." August 1995. http://platypus1917.home.comcast.net/~platypus1917/postonemoishe_rethinkingmarx1995.htm

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CHAPTER 6

Marxism and Feminism: Beyond the Unhappy Marriage

Nina Power

INTRODUCTION

How best to understand the often vexed history, present, and future of Marxism-feminism? Is it a fundamental unity, a relation, a hierarchical pairing or one fragment of a larger whole? The metaphorical placing of the two has often revealed much about the perceived relation in theory and in practice. Clara Zetkin's 1896 speech "Only in Conjunction with the Proletarian Woman Will Socialism Be Victorious" sees the relation as, first and foremost, a practical question—how best to incorporate proletarian women into the socialist struggle, and, at the same time, avoid understanding women's interests as separate concerns:

Our guiding thought must be: We must not conduct special women's propaganda, but Socialist agitation among women. The petty, momentary interests of the female world must not be allowed to take up the stage. Our task must be to incorporate the modern proletarian woman in our class battle! . . . We have no special tasks for the agitation among women. Those reforms for women which must be accomplished within the framework of today's society are already demanded within the minimal program of our party.¹

Zetkin's critique of the supposed factional pleading of bourgeois feminism, the plea to subsume "the petty, momentary interests of the female world" sets the tone for the subsequent back and forth over whether—in theory and in practice—feminism must subsume itself in the name of the class struggle, or postpone its demands until after some tentative

revolutionary moment (thus displacing itself in both space and time), or whether there can be no true communism or Marxism without feminism, or whether, indeed, there is a fundamental antagonism between Marxism and feminism (in theory, practice, or both). On the latter point, one thinks of Shelia Rowbotham's experiences of the revolutionary movement in the 1960s and 1970s:

The language which makes us invisible to "history" is not coincidence, but part of our real situation in a society and in a movement which we do not control. Our subordination is so deeply internalised that it has taken women's liberation to reveal it. The pain, emotional violence, and intense rejection of the male-defined revolutionary movement, which some women have expressed as part of a specifically feminist consciousness, are inseparable from that invisibility.²

The replication of patriarchal (not to mention racist) attitudes within the revolutionary movement draws attention to a crucial question in the relation between Marxism and feminism: what would it mean to think both together from the beginning? To neither subsume feminism under Marxism, nor postpone its demands in the name of the more serious, more universal ongoing class struggle? On the face of it, this doesn't look too difficult, and yet time and time again, in both theory and practice, feminism is treated as a side-issue, or even as the enemy within, somehow out to destroy the revolutionary movement in a sea of factionalist demands. In 1981, a crucial collection addressing all of these concerns appeared: *The Unhappy Marriage of Marxism and Feminism: A Debate of Class and Patriarchy*.³ This chapter begins by briefly revisiting a couple of chapters in this volume in the name of thinking through a future Marxist-feminism that neither subsumes nor postpones. The "marriage" metaphor of the 1981 collection could itself be updated and made more optimistic: the complicated civil partnership of Marxism and feminism, perhaps. The chapter then turns to look at important theoretical attempts—in the work of Shulamith Firestone and Silvia Federici—to bring Marxism and feminism together in important and relevant ways for today. The chapter nevertheless finishes with something of a pessimistic tone, by examining the way in which feminism itself has been taken up by capitalism and co-opted for its own purposes, before pointing to ways out of this historical impasse and dilemma.

MARXIST-FEMINISM AND THE REVOLUTIONARY MOVEMENT IN THEORY AND PRACTICE

What are the tensions and possible resolutions identified in the various different papers in the "Unhappy Marriage" collection? The editor of the

collection, Lydia Sargent, much like Rowbotham discussed earlier, identifies a historical split between men and women in the revolutionary movement. Her introduction indicates very clearly that the demand to subsume feminist claims and the poor treatment of female comrades in left-wing circles has caused her and others to question the revolutionary movement as a whole. Sargent highlights both practical and theoretical problems with leftist and civil rights movements: the problem of day-to-day work ("who cleans the office/who messes it up, who writes the leaflets/who types them, who talks in meetings/who takes notes, who gains status through sexual relations/who gives status through sexual relations")⁴ and the problem of theory—who is in charge and to what end? The mimicry of everyday sexist attitudes within the Left is seen as completely disheartening, and ultimately completely alienating: "[women] were doing important, valuable work . . . they also knew that the men in the movement (and in some cases the women) saw women's function and legitimacy primarily through their participation in traditionally 'feminine' ways, i.e., as movement wives, mothers, sisters, mistresses, secretaries, maids, waitresses, nurses, and sex objects."⁵

But what of the theoretical tensions? Heidi Hartmann in her essay argues that "[b]oth Marxist analysis, particularly its historical and materialist method, and a feminist analysis, especially the identification of patriarchy as a social and historical structure, must be drawn upon if we are to understand the development of western capitalist societies and the predicament of women within them."⁶ This expansive image of the relation between the two seeks to identify not the hierarchical importance of patriarchy over capitalism, or vice versa (in which the former would characterize radical feminism and the latter a Marxism that would completely ignore feminist demands), but to understand that society is organized both in "capitalistic and in patriarchal ways."⁷ Hartmann ultimately suggests that feminist socialists must insist "that the society we want to create is a society in which the recognition of interdependence is liberation rather than shame, nurturance is a universal, not an oppressive practice, and in which women do not continue to support the false as well as the concrete freedoms of men."⁸

Elsewhere, however, Hartmann's reconciliation, understood as a dual systems theory approach, is criticized precisely for keeping these two streams open. Iris Young suggests instead that what is needed is a single theory developed out of "the best insights of both Marxism and radical feminism, which can comprehend capitalist patriarchy as one system in which the oppression of women is a core attribute."⁹ Young's alternative is to see the division of labor, particularly as it is gendered, as the often-neglected category within class analysis. By moving this category to the forefront, we can bring gender relations and the position of women to the center of historical materialist analysis, instead of treating women's roles

and women's work as secondary features in a wider landscape (need it be pointed out that women make up the majority of the world's population and do the majority of the work?). Here the gender division of labor is understood as the first division of labor, here is where the feminist centralizing of questions of labor really comes into their own. What does it mean to think about labor where the question of gender is present from the start?

The work of Shulamith Firestone is significant for taking on precisely this project of making the link between the oppression of women and the revolutionary overthrowing of this oppression via technology that would obviate the work that women typically bear, whether it is the work of childbearing, domestic labor, or paid work. As a vision of the history, present, and possible future of human emancipation, Firestone's brief tract, "The Dialectic of Sex," is remarkable.¹⁰ Her materialist view of history based on sex itself seeks to expand the work of Marx and Engels by making gender (whose divide is described as sex-class) central to her analysis. Firestone, in a play on words and revolutionary theory, argues that the political demand is to seize the means, not only of production, but of reproduction as such: women will not be free until they are liberated from biology, as well as work (thus, labor in both senses).

But what is sex-class? Firestone writes: "Sex class is so deep as to be invisible."¹¹ Like Freud's unconscious, which is revealed only in moments of breakdown and lapses of speech, the unspoken acceptance of the nuclear family (in particular) must be revealed in its contradictory character: it depends upon the sex divide but continually seeks to render the division of labor it involves obscure, both to participants and to wider society. Firestone and Engels both share the view that reproductive difference between the sexes is the first division of labor, or as Engels puts it: "According to the materialistic conception, the determining factor in history is, in the final instance, the production and reproduction of immediate life."¹²

Yet, seizing the means of reproduction is neither a historical inevitability on Firestone's account nor something that the technology itself will necessarily entail. Firestone's turbo-Enlightenment approach (that is to say, her argument's ultimate dependency on the revolutionary impact of speedy innovation) and her commitment to the emancipatory dimensions of these technologies was both prescient but ultimately incomplete. The technologies that Firestone celebrated and predicted—in vitro fertilization (IVF) treatment, wide access to contraception, advice and abortion, test tube technology—are available, at least in richer parts of the world and asymmetrically elsewhere, but their effects on the structures of the family have been negligible, or at least nowhere near as revolutionary as Firestone predicted. IVF treatment, which in most cases is extremely expensive, is still seen as an alternative to natural childbirth, as opposed to its replacement, and while birth control has undoubtedly revolutionized the ways in which women live and work, it hasn't shattered the existing

order or ushered in a new era of widespread genderless pan-sexuality, or the elimination of the nuclear family model.

Firestone's work begins from the premise that sex difference is fundamentally a question of biological difference, not social construction, as later feminist work (e.g., in the work of Judith Butler) would have it. Rather than suggesting the necessity of a reevaluation of cultural values—for example, challenging the notion that pregnancy is an illness and undermining the idea that women are weaker than men, for example—Firestone takes the negative assumptions about female biology all the way to the end: history has treated women poorly precisely because of their biology, or at least their biology has been used as an excuse to generate oppression and social imbalance. Sex difference is at the root, she argues, of all other inequalities: "the natural reproductive difference between the sexes led directly to the first division of labor at the origins of class."¹³

But the making unnatural of reproduction via technological invention has not had the revolutionary impact that Firestone perceived it might. A more realistic approach to thinking about gender under capitalism would involve starting with the work that women do now, and what this work, the way it is gendered, and where it is resisted, might mean for political organizing in the present and near future.

SILVIA FEDERICI AND SOCIAL REPRODUCTION

The various feminist discussions from the latter half of the 20th century concerning the nature and status of work and the key question of social reproduction have recently come back into focus. Partly this can be explained by a theoretical move within Marxist and post-Marxist thought and practice to challenge older models of labor and, indeed, labor organizing: if much of the work done in the world is now service work, involving affective and emotional labor, and the labor market is dominated by women, how can a notion of work be expanded to include these elements? Given that feminist work on these topics has been strong for a very long time, it makes a great deal of sense to look back at these debates for a revised and fundamentally feminist, analysis of work. An expanded notion of work as care is timely.

The question here is, to return to Hartmann, the question of nurturance as a universal—all the work that exists in order to keep life going, waged and unwaged. The erasure and undermining of women's role in this is a central feature of capitalism. As Silvia Federici puts it, "Through my involvement in the women's movement I realised that the reproduction of human beings is the foundation of every economic and political system."¹⁴ Reproduction here should be read in the broadest possible sense as the "complex of activities and relations by which our life and labor are daily reconstituted,"¹⁵ that is to say, everything that makes life possible in

the first place and everything that continues to sustain it. Reproduction in this broad sense is where the contradictions inherent in alienated labor are “most explosive,” according to Federici.

In the feminist analysis of social reproduction, we should note that care is a central category. The double character of reproductive work, as Federici puts it, means that social reproduction is not simply work that reproduces for capital, but also, sometimes, against it. Care that is coerced, or considered a duty is a problem (coerced emotional labor—do this because you’re a woman and you’re supposed to care), but communities of care that are self-reliant and acknowledge the pressure of implicit and explicit reproductive demands are genuinely oppositional because they do not uphold the logic of enforced atomization and individual self-promotion otherwise demanded by the job market and consumer culture. But if there is a generalized absence of care, what steps in? Federici’s recent work on eldercare describes an unstable redistribution of care work of the elderly onto the shoulders of women, family members as well as poorly paid and badly treated workers from other countries. The fact that questions of eldercare do not “top the agenda of the social justice movements and labor movements internationally”¹⁶ is a serious problem, and remains tied, Federici argues, to a kind of fetishism for wage-work and the wage-earner, and to the individual’s history of employment. The post-worker, the retiree, becomes, then, a kind of absence for both governments and the Marxist Left, just as the neglect and abuse of women’s work in general was brought to light in earlier Left movements. The replacement of care by machines, in the form of robots or screens, is clearly inadequate: reproductive labor cannot be automated, whatever futurist fantasies might remain. As Federici points out, describing work that involves the communication of affect or emotion as “immaterial” does an injustice to eldercare and other care work, which involves “a complete engagement with the persons to be reproduced and is, in practice, anything other than immaterial.”¹⁷ Part of the solution to this situation, Federici argues, as well as a transformation in the social/sexual division of labor and the recognition of reproductive work, is the recognition that the “seeds of the new world will not be planted ‘online’ but in the cooperation we can develop among ourselves.”¹⁸ Federici remains, then, optimistic, at least at the level of providing a positive set of solutions to the current crisis in and of care.

Despite the fierce battles that raged over the idea of “wages for housework,” in which Federici played a major part, it seems that today at least two of the positions that were staked in this debate have some kind of strange genealogical resonance today. On the one hand, the autonomist Marxist idea that domestic labor creates surplus value, either “directly or indirectly” as Kathi Weeks puts it in her recent *The Problem with Work*,¹⁹ and the related claim that there should be economic recognition

of the value this work produces, not in order to valorize housework as such, but to make a broader point about how the wage relation operates within capitalism, and how it depends on vast quantities of unpaid female labor. As Federici puts it in *Caliban and the Witch*, summing up the earlier debates:

A social system of production that does not recognise the production and reproduction of the worker as a social-economic activity, and a source of capital accumulation, but mystifies it instead as a natural resource or a personal service, while profiting from the wageless condition of the labour involved.²⁰

The antiwork dimension, or the “struggle not to work,” as Dalla Costa puts it in “Women and the Subversion of the Community” from 1971/72, is central to this campaign: “Men when they reject work consider themselves militant, and when we reject our work, these same men consider us nagging wives.” The tension for a demand for unwaged work to be recognized and valued and the demand for an end to work under capitalism—in and outside the home—is there right from the start. As Federici puts it in “Wages against Housework,” “to demand wages for housework does not mean to say that if we are paid we will continue to do it. It means precisely the opposite.” On the other hand, there is the idea that women should fight to enter paid employment, and/or that women have been being paid for jobs that are characteristic of housework for a long time. As Angela Davis states in “The Approaching Obsolescence of Housework: A Working-Class Perspective”²¹:

In the United States, women of colour—and especially Black women—have been receiving wages for housework for untold decades. . . . Cleaning women, domestic workers, maids—these are the women who know better than anyone else what it means to receive wages for housework.²²

And furthermore, that campaigning for equal access to paid employment has a revolutionary potential, as it is in the workplace that workers will together organize against exploitation:

The only significant steps toward ending domestic slavery have in fact been taken in the existing socialist countries. Working women, therefore, have a special and vital interest in the struggle for socialism. Moreover, under capitalism, campaigns for jobs on an equal basis with men, combined with movements for institutions such as subsidised public health care, contain an explosive revolutionary potential.²³

The liberal feminist argument for enhanced access to the workplace as a marker of equality shares superficial similarities with Angela Davis's position, in that both stress access to the workforce as the fundamental lever in achieving historical equality with men. However, the liberal feminist position on work tends to view work as an end in itself and a personal good, without questioning its exploitative character qua capitalist function. Angela Davis's approach sees work, and the possibilities for organizing it affords, as the site of revolutionary worker self-organization and emancipation.

But are there grounds for being optimistic about the emancipatory potential of work—either from the liberal-feminist liberation-through-participation position or from the Marxist-feminist model of the workplace as hub of working-class organization? The exploitation that is at the heart of the capitalist mode of work has hardly vanished in recent decades; if anything, it has increased. At the same time, we have the idea that work itself has become more feminized in many parts of the world, or in particular sectors.

So what is this feminization of labor? Often it involves the idea that work has increasingly taken on the attributes typically associated with women—communication, service economy work, care work, or what Arlie Russell Hochschild calls “emotional labour.”²⁴ Theories of the feminization of labor overlap with various other contemporary theories of work: affective labor, cognitive capitalism, and so on, popularized by Hardt and Negri, in particular. These descriptions of work attempt to capture something of the post-Fordist nature of much contemporary labor: the work in question here involves, among other things, knowledge, language skills, emotional skills, and a blurred relationship between life and play. Elements of one's life that may have once been associated with the private sphere—love, leisure, personality—have increasingly become attributes to be mined by employers anxious to give their customers the best service. It is not only one's labor-power that is sold, but also one's soul. At the same time, the desire for life-work balance (if one were to maintain the illusion that they were separate things) has been rebranded as flexible work where women (especially) are paid less and given fewer hours. The unhappy marriage may no longer be between Marxism and feminism, but between feminism and work, where the latter promised so much but has failed to deliver, permitting not the expansion of life, but its further exploitation.

One common feature of much contemporary discussion of work is a description of its precariousness, or precarity. This concept attempts to capture much of what is supposedly lost in contemporary employment—job security, pension, holiday, sick pay, and other benefits. Work is increasingly seen as something fragmentary, part time, and uncertain. One knock-on effect of this idea is that the working class have been displaced,

and rendered geographically more mobile. But some feminists have questioned the originality of the precarious work thesis, and in particular its take-up by theorists such as Hardt and Negri, who are at the forefront of such thinking, particularly through their introduction of the term “multitude,” designed to capture the amorphous relationship between employment and unemployment, and the constitutive quality of that which is exploited in contemporary labor, namely the capacity to network and to manipulate language and information. Federici points out that:

The concept of the “Multitude” suggests that all divisions within the working class are gone or are no longer politically relevant. But this is obviously an illusion. Some feminists have pointed out that precarious labor is not a new phenomenon. Women always had a precarious relation to waged labor.²⁵

Contemporary theorization of work appears to only just be catching up with feminist insights from 40 years ago: what is captured in the thought of precarity is something that has dominated the way in which female labor has been understood in previous eras. Federici goes on to argue that unless the feminist conception of work is placed at the center of our understanding of labor in general, then nothing of these transformations will be understood:

[T]he Negrian theory of precarious labor ignores, bypasses, one of the most important contributions of feminist theory and struggle, which is the redefinition of work, and the recognition of women’s unpaid reproductive labor as a key source of capitalist accumulation. In redefining housework as WORK, as not a personal service but the work that produces and reproduces labor power, feminists have uncovered a new crucial ground of exploitation that Marx and Marxist theory completely ignored. All of the important political insights contained in those analysis are now brushed aside as if they were of no relevance to an understanding of the present organization of production.²⁶

Federici is right to point to women’s work, and particularly the expectation that women will perform vast quantities of unpaid labor, as the hidden location of exploitation and precisely where contemporary writing on affective and precarious labor would do well to look. Her analysis can only be expanded into the expectation that everyone will be expected to do more work for free—from internships, to unpaid overtime. The feminization of labor, alongside its quantitative and qualitative dimensions, is also the idea that all work will come to resemble the worst of women’s work, as understood historically: that is to say, badly paid (if at all), with

terrible conditions and the fantasy that every employee is somehow doing it from the goodness of his or her heart.

THE UNHAPPY MARRIAGE OF FEMINISM . . . AND CAPITALISM?

What can we then say about the current relationship between not only Marxism and feminism, and between feminism and work, but about feminism's current standing as a pressing political concern? The massive historical gains of feminism, including ongoing activism against and theorizing of violence against women, the reclaiming of bodily autonomy, critiques of rape culture, and so on, are hugely significant and remain vital. But feminism has simultaneously been co-opted for deeply reactionary aims: the use of feminism to justify imperial wars, or to push depressing models of consumerism, is part and parcel of the ability of capitalism and nationalism to repurpose language for its own ends. A further concern comes not only through understanding the theoretical and political implications of the neglect of feminist additions to Marxist thought, as we saw in Federici's criticism of contemporary theories of work that neglect the feminist contribution, but there are worries also about what has happened to feminism if it is abstracted from a live political project. There is no doubt that feminism has been co-opted, assimilated, and undermined in central ways by certain political currents in recent decades. All from 2009, Nancy Fraser's article "Feminism, Capitalism and the Cunning of History,"²⁷ Hester Eisenstein's *Feminism Seduced*²⁸ and some of the claims made by Angela McRobbie in *The Aftermath of Feminism*²⁹ sound a warning against an uncritical history of the term. There is a certain amount of coming to terms in all three of these thinkers—Eisenstein, McRobbie, and Fraser all understand their projects as, in Fraser's words, "looking back" over second-wave feminism "as an epochal social phenomenon."³⁰ All three also attempt to configure the relationship between different tendencies and shifts within capitalism after the postwar period: as "the new spirit of 'capitalism'/neoliberalism,"³¹ as Fraser positions it; as under the regime of "globalised corporate capitalism,"³² as Eisenstein understands it; and as "the current global and still patriarchal system of economic power and domination,"³³ as McRobbie describes it.

All three writers note the disturbing convergence of some of the ideals of second-wave feminism (which Fraser sees emerging from the anti-Imperialist New Left) with the demands of an emerging new form of capitalism—post-Fordist, disorganized, transnational. As we saw earlier, this is exactly that kind of description Federici recognized in contemporary descriptions of work, and that these descriptions were hampered by their lack of attention to feminist theorizing of unpaid labor. Fraser, however, paints a much more worrying picture, where it is feminist theorizing

itself that has unwittingly provided some of the tools for this new form of capitalism. Eisenstein puts this point in a similar way: "the feminist 'revolution' of the 1960s and 1970s was undergirded by the demands of the capitalist economy for women's labor." So which, we might ask somewhat provocatively, came first, feminism or capitalism's desire to expand the pool of exploitable labor? What, to return to the fundamentals of Marxist-feminism, would be the use of a feminism that had severed its ties to a thorough-going critique of all forms of existing exploitation, including that of the labor market? Fraser notes the cultural success of second-wave feminism combined with its "relative failure to transform institutions."³⁴ Fraser here is referring to the relatively widespread acceptance at one level of critiques originating in feminist activism and theory of unequal pay, sexual harassment, and so on, without the actual concomitant elimination of such practices. Changing people's minds has not yet led to changing their behavior. Fraser notes that the optimistic version of this separation between culture and institutions would be the idea of catch-up, where it's just a question of time. Here the liberal feminist might point to the need to smash the glass ceiling or change expectations via education—but missing the central role of capitalism, and its uncanny ability to subsume even the most radical demands into opportunities to further exploitation, and ignoring the structural role of misogyny in favor of piecemeal reform at the level of attitudes, misses what is fundamentally at stake: the system depends upon the continued and opportunistic expropriation of women's labor and will neutralize feminism's demands for its own ends. Fraser is therefore understandably skeptical of the idea of historical catch-up, noting that this optimistic account may "obscure a more complex, disturbing possibility: that the diffusion of cultural attitudes born out of the second wave has been part and parcel of another social transformation, unanticipated and unintended by feminist activists—a transformation in the social organization of postwar capitalism."³⁵

Fraser goes even further than mere pessimism. Instead, she hypothesizes "the disturbing possibility" that "the cultural changes jump-started by the second wave . . . have served to legitimate a structural transformation of capitalist society that runs directly counter to feminist visions of a just society"³⁶ (it should be noted that Fraser argues that "it was not until after 1989 that second-wave feminism emerged as a political force in what were by then ex-Communist countries."³⁷ For non-Communist countries she places the origin of second-wave feminism conventionally in the early 1970s). Is Fraser overly anxious about the capacity for capitalism to assimilate the ideas and practices of those that would oppose it? Eisenstein's work would indicate that she is not, as Eisenstein focuses on the continued and growing use of feminist rhetoric and ideas by elites and imperialist powers in order to justify invasions and the continued exploitation of domestic and industrial labor. Eisenstein too points to the opportunistic

bending of older structural claims regarding gender: "No matter how begrudgingly, state, academic, and corporate structures have been able to make way for the demands of gender . . . gender has been a more malleable feature of public life than either race or class."³⁸ Feminism and its conceptual apparatuses have proved useful sources of rhetoric. All of this would be just another story about the ability of capitalism to co-opt all its surveys, but the language and rhetoric of feminism and the opportunistic abuse of these dimensions of the political project frequently have a sinister dimension. As Eisenstein puts it: "the 'freedom' experienced by women in the developed world becomes a selling point across the globe."³⁹ The freedom allegedly enjoyed by women in the West is presented as a universalist desire, even when equality is an unfinished project in the countries so keen to export it elsewhere.

McRobbie offers a similar argument: that "'Feminism' is instrumentalized, it is brought forward and claimed by Western governments, as a signal to the rest of the world that this is a key part of what freedom now means."⁴⁰ Ultimately, neither women in the developed world nor those elsewhere benefit from the invocation of a phony freedom delivered at the end of a gun. As McRobbie puts it, "women are currently being disempowered through the very discourses of empowerment that they are being offered as substitutes for feminism."⁴¹ This goes for state-sponsored military freedom as it does for a consumerist culture that positions women as somehow empowered through hair products.

But how did feminism get "seduced" as Eisenstein would have it, in such a way as we are living through its "aftermath" as McRobbie puts it? For Fraser, the historical strength of the second-wave feminist movement was the way in which it combined three "analytically distinct" dimensions of gender injustice under a critique of "androcentric state-organised capitalism," these three dimensions being economic, cultural, and political. These three interlinked dimensions, argues Fraser, have become fragmented, no longer part of a coherent feminist project against gender injustice understood as the combined and inseparable desire for "redistribution, recognition and representation."⁴² At the same time, a process of "selective incorporation" and "partial recuperation" of some of these strands has taken place—so that this utopian set of desires unwittingly found itself, in a complicated way, legitimizing a "new form of capitalism."⁴³ Second-wave feminism originally unified a set of critiques operating on different levels, but now finds itself torn apart and recombined with elements of social and political life that would have originally left it appalled.

Fraser describes the situation that second-wave feminism was responding to—and the reason for its unified critiques—via four main terms: economism (state-organized capitalism framed social questions in terms of distribution and class terms that tended to ignore "other

dimensions, sites and axes of injustice”), androcentrism (the ideal image of society—if not always operative in practice—whereby the working citizen is gendered as a male breadwinner with any female wages earned seen as “merely supplemental.” Fraser calls this “the family-wage ideal,” which obscures through naturalization the social importance of unwaged care work and reproductive labor, precisely those aspects discussed in the work of Federici and the Wages for Housework campaign), Etatism (the way the state treated questions of justice as technical, bureaucratic, and technocratic issues—we could also call this paternalism, in which citizens are seen as being told what’s best for them) and Westphalianism (state-organized capitalism was first and foremost a national formation that obscured cross-border injustices). Second-wave feminism was united, argues Fraser, with the New Left and anti-imperialists in attacking these dimensions of state-organized capitalism, while also attacking the sexism of their colleagues in the struggle (as Rowbotham did in the discussion earlier). Second-wave feminism did this by politicizing the personal, thus blowing apart the economic and narrow understanding of injustice, and understanding injustice in an intersectionist (the term is perhaps now more commonly “intersectional”) and deep structural way, crossing gender injustice with injustices involving class, race, sexuality, and nationality. That which was seen as private in a liberal statist framework—sex, domestic labor, domestic violence, and reproduction—became public, crossing economic, cultural, and political lines. Second-wave feminism further developed, against a perceived bureaucratic managerialism, “a horizontal counter-ethos of sisterly connection”⁴⁴—grassroots against those who would declare themselves to be experts, but also an attempt to transform state institutions that would promote and express gender justice. It also attempted to globalize sisterhood, although Fraser argues that this idea functioned as more of an “abstract gesture” than anything else.⁴⁵

So how exactly did new forms of capitalism come to cut short, undermine, and assimilate elements of this project? Soon after the insights of second-wave feminism came the era that we know so well: privatization, deregulation, the destruction of the public sphere, welfare, the ideological promotion of individualism and competition, unevenly executed across Eastern and Western Europe and “at the gunpoint of debt” in the developing world (structural adjustment etc.). The most contentious part of Fraser’s argument is her suggestion that second-wave feminism thrived in these new conditions—that its ideas and critiques reached across class, ethnicity, political ideology to ultimately “reshape common sense views of family, work and dignity.”⁴⁶ She asks, polemically, “was there some perverse, subterranean elective affinity between [second-wave feminism and neoliberalism]?”⁴⁷ Eisenstein puts it more bluntly, speaking of the morphing of the second-wave into the third: “the ideology of twenty-first-century

feminism lends itself to the principles behind globalisation."⁴⁸ Was feminism complicit, or even responsible for what is often described as the neoliberal project? It seems grossly unfair to suggest that the activism and theory that came out of a dedicated struggle against patriarchy, for equality, and for economic justice was unwittingly or even knowingly waging a battle it had no idea it was fighting, and that the very people it was fighting for—women—were ultimately to lose the struggle. Fraser's description of the unraveling of the economic, cultural, and political strands of feminism is insightful, but ultimately too clean: the fragments or threads have also had positive effects, again intended or otherwise, and for millions, life is unthinkable without the gains of feminism, whichever strand is in question.

Fraser continues her critique, setting up a heretical set of hypotheses: that feminist antieconomist claims for justice became calls for the recognition of identity and difference at the expense of class (and a concomitant absolutist turn to cultural rather than social theory) whose timing "could not have been worse"⁴⁹; that capitalism took on some of feminism's critiques of the inflexible androcentric model in favor of "a new 'connexionist' image of capitalism in which rigid organizational hierarchies would give way to horizontal teams and flexible networks."⁵⁰ The mass inclusion of women into the workforce at the top (or middle, anyway) and bottom (mainly) as a partial result of the critique of the image of the male breadwinner means that, for Fraser, "the dream of women's emancipation is harnessed to the engine of capitalist accumulation."⁵¹ Does capitalism benefit from women's mass entry into the workforce? Of course it does: there is nothing that prevents capitalism seeking out cheaper labor in principle, and laws against child labor, overexploitation, and so on, are hard-won and unevenly applied in a global context. Are women somehow to blame for this historical shift? No, of course not: the problem is the structure of wage labor and the inherently exploitative quality of the wage, not the laborer. But it is fair to say that the mass entry of women into the workforce means that feminism must ask harder questions and address difficult issues: to what extent is feminism compatible with the critique of work, even as the emancipatory quality of a life lived outside of the home is recognized? How can feminism and class be realigned when the work of women and men in developed countries relies so heavily on the labor of working-class women (overwhelmingly) who take care of their children, among other tasks? The global exploitation of women may rely on the rhetoric of a feminism detached from its political, cultural, and economic moorings, but it is hard to think of a feminist solution that wouldn't *also* be internationalist: working women of the world unite?

Fraser concludes her synopsis with reference to the "uncanny double"⁵² of feminism—it's not at all, she argues, that second-wave feminism has failed or is directly responsible for neoliberalism, but rather that feminism

needs to become “more historically self-aware”⁵³ about the way in which it can and has been resignified. In an interview she states that “feminist ideas have become so broadly disseminated that they have become part of common sense. Just about everyone claims to be a feminist now, but what does that mean?”⁵⁴ Eisenstein described this particular phenomenon as “hegemonic feminism,”⁵⁵ and McRobbie also talks about a postfeminism “which positively draws on and invokes feminism as that which can be taken into account, to suggest that equality is achieved, in order to install a whole repertoire of new meaning which emphasize that it is no longer needed, it is a spent force.”⁵⁶ Fraser ultimately suggests, as a positive way out of the haunting by this uncanny double, several necessary shifts in the resurrection of feminism for the 21st century: reasserting an image of the social totality by reconnecting feminist critique to the critique of capitalism; promoting forms of life that decenter waged work and valorizes “uncommodified activities such as care work” as “valued components of a good life for everyone”⁵⁷ (but this too has been co-opted by emphasis on volunteer work and philanthropy, in the UK Conservative’s idea of the Big Society, for example); to empower citizens to use politics to “tame markets” and to fight for a “new constellation of democratic powers”⁵⁸ that would challenge trans-border injustices. In a more recent interview, Fraser talks about this need for a transnational, even global, public sphere, citing the massive opposition to the Iraq War in 2003 as a potential image of this idea, while admitting that the numbers involved did little to constrain the policies of warmongers. She calls for transnational institutions that will regulate markets and banking, though it is difficult to imagine bodies large and powerful enough to outstrip the unstable yet highly effective combination of financial institutions and states that will bail them out when necessary.

CONCLUSION

Positioned between the recognition and critical description of continued and complex exploitation of women and women’s work (both paid and unpaid), and the uncanny ability for capitalism and imperialist projects to one-sidedly take up the rhetoric of feminism, the future of feminism hangs in the balance. On the one hand, there is the widespread dissemination of certain threads of feminist ideas—on the other, these have often become detached, as Fraser, Eisenstein, and McRobbie all note, from the way in which these threads also form a totality: the separation of economic, social, and political dimensions of the feminist struggle, and the continued question of transformations in the nature of work mean that feminist has a difficult job playing catch-up with a system that will asset-strip the project for anything that suits it under the guise of a rhetoric that claims to be promoting gender equality: but the underlying questions—the role

of patriarchy, the complicity of capitalism with the devaluing of women and women's work—remain the questions of a revolutionary project as such. The fact that contemporary discussions of work often overlook, as Federici points out, the contribution of feminist research and theoretical perspectives signals just how urgent it is to reunite the revolutionary and feminist approaches, and how one side is incomplete without the other. Federici's analysis of the feminization of labor points to the idea that society is tending toward the expectation that everyone will be expected to do more work for free, or for very little remuneration: in order to value human life and labor we must begin to revalue women's work, once again, particularly eldercare and other care work, less typical forms of work as understood from the classical Marxist perspective.

It seems to me that reuniting the threads of the second-wave feminist project—economic, cultural, and political—is vital, and tracing the global patterns of women's international labor cannot but be a part of this. Ultimately, the unhappy marriage may be less between Marxism and feminism, as the original collection had it, than between feminism and the cynical take-up of the very same term by those who would ultimately oppose feminism's original ambitions. Working against the exploitation of women, even if this might involve a critique of waged work that historically emancipated them from the home, is entirely necessary for a total critique of the existing world—work, family structure, and patriarchy combined. The resources are already there in feminism: the threads simply need to be recombined.

NOTES

1. Clara Zetkin, "Only in Conjunction with the Proletarian Woman Will Socialism Be Victorious," Speech at the Party Congress of the Social Democratic Party of Germany, Gotha, October 16, 1896, Marxist.org (1984). <http://www.marxists.org/archive/zetkin/1896/10/women.htm>.

2. Shelia Rowbotham, *Women, Resistance and Revolution* (London: Penguin Books, 1972), 11–12.

3. Lydia Sargent, ed., *The Unhappy Marriage of Marxism and Feminism: A Debate on Class and Patriarchy* (London: Pluto Press, 1986).

4. *Ibid.*, xii.

5. *Ibid.*, xiv.

6. *Ibid.*, 3.

7. *Ibid.*, 3.

8. *Ibid.*, 33.

9. *Ibid.*, 44.

10. Shulamith Firestone, *The Dialectic of Sex* (London: Paladin, 1970).

11. *Ibid.*, 11.

12. Frederick Engels, *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State* (London: Penguin, 2010), 35–36.

13. Firestone, *The Dialectic of Sex*, 8.
14. Silvia Federici, *Revolution at Point Zero* (New York: Autonomedia, 2012), 2.
15. *Ibid.*, 5.
16. *Ibid.*, 119.
17. *Ibid.*, 122.
18. *Ibid.*, 125.
19. Kathi Weeks, *The Problem with Work: Feminism, Marxism, Antiwork Politics, and Postwork Imaginaries* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2011), 97.
20. Silvia Federici, *Caliban and the Witch: Women, the Body and Primitive Accumulation* (New York: Autonomedia, 2004), 8.
21. Angela Y. Davis, *Women, Race and Class* (London: Random House: 1981).
22. *Ibid.*, 237.
23. *Ibid.*, 243–244.
24. See Arlie Russell Hochschild, *The Managed Heart: Commercialization of Human Feeling* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2003 [reprint]).
25. Silvia Federici, "Precarious Labor and Reproductive Work," *Variant 37*, Spring/Summer (2010): 23.
26. *Ibid.*, 24.
27. Nancy Fraser, "Feminism, Capitalism and the Cunning of History," *New Left Review* 56, March/April, 2009.
28. Hester Eisenstein, *Feminism Seduced: How Global Elites Use Women's Labor and Ideas to Exploit the World* (London: Paradigm Publishers, 2009).
29. Angela McRobbie, *The Aftermath of Feminism: Gender, Culture and Social Change* (London: SAGE Publications, 2009).
30. Fraser, "Feminism, Capitalism and the Cunning of History," 97.
31. *Ibid.*, 98.
32. Eisenstein, *Feminism Seduced*, vii.
33. McRobbie, *The Aftermath of Feminism*, 2.
34. Fraser, "Feminism, Capitalism and the Cunning of History," 98.
35. *Ibid.*, 99.
36. *Ibid.*
37. *Ibid.*, 100.
38. Eisenstein, *Feminism Seduced*, 4.
39. *Ibid.*, 196.
40. McRobbie, *The Aftermath of Feminism*, 1.
41. *Ibid.*, 49.
42. Fraser, "Feminism, Capitalism and the Cunning of History," 116.
43. *Ibid.*, 98.
44. *Ibid.*, 105.
45. *Ibid.*, 106.
46. *Ibid.*, 108.
47. *Ibid.*, 108.
48. Eisenstein, *Feminism Seduced*, viii.
49. Fraser, "Feminism, Capitalism and the Cunning of History," 109.
50. *Ibid.*, 109.
51. *Ibid.*, 110–111.
52. *Ibid.*, 114.
53. *Ibid.*, 114.

54. Nancy Fraser, "Will Feminism Be Articulated to the Left or the Right?" (Nancy Fraser interviewed by European Alternatives, 2010). <http://mrzine.monthlyreview.org/2010/fraser170410.html>
55. Eisenstein, *Feminism Seduced*, 40.
56. McRobbie, *The Aftermath of Feminism*, 12.
57. Fraser, "Feminism, Capitalism and the Cunning of History," 116.
58. *Ibid.*, 116–117.

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CHAPTER 7

Critical Theory, History, and the Question of Revolution

Werner Bonefeld

INTRODUCTION

At its core, the critical theory conception of history and revolution amounts to a critique of the philosophy of progress. It opposes the idea of history as some objectively unfolding force toward some human ends. Instead, it calls for the progress of history to come to a standstill and conceives of revolution as a means of applying the emergency break. This chapter attempts to articulate the critical theory tradition in relation to contemporary socialist responses to austerity. Walter Benjamin's *Theses on History* provide the most cogently argued critical theory conception of history and revolution, and his *Theses* guide the argument.¹

Since the chapter is guided by Benjamin's stance, a brief contextualizing is in order: he wrote them in the early days of 1940, before his attempted escape from Vichy France. He died by suicide in September 1940, fearing capture. He first mentions his *Theses* in a letter to Gretel Adorno dated February 22, 1940. In this letter he pronounces on the aim and context of the text. The *Theses* focused "some thoughts about which I may say that I have kept them about myself for some twenty years," and they were to establish a break between what he calls "our" way of thinking and the "survival of positivism," especially in the Marxism of his time. Yet, they were not meant for publication, which, he said, "would throw wide open the doors to enthusiastic incomprehension."²

Benjamin's *Theses* were first published in 1942 by the Frankfurt Institute of Social Research, when exiled in New York. This was followed by a French translation in 1947. It was only in the 1960s that his *Theses* were debated widely. Some see him as a coherent materialist, while others see

him as a messianic thinker and theologian of history.³ For Michael Löwy, both positions contain elements of the truth and he therefore proposes that Benjamin is both a Marxist and a theologian. Löwy says that for Benjamin “there can be no struggle for the future without a memory of the past.”⁴ In distinction, Benjamin does not write about revolutionary struggle as a struggle for the future. He conceives of revolutionary struggle as a struggle that stops the progress of historical time. Benjamin does not look into the future as a future of freedom and redemption. In fact, he characterizes as rotten the idea that revolutionary struggle is a struggle for the liberation of the nephews and nieces of the working class, and criticizes the tradition of classical Marxism for weakening the resolve of revolutionary struggle. Revolution is about liberation from oppression in the here and now, not in the tomorrow that never comes.

Howard Caygill focuses on the notion of revolution as redemption. He argues that Benjamin’s *Theses* do not provide for a messianic opening of history toward redemption. Redemption is sought, but not necessarily found. Redemption from suffering is what the class struggle is all about, but there is no certainty at all that it might succeed. There is thus no messianic resolution to human suffering.⁵ He therefore argues that Benjamin’s notion of redemption can be “more plausibly interpreted eschatologically,” that is, history is a struggle for redemption, and by means of this struggle history progresses by force of a constant struggle for, but without, the attainment of redemption. There is, says Caygill quoting from Benjamin, “the storm called progress’ that is blowing from paradise,” and the Angel of History “bears witness to ruination.”⁶ In distinction, Walter Benjamin argued that ruination, or barbarism, does not await us.⁷ Like Luxemburg’s notion of barbarism, ruination is an existent reality. Benjamin conceives of Luxemburg’s alternative to barbarism, that is socialism, as the here and now of revolutionary struggle. Caygill’s eschatological interpretation reinforces the danger of ontological argument in Benjamin, which Adorno warned against. That is, the conception of history as a history of class struggle lends itself to an ontological conception of struggle as a universal force of the bad-infinity of history. Here, class struggle is endorsed as the progressive force that forces the transition from one set of rulers to the next, without the oppressed class ever escaping from the dungeons of despair, as if it were a natural condition.⁸ However, history appears as this system of universal progress of rule of one class of people over another class of people, only afterward, and what appears afterward is history as a linear process from which even the memory of a struggle at the knife’s edge is condemned as heresy.

Critical theory demands a praxis that fights barbarism and argues that in hell everything is hellish. Like Marx, it rejects the idea of revolution as a revolution for the freedom of labor as regressive, opposes the notion of historical progress for the benefit of the working class, denies that bourgeois society contains within itself the necessity of human emancipation,

and criticizes a revolutionary politics on behalf of the oppressed as a “conformist rebellion,” a rebellion that, say, instead of ending slavery, seeks a new deal for slaves.⁹ Although “the world contains opportunities enough for success [communism] . . . everything is bewitched” and “whatever one does, it is false.”¹⁰ For the critical tradition, class is an entirely negative concept. The critique of class society finds its positive resolution not in better paid workers or conditions of full employment, and so on. It finds its positive resolution only in the classless society. Critical theory holds on to the idea of communism as universal human emancipation, which according to Marx and Engels entails revolution as a means of ridding the world of “all the muck of ages and found it anew”¹¹—as a commune of “communist individuals.”¹² Its intransigence toward existing society in which “everything is the same” invites the repost that it amounts to little more than a self-indulgent posture of negativity.¹³ In the face of abject misery, a constructive critique of capitalism is said to be required to secure the interests of the workers. For critical theory, constructive critique does not amount to a critical practice. It amounts, argue Horkheimer and Adorno, to “ticket thinking.”¹⁴ Such thinking is “one-dimensional.” It argues in interests of the wage laborer with a claim to power. That is, rather than understanding capital as a social relationship, it takes capital to be an economic thing that, given the right balance of class forces, can be made to work for the benefit of workers. Ticket thinking proclaims “falseness” as if the hell of a class-ridden society can be reformed for the sake of labor—just like that.¹⁵ Critical theory therefore rejects the “optimism of the left” that puts forth a program of capitalist transformation, which does “not talk about the devil but looks on the bright side.”¹⁶ The following theses explore these insights against the background of contemporary socialist antiausterity proposals.

I

The critique of capitalism finds the positive only in communism. The difficulty in conceiving of communism has to do with its very idea. In distinction to the pursuit of abstract wealth, of value in process, money in process and as such capital, and in distinction to seizure of the state, pursuit and preservation of political power, economic value and factor efficiency, and in distinction to the idea of labor as the means of social wealth and conception of economic as an economy of labor, it follows a completely different entelechy of human development—communism seeks the *communis* of human purposes, that is, universal human emancipation.

II

Communist wealth and the wealth pumped out of labor belong to two different realities. For communism time is not money, the economy is not an economy of labor, and the laborer is not time’s carcass. Instead, time is

lifetime. The communist metabolism with nature is not a means toward the accumulation of abstract wealth. Instead, it comprises the satisfaction of individual human needs. In communism humanity is a purpose, not a means. This commune of the free and equal comprises a new form of human wealth: free time, that is, time "for enjoyment."¹⁷ Communist wealth is freely disposable time.¹⁸ Marx associated this time with the realm of freedom.¹⁹ The time of economic necessity, in which labor exists as the means of wealth, and the time of human emancipation belong to different worlds. The time of human emancipation is the time of the democratic organization of the means of human existence by the community of the communist individuals themselves.

III

Instead of counterposing "society" as an abstraction to the individual, communist individuals recognize and organize "society" as their own social product.²⁰ This society of the free and equal is not governed by some abstract equality before the law. Communist equality is the equality of individual human needs. The difficulty of conceiving of communism has thus not only to do with its distinct conception of human development. It has also to do with its conception of history that stands in complete opposition to the idea of history as an unfolding force of human progress. Communism entails that the progress of history comes to a standstill so that society can be found anew.²¹

IV

The notion that communism is the real movement of the working class and the conception of history as a history of class struggle recognizes that history has been a history of rulers and ruled, and this is the only history that has been—a bad universality of transition from ruler to ruler.²² The universality of history is, however, both real and false. As a history of the victors it renders the victims of history invisible, and it is their invisibility that makes history appear as a universal history that, akin to a sequence of events, records the times of glorious rule, from which the memory of struggle and insubordination is necessarily expunged. The courage, cunning, and suffering of the dead disappears twice, once in a defeat in which "even the dead will not be safe" from an enemy that "has not ceased to be victorious," and then again in the present, which either denies that the dead ever existed or ritualizes their struggles as a heroic act that culminated in the present as the unrivalled manifestation of their bravery.²³ The struggles of the past transform into a monument of history, erected in celebration of the present state of rule, for which the dead perform the role of legitimizing fodder. It is true, says Benjamin, that "all the

rulers are the heirs of those who conquered before them." There is thus no "document of civilisation" that is "not at the same time a document of barbarism."²⁴ History, though universal in its appearance, is not some automatic thing that unfolds on behalf of the masters of the world by force of its own objectively unfolding victorious logic. There is, however, no such automaticity and the future has not already been written. This conception of history belongs to bourgeois society, which appears to itself as the culmination of historical processes. "Whoever has emerged victorious participates to this day in the triumphal procession, in which the present rulers step over those who are lying prostrate."²⁵ This then explains the idea of the present as the incarnation of human progress itself.

V

However universal the progress of history might appear, class struggles have to be fought, and their outcomes are uncertain, unpredictable, and fundamentally open, then and now. What appears linear to us was contested, uncertain, and unpredictable in its resolution. What alternatives might there have been in the past? And how many struggles have been at the knife's edge and could have led to a course of history that would be unrecognizable to us? There is no inevitability in history, nor is history an irresistible force. It is made by the acting subjects themselves—and what is made by man can be changed by man. History appears inevitable and irresistible only afterward, which gives history the appearance of some objective force and directional dynamic, a telos of becoming and achievement, toward which it strives, ostensibly. For the proponents of present society, history has been concluded. Others say that it is still continuing toward some assumed socialist or communist destiny, at which point it will conclude. History does however not make history. That is to say, "[h]istory does nothing, does not 'possess vast wealth', does not 'fight battles'! It is Man, rather, the real, living Man who does all that, who does possess and fight, it is not 'history' that uses Man [*Mensch*] as a means to pursue its ends, as if it were a person apart. History is nothing but the activity of Man pursuing its ends."²⁶ Historical materialism is not the dogma indicated by clever opponents and unthinking proponents alike, but a critique of things understood dogmatically. That is to say, the "human anatomy contains a key to the anatomy of the ape," but not conversely, the anatomy of the ape does not explain the anatomy of Man.²⁷ If the anatomy of the ape would really explain the anatomy of man then the ape would already possess man as the innate necessity of its evolution—a natural teleology or an already written future.²⁸ The future, however, has not already been written. Nor will it be the result of some abstractly conceived objective logic of historical development. History does not unfold, as if it were a person apart. History has to be made, and will be made, by man pursuing her

ends. These ends themselves are not theologically determined, naturally founded, or historically active. The purpose of capitalism is the profitable accumulation of abstract wealth. The commune of human purpose is not an existing human purpose. Its reality is a negative one.²⁹ That is to say, linear conceptions of history do not reveal abstract historical laws. They reveal accommodation of thought and practice to the existing "objective conditions." Linear conceptions of history conceive of it as a continuum of progress in which capitalism is expected to give way to socialism, and socialism transform into communism—just like that. Communism is however not a future toward which the present strives, nor did the past strive toward capitalism. Communism is not some already written future of capitalism. Communism is either a present or it is nothing at all, and yet, it has no present existence whatsoever. Communism is the struggle for communism within the present and against the present.

VI

History has no independent reality. It appears as a sequence of events, from one battle to another and from this division of labor to that division of labor. This appearance is real but by itself, devoid of meaning. What does it really mean to say that history is a sequence of events? Events of what and what was so eventful? Its appearance as an objectively unfolding force toward the present state of affairs is deceptive. It gives rise to the idea of communism as an "event" of the future toward which history strives in fulfillment of the human desire for a freedom from want.³⁰ In this view, the critical theory notion of communist struggle as an attempt at preventing the progress of history, at stopping the time of historical progress, seems preposterous. Who in their right mind would reject economic progress beyond scarcity? What, however, is the purpose of economic progress? Is it for the sake of free time or is it for the sake of a rational economic system of labor in distinction to the supposed anarchy of the capitalist organization of labor? For critical theory, the tradition of communist party organization, thought, and labor organization, this ticket for a rational labor economy belongs to a world that needs to be overcome. The fetishism of labor is innate to the concept of bourgeoisie society. That is, communism is not a capitalist derivative. Communism entails a break in the continuum of history. "Origin is the goal."³¹ The idea of history as a force of relentless progress beyond economic scarcity has to be abandoned—it amounts to an article of faith in economic dogma that substitutes the religious idea of divine revelation for the belief in history as an objectively unfolding force beyond scarcity.³² History appears as such a transcendent force only when one abstracts from it, leading to its description of a sequence of historical events, for which the term "historicity" provides the name. That is to say, in order to comprehend history, one needs to "crack the continuum

of history."³³ One needs thus to think out of history, out of the battles, out of the struggles of the Levellers and Diggers, slave insurrections, peasant revolts, the struggles of Les Enragés, working-class strikes, riots, insurrections, and revolutions, including St. Petersburg (1917) and Kronstadt (1921)³⁴, to appreciate the traditions of the oppressed, recognize the smell of danger and the stench of death, gain a sense of the courage and cunning of struggle, grasp the spirit of sacrifice, comprehend, however fleetingly the density of a time at which history almost came to a standstill.³⁵ History does not lead anywhere; it has no telos and does not take sides. At its worst, it continues on the path of victorious progress under darkened clouds and smoke filled skies. At best, its progress will be stopped. Such history has not been made yet, though it has often been attempted. In our time, this attempt is called communism—this attempt at negation that seeks to rid the world of “all the muck of ages.”

For Marx, the struggle against oppression is the struggle of the last oppressed class, time and time again. The proletariat is the name of the oppressed class of our time. Marx says that it is the last class. It might not be the last class, though, and if it is not, then the continuum of history will not have been broken. This continuum of history has to come to a standstill. History at a standstill belongs to a “praxis that fights barbarism” and “found[s] it [society] anew.”³⁶

VII

The true picture of the past, says Walter Benjamin, “flits by.”³⁷ When? How? It flits by “at a moment of danger,” at moments of courageous struggle when the time of progress appears to have come to a hold, a time at which everything seems possible, and where everything is up in the air, a time of great unpredictability and thus a time at which its “bloody grimace” attains actual force in the experience of struggle, which defines a time of greatest uncertainty.³⁸ This is a time at which the certainty of tomorrow dissolves and at which the monuments of the past crack to reveal their hidden secret. This is the time of historical comprehension, in which the mass-produced view of a glorious history transforms from a historicity of events into an experienced history of death and destruction, pillage and rape, enslavement and dispossession. This, then, is the time that reveals the bloody grimace of the past struggles, which up-to-now had hidden in the seemingly civilized forms of rule and power. This, then, is the time at which the dead victims of history step off the monument built by the state in its role as memory entrepreneur.³⁹ There is no redemption. There is only the realization that history was not what it seemed, and there is a sudden understanding of the earlier sacrifice and deadly struggle. The experience of a time at a standstill is intoxicating, and full of danger. It is this experience that allows a glimpse of the past to take hold

in the present, revealing a deadly certainty. That is, redemption is a matter of staying alive for “even the dead will not be safe” if “the enemy” wins.⁴⁰

VIII

The time of communist struggle is akin to pulling the emergency-break on a runaway train—here and now so that the continuum of history “come[s] to a stop.” Another way of putting this is to say: the future present is both a present in transition toward its own future and a now-time that explodes this continuum of history. The time for pulling the emergency break is not tomorrow. It is now. Compared with the time of the present, now-time appears as a myth. The present is the time of seeming certainty and predictability. Now-time says that now is the time to fight barbarism. Now is the time to stop the forward march of the time of the clock, adding units of time to units of time, ticking and tacking according to the rhythm of a world in which time is money. Now-time appears as a myth because its acuity is a time that does not add to itself. It does not move forward in relentless pursuit of abstract wealth, accumulating living labor on the pyramids of abstract wealth, appropriating additional atoms of unpaid labor time for the sake of an accumulation of abstract wealth alone. In now-time, time is courage and cunning. Now is the time for taking aim “at the clocks” so that their ticking and tacking stops. Now-time is not the time of the present. It is a time against the present, seeking to stop it in its tracks. Conceived as a present time, now-time ceases as a time that fights barbarism. Instead it converts the no of now-time into an affirmative critique of existing conditions, rendering it doctrinaire in its unbending faith that all will be well in the future once the communist bead of the rosary of history has slipped through our hands.⁴¹

IX

For Benjamin the notion that history is on the side of the oppressed and that their struggle is therefore “moving with the current” as if, for the oppressed, progress is just around the corner, is most corrosive. It deludes the oppressed that redemption from suffering is really just a matter of choice between, say, the party of austerity and the party of antiausterity. This claim of imminent progress makes “dogmatic claims” about a future of freed proletarians. How might one conceive of a liberated future that is not also a future present? Benjamin calls the conception of history that conceives of existing reality as something that can be fixed for the benefit of future proletarians, the “bordello” of historical thought.⁴² It criticizes capitalism with a claim to power, envisages progress as a matter of party political success, advertises itself as the agent of progress, organizes struggle ostensibly in the interest of labor, but in reality in support of a history

that “runs its course . . . according to its own dialectic.”⁴³ In distinction, historical materialism is not a theology of history. At its best it is the critique of history unaware of itself.

X

We live at a time that resounds with misery. The headlines have changed from war and terror to what seems like a never-ending global economic crisis. Against the background of debt, default, and sluggish rates of economic growth, accumulation by dispossession is back en vogue, a whole generation of workers appear redundant, and a whole mass of people have been cut off from the means of subsistence, struggling to survive—and despite appearances to the contrary, war and terror continue unabated. Discussing the social consequences of the economic crisis, Alex Callinicos has argued that an extreme situation “promotes extreme responses,” and in this context he speaks about the need for a socialist fiscal policy to secure conditions.⁴⁴ Abject conditions require immediate and direct responses to alleviate suffering. Rather than indulging in the negativity of critical theory, there is need for a constructive politics of socialist interventions. Here we have an extreme situation and there we have a school of thought that is beset by a debilitating negativity. It is true that negative dialectics does not offer positive proposals to tackle, say, poverty. Instead, it holds that the pauper is entailed in the conception of capitalist wealth. For critical theory capitalism comprises a mode of production that destroys the two sources of social wealth, that is, nature and labor.⁴⁵ In this context, the notion that capitalism produces deplorable situations is a most optimistic point of view. Deplorable conditions (*Zustände*) are not the same as deplorable situations (*Mißstände*). The one says that poverty is a capitalist condition. Challenging it requires a revolutionary change in the social relations of production. On the other hand, deplorable situations describe entirely avoidable socioeconomic circumstances, be they the result of a chance development, government incompetence, or hard-nosed class politics. As such it can be rectified by well-meaning political interventions and political programs that benefit society at large.⁴⁶ Instead of capitalist profit, it demands a political practice that holds capital accountable to democratic aspirations for a freedom from want. Deplorable situations thus require a social activism that challenges This misery and That outrage, seeking to alleviate and rectify This and That. What, however, are the social preconditions that constitute the necessity of This poverty and That misery? Adorno condemns activism for its own sake, and rejects it as a pseudo-praxis that fights This and That but leaves the conditions that render This and That entirely untouched. In this way, activism is not only affirmative of existing society but also regressive—it deludes itself that however bad the situation,

it can be rectified by this or that policy, by this or that technical means. Whatever misery it encounters, it laments, say, unemployment as an entirely avoidable situation and demands a change in policy to put workers back to work. Its sadness about the plight of the world is thus relative—the transformation of labor power into a commodity does not describe a deplorable condition. Rather, it describes a situation that can be made good for the laborer. It feels the pain of the world and offers itself as the means of salvation. Action against this or that is delusional in its conception of society.⁴⁷ Such action deceives those whose interests it pretends to represent by making them believe that a resolution to their plight is really just a matter of proper government by means of a state that governs in their interest. In its essence, action for this cause or that cause is a political advertisement for some alternative party of order. It transforms the protest against a really existing misery that blights the life of a whole class of individuals into a selling point for political gain.

XI

Critical theory does not share the optimism of a Left that demands state action to compensate workers for a hostile capitalist society. It is conscious of the fact that the pauper belongs to the concept of capitalist wealth, and poverty is thus more than a deplorable situation. It is a capitalist condition. Nevertheless, the promise of mitigating poverty within capitalism appears to offer a more realistic perspective than the demand for a practice that overcomes the existing society. Herbert Marcuse focuses the conundrum of the critical theory conception of communist liberation most succinctly when he argues that the workers have to be free for their liberation so that they are able to become free.⁴⁸ In his view, workers can free themselves only insofar as they are not workers, on the basis of their nonidentity. Marcuse's argument is to the point: to stop the progress of capitalism requires a noncapitalist identity, and its difficulty is a simple one: such an identity does not belong to the present, which is a capitalist present. Capitalist society exists through the individuals and prevails in them. That is to say, what really does it mean to say no to a capitalistically organized mode of human subsistence? To say "no" to capitalism is simple. But to say what the no is, is difficult. For one, the no is not external to, but operates within that same society which it opposes. Like Marx's summons of class struggle as the motor of history, the no drives the negative world forward. It is its dynamic force. Furthermore, to say what the no is compromises the no, insofar as it becomes positive in its affirmative yes to something that has no valid content except the very society that it opposes. The no is immanent to bourgeois society and gives it its dynamic.

XII

Austerity is the name that many use to define the deplorable situation of contemporary capitalism. As a political practice, antiausterity is, in itself, neither communistic nor social-democratic, nor is it necessarily critical of capitalism. Indeed, the extreme Right, including neo-Fascist parties, are as vocal as the political Left in its opposition to austerity. There is thus more to the politics of antiausterity than it seems at first sight.⁴⁹ Leaving aside the repugnant idea of antiausterity as a progressive movement from market liberty to economic nationalism and from economic nationalism to national bestiality, the political Left has argued most strongly for a socialist antiausterity policy as an alternative to capitalist crisis resolution.

According to Alex Callinicos, the socialist alternative to austerity has to overcome the entrenchment of neoliberal dogma in the regulative institutions of the capitalist economy. He urges the Left to remember the original response to the crisis of 2008, which, for him, revealed the possibility of a program that combined financial nationalization with a socialist fiscal stimulus. In order to secure the reality of this original and then hastily abandoned response to the crisis of 2008, he calls upon the Left to struggle for institutional reform, putting banking and credit into public ownership and operating the system of finance under democratic control. Among other things, he proposes the devaluation of weaker currencies, reintroduction of capital controls, and concentration of investment resources on strategic industries. However, the viability of this program requires, he argues, anchorage in transnational institutions to secure progressive objectives in the face of global market challenges. Nevertheless, the national state is key.⁵⁰ Saad Philo therefore argues that the national program of economic planning "is potentially more advantageous for the working class because the state is the only social institution that is at least potentially democratically accountable and that can influence the pattern of employment, production and distribution of goods and services . . . at the level of society as whole."⁵¹ This is the background to Panitch, Albo, and Chibber who demand a program of central planning as an alternative to capitalist austerity. They argue that the protests against austerity, the Greek rebellion in particular, "only served to reveal the continuing impasse of the left." The antiausterity movements thus exhibit a "sorry lack of ambition." In their view the movement lacks the ambition to formulate a socialist political program of manifest change. As they put it in dramatic pose, "we cannot even begin to think about solving the ecological crisis that coincides with this economic crisis without the left returning to an ambitious notion of economic planning." Antiausterity requires a political decision in favor of economic planning to secure those rational

investment decisions “for the allocation of credit” that benefit the working class.⁵²

For Alfredo Saad Philo this socialism of investing in the working class requires a Left that is able to “imagine an alternative future.”⁵³ There is thus the need for a large-scale mobilization of society to alter the balance of class forces in favor of labor—to overcome “wage restraints,” gain “control of the financial system,” “rebalance core economies,” “nationalise banks,” “recapture [national] command over monetary policy,” “facilitate workers participation in confronting the problem of debt,” “impose capital controls,” “regain [national] control over monetary policy,” pursue an “industrial policy” to “restore productive capacity,” etc. The economies are thus to be restructured “in the interest of labor,” for the sake of “employment,” and in the interest of “better conditions” for workers, including the “distribution” of wealth, the achievement of “economic growth, and employment in the longer term.”⁵⁴ Clearly, the more the laborer gets, the better. After all, it is her social labor that produces the “wealth of nations”—and the proposed socialism of antiausterity recognizes this in its programmatic stance and political outlook. It rightly contests the manner in which the economic surplus is distributed, and is strenuous in its demand that capitalist wealth should not be sustained by taking money out of the pockets of workers. They demand that wealth is redistributed from capital to labor and, one might add, this redistribution is good for capital, too—commodity markets depend on sustained consumer demand. Money, they say, has to be made to employ workers, create employment, pay good wages, and improve conditions. Struggle is the means of shifting the balance of the class forces in favor of workers to secure the “institutional transformation” that will make money the servant of the working class, securing its interests.⁵⁵ The struggle against austerity is thus a struggle for the working class. Whichever way one looks at it, to be a member of the working class is a great “misfortune.”⁵⁶ Even its proponents demand that it works, and what they call socialism comprises the ambition of transforming money into productive activity, into productive engagement with workers by means of state authority.

XIII

Originally the critique of ideology sought to reveal the necessary perversion of human social practice in its reified appearance. It sought to decipher the human social content of a world of abstract economic laws. Enlightenment was its critical intent. For critical theory, the critique of political economy is therefore not an expression of social forces whose real interests it pretends to represent in theoretical terms and practical intent. Instead of arguing from the standpoint of the social forces, it aims at these forces themselves, seeking their dissolution. Class is not a positive

category. It is a category of a perverted society, and thus an entirely negative category.

Affirmative conceptions of class, however well meaning and benevolent in their intensions, presuppose the working class as a productive social force that deserves a better deal. Critical theory is not opposed to higher wage settlements and distribution of wealth from capital to labor. However, it rejects as regressive the idea that the transformation of money into productive activity is in any way critical of capitalist economy. For critical theory, communism is not a labor economy nor is it meant to secure the capitalist economy of labor.⁵⁷ Communism does neither compete nor derive from capitalism. Communism is not a capitalist derivative. It is its alternative—it entails a completely different conception of social wealth. In distinction to the idea of an economy of labor, it encapsulates the idea of the society of the free and equal.⁵⁸ Instead of being “governed by the products of his own hands,” communism entails the autonomy of the social individual in her own social world.⁵⁹

XIV

Only a reified consciousness can declare that it is in possession of the requisite knowledge, political capacity, and technical expertise for resolving capitalist crises in the interests of workers. Its world view describes capitalist economy as an irrationally organized practice of labor, and proposes socialism as a rationally organized practice of labor by means of conscious planning by public authority. In this context the role of the theorist is that of the analyst, not of the unconscious, but of the conscious organization of economic necessity. However, only a “vulgar . . . conception of the nature of labor” can pretend that communism is really just another labor economy, without even asking how the workers “might benefit” from a production process that is not at the disposal of the direct producers.⁶⁰ That is to say, the anticapitalism of central economic planning is abstract in its negation of the capitalistically organized mode of social reproduction. “Abstract negativity” barks in perpetuity and without bite. Instead, it sniffs out the miserable world, from the outside as it were, and puts itself forward as having the capacity, ability, insight, and means for resolving the crisis of capitalist economy “for the workers.”⁶¹ Abstract negativity describes the theology of anticapitalism. Theologically conceived, anticapitalism is devoid of now-time. Instead of rupturing the continuum of history, it promises deliverance from misery as a matter of public policy. In the meantime, it soothes the downtrodden and, akin to Marx’s conception of religion, delivers its message of hope where there is none.

Benjamin’s critique of social-democracy as the reigning Marxist orthodoxy of his time denounces it for promising the world amid “a pile of debris” that “grows skyward.” Its anticapitalism offers a ticket to paradise

that cuts “the sinews of its [the oppressed class’s] greatest strength” by making it “forget both its hatred and its spirit of sacrifice.” Benjamin’s thesis on the Angel of History says that the poor and miserable will not be liberated unless they liberate themselves, by their own effort, courage, and cunning.⁶²

XV

Walter Benjamin’s theses of history are without promise. He argues that history is neither the consequence of divine revelation nor a natural process that moves relentlessly through the ages until transition to socialism becomes an “objective possibility” and “necessity.” History, argues Adorno, is the struggle for freedom, that is, the struggle of mankind to dispose of their own circumstances as they wish.⁶³ For Benjamin, this struggle for freedom manifests itself “as courage, humour, cunning, and fortitude.” It “constantly calls into question every victory, past and present, of the rulers.” However, at the heart of this struggle is “hatred and its spirit of sacrifice.” “Class struggle,” he says, is about access to “crude and material things without which no refined and spiritual things could exist.” Hatred and the spirit of sacrifice are “nourished by the image of enslaved ancestors,” and this nourishment makes the “struggling, oppressed class itself . . . the depository of historical knowledge.” Its history is a history of an often-attempted now-time against the progress of the present. In this struggle for now-time every oppressed class appears “as the last enslaved class, as the avenger” of a history of oppression. That is, communism belongs to a time of history that is not filled by “homogenous, empty time, but [by a] time filled by the presence of the now.”⁶⁴ Now, not tomorrow, is the time to get rid of the muck of ages.

XVI

What is the alternative? Let us ask the question of capitalism differently, not as a question of austerity but as a question of labor time. How much labor time was needed in 2012 to produce the same amount of commodities as was produced 1992? 50 percent? 30 percent? 20 percent? Whatever the percentage might be, what is certain is that labor time has not decreased. It has increased. What is certain, too, is that despite this increase in wealth, the great majority of society has been subjected to a politics of austerity as if famine, a universal war of devastation, had cut off the supply of every means of subsistence. What a calamity! Less living labor is required to produce the same amount of commodities than only yesterday, and society finds itself cut off from the means of subsistence, forced to accept frugality and be more industrious in order to perpetuate a mode of production, in which human productive effort asserts itself as a crisis

of finance, money, and cash. The current crisis is said to require the appropriation of additional atoms of unpaid labor time to resolve the crisis of debt, finance, and cash flow, by means of a real breakthrough in labor productivity. Time is money.

What does the fight against austerity entail? Fundamentally, it does not follow some abstract ideas. It is a struggle for access to crude material things. It is a struggle for subsistence and against the reduction of life time to labor time. The fight against austerity is in fact a fight for life, and for a life to be lived. This fight might well express itself uncritically as a demand for a national politics of jobs and wages, technocratic government and protected borders, and in the name of national solidarity, national wealth, national labor, and national harmony. This national idea will focus on The Other as an excuse for a damaged life. Still, the demand for access to the means of subsistence might not be contained by the assertion of the national state as the authoritative institution of an imagined national community. It might in fact politicize the social labor relations. It might lead to the question of why the development of the productive forces at the disposal of society has become too powerful for this society, leading first to financial disorder and then austerity to maintain it. Such politicization, if indeed it is to come about, might well ask why the human content of economy, that is, human social reproduction, takes the capitalist form of price, cash, and profit. This politicization of the social labor relations will thus express, in its own words, Jacques Roux's dictum that "freedom is a hollow delusion for as long as one class of humans can starve another with impunity. Equality is a hollow delusion for as long as the rich exercise the right to decide over the life and death of others."⁶⁵ However, the secret of the capitalist relations of equivalent exchange is not the relations of distribution, upon which the socialism of antiausterity rests as a contemporary expression of a tradition of "conformist rebellion."⁶⁶ The secret of the capitalist relations of distribution is surplus value, which is the foundation of capitalist wealth. Its conception let Marx to argue that "to be a productive laborer is, therefore, not a piece of luck but a misfortune."⁶⁷ That is, the social individuals who possess no other property than their labor power must by necessity become "the slave of other individuals who have made themselves the owners of the means of human existence."⁶⁸ Communism is the name for the struggle for the society of human purposes, universal human emancipation. Its relationship to capitalism is therefore entirely negative.

XVII

In itself, the working class does not struggle for institutional transformations, capture of monetary policy, or ambitious programs of economic planning. It does indeed struggle for better wages and conditions, and

defends wage levels and conditions. It struggles against the “werewolf’s hunger for surplus labor”⁶⁹ and its destructive conquest for additional atoms of labor time, and thus against the reduction of the working class to time’s carcass. It struggles against a life constituting solely of labor time and thus against a reduction of human life to a mere economic resource. It struggles for respect, education, and recognition of human significance, and above all, it struggles for food, shelter, clothing, warmth, love, affection, knowledge, and dignity. Its struggle as a class “in itself” is really a struggle “for itself”: for life, human distinction, life time, and above all, satisfaction of basic human needs. It does all of this in conditions in which the increase in material wealth that it has produced pushes beyond the limits of the capitalist form of wealth. Every so-called trickle-down effect that capitalist accumulation might bring forth presupposes a prior and sustained trickle-up in the capitalist accumulation of wealth. And then

society suddenly finds itself put back into a state of momentary barbarism; it appears as if famine, a universal war of devastation, had cut off the supply of every means of subsistence; industry and commerce seem to be destroyed; and why? Because there is too much civilization, too much means of subsistence; too much industry, too much commerce. The productive forces at the disposal of society no longer tend to further the development of the conditions of bourgeois property; on the contrary, they have become too powerful for these conditions, by which they are fettered, and so soon as they overcome these fetters, they bring disorder into the whole of bourgeois society, endanger the existence of bourgeois property. The conditions of bourgeois society are too narrow to comprise the wealth created by them. And how does bourgeois society get over these crises? On the one hand, by enforced destruction of a mass of productive forces; on the other, by the conquest of new markets, and by the more thorough exploitation of the old ones.⁷⁰

For the oppressed class it really is the case that “the state of emergency is the rule.” For Benjamin, the experience of being cut off from the means of subsistence makes the oppressed class the depository of historical knowledge. Class struggle “supplies a unique experience with the past” and the present.⁷¹ Whether this experience “turns concrete in the changing forms of repression as resistance to repression” or whether it turns concrete in forms of repression is a matter of experienced history.⁷² For critical theory, there is thus a need to “brush history against the grain” so that the critical reason of human emancipation does not become “a piece of the politics it was supposed to lead out of.”⁷³

POSTSCRIPT

Those to whom human emancipation has meaning should not dread to be called idealists. They really are idealists. Idealism is the true reality of the specter of communism.

Where is the positive? The society of the free and equal can be defined in negation only. Humanization of social relations is the purpose and end of human emancipation. However, the effort of humanizing inhuman conditions is confronted by the paradox that it presupposes as eternal those same inhuman conditions that provoke the effort of humanization in the first place. Inhuman conditions are not just an impediment to humanization but a premise of its concept. Especially in miserable times, the positive can be found only in the negation of the negative world.

History holds no promise at all. History does nothing. It is made. Communism is the negation of the negative world. Nothing is certain in the negative world of capitalist social relations, except misery itself. Nevertheless, uncertainty is also an experienced concept of struggle.⁷⁴ Historically, it has assumed the form of the “council,” the commune, the Raete, the assemblies: this democracy of the street, which, despite appearance to the contrary, manifests no impasse at all. It is the laboratory of communist freedom—its validity is its own uncertainty.

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NOTES

1. Theodor Adorno, “Reflections about Class Theory,” in *Gesellschaftstheorie und Kulturkritik* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1975), 7–25. See also Walter Benjamin, “Theses of History,” in *Illuminations* (London: Pimlico, 1999), 245–255. Adorno’s *Lectures on History and Freedom* offers a more critical exposition of Benjamin’s ideas and independent scrutiny of history as the movement of class struggle, see Theodor Adorno, *Lectures on History and Freedom* (Cambridge: Polity, 2008). On this, see Dirk Braunstein, *Adornos Kritik der politischen Ökonomie* (Bielefeld: Transcript, 2011). Herbert Marcuse’s *One Dimensional Man* is not as rigorous in its conception of revolution and history. It develops traditional Marxist themes about the general

character of labor in capitalism, conceives of the working class as an actor of history that has become firmly incorporated into the capitalist system, posits that marginal movements embody a new revolutionary subject, and finally, argues that communism is not an existing promise in capitalist society. This last point is core to a critical theory conception of history and revolution. See Herbert Marcuse, *One Dimensional Man* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1964).

2. Walter Benjamin, *Gesammelte Schriften*, vol. I.3 (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1991), 1226–1227.

3. See, for example, Sergio Tischler, “Time of Reification and Time of Insubordination. Some Notes,” in *Human Dignity: Social Autonomy and the Critique of Capitalism*, ed. Werner Bonefeld and Kosmas Psychopedis and trans. Anna-Maeve Holloway (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2005), 131–146.

4. Michael Löwy, *Fire Alarm*, trans. Chris Turner (London: Verso: 2005), 79.

5. In contrast, Ernst Bloch conceives of redemption in messianic terms. He argues that resolution to suffering is a matter of the “not-yet” of communist salvation. Ernst Bloch, *The Principle of Hope*, 3 volumes, trans. Neville Plaice, Stephen Plaice, and Paul Knight (Oxford: Blackwell, 1986). John Holloway’s conception of revolution is resolutely Blochean in its account of capitalism as the “not-yet” of communism. See John Holloway, *Change the World* (London: Pluto Press, 2002) and *Crack Capitalism* (London: Pluto Press, 2010).

6. Howard Caygill, *Walter Benjamin: The Colour of Experience* (London: Routledge, 1998), 149.

7. Walter Benjamin, “Central Park,” in *Selected Writings 1938–1940*, vol. 4, ed. Howard Eiland and Michael W. Jennings and trans. Edmund Jephcott et al. (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 2003), 161–191.

8. The second and third Internationals subscribed to naturalized conceptions of society and history, as if history contained a developmental objective, which akin to Adam Smith’s stages theory of history, moves relentlessly through the ages until transition to socialism becomes an “objective possibility.” The revisionists did so to argue that revolution was unnecessary, and the orthodoxy that revolution was a product of natural necessity. In contemporary Marxism, Gerald Cohen’s *Karl Marx’s Theory of History: A Defence* offers the most lyrical defense of history as an objectively unfolding material force of progress. See Gerald A. Cohen, *Karl Marx’s Theory of History: A Defence* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1978). Terry Eagleton criticizes Cohen’s conception and yet endorses the underlying argument when he argues that history is a process of the constantly growing forces of production. See Terry Eagleton, *Why Marx was Right* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2011), 44. Georg Lukács focuses the classical conception well. He speaks about the “ontological priority of the economy” and argues that history is the “necessary product . . . of the self-development of the economy . . . as well as of the class struggle.” Georg Lukács, *Marx’s Basic Ontological Principles*, trans. David Fernbach (London: Merlin, 1978), 10, 159. For critique, see Theodor Adorno, “Reconciliation Under Duress,” in *Aesthetics and Politics*, ed. Ernst Bloch, Georg Lukács, Bertolt Brecht, Walter Benjamin, and Theodor Adorno (London: New Left Books, 1977), 154; Simon Clarke, *Marx, Marginalism and Modern Sociology*, 2nd ed. (London: Palgrave, 1991), 315–317; Vasilis Grollios, “Dialectics and Democracy in Georg Lukács’ Marxism,” in *Capital & Class*, forthcoming vol. 38, no. 2 2014; Jürgen Krahl, *Vom Ende der abstrakten Arbeit* (Frankfurt: Materialis Verlag, 1984).

9. Karl Marx, "Critique of the Gotha Programme," in *Karl Marx and Frederick Engels Selected Works*, vol. 3 (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1970), 9–30. The notion of a "conformist rebellion" is Horkheimer's. See Max Horkheimer, *The Eclipse of Reason* (New York: Continuum Books, 1985).

10. Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer. *Towards a New Manifesto*, trans. Rodney Livingstone (London: Verso, 2011), 20; Theodor Adorno, *Einleitung zur Musiksoziologie* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1962), 30.

11. Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, "The German Ideology," in *Marx-Engels Collected Works*, vol. 5, trans. Richard Dixon et al. (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1975), 53.

12. Herbert Marcuse, *Soviet Marxism: A Critical Analysis* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1958), 127. For an alternative interpretation of this idea, see Michael Lebowitz, "Beyond the Muck of Ages," in *Human Dignity: Social Autonomy and the Critique of Capitalism*, ed. Werner Bonefeld and Kosmas Psychopedis (Aldershot, UK: Ashgate, 2005), 95–104.

13. Theodor Adorno, "Soziologische Schriften I," in *Gesammelte Werke*, vol. 8. (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1972), 369.

14. Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno, *Dialectics of Enlightenment*, trans. John Cummings (London: Verso, 1979). Theodor Adorno, *Ästhetische Theorie* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1970).

15. Adorno, *Lectures on History and Freedom*, 28.

16. Theodor Adorno, *Minima Moralia: Reflections from Damaged Life*, trans. Edmund Jephcott (London: Verso, 1978), 114.

17. Karl Marx, "Theorien des Mehrwerts." *Marx-Engels Werke*, Vol. 26.3 (Berlin: Dietz, 1972), 252.

18. Theodor Adorno, "Über Statik und Dynamik als soziologische Kategorien," in *Gesellschaftstheorie und Kulturkritik* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1975), 43.

19. Karl Marx, *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy*, vol. 3, ed. Frederick Engels and trans. Samuel Moore and Edward Aveling (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1966), ch. 48.

20. This is most strongly argued in Karl Marx, *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts* (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1959).

21. This insight is core to Walter Benjamin's critical theory of the time of history.

22. On communism as the real movement, see Marx and Engels, "The German Ideology." The notion of history as a history of class struggle is from the Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *The Communist Manifesto* (London: Pluto, 1996).

23. Benjamin, "Theses of History," 247.

24. *Ibid.*, 248.

25. *Ibid.*

26. Karl Marx, "Die heilige Familie." *Marx-Engels Werke*, Vol. 2 (Berlin: Dietz, 1980), 98.

27. Karl Marx, *Grundrisse* (London: Penguin, 1973), 105. For a recent interpretation of this point, see Werner Bonefeld, "Primitive Accumulation and Capitalist Accumulation: On Social Constitution and Expropriation," *Science and Society* 75, no. 3 (2011): 379–399.

28. On this see Alfred Schmidt, *History and Structure*, trans. Jeffrey Herf (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1983), and Werner Bonefeld, "History and Human Emancipation," *Critique: Journal of Socialist Theory* 38, no. 1 (2010): 61–73.

29. On this, see Werner Bonefeld, "State, Revolution and Self-Determination," in *What Is to Be Done? Leninism, Anti-Leninist Marxism and the Question of Revolution Today*, ed. Werner Bonefeld and Sergio Tischler (Aldershot, UK: Ashgate, 2002), 1–12.

30. Terry Eagleton, in *Why Marx Was Right*, says that the history of class struggle has to do with economic scarcity, and that "only with capitalism can enough surplus be generated for the abolition of scarcity," which "only socialism can put into practice." Eagleton, *Why Marx Was Right*, 44. For the sake of socialism, there is thus a need to develop capitalism to the fullest. See Jürgen Krahl, *Konstitution und Klassenkampf* (Frankfurt; Verlag Neue Kritik, 1970), for a forceful critique of the idea of history as an unfolding process of economic laws.

31. Karl Kraus, cited in Benjamin, "Theses of History," 252.

32. Eagleton's, *Why Marx Was Right*, account of history expresses most eloquently the view that economic scarcity is the historical foundation of class struggle. Economics does indeed see itself as a theory of the distribution of scarce resources, a view that Marx dealt with swiftly by calling it a "learned disputation how the booty pumped out of the labourer may be divided." Karl Marx, *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy*, vol. 1, ed. Frederick Engels and trans. Samuel Moore and Edward Aveling (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1958), 559. See Werner Bonefeld, "Abstract Labor: Against Its Nature and on Its Time," *Capital & Class* 34, no. 2 (2010), for a critique of transhistorical conceptions of economic categories.

33. I use this phrase in reference to Holloway's negative theory of capitalism. John Holloway, *Crack Capitalism* (London: Pluto Press, 2010).

34. On the connection between St. Petersburg and Kronstadt, see Cajo Brendel, "Kronstadt: Proletarian Spin-Off of the Russian Revolution," trans. Joseph Fracchia, in *What Is to Be Done? Leninism, Anti-Leninist Marxism and the Question of Revolution Today*, ed. Werner Bonefeld and Sergio Tischler (Aldershot, UK: Ashgate, 2002).

35. The notion of thinking out of history rather than about history derives from Adorno's negative dialectics which argues that for thought to decipher capitalist society, it needs to think out of society. For him, thinking about society, or about history, amounts to an argument based on hypothetical judgments that treat the world as an "as if," leaving reality itself untouched and leading to dogmatic claims about its character. Critical theory, at least this is its critical intent, deciphers society from within, seeking its dissolution as a continuum of inevitable and irresistible social forces, political events, economic laws (of scarcity), and empirical data. Theodor Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, trans. E. B. Ashton (London: Routledge, 1973). For a recent account, Werner Bonefeld, "Negative Dialectics in Miserable Times," *Journal of Classical Sociology* 12, no. 1 (2012): 122–134.

36. Adorno, *Einleitung zur Musiksoziologie*, 30. Marx and Engels, "The German Ideology," 53.

37. Benjamin, "Theses of History," 247.

38. Theodor Adorno, "Über Statik und Dynamik als soziologische Kategorien," 43.

39. On this, see Sergio Tischler, "Time of Reification."

40. Benjamin, "Theses of History," 247. In distinction to Caygill's and Löwy's interpretations of Benjamin's use of the term "redemption," I argue that it summons the historical experience of maintaining life and limbs in the context of a deadly struggle with the callous victors of history, whose vengeance is not limited

to the living alone but includes “even the dead” who are transformed into memorial fodder. I accept that redemption contains a religious element. For the oppressed, religion is not only some opium that curbs their passion for revolt. It is also a refuge in a merciless world.

41. Benjamin, “Theses of History,” 253, 254. The “rosary that slips through our hands” refers to Benjamin’s critique of an historical materialism that has slipped into the theoretical method of historicism, which conceives of history as a sequence of events.

42. *Ibid.*, 252, 253.

43. Georg Lukács, in Theo Pinkus, *Conversations with Lukács*, trans. David Fernbach (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1975), 74. I owe this part of the argument to Johannes Agnoli, *Subversive Theorie* (Freiburg: Ca Ira, 1996). Theodor Adorno, *Philosophische Elemente* (Berlin: Suhrkamp, 2008), likened the struggle for the benefit of wage labor to a struggle for charity, appealing to the charitable side of a bourgeois order (196), or as Karl Marx put it in the *Holy Family*, its sentimentality, which combines hard-nosed discipline at the shop-floor with philanthropy. See Marx, “Die heilige Familie.” Leninism demanded the extension of factory discipline to society at large, ostensibly in the name of communism, seeking the classless society by transforming the whole of society into a factory. Karl Marx, in *The Critique of the Gotha Programme*, rejected laborism as a revolutionary idea and condemned the notion of a revolution for labor as a revolution for slavery. See Marx, “The Critique of the Gotha Programme,” 9–30. On Leninism, see Simon Clarke, “Was Lenin a Marxist? The Populist Roots of Marxism-Leninism,” in *What Is to Be Done? Leninism, Anti-Leninist Marxism and the Question of Revolution Today*, ed. Werner Bonefeld and Sergio Tischler, 49–75 (Aldershot, UK: Ashgate, 2002).

44. Alex Callinicos, “Contradictions of Austerity,” *Cambridge Journal of Economics* 36, no. 1 (2012): 76.

45. Alfred Schmidt, *The Concept of Nature in Marx*, trans. Ben Fowkes (London: New Left Books, 1971).

46. Johannes Agnoli, “Destruction as the Determination of the Scholar in Miserable Times,” in *Revolutionary Writing*, ed. and trans. Werner Bonefeld (New York: Autonomedia, 2003), 25–37, argues that destruction is the response to miserable conditions. On the distinction between deplorable situations and deplorable conditions, see Werner Bonefeld, “Die Betroffenheit und die Vernunft der Kritik,” in *Kritik der Politik*, ed. Joachim Bruhn, Manfred Dahlmann, and Clemens Nachmann (Freiburg: Ca Ira, 2000), 61–81.

47. Theodor Adorno, *Stichworte. Kritische Modelle 2* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1969), 176.

48. See Marcuse’s *One Dimensional Man*.

49. On this issue in relation to contemporary radical thought, see Marcel Stötzler, “On the Possibility that the Revolution That Will End Capitalism Might Fail to Usher in Communism,” *Journal of Classical Sociology* 12, no. 2 (2012): 191–204.

50. Callinicos, “Contradictions.”

51. Alfredo Saad-Philo, “Crisis in Neoliberalism or Crisis of Neoliberalism?” in *Socialist Register 2011* (London: Merlin, 2010), 253–254.

52. Leo Panitch, Greg Albo, and Vivek Chibber, “Preface,” in *Socialist Register 2012: The Crisis and the Left* (London: Merlin 2011), xi.

53. Saad-Philo, “Crisis,” 255.

54. Costas Lapavistas, "Default and Exit from the Eurozone," in *Socialist Register 2012: The Crisis and the Left* (London: Merlin Press, 2011), 295–296.
55. Callinicos, "Contradictions," 65–77.
56. Marx, *Capital*, vol. 1, 477.
57. On this, see Werner Bonefeld, "Anti-Globalization and the Question of Socialism." *Critique: Journal of Socialist Theory* 34, no. 1 (2006): 39–54 and Werner Bonefeld, "Global Capital, National State, and the International," *Critique: Journal of Socialist Theory* 36, no. 1 (2008): 63–72.
58. On this, see Marx and Engels, *The Communist Manifesto*.
59. Karl Marx, *Capital*, vol. 1, 582. For contemporary discussion, see David Eden, *Autonomy: Capitalism, Class and Politics* (Aldershot, UK: Ashgate, 2012). Joseph Fracchia, "The Untimely Timeliness of Rosa Luxemburg," in *Human Dignity: Social Autonomy and the Critique of Capitalism*, ed. Werner Bonefeld and Kosmas Psychopedis (Aldershot, UK: Ashgate, 2005); and Holloway, *Crack Capitalism*.
60. Benjamin, "Theses of History," 251.
61. Adorno, *Lectures on History and Freedom*, 25.
62. Benjamin, "Theses of History," 249, 252.
63. Theodor Adorno, *Lectures on Negative Dialectics* (Cambridge: Polity, 2008).
64. Benjamin, "Theses of History," 246, 251, 252–253.
65. Jacques Roux, "Das Manifest der Enragés," in *Freiheit wird die Welt erobern, Reden und Schriften*, ed. Jacques Roux (Frankfurt: Röderberg, 1985), 147.
66. Horkheimer, *The Eclipse of Reason*.
67. Marx, *Capital*, vol. 1, 447.
68. Marx, "Critique of the Gotha Program," 13, translation amended.
69. Marx, *Capital*, vol. 1, 233 and 252.
70. Marx and Engels, *The Communist Manifesto*, 18–19.
71. Benjamin, "Theses of History," 247, 254.
72. Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, 265.
73. Benjamin, "Thesis of History," 248; Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, 143.
74. On Uncertainty, see Werner Bonefeld, "Uncertainty and Social Autonomy," *The Commoner* 8 (Winter 2004): 1–6.

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CHAPTER 8

Notes toward a Rethinking of the Militant

Rodrigo Nunes

Over a decade ago, Alain Badiou spoke of a “widespread search” for a new figure of the militant to replace “the one established by Lenin and the Bolsheviks.”¹ Barring two notable exceptions—in Badiou’s own work and Hardt and Negri’s²—the search does not appear to have gone very far. It certainly does not bode well that, more than a decade on, Badiou still speaks of the need to “create new symbolic forms for our collective action”³ or a “paradigm”⁴ with which to replace the militant of state communism, the soldier, and war, as models for the project of emancipation. More often than not, the militant, with its Bolshevik associations, is treated today with a dose of suspicion. Given the last century’s dismal record of defeats, betrayals, and disasters—on the part of communist parties and the labor movement as well as of the alternative modes of politics that were meant to replace them—it is no surprise that the militant should be another one of its casualties. Maybe, as Badiou himself already recognized, the search is primarily in the oxymoronic form of denying the possibility of its object.⁵

Questions of organization have returned to the top of the agenda since the mass movements that the world saw in 2011: how to prevent that degree of mobilization from dissipating? How to channel that powerful, if diffuse, desire for radical change into a struggle capable of rendering it effective? In this context, even ideas that seemed largely discredited have been put back on the table. For instance, Jodi Dean has argued for the need of “something like a party” as “an explicit assertion of collectivity, a structure of accountability, an acknowledgment of differential capacities, and a vehicle for solidarity.”⁶ Slavoj Žižek has once more insisted

that “to impose a reorganization of social life . . . one needs a strong body able to reach quick decisions and to implement them with all necessary harshness.”⁷ Even while they diverge on key issues—Badiou’s own preference is for a “politics *without party* . . . organized through the intellectual discipline of political processes, and not according to a form correlated with that of the State”⁸—these attempts to rekindle thinking about organization and militancy display clear points of overlap. The qualities that they advocate, such as discipline and the capacity to decide and act in a unified way (and hence some form of structure and a degree of centralization), allow us to discern between the lines what they reject in present forms of activism. For example, Badiou chides activists and theoretical adversaries for their disregard for, even hostility toward, “organization, perseverance, unity and discipline,”⁹ while Dean speaks of the need to overcome a “mistrust of collectivity” and “anxiety around hierarchy, non-transparency, leadership, delegation, institutionalization, and centralization.”¹⁰

Evidently, even the neutral talk of a *new* figure of the militant, or of “a new figure of organization, and hence of politics,”¹¹ belies a negative evaluation of what exists now. But posing the problem in terms of a model or paradigm invites several questions. Firstly, it is clear that the wane of the Leninist figure has not entailed the disappearance of political activism altogether. For instance, only two years after Badiou declared the search open, a cycle of global struggles arose comparable in intensity to the one begun in 2011. If a model is just an abstraction that identifies what is common to different practices, how could one say that no model(s) existed in this period? Or was there one, except it is exactly what is denied in the call for a new one? Can the work of producing “a reformulated ideological proposition, a strong Idea, a crucial hypothesis” be done without regard to existing practices and the conditions that produce them?¹² Secondly, to prove the feasibility and desirability of an organizational model in theory does not prove that it is feasible and desirable in practice. People do not join a party because the idea makes sense, but because *the party* makes sense; the Bolsheviks were not copied because their model was good, but because it had worked (and they actively exported it). Is the problem then not better posed as one of transition—the practical work of selecting and cultivating, among existing practices, those elements that can improve and transform them? In this case, it is no longer a matter of an externally created model, but of progressively transforming what is according to an idea, itself in progress, of what is needed.¹³

It is this path that I intend to take here. It will take us from a reappraisal of the left-wing critique of vanguardism to an examination of its incorporation into a lineage of attempts to conceptualize a nonvanguardist politics that would remain radical or revolutionary. This will allow us

to better appreciate the thrust of criticisms such as those raised by Badiou, Žižek, and Dean, identifying the exact point in which those alternative conceptions of radical systemic change flirt with a covert teleology that overlooks the subjective, partisan dimension of politics. Having done this, we will be in a position to return to the questions of the militant and of organization through an examination of networked politics, today's dominant organizational mode: what *is*. It is then that the problem of what is needed—finding elements for a redefinition of the militant—can be posed anew, via a preliminary question: can there be a nonvanguardist practice of the vanguard?

I

The neglect and anxieties that Badiou and Dean criticize are, of course, more than a manifestation of the atomization characteristic of neoliberal subjectivity, and are historically grounded. But it is good to remember that the critique of vanguardism from the Left encompassed more than the thematic, which typifies the critique from the Right, of revolutions inevitably resulting in authoritarian states; it also referred both to the conciliationist turn of many (former) communist parties and trade unions in the West, and to the growing isolation and irrelevance of organizations of the Far Left. Attention to this difference should prevent us from conflating it with the ideological binary erected by the rightist critique—either free market and liberal democracy or totalitarian socialism. The question would then be: Even if we identify discipline, unity and organizational consistency as values to be re-injected into existing practice, how to do so without losing sight of the critique of authoritarianism and bureaucratization? What organizational forms and ethos need to be fostered so that a reformulation of the militant can be based on more than the hope that “this time it will be different?” Or is it just a matter of, in Lacanian fashion, accepting the inexistence of the big Other and hoping that we can “*fail better* than a ‘normal’ bourgeois state,”¹⁴ better than (formerly) really existing socialism?

What, then, is the vanguardist militant according to the leftist critique? It is a figure defined by separation. First and foremost, that between means and ends, a separation that encapsulates the performative contradiction in which this militant figure is caught: it fights separation—of producers from their products, from the social nature of their production and from nature; of the people from power; of the masses from their fate—through means that reinforce it rather than eliminate it. Of course, the activist or militant always exists on the basis of objective separations—if not necessarily only those that characterize existing society (differentials in access to education and resources, gender, division of labor etc.), at the very least the one that constitutes the activist as activist: between the politically

active and the nonactive or not-yet-active. In this sense, any militant is always in the paradoxical position of existing in order to abolish himself or herself: a mediator whose aim is to end mediation.¹⁵ According to the left-wing critique, the problem with the vanguardist model is that it tends toward the (self)perpetuation of militants in the condition of mediators—"bureaucrats of the revolution," "functionaries of Truth,"¹⁶ and "specialists of power"¹⁷—and that this, in turn, results from the circular, narcissistic structure of (self-) identification that welds the militant to the revolutionary process via belonging to an organization or group.

The organization or group functions as a mediation that at once elevates the individual into a collective, historical dimension, and schematizes the abstraction of utopia into spatiotemporal coordinates: an organizational form, a sequence of tasks, steps, stages, and so on.¹⁸ What is characteristic of vanguardism is the way in which, through group belonging, the individual identifies himself or herself with a subjective excess (to be a member is to be in excess of existing conditions), and objectively identifies the group with the revolution. This is contained in the very notion of vanguard: for a group to identify itself as a vanguard means to see itself as the most advanced detachment in the revolutionary movement; the one with the best theoretical and practical grasp of the process, its direction and its requirements.¹⁹ The circularity is evident: if there are forward and backward elements in the process, it is because there is an objective knowledge that allows to discern them—and, by definition, nowhere can this objective knowledge be sharper than among the most advanced detachment. (One could ironically conclude that the vanguard is the group in possession of the knowledge that it is the vanguard.) From this follows that the organization itself can be identified with the revolution: the former's advances and retreats, defeats and victories, allies and enemies are automatically the latter's, and the future of the latter depends on the continued existence of the former. At the same time, for an individual to identify himself or herself with the group is to identify with those qualities that place it in excess of the situation, and thus with a subjective excess over the practico-inert that manifests itself in the possession of a perspective (an outlook uncompromised by the dominant modes of thinking, the correct line, a superior analysis), in practice (otherness to or exception from existing social relations and mores), and even in regard to one's own desires and interests (the readiness to pay any costs exacted by the revolution). The circle closes in on itself: if to be the vanguard of the revolution is to be in excess of the present situation, to be a member is to be in excess of the situation, that is, to be the vanguard of the revolution.

This double movement both justifies and disguises the reproduction of separation inside the organization and in its milieu—the entrenchment of hierarchies, the division of labor, the split between "the knowers . . . and the non-knowers,"²⁰ representatives and the represented, mediators and

mediated. Externally, the superposition between the group's goals and interests and those of the revolution validates manipulative and sectarian behavior, "continuously struggling to attain majority, 'possessing' in order to lay down the line . . . affirming ourselves as revolutionaries and not the class and its behaviours."²¹ Internally, the fact that one is "fighting the good fight" at once legitimizes the contradictions between ends and means in the organization's internal life²² and fosters a culture of sacrifice and self-denial with which militants steel themselves in the face of failure and "the cost to ourselves of what we are trying to do."²³ This confirms their subjective excess over existing society even while they engage in its reproduction; self-instrumentalization cements the separations within the group and legitimates the persecution of those who speak out (having doubts reveals insufficient commitment), and serving as a tool to persecute those who speak out.²⁴ In our times—whose terms of debate are still largely set by the failed experiences of the 20th century and the critique of vanguardism of the 1960s and 1970s—this is what the words "political discipline" probably suggests to most. Not "quite simply the discipline of processes" themselves, but an internalization of the "superego of the organisation"²⁵—which is the flipside of the vanguard militant's and the vanguard group's narcissistic investment in themselves as the real revolutionaries, the ones who make the revolution.²⁶

II

It must be remembered, however, that the left-wing critique of vanguardism was not just a mockery of the Left's "joyless ascetics,"²⁷ or an exposé of revolutionary organizations as a microcosm of the totalitarian societies they were predestined to create. It was also about how they had become, at best, innocuous, shut-off from "the real (contradictory and autonomous) processes of the masses"²⁸ and incapable of communicating with new struggles or changes in objective conditions and class composition²⁹; and, at worst, counterrevolutionary, "antagonistic to any expression of subjectivity on the part of . . . the subject groups spoken of by Marx,"³⁰ sabotaging what they could not control and stifling what they could, motivated only by the overriding imperative of party-building and organizational survival, perpetuating their position as mediators and representatives.

It was as an overcoming of the "the sad, ascetic agent of the Third International whose soul was deeply permeated by Soviet state reason"³¹ and the activist "who acts on the basis of duty and discipline, who pretends his or her actions are deduced from an ideal plan,"³² that Hardt and Negri proposed their own version of a "communist militant" for the "postmodern era."³³ Against the transcendence of vanguardism—of the vanguard over the masses, of the preestablished plan over the materiality of the

movement, of a knowledge already possessed over the political process, of a projected goal over the means to attain it, of the militant's position over existing relations and structures—this was the militant of an immanent communism that created itself in its very unfolding. Rather than a specialist in charge of directing workers in political struggle, this militant was to be “positive, constructive, and innovative,” immediately connecting “insurrectional action” and “the formation of cooperative apparatuses of production and community.”³⁴

Importantly, however, Hardt and Negri's was not a paradigm thrown out into the world, but a figure brought forth by the very neoliberal capitalist restructuring, which had, since the late 1970s, decimated the working-class organizations of the previous period. This shift represented the passage into a new, biopolitical age of capitalist production, in which capitalism had become productive of “*social life itself*,”³⁵ directly exploiting living labor's collaborative, communicative, affective, and creative capacities, which could now fully appear for what they always were: not only the foundation of production, but also its product and means. This new situation erased the distance between strategy and tactic and economic and political struggles³⁶ central to Lenin's conception of the party's role, and ultimately also that between communism as “the real movement which abolishes the present state of things”³⁷ and living labor in “the absolute movement of [its] becoming.”³⁸ Now, “[r]evolutionary political militancy” could “rediscover what has always been its proper form: not representational but constituent activity.”³⁹

If the conception of “party and organization as factory [was] adequate to the determinate level” of the Leninist project, “replicating the technico-political composition of the working class” of its time, the network was today's answer to the question of “what is the organizational need” arising from the “determinate composition” of the class.⁴⁰ If networks are “the form of organization of the cooperative and communicative relationships dictated by the immaterial paradigm of production,”⁴¹ and “in each era . . . the model of resistance that proves to be most effective turns out to have the same form as the dominant models of economic and social production,”⁴² they were not only the default organizational form in the present technical composition of labor, but also the most adequate to the struggles of the multitude. In the same way that biopolitical production rests directly on the multitude's self-activity, meaning that the latter's autonomy from capital is tendentially complete, networks both “directly produce new subjectivities and new forms of life”⁴³ and provide “the model for an absolutely democratic organization”⁴⁴ capable of materializing the “profound desire for . . . the rule of all by all based on relationships of equality and freedom” that “the great revolutions of modernity” had created but “never yet realized.”⁴⁵

One must note that, as with the critique of vanguardism, the focus here was not only democracy and autonomy (let alone individual

self-expression) but political effectiveness. The communicative possibilities created by the spread of the Internet and the circulation of struggles then taking place around the globe evoked the promise of a global political process that was both centerless and sufficiently strong to fight global capitalism. The enthusiasm was boosted by a dialogue with the sciences of complexity, which pointed both to networks' ubiquity in the natural and social worlds, and their capacity to give rise to effects greater than the sum of their parts: local movements networked on a global scale "could exhibit complex adaptive and emergent behaviour of their own, and would promote it for society as a whole out of their own local work."⁴⁶

If it is true that global capitalism and information society are attempting a re-structuring towards the network form, movements could be better off by building on this logic and getting ahead in the game. Movements have the advantage since, unable to really pursue a strategy of collective intelligence, capitalism will progressively lose out to an anti-globalisation movement which . . . will have learned to "think like a swarm."⁴⁷

Amid the technopolitical optimism of the times, however, many questions were overlooked: that movements of resistance do not constitute a system in exterior competition with capital, but are internal to it, and are not simply trying to adapt, but to change the system that is their environment; that systemic equilibrium does not necessarily overlap with our human notions of justice (ant colonies display a stratified division of labor, ecosystems include natural predators and prey, etc.); that if networks and self-organized behavior are ubiquitous, it is just as possible to describe capitalism as both networked and possessing admirable adaptive capacities; that even if it is possible that the emergent behavior of networked movements could progressively transform their surrounding system, it would quite possibly be in a longer timescale than the one needed by capitalism to collapse by undermining its own conditions of existence (and so ours). Of several possible outcomes—that capitalism neutralizes, instrumentalizes or destroys its antisystemic subsystem; that the latter dissipates; that capitalism collapses before it changes—it was often only the most positive that was picked for consideration. A selectiveness that, in the end, amounted to a covert reliance on teleology, even if not in an assertoric but only conditional mode: "*it may well be that, by doing what we are doing, we will attain what we want . . .*"

III

Our attempt to rethink the militant can be situated in the context of the criticisms raised by the likes of Žižek and Badiou against the politics and theory that they identified with the alter-globalist movement.⁴⁸ In

essence, they bear on three questions: effectiveness, continuity, and the one that ties the two together—the place of the political subject. To put it in shorthand: unless it is based on a subjective break, opposition to capitalism is—similarly to how the critique 1970s saw vanguardism—at best innocuous, and at worst continuous with it. For the most part, the charges of ineffectiveness and continuity intermingle. While Žižek acknowledges that “there are situations in which a minimal measure of social reform can have much stronger large-scale consequences than self-professed ‘radical’ changes,”⁴⁹ today he would probably lump even the more radical strains of alter-globalist activism in with the “frenetic humanitarian, Politically Correct etc. activity” that he calls “interpassivity”: scattershot, knee-jerk responses to the injunction to act that ultimately amount to “doing things not to achieve something, but to prevent something from really happening.”⁵⁰ Against the belief that “creative power will be ‘expressed’ in the free unfolding of the multitudes”⁵¹—which generates a neglect of questions of discipline and organization—their point is to remind us that the “task of emancipatory politics,” rather than “elaborating a proliferation of strategies of ‘resisting’ the dominant *dispositif* from marginal subjective positions,” should be “thinking about the modalities of a possible radical rupture in the dominant *dispositif* itself”⁵²—and hence also considering how to amass and concentrate the forces needed for that rupture.⁵³

Against the proliferation of local resistances, we have here an affirmation of the rarity of politics, which stems, precisely, from the rarity of subjective breaks encapsulated in an “event” (Badiou) or “act” (Žižek) that creates its own conditions and draws legitimacy from nothing but itself. Politics, in this sense, is the opposite of what usually goes by that name in its parliamentary form or in most activist expressions; it is the interruption and redefinition of ‘politics as usual’ through the irruption of the political, in the form of an act or an event. The subject’s relation to the existing order is thus one of subtraction, a distance from “the hegemonic ideological coordinates”⁵⁴ (a world’s transcendental, for Badiou) in which the subject is formed in the very process of transforming what is: “the political, when it exists, founds its own principle concerning the real, and it does not have any need for anything except for itself.”⁵⁵ Without this distance, “that which goes by the name ‘resistance’ . . . is only a component of the progress of power itself”; to miss “the importance of separation” is to espouse “a metaphysical politics, a politics of the One . . . in the precise sense that it excludes negativity, and thus, in the end, the domain of the subject.”⁵⁶ The very features that Hardt and Negri extol in contemporary activism for how they build on the contemporary technical composition of labor—network organization, spatial mobility, temporal flexibility⁵⁷—bear witness to an ideological continuity with contemporary capitalism. In their lack of “organization, perseverance, unity and

discipline," they fail the test of the highest militant virtue: courage as "endurance in the impossible."⁵⁸

One could argue that this judgment was vindicated by the subsequent dissipation of alter-globalism. But before we appreciate the thrust of this critique, let us once more draw a distinction between rightist and leftist variations of a same logic.

It was largely through the critique of real existing socialism, the conciliationism of party and union bureaucracies and the failed vanguards of the extraparliamentary Left that the idea of a minoritarian politics developed in the 1970s, in the works of Michel Foucault, Gilles Deleuze, and Félix Guattari, among others, and in the activism of groups of women, people of color, gays and lesbians, prisoners, psychiatric patients, and so on. For most of those who took it, at least at the time, this turn did not signal the abandonment of the critique of capitalism, or of the idea of overcoming it. Again, it was motivated by questions of political effectiveness, and started precisely from the idea that the reason for the shortcomings of vanguardist politics lay in its deficient understanding of who or what the enemy was. Concepts of micro or molecular politics, or of a diffuse, centerless network of power relations coextensive with the social field, served to explain why "revolutionary movements [that] privileged the state apparatus as the target of struggle"⁵⁹ had come to reproduce the old society they had fought, or why "a group can be revolutionary from the point of view of class interest" and yet be "even fascistic and police-like from the point of view of its libidinal investments."⁶⁰ At the same time, they offered a view of what an alternative revolutionary politics could be. Against the idea that the struggle is (and has to be made) concentrated in the "most advanced sector of the class," resistance is to be found in the myriad places in which it manifests itself ("local responses, counterfire, active and sometimes preventive defensive measures"). The great political problem is how "to create lateral connections, a whole system of networks, of popular bases . . . transversal connections between these discontinuous active points, from a country to another and inside the same country" so as to make "the revolutionary process"⁶¹ a polycentric, wide-scale, systemic challenge.

It is true that this line of thinking was instrumentalized in the 1980s in order to rationalize the end of class politics (in effect, the end of the hitherto existing institutions of class politics) and an acceptance of capitalism as the only game in town. It is also true that this was done at times by some of the social subjects at the margin of (and marginalized by) traditional class politics who had been standard bearers for a minoritarian politics. Morphing into minority politics, the latter was largely assimilated into the market and governance mechanisms of the neoliberal regime, which successfully forged the libertarian 'artistic' critique of capitalism from the 1960s and 1970s into a "new spirit of capitalism."⁶² The celebration of easily

accommodated molecular transgressions often became no more than the flipside of resignation to moderate reformism. Yet not only should we not confuse minoritarian and minority—as Deleuze and Guattari⁶³ would remind us not to do—we should take minoritarian politics for what it once tried to be: not an investment in small “acts of resistance which only keep the system alive” but an attempt to think a non-vanguardist politics up to the task of radical change.⁶⁴

IV

It is not difficult to see how this conception of revolutionary change and its inherent desire to exorcise the ghosts of vanguardism’s past could result in a covert teleology; it suffices that one subtract the subjective dimension from the telos of radical social transformation. In other words, one makes what is a question asked from a subjective perspective (what do we need to connect struggles and create the conditions for systemic change?) into an objective process behind the backs of agents (if everyone keeps on doing what they are doing, these connections will emerge). There is an obvious appeal in this, to the extent that transferring the problem of strategy from a subjective to an objective dimension by definition eliminates the need for vanguards, and thus all the problems associated with vanguardism. A process that is absolutely, immediately spontaneous has no need for mediations, or mediators. And this is because the hidden hand of teleology intervenes at the precise point(s) that would require subjective intervention (hence strategy, organization, etc.): the passage from a quantitative proliferation (of struggles) to a qualitative (systemic) change.

Even if this idea is not explicitly held anywhere,⁶⁵ it is secretly operative behind different positions: in John Holloway, when the spillover of noncapitalistic doings or cracks becomes a qualitatively different arrangement that can “recover or, better, create the conscious and confident sociality of the flow of doing”⁶⁶; in Escobar, when he imagines the realization of utopia as a “phase transition . . . perhaps promoted by some sort of non-linear dynamics in the mechanisms of the world economy, ecology, ideology etc.”⁶⁷; in the “materialist teleology”⁶⁸ subtending the movement of the multitude as ever greater autonomy from capital, in Hardt and Negri; and even in much earlier Left communists Gilles Dauvé and François Martin:

The communist party is the *spontaneous* (i.e., *totally determined by social evolution*) organization of the revolutionary movement created by capitalism. The party is a spontaneous offspring . . . *It does not need to be created or not created: it is a mere historical product.* Therefore, revolutionaries have no need either to build it or fear to build it.⁶⁹

Because this is a *conditional* teleology, all of the above offer elements that compensate for it.⁷⁰ It is not that it is wrong, given that teleological judgments cannot in any case be disproven, as something not happening cannot prove that it might not. The problem does not lie either in the idea that radical change can only emerge through the interaction of struggles and their environment nor in the emphasis on uncertainty as a corrective to “old revolutionary certainty,”⁷¹ both of which are unavoidable. The issue is how this wager can function repressively, by replacing the uncertainty proper to every situated, subjective decision with a certainty of the process itself, which, left to its own devices, will spontaneously show the way. In this case, the affirmation of the process’ immanent capacities, and of the uncertainty of political action and the impossibility of its totalization by any single agent, reverts into its opposite: not only is the process ascribed teleological certainty (solutions will appear), it is made into something external to the agents that constitute it. Action is deemed immanent only to the extent that it ‘goes with the flow’ but is transcendent—tainted with the suspicion of harboring aspirations to certainty, leadership, and so on—every time it attempts to seize a moment to consciously influence the flow’s direction.⁷²

No objective knowledge could lay claim in advance to the effects of political decisions and only the process itself can produce its solutions—but how can solutions emerge if not by trial and error, that is, through concrete attempts at producing them? Is it not necessary that they exist as and are taken for the only thing they can be—partial, partisan, perspectival extrapolations on limited information, to be judged on the merits of what they include and leave out, what their biases are, how well or badly they appraise objective conditions (correlation of forces, points of leverage etc.), how realistic the tasks they set are, what their negative side-effects could be, how well or badly executed they are? It is true that one only acts one step at a time, but this does not mean that one should only *think* one step at a time—otherwise, the tendency will always be to do what comes naturally, when the obvious or easiest path is not necessarily the best. While it is important to bear in mind the Zapatista motto of “*caminar preguntando*” (usually translated as “walking, we ask questions”), it is good to remember that it is in the interest of finding answers that one asks questions.

Perhaps we can start to work on a nonvanguardist way of posing the question of subjective intervention in a process by looking at this passage:

experiencing the eventfulness and uniqueness of every situation [is] not necessarily about commanding movement, it’s about navigating movement. It’s about being immersed in an experience that is already underway . . . going with the flow. It’s more like surfing the situation, or tweaking it, than commanding or programming it. The

command paradigm approaches experience as if we were somehow outside it, looking in, like disembodied subjects handling an object. But . . . [w]e are our situations, we are our moving through them. We are our participation—not some abstract entity that is somehow outside looking in at it all.⁷³

The crucial issue here is the difference between surfing and tweaking. For a surfer, a wave is an external body of much greater mass and momentum; he or she does not control its direction or movement, and so can only navigate it, coordinating his or her own trajectory with that of the force that hauls them. Tweaking is a much more appropriate metaphor for being inside a process. The process still possesses much greater mass and momentum than any individual agents, but these agents are its constituent parts, thus having some, if only partial, control over it. It corrects the command paradigm idea of the party as an external agent bestowing form upon matter from the outside; but it does not go too far in the opposite direction, treating the process as if it were a whole existing apart from those who constitute it (again on the outside looking in), and as an agent in its own right rather than the contingent, emergent result of their (necessarily limited, necessarily uncertain) action. It eliminates the transcendence of agent over process proper to vanguardism, without instituting a transcendence of process over agent in which the denial of intentional, strategic initiative to the latter is the flipside of the former's surreptitious elevation to the position of a Lacanian subject supposed to know: what is imagined to be in charge when, and because, "there is no-one in charge."⁷⁴

V

So where does this leave us in regard to a rethinking of the militant? With questions of strategy and organization, it is always good to first ask the question "where are we," and only then "where do we want to go?" This is how we will proceed.

Our starting point is networked organization. However, even if we can speak of networked politics as today's movements' spontaneous organizational logic ("what comes naturally"), it must be understood in its materiality as an *organizational* logic. On the one hand, as Gramsci noted, "pure" spontaneity does not exist in history: it would coincide with "'pure' mechanicity."⁷⁵ The notion of a purely spontaneous, nonorganized political movement is nonsensical because for it to exist and be noticeable as such, it must have already somehow distinguished itself, subjectively and objectively, from the everyday spontaneous reproduction of order ("this group of workers, rather than go to work, decided to picket the gates . . ."). On the other, networks are not structureless and "formless"

and, in a certain sense, not even “multiform”⁷⁶; they possess forms and structures of their own, which emerge (spontaneously) regardless of whether individuals realize or will them.

The first thing to recognize, in this case, is that networked organization does not eliminate vanguards. The fact that political networks have a structure characterized by the presence of hubs (nodes with an anomalously high number of links and with links to nodes in more and more distant clusters) immediately puts paid to the idea that they are horizontal by nature. Leadership still exists in them, if in a noninstitutionalized mode, which has advantages (such as weaker tendencies toward the formation of hierarchies) and disadvantages (no defined structures of accountability, greater fluctuations in mobilizing capacity). It is recast as distributed leadership, which means that the isolated initiatives of individuals or relatively small groups, communicated across the overall network system, can trigger positive feedback loops that increase their impact exponentially. Emergent behavior is not spontaneous in the sense of miraculous but always induced by a germ of action; when one such germ spreads to nodes and hubs that respond to it and amplify its reach, large-scale effects such as the Arab Spring, 15M, and Occupy—mass movements without mass organizations—can happen. And once they do, even if the nodes that originated them are drowned out in the now enlarged, activated network-system (which is not necessarily the case), these movements themselves can still be described as vanguards: while they may be attempting to reach out to and speak on behalf of society-at-large, they differentiate themselves from it precisely to the extent that, whoever the participants may be, they are the ones taking part at that precise moment. Politics always inevitably involves synecdoche, that is, a part standing for the whole; in this sense, vanguards (and, in a sense, representation) are ineliminable.⁷⁷

Yet it is important to draw the distinction between the objective and teleological understanding of vanguard, whose sway over the Marxist tradition helped engender vanguardism, and what we could call the *vanguard-function*. The latter is best understood as what Deleuze and Guattari would call the “cutting edge of deterritorialization” of a situation—in this case, those people who, having started to ‘function’ in a different way, open a new direction, which, communicated along different networks, progressively becomes something that can be followed, tweaked, opposed, and so on. The vanguard-function is objective in the sense that, when it has spread, it can be identified as the anomalous cause behind a growing number of effects. Because it is objective, it need not be subjectively sensed at first as being in opposition to anything (e.g., the way in which an influx of migrants transforms an area); it is what people do when they start doing something other than “what people do.” Yet it is not objective in the old Marxist sense, rightly criticized by Badiou, of a

determinism or transitive determination between an objectively defined position (class, class sector, etc.) and the occurrence of a political, subjectivizing process. Where a process starts, which direction it takes, who steers or tweaks it, what is its course—these are objectively determinable retrospectively, but never in advance.⁷⁸

To speak of a vanguard-function is to say that something leads to the extent that it is followed: it works when it works, and when it does not, it does not, in ways that may even, as in the case of a group whose mistakes in steering a mass action have negative results, damage its power to work in the future.⁷⁹ This entails that, while networks are not the oft-fantasized medium of frictionless interaction and absolute horizontality, distributed leadership does not make them undemocratic either. While they are governed by preferential attachment (more connected nodes tend to attract more new links, and so nodes that have fulfilled a vanguard function will tend to be more connected), the degree of validation of a hub, and therefore its capacity to initiate successful actions, oscillates according to how much successful traffic it routes or starts—like a self-regulating, but evidently far from perfect, accountability mechanism.⁸⁰ The question then is: what makes an initiative more successful than another? Clearly, the large-scale effects seen in 2011 could happen because some initiatives struck the right informational, affective, and organizational notes to tap into a widely spread social malaise and give it form; how? Equally, there is plenty to be learnt from examining less successful initiatives in regard to their contents, affective components, to who initiated them, how they circulated, and what kinds of action they proposed, and so on.

What are the advantages of redescribing these phenomena with words like leadership, representation, vanguard? First of all, to demonstrate that they continue to exist, and do so independently from any agent's dark motivations; to show that their disavowal both prevents us from better understanding them so that we can better explore their potential, and blinds us to their risks, such as invisible hierarchies. The second advantage is to demystify them. If they exist by necessity, the question becomes less how to prevent them than how to use them in nonvanguardist ways; vanguardism, not vanguards, appears as the problem. Thirdly, to bring the subjective dimension back into the picture, by pinpointing the spot in which it is elicited by a nonvanguardist revolutionary politics: what do *we* need to do in order to further multitudinous, polycentric, open-ended processes in the direction of systemic change? Finally, to open the space for posing, in nonvanguardist ways, the strategic challenge suggested by Žižek: a collective, organized work of identifying the paths, leverages, potentials for "possible radical rupture[s] in the dominant *dispositif* itself."⁸¹

If a tweak is a matter of steering or nudging a process in a subjectively determined direction, even if one we can neither control nor predict fully, it still matters what amount of force one can apply on it; this is why we cannot ignore questions of discipline, organizational consistency, unified action, and so on. There is a difference between open, indeterminate calls (e.g., to demonstrate against the regime), and more complex, strategic initiatives. The greater the scope and complexity of the latter, the more consistency, commitment, structure will in all likelihood be required; here, it may be a good idea to invert the order of questions, and start from “what do we need to have in order to do what we think is necessary?” instead of “what can we do with what we have?” In fact, as I have argued elsewhere,⁸² even in the case of those indeterminate calls that set in motion processes like 15M and Occupy, the usual media picture of previously entirely unconnected, nonactive individuals suddenly coming together is misguided. Rather than spreading through an exclusive individual-to-individual basis, such processes are better understood as depending on an interplay between small formal or informal groups with stronger ties among members (which provide some kind of initial informational and logistical backbone) and a long tail of individuals with weaker ties (little or no previous connections to those groups, little or no previous political involvement), which tend to become stronger as the process develops. The point is that, as much as networked organization does not render issues such as discipline and consistency, superfluous, there are no one-size-fits-all answers: different things can be achieved through different means.

Clearly, mass membership and a centralized structure is no panacea—it suffices to see how mostly irrelevant parties and unions have been in recent decades. For several reasons (including endemic suspicion against parties and hierarchies, which will not disappear in the foreseeable future), rather than fixating on the idea of a single unified organization, a better way of working through questions of organization might be thinking in terms of what Italian autonomists used to call an ‘area’. This would consist of a long tail of supporters and individuals fluctuating among different networks, and an ecology of middle-sized groups with a greater degree of organizational consistency. Rather than competing with each other (over members, over leadership), as parties by definition do, these would be complementary, defined not by their group identities, but by the initiatives they carry out—not single-issue campaigns in the usual sense, but strategic interventions that explore the political potentials opened by the conjuncture. This may in fact be the emergent solution already advanced by the movements of 2011: at times when things hit an impasse, it was the distributed leadership performed by projects such as antireclosure campaigns and neighborhood assemblies that moved things forward.⁸³ With this in

mind, we could conclude that something like a care for the whole may be a virtue to retain in a redefinition of the militant: a capacity to think strategically in the context of a larger ecology of struggles and agents, as well as the overall systemic environment, so as to evaluate what are the most effective initiatives that stand the best chance of working, and how to make the most of them; when (and how) to tweak and when to surf; when and how to produce positive or negative feedbacks. In short, how to best employ existing (subjective, material, affective, organizational) conditions in order to ensure the greatest political impact, while thinking of the development of the political process as a whole, rather than of an individual organization or initiative.

VI

The attempt to pose the question of the militant has led us to reframe it in the terms of a preliminary one. The concept of vanguard-function sought to grasp the ‘spontaneous’ occurrence of nonvanguardist vanguards; regarding the militant, can there be an active, conscious nonvanguardist practice of the vanguard? I would suggest that this not only probably still exists but that it has existed many times; one example would be the *comunidades eclesiais de base* (ecclesial base communities) of Liberation Theology. It is to this experience that I turn for my conclusion.

A major strength of Liberation Theology was how it confronted, rather than disavowed, the performative contradiction that is constitutive of the militant: a heteronomous force for autonomy, a figure of separation against separation. Given the reality of their practice, which normally typically involved middle-class, educated popular agents moving to work with very poor communities, the problem could not be circumvented. They tackled this performative contradiction head on by treating it as a specific manifestation of the pedagogic relation in general—understood not as “another form of the mind-matter, leader-mass contradiction”⁸⁴ but in the terms set forth by Brazilian educator Paulo Freire. The strength of Freire’s egalitarianism lies precisely in assuming not that there is no difference between educator and educated, but rather that “[n]o-one educates anyone, no-one educates themselves, men educate each other, mediated by the world.”⁸⁵ As a Liberation Theology manual puts it:

flattening the difference between the educator and the people must be unmasked as a farce . . . The agent is an agent because she is different. This must be seen and acknowledged. . . . [O]nly an agent who does not understand her real position in the process of popular development could wish to lead the people, or to be exactly like them.⁸⁶

So while her position is constituted by a difference or separation not to be disavowed—"someone is or becomes an agent . . . because they have a particular contribution to give [to the people]"⁸⁷—the militant's work consists in closing this gap by coming closer to the people (divesting herself of class biases, incorporating the people's culture, departing from the problems they confront and how they deal with them, respecting their decisions) and bringing the people closer to her (sharing the knowledge she possesses, helping them reflect on the process, problematizing received opinions, questioning power relations and internalized oppressions). She foregoes any fusional fantasy and recognizes her position's intrinsic contradiction, while knowing that the work's success depends on establishing some degree of continuity between her and the community; the greater the discontinuity, the closer she would be to either becoming a leader or being rejected as a foreign body.

The point here is not to idealize a specific experience, or to advocate one kind of practice above others, but to draw out another virtue for a redefinition of the militant. There is a risk in recent attempts to correct the objectivist, teleological bias implicit in a certain way of thinking what a nonvanguardist militancy would be that they overcompensate by placing too much emphasis on the sovereignty of subjective separation.⁸⁸ Perhaps we should look instead for something like what Deleuze and Guattari call an "art of dosages"⁸⁹; an art to be applied, first and foremost, to the very constituent condition of the militant, that is, separation.

Consider the situation created by the movements of 2011. When upsurges of mass mobilization like these happen, a conundrum presents itself: their open, indeterminate nature, meaning all things to all people, can attract large numbers; but this selfsame openness makes concerted action difficult, because any decision will close things down, increase determinacy, define "who's in" and "who's out." It is the case, then, that making anything happen will involve drawing divisions, creating new separations. Now consider the good popular agent of Liberation Theology: she does not disavow separation, but does not affirm it one-sidedly; she is attentive to the ways in which her action can end up reproducing the societal divisions that she fights against, and doses her separation by selecting when and how to tweak or surf. She knows that the thresholds that define the best action vary according to the situation and is sensitive to how much separation must go into each moment—taking it too far would simply sever her from the shared situation. She understands that the sovereign assertion of separation would be an illusion: she is always working with the material at hand, whatever it is. What defines her quality as a popular agent is the capacity to create divisions, but in such a way that she can meet people where they are, and take them with her. Would this gift for immanence without immediacy, mediation without transcendence, not be a virtue worth learning?

NOTES

1. Alain Badiou, *Saint Paul. La fondation de l'Universalisme* (Paris: PUF, 1997), 2.
2. Michael Hardt and Toni Negri, *Empire* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2000), 411–413.
3. Alain Badiou, *La Relation Énigmatique entre Philosophie et Politique* (Paris: Germina, 2011), 64.
4. *Ibid.*, 57.
5. Badiou, *Saint Paul*, 2.
6. Jodi Dean, *The Communist Horizon* (London: Verso, 2011), 239.
7. Slavoj Žižek, “Shoplifters of the World Unite,” *London Review of Books*, August 19, 2011. <http://www.lrb.co.uk/2011/08/19/slavoj-zizek/shoplifters-of-the-world-unite>.
8. Italics in the original. Alain Badiou, *Metapolitics*, trans. Jason Barker (London: Verso, 2005), 122.
9. Alain Badiou, “Beyond Formalisation,” trans. Bruno Bosteels and Alberto Toscano. *Angelaki: Journal of the Theoretical Humanities* 8, no. 2 (2003): 126.
10. Dean, *The Communist Horizon*, 235.
11. Alain Badiou, *Le Réveil de l'Histoire* (Paris: Lignes, 2011a), 66.
12. *Ibid.* Badiou’s talk of reinventing “the communist Idea” has already been criticized as a desire to reserve for philosophy the task of providing answers that can only be given by practice. See Bruno Bosteels, *The Actuality of Communism* (London: Verso, 2011), 30–34. If we consider that all the new models that he calls for (of the militant, of organization, of discipline) can be grouped under the heading of a new mode of the communist hypothesis to replace “the (19th-century) movement and the (20th-century) party,” one can conclude that today’s problem, as he sees it, is precisely that of finding a substitute for the party. See Alain Badiou, “The Communist Hypothesis,” *New Left Review* 49 (2008): 37. Phrasing it as a search for an Idea, however, what Badiou seems to do is replace what were organizational solutions to organizational problems with a much more abstract problematic. This results in what often sounds more like abstract redefinitions of communism and organization according to his vocabulary than actual answers to the question of what can and is to be done today. See Badiou, *Le Réveil de l'Histoire*, 98–99, 105.
13. It is one of the strengths of Dean’s argument that it is built on showing how practices that already exist among Occupy can form the basis of what she understands as party.
14. Italics in the original. Slavoj Žižek, *In Defence of Lost Causes* (London: Verso, 2008), 361.
15. As Lenin put it in his early polemic against Russian populists: “the role of the ‘intelligentsia’ is to make special leaders from among the intelligentsia unnecessary.” V.I. Lenin, *Who the “Friends of the People” Are and How They Fight the Social-Democrats*, Marxists Internet Archive (2001). <http://www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1894/friends/08.htm#v01zz99h-271-GUESS>. This evidently does not apply to the ‘intelligentsia’ only; it is in fact the same condition of the state in the dictatorship of the proletariat, as laid out in *State and Revolution*.
16. Michel Foucault, “Préface,” *Dits et Écrits* Vol. 2, 134 (Paris: Gallimard, 2001).

17. Guy Debord et al., "Définition Minimum des Organisations Révolutionnaires," *Oeuvres* (Paris: Gallimard, 2006), 731.

18. In this sense, it is much like Badiou's communist Idea, "the subjectivation of an interplay between the singularity of a truth procedure and a representation of History," that is, a mediation between the individual's incorporation into a singular practice of collective emancipation, and the projection of this incorporation onto the past and future constructed by a historical narrative. See Alain Badiou, *The Communist Hypothesis* (London: Verso, 2010), 239. Again, the Idea seems to be called upon to fill in the space left vacant by the party ("Lacking the Idea, the popular masses's confusion is inescapable"; *ibid.*, 258).

19. Although vanguardism is evidently historically tied with the notion of vanguard, it is just as easily observed in other forms of activism, as pointed out by Andrew X in regard direct action groups, drawing on Jacques Camatte's analysis of political organizations as gangs: "Activism as a whole has some of the characteristics of a gang. Activist gangs can often end up being cross-class alliances, including all sorts of liberal reformists because they too are activists. People think of themselves primarily as activists and their primary loyalty becomes to the community of activists and not to the struggle as such. The gang is [an] illusory community, distracting us from creating a wider community of resistance." Andrew X, "Give Up Activism," *Do or Die* 9 (2001): 160-166. <http://www.eco-action.org/dod/no9/activism.htm>

20. John Holloway, *Change the World without Taking Power* (London: Pluto, 2005), 144.

21. Emilio Constantino, "Agli Ex 'Militanti di Professione'," *Settantasette. La Rivoluzione Chi Viene*, ed. Sergio Bianchi and Lanfranco Caminiti (Rome: DeriveApprodi, 2007), 248.

22. For Camatte "within the group, under the pretext of negating [existing society], an unbridled emulation is introduced that ends up in a hierarchization even more extreme than in society-at-large; especially as the interior-exterior opposition is reproduced internally in the division between the center of the gang and the mass of militants." Camatte, "On organization," Marxists Internet Archive (1969). <http://www.marxists.org/archive/camate/capcom/on-org.htm>. For Piercey: "[w]e are an exact microcosm of the society we oppose. Work . . . is mindlessly done by unappreciated-invisible workers, and the results, the profits in prestige and recognition, are taken away . . . The real basis is the largely unpaid, largely female labor force that does the daily work. Reflecting the values of the larger capitalist society, there is no prestige whatsoever attached to actually working." Marge Piercey, "The Grand Coolie Damn," *CWLU Archive*, 1969. <http://www.uic.edu/orgs/cwluherstory/CWLUArchive/damn.html>

23. Piercey, "The Grand Coolie Damn."

24. For example, see Piercey: "for a woman to think of herself is bourgeois subjectivity and inherently counterrevolutionary. Now dear, of course you find your work dull. What the Movement needs is more discipline and less middle-class concern with one's itty-bitty self!" *Ibid.*

25. Badiou, *Metapolitics*, 76.

26. On "the phenomena of 'superegoization,' narcissism and group hierarchy" characteristic of "preconsciously revolutionary" (i.e., not libidinally revolutionary) groups, see Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *L'Anti-Oedipe* (Paris: Minuit, 2006), 417.

27. Foucault, "Preface," 134.

28. Constantino, "Agli Ex," 248.

29. Paraphrasing Trotsky's mordant commentary on what he saw as a tendency for organizational preoccupations to eclipse tactical ones in Lenin's conception of the party, here the "materialist explanation of the world" took the back seat to "a centrally constructed 'plan,'" while the "immense but doctrinaire task" of understanding the organization's place "in the divine macrocosm" was transformed into tailoring the material world to fit the organization's "microcosm." This is the text, later disowned by the author and used by Stalin against him, famous for the lapidary condemnation of the Bolshevik model as leading to "the Party organization 'substituting' itself for the Party, the Central Committee substituting itself for the Party organization, and finally the dictator substituting himself for the Central Committee." Leon Trotsky, *Our Political Tasks*, trans. New Park Publication, Marxists Internet Archive (1999). <http://www.marxists.org/archive/trotsky/1904/tasks/index.htm>.

30. Félix Guattari, "The Group and the Person," in *Molecular Revolution*, trans. David Cooper and Rosemary Sheed (London: Penguin, 1984), 33.

31. Hardt and Negri, *Empire*, 411.

32. *Ibid.*, 412.

33. *Ibid.*, 411.

34. *Ibid.*, 413.

35. Italics in the original. Toni Negri and Michael Hardt, *Multitude. War and Democracy in the Age of Empire* (New York: Penguin, 2004), 146

36. Hardt and Negri, *Empire*, 63.

37. Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *The German Ideology* (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1970), 56–57.

38. Karl Marx, *Grundrisse. Foundations of the Critique of Political Economy*, trans. Martin Nicolaus (London: Penguin, 1993), 488.

39. Hardt and Negri, *Empire*, 413.

40. Antonio Negri, *Trentatrate Lezioni su Lenin* (Rome: Manifestolibri, 2004), 48–49. On the "party as factory" and how a disparaging use of the phrase "betrays the mentality of the bourgeois intellectual," see V.I. Lenin, *One Step Forward, Two Steps Back (the Crisis in Our Party)*, trans. Abraham Fineberg and Naomi Jochel, Marxists Internet Archive (1964). <http://www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1904/onestep/index.htm>.

41. Hardt and Negri, *Multitude*, 142.

42. *Ibid.*, 68.

43. *Ibid.*, 83.

44. *Ibid.*, 88.

45. *Ibid.*, 67.

46. Arturo Escobar, "Other Worlds Are Already Possible: Self-Organization, Complexity and Post-Capitalist Cultures," *World Social Forum: Challenging Empires*, ed. Jai Sen, Anita Anand, Arturo Escobar, and Peter Waterman (New Delhi: Viveka Foundation, 2004), 355.

47. *Ibid.*

48. On why speaking of a global moment is preferable so as not to reduce it to its more visible manifestations (the counter-summit movement), see Rodrigo Nunes, "The Global Moment," *Radical Philosophy* 159 (2010): 2–7.

49. Žižek, *In Defence of Lost Causes*, 390.

50. Slavoj Žižek, "Lenin's Choice," V.I. Lenin, *Revolution at the Gates: A Selection of Writings from February to October 1917*, ed. Slavoj Žižek (London: Verso, 2002), 170.

51. Badiou, "Beyond Formalisation," 126–127.

52. Slavoj Žižek, *The Year of Dreaming Dangerously* (London: Verso, 2012), 106–107.

53. While their critiques converge, one must note the differences between Badiou and Žižek: for the latter, the subject constitutes itself before, through, and in the consequences of the act; for the former, it appears in the wake of the evanescent event. Therefore, whereas for Žižek one must actively identify the "symptomal torsions" of the system (those points whose very invisibility are the condition for the system's functioning), politics for Badiou is by definition what extracts the consequences of a "symptomal torsion" having made itself visible (i.e., the event). Thus, while Žižek's version of the vanguard would be a more traditional, mediating one (as that which is responsible for producing the subjective and objective mediations between the present state and the political project), Badiou's event is immediate, and the question of mediation only comes afterwards—"[a]n evental situation can be recognised at a glance . . . you are universally touched by this universality of its visibility. You *know* [it, and] no-one can publicly deny it." Badiou, *Le Réveil de l'Histoire*, 105. Like many, Žižek has taken Badiou to task on the subject's passivity in regard to the event, as well as on how his concept of (distance from the) state not only undermines the posing of questions of mediation, but results in a kind of reformism—"there are a certain number of questions regarding which we cannot posit the absolute exteriority of the state," and so politics becomes "a matter of requiring something from the state, of formulating . . . prescriptions or statements." Alain Badiou, "Politics and Philosophy," *Ethics*, trans. Peter Hallward (London: Verso, 2001), 98. Žižek draws attention to "a strange *non sequitur*: if the state is here to stay, if it is impossible to abolish the state (and capitalism), why act with a distance towards the state? Why not act *within the state*?" Žižek, *In Defence of Lost Causes*, 402.

54. Žižek, "Lenin's Choice," 170.

55. Alain Badiou, "One Divides into Two," *Lenin Reloaded. Toward a Politics of Truth*, ed. Sebastien Budgen, Stathis Kouvelakis, and Slavoj Žižek (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007), 14.

56. Badiou, "Beyond Formalisation," 125.

57. Hardt and Negri, *Multitude*, 267.

58. Badiou, "The Communist Hypothesis," 42.

59. Michel Foucault, "Pouvoir et Corps," *Dits et écrits*, Vol. 1 (Paris: Gallimard, 2001), 1625.

60. Deleuze and Guattari, *L'Anti-Oedipe*, 417.

61. Michel Foucault and Gilles Deleuze, "Les Intellectuels et le Pouvoir," Vol. 1 (Paris: Gallimard, 2001), 180–1183.

62. Luc Boltanski and Éve Chiapello, *Le Nouvel Esprit du Capitalisme* (Paris: Gallimard, 1999).

63. Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *Mille Plateaux* (Paris: Minuit, 2003), 356–357.

64. This passage (in which he goes on to criticize bank bail-outs, a measure hardly advocated by any activists), as well as the one on interpassivity (in which

he refers to “*Medécins sans frontières*, Greenpeace, feminist and anti-racist campaigns” and cultural studies) illustrates Žižek’s tendency to conflate rather different political strains in his criticisms. Žižek, *The Year of Dreaming Dangerously*, 109.

65. “Back [in 1999] I naively believed that all we needed to do was work on [“coordination at a distance”]; [“a shared horizon”] would look after itself.” Phil McLeish, “From Horizontal to Diagonal,” *Turbulence* 5 (2009): 7.

66. Holloway, *Change the World without Taking Power*, 210.

67. Escobar, “Other worlds are already possible,” 357, n. 12.

68. Hardt and Negri, *Empire*, 66.

69. My emphasis. Gilles Dauvé and François Martin, “Leninism and the Ultra-Left,” *Eclipse and Re-Emergence of the Communist Movement*, LibCom (1969), <http://libcom.org/library/3-leninism-ultra-left>.

70. Thus, Holloway warns that “[a]ny institutionalization of struggle is problematic” but begrudgingly recognizes the need for positivizing the movement of negation by creating institutions—and despite a staunch antivanguardism, acknowledges that “what is sometimes called a ‘vanguard’ probably cannot be avoided” to the extent that “[t]here are undoubtedly some who can walk better than others.” See John Holloway, *Crack Capitalism* (London: Pluto, 2010), 224; Holloway, *Change the World without Taking Power*, 242–243, 230. In turn, Escobar contemplates the necessity of “self-organization with some measure of leadership, structure, and regulation” (Escobar, “Other worlds are already possible,” 354), while Dauvé and Martin state that communists must not “refrain from intervening under the pretext that ‘the workers must decide for themselves,’” but instead “express the whole meaning of what is going on, and . . . make practical proposals.” Dauvé and Martin, “Leninism and the ultra-left.” Hardt and Negri have responded to the charge of teleologizing the multitude’s self-producing movement toward autonomy by acknowledging the problematic of transition explicitly as a transposition of “the Leninist Gramsci on[to] the biopolitical terrain.” Transition is necessary because “the formation of the multitude” is not yet fully achieved, and so “is not spontaneous,” but must be “governed” through the consolidation of “[t]he insurrectional event . . . in an institutional process that develops the multitude’s capacities for democratic decision making,” including the inscription of constituent power into constitutional frameworks. Michael Hardt and Toni Negri, *Commonwealth* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap/Harvard University Press, 2009), 361, 363, 367.

71. Holloway, *Crack Capitalism*, 9.

72. See Lenin’s response to those who opposed *Iskra*’s plan for an all-Russian newspaper as a way of making isolated underground circles coalesce into a party: “Isn’t it demagoguery when you [incite people] against the author of the sketch for this reason alone . . . that he dared to propose a sketch of a plan?” Italics in the original. V.I. Lenin, *What Is to Be Done?*, *Lenin Rediscovered*. What Is to Be Done? in *Context* (Chicago: Haymarket, 2008), 815.

73. Brian Massumi, “Navigating movements,” in *Hope: New Philosophies for Change*, ed. Mary Zournazi (Annandale: Pluto, 2002), 219.

74. Dean refers to this as “the flipside of the suspicion towards leaders: the unconscious fantasy that ‘someone else is in charge,’ ‘a kind of delegation without delegation . . . or without representation.” Dean, *The Communist Horizon*, 236.

75. Antonio Gramsci. *Quaderni del Carcere*, Vol. 1 (Turin: Einaudi, 1977), 328.

76. Badiou, “The Communist Hypothesis,” 37.

77. As Dean pithily puts it: "Occupy Wall Street is not actually the movement of the 99 percent of the population of the United States (or the world) against the top 1 percent. It is a movement mobilizing itself around an occupied Wall Street in the name of the 99 percent." Dean, *The Communist Horizon*, 229. For Badiou, "however large a manifestation, it is always hyper-minoritarian [*archi-minoritaire*]," a "mass minority" in which "the situation is contracted into a sort of representation of itself, a metonymy of the overall situation." Italics in the original, Badiou, *Le Réveil de l'Histoire*, 90, 104, 134.

78. *Pace* Badiou's "metaphysical politics of the One" accusation, the difference between Deleuze and Guattari and him is not that the former allow no room for discontinuity or the subject, as they too establish a connection between a process of subjectivation and a "break with [linear] causality," that is, an event. Deleuze and Guattari, *L'Anti-Oedipe*, 453. The difference is that, for Badiou, the subject constitutes itself in response to the event as immediately sovereign—not over the real (in the confrontation with which it develops the consequences of fidelity) but over itself (as conscious, therefore separate, or conscious of the separation whose consequences it must follow; hence why its only options are to keep going or betray). For Deleuze and Guattari, in turn, the subject is coextensive with the evental break, and constitutes itself as consciousness of this break progressively, in ways that may or may not be oppositional, but are never wholly sovereign.

79. In a similar vein, Dauvé and Martin write that communists must not refrain from making proposals because, "[i]f the expression is right and the proposal appropriate, they are parts of the struggle of the proletariat and contribute to build the 'party' of the communist revolution." Dauvé and Martin, "Leninism."

80. I develop this and other points discussed here in Rodrigo Nunes, "The Lessons of 2011: Three Theses on Organisation," *Mute* 2012, <http://www.metamute.org/editorial/articles/lessons-2011-three-theses-organisation>.

81. Ben Trott's work on "directional demands," reforms ultimately too radical for the system to bear that can function as focal points for diverse struggles, is a promising attempt to pose this problem. Ben Trott, "Walking in the Right Direction?," *Turbulence* 5 (2005): 14–15.

82. Nunes, "The Lessons of 2011."

83. In this sense, regardless of what merits its analysis and plan may or may not have, Rolling Jubilee strikes me as huge step in the right direction: it is defined not by a group identity, but by a concrete, ambitious strategic wager translated into a series of organizing measures. See <http://rollingjubilee.org/>. Another interesting recent development plays directly on the idea of a party is Spain's Partido X. See <http://partidox.org/en>.

84. Camatte, "On Organization."

85. Paulo Freire, *Pedagogia do oprimido* (Petrópolis: Vozes, 1981), 79.

86. Clodovis Boff, *Como Trabalhar com o Povo* (Petrópolis: Vozes, 1984), 23–24.

87. *Ibid.*, 24.

88. I have developed this point in relation to Badiou, arguing for a complementarity between him and Deleuze and Guattari, in Rodrigo Nunes, "Subjekt, Ereignis, Trennung. Über Politik bei Badiou und Deleuze/Guattari," *Treue zur Wahrheit. Die Begründung die Philosophie Alain Badiou's*, ed. Jens Knip and Frank Meier (Munich: Unrast, 2010).

89. Deleuze and Guattari, *Mille Plateaux*, 198.

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CHAPTER 9

Beyond Assemblyism: The Processual Calling of the 21st-Century Left

Keir Milburn

INTRODUCTION

From the Arab Spring, through the Spanish Indignados, to the Occupy movement, and beyond, the dominant organizational form of the 2011 protest wave was the assembly. It gained this prominence through its compatibility with the year's dominant protest repertoire, the protest camp. The camps of 2011, in distinction from earlier camps, were semipermanent occupations of prominent public space, often city squares. While these camps facilitated other forms of protest and direct action it was the very act of occupation, as a public display of dissatisfaction, which had the most impact. They acted as a pole of attraction to which the dissatisfied could congregate and find one another. Within this the general assemblies of the camps found themselves moving beyond an ancillary, supporting, and merely organizational role to become central to the very purpose of the protest. The assemblies were one of the primary means through which people found one another and displayed their commonality.

While the protest camp at Tahrir Square in Egypt did hold mass assemblies it was only with the camps of the Spanish M15 movement that a particular form of consensus decision-making process began to be introduced: an inheritance from the veterans of the anti-globalization movement who were a vital component of the early camps. It was Occupy Wall Street, however, that did the most to spread this process and codify it as assembly practice.¹ Consensus decision making has undergone

continuous development within social movements for over 40 years, resulting in a highly structured process. The group Seeds for Change, which provides training in consensus decision making, provides a useful definition:

Consensus is a decision making process that works creatively to include all persons making the decision. Instead of simply voting for an item, and having the majority of the group getting their way, the group is committed to finding solutions that everyone can live with. This ensures that everyone's opinions, ideas and reservations are taken into account. But consensus is more than just a compromise. It is a process that can result in surprising and creative solutions—often better than the original suggestions.²

Experiencing this process for the first time can be exhilarating. This much is made obvious by the vivid testimony of Quinn Norton, a journalist who spent several months participating in the Occupations across the United States:

The GA process also became part of everyday life: the queue, called “stack”; the people’s mic; consensus; arguments and counter arguments; points of information; blocking. Fights and logistical problems fell into little GAs, and the GA became a way of organizing thought. Hand gestures, called twinkles in New York, let groups express their feelings in silence. All of it migrated into the culture of camp life. After a while in the camps, you put your concerns “on stack,” and you twinkled people in conversation as a phatic. At first, like so many parts of Occupy, it was a wonder to see.³

Beyond its organizational process the dominant political issue of the protest wave was dissatisfaction with representative democracy, at least as it currently operates. There is an implicit continuity between the slogan of the Spanish Indignados movement, “Real Democracy Now!” and the slogan of Occupy Wall Street, “We are the 99%.” Between them they reflect the widespread perception that contemporary governance functions primarily in the interest of big business, the well-connected, and the very rich.⁴ The prominence of this issue combined with the early exhilaration of participation in consensus-driven assemblies produced what I would call Assemblyism, the idea that the general assembly is the direct and sufficient answer to the demand for Real Democracy Now! Just as some council communists in the 20th century thought they had discovered in workers councils the organizational form of both future struggle and a future communist society, some in Occupy, and beyond, mistook consensus

assemblies, which had emerged from quite specific circumstance and inheritances, for a new universal model of democracy, which at the very least prefigures the postcapitalist society to come.

As with all ideal types such an assessment is set up to fail and as the limits of usefulness were reached then complete rejection ensued. Such a dynamic is quite visible in Norton's continuing testimony:

[L]iving in parks, having to rub elbows with the people society was set up to shield from each other, began to stress people and make them twitchy from constant culture shock. Grad students trying to reason with smack addicts was torture for both sides. The GA became the main venue for this torture, and sitting through it was like watching someone sandpaper an open wound. Everyone said "Fuck the GA" as a joke, but as time wore on, the laughter was getting too long and too hoarse; a joke with blood in it. . . .

Because the GA had no way to reject force, over time it fell to force. Proposals won by intimidation; bullies carried the day. What began as a way to let people reform and remake themselves had no mechanism for dealing with them when they didn't. It had no way to deal with parasites and predators. It became a diseased process, pushing out the weak and quiet it had meant to enfranchise until it finally collapsed when nothing was left but predators trying to rip out each other's throats. . . .

The idea of the GA—its process, its form, inclusiveness—failed. It had all the best chances to evolve, imprinted on the consciousness of thousands of occupiers like a second language. No idea gets a better chance than that, and it still failed.⁵

The problem with total rejection is that it discounts the initial exhilaration of participation in assemblies that did so much to spread the Occupy model around the world. The sheer fact of their phenomenal spread indicates that General Assemblies must have fulfilled some deeply felt function. If we judge the assemblies to be a failure perhaps we have simply mistaken the role they were actually playing and so applied the wrong criteria of judgment. In this chapter I seek to reexamine the organizational lessons of the 2011 and move beyond Assemblyism by clarifying the tasks that an anticapitalist movement must set itself. After all addressing society's democratic deficit will take more than designing new democratic forms. If we accept that material and social inequalities have annulled representative democracy, then it follows that the reestablishment of democracy must involve their overcoming.

Such a task is made much more difficult, I will argue in the following section, by capital's tendency to fetishize contemporary social relations

and so naturalize inequality. It follows that a project to establish “Real Democracy Now!” must be an anticapitalist one and involve the transformation not just of existing institutions but also of our own subjectivities, informed as they are by the fetishisms of existing society. If we ourselves must be transformed then we can’t know in advance exactly where we are going. Indeed it is far from obvious how this transformation will be guided. Once we have clarified this task we will, in the third section, look at its consequences for organization by examining the literature on revolutionary transition. We will conclude that transition must be a process of collective self-training in democracy, a process that might well include moments of organizational rupture. In section four we will reexamine this question of guidance through a reading of Jodi Dean’s recent call for a communist party of a certain type, one that “doesn’t know.” Vital in this regard is her indication that political organizations must address the problem of transference found in psychoanalysis. Through these three sections I hope to construct a prism that will allow me, in section five, to look again at the organizational practices of 2011 and show that while the assembly moment might be necessary in contemporary movements it is far from sufficient. It will need supplementing with organizational forms that can address the necessary functions for which the assembly is ill suited. One of these, it turns out, is preventing the fetishization of organizational forms, such as assemblies. Or, in other words, moving beyond Assemblyism.

A PROCESSUAL PASSION

In a short article, written amid the political disorientation of the early 1980s, Felix Guattari provided an enigmatic but useful description of the Left:

What is it that separates the left from the right? Upon what does this essential ethico-political polarity rest? Fundamentally, it is nothing but a processual calling, a processual passion.⁶

This is not the most obvious definition to give. As an everyday rule of thumb we might position someone on the Left or Right through reference to the issues they are concerned with and the positions they take; in this sense the Left is a contextual term. Yet the position of the center, in relation to issues and attitudes, is subject to change over time and Guattari is arguing precisely against those who “see nothing in the left-right polarity than what may distinguish them momentarily under specific circumstances.”⁷ Writing in the context of nominally leftist governments implementing neoliberal policies, he is seeking a more trans-historical definition of the Left.⁸

In recent social movements, from antiummit protests to Occupy, some have sought to short-circuit this problem by elevating organizational process above shared political platforms as the key factor in deciding whether collaboration between one group and another is possible or desirable.⁹ Should we position Guattari's definition within this lineage? Wouldn't this reduce the Left to a bureaucratic passion for a set of organizational procedures? In *Anti-Oedipus*, which Guattari wrote with Gilles Deleuze, the idea "that sexuality is everywhere" is explained with the example of "the way a bureaucrat fondles his records."¹⁰ Should we interpret the concept of a processual passion through the image of movement activists fondling their facilitation handbooks or becoming aroused by the hand waving that indicates a meeting approaching consensus?¹¹ In fact, Guattari has a different concept of process and the processual in mind, one which is not completely disinterested in considerations of organizational process but which subordinates it to the task of unearthing and acting upon the historical and social processes that condition political possibility.

We can begin to think a processual politics in the Guattarian sense through reference to a Marxist politics of de-fetishization, which, after all, seeks to discover the process behind the object. In the famous section on commodity fetishism in the opening chapter of *Capital*, Marx explains how "the commodity reflects the social characteristics of men's own labor as objective characteristics of the products themselves, as the socio-natural properties of these things."¹² Commodity fetishism is an example of a wider tendency within capitalism toward the fetishization of social relations. As contemporary social relations come to appear as the precondition of social production rather than its result, then the possibility for change becomes obscured. So, for example, capital not only creates material and social inequalities but also presents those inequalities as inevitable, as a social-natural fact. This implies that if we are to establish the conditions for democracy, we must aim not simply at institutional change but also at transforming our own subjectivities, informed as they are by the fetishisms of contemporary society. This complicates the task of the anticapitalist Left but does not annul it. We cannot escape such fetishisms by simply exposing them but neither should we mistake them for inescapable totalities. As Michael Heinrich explains in his influential recent guide to reading *Capital*:

All members of society are subordinated to the fetishism of social relations. This fetishism takes root as an "objective form of thought" that structures the perception of all members of society. . . . Neither capitalists nor workers have a privileged position that allows them to evade this fetishism.

However, this fetishism is also not a completely closed universal context of deception from which there is no escape. Rather, it constitutes a structural background that is always present, but affects different individuals with varying strength and can be penetrated on the basis of experience and reflection.¹³

We can position Guattari's call for a processual politics within this problematic but more directly his contribution can be placed within the turn toward theories of subjectivity that followed the perceived failures of the spontaneity of May 1968. This theorization was provoked not just be the diagnostic impulse to explain the failure of the events but also, in Guattari's case, by the search for a form of political organization that moved beyond celebrations of spontaneity without falling into the paranoid bureaucratism of the French Communist Party. In this light Guattari's definition can be returned to more familiar ground for the Left. As he says: "At issue here is the collective recapturing of those dynamics that can destratify the moribund structures and reorganize life and society in accordance with other forms of equilibrium, other worlds."¹⁴ For Guattari the task of de-fetishization, or destratification, of discovering the process behind the object, must itself be a continuous and open-ended process. Indeed Guattari says: "A process implies the idea of a permanent rupture in established equilibria."¹⁵ What Guattari is seeking then is a definition of the Left that would be distinguished not only from any specific, historically contingent program but also from reliance on a strongly teleological conception of communism. A telos would, of course, represent a stopping point for process, quite literally an end to process.

A processual politics then asserts that, while politics must start from a critical engagement with the present, we can't determine in advance exactly where we are heading. This represents a considerable challenge to a prefigurative notion of Assemblyism in which ultimate ends determine current means. The problem is complicated further by the need to transform our own subjectivities as we change the wider world. Can the same organizational structures really be appropriate through the whole of this process of transformation.

REVOLUTIONARY TRANSITION

There is, of course, a literature on this problem, the literature on revolutionary transition and we can reframe our discussion within it. We will, however, use a slightly unusual entry point, the figure of Thomas Jefferson, and in particular a reading of Michael Hardt's introduction to a collection of Jefferson's writing.¹⁶ Hardt's project in this essay is to extract

Jefferson from the canonical embrace of liberalism and reinserts him into an alternative lineage of revolutionary theorists.

Like all great revolutionary thinkers, Jefferson understands well that the revolutionary event, the rupture with the past and the destruction of the old regime, is not the end of the revolution but really only the beginning. The event opens a period of transition that aims at realizing the goals of the revolution.¹⁷

As an explanatory counterpoint to Jefferson's conception of transition Hardt uses Lenin's *State and Revolution*, which, Hardt suggests, "poses the role of transition with the greatest clarity and realism."¹⁸ Lenin positions himself between, on the one hand, the Social Democrats who deny the need for any form of rupture and, on the other hand, the anarchists whom he accuses of being spontaneists, and so denying the need for any period of transition.¹⁹ "For the anarchists . . . the revolutionary event is punctual and absolute, assuming everything can change overnight."²⁰

For Lenin, although the ultimate goal is to do away with the state along with its separation of ruler and ruled, this cannot be achieved "with human nature as it is now, with human nature that cannot do without subordination, control and 'managers.'"²¹ Lenin's solution, Hardt says, is to conceive of revolutionary transition as "a period of education and training in which the multitude learns how to rule itself, in which democracy becomes an ingrained characteristic."²² The problem Hardt finds with this schema is "that the source of the transformation comes from above, from outside the people."²³ The form of authority that is to lead this operation is radically different from, and perhaps even in contradiction to, the new fuller democracy that Lenin sees as its goal."²⁴

A number of problems arise here. Firstly, rule by a transcendent entity "does not teach people anything about self-rule; it only reinforces their habits of subservience and passivity."²⁵ Indeed, secondly, we might extend this argument to say that as the process of direct transformation is interrupted, then the potential for future transformation becomes hidden. We reencounter here the problem of fetishism. The transformative potential comes to appear to reside in the transcendent entity—the party or leader—rather than in the wider field of relations from which the ruler has become separated. Fundamentally, as Hardt summarizes: "How could democracy . . . result from its opposite?"²⁶ In addition there is an implicit temporal sequence constructed in which rebellion is justified during the first stage of struggle but must be subsequently reined in by the erection of a new state apparatus. Or, as Hardt recasts this conception, "rebellion is necessary to overthrow the old regime, but when it falls and the new government is formed, rebellion must cease."²⁷ It is in the refusal of this temporal sequence that Hardt finds Jefferson's contribution to the problematic of transition.

Jefferson values rebellion as a good in its own right, independent of its justness or timing.²⁸ Indeed Jefferson suggests a very different revolutionary temporality when he remarks, "God forbid that we should ever be 20 years without such a rebellion."²⁹ This valorization of rebellion indicates the need for the periodic reopening of the revolutionary event. In fact Jefferson goes further saying:

[N]o society can make a perpetual constitution, or even a perpetual law. The earth belongs always to the living generation. . . . Every constitution, then, and every law, naturally expires at the end of 19 years. If it be enforced longer, it is an act of force and not of right.³⁰

Although he doesn't use the term, Jefferson also seems to deal with the problem of fetishism when he says: "Some men look at constitutions with sanctimonious reverence, and deem them like the arc of the covenant, too sacred to be touched. They ascribe to the men of a preceding age a wisdom more than human, and suppose what they did to be beyond amendment."³¹ Just as Marx reached for religious analogies to describe commodity fetishism, Jefferson does the same when describing the fetishization of institutional forms. As long as constitutions are acknowledged as the work of mere men, they can always be remade, but as they come to appear to be the work of "a wisdom more than human" so they become untouchable. Once again the product of social relations comes to appear as their precondition. We can, of course, see a similar fetishism of institutional forms at play in the transformation of consensus decision making process into Assemblyism.

Jefferson's solution is rebellion; he is not, however, advocating continuous rebellion but, rather, a periodic one. As Hardt puts it: "The only way to be faithful to the revolution . . . is to repeat it. The temporal figure of the revolutionary event, therefore, is the eternal return—not of the same, of course, but the return of the different, that is, the difference marked by each generation."³² Jefferson is wrong, however, to set the temporality of the eternal return to a 20-year cycle. Indeed it seems that this part of Jefferson's argument needs to be reversed. In reality births don't occur in 20-year bursts, they happen continuously; as such, the concept of a generation makes sense only if we say they are formed in relation to certain significant shared experiences.³³ From this perspective we can say that it is events that form generations and not the other way around.³⁴

Transition, then, doesn't proceed at an even pace or in a linear direction. As Hardt says, "even when a democratic process moves forward it reaches thresholds that cannot be crossed without the rupture provided by rebellion."³⁵ Those moments of rupture can also allow the breaking

with one problematic and the positing of a new one. As the problematics of the revolution develop, and new forms of domination and fetishism are discovered or emerge, then the event, as rupture, must be revisited.³⁶ Transition is continual but it is not continuous. To return to our original Guattarian vocabulary, what Hardt finds in Jefferson, although he doesn't use the term, is a processual transition, in which new forms of fetishization can be overcome and new problematics can emerge.³⁷ Transition becomes, not a distinct and separable period but a periodic repetition, not a movement from one fixed state to another but "a process of infinite becoming."³⁸ From this perspective it makes no sense to consider democracy, self-rule, or indeed communism as an endpoint. Communism can only be this very process of continued transition. It must be an experimental process of learning by doing, a self-training, which includes a process of collective self-analysis and self-correction, including, when necessary, recurrent events of rupture.

This processual politics of continual transition means that, *contra* liberal theory, the problematics of revolutionary events can no longer be confined to exceptional periods. If we are to find the communist dynamic in contemporary movements then they too must be subject to the problematic of transition. So what lessons can we draw for contemporary organization? Firstly we can gain a better understanding of the fetishization of organizational and institutional forms. The risk of fetishism rises as forms become separated from the conditions of their emergence. If conditions in wider society change, if class composition changes, then the organizational forms, which were adequate to the original conditions, might have to change as well. In addition as movements develop then new problematics can emerge that demand attention. This often involves reconfiguration of both organizational forms and interpretive grids. As thresholds are reached then rupture and rebellion must be revisited.

The organizational and institutional schema that we are constructing seems to require not just mechanisms of self-training in democracy but also mechanisms of rupture with the existing sense of the movement. These seem if not contradictory then certainly in tension. Can they both be contained in the same organizational form? If so how can that organizational form transform itself when necessary? As we saw in the testimony about General Assemblies people can become vehemently attached to particular forms of organization, and as a flip side often vehemently reject them later. Is there any way we can turn this dynamic to our advantage? In addition if revolutionary transition requires the transformation of ourselves and consists of a self-training in democracy then who can guide that transformational process? It is to help think through this problem that we now turn to Jodi Dean's recent proposal for a post-Occupy communist party.³⁹

PARTY LIKE IT'S NOT 1999?

Occupy, with its organizational inheritance from the anti-globalization movement, sparked by the 1999 Seattle protests, has not been a welcoming environment for political parties. However, Dean's proposal for a party, or at least "something like a party," gains significant power from its rootedness, at least ostensibly, in the experience of Occupy's shortcomings.⁴⁰ Her timely argument resonates with the "crisis of Assemblyism" provoked by Occupy's collapse. She criticizes, for instance, the radical inclusivity of the General Assembly model for obscuring the problematic of division and therefore decision. In fact the most prominent slogan of the movement, "We are the 99%," gained its purchase by giving voice to a hidden transcript, "we are *not* all in this together." For Dean, however, the movement mistakenly rooted its legitimacy not in this narrative of division but in its practice of inclusivity. It was this inclusivity that critically weakened the movement as the ever-changing composition of the General Assemblies produced a crippling lack of division between the occupations and their outside. The entropy that increasingly gripped the assemblies was a predictable consequence of this lack of consistency and led to the usurpation of decision making and leadership functions by unaccountable groups of individuals in the know.

The proposition of a Leninist party as the answer to such failings is certainly nothing new. There were many parties circulating Occupy, bemoaning their inability to gain a fair hearing. What makes Dean's discussion more worthy of engagement is her willingness to rethink what a party might entail. Rather than promote an off-the-shelf party Dean seeks to build one from within the practice of Occupy.⁴¹ She describes, for example, how, "Occupy does work that Lenin associates with a revolutionary party: establishing and maintaining a continuity of oppositional struggle that enables broader numbers of people to join in the movement."⁴²

As she criticizes Occupy for elevating organizational process above content, it's not surprising that Dean offers little detail on the organizational structures that will enact her vision of a party. She comes closest to doing so when she says:

[S]trong structures, structures that can grow, structures with duration, need vertical and diagonal components in addition to horizontal ones. . . . Diagonality is basically neglected, which means we haven't put much energy into developing structures of accountability and recall.⁴³

Sensible as this might seem it is not enough to allay suspicions of the party form. What, we might well ask, will stop the vertical structures simply usurping the others and rendering them meaningless? Such

fears can't be dismissed through the reassessment of Cold War mythology offered by Dean. They are rooted in real-life experience of the practices of actually existing Leninist parties. There are, after all, plenty of organizations that have mechanisms of recall and accountability as their manifest structure but whose actual practices render them defunct. Much to her credit Dean indicates a route through this impasse by emphasizing the role of desire in organizations. To me this move seems vital. If we are to understand the fetishization of organizational structures, whether the assembly or the party, then we must examine the structure of the desires that animate them. Dean follows this line of argument in her sketch of a contemporary communist party by providing an analysis of communist desire. Interestingly, despite a quite different theoretical assemblage, she renders communist desire in a way that produces similar political problematics to that of a processual politics.

Dean begins from Lacan's conception that desire is constituted as a lack but then overlays it with Lukács's conception of a "party that doesn't know." For Dean communist desire is "a desire for collectivity" or, rendered more fully, "the collective desire for collective desiring."⁴⁴ Under capitalism, which, again following Lukács, she renders as inherently individualizing, this desire is experienced as a lack, indeed as an impossibility. Far from this being the end of communist politics for Dean this very impossibility can produce a subjectification of "constitutive openness."⁴⁵ The role of the party must be to occupy this subjectification, to keep the gap in desire open and prevent struggle, discourse, and emergent subjectivities from falling back upon the fetishisms of contemporary society. The party must prevent us settling for either what exists or what currently seems possible.⁴⁶

This construction of desire as lack, "what the subject wants but never gets,"⁴⁷ is supplemented by the assertion that people's desires are never fully present to them. This produces a powerful critique of Assemblyism, which assumes people can be fully present to themselves: that they can truly know who they are and what they want. For Žižek the opposite is true, "what is 'spontaneous' is the misperception of one's social position."⁴⁸ So is it the party's job to inform the people of their true interests and tell what they really want? Dean argues against this "fantasy that the party can know and realize people's desires."⁴⁹ Instead "[t]he party . . . is an organization situated at the overlap of two lacks, the openness of history as well as its own non-knowledge."⁵⁰

This concept of a "party that doesn't know" is in many ways an attractive prospect. It would presumably need to transform itself as class composition changes and engage in current struggle while keeping open expanded field of possibilities contained in the communist horizon. It does, however, beg a number of questions. Firstly by what mechanism does

the party maintain its knowledge of its own non-knowledge? Secondly who gets to know that the party doesn't know?

We can engage the first question via a passage by Žižek that exercises a strong influence over Dean: "[T]he external agent (Party, God, Analyst) is not one who 'understands us better than we do ourselves,' who can provide the true interpretation of what acts and statements mean; rather, it stands for the form of our activity."⁵¹ For Dean then the communist form of our activity is its collectivity and it is the gap between the desires this experience of collectivity produces and their fulfillment within capitalism that reinscribes the party's tasks. This perhaps too neat answer is complicated by Dean's indications that the party must also be treated as a transferential object. She says, for instance that, "[a]s it learns from the struggling masses, the party provides a vehicle through which they can understand their actions and express their collective will, much as the psychoanalyst provides a means for the analysand to become conscious of her desire."⁵² This consideration of the effect of transference seems crucial yet the operation of transference upon a "party that professes not to know" sets up a complicated schema. It complicates, not least, any answer to the second question posed earlier; who gets to know that the party doesn't know?

We can understand transference in the psychoanalytical context as the libidinal tie between the analysand and the analyst, in which, for Freud, "the patient sees in [the analyst] the return, the reincarnation, of some important figure out of his childhood or past, and consequently transfers on to him feelings and reactions which undoubtedly applied to this prototype."⁵³ Transference can bring advantages for analysis if, for example, it increases the patient's openness to the influence of the analyst. "If the patient puts the analyst in the place of his father (or mother), he is also giving him the power which his super-ego exercises over his ego, since his parents were, as we know, the origin of his super-ego."⁵⁴ The authority that this gives the analyst allows the analysand the confidence to enter into a disruptive period of transformation with the expectation that it will work out well in the end. So far only part of this fits with Dean's description of the party. We can see how erecting an image of a "party that doesn't know" might help undo some of the transferential attachments underlying the sectarian, "my party right or wrong," attitudes that plague the Left. The problem, of course, is that the transferential authority described seems to rely on the perception that the analyst (or the party) is "a subject that knows" and can therefore guide them safely through transformation. Wouldn't transferential authority be much diminished by the revelation of non-knowledge?

Of course, this is not all there is to say about transference. It can also be a strong source of resistance to analysis in the form of displaced Oedipal

feelings of resentment toward the father. For Freud, however, the analyst can also turn this resistance to their advantage:

The transference is made conscious to the patient by the analyst, and it is resolved by convincing him that in his transference-attitude he is re-experiencing emotional relations which had their origin in his earliest object-attachments during the repressed period of his childhood. In this way the transference is changed from the strongest weapon of the resistance into the best instrument of the analytic treatment.⁵⁵

This transference effect turns the analyst into a mirror upon which original traumas can be restaged, recognized by the analysand, and ultimately resolved. It is in this register that Dean, and Žižek's, conception of the party as transference object makes most sense. The party is the object upon which the fantasy of the "big Other," the subject supposed to know, can be traversed, the revelation of non-knowledge achieved and communist desire established. Such a move is implied in Dean's declaration of the need for "[a] new shifted desire, one that recognizes the impossibility of reaching or achieving its object and holds on, refusing to cede it . . . such a desire is collective, sustaining a community even as it has moved past the need for some kind of phantasmic support."⁵⁶ This is an important point for Dean and as she links it to a passage from Žižek on the Lacanian notion of the "desire of the analyst" it is worth quoting from the original:

The desire of the analyst is . . . supposed to sustain the analytic community in the absence of any phantasmic support; it is supposed to make possible a communal "big Other" that avoids the transference effect of the "subject supposed to . . . [know, believe, enjoy]." In other words, the desire of the analyst is Lacan's tentative answer to the question: after we have traversed the fantasy, and accepted the "nonexistence of the big Other," how do we none the less return to some (new) form of big Other that again makes a collective coexistence possible?⁵⁷

The "desire of the analyst" animates those who have knowledge of their non-knowledge, those who have traversed the phantasy. Yet this schema appears to reerect an uncomfortable separation between a party of the initiated, sustained by the "desire of the analyst," and the naive mass that are still subject to the transference effects of the "subject supposed to know." One solution would have the party retain a public face of certainty to allow the masses to gain the transference confidence that the disruptive

process of transforming both society and their own subjectivities will end well. Presumably the party would then consist of those who have worked through their transference disappointment toward acceptance of the constitutive uncertainty that faces them. Given the unevenness of class struggle doesn't this sound a little like a party of higher-level communist thetans?⁵⁸

I don't mean to trivialize the problem. If we accept, as I do, that communist organizations must include the collective analysis and transformation of the desires that animate them, then problems such as these are not easily escaped. We might, however, clarify the problem in light of our previous discussion of revolutionary transition. If the task of transition is to institute a collective self-training in democracy, or, depending on the terminology used, in communism, then surely in analytical terms the task is for the mass itself to become its own analyst. This may of course be what Dean has in mind yet I'm not sure the insistence on calling this process a party is necessary or useful. The party carries with it a heavy identity as monolithic, monopolistic, and continuous. How can this be resolved with the need for moments of recomposition and rupture? Can a party include this in its constitution? Indeed do we necessarily need the party form to fulfill our previously identified analytical and transference functions? With these questions in mind let's look again at the practices of Occupy to see which functions they might be fulfilling and how they might be supplemented for those that they aren't.

TRANSFERENTIAL ASSEMBLIES AND TRANSVERSAL LEADERSHIP

An understanding of transference can help explain the feelings of betrayal and hopelessness apparent in Norton's eulogy for Occupy.⁵⁹ As the General Assemblies were the main means of continuity within the Occupations the effects of transference seemed to fall primarily upon them. The General Assemblies acted as screens upon which people could realize their commonality with others while recognizing themselves as newly emerging political subjects. In terms of the latter it was often what we might call the affect of democracy within the Assemblies that people found most appealing. Being listened to and taken seriously by others while taking collective control over an important political moment really can be life-changing. This radically participatory element did much to increase people's collective capacities. It was in effect a training in democracy. Yet the emphasis in the General Assemblies was to allow people to express themselves even at the expense of efficient decision making.⁶⁰ We might call this an emphasis on testimony, and it is a good indication of the actual function that the assemblies were really fulfilling. Think about the popular "We are the 99%" website, in

which people post photographs of themselves holding pieces of cardboard upon which they tell their stories of financial hardship.⁶¹ It's the sheer aggregation of these stories and the common themes within them that produces not only a sense of commonality but also a shared understanding of the structural nature of our hardships. If the same problems are suffered by so many others then they cannot be, as the right-wing press asserts, the result of individual personal failings. This recognition is powerful but tackling structural causes takes more than mere aggregation. It requires collective analysis and action, and it involves us changing our preexisting selves.

Consensus process, as practiced in the General Assemblies, is well suited to facilitating the expressive moment but it's less suited to some of these other tasks. During the anti-globalization movement it was found that consensus process works best among fairly cohesive groups committed in advance to the same broad objective. It relies, of course, on a common commitment to, and understanding of, consensus decision making but more fundamentally for it to work effectively it requires a fixed point of reference. The big stalling point with consensus process is its unsuitability for making strategic decisions, that is, collectively transforming and generating objectives different from the one around which the assembly was formed.⁶² The pressure to come to consensus, for instance, can provide a bias toward the status quo. It is much more difficult to achieve near unanimity on a proposal for a radical break with normal practice. Indeed consensus as a goal is problematic in itself.

For Guattari consensus creates "oppressive redundancies" and "a situation in which participants say exactly what they are expected to say."⁶³ It is a situation that risks the development of unexamined common sense assumptions and dogma. Of course, such problems are not confined to horizontal organization; vertical organizations have their own mechanism of fetishization. The solution, however, may well be the same; allow the development of alternative foci of meaning and reference. It is here that we can return to the conception of the Left as a processual passion as Guattari's solution is to supplement the horizontal structures of Occupy not just with the vertical and diagonal structures proposed by Dean but also with, what he would call, transversal ones.

Guattari developed his concept of transversality through both engagement with Left groups and his experience of group analysis with schizophrenics at the psychiatric hospital La Borde.⁶⁴ Guattari's practice privileged the group as an analytic unit in order to bring the institutional form and institutional object within the scope of analysis and transformation. In this context the one-way libidinal tie of transference is disrupted by the analysis of, and experimentation with, multidirectional

transversal libidinal ties. Guattari opposes transversality to both “verticality” and “horizontality.” By the former he means the vertical lines of bureaucratized authority, while “horizontality” refers to an inert seriality, in which different sectors, such as patients and roles, remain separated from each other, “a state of affairs in which things and people fit in as best they can with the situation in which they find themselves.”⁶⁵ Verticality, then, is associated with paranoid investments in which all communication and meaning is channeled through a few key individuals.⁶⁶ Guattari contrasts a coefficient of paranoid investments to its inverse, a coefficient of transversality, the maximization of which “tends to be achieved when there is maximum communication among different levels and, above all, in different meanings.”⁶⁷ The ultimate aim of experiments with transversality is to “change the data accepted by the super-ego into a new kind of acceptance of initiative.”⁶⁸ Transversal mechanisms are designed to facilitate transformations in group desire, by seeking out escapes of meaning that indicated the limits of a group’s common sense assumptions and so the potential points of fetishization. These escapes, however, are not read interpretively, as signs of an underlying condition, but constructively, as indications of new possibilities. Transversal mechanisms allow new foci of meaning to develop and new political problems to emerge.

If we widen our scope a little and situate Occupy within other post-crisis movements in Europe and America, we can see that the transversal tasks of shifting the consensus of the movement, of introducing new political problems, new repertoires, and new frames of reference has fallen not to the General Assemblies but to that other organizational innovation of 2011, what Nunes has called “distributed leadership.” He describes the concept as:

the possibility, even for previously “uncharted” individuals and groups, to temporarily take on the role of moving things forward by virtue of coming up with courses of action that provide provisional focal points for activity. . . . It applies both to the first outliers, groups or individuals, who started networking towards the mass actions that then developed into camps and assemblies. But equally to all those whose initiatives, by example more than persuasion, by contagion more than argument, managed to cut through deadlocks in decision making processes progressively reduced to the assembly form.

What makes this form of leadership different is the fact that it does not require a previously established “leader” or “vanguard” status (membership numbers, political trajectory, reputation). In fact, one of the key things that, in the present environment, appears to work in favor of an initiative is precisely its being “anonymous” or (to put it in sports language) “unseeded.”⁶⁹

This seems a little different to traditional notions of leadership. There is, for instance, much less reliance on preexisting authority. While successful leadership still tends to build authority the logic of distributed leadership appears to disrupt the negative transferential effects associated with more traditional leadership roles. In distributed leadership you are only as good as your latest initiative, if you stop making sense then it's easier for the movement to move on.

Indeed if we look at the developments emerging from the ashes of OWS, then we can see groups putting these elements into powerful new assemblages. The group Strike Debt, for instance, did not work through the general assembly to persuade others to adopt the issue of debt as the new political focus. Instead a small group went away, did research and came up with initiatives, along with materials and techniques, which had the potential to go viral.⁷⁰ Indeed we can also see how Strike Debt has learned how to retain the expressive functions of the assembly form. One of the key pieces of advice Strike Debt gives to those wanting to initiate an antidebt campaign is to hold Debt Assemblies, in which people can testify publically about their indebtedness in order to overcome their guilt and recognize the commonality of their position.

CONCLUSION

The aim of this chapter was to move beyond both the erection of Assemblyism as a new universal model of democracy and the rejection of general assemblies due to their failure to be one. In doing so I aimed to clarify the lessons of 2011 for contemporary communist organization. I hoped to show that the communist project must be a processual one; it must carry an antifetishistic dynamic. Indeed as our own subjectivities are partly formed by the fetishisms of capital, then the communist project must include not just the transformation of institutional structures but also the transformation of our very selves. The appropriate organizational form for this task must also be subject to change; it must be a processual organizational process that involves collective self-analysis, the emergence of new problematics and even periodic moments of rupture. Within this schema the assembly moment seems vital if not sufficient. It is evident that assemblies have been fulfilling, among other functions, a transferential role. They have operated as a screen upon which newly emerging political subjects can project and recognize both their transforming subjectivities and their commonality with others. Assemblies, however, have not been the only organizational innovation of 2011. The other, which we have called distributed leadership, has acted transversally, allowing the emergence of new foci of sense and enabling the movement to move from one problematic to the next. Of course this doesn't solve all organizational problems. It doesn't address the problem

of accountability, raised by Dean, nor, on its own, the problem of massification and state power. It does, however, suggest a general approach to take toward organizational problems, a processual one. It is this that provides the 21st-century Left with its processual calling.

NOTES

1. It should be noted that the early camps such as Tahrir Square and the Spanish square occupations were not planned. They came about almost accidentally. In the case of the M15 movement the initial square occupation only happened because their initial action plan came unstuck (see Rodrigo Nunes, "The Lessons of 2011: Three Theses on Organisation." *Mute Magazine*. Accessed on July 10, 2012. <http://www.metamute.org/editorial/articles/lessons-2011-three-theses-organisation>). Occupy Wall Street was the first planned camp, with a small group working to prepare the occupation for weeks in advance. It was this foreplanning that allowed the codification of consensus process.

2. Seeds for Change, *Consensus Decision Making*. Accessed July 10, 2012. <http://www.seedsforchange.org.uk/free/consensus.pdf>

3. Quinn Norton, "A Eulogy for #Occupy," *Wired Magazine*. Accessed December 15, 2012. <http://www.wired.com/opinion/2012/12/a-eulogy-for-occupy/all/>

4. This link is emphasized by OWS participant Marina Sitrin, "If you really get into the conversation, it's that you can't have a democracy with this kind of economic system. That's what it's really about when people say, 'I don't feel heard, my voice has never been heard before, no one consults me in any decisions that are made.' It's a very radical politics coming out of that." Cited in Ruth Milkman, Stephanie Luce, and Penny Lewis, *Changing the Subject: A Bottom-Up Account of Occupy Wall Street in New York City* (New York: The Murphy Institute), 30, accessed January 30, 2013, sps.cuny.edu/filestore/1/5/7/1.../1571_92f562221b8041e.pdf

5. *Ibid.*

6. Felix Guattari, *The Guattari Reader* (Oxford: Blackwell 1996), 260.

7. *Ibid.*, 260.

8. Indeed we can be more specific about this context. In 1981 the Mitterrand government abandoned its left-wing manifesto just six months after its election. Franco Berardi, *Precarious Rhapsody: Semiocapitalism and the Pathologies of the Post-Alpha Generation* (London: Minor Compositions, 2009) points to this as a key moment in the realization that power was moving far more resolutely into a position transcendent to national governments and as a consequence the old distinctions between Left and Right were losing their purchase. For the wider context of this remark, however, we might also point to the impact that neoliberalism and the New Right had upon French thought. Ross, for instance, charts the rise of the New Philosophers and their movement from libertarian to neoliberal, through the medium of anti-totalitarianism. Kristin Ross, *May '68 and its Afterlives* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2002).

9. Occupy Wall Street activist David Graeber, for instance, has said of an early group with which he was involved: "When members of the Direct Action Network or similar groups are considering whether to work with some other group, the first

question that is likely to be asked is ‘what sort of process do they use?’—that is: Do they practice internal democracy? Do they vote or use consensus? Is there a formal leadership? Such questions are usually considered of much more importance than questions of ideology.” David Graeber, *Possibilities: Essays on Hierarchy, Rebellion and Desire* (Oakland, CA: AK Press., 2007), 378.

10. Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (London: Athlone Press, 1984), 293.

11. In consensus process it is normal to show agreement through waving hands in the air rather than shouting out. This aim of this is to provide clearer visual indications of the extent of agreement.

12. Karl Marx, *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy: Volume One* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1982), 164.

13. Michael Heinrich, *An Introduction to the Three Volumes of Karl Marx’s Capital* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 2012), 185.

14. *Ibid.*, 260.

15. Guattari, *Guattari Reader*, 260.

16. Michael Hardt, “Thomas Jefferson, or the Transition of Democracy,” in *The Declaration of Independence* by Thomas Jefferson (London: Verso, 2007), xii–xxvi.

17. *Ibid.*, viii.

18. *Ibid.*, ix.

19. Vladimir I. Lenin, *Essential Works of Lenin: “What Is to Be Done?” and Other Writings* (Mineola, NY: Dover, 1987).

20. Hardt, *Jefferson*, x. We shall leave to one side whether this is a fair characterization of anarchist theories of revolutionary transformation but point out that the notion of prefigurative struggles is, in part, drawn from the long-standing anarchist concern with the compatibility of means and ends.

21. Lenin, *Essential Works*, 207.

22. Hardt, *Jefferson*, xi.

23. *Ibid.*, xvi.

24. Once again we shall leave to one side whether this is a fair characterization of Lenin’s position. In fact Hardt is talking here about Žižek’s theory of transition, although he says that in the points mentioned above Žižek is following Lenin. Hardt, as we shall see later, does not do justice here to the nuance of Žižek’s position.

25. *Ibid.*, xx.

26. *Ibid.*, xx.

27. *Ibid.*, xii.

28. Thomas Jefferson, *The Declaration of Independence* (London: Verso, 2007). For example he says: “The spirit of resistance to government is so valuable on certain occasions, that I wish it to be always kept alive. It will often be exercised when wrong, but better so than not to be exercised at all. I like a little rebellion now and then. It is like a storm in the atmosphere.” *Ibid.*, 30.

29. *Ibid.*, 30.

30. *Ibid.*, 56–57. In a letter to Madison, sent from revolutionary France, Jefferson writes: “The question Whether [*sic*] one generation of men has a right to bind another, seems never to have been started either on this or our side of the water. Yet it is a question of such consequences as not only to merit decision, but place also, among the fundamental principles of every government.” *Ibid.*, 53. We can

see here an extension of the reasoning of the American Revolution. Just as one country can't be bound by the laws of another, neither can a new generation be bound by the laws of its antecedents.

31. *Ibid.*, 73.

32. Hardt, *Jefferson*, xxi.

33. The American Revolution was, of course, the shared experience that formed Jefferson's generation.

34. Of course, a full criticism of Jefferson could not stop here. At the very least the critique of constitutional fetishism should be extended to other fetishisms, in particular the fetishisms tied to property rights. Indeed Hardt and Negri point to "the inviolability of the rights of private property, which excludes or subordinates those without property," as the point at which the republican revolutionary process becomes interrupted. This point is illustrated by the implacable hostility that most republicans displayed toward the Haitian Revolution of 1791–1804. Hardt and Negri argue that this revolution "was unthinkable because it violated the rule of property. . . . A simple syllogism is at work here: the republic must protect private property; slaves are property; therefore republicanism must oppose the freeing of the slaves." The slave-owning Jefferson found it impossible to address not only the elevation of the rights of property above the rights of man but also the related racial fetishism that underscored slavery in the United States, and indeed still haunts it today. Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Commonwealth* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2009), 9–13.

35. Hardt, *Jefferson*, xxii.

36. A good example of the emergence of a new problematic out of a movement's development can be found in the disruption caused by second-wave feminism as it emerged out of the New Left in the 1960s and 1970s.

37. It should be made clear that Hardt doesn't use the concepts of fetishism or the processual in this essay. So just as Hardt could be accused of ventriloquizing Jefferson I could be accused of ventriloquizing Hardt. However, the question of what a writer really means is rarely the most interesting or useful one to ask. We are following here the Althusserian methodology of symptomatic reading, in which we seek problematics that are absent yet inherent to the text. In this way rather than being read definitively, texts can be revisited as new problematics are raised. Louis Althusser and Etienne Balibar, *Reading Capital* (London: Verso, 2006).

38. Hardt, *Jefferson*, xx.

39. Jodi Dean, *The Communist Horizon* (Verso: London, 2012).

40. *Ibid.*, 239.

41. Dean argues that Occupy Wall Street "pushes us to think again about the role of a communist party." *Ibid.*, 210.

42. *Ibid.*, 233–234. Dean's argument that the occupations maintained continuity of struggle makes sense when the comparison made is to the much more time limited protest and convergence camps created to facilitate anti-summit protests for instance. The subsequent collapse of the occupations, and we should remember that many camps were fraying before they were evicted, should give pause to Dean's next move of suggesting the party as the mechanism to codify what Occupy started. The real problem is not just the maintenance of continuity within a particular cycle of struggle but continuity across cycles as movements displace to new issues and problems.

43. *Ibid.*, 238.

44. *Ibid.*, 197–199.

45. *Ibid.*, 206.

46. Indeed Dean comes even closer to the conception of an anti-fetishistic processual politics when she says: “it is active struggle that changes and reshapes desire from its individual (and for Lukács, bourgeois and reified) form into a common, collective one.” *Ibid.*, 197.

47. *Ibid.*, 65.

48. Slavoj Žižek, *Revolution at the Gates: Žižek on Lenin, the 1917 Writings* (London: Verso, 2002), 189.

49. Dean, *Communist Horizon*, 207.

50. *Ibid.*, 242.

51. Žižek, *Revolution at the Gates*. 189. We can see that this is a very different conception of the party and transition than the caricature offered above by Hardt.

52. Dean, *Communist Horizon*, 243.

53. Sigmund Freud, *The Penguin Freud Reader* (London: Penguin, 2006), 29.

54. *Ibid.*, 30.

55. Sigmund Freud, *The Freud Reader* (London: Vintage 1995), 26.

56. Dean, *Communist Horizon*, 187.

57. Slavoj Žižek, *The Ticklish Subject: The Absent Centre of Political Ontology* (London: Verso 1999), 296.

58. This is a tongue-in-cheek reference to Scientology in which as you rise through the levels of the organization, and become a higher-level thetan, more is revealed about the organization’s hidden beliefs.

59. Norton, *Eulogy for #Occupy*.

60. There is recognition of this amongst OWS participants. Jonathan Smucker, for instance, commented: “The problem is when you try to make 400 people mic-checking in a park into a functional decision making structure, which it’s just not meant to be. It never did that well. So there’s a kind of hyper-democracy, which theatrically expresses some of the values of what this movement is about, but it’s not always the most functional thing.” Cited in Milkman, *Changing the Subject*, 30.

61. See <http://wearethe99percent.tumblr.com/>

62. Indeed as Cornell shows the organization that did most to develop and spread consensus decision making process in the United States, the Movement for a New Society, was acutely aware of these shortcomings and eventually dissolved their organization partly because their attachment to consensus process hindered their strategic development. Andrew Cornell, *Oppose and Propose!* (Oakland, CA: AK Press, 2011).

63. Felix Guattari, *Soft Subversions: Texts and Interviews 1977–1985* (New York: Semiotext(e), 2009), 55.

64. In fact we might argue that Guattari’s experience with schizophrenics might be more apt to contemporary subjectivities than Freud’s emphasis on neurotics. As Deleuze explains: “Freud’s stroke of genius was to show that bourgeois families and the frontiers of the asylum contained a large group of people (‘neurotics’) who could be brought under a particular contract, in order to lead them, using original means, back to the norms of traditional medicine . . . one of the principle consequences of this was that psychosis remained on the horizon of psychoanalysis, a general source of clinical material, and yet was excluded as beyond the

contractual field." Gilles Deleuze, *Desert Islands and Other Texts: 1953–1974* (New York: Semiotext(e) 2004), 201. Is it pushing things too far to describe the desire for a party as a nostalgic desire to bring our current subjectivities, riven as they are by the schizophrenic tendencies of contemporary production, back with a lost contractual field?

65. Felix Guattari, *Molecular Revolution: Psychiatry and Politics* (New York City: Puffin, 1984), 17.

66. Despite Guattari's association with the anti-psychiatry movement of David Cooper, R. D. Laing et al., he was critical of their practice precisely on their failure to break with an Oedipal model and its paranoid investments. The following testimony from a participant in R. D. Laing's Kingsley Hall commune provides an insight into the dangers of paranoid investments in group analysis: "I later realised, this community functioned like a large spooked wheel with Laing at the centre. All communications had to pass through him. All relationships were centred on him. He knew what everyone was thinking and doing, but most of the residents were dimly aware of what was happening on their periphery. This led to a lot of paranoia. The principle projective processes had to do with jealousy, who was closest to him, and who had been shunted to the outer circle. Much of the psychotic interactions had to do with these highly charged, but vigorously denied jealous emanations." Joseph Berke, "The Power of Projective Processes in Large Groups," in *The Large Group Revisited: The Herd, Primal Horde, Crowd and Masses*, ed. Stanley Schnieder and Haim Weinberg (Philadelphia: Jessica Kingsley, 2003), 112.

67. Guattari, *Molecular Revolutions*, 18.

68. *Ibid.*, 13.

69. Nunes, *Lessons of 2011*. Another good example of distributed leadership is UK Uncut, which started when a small group of activists stumbled upon a replicable action form while trying to problematize tax evasion. For a discussion on the mechanisms of distributed leadership, see The Free Association, *On Fairy Dust and Rupture*, Accessed July 12, 2012, <http://freelyassociating.org/on-fairy-dust-and-rupture/>

70. For more on Strike Debt, see: <http://strikedebt.org/>

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CHAPTER 10

Communize

John Holloway

It has to be a verb, doesn't it? A noun cannot possibly express adequately the sort of society we want. A social organizing that is self-determining cannot possibly be contained inside a noun. The notion of communism is grossly, nonsensically, dangerously self-contradictory. A noun suggests some form of fixity that would be incompatible with a collective self-creating. A noun excludes the active subject, whereas the whole point of the world we want is that the active social subject would be at the center.

Ours is the revolt of verbs against nouns. It is the revolt of being-able-to against Power, of poder against Poder, pouvoir against Pouvoir, potere against Potere, machen (and können) against Macht.¹ The moving of self-determining (of communizing) against alien determination can hardly be otherwise. Alien determination is the entrapment of our lives within coagulations, within barriers, rules, frontiers, habits. Within social forms, in other words. Social forms are the molds or jellies into which human action rigidifies.

Marx devoted his work to the critique of these forms. The challenge is posed in the first sentence of *Capital*, which tells us that under capitalism the immense richness of human creation (for, as Marx puts it in the *Grundrisse*,² "what is wealth other than the universality of human needs, capacities, pleasures, productive forces etc . . . [t]he absolute working-out of his creative potentialities, with no presupposition other than the previous historic development, which makes this totality of development, i.e. the development of all human powers as such the end in itself") "appears as an 'immense accumulation of commodities.'"³ It appears as such because that is the social form in which it exists. The potentially unlimited force of human creation is really entrapped within the limits

of the commodity form. An absolute horror, a total nightmare, a present catastrophe that threatens to lead us to complete self-annihilation. How did it happen, what does it mean, how can we break these social forms?

What is at issue is not just the forms that Marx criticizes in *Capital* (commodity, value, money, rent, law, state, and etc.) but the very rigidification of human interacting that constitutes these forms. It is not just a question of criticizing capitalist social forms but of understanding social forms as such as being capitalist—a vertiginous, exhilarating thought. Or, to return to our opening formulation, the problem is not particular nouns but nouns as such, the very enclosure of verbs within fixities.

The noun is closely tied to the closure of identity, whereas a verb suggests non-identity, an overflowing of identity, a bursting-beyond, a moving of anti-identity, an anti-identifying that can be understood only as a constant moving against the identity within which it is (and we are) entrapped, a subverting. Let the noun, then, stand for identity, the verb for the moving of anti-identity. Identity is the real but mendacious separation of constitution and existence, whereas it is clear that communizing can only mean the overcoming of this separation. Love as passion, not as habit.

Communizing is the moving against that which stands in the way of our social determination of our own lives. The obstacles that confront us are not just our separation from the means of production but all those social forms that proclaim their own identity, that negate their own existence as forms and simply say “we are.” Money, for example, says “I am who am,” pure timeless identity. It does not say “I am a form of social relations, a rigidification of the way in which people relate to one another in a historically specific social context.” It does not say to us “I am a human product and can therefore be abolished by humans.” Just the contrary: the force of money depends on the denial of that which produced and produces it. The power of money is based on the separation of its existence from its constitution, from its genesis. And, as with money, so with wife, table, state, commodity, Australia, man, dinner. All of these present themselves in their pompous, mendacious, self-sufficiency as identities, as existences liberated from their constitution, as nouns that have swallowed up the verbs that created them. All must be dissolved. Communizing is the movement of dissolving them; it is the unchaining of our doing, the reclaiming of the world. To free our culinary doing, we must understand dinner from the point of view of cooking, we must reunite the existence of the dinner with its constitution, emancipate the verb from the noun that it has created. And, as with dinner, so with man, Australia, commodity, state, table, wife, and money.

Critique, then, is genetic, directed at recovering the genesis of these forms that deny their own origins. It seeks, behind that which exists, the process that constituted it, that gave rise to its existence. Crucially, it

also asks “what is it about the constituting that gives rise to an existence that denies its own constitution? What is it about our verb that creates a noun that swallows up the verb? What is it about our doing that creates a done that denies the doing?” It is not enough to understand money, wife, table, state, commodity, Australia, man, dinner as human products. We must go to the root, understand what is wrong with our doing that produces these monstrosities, children that deny their own parents.

What is wrong with our doing? Marx’s answer is clear. In capitalist society our doing is self-antagonistic. It has a dual character, which Marx refers to as useful or concrete labor, on the one hand, and abstract labor, on the other: “This point is crucial to an understanding of political economy.”⁴ If we wish to understand why our activity produces a society that denies our activity, then we must look to the twofold nature of that activity.

Concrete labor is simply labor that produces wealth in all its manifold varieties. It is making a car, writing an article, cooking a meal, cleaning the street. Here there is nothing that leads to a separation between constitution and existence. I make a table; I use it or give it to someone else to enjoy: its existence as a table speaks directly of my act of making it. There is a making and a thing made, but no separation between them.

Abstract labor is the same activity, but seen now from the perspective of producing commodities. I make a table, but what matters is not the individual characteristics of the table or my relation to it, but its value or the price that it will receive on the market. The table, as a commodity, is a thing outside me, totally indifferent to me. As a commodity, it is a thing to be bought and sold, to be measured in the quantitative relation it establishes with other products—measured generally in money. In the world of commodities what matters is the amount of value produced, not its composition in terms of cars, articles, meals, or clean streets produced. There is an abstraction from the particular qualities of the concrete labors: these count now only as a quantity of abstract labor. There is an abstraction from the very act of producing: all that matters is the quantity of value produced. Abstract labor creates a world of things, a world of existences that separate themselves from their constitution, a world of identities that proclaim “we are,” a world of nouns indifferent to the verbs that brought them into existence, a world of “fetishes,” as Marx calls it. Abstract labor is dynamic, driven by the pursuit of value, of profit, but it posits its creations as things independent of the act of creation. In other words, it is the existence of our activity (doing, concrete labor) as abstract labor that leads to the rigidification or coagulation of social relations into social forms. We can speak of abstract labor as a social form, as the form in which concrete labor exists, but it is the central form that generates all other forms. It is abstract labor that holds entrapped the endless potential and creativity of concrete labor, that is,

of human doing; and, therefore, it is the key to all the other forms of entrapment or domination in capitalism.

Wealth exists in the form of an immense accumulation of commodities; concrete labor (or human doing) exists in the form of abstract labor. Human doing (concrete labor) produces wealth; abstract labor produces commodities. In both cases, the activity (doing or abstract labor) is inevitably social. There is a coming together of different activities, a cohering of diverse active subjects, some form of sociality, communality, some communing of doers, some form of communizing. Wealth exists in all societies, but in present-day society it takes the form of an accumulation of commodities; human doing exists in any society, but in this one it exists in the form of abstract labor. In the same way, we can say that communizing, or social cohering, exists in any society, but in capitalism it is present in a peculiar form. There is a more intense and extensive integration of doings than ever before, but the intense social integration is not accompanied by social determination of what is done but is subjected in the first place to private determination by the owners of capital; the private determinations by the capitalists are subject in turn to a social determination by money (ultimately value), a determination that is subject to no conscious control. Communizing, like wealth, like doing or concrete labor, exists as a hidden substratum of a social form that denies its existence. Capitalism is based on an intense communality or sociality or intertwining of doings or activities, but the common doing which is the basis (substratum) of capitalist society is hidden from view by its capitalist form. We have, then, an indissoluble trinity (in no way formulaic)—wealth, doing, communizing—that exists in the form of a counter-trinity, equally indissoluble, of commodities, abstract labor, capitalism.

All eyes now turn to this “exists in the form of,” or “appears as,” or “presents itself as.” When we say (with Marx) that in present-day society wealth “appears as an ‘immense accumulation of commodities,’” it is clear that this is not mere illusion, it is not a false appearance. If wealth appears in this way, it is because it really exists in this form. It is equally clear that the expression does not indicate a simple identity: we are not saying that in capitalist society, wealth is an immense accumulation of commodities, concrete labor is abstract labor, communizing is capitalism. We are clearly talking of two things that are non-identical but appear to be identical. There is at very least a tension here, but what is the nature of this tension? It is a tension of domination. If something exists in the form of something else, then clearly it is subject to that form. If wealth exists in the form of commodities, it is the commodity that dominates, just as abstract labor dominates concrete labor and capitalism dominates the communal.

This domination is a negation. If wealth exists in the form of an accumulation of commodities, then in effect the commodity is proclaiming

"I am the only wealth," a wealth usually measured in the money-form of the commodity. This we know from constant experience: wealth is measured in money. The lists of the 500 richest people in the world, for example, assume that richness is identical to the accumulation of money: they do not try to measure richness in terms of people's wisdom or affective relations or enthusiasm for what they do. Wealth-richness disappears from view and money-wealth takes its place. That which exists in the form of something else, exists—to borrow Richard Gunn's classic phrase—in the "mode of being denied."⁵

The fact that something exists in the mode of being denied does not mean that it ceases to exist. On the contrary, inevitably, it struggles against its own denial. Domination without resistance and revolt is inconceivable. The very fact that we think of revolt means that subordination is not total. The tension is an antagonism, an antagonism between content and form, between that which is denied and that which denies it.

This is an antagonism of verbs, not of nouns: an active struggle. Domination, if it meets resistance (as it always does), is an active dominating: dominating is always a struggle, it can never be taken for granted. Moreover, it is characteristic of domination under capitalism that it cannot stay still. The fact that value is determined by the socially necessary labor time required to produce a commodity means that the enriching of human capacity to produce is metamorphosed into an intensification of abstract labor, faster-faster-faster. Domination cannot afford the luxury of the stillness of a noun: it can only be a dominating that constantly struggles to find ways of achieving an ever deeper subordination of life to its aim of self-expansion. And if dominating is a verb, then clearly resisting and rebelling are too. The forms of social relations must be understood as form-processes, processes of forming, not as established fact. So money as monetizing, state as statifying, commodity as commodifying, man as man-ing, Australia as Australiaing, commodity as commodifying, and so on: all fierce struggles, daily and often bloody fightings.

This is the key issue in Marxist theory and practice. It can be seen in the debates around primitive accumulation. In the traditional mainstream interpretation, primitive accumulation refers to the violent period of struggle that led to the establishment of capitalist social relations, a historical phase followed by a routine capitalist normality. There is in this interpretation a clear separation between constitution and existence. Primitive accumulation is taken to refer to the constitution of forms of social relations (value, state, capital, etc.), followed by a period in which these forms acquire a relative stability. If that is so, then these forms can be seen as nouns: nouns with a limited historical life, but nevertheless as nouns which have a degree of fixity as long as capitalism survives. Marx expresses the traditional view graphically in the *Grundrisse*:

the conditions which preceded the creation of surplus capital, or which express the becoming of capital, do not fall into the sphere of that mode of production for which capital serves as the presupposition; as the historic process of its becoming, they lie behind it, just as the processes by means of which the earth made the transition from a liquid sea of fire and vapour to its present form now lie behind its life as finished earth.⁶

Constitution is clearly separated from existence. However, those of us who live just beside smoking volcanoes (in my case Popocatepetl just 40 kilometers away) know that the geological transition from a liquid sea of fire to solid earth is not as clear-cut as Marx suggests and we strongly suspect that this is even more so in the case of social relations. Beneath the apparent solidity of money, for example, is a seething, bubbling liquid. It certainly cannot be taken for granted that money is a universally respected form of social relations: how else can we explain the vast amount of energy devoted to its enforcement? Money, like state, man, woman, Australia, Mexico, rent, is constantly at issue, constantly contested: the existence of all these social relations depends on their constant re-constitution. Although there may well be significant differences according to time and place, Marx was wrong to suggest such a radical separation between constitution and existence.

The capitalist form of social relations, this rigidification of social interactions into established patterns, is, then, a process, a verb, a rigidifying or forming of social doings that always meets with opposition. Genesis refers not just to the past but to a constant process of generating and regenerating the social forms; genetic criticism is not just the uncovering of the past but also of the present generating. If wealth exists in the form of an accumulation of commodities, this means that there is a constant commodifying of the richness of human creation, and that this commodifying meets a resistance, a constant pushing by human creativity against the commodifying and a constant overflowing from commodification. In other words, if wealth exists in the form of an accumulation of commodities, this inevitably means that it exists not just in, but also against and beyond the accumulation of commodities. It does not exist outside the accumulation of commodities, untouched by it: this would lead us to an ahistorical essentialism that would not be helpful. It does not float in the air: it is a live, daily struggle. The richness of our activity is constrained within the commodity form but also pushes against it and, at least sporadically, eruptively, it breaks through the commodity form, establishing other ways of interacting. Indeed, both sides of the antagonism are constituted through the antagonism: it is clear that the accumulation of commodities is constituted through the struggle to commodify wealth, but the contrary is also true: wealth is constituted through the struggle in-against-and-beyond

the commodity form. And what is true of wealth is also true of concrete labor and communality: they are not only trapped within their capitalist forms but also push against and beyond them.

We can go a step further. That which exists in the form of something else, that which exists in the “mode of being denied,” is the hidden substratum of that which denies it, and thereby its crisis. That which appears on the surface—commodities, abstract labor, capitalism—is nothing without that which it denies: wealth, concrete labor, communality. The master depends on his servant, always. It is a mutual dependence, but the relation is highly asymmetrical. The master without his servant is nothing, unable to cook his supper or make his bed, but the servant, through her concrete labor, is potentially everything, as Hegel, La Boétie, and others have pointed out. Power, the noun, is visible, but it depends on the invisible being-able-to. The possibility of radical change comes from below, from that which is hidden, from that which is latent, that on which Power depends. It is this dependency that is the key to the crisis of domination. Marx’s theory of the tendency of the rate of profit to fall is an attempt to understand how capital’s dependence upon labor (and therefore on the transformation of human activity into labor) manifests itself in the tendency of the rate of profit to fall. The latent is the crisis of the apparent, the verb the crisis of the noun.

Enough, then, of the absurd, degrading idea that the crisis is the fault of the capitalists! We are the crisis of capital. We, who are not just invisible but latent, the latency of another world. We, who are the verbs that the nouns are incapable of containing. We, whose concrete doing will not fit in to abstract labor, whose wealth overflows from the immense accumulation of commodities, whose communality bursts through the false community of individuals and citizens. We, who will not be contained, we who have not yet accepted our role as robots. We, who are the hidden, volcanic substratum upon which the whole edifice of power is so fictively constructed. We, who reclaim the earth because it is ours.

Communizing is the moving of this crisis. Crisis is most visible in falling rates of profit, falling growth rates, rising unemployment, and so on, but beneath these manifestations lies the incapacity of capital to subordinate human doing sufficiently to the logic of its dynamic. Beneath the statistics lie the volcanic eruptions of insubordination, the multiplication of No’s, the overflowing of these No’s into “No, we will not accept that, we shall do things differently, in a way that we decide.” Navarino Park in the center of Athens, where the people tore down the walls of a car park to create a community garden, a place of children’s games and cultivating vegetables and playing music, a place for talking and making revolution. A large part of the state of Chiapas, where the road signs proclaim “Bad government stay out, here the people rule!” The

recovered factories in Argentina, where the workers have shown that there can be a life without bosses. Abahlali baseMjondolo, the shack-dwellers in Durban who are creating a living communism in their settlements. And so on, and on, and on. We can all think of examples, fill page after page with them. Communizings large and small, often so small as to be invisible, even to the participants—but nonetheless crucial, for crisis can probably not be explained in terms of overt resistance, but it certainly can be understood as resulting from the combined effect of open insubordination and the constant, ubiquitous nonsubordination, the constant and ubiquitous refusal to subject our lives totally to the ever-intensifying exigencies of capitalist production. Communizings of many different types, all experimental, all filled with the active fragility of verbs, all contradictory, with one foot caught in the filthy mire of capitalism while they reach for something else, a different doing, a different richness, a different coming together.

Communizing then, not just as verb but as plural: communizings. The flowing of many babbling brooks and silent streams, coming together, parting again, flowing toward a potential sea. There is no room here for institutionalization, however informal. Institutionalization is always an attempt to block the flow, to separate existence from constitution (is that not the meaning of institutionalization?), to subject the present to the past, to hold still the flow of doing, whereas communizing is the opposite: the push to free ourselves from past determination, to give explicit articulation to the unity of constitution and existence.

Not communism-in-the-future, then, but a multiplicity of communizings here and now. Does this mean that there can be no radical break with capitalism? Certainly not. We have to break the dynamic of capital, but the way to do it is not by projecting a communism into the future, but by recognizing, creating, expanding, and multiplying the communizings (or cracks in the texture of capitalist domination) and fomenting their confluence. It is hard for me to imagine the overcoming of capitalism other than through the confluence of communizings into a torrent that marginalizes capital as a form of organization and renders its violence ineffective. Then indeed we could think of the journey ending in a home-coming, but even that could not be a communism, but only a constant communizing in a more favorable climate (as indeed home is never the noun that the child imagines but a constant recreating by those involved).

Communizing is simply the reclaiming of the world that is ours, or perhaps better, the creating of the world that is ours, in which we articulate practically the unity of doing and done, of constitution and existence, the communality of our doings.

Communize, wherever you are, now.

NOTES

1. I take *to-be-able-to* to be the verbal form of Power, in the same way as poder is the verb of Poder, pouvoir of Pouvoir, and so on.
2. Karl Marx, *Grundrisse: Foundations of the Critique of Political Economy* (London: Penguin, 1973), 488.
3. Karl Marx, *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy*, vol. 1, ed. Frederick Engels and trans. Ben Fowkes (London: Penguin, 1990), 125.
4. *Ibid.*, 132.
5. Richard Gunn, "Against Historical Materialism: Marxism as a First-Order Discourse," in *Open Marxism*, vol. 2, eds. Werner Bonefeld, Richard Gunn, and Kosmas Psychopedis (London: Pluto, 1992), 14.
6. Marx, *Grundrisse*, 460.

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