The Class Struggle In Theory

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ABSTRACT

This study considers the relation between the intellectual character of labour's political leadership and the phenomenon of authoritarianism in Marxism's political history. It focuses on the European labour movement in the period between the founding of the International Workingmen's Association in 1864 and the Bolshevik revolution in 1917-22. The need to critically engage this history comes from an awareness of the negative impact it continues to have on global labour's contemporary efforts to construct a coherent class identity and organize itself politically as a revolutionary social force.

The aim of the study is to imagine, following a critique of Marxism's political experience, what the framework of a revitalized Marxist political imaginary might look like. To arrive at such a perspective, the study has deliberately avoided the temptation to excuse Marxism of its culpability in this history adopting instead the spirit of ruthless criticism espoused by a young Marx. Therefore, the study relies on the premises of Marx's method of immanent critique: a process of theorizing which identities the presence of unexamined givens by means of which an uncritical attitude can be shown defining the relation of the knower (i.e., the Marxist) to the social conditions (i.e., the class interests of the proletariat) from which comes their knowledge (i.e., the politically revolutionary agency of the working class).

The results of this research argue Marxist authoritarianism is a phenomenon of the fetish character of labour's intellectual and political (i.e., Marxist) leadership, which is ultimately rooted in a postulate of the capitalist social division of labour. To be more specific, it argues the authoritarian dénouement of the European labour movement is the consequence of a contradiction inherent in Marxism's conception of politics between the

character and form of relations established on the basis of a didactic principle and those established on the basis of a principle of self-emancipation.

Once the didactic principle inscribed itself into the institutional form of labour's political organizations, the intellectual character of labour's political leadership acquired its fetish character. The relations presupposed by the principle of self-emancipation, therefore, never acquired a material existence beyond their articulation in knowledge as Marxist theory, which was then used to ground the authority of labour's political leadership over the class as a whole. As a result, rather than provide the framework in which labour could model for itself the emancipated relations its revolutionary agency sought to realize, labour's political organizations replicated politically the same relations of domination defining its socio-economic experience.

By tracing the development of this contradiction through the succession of institutional forms taken by Marxism in its efforts to establish its hegemony over the European labour movement—beginning with the International Workingmen's Association, followed by the German Social Democratic Party, and ending with the Russian Communist Party—a picture of Marxism's revitalized political imaginary begins to emerge. For contained in the emancipatory class interests Marxism deduced from the proofs of labour's structural subordination to capital are the two principles of communist social-economic organization: collective ownership of the means of production and a production/distribution process socialized by practices of democratic decision-making. Should these principles form the basis of Marxism political organization, no longer will it simply offer the working class the conditions of its emancipated relations in knowledge: it will provide them with a concrete example of these relations in reality.

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Decisions are best made by the people affected by them.
- Gloria Steinem

The materialist doctrine concerning the changing of circumstances and upbringing forgets that men change circumstances and that it is essential to educate the educator.
- Karl Marx

INTRODUCTION

I. Outlining the Object of Analysis and its Problematic

After the travesty of twentieth-century communism, is there not something impossible about Marxism *today*? Has it not been debunked, demonstratively proven defective in its authoritarian politics and its inefficient economics? Is not its tattered and shredded body of "scientific knowledge" the detritus of a bankrupt and discredited ideology? In short, don't the facts—of globalization, of the collapse of the Soviet Union, of the comi-tragedy of Stalinist North Korea, of the narco-terrorism of FARC rebels, of the violent irrelevance of south Asian Maoists, of the opulence and elite arrogance of China's party bosses (at all levels), of the end of history, of the ascent of finance, of the contradiction between the law of the average rate of profit and the labour theory of value, of the overwhelming soft power of American popular culture, of the "irrefutable" freedom of free markets—speak for themselves?

And yet, despite Marxism's political failures and apparently full repudiation in the face of the triumphant calamity of global capitalism[1] *it* persists, if not in the hearts of a

[1] Is not capitalist development in China under the guidance of the Communist Party capitalism's greatest victory to date? Not only has the capitalist mode of production (nearly) conquered the globe; it did so by means of its supposedly future negation, a 'communist' society. What greater proof of this triumph is there than the reality in which one can purchase a print of Warhol's silkscreened Mao to hang on the wall while wearing a Che t-shirt after just perusing Verso's 50% sale on all Marxist literature in celebration of Marx's 200th birthday.

militant working class then as a movement of intellectuals. Where it has faded politically,[2] Marxism has flourished intellectually, having found refuge in the academic institutions of late capitalism. Marxism has evidently established such a strong institutional foothold that its presence from time to time goads the academy's more conservative and reactionary horde to hysteria, stirring in them fantasies of the "Bolshevization" of higher learning.[3]

While it is true all academics are *not* Marxists, it is certainly not the case that all Marxists are academics. There are numerous complex and contradictory Marxist subject-positions both inside and outside of the academy. I am, however, interested in the "institutionalized" more than the autonomous form of contemporary Marxism if only because it is at the level of organization—be it the Party or the academy—that Marxism's past and present meet. The aim of this study is not so much to consider the history of Marxist ideas about politics, as it is to explore the history of the relation between

[2] With one exception: the Kurds strewn about the territories of northern Iraq, north eastern Syria and south western Turkey fighting both the Turkish State and the Islamic State draw both inspiration and organizational tactics from Marxist doctrines. The military wing of the Kurdistan Workers Party, the PKK, is in many regards the main opponent of ISIS in Northern Iraq and North-Eastern Syria (backed by Western air support). While western media coverage tends to focus on the feminist dimension of the PKK or the YPG Special Protection Units, they are conspicuously silent regarding its Marxist sympathies, or the fact that the current fight is but one battle in the war for Kurdish autonomy and self-determination in which Marxism has played, and will continue to play, an important part. The nature of this conflict resides in the history of imperialism in the Middle East, a fact entirely lost on contemporary and popular perspectives fixated by the horrific gore dominating the character of the conflict.

[3] Two examples: Conservative ideologues typically cite a 2006 study that surveyed the political identifications of American professors noting in the social sciences 18% self-identified as "Marxist". While the study's authors found this figure to be of little consequence, others were not so inclined. Bryan Caplan, for example, was incensed. "I urge you to rubberneck" he pleads. "If 18% of biologists believed in creationism, that would be a big deal. Why? Because creationism is nonsense. Similarly, if 18% of social scientists believed in Marxism, that too is a big deal. Why? Because Marxism is **nonsense**" (Caplan). And in just the past year in Canada, "cultural Marxism" has been 'outed' as a campus boogeyman accused of being the driving force behind a campaign of indoctrination precipitating the current bout of campus culture wars. The reference to 'cultural Marxism' is misleading, however. In all likelihood the term is meant to signify an authoritarian attitude and not anything specific within contemporary Marxist theory. Its use by the academy's conservative rabble is intended as a pejorative shorthand used to describe the moral self-righteousness of the academy's progressive liberal faction. As such, the shifting sentiments around the term 'cultural Marxism' are symptomatic of the antagonism internal to the academy.

revolutionary theory and revolutionary practice. And it is in the different forms of organization that the relation between these two modes of revolutionary praxis can be unpacked.

If one looks back over the course of the last eighty years or so, the relationship between Marxism and the academy, as both an object of study and a method of research, has in many ways proved symbiotic to both. Amongst various sectors of the Western academic world, and in particular the social sciences, Marxism has grown *lichen-like* appearing and contributing significantly to such fields as philosophy (T. Adorno, L. Althusser, E.V. Ilyenkov to name only a few), comparative literature (G. Lukács, F. Jameson), and sociology (A. Labriola; The Frankfurt School; A. Gramsci, E. Olin Wright; A Freenberg); it has even participated in the founding of a new discipline, cultural studies (T. Eagleton; S. Žižek; A Negri, M. Hardt; I, Szeman, to name only a few); even historians (E. Mandel; A. Sohn-Rethel) and geographers (D. Harvey) have contributed to the ever-expanding textual body of Marxist theory. It is also not entirely out of the question, either, for Marxist theory to find its way into course syllabi or to provide the conceptual constellation of research projects in the field of political science (C. Mouffe; E. Laclau; R. Cox; L. Panitch) and even economics (U. Krause; Kim Soo Heang), although the latter are indeed rare birds at least in comparison to their counterparts in other fields.

In the face of Marxism's political failures the academy has become akin to the proverbial (and for that matter, literal) drawing board. And since beggars are not in the position to be choosers, the academy is the site where contemporary efforts are underway to rehabilitate Marxism's political imaginary, presumably in hopes of revitalizing its

mass appeal. But does this, then, not make for a rather odd partnership considering the "Kathedersozialisten"—the professorial socialist—was treated with such open disdain during the so-called "golden era"[4] (around and following the First World War) by some Marxists who hollered and pontificated against the "theoretical revisionism" of Marxism at the hands of academically affiliated intellectuals (who nevertheless remained, in many cases, engaged party members)? A classic example of this hostility occurred in 1924 during the fifth congress of the Communist International (which notably was the first congress following Lenin's death). The incorrigible and demagogic Grigory Zinoviev famously intervened into the proceedings so as to confusedly denounce "theoretical revisionists" as somehow also "ultra-leftist": "We have a similar tendency in the German party," Zinoviev bleated, "Comrade Graziadei is a professor. Korsch is also a professor. (Interruption from the floor: Lukács is a professor, too!). If we get a few more of these professors spinning their Marxist theories we shall be lost" (qtd. in Rees *The Algebra of Revolution* 25).

Should this relation seem odd, it is not for the obvious reason—i.e., how it signals the contemporary fact Marxism is persona non grata to contemporary labour movements in the western world. Nor is there anything really odd about the fact a tolerant liberal social institution committed to the practice of academic freedom should make room for and even encourage the intellectual exploration of a discourse openly critical of and in many instances fundamentally hostile to its values (or rather to the way it dogmatically clings to the belief present social ills stem from the absence of these values and not their

[4] I borrow this term from Leszek Kolakowski who uses it in his massive study *Main Currents of Marxism* to describe the period beginning with the inception of Marxism and ending with the Soviet Union's authoritarian turn. I suppose the example of Zinoviev represents a transitional moment, the beginning of the period of 'breakdown' as Kolakowski labeled it.

practice). Rather, despite the appearance of an essential, even irreconcilable, difference between academics and what Lenin (perhaps symptomatically) called "professional revolutionaries," (i.e., party members, working-class militants, *orthodox Marxists* etc.), there is, in fact, a fundamental structural homology, that is, an essential Identity between these seemingly opposed subject positions, the revolutionary and the academic. And it is this homology that makes the partnership odd, if not outright uncanny. On what do I base this claim?

It is none other than Slavoj Žižek, self-professed "old Marxist" and Kathedersozialisten *par excellence*, who is responsible for preparing the conceptual ground of this identification. As he considers the claim the textual origins of Western Marxism are to be found in Georg Lukács' *History and Class Consciousness*[5]—whose exceptional status within Marxism he also argues stems from the fact it is "a philosophically extremely sophisticated book…[that is also] thoroughly engaged in the ongoing political struggle" (Žižek "Postface" 152)—Žižek ends up establishing an equivalence between Western Marxism, as the tradition that represents Marxism's integration into the academy, and Soviet orthodoxy, as the tradition that made Marxism synonymous with authoritarianism.

As both traditions withdrew from pursuing a "concrete analysis of the logic of the political process" –the thing that made Lukács' work exceptional—each, Žižek claims, in their own way transformed Marxism from a revolutionary praxis into a kind of general

[5] Besides Žižek, others make this claim as well. For instance, see: John Sitton's *Habermas and Contemporary Society* (although Sitton places the accent of influence on Weber, it is nevertheless through Lukács' work that Weber is acclimatized to Marxism and in this form presented to the Frankfurt School; Perry Anderson's *Considerations on Western Marxism*; Andrew Feenberg's *Lukács, Marx and the Sources of Critical Theory*; and Terry Eagleton's *Ideology: An Introduction*. As well, Žižek's "Postface" to Lukács' *A Defense of History and Class Consciousness* appears elsewhere under the title "From History and Class Consciousness to the Dialectic of Enlightenment… and Back!"

epistemological theory ("Postface" 154). With Soviet orthodoxy, it was the systematic development of Marxism into a universal science expounding the universal laws of social development—i.e., dialectical materialism. As Soviet state ideology Marxism's new purpose was to provide after-the-fact legitimation for party decisions (Žižek "Postface" 155).

With Western Marxism, the "fateful shift" came in the form of the abandonment of concrete socio-political analysis in favour of "philosophico-anthropological generalization" (Žižek "Postface" 157). As a result, Lukács' theory of reification, originally intended to describe the effects of the expanded reproduction of capitalist social relations (beyond their industrial and traditional market bases), becomes, in the hands of Western Marxists, the form of appearance of contemporary social relations' "quasi-transcendental 'principle,'" epitomized in the concept "instrumental reason" (Žižek "Postface" 157). Thus a strange familiarity links Soviet orthodoxy and Western Marxism to the extent that each, for different reasons, abandoned revolutionary Marxist politics to epistemology.[6] Here is where Žižek's analysis stops. The "old Marxist" does not pursue the line of inquiry this equivalence opens up. But, in drawing attention to the shift in Marxism with respect to the function and, therefore, status of knowledge, he nonetheless prepares the ground for its further exploration.

[6] It would seem even Žižek gets caught up in this game of reification despite encouraging academic Marxists to hold fast to "concrete analyses." Does he not undermine the concreteness of his own analysis by reducing the exceptional status of *History and Class Consciousness* to being an expression "yet *again*" [italics added] he says of Schelling's notion "the beginning is the negation of that which begins with it" ("Postface" 153)? Rather than *explain* the contradictory character of the political process as it is revealed through a consideration of the impact and fate of Lukács' *History and Class Consciousness*, the work serves as "yet again" another *description* of the dialectical logic defining the process (seemingly without regard to the circumstances).

Even though the identity Žižek establishes between Soviet orthodoxy and Western Marxism hinges on the transformation each induces in the function and status of Marxist knowledge, the significance of this shift is not to be considered for itself. Rather, its significance lies in the fact it also signals a shift in the character and form of the social relations Marxism, serving as an intermediary to, realizes. In this sense, it is not so much the content of the knowledge-claims made, although the truthfulness of these is always of immense importance, but the way knowledge functions to establish, legitimize, and reproduce a specific type of social relation.

The class-determined content of knowledge in general and Marxist theory in particular means the reality the latter depicts and the concepts and categories it uses to do so are those of the experiences of the working classes. Marxist theory, as even Marx imagined it, is the scientific expression of the standpoint of the proletariat. It is knowledge of labour's structural subordination to capital, proof of the objectivity of its exploitation at the hands of the capitalist class. Even though this knowledge comes to labour from outside, in the form of Marxist theory, it is nonetheless immanent to labour's experience.

So, while Western Marxism did not use knowledge to legitimize a politically authoritarian regime, as Soviet orthodoxy did, the relations it did establish were predominantly academic and so were ordered according to a didactic principle which meant they were of an already established form and character, one which severely limited the proletariat's ability to assimilate the critical knowledge of its objective conditions, let alone participate in the development of the body of knowledge—i.e., Marxist theory—in which its own experiences were reflected and expressed.

I would argue this legacy still defines the situation contemporary academic Marxism[7] confronts, despite the fact the funding of mass education throughout the period of welfare state capitalism meant, as Tony Smith points out, "wage labourers as a class now spent an unprecedented portion of their lives in formal and informal education and training" ("The General Intellect" 238). The idea the shift in function and status of knowledge also signals a shift in the character and form of social relations has a tremendous impact on how we should understand contemporary efforts to rehabilitate Marxism's political imaginary and the likelihood of these efforts actually revitalizing Marxism's role in twenty-first century socialist strategy.

To date, the most common strategy has focused on modifying Marxism's conceptual lexicon and its methodological premises. One of the most popular examples of this can be found in the work of Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri. They explain the need to modify Marxist theory with the premise that "our understanding must be fitted to the contemporary social world and thus change along with history," which naturally means, "once history has moved on and the social reality changes, the old theories are no

[7] A note on terminology: contemporary Marxism is typically classified according to three groupings, "Marxist," "post-Marxists," and "neo-Marxists." "Marxists" like David Harvey for instance, maintain a commitment to the basic premises of Marxism's methodological and conceptual lexicon and so might be defined by the attitude Lukács professed in his essay "What is Orthodox Marxism?" when he wrote, orthodoxy in this sense "is the scientific conviction that dialectical materialism is the road to truth and that its methods can be developed, expanded and deepened only along the lines laid down by its founders" (1). Both "neo-Marxism" and "post-Marxism" do not share these commitments. Göran Therborn offers the following definitions: "Post-Marxism," he writes in *From Marxism to Post-Marxism?* "[refers] to writers with an explicitly Marxist background, [but] whose recent work has gone beyond Marxism's problematic and who do not publicly claim a continuing Marxist commitment," while "the term neo-Marxist" describes "theoretical projects which both signal a significant departure from classical Marxism" yet still "retain an explicit commitment to it" (165). I prefer the term "academic Marxist" for the following reasons: a) there is within Marxism a historical precedent found in the term "Kathedersozialisten," which speaks to an internal antagonism within Marxism I recognize is very important to any project that seeks to rehabilitate Marxism's mass appeal. And b), unlike the labels "neo-Marxist" and "post-Marxist," the term "academic Marxist" does not conceal or obliterate the two most important predicates upon which the term is built: 1) its predominantly intellectual character, and 2) the institutional setting in which the subject position of "academic Marxist" is located.

longer adequate" (*Multitude* 140). Towards this end, they propose that Marxism update itself by substituting for Marx's dialectical method a more fashionable approach, one that takes into account recent developments in French philosophy. In *Empire,* they write,

> Our reasoning is based on two methodological approaches that are intended to be non-dialectical and absolutely immanent: the first is *critical and deconstructive*[8]aiming to subvert the hegemonic languages and social structures and thereby reveal an alternative ontological basis that resides in the creative and productive practices of the multitude; the second is *constructive and ethico-political*, seeking to lead the processes of the production of subjectivity toward the constitution of an effective social, political alternative, a new constitutive power. (*Empire* 47)

Since the modifications Hardt and Negri propose are imagined as mirroring historical developments in the object of analysis (i.e., capitalist society), it remains unclear to what extent they could help explain Marxism's political experiences. As a result, it also remains unclear to what degree the old theories, and therefore the methodological premises upon which they rest, can be said to be responsible for Marxism's political failures, since these are assumed to have been more or less correct at the time.

The work of Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe provides another important example of efforts to revitalize Marxism by modifying its basic premises. Laclau and Mouffe are known primarily for the transposition of Swiss linguist Ferdinand de Saussure's insight into the nature of semiotic relationships into the Marxist edifice.[9] To Laclau and Mouffe, it was the overtly deterministic brand of Marxism, which had found its fullest expression sometime around the time of the Second International [1889-1916]

[8] Slavoj Žižek argues against deconstruction as a method based on the premise 'there is no meta-language.' In *The Sublime Object of Ideology* he writes, "To put it more bluntly, the position from which the deconstructivist can always make sure of the fact that 'there is no meta-language', that no utterance can say precisely what it intended to say, that the process of enunciation always subverts the utterance, is *the position of meta-language itself* in its purest, most radical form" (173).

[9] Laclau and Mouffe also incorporated Jacques Lacan's conception of the "master signifier," which I regard as an extension of the more fundamental insight they borrow from de Saussure.

that ended up nurturing the nascent tendencies within Marxism towards authoritarianism. For Mouffe, the seeds of essentialist thinking were planted in Marx (ism)'s mind by the Hegelian conception of history. It was Hegel's lingering influence, Mouffe argues in her 1979 essay "Hegemony and Ideology in Gramsci," that led Marxists to consider "all contradictions as moments in the development of a single contradiction—the class contradiction—which as a consequence leads one to attribute a class character to all political and ideological elements" (171).[10]

With de Saussure's work, both Laclau and Mouffe saw an opportunity to undermine this essentialism and break Marxist theory free of its own dogma. In the same way de Saussure argued there is no necessary relation between a word and its referent, Laclau and Mouffe introduced into Marxism's methodological presuppositions the position there is no necessary relation between social reality and its symbolization (Butler *Live Theory* 31). "There is no sutured space peculiar to 'society,'" they argue, "since the social itself has no essence" (*Hegemony and Socialist Strategy* 96).[11]

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[10] Seyla Benhabib, however, directly refutes this claim in the essay "The Logic of Civil Society." While not discussing Mouffe's claim, Benhabib argues,

> Marx distinguishes between the order of theory and the order of the real, because thought must render an account of a moving, dynamic, and self-reproducing totality. Viewed in light of the circular movement of production and reproduction, the categorical exposition of the theory reveals, beneath the linearity of logical sequence, a different order of relationships that obtain between the categories insofar as these are also aspects of a concrete, self-generating, and structural totality. The Hegelian logic of exposition, on the other hand, is defined by the unfolding of a single conceptual principle. (164)

[11] It should be considered whether Laclau and Mouffe's anti-essentialism is just another form of essentialism. By 'essence' they mean ultimate cause. But, as with the deconstructivist, do they not end up saying the opposite of what they intend? By asserting the non-essential character of the social, its "openness," do they not nevertheless articulate it in terms of its essential quality, i.e., its openness? In the same way the finite can be shown to possess the quality of its opposite (as destined *always* to disappear) and the infinite can also be shown to possess the quality of its opposite (in not being finite the infinite is limited by what it is not and so is not what it claims it is), so too does the non-essential definition of the social succumb to a similar dialectic: the social's definition as fundamentally open is meant to deny the possibility of its determination ever occurring out of necessity, but, since this is intended to apply to all possible circumstances in which a social is constituted, its openness becomes its necessary determination.

Yet, despite these modifications, contemporary academic Marxism arrives at a conception of politics remarkably similar to the conception found in "traditional" Marxism. As the strange identity between Soviet orthodoxy and Western Marxism suggests, the similarity comes down to the role ascribed to the technician of knowledge, the intellectual and his expertise. With Hardt and Negri, the central importance of the intellectual follows from the task of theory, which is to reveal, "in the creative and productive practices of the multitude" an "alternative ontological basis"—i.e., program of radical politics. To assume otherwise would be to abstract from the fact the separation of intellectual from manual labour is a commonly recognized characteristic of the technical division of labour within capitalist society. They also claim, as intellectuals, their method will help them "lead the processes of the production of subjectivity" (*Empire* 47).

The assumption is the same in *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy,* where Laclau and Mouffe ascribe to intellectuals the important work of "political mediation" (85). Only now, thanks to the insights of Saussurian linguistics, political mediation can finally be conceived in accordance with the logic of contingency, a logic Laclau and Mouffe feel opens the discursive space of society to the practice of "*articulation*," which they identify as a key process in establishing hegemonic socials relation and define as "a *political construction* from dissimilar elements" (*Hegemony and Socialist Strategy* 85). It would then seem that the role of the intellectual within Marxism, whether in its classical or contemporary periods, does not change; only the ideas with which Marxists—and in this case academic Marxists—conceive politics change.

The reliance within contemporary academic Marxism on the role of the intellectual needs to be seen as a conceit of the fetish character of intellectual activity

springing from its separation from manual labour. It is the uncritical assumption of the fact of this separation and so represents a conservative attitude despite its claims to the opposite. In its conservatism it normalizes the social division that functions by means of the technical division and so needs to be seen as a failure of critical thinking within itself.

The importance academic Marxism ascribes to the intellectual can be seen lurking behind the diagnostic theme of a communication breakdown between contemporary social movements. As the sun set on Euro-Communism, it was in the twilight of Marxism's revolutionary imagery of a collective singular subject/object of history that the scattered constellations of the new social movements began mapping out new political horizons. Inside the seemingly limitless expansion of the processes of globalization there proliferated the dispersed series of new subject positions and new social movements. Surveying new militancy at the end of the last millennium Hardt and Negri suggest that the often pointless and usually abbreviated outbursts of emancipatory political projects are to a significant degree hampered by an inability to communicate. The various factions and instances of contemporary social movements typically fail to translate themselves into a global context, in large part because they fail to communicate laterally between (and within) themselves. For Hardt and Negri, popular struggle has "become all but incommunicable" (*Empire* 54).[12]

David Harvey also echoes these sentiments.[13] According to Harvey, the struggles against expanded reproduction were, on the one hand, internal struggles dominated by the

[12] Are not the Occupy movement and the Arab Spring exemplary in this respect, or Black Lives Matter and Idle No More?

[13] Harvey does this despite fundamentally disagreeing with Hardt and Negri's approach and project. And speaking of a communication breakdown, without coming out fully in his opposition to Hardt and Negri, Harvey prefers to let his readers infer the opposition from his analysis and from subtle hints like the title of *The New Imperialism,* which might have had for its subtitle: "Against Hardt and Negri's theory of a post-imperialist Empire."

myth of the revolutionary industrial working class. On the other hand, the struggle against imperialist displacement, or what Harvey calls "accumulation by dispossession" comprised the anti-colonial movement often waged under nationalistic banners or ethnic narratives, but also includes new social movements such as feminist politics, ecological movements, and minority rights struggles (*The New Imperialism* 149).[14] Though both fields of struggle were in essence, according to Harvey, anti-capitalist, linked organically by the historical geography of late twentieth-century capitalism, this by no means meant they were both equally pro-socialist. In the end, it was the "single minded concentration of much of the Marxist and Communist-inspired left on proletarian struggles to the exclusion of all else," that Harvey laments as "the fatal mistake" (*The New Imperialism* 171).

As much as these analyses accurately reflect the gulf between Marxism and new social movements, as well as the gulfs within and between new social movements, they also function as a means to legitimate the role of the intellectual in a program of radical politics. Therefore, despite any pretences towards inclusivity, difference, or plurality, such an approach still inscribes between the multitude and their political agency a mediating role performed by expert knowledge, which, as a result, gives central importance to the technicians of knowledge, the intellectuals. This "modern" revitalized conception of Marxism's political imaginary bears a striking similarity to the older conception outlined, for example, by Georg Lukács. In Lukács' political analyses, Marxism's political leadership was seen as a function of its intellectual leadership. Intellectual leadership, Lukács argues, "can only be one thing: the process of making

[14] See chapter four of Harvey's *The New Imperialism* for a detailed discussion of the concept of "accumulation by dispossession."

social development conscious, the clear understanding of what is essential as opposed to obscure and distorted slogans" ("'Intellectual Workers' and the Problem of Intellectual Leadership" 90).

There is ample evidence to support the argument that Lukács' conception is in line with Marx's and that the conception of politics originally advanced by traditional Marxism ascribed to intellectuals the same central role contemporary academic Marxists do. For instance, in a letter to Friedrich Bolte written in 1871 at a particularly tense time within the International, Marx discusses how the inherent limitations of trade unionism can only be overcome by the political organization of the working classes. Where the proletariat, he says, is "not far enough advanced in its organization to undertake a decisive campaign against the…political power of the ruling classes, it must at any rate be *trained* for this…"[italics added] ("Letter to Bolte" 258). Consider also the descriptions of communists given by Marx and Engels in *The Manifesto of the Communist Party*. Communists are distinguished by their intelligence and defined on the basis of what *they know*: communists "have 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" (Marx and Engels *Manifesto* 484). There is even a passage written by Engels where he swoons about his love for "abstract principles" and how this love will "guarantee the success of a philosophical Communism" in Germany ("Progress of Social Reform on the Continent"). But, to be fair, Engels' words were written in 1843, so cannot in good faith be described as the words of a Marxist. Nevertheless, they do signal an attitude present in Marxism, and, since the political history of Marxism is marked by its descent into authoritarianism, it

would seem irresponsible to ignore the possibility there is a link between the role of intellectuals in Marxism and its authoritarian politics. To those who might balk at the possibility of such an indictment, there are plenty of historical precedents to suggest otherwise. Just read Plato's *Republic*![15]

II. Defining the Method of Analysis.

There are two important consequences I want to draw attention to in this brief exploration of the relation between contemporary academic Marxism and its own political history. First, to the extent contemporary academic Marxism shares with its antecedent "antipodes" the uncritical assumption the political process need be mediated by intellectuals, there is a lacuna within contemporary Marxism when it comes to critical insight into it its own political history.[16] This is unfortunate to say the least, since

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[15] As a means to further elaborate on this claim, consider the social function of logic, long regarded as a domain of intellectuals. In its inception it is used to rationalize slavery. Take, for example, the first law of formal logic: the law of identity A=A. When this is used to express the difference between individuals in terms of their natures it functions to rationalize the form of domination specific to slavery. "Any human being," Aristotle argued, "that by nature belongs not to himself but to another is by nature a slave" (*Politics* 32). It might appear as though Aristotle is differentiating between classes of humans, but what he is in fact doing is excluding the slave from the category of human: the slave cannot be human because it does not meet the requirements of the first law of identity: to belong to oneself, A=A. And yet, slaves can still be known through their subsumption under the law of identity, just not as humans. They are property. They are what belong to another. "There can be no objection in principle to the mere fact that one should command and another obey: that is both necessary and expedient. Indeed, some things are so divided right from birth, some to rule, some to be ruled" (Aristotle *Politics* 32). Aside from begging the question, the upshot of Aristotle's reasoning functions to deny the potentiality inherent in slaves "to belong to oneself."

[16] As another example of this difficulty, take the optimistic note on which Perry Anderson ends his conspectus of Western Marxism. Writing less than a decade after the French Revolt of May 1968 he says of it, as the first massive revolutionary upsurge in half a century it was "a profound historical turning point" (*Considerations on Western Marxism* 95). "The re-emergence of revolutionary masses outside the control of a bureaucratized party rendered *potentially* conceivable the unification of Marxist theory and working class practice once again" (*Considerations on Western Marxism* 95).

What is perhaps a testament to the difficulty academic Marxists have had in confronting the legacy of Marxism's political failures, Anderson, in his optimism, seems completely unaware of how the decidedly *Leninist* conclusion he reaches regarding Western Marxism almost certainly abort the potentiality he only just praised. He explains that because "Marxism aspires in principle to be a *universal* science… the term "Western" inevitably implies a *limiting* judgement" which means, "Western Marxism was necessarily less than Marxism to the extent that it was Western" (*Considerations on Western Marxism* 94). Failing to establish the link between party bureaucracy and the belief in Marxism as a universal science (the link being the rigidity with which both confront social reality and how the latter is mobilized to justify the

overcoming the association of Marxism with authoritarianism is perhaps the single most important task facing the work of rehabilitating Marxism's mass appeal. Contributing to this effort is the *raison d'être* of this study.

Second, having got a sense of the problem confronting contemporary Marxists, it is possible to turn to the question the problem raises, that of which method we must take to arrive at a solution. One thing is certain, though: a concrete analysis of the logic of Marxism's political experience demands a methodology sensitive to the fact the knowledge it will come to produce must also function as an intermediary by means of which the working class relates to its own political agency. In other words, the results of the analysis must possess a practical dimension useful to the class struggle in the here and now.

At first glance, a number of methodological approaches both within and without the Marxist tradition present themselves as possible analytic frameworks. For instance, it would seem the shift in the status and function of knowledge forming the basis of the equivalence Žižek establishes between Western Marxism and Soviet orthodoxy bears a striking familiarity to the structure of myth as analysed by Claude Lévi-Strauss. When considered in light of its lack of political practice, does not contemporary critical theory come to resemble a pattern reminiscent of Lévi-Strauss' discussion of the temporal

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former) suggests Anderson account of Marxism's political experiences lacks the insight necessary to placate history's propensity to use our ignorance as a springboard for its repeat performances. Adding to this is the fact he also seems unaware of the difficulties the new social movements, i.e., "the re-emergence of revolutionary masses", understandably weary of socialist politics, might pose for his vision of Marxism as a universal science.

But Marxism is not a universal science. It is the intellectual expression of the revolutionary working classes. As such, its ultimate aim is not the production of knowledge but the transformation of the conditions from which knowledge emerges. Were it to achieve this aim, the body of thought known as Marxist theory would no longer contain any truth, since the world it previously described would have passed into history. It follows from this that Marx's method would also become redundant insofar as its basis was the object it was designed to comprehend. At the very least, the method would undergo such significant modifications that it would hardly be recognizable as the Marxist method of social analysis.

dimensions of myth? The pattern Lévi-Strauss observed begins with the understanding that any object of theoretical analysis inevitably refers to some past event, sequence or phenomenon. In order to detect and interpret the effects of the past on the present recourse is made to some timeless pattern, some "philosophico-anthropological generalization," be it the hegemonic wax and wane of the rise and fall of civilizations, the eternal refrain of the world's natural rhythms, or the epistemological implications of the dialectical interpenetration of opposites. Finally, from this process comes the decipherment of some clue, some lead from which future developments may be deduced.

Since the production of theory is not some isolated act, the work of some "genius," but is embedded in a whole series of practices, material rituals even —from its presentation at academic conferences, its preparation for publication, its circulation through publication channels and distribution networks (across various platforms, some of which designate "higher" species of theory, i.e., reputable journals vs. open access and self-publishing platforms like blogs, etc.) and its incorporation into the pedagogical activities of the academy—the similarity with the structure of myth seems, from a theoretical point of view at least, promising. The similarity becomes all the more striking once we recall that Lévi-Strauss defined politics as myth's "modern replacement" ("The Structural Study of Myth" 430).[17] Since it provides a framework for the description of the relation between a certain type of thinking (in abstract universals) and its associated material practices (i.e., theorizing as ritual), the method pioneered by Claude Lévi-Strauss in his analysis of the structure of myth has much to offer a study aiming to

[17] To continue with this line of thought, it is certainly tempting to read in Western Marxism's founding narrative the story of the preservation of Marxism's theoretical core in the face of the movement's broader destruction at the hands of bandits and fanatics. In preparing the ground for the generalization of Marx's analysis of the commodity-form among disparate fields of inquiry Western Marxism ritualized the act of theorizing and so elevated Marxism to the status of myth.

produce a concrete analysis of the logic of Marxism's political experience, or at least it would seem it has much to offer such a study.

To make the proposition even more attractive, there is even the historical precedent of an encounter between Marxism and Lévi-Strauss' structuralism in the work of French philosopher Louis Althusser. As to this encounter, Althusser is concerned with the possibility Marx's concept of representation (*Darstellung*) contains the epistemological notion of structural causality, which he considers might be the contact point between structuralism and Marxism (and thus solve the dilemmas of determinism/essentialism in Marxism). Representation, Althusser claims, designates "the mode of presence of the structure in its effects" (*Reading Capital* 188).

But there is a real limit to Althusser's efforts to incorporate structuralism into the Marxist edifice. Similar to Žižek's approach, the explanation of the logic of the political process is in actual fact only its uncritical description. Žižek claimed to explain this logic by alluding to the way some political event (the impact of Lukács' work and the barrage of criticism it elicited from the Bolsheviks, which ultimately forced him to renounce it and withdraw from political activity) seem to testify to the contradictory character of the process, which then becomes the basis of the explanation of its logic. But dialectical logic does not govern the process as much as it indicates the complex of contradictory relations giving the process its content. These relations are themselves the form by which antagonistic groups pursue their specific material interests. Tracing the basis of these relations to the material interests they serve is the key to explaining their contradictory character. Insofar as Althusser's concern remains fixated on structural analysis, his work contributes to an epistemological project, not a politically revolutionary one (in which

epistemological concerns are resolved by revolutionary activity). As a result, the emphasis on epistemology causes Marxism's theoretical focus to drift ever further afield from the "concrete analysis of the logic of the political process."[18]

The reference to structuralism does, however, bear some fruit, mainly in the form of the concept of representation (*Darstellung*), which has significance for this study and its methodology. Soviet philosopher Evald Ilyenkov's understanding of representation is congruent with Althusser's, but where the latter stops at structure in order to ponder epistemological problems, the former advances, crucially, to social relations. In his essay "The Concept of the Ideal," Ilyenkov uses Marx's conception of Darstellung to differentiate between two opposed conceptions of Ideality, one conception being synonymous with a process internal to consciousness (thinking in abstract universals) and one designating the alienated but nonetheless objective form of people's social activities. He writes, "this relationship of *representation* is a relationship in which one sensuously perceived thing performs the role or function of representative of quite another thing, and to be even more precise, the universal nature of that other thing, that is, something 'other' which in sensuous bodily terms is quite unlike it" (Ilyenkov "The Concept of the Ideal"). Ilyenkov's definition posits a sensual-suprasensual dynamic similar to Lévi-Strauss and Althusser (i.e., timeless pattern and structural causality respectively). But Ilyenkov goes further. He explains how the suprasensual,[19] which appears as a thing distinct from its

[18] Additionally, the link Lévi-Strauss establishes between ancient myth and modern politics suggests his analysis culminates in the unearthing of its own timeless pattern, which, again, suggests this approach is better equipped to describe its object than to explain it. I am in agreement with the conclusion Warren Breckman reaches in his *Adventures in the Symbolic*. There he states, "the structuralist understanding of the symbolic is incapable of conceiving forms of critical thought and action that could disrupt the hegemonic ideological forms, as structuralism takes these to be constitutive of our subjectivity itself" (12). Ultimately, Lévi-Strauss' insistence on the autonomy of the symbolic order from other levels of reality disqualifies it from methodologically orientating Marxism toward the task of rehabilitating its political imaginary.
[19] Marx did not use this term, but the term "socio-natural" (*Capital* 164).

representation by the sensual thing is in reality "the form of people's activity, the form of life activity which they perform together" ("The Concept of the Ideal"). This complex process of conversion in which a historically determined social relationship is transformed into a thing is none other than an iteration of Marx's theory of fetishism, only approached from the perspective of the concept of *Darstellung*.

Marx's theory of fetishism is like Einstein's theory of relativity or Freud's theory of the unconscious in that the popular understanding of it tends to differ in significant ways from the picture one gets from a more nuanced or in-depth consideration. The oft-quoted definition of commodity fetishism states "the mysterious character of the commodity form consists therefore simply in the fact that the commodity reflects the social characteristics of men's own labour as objective characteristics of the products of labour themselves, as the socio-natural properties of these things" (Marx *Capital* 164). It is, however, incorrect to take this statement to mean the social relations among individuals are concealed or hidden behind the relation between things. If this were the case the conversion typical of fetishism would be an effect of faulty thinking: that is, individuals entertaining the wrong ideas of things.[20] This would be to reduce fetishism to an epistemological concept and the radical dimensions of Marxist theory to an epistemological project. An analysis of capital in its money-form would then conclude,

[20] Political programs developed on this basis would then direct attention to changing people's attitudes, or at least the words they use to express themselves. The most obvious example would be the evolution of terms used to identity Indigenous peoples. What continues to drive this evolution is the fact the underlying antagonism defining the relation between indigenous and non-indigenous peoples is irreducible to language. Rather, it is a consequence of an entire socio-economic order and the political institutions that administer this order's relation to the peoples it conquered in the process of its expansion. Therefore, whether latent or explicit in the term, the antagonism it designates is simply not resolved at the level of language. The evolution in the concept of racism from 'traditional' racism to 'casual' racism is likewise not so much a deepening of the concept and its ability to explain social antagonism, but an instance of its repudiation, of the fact it is not capable of providing an exhaustive explanation of the social antagonism it nonetheless registers but fails to understand.

for instance, that money, being a symbol of value, conceals a relation in which qualitatively different acts of labour are rendered commensurate. As a result, the historically distinct character of capital, considered in its money-form, would recede into the background, replaced instead by a consideration of money's unique and ahistorical ability to function as a symbol reflecting the universal attributes of some other thing. In other words, capital in its money-form would be apprehended at the level of its "philosophico-anthropological generalization" and not at the level of its historical specificity.

But this is not what Marx had in mind. Rather, with commodity fetishism it is, as Soviet economist I.I. Rubin put it, the case that "social production relations inevitably [take] the form of things and [can] not be expressed except through things" (*Essays on Marx's Theory of Value* 6). Things do not simply represent or reflect contemporary social relations; they are the intermediaries by means of which these social relationships are established and reproduced. Money is not a symbol of a hidden social relation but the material expression of that relation.[21] It is the structural dynamics of capitalist economies that cause things to play a specific social role, and it is as a result of this role that they acquire particular social properties. These properties are not the property of subjective misperceptions, but the appearance in the mind of the alienated form of people's social activity, be it of a productive, political or educational character.

[21]Because it must appear in the commodity-form, the social character of labour requires for its realization the exchange of commodities on the market. Should this movement not occur, should labour's product be unable to command sufficient market demand, the social character of the labour spent on its production fails to find any social validation. Once it becomes apparent a certain labour-process is no longer capable of affirming its social character, *it is because it has ceased to find a buyer on the market*—this is framework in which appears the phenomenon of unemployment.

From a methodological standpoint, the emphasis on social relations is crucial, since it is precisely the authoritarian relation in Marxism that needs to be explained as a condition of Marxism's political rehabilitation. There are numerous examples in Marx's writings, often whenever he discusses method, where he states that categories and their constellation of respective concepts express in intellectual form historically determined social relations. For instance, in *The Poverty of Philosophy* Marx states, "economic categories are the intellectual expression of social production relations" (48). Again, in 1859, more than a decade after *The Poverty of Philosophy,* Marx reiterates this premise, stating again the content of categories are "forms of life and conditions of existence" (*Contribution to a Critique* 212). And, nearly a decade later in *Capital,* he again states, "The categories of bourgeois economy consist of such like forms. They are forms of thought expressing with social validity the conditions and relations of a definite, historically determined mode of production, viz., the production of commodities" (169).

In the same way "one does not judge an individual by what he thinks about himself," but by the "contradictions of material life," the role of the intellectual in Marxism's political history cannot be explained simply on the basis of the image Marxists, or their modern intellectual counterparts, have of themselves (Marx "Preface to a Contribution" 5). It is an altogether uncritical description, and not a critical explanation, to assume intellectual activity can supposedly reveal "ontological alternatives," or is allegedly the only form of mediation by means of which radical political subjectivities are "articulated" and constructed of "dissimilar elements." The role of the intellectual in Marxism's political history can only be understood once these "special" properties are

explained as the alienated form the proletariat's political agency took (and will continue to take) as it appears in the minds of Marxists.

In addition to contributing to contemporary efforts to revitalize Marxism's political imaginary, I envision the study picking up where Georg Lukács' 1922 work *History and Class Consciousness* left off. Lukács' account of reification, which sought to explain the social impact of the processes of expanded reproduction on consciousness by synthesizing Max Weber's sociological work on the rationality of bureaucracy with Marx's theory of fetishism,[22] is believed to have provided the theorists of the Frankfurt School with the conceptual framework they would use to confront the unsettling fact (in which is included the collapse of the European labour movement into authoritarianism) that mankind ineluctably appeared to be, as Horkheimer and Adorno put it, "sinking into a new kind of barbarism" ("Preface" xiv).

According to the standard historiography, Lukács' influence on Western Marxism was at the same time Western Marxism's one-sided appropriation of his work. What this interpretation neglects is the way this one-sided appropriation foreclosed to Western Marxism the possibility of assimilating the truly radical and truly historical dimension of Lukács' work. For the genuine insight the concept of reification, as a development of Marx's theory of fetishism, contains comes to light only once it is juxtaposed with Lukács' other completely neglected theoretical insight concerning the organizational form of Marxism's political parties, an insight that represents the concrete analysis of what at the time was the historical specificity of the ongoing political struggle.

[22] In "Reification and the Consciousness of the Proletariat" Lukács states, "Reification is, then, the necessary, immediate reality of every person living in capitalist society. It can be overcome only by constant and constantly renewed efforts to disrupt the reified structure of existence by concretely relating to the concretely manifested contradictions of the total development, by becoming conscious of the immanent meanings of these contradictions for the total development" (197).

It is not until the final essay of *History and Class Consciousness* that this insight appears. In "Towards a Methodology of the Problem of Organization" Lukács makes the following claim: "Organization is the form of mediation between theory and practice" (299). The significance of this statement lies in the overlooked fact it is the expression in theory of *the accumulated truth* of Marxism's political experience, an experience that began in 1864 with the International Workingmen's Association and climaxed with the European labour movement's authoritarian dénouement, that is, with the Bolshevik's refusal to transfer "all power to the soviets" following the overthrow of Russia's provisional government in late October, 1917.

On the surface, these two moments of Lukacs' work, the concept of reification and a theory of organizational form, appear as though they refer, on the one hand, to developments in the object of study (i.e., objective developments in the structure of the capitalism[23]), and, on the other hand, as developments in the subject of action (i.e., the political organization of the revolutionary proletariat). Yet, it is by turning them to face each other that they acquire their radical significance and so constitute the real legacy of Lukács' work, a legacy that has yet to be taken up.

By turning these two moments of Lukács' work towards each other it becomes clear that a concrete analysis of the logic of Marxism's political process calls for the immanent critique of the principles determining the organizational form of labour's

[23] In the essay "Reification and the Consciousness of the Proletariat" Lukács describes these developments in the following terms:

> Thus the extent to which [commodity] exchange is the dominant form of metabolic change in a society cannot simply be treated in quantitative terms—as would harmonize with the modern modes of thought already eroded by the reifying effects of the dominant commodity form. The distinction between a society where this form is dominant, permeating every expression of life, and a society where it only makes an episodic appearance is essentially one of quality. For depending on which is the case, all the subjective and objective phenomena in the societies concerned are objectified in qualitatively different ways. (84)

political institutions in terms of Marx's theory of fetishism. Lukács' thesis gathers from Marxism's political experience its most essential moments. By emphasizing the importance of organizational form, particularly at a time when authoritarianism in Marxism was about to reach its tragic crescendo, Lukács' insight into political organization indicates the object of a concrete analysis embracing Marxism's political process can only be the different organizational forms Marxism passed through in its attempt to give reality to a radical politics, which unfortunately was inhibited by the uncritical attitude it held with respect to its own principles.

An elementary procedure of immanent critique is to expose as a "subjective determination" (this is a Hegelian term) what had hitherto been taken to be an objective property of the object. The subjective character of this determination does not mean it is synonymous with individual consciousness. What appears in the mind of the individual is in actuality the reified form of the social activity in question, and so appears in everyone's mind this way. An immanent critique is, therefore, a critique of ideology. As Seyla Benhabib puts it, the aim of such an approach is twofold: on the one hand, it aims to reveal in modes of thought the presence of unexamined givens so that, on the other hand, it can show how these modes are ultimately "grounded in the uncritical relation of the knower to the conditions out of which knowledge emerges" (*Critique, Norm, Utopia* 30).

But the transition from the identification of subjective determinations to the analysis of the conditions out of which knowledge comes is not so straightforward. The causality between the two moments is not as mechanical as the presentation at first sight suggests. There is between these two moments a mediating term. As such, this term is

what functions in the political process under study as its concretely universal element, an element by means of which the contradictory reality of the process can be seen unfolding. To paraphrase another comment by Marx regarding his method, the explanatory power of the concrete universal stems from the way it assigns all the other elements their rank and influence and so allows the analysis to define the specific weight of each element within the process under scrutiny (*Grundrisse* 47).

By approaching the phenomenon of authoritarianism in Marxism's political history, guided by the premises contained in Marx's theory of fetishism—that the categories of political theory, like the categories of political economy are "forms of life"—it is possible to identify, as the basis of a concrete analysis, the three most significant aspects in which the object should be divided for analysis. These are: 1) the subjective determination—i.e., the authority of the working-classes' political leadership; 2) the social conditions from which knowledge emerges—i.e., the organizational form assumed by labour's political associations; and 3) the concrete universal by means of which the activities inscribed in specific social conditions are given the form of subjective determinations—i.e., the knowledge of both the working classes' structural subordination to capital and the conditions necessary for the classes' emancipation.

III. Stating the Thesis

Enough has been said at this point to introduce the primary thesis of this study. The main thesis I will defend argues *fetishism is the authentic leitmotif of Marxism during the period of its most pronounced political activity.* Stated by way of a simple analogy, this thesis implies the following: the Marxist position—the proof of the objectivity of labour's exploitation and the deduction from this proof of the necessity of

the political category of revolution—first begins to take shape in the (in)famous inversion (what Benhabib has called a gesture of *defetishization*) of the Hegelian dialectic: what appeared as the self-objectification of Spirit in the historical process was, according to Marx's insight, "nothing but the estranged mind of the world thinking within its self-estrangement" (*1844 Manuscripts* 100); or, in other words, an uncritical description of a real feature of modern intellectual activity and its fetish character, which ultimately has its roots in the capitalist social division of labour.

Fetishism in this context refers to the way intellectual activity, in its separation from manual labour (a *sine qua non* of the capitalist social relation), appears as if thought/consciousness engages with reality at a more fundamental level than manual labour does, if only because intellectual activity (assuming the form of expression of the individual's relation to personal property both inside and outside the production process) reserves for itself, especially in relation to manual labour, *the right to decide.* Similarly, I will argue, in light of the European labour movement's authoritarian dénouement, what appeared as the actualization of the essence of a revolutionary working class, first in the organizational framework of the International Workingmen's Association, then in the generic political party (The German Social Democrats), and finally in the Bolshevik revolution, turned out to be *nothing more than an estranged form of politics acting within its estranged political arrangements*. Where Marx may have overcome the fetish character of intellectual activity in theory, it continued to govern his actions, as well as the actions of subsequent generations of Marxists, by defining the institutional logic of their political organizations.

As a result, what appeared in the minds of Marxists as a didactic principle upon which was based their approach to revolutionary politics was from the perspective of the working class the authority of its political leadership grounded in the former's proximity to knowledge, specifically the historical knowledge of the conditions of labour's self-emancipation from capital. But from the perspective of Marx's theory of fetishism and its relation to Lukács' thesis on organizational form, what appeared, as a didactic principle on the one hand, and political authority on the other, was actually the form of appearance of the postulate of social organization pertaining to the capitalist social division of labour. What, therefore, appeared in the minds of Marxists and proletariat alike was, in reality, the alienated form of the working classes' political agency.

The defetishization achieved in method and at the level of theory by Marx failed to replicate itself at the level of political and social organization, if only because Marxist politics uncritically absorbed the social and political organization of its opponent. And yet, if this is the case, it is also true that within this uncritical aping, there was nonetheless a critical process working itself out, the apex of which is Lukács' thesis on organization. In the passage of Marxism through successive political forms, from the International to the political party and from the political party to the Bolsheviks and the Soviet state apparatus, there develops an awareness of the need to theorize organizational form as a prerequisite to any theory of revolutionary practice.

Lukács' thesis might be read as an attempt to incorporate into Marxism's political consciousness Weber's conclusions regarding bureaucratic organizational structures. In *Economy and Society* (published posthumously in the same year Lukács wrote "Towards a Methodology of the Problem of Organization"), Weber defines the essential character

of such institutions as divided between "a nucleus of people who are in active control" and a mass of membership "whose role is essentially more passive" (169). But what exactly does Weber mean when he states a nucleus is "in active control" and members are essentially "passive"? How can the active element achieve it aims and thereby demonstrate its control if the passive mass it gathers in turn does not become active and either submit to the demands of the leadership or dutifully carry out their commands? While the distinction between active and passive denotes a social division internal to the framework of the organization, Weber's definition lacked the insight only a Marxist perspective provides: that the Marxist political institution, insofar as its internal organization resembles Weber's definition, gave objective shape to a postulate of the capitalist social division of labour and that the fetish character of intellectual activity arising from this postulate determines the division between the active nucleus in control and the passive membership under control. Like the bureaucratic institution Weber analysed, it is this social division that gives to labour's political institutions their form. Form in this sense refers to the character of social relations, the "forms of life and conditions of existence" realized in and by labour's political organization. The logic of a given institution describes the consequences, both intended and unintended, these relations create in the course of their realization and reproduction.

By turning Lukács' work on reification towards his work on organizational form, the truly historical insight emerges: labour's "political" organization, if it is to facilitate a revolutionary politics, if it is to change social reality, if it is to alter the conditions out of which knowledge emerges, must be more than the means to this end**.** *It must be the end itself,* meaning the emancipation it strives toward must first be practiced within its

framework. It cannot simply r*epresent* the interests of the working class, but must be the site of their actualization. In doing so, both theory and practice stop being distributed into opposed poles at the same time the organization stops incorporating this division into its own framework.

Practice, furthermore, does not establish or realize the emancipated relations—as these are envisioned by the theory—outside the organization, but as the organization's internal relations and the practices that follow from these relations. This becomes clear the moment the term "revolutionary" is inserted into Lukács' thesis: "organization is the form of mediation between [*revolutionary*] theory and [*revolutionary*] practice" (Towards a Methodology" 299). To mediate between opposed entities is to become the site of their *interpenetration* from which emerges new reality. Social reality, after all, is nothing more than "*sensuous human activity, practice"* (Marx "Theses on Feuerbach" 143). As strange as it sounds, this is the logic of Marxism's political process; it means before the proletariat can be emancipated it must emancipate itself. And the only way it can achieve this is by building those institutions in which it practices the emancipated relations envisioned by the awareness of its interests as a universal class. And there is nothing stopping it from doing this in and against the society from which it seeks emancipation.

IV. Chapter Breakdown

The three chapters that follow this introduction trace Marxism's political experiences through its three primary organizational forms: the International Workingmen's Association founded in 1864; the German Social Democratic Party founded in 1875; and the Bolshevik experiences within the Russian Social Democratic

and Labour Party as it precipitated a transformation into the Russian Communist Party via the October Revolution in 1917.

The chapter on the International will focus on the struggle Marxists waged against anarchists for control over the International's General Council. It will consider the sectarian struggle that led Marxists to subvert the Council's democratic framework as an instance of fetishism in political action. The fetish character of these actions will be read in the effects they had on the form of the International. By seizing control of the General Council, Marxists inverted its function as an administrative entity transforming it into a centralized source of political authority. As a result, the International went from an organization immanent to the working class to one that related externally to the class inserting itself between labour and its political agency. Marxists justified their actions on the basis of the knowledge they possessed, a knowledge they used to ground their authority over the working class. This is how the postulate indigenous to the capitalist social division of labour first appeared in Marxist politics, as a didactic principle derived from Marxism's conception of politics. The chapter will explore the elements contributing to the formation of Marx's view of revolutionary politics. It will look at the tension created within this view by the Hegelian lineage in Marx's thought on the one hand, and a lineage that goes back to Rousseau on the other. In addition to primary theoretical sources, the chapter will also analyse the personal correspondence of Marx and Engels as well as anarchist "leader" Mikhail Bukharin. The candid character of these letters provides insight into the hostile and antagonistic mood within the International for much of its lifespan. In the letters, opinions and thoughts are shared on such things as organization, politics and authority, which in some instances do not readily appear in

both Marx's and Engels' theoretical works, and in others do appear but are in need of clarification. The letters also help shed light on the way the antagonism appeared to Marxists as a sectarian struggle brought about by the obstinacy of anarchist factions rather than the authoritarian actions of Marxists. In this way, sectarianism was the first form of appearance of fetishism in Marxist politics.

The chapter on the German Social Democratic Party will focus on the emergence of a revisionist school of thought within Marxism. Following the collapse of the International in 1876 and taking the lessons of the experiences of sectarian struggle, Marxism migrated to the political party proper. In 1875, Marx and Engels participated in the founding of the German Social Democratic Party. To Marxists, the belief was the party framework provided a more stable form in which the political education of the working class could be carried out. And yet, by the end of the century and as a result of the party's electoral successes, a revisionist movement appeared in response to the gulf the party's success opened between Marxist theory (i.e., its commitment to revolutionary politics) and its practice (in parliamentary politics).

The chapter will focus mainly on the origins of the revisionist attitude in a perceived shift in Engels' attitude towards parliamentary activity. In doing so, the chapter considers Marx's critique of parliamentarianism, the capitalist state, and the social division of labour. The chapter also considers the relation between the rise of monopoly capital and revisionism. I argue the significance of the former to the latter is found in the way monopoly reveals, via a consideration of the postulates organizing the social division of labour, a structural homology between political leadership and the position of capital vis-à-vis labour. Within this homology, it is possible to grasp the basis of labour's

political leadership in the postulate of the social division of labour responsible for the fetish character of intellectual activity. In this way, revisionism is regarded as the second form of appearance of fetishism in Marxist politics.

The chapter on the Russian Social Democratic Party will focus on the emergence of Leninism as a distinct adjunct to Marxism within the labour movement. Leninism signals the point in Marxism's political history when the structural homology between capitalism and Marxist politics acquired its ideological expression in Lenin's theory of the party as vanguard. Up until this point Marxism's approach to politics had focused mainly on the political organization's relation to the class. With Leninism, however, the principle orienting this approach for the first time came to internally organize the party, which represented a significant step forward, one that ultimately prepared the ground for the society-wide realization of Marxist authoritarianism in the event of the Bolshevik overthrow of Russia's provisional government in October 1917. In addition to several of Lenin's own writing, the chapter will carefully consider the Russian Social Democratic Labour Party's Congress archives, focusing on the discussions that took place over party organization. As the didactic principle in Leninism is revealed through the Bolshevik revolution to be the postulate of capitalism's social division of labour, both forms of antagonism associated with sectarianism and revisionism appear again in Leninism. Leninism, then, is the final form of appearance of fetishism in Marxist politics.

By way of a conclusion, the final chapter will focus on considering Lukács' thesis in light of the preceding analysis of the phenomenon of Marxism's political authoritarianism. The chapter will focus on extrapolating from Lukács' thesis the historical lesson upon which academic Marxists must re-evaluate their current relation to

the university system of late capitalism. The primary theme the chapter considers is that of social change and how Marxism's conception of social change influences its understanding of social reality.

This final argument will lean heavily on Marx's account of the real subsumption of labour by capital as a means with which academic Marxism can explore the impact Marxism's integration into the university system of late capitalism has had on both Marxism's perspective on its own political history and on how it currently approaches the question of social change through the lens of popular working-class struggle. The continued privileging of intellectual activity among contemporary academic Marxists indicates there still exists an uncritical attitude as to the certainty with which they distinguish and elevate their activity above the activities of the working class across the technical division of labour. The hallmark of this attitude is its inability to distinguish between the politically important role knowledge plays in capitalist society as a result of its immanent mystifications, and the social origin of the fetish character of intellectual labour in the social division of labour under capitalism. This unexamined given within the perspective of contemporary academic Marxists is a testament to their uncritical relation to the conditions, i.e., the organizational form of the university, out of which their knowledge emerges. As such, the university is the site of the class struggle in theory.

CHAPTER I. SECTARIANISM

Introduction

Even though it limped on until 1876, it was clear by the end of 1872 that the sectarian struggle between Marxists and anarchists had deformed the first International Workingmen's Association beyond recognition. The struggle culminated in the Association splitting into two once the Marxists, having effectively subverted the organization's federalist-democratic framework, rendered the anarchists influence nil. This event represents the first appearance of an authoritarianism that would eventually consume the European labour movement.

Though Marxist historians acknowledge this fact, more often than not, it is almost always as they are attempting to explain it as happenstance. Hal Draper, for example, frames this first appearance as a gesture of self-defence, and as part and parcel of "those paradoxes of sovereignty" (*The Dictatorship of the Proletariat: from Marx to Lenin* 18). Likewise, Richard Norman Hunt counters the "widespread… belief that Marx and Engels embraced [the] Babouvist-Blanguist prescriptions for minority revolution and totalitarian dictatorship" with the thesis Marx and Engels were just misunderstood "tough-minded democrats" (*The Political Ideas of Marx and Engels* 13, 16). In both instances, authoritarianism is regarded as external to the premises with which Marxism approached politics. As a result, the possibility that such analyses might convey something profound to Marxism about its own experience is from the start foreclosed.

There is, however, something quite important Marxism can learn about itself should it subject the experiences of the first International to a more rigorous self-

criticism. For instance, even though Marxist theory articulates a historically progressive conception of politics, in the sectarian struggles against anarchism, this politics comes to rely on a conception of authority decidedly at odds with its progressive vision. That Marxism's approach to politics proved inadequate to the self-emancipatory aims of the working classes became apparent in the way it inspired Marxists to dominate their allied but doctrinally opposed colleagues in the International. This they did by seizing control of the organization's General Council. As a result, the General Council acquired an operational independence from both the organizations comprising the International and the working class for whom it was designed. In this independence the purpose of the General Council became inverted. It went from an administrative entity designed to facilitate and coordinate working class organizations across Europe to a means through which rival factions, i.e., anarchists, within the labour movement could be controlled and suppressed.

In order, then, to grasp this inversion as an example of fetishism in Marxist politics, I want to show how this is a consequence of the theoretical premises orientating the commitment Marxism makes to conquering political power. By analysing the origin of this strategy, Marxism's approach to politics, based on a principle of self-emancipation, and its vision of political leadership, based on a didactic principle, can be shown to stem from a tension between two visions of authority representing two conflicting lineages within Marx's conception of revolutionary politics. The conflict between these visions internal to Marxism's approach to politics appears, however, in the difference between Marxism and anarchism. It is for this reason sectarianism, as it

characterizes the experiences of the first International, is the first form of appearance of fetishism in the political practice of Marxism.

I. Neither Lord Nor Subject

The International Workingmen's Association was founded during a gathering of European radicals in London at St. Martin's Hall on September 28th, 1865. Through a series of subsequent meetings (and the creation of various committees and subcommittees) the task eventually fell on Marx's shoulders that he should author the organization's programmatic statement of principles. This he did, and in November 1864 the "General Rules" of the Association where published as part of a pamphlet titled *Address and Provisional Rules of the Working Men's International*.

While the aim of the International to promote the unity of the workers across borders and professions was simple, the reality involved in achieving such a goal was much more complicated. This was in part a consequence of the divergent histories, cultural traditions and stages of economic development differentiating the groups the International aimed at coordinating. The International liaised with various kinds of radicals, be they socialist, anarchist, or moderate. In an eclectic fashion there were English Owenites, followers of the French anarchist Pierre-Joseph Proudhon, followers of Louise Auguste Blanqui, German Socialists, Chartists, Irish and Polish nationalists, delegates from groups such as the Universal League for the Material Elevation of the Industrious Classes, as well as a whole series of organizations, some spontaneously formed in various crises but unstable in their internal coherence, and others, such as mutual aid societies (worker-run relief funds), less orientated towards political activity,

but stable in their organizational framework and aims (Stekloff *History of the International* 46).

From the beginning, however, a dissensus surrounded the Association's declaration. Between the English and French translation there appeared a discrepancy in the form of a small omission. While seemingly insignificant, the discrepancy goes beyond language speaking instead to the sectarianism that had began crystalizing around the question of authority and political leadership within the International. Given its author, the document is replete with Marxist themes: for instance, at the bottom of "servitude in all its forms" lies economic exploitation; there is also the claim that the source historically of labour's *continual* subjugation has been "the want of solidarity between the manifold division of labour in each country," and, perhaps most *Marxist* of all, the claim "that the economic emancipation of the working classes is therefore the great end to which every political movement ought to be subordinate as a means" ("General Rules").

On this last point is where the French version differs. It leaves out the final phrase "as a means," stating instead "the workers' economic emancipation is the great goal to which all political activity should be subordinated" ("Statutes of the First International" 77). While seemingly innocuous, the significance of the omission should not be overlooked. Despite the identity of the translator of the French version having been lost to history, there is little reason to doubt the intention behind the omission was to express a distinctly anarchist perspective, since as co-founders of the Association in Paris, the Mutualists,[24] in Marx's words "naturally held the reigns there for the first few years"

[24] A Proudhonist inspired anarchist collective distinct from the Bakuninist Alliance. The latter would eventually become the primary anarchist collective in the International.

("Marx to Friedrich Bolte" 255). By removing "as a means" from the statute the political strategy of the International becomes a contested site at which opposed notions of politics and authority would come to clash. More importantly, though, is the way this opposition also becomes the site at which a tension internal to Marxism's approach to politics begins to appear.

As a way of approaching this tension, it is necessary to first explore the differences in outlook between Marxists and anarchists regarding authority, the different relations it gives rise to and the impact it has on the character of the politics of the European labour movement in the latter half of the nineteenth century. That politics was seen as subordinate to economic emancipation meant to the anarchists of the mid-nineteenth century quite simply politics of the kind Marxists had in mind was seen as unnecessary to economic emancipation, that is, compared to the activity of economic emancipation itself, politics was a less, even counter-productive mode of revolutionary action. This aversion touches on one of the most well known but also most misunderstood anarchist themes—anti-authority—and so raises the question of what shape the social power of labour should assume in order to legitimate its emancipatory values.

That anarchism espouses an anti-authority ethos does not mean it is outright opposed to governance of any kind. The belief that it is, particularly within anarchist circles (even in the present), is perpetuated by a terminological deficit that testifies to a conceptual confusion within anarchist discourse. Murray Bookchin describes this confusion as a tendency to collapse the concept of "government" into the concept of the "state." Of this tendency he writes it is responsible for "a mischievous distortion"

(Bookchin “Anarchism, Power, and Government”). A prime example is early twentieth-century American anarchist Emma Goldman. In her otherwise passionate defense of anarchism in “Anarchism: what it stands for,” Goldman defines the anarchist world view as “the philosophy of a new social *order* based on liberty unrestricted by man-made law; the theory that *all forms of governm*ent rest on violence, and are therefore wrong and harmful, as well as unnecessary” [italics added] (50). Here the” mischievous distortion” springs from Goldman’s definition and the conflict it has with itself, since social order implies a kind of governance, but if all forms of government rest on violence, anarchism too, insofar as it is a social order, must then also rest on violence.

In contrast, a greater care is taken by Diego Abad de Santillian’s *After the Revolution* to observe the distinction between state and governance. In his text, which was written in the lead up to the 1936 Spanish Revolution, he writes, “the revolution cannot consider the state as a medium, but must depend on the *organization of the producers*” [italics added] (86). Here, made visible by Abad de Santillian’s distinction between the state and the organization of the producers, there is a crucial intersection between anarchism and Marxism. For both, the organization of the producers, if this activity is to give a concrete content to labour’s self-emancipation, abolishes labour’s alienated self-relation, which springs from its structural subordination to capital, if and only if two structural imperatives are realized: the unity of labour with the means of production (i.e., the socialization of property); and the overcoming of the opposition between labour’s intellectual and manual modes (i.e., the socialization of production through the democratization of the labour-process). That Marxism’s approach to politics caused the understanding of the importance of these structural imperatives to recede into

the background speaks to the way Marxism's early political experiences were shaped by internal, yet disavowed, tensions rather than some external obstacle.

As the conceptual ambiguity around authority, state and governance attests, anarchism, like Marxism, also contained opposed tendencies and contradictory perspectives. For those within the anarchist movement who consider all forms of authority to be a priori illegitimate, all modern social institutions are equated with oppression. For others more receptive to nuances, they recognize that just as authoritarianism issues from the organization of certain social institutions, the modern bourgeois state for instance, so egalitarianism issues from the organization of different types of social institutions. The latter recognize that if economic emancipation is to be a genuine emancipation, it must come about within those actions that do more than simply create a framework in which the will of one group is imposed onto that of another, for this is what the "state" is to anarchists (as well as Marxists). For whenever and wherever this is the case, one is immediately confronted with what is to the anarchist mind an "incontrovertible fact": that "it is absolutely impossible for a man with power over his neighbors to remain a moral man" (Bakunin "Sonvillier Circular" 96).[25] While internally conflicted, the progressive aspect of the anarchist attitude towards authority precludes from its approach to politics the need to build or rely on hierarchical social institutions as the means to its own liberation. As Noam Chomsky, perhaps the greatest contemporary proponent of anarchism, put it apropos the principles of anarcho-syndicalists, "they embody in themselves the structure of the future society" ("Notes on Anarchism" 119).

[25] The moral dimension of Bakunin's position can be traced back to Boa Jingyan's *Neither Lord Nor Subject* considered, albeit not without dissent, the first text attempting to expound anarchism. In it Jingyan writes, "As soon as the relationship between lord and subject is established, hearts become daily filled with evil designs" ("Neither Lord Nor Subject" 4).

What the (mainly French) anarchists of the International were putting to the Marxists was the question of the relation between political organization, authority, and class struggle. Anarchists implored Marxists to consider what sort of organization working-class politics must build in order to realize its aims, which as it appeared to the anarchists were not to conquer political power as imagined by Marxists, but to reconfigure the field of power's operation such that its vertical (i.e., hierarchical and authoritarian) operations are diverted into laterally distributed and cooperative arrangements. Put another way, the emancipated relation envisioned must be an integral element of the emancipation process itself; otherwise, the likelihood oppressive power structures would survive the struggle over who controls them remains high.

This seems to be the sense operative in those anarchists' currents that conceptually distinguish between the state and government. As Murray Bookchin explains, "a government is a set of organized and responsible institutions that are minimally an active system of social and economic administration," whereas by contrast, the state "is a government that is organized to serve the interests of a privileged and often propertied class at the expense of the majority" ("Anarchism, Power, and Government"). In order for a proletarian government to distinguish itself from the bourgeois state, the relations involved in the social and economic administration of society must not translate into a social distinction by means of which private interests take precedence over, and therefore externally impose themselves on, the interest of those individuals comprising the wider community.[26]

[26] Monty Python stages a confrontation between "state" and "government" wonderfully in *The Holy Grail*. Happening upon a pair of toiling serfs, King Arthur demands to know who their lord is and is promptly schooled in the premises and organizational form of anarchism. "We don't have a lord," the serfs inform Arthur. "We are an anarcho-syndicalist commune. We take it in turns to act as a sort of executive officer

When read against the nuanced distinction between state and governance, the rigidness of anarchist anti-authority gives way to an understanding of authority, or rather governance, grounded *in immanency,* not externality. As anarchists see it, so long as authority comes from a place external to those over which it exercises power it is illegitimate. It is superfluous to build a political framework *outside and independent* of the sphere of production to achieve an aim located in the latter. What springs from the organization of the producers by the producers is a form of governance in which labour exercises an authority over the conditions of its own existence. The reason the state, or similarly constructed hierarchical institutions, cannot be a medium of revolution is by virtue of its organizational form, which grants to the few power over the many. It is certainly a contradiction in terms for an alienated social institution to serve as the medium through which individuals could 'embody in themselves" the emancipated relations of a liberated society. The more progressive aspects of anarchism are attuned to this dimension of radical politics in comparison to the more naïve factions, which seem to seek only to provoke, undermine, or taunt state power.[27] It is, therefore, the external place vis-à-vis the socio-economic sphere from which politics derives its inherently hierarchical and hence authoritarian form so distasteful to the anarchist palette. The anarchist conception of authority rests on a principle of immediate immanency.

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for the week. But all the decisions of that officer have to be ratified at a special bi-weekly meeting by a majority in the case of purely internal affairs, but by a two-thirds majority in the case of more major issues" ("The Holy Grail"). When Arthur attempts to explain how he was anointed king by "the lady of the lake" proving his kingship is by divine right, he is met with incredulity from the serfs. "Listen, a strange woman lying in ponds distributing swords is no basis for a system of government. Supreme executive power is derived from a mandate from the masses, not from some farcical aquatic ceremony! You can't expect to yield supreme executive power just because some watery tart threw a sword at you!" ("The Holy Grail").

[27] Consider as a recent example the spring 2018 vandalism spree in Hamilton ON. A procession of anarchists marched through a section of the city wreaking havoc as they smashed storefront windows and damaged signs, etc. Whatever the aim of the event, its outcome secured in the minds of the city's general population a fear and anger towards anarchism, at the same time as it has provoked the state to enforce the law through violence to the approval of the city's residents.

As it is in the nature of contemporary forms of authority operating within a framework of the division of powers to operate (within their jurisdictions) unilaterally, and so to separate themselves from those over whom control is asserted, the social division within political associations mimics (if only because they are a sublated expression of) the social division of labour under capitalism defined as it is by the separation of the (dominant) intellectual mode from the (subordinate) manual mode of labour, i.e., creative activity. Even though this authority is originally mediated by the market and so dispersed among individual capitals, it nonetheless establishes and reproduces an unequal relation structurally homologous to the unequal relations between rulers and ruled realized practiced on the terrain of bourgeois politics (yet concealed by representative institutions). From the anarchist perspective, then, in the struggle for power it is not the proletariat that would conquer political power, but political power that would conquer the proletariat. Should the proletariat achieve this aim its victory would amount to a defeat, since it would have done no more than re-establish within the class the same social division to which it already owes its subordination. To the anarchists of the first International to want political power is to want power over others. And so, it was to this mutual exclusion of hierarchical power and social emancipation that an obstinate Mikhail Bakunin, for one, continually attempted to draw attention throughout his dealings with Marxists in the International. It was also upon this point that the sectarian divide that would eventually bring about the International's collapse continually articulated itself.

A question arises at this point: to what degree did Bakunin and the anarchists observe the distinction between state and government in their vision of how the

International should function? There is good reason to believe the distinction did inform Bakunin's conceptualizations. For instance, in "What is the State?" he answers this question in typical anarchist fashion, stating it "is the altar on which the real freedom and welfare of peoples are immolated for the sake of political grandeur" ("What is the State?"). And in "The Organization of the International" he expresses the desire for the International, in the face of its Marxist-led authoritarian turn, to present itself as having an "essentially different character from the organization of the state" ("The Organization of the International").

Bakunin was very much in favor of the International consolidating and deepening its commitment to a framework of voluntary federations. Federalism, he felt, was the best way to ensure consistency between revolutionary means and revolutionary ends (Graham *We Don't Fear Anarchy* 4). Federalism functioned according to a principle of self-determination primarily because it guaranteed a consistent structural logic across the International's different levels, such that the local, regional, and national levels were just successive stages in which the same locally determined mandate was pursued. As an example, the role of the local or regional section of the International in Munich, Bavaria, Germany was to facilitate the coordination and communication between different labour groups in and around Munich. In a likewise manner, the International's regional or provincial section served the same function with respect to the Associations' local sections across Bavaria. And at the national level, the International's task was to facilitate and coordinate communication between Germany's different provincial sections. Finally, at the international level, it was the responsibility of the General Council to coordinate the interaction of the different national federations. As to staffing the different sections,

to the local sections delegates were elected from the various groups to staff the provincial section; from the provincial section came the delegates that would staff the national section; and from the national federation delegates were elected to the General Council. Marx—as his alliance with the Blanquist faction (who pushed for a more authoritarian framework in the International) demonstrated—was somewhat ambiguous as to his view on federalism. While his support of the efforts of the Paris commune to establish a federalist framework suggests he was supportive at least in theory, his actions within the International demonstrate he was opposed wholeheartedly to it in practice.

What Bakunin's support of a federalist framework for the International suggests, particularly as this is considered next to the conception of authority it implies, being based as it is on a principle of immediate immanence linked to the organization of the producers by the producers, is that it was the anarchists, not the Marxists, who displayed a greater awareness of labour's need to revolutionize organizational form over institutional content.

II. From Pactum Subjectionis to Pactum Societatis and back

If at times anarchists were not always able to appreciate the nuances present in their own understanding of politics and authority, this was perhaps due to the tendency, by no means exclusive to anarchists, to think in ahistorical terms (such as Bakunin's "incontrovertible fact" about power and morality, authority and politics, etc.) In contrast, Marx's conception of politics aimed to be more concise in its effort to qualitatively distinguish proletarian authority from political power in general and from bourgeois authority in particular. In this sense there is a greater attention within Marxism to the historical dimensions of the class struggle, and it is on the strength of its historical

considerations that Marx's conception of politics aspires to present its strategies as aiming at more than just a transfer of power, but a reconfiguration of it.

In a letter to Friedrich Bolte written in November 1871, Marx writes at length about the sectarian struggles in the International that were at this time—following the massacre of the Paris commune— coming to a decisive head. In clearly agitated tones he writes:

> The POLITICAL MOVEMENT of the working class naturally has as its final object the conquest of POLITICAL POWER for this class, and this requires, of course, a PREVIOUS ORGANISATION of the WORKING CLASS developed up to a certain point, which arises from the economic struggles themselves. But on the other hand, every movement in which the working class comes out as a *class* against the ruling classes and tries to coerce them by PRESSURE FROM WITHOUT is a POLITICAL MOVEMENT. For instance, the attempt in a particular factory, or even in a particular trade, to force a shorter working day out of the individual capitalists by STRIKES, etc., is a purely economic movement. The movement to force through an eight-hour *law,* etc., however, is a *political* movement. And in this way, out of the separate economic movements of the workers there grows up everywhere a *political* movement, that is to say a movement of the *class,* with the object of achieving its interests in a general form, in a form possessing general, socially binding force. Though these movements presuppose a certain degree of PREVIOUS organisation, they are in turn equally a means of developing this organisation. Where the working class is not yet far enough advanced in its organisation to undertake a decisive campaign against the collective power, i.e. the political power, of the ruling classes, it must at any rate be trained for this by continual agitation against, and a hostile attitude towards, the policies of the ruling classes. Otherwise, it remains a plaything in their hands… (258)

Marx too, it would appear, acknowledges the external character of political authority vis-à-vis the socio-economic—"PRESSURE from WITHOUT is a POLITICAL MOVEMENT." But with Marx, this character is not indicative of some incontrovertible fact. Rather, as the distinction between political and economic struggle is intended to suggest, this external character is actually an index of the class struggle itself. It is

intended to gauge the degree of development obtained by the working class *as a whole in its struggle against the whole of the ruling class.* Insofar as it concerns the historical possibility open to the working classes, who (still even to this day) appear (as they did to Marx) scattered and diffuse despite various forms of resistance, political activity generates from this fragmented lot a *universal* identity, the class as a whole. Politics is, then, the terrain upon which the proletariat can become an organized whole so that it might then confront the whole of the ruling class as a self-determining entity.

That labour politics was to be considered a historical development was a premise Marx had expressed back in the 1840's. As outlined in *The Manifesto of the Communist Party*, he and Engels conceived the political organization of the proletariat as a developmental stage in its constitution as a class. "At first the contest [between labour and capital] is carried on by individual labourers," explains Marx (*Manifesto of the Communist Party* 480). As the struggle develops it engrosses "the workpeople of a factory, then…the operative of one trade" until the point is reached where "the proletariat not only increases in number, it becomes concentrated in greater masses" (Marx *Manifesto of the Communist Party* 480). Out of this concentration comes the common interests that compel labour to organize itself "into a class, and consequently into a political party" (*Manifesto of the Communist Party* 481).

Unlike the anarchists who see only the externalized form of political power, Marx's conception of politics is linked dialectically to economics, such that the struggles originating in the latter are working towards a resolution by generating and passing through the former, and it is precisely in this passage that the historical character of the present is registered. The political organization of the proletariat has become possible

because it has grown on the substrate of "the separate economic movements." It is not opposed to them so much as it is their more developed expression. The current stage wherein such a thing as the International is possible recognizes its debt to the different forms working class resistance has taken till to this point. At the same time, however, as a condition of the historical development of these forms of resistance, a politically organized working-class seeks its own institutional autonomy and one method by which it does this is as Marx said, by using the previous (dispersed economic) organizations as "means of developing this [new and universal] organization."

Compared to the anarchist perspective, Marx's concept of politics is of a more concrete character for the reason its basis in historical developments allows it to clearly distinguish between two opposed modes of externality, one rooted in alienation and one rooted in autonomy. Political autonomy is measured by the degree to which the class interests of the proletariat acquire a "general form," meaning they find expression in an organizational form stable and effective enough that the interests are able to possess as Marx says, a "socially binding force." The anarchist approach to politics, however, lacks the historical sensitivity of the Marxist conception, if only because its identity is so firmly rooted in a rejection of authority that it becomes and remains insensitive to historical developments as they appear in the concrete and nuanced dimensions of the struggle, which in turn are registered in the development of the concept of politics as it appears in and rises out of Marx's activism.

And yet, as already mentioned, despite the opposition between anarchism's negative conception of politics and Marxism's historical conception, both, in their own way, rely on a vision of non-alienated social forms. The basis of this common vision can

be found in the concept of sovereignty Jean-Jacques Rousseau develops in his critique of parliamentary representation contained in *The Social Contract*. Despite the perception that Rousseau remained marginal to Marx's development, especially next to figures like Hegel and Ricardo, Lucio Colletti argues that both Marx and Lenin's revolutionary theories move exclusively within Rousseau's orbit (*Rousseau* 185). And while Bakunin is on record rejecting the "factious liberty extolled by the school of Jean Jacques Rousseau and the other schools of bourgeois liberalism," the anarchist critique of the modern state can easily been seen as moving within the field opened up by Rousseau's rejection of Hobbes' *pactum societatis* (*The Paris Commune and the Idea of the State* 2).

Both Hobbes and Rousseau develop their political theory through critiques of Natural Law theory. In this regard, their primary focus is on the double contract contained in Natural Law, which introduces a duality into the concept of sovereignty doubling the center of power and decision-making between the people and the sovereign. On the one hand, there is the *pactum societatis*, a contract among individuals who in the interest of mutual self-preservation agree to enter into solidarity with one other. From this comes the *pactum subjectionis*, where the same united individuals in turn agree to transfer power to a sovereign (Colletti *Rousseau* 181).

As Colletti notes, both Hobbes and Rousseau attempt to eliminate this duality from Natural Law Theory, but for opposing reasons (*Rousseau* 181). Hobbes develops his concept of sovereignty through the elimination of *pactum societatis*. He argues "that he which is made sovereign maketh no covenant with his subjects before hand is manifest" (*Leviathan* 108). It makes no sense to Hobbes that the people as a collective subject could exist prior to the sovereign. What they are before they are formed by sovereignty is not a

people, but a multitude—dispersed, fragmented and divided. And since, "it is impossible, because as they are not one person," the sovereign cannot enter into contract with the multitude (Hobbes *Leviathan* 108).

Rousseau's concept of sovereignty, on the other hand, eliminates the *pactum subjectionis,* a gesture some, such as Lucio Colletti for instance, argue founds the revolutionary tradition in modern political theory. Rousseau attributes sovereignty exclusively to the people. Finding precedent in Grotius, Rousseau reasons that since "a people…can give itself to a king…a people is a people before it gives itself to a king" (*On the Social Contract* 23). By defining sovereignty as a phenomenon that comes from the assemblage of people, Rousseau exposes the fiction of an executive power antecedent to those over whom it is exercised. Rousseau, in other words, suspends the fantasy the prerogatives of state jurisdiction precede the jurisdiction to which it applies. In Rousseau's thought sovereignty is *inalienable.* The *pactum subjectionis* is nonsensical, Rousseau argues, for the reason "the act by which a people submits itself to leaders is not a contract" (*On the Social Contract* 49). This is the groundwork for the radical critique of representative *bourgeois* democracy Colletti sees in Rousseau's line of thinking, since it is for the same reason that it cannot be alienated that "sovereignty cannot be represented" (*On the Social Contract* 74).

Two interrelated consequences follow from Rousseau's rejection of *pactum subjectionis* relevant to the revolutionary traditions this rejection is said to establish. The conceptual unity of sovereignty Rousseau posits overcomes the division of powers into executive and legislative bodies, and so overcomes the alienated character this division receives in Natural Law theory. At the same time both bodies in their unity become

reduced to working assemblies acquiring the form of commissions whose functions are to administer social affairs under the direct control of the community. "Government," Rousseau concludes, " is absolutely nothing but a commission, an employment in which the leaders, as simple officials of the sovereign [i.e., the people] exercise in its own name the power with which it has entrusted them" (*On the Social Contract* 50).

On the basis of the aforementioned distinction between government and state, anarchist politics it would appear moves on the terrain opened up by Rousseau's rejection of the *pactum subjectionis* insofar as what is rejected is the exercise of authority based on an external, therefore alienated, form of sovereignty;[28] it is likewise the case with Marxism. For Colletti, who sees in Marx a deepening of the political tradition Rousseau's work established, "the meaning of the 'new pact' founding society… literally constitutes the need for the abolition or [to put it in Marx and Engels' words] 'withering away of the State'" (*Rousseau* 184).

The theory of the transcendence of the alienated character of the political apparatus through working class revolution speaks to the progressive and emancipatory dimensions of Marxism's approach to politics, based as it is in the possibilities presented by history. At the same time, and here it breaks radically from anarchism, the historically progressive character of this conception comes up against the expansive and developmental logic at work in it, a logic that can be traced with some ease to Hegel. Marx's relation to Hegel has long been the source of interest among generations of

[28] Long considered an early anarchist thinker Etienne de la Boetie prefigures Rousseau's rejection of *pactum subjectionis* in his mid-sixteenth century piece *On Voluntary Servitude*. Here he questions Natural Law theory by asking "I should like merely to understand how it happens that so many men, so many villages, so many cities, so many nations, sometimes suffer under a single tyrant who has no other power than the power they give him" (4).

Marxists and scholars alike.[29] Without wading into the intricacies of these debates, under the guidance of Marxism there is nonetheless implicit in the trajectory of labour politics towards institutional autonomy a vision of social change rooted in a different notion of immanence found in Hegel's concept of "immanent form," which is central to the vision of change he presents in the section on "Absolute Mechanism" in his *Science of Logic.*

Thomas Meaney's *Capital as Organic Unity* provides an account of the link between the immanence found in Hegel's section on "Absolute Mechanism" and Marx's categorical exposition in *Capital*. Meaney's argument claims the logic of change found in Hegel's account of absolute mechanism provides Marx with the logical form of his exposition in *Capital.* As Meaney explains,

> Hegel demonstrates that once the objective universality [i.e., in ideological form as Spirit, and in critical form as capital] has emerged as "the centre" whose self-determining principle acts on and determines the previously external objects, these objects are then superseded as external. The centre is not a body. It is rather the unity or the "one" (Eins) that is now an immanent form or a self-determining principle through which the many are bound together. (Meaney *Capital as Organic Unity* 147)

Gathered together by this process, the previously independent objects are no longer related as in a "mere composition," but are now the determinants of a self-determining principle, an "immanent form" (Meaney *Capital as Organic Unity* 147). The main idea here concerns the way a self-determining entity *does not* express its "objective universality" simply by differentiating itself from other external objects. Rather, it is by engaging them such that the external status of the others is negated that its objective universality is expressed. That "the center is not a body," but a "one" in which the many

[29] See Sidney Hook's *From Hegel to Marx*; Tony Smith's *The Logic of Marx's Capital*; Thomas Meaney's *Capital as Organic Unity*; Hiroshi Uchida's *Marx's Grundrisse and Hegel's Logic*; Seyla Benhabib's article "The Logic of Civil Society" for a survey of the debates regarding the relation of Hegel to Marx's method of analysis.

are “bound together” means the being of the “one” is found outside itself in the formal externality of the many. There is thus a notion of a mediated immanence at work in Hegel’s notion of self-determination as “immanent form,” which distinguishes it from the anarchist understanding of self-determination based on Rousseau’s conception of sovereignty as an immediate immanence. Where anarchists aspire to self-determination by withdrawing from the institutions they seek to overcome, in Hegel, self-determination comes about only as the result of mediation through the external other.

There is a curious similarity between the images of Hegel’s mediated immanence and the narrative arc Marx uses in both the *Manifesto* and in his comments to F. Bolte. The subsumption of labour’s economic struggles, i.e., trade unionism, by the political struggle is an essential phase in the development of the class struggle as it expresses the moment labour acquires an “immanent form.” And it only consolidates this form to the extent it supersedes the externality of the organizations developed by the previous phase of struggle. Just as trade unionism presupposed the individual’s struggle, it is, as Marx put it, “in turn equally a means for developing” the next phase, the political struggle.

Within the self-determining potential of the proletariat, then, there is also an expansionist and expropriative drive at work. The logic of this drive indicates that when approached as a question on the nature of proletarian authority, the principle of self-emancipation can be shown to contain a contradiction. On the one hand, the principle posits a form of authority, which establishes a relation of equality between everyone to which it applies. It is legitimate because it does not come from outside, but arises from the organization of the producers by the producers. On the other hand, it posits a form of authority that does not apply to everyone equally, but concentrates itself in the hands of a

few who use it to assert control over the many. In this lies the source of the tension internal to Marxism's approach to politics.

If the principle of self-emancipation, rooted in the Rousseauian notion of the immanence of sovereign authority, is what placed Marxism and anarchism on the same footing with respect to the aim of the labour movement, then the expansionist logic immanent to Hegel's vision of self-determination is what divided them with respect to the how, that is, the method by means of which labour was going to achieve its aim. For Marxism, the how ultimately had a didactic character. "Where the working class is not yet far enough advanced in its organization," Marx wrote to Bolte, "it must at any rate be trained for this" (Marx to Friedrich Bolte" 259). And since communists were defined in the *Manifesto* by the knowledge they yielded, they "have 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" (Marx and Engels *Manifesto* 484). But the authority connected to this method clashes with that operative in the principle of self-emancipation, since it deprives the majority of the working class from exercising control over the conditions of its organization placing instead this authority in the hands of an enlightened few who then related to the class from a place external to the class, as its political leadership. From the tension internal to Marxism's approach to politics, then, comes the didactic principle, which in turn ascribes to knowledge a key role in the exercise of authority within the International.

Where knowledge mediates between the working class and its revolutionary activity, it does this by containing the vision of what is necessary for labour's emancipation. In this case, as Marxism has elaborated this knowledge, it refers to two

conditions: the unity of head and hand and the unity of labour with the means of production. Insofar as this knowledge properly mediates between the working class and its revolutionary activity, through this activity it should establish and reproduce organizations in which labour's social relations of production are shaped by these two conditions. In this way, the political and the economic are inseparable aspects of labour's revolutionary praxis.

Where knowledge mediates between the working class and *the alienated form of its activities*, it does so as the expression of a fetishistic inversion, as *a hypostatized element* appearing within an institution whose organizational form establishes a series of, or a specific set of, subordinate and asymmetrical relations. As a result, a gap opens between Marxist theory, which contains the emancipatory vision, and practice, which realizes an unequal relation between the working class and its political agency. The processes that then take place within this context reproduce rather than negate the social subordination of labour.

By grounding the source of their authority in knowledge, Marxists in their efforts to assert themselves as the proletariat's political leadership ended up separating labour's primary political institution, the International, from the class and by virtue of this separation established a hierarchical structure—in which the conditions of authoritarianism took shape—wherein knowledge mediated the unequal relation between leaders and class. It is on this basis that a mode of authority pertaining to the constituted power of the bourgeoisie is appropriated and re-inscribed into the otherwise historically determined political practice of the working class.

Hegel would be the route by which a remnant of idealism—in the form of a conceit indicative of the fetish character of intellectual labour under capitalist conditions[30]—was admitted into the otherwise revolutionary edifice of Marxist theory. This is not a new insight by any measure. What sets it apart, however, is the way the fetish identified at the level of theory can be linked to the practical consequences it had on the European labour movement of the mid to late nineteenth century. This can be traced through the development of the concept of the dictatorship of the proletariat, which formed one of the sharpest spearheads with which Marxism's approached labour politics and so historically became another point around which crystallized the sectarian struggles within the International.

III. The Dictatorship of the Proletariat

As his comments from the above letter suggest, Marx did not pull the strategy to conquer political power from thin air. Nor was it simply a ruse he conjured up to satisfy some pathological will to power as some critics have argued.[31] In the way he juxtaposes political struggle with the parochial nature of the economic struggle, Marx understands political affiliation to be a more developed mode of struggle than trade unionism insofar

[30] The unfortunate aspects of the Hegelian legacy do not nullify the historical possibility of the proletarian revolution. The Hegelian dialectic presented to Marx in philosophical form a picture of the real state of things as they grew out of the soil of capitalist society. The expansionary character of the self-acting principle Hegel presents in his comments on "Absolute Mechanism" philosophically narrate the process of capital's expanded reproduction. It is, of course, ideological fantasy insofar as the self-acting principle is capital (alienated labour) and its process of expanded reproduction through the subsumption of all external objectivity abstracts from the reality of this process: that it is mediated by the exploitation of labour. This is what Marx was gesturing towards in his critique of the Hegelian dialectic when he pointed out Hegel begins from an abstraction (capital is the abstraction. It is in reality the accumulation of alienated labour. Alienated labour is the source of private property). The proletariat as a revolutionary force, as a self-acting principle, on the other hand, does not rest on a substrate of domination, but on emancipation and liberation. This tradition remains even though it was eclipsed by the idealist remnant that survived the Marxist break.

[31] See Jon Elster *Making Sense of Marx*; Gabriel Kolko *After Socialism*; and David Priestland *The Red Flag*: all of which at various moments resort to an ad hominem attack rational in their analyses of Marx and his work.

as the former converts the array of particular identities rooted in the technical division of labour into a unified social identity based on the common interests of the working class. A unified class identity was intended to help the proletariat clarify to itself its real interests, i.e., those that lead it towards emancipation and those that while seeming to serve the class actually perpetuated its subordination and exploitation.

There are two primary interests in which the identity of the proletariat as a class is grounded. Both express an emancipatory logic immanent to labour's structural subordination to capital. In this sense, as deductions from Marx's proofs of the objectivity of labour's exploitation, these interests are the inverted articulation of the primary aspects of labour's structural subordination. One interest addresses the separation of labour from the means of production and therefore aims at unifying the former with the latter. The other is concerned with overcoming the separation and opposition of labour in itself, between its intellectual and its manual modes. As political demands, the emancipatory interests of the working class lead it to realize a society based on collective ownership (unity of labour and the means of production) and the socialization of production and distribution according to democratic principles (unity of head and hand).

The beginnings of Marx's understanding of this strategy appeared in the context of a historical tendency peculiar to the situation of the German proletariat as it faced a post-1848 political landscape. Marx first conceptualized this tendency in his theory of permanent revolution of which a nascent notion of the dictatorship of the proletariat appears. Specific issues of political authority begin occupying more privileged places in Marx's thought around 1850. As editor of the *Neue Rheinsche Zeitung* in Cologne, the paper's position advocated the newly established National Assembly (or Frankfurt

Parliament) repudiate the absolutist government and squash any remaining forces of restoration by declaring itself sovereign. This it could do, certain progressive republican proponents argued, by imposing a dictatorship of the National Assembly. Championing this line, Marx wrote, "Every provisional state setup after a revolution requires a dictatorship, and an energetic dictatorship at that," meaning the defeat must be total and the remnants of the old order completely smashed for fear of its revitalization through auxiliary institutions like the military or the bureaucracy (qtd. Draper *Karl Marx* 63). As it turned out, maintaining the trust and loyalty of auxiliary institutions was the way the forces of restoration weathered the storm in Germany during the continent-wide upheavals between 1848-50.[32] Therein lie the beginnings of Marx's concept of proletarian dictatorship.

Of course, Marx was playing a long game. The point was not simply to replace the remnants of feudal governance with a liberal republic, but to use the German bourgeois to lay the groundwork for the subsequent passage of power into the hands of a revolutionary working class. When a compromise formation was reached between the republican and absolutist camps in Germany, it had become an irrefutable fact, at least in Marx's eyes, that the German bourgeois (unlike their French counterparts) could not be relied on to make a revolution.

And so the events of 1848-50 made it clear to Marx the German proletariat would have to perform double duty, that is, work to uproot and eliminate the state's feudal remnants by participating in the establishment of a democratic republic *and then* use this form to abolish the social power of the bourgeois. Tactically, this walked a very fine line,

[32] By May of 1849 the National Assembly collapsed after Frederick William IV, King of Prussia invoking God as the source of his authority refused the title "Emperor" and so undermined the Imperial Constitution and the Parliamentary body responsible for it.

since in order to carry through a liberal democratic revolution it would be necessary to enter into cooperation with segments of the bourgeois with whose interests those of the working class had temporarily aligned. The telescoping of these tasks is represented in Marx's theory of "permanent revolution"—"a revolution which does not come to a halt until the proletariat has taken power" (Draper *The Dictatorship of the Proletariat* 17)—i.e., an uninterrupted succession of political forms from absolutism through republicanism to socialism peculiar, as a political process peculiar to the German situation.

Given the obviously authoritarian connotation of the term "dictatorship," Marx's concept of proletarian dictatorship has long been viewed with suspicion, especially among anarchists. Among Marxists, on the other hand, it has occasioned much rationalization. Take Hal Draper for instance, who points out that contrary to contemporary sentiments, the term "dictatorship" in the middle of the nineteenth century "still meant what it had meant for centuries, and in this meaning it was *not* a synonym for despotism, tyranny, absolutism, or autocracy, and above all it was *not* counterpoised to democracy" (*The Dictatorship of the Proletariat* 11). The earliest instance of the use of the term appears in Roman law,[33] where it denoted an *exceptional*, and so temporary political situation in which an executive power, in the face of some sort of existential threat, was concentrated in the hands of a single agency who remained unencumbered by

[33] In an effort to highlight and combat the negative connotations the term "dictatorship" carries and the negative impact this has on the perception of Marxism, Hap Draper, who produced numerous texts on the subject, while comparing it to its modern equivalent Martial law, writes of the latter, "This device has the three distinguishing features of the Roman one: it is based on constitutional legality, not tyranny; it is temporary; it is limited, especially in its ability to impose new laws or constitutions. Again and again, institutions of the martial-law type have provided for some form of crisis government or emergency regime. Few claim that these institutions are *ipso facto* antidemocratic, though of course they can be perverted to antidemocratic uses like everything else" (*The Dictatorship of the Proletariat: from Marx to Lenin* 13).

the state's auxiliary institutions until a time when the safety of the republic was again secured (Agamben *The State of Exception* 41).

There is, however, an altogether different sense to the term in Marx's thinking, which Draper appears to sidestep when he concludes, "all Marx did at the time was apply this old political term to the political power of a *class*" (*The Dictatorship of the Proletariat: from Marx to Lenin* 18). Where the traditional usage indicated by Draper refers to a constituted power structure and its efforts at self-preservation, Marx's sense of the term emphasizes the opposite. It seeks to express the authority associated with the *proletariat as a constituting power*, i.e., a revolutionary force and so implicitly at least refers to something unprecedented in history, which remains unaccounted for if the term is understood as being applied "to the political power of a *class*."

Draper, in a sense, does pursue this line, framing the historical character of Marx's concept as first synonymous with 'rule' then distinct from all earlier types of rule because *this* rule is of the working class. As a result, Draper's characterization emphasizes the relation this rule establishes between the working class and the society it is consigning to history. Ultimately, Draper fails to consider what sorts of relations this rule establishes *within* the working class as he is to fixated on the relations it establishes between classes. As the anarchists understood, the logistics of democratic principles must inevitably inform the framework of proletarian rule; and yet, so long as this framework remains external to the production process, the class as a whole cannot rule, or rather its rule must be indirect, that is mediated by representatives, committees, etc, which makes it extremely vulnerable to corruption—as the history of the first International indicates—and so forces the question, *how can the proletariat as a class rule?*

The Marxist answer, as practiced in the context of the first International, is altogether inadequate. In logical terms it falls into a sort of circular reasoning whereby conquering state power allows the working class to rule and so long as the working class rules it is because it has conquered state power. What is not explained is how the conquering of state power by the working class means the working class exercises power *as a whole*. It assumes rather that in conquering state power it is the interests of the working class that orientate the state's operations and that this is somehow the same as if the whole class participated in this rule.

What it also fails to acknowledge is that by conquering state power, power is not immediately reconfigured into a lateral redistribution but is merely vertically shuffled.[34] Power is invested in the hands of the proletarian *leadership* who then use its apparatuses as its *bourgeois* opponents did before it. It is not configured such that the class as a whole leads, whatever this might mean, but that its representatives manage the affairs of tending to the interests of the class, which have now become the interests of the whole of society. What has not taken place is the reconfiguring of the networks of power in accordance with cooperative practices immanent to the proletariat as the universal class. In the end, Marxism's attempt to exercise a form of authority grounded only in the knowledge of the conditions necessary to labour's social emancipation rather than a model of these emancipated relations caused it to subvert the International's democratic framework,

[34] Would not an exemplary contemporary example of this be any campaign aimed at getting more marginalized groups into politics, the questioning of which should not be seen as arguing against the idea of diversity in politics but against the idea that diversity in positions of power constitutes a transformation of the structures of power. The assumption being, based as it is on an essentialist discourse, that, for instance, women by virtue of their marginalized perspective have a certain set of experiences and skills that if employed in the political field would alter the functioning of the field for the betterment of society. And yet, from Margaret Thatcher through Alison Redford to Aung San Suu Kyi, the fallaciousness of this reasoning is everywhere on display: unable to see the forest for the trees, such campaigns are unable to see the office for the individual.

which induced the sectarian struggle that ultimately led to the demise of the first International Workingmen's Association.

IV. Sectarianism

If at the time of the International's founding there appeared the first inclinations of a sectarian struggle, by the end of the decade it had developed into an intractable schism. Once those anarchists affiliated with Mikhail Bakunin joined in 1868 the conflict acquired a more open character, in part due to the practical and vocal way Bakunin chose to oppose the Marxists. Unsurprisingly, the focus of this struggle was for control of the International itself, or more specifically, control over the role and function of the Association's General Council. Since the type of authority established in and by a struggle for control over the General Council would posit a simple relation of domination, it is in this sense that the struggle provides the avenue for the development of an authoritarian tendency already germinating within the Marxist camp.

The large-scale coordination of the working class Marx envisioned the International as facilitating was dismissed by the anarchists primarily because it enlisted the aid of an illegitimate form of authority they argued Marxists misrecognized as a sign of the movement's political maturation. If it was to function in that capacity, the internal dynamics of the International would have to undergo significant modifications that would, ultimately, in addition to igniting a sectarian struggle undermine and violate the very rules and principles Marx himself wrote.

For the most part, the International was organized in such a fashion that the relation between the principles upon which it was founded and the rules by which it was to function appeared coherent. For instance, between the very first principle—"the

emancipation of the working classes must be conquered by the working classes themselves" (*Address and Provisional Rules*)—and the very first rule –"This association is established to afford a central medium of communication and cooperation between workingmen's societies existing in different countries and aiming at the same end; viz., the protection, advancement and complete emancipation of the working classes" (*Address and Provisional Rules*)—there appears a reciprocal relation: as a medium of communication and coordination the International would itself be a concrete instance of this self-emancipation in action.

It was as a consequence of its stated aim (to function as a medium of communication and coordination among distinct and varied working-class organizations) that the International initially lacked a hierarchical structure, at least in the traditional sense, preferring instead a democratic-federalist framework, which at the time represented a historically distinct type of politics. The General Council functioned less like an executive committee and more like an administrative body and so established within and between the working class a series of relations that resembled a *pactum societatis*. Among the duties of the General Council was the responsibility to determine the agendas of the Association's congresses. At these congresses, which were to be held once a year, the national delegates, all of whom would have been selected from the various federal, provincial, regional and local organizations, would convene and carry out the business of coordinating the political strategies the various sections pursued. While the General Council did reserve certain rights for itself, which accrued it a certain authority over the federal and provincial sections, such as the right to change the place but not the time of the next congress, the fact that the General Council was to be

composed of thirteen elected Secretaries representing a cross-section of the European labour movement indicated participation on this basis would mitigate the need for any one segment to seek control.

Furthermore, because the rules state the "The General Council shall consist of workingmen from the different countries" (*Address and Provisional Rules*), it was assumed that it would over time continually shift its emphases and accents depending on who composed its elected membership and what they at that time considered to be of pressing importance. This would also mitigate any tendency towards the transformation of the council's functions into a centralized power. As such, the principle of self-emancipation would concretely express itself in the constant evolution of the council's mentality through the periodic replacement of its members. This much is implied by the combination of its coordinating function and its democratically elected membership.

There is, however, a certain misalignment between some rules. For instance, consider the relation between rule #7 and rule #11. Rule #7 states that "success…cannot be secured but by the power of union and combination" meaning "the usefulness of the International's General Council must greatly depend on the circumstances whether it has to deal with a few national centers or workingmen's associations, or with a great number of small and disconnected local societies"(*Address and Provisional Rules*). With this in mind, rule #7 urges that members "shall use their utmost efforts to combine the disconnected…workingmen's societies…into national bodies represented by national organs" (*Address and Provisional Rules*). Rule #11 states, "the workingmen's societies joining the International Association will preserve their existent organizations intact" (*Address and Provisional Rules*). But given the aim established in rule #7, it is difficult to

imagine how the combination of the scattered and diverse local societies into regional then national bodies, and then the subsequent separation from these bodies of certain organs whose task it is to represent these national bodies to the General Council should "preserve their existent organizations in tact" when already the absorption into a provincial body signals at the very least a modification in the local entity's existent shape if only to allow it to accommodate the provincial liaison.

Nevertheless, the history of the evolution of the General Council shows it assumed an increasingly authoritarian role within the Association. However, there seems to be a general consensus among Marxist historians, like Hal Draper or H. Stekloff, that the authoritarian turn taken by the General Council was inspired largely by the bloody and tragic end met by the Paris Commune. Marxist authoritarianism was not tyrannical such narratives argue, but was a rational response to an existential threat posed by European governments who, in the aftermath of the events of the Paris commune, had it out for the International. While such threats to the International were indeed real, the self-defense interpretation mobilizes a series of rationalizations designed to absolve Marxists of any responsibility for their own actions. Nevertheless, it does appear, on the surface at least, as through the process within which the General Council assumes a more authoritarian occurs in the series of congresses that follow the events in Paris.

For instance, at the London Congress held between the 17th-23rd of September 1871, there are two events that illustrate the shift. First, there was the resolution that committed the International to a program of electoral participation via the formation of national proletarian political parties whose aim was to acquire state power (Graham *We Do Not Fear Anarchy* 167). The resolution was clearly aimed at subordinating anarchist

participation to Marxist strategies, since anarchists opposed political action on the grounds it was peripheral to economic action, the latter being the real terrain upon which the class struggle was to be decided. Yet, to the Marxists, the events in Paris demonstrated bourgeois governments, such as the one in France, would not hesitate to massacre workers to reassert control. And since the proletarian revolution seeks the overthrow of the bourgeois social order as it moves towards this goal another military assault was inevitable; ergo, the labour movement needed the sort of hierarchically ordered organization with which it could simultaneously defends itself and take control of the state apparatus. As Engels reflected, "it was the lack of centralization and authority that cost the life of the Paris commune" ("Engels to Carlo Terzaghi" 293).[35] On account of its current incorporation into the structure of the bourgeois state, the political party seemed to offer this sort of framework.

Second, the council agreed, so as not to contribute to a possible conflict between sections and thus preserve a general level of association-wide stability, i.e., "the power of union and combination," to deny affiliation to the Jura Federation on the basis that the Romande Federation in Geneva already represented the International in Switzerland. However, the fact of the matter was the Jura Federation was a Bakuninist collective, which, in the face of underrepresentation and a desire for greater participation, had formed as an alternative to the Marxist aligned Romand Federation. Since it was from the Federations that members were elected to the General Council, the anarchists had to represent themselves at the federal level of the International if they were to continue to

[35] Engels doesn't seem to get that had the Commune adopted such a centralized and hierarchical framework then it would not have been *the* Commune. One of the main problems in Marxism's approach to politics is the emphasis it places on dominating opponents, which given its tendency to coordinated violence requires a hierarchically ordered organization. This emphasis comes at the expense of any consideration of the character and form of labour's emancipated social relations.

have any influence. Still, it was not as though the council was without dissent. There are members on record (James Guillaume, an anarchist) arguing against the actions of the council and the fact it was clear the International was having imposed on it "theories of German Communism" (Stekloff 236). No matter, though, Marx was very pleased with the results of this congress claiming in a letter to his wife Jenny that "more was done than at all the previous congresses put together" ("Marx to Jenny Marx" 220).

Aside from the convenient if still unimaginative way the authoritarian turn is rationalized within Marxism's sense of its own history, what a self-defence interpretation also fails to properly account for is the fact the General Council was able to function as it did *after* the events in Paris because the groundwork for its unilateral actions had already been laid. The process by which the General Council had begun to accrue to itself greater powers predates the London Congress and so predates the events in Paris. At the Basel Congress, for instance, held in Sept of 1869, the following resolution was proposed and accepted:

> Every new section or society, which comes into existence and wishes to join the International, must immediately notify the General Council of its adhesion. The General Council is entitled to accept or to refuse the affiliation of every new society or group, subject to an appeal to the next congress. But where federal groups exist, the General Council, before accepting or refusing the affiliation of a new section or society, should consult the group, while still retaining its right to decide the matter provisionally. The General Council is also entitled to suspend, till the forthcoming congress, a section of the International. Every group in its turn, can refuse or expel a section or society, without being able to deprive it of its International status; but the group can ask the General Council to suspend the section or society. In case of any disputes arising between the societies or branches of a national group, or between the respective national groups, the General Council can adjudicate the difference, subject to an appeal to the next congress, which shall give a final decision on the matter. (Stekloff 140)

With the Basel resolution, the General Council began eclipsing the lateral arrangements it had with the provincial and federal sections. The organization of the International was beginning to define itself hierarchically while assuming at the same time an ideological rigidity, mainly that the aim, and only aim, was to accrue political power. By reserving for itself the right to "accept or refuse" new affiliations and to "adjudicate the difference" in opinion independently of the provincial and federal sections the General Council no longer functioned simply to facilitate the coordination of working class organizations. It was now in the position to actively shape, according to a Marxist-determined litmus test, the overall character of the affiliated groups. Having succeeded in incorporating previously existing organizations into the International, it was at this point using the organizational form of the International itself, its regional, provincial and federal groupings as "means of developing this [new authoritarian] organization."

Additionally, Marxist historians tend to have little to say about the other tactics Marxists used to subvert the organization's democratic framework. The most egregious tactics involved capricious changes to voting procedures. For instance, there were times when unelected delegates were installed as national representatives and granted congressional voting rights, while on other occasions elected national delegates were granted only observer status and thus prevented from casting ballots at some congresses (Graham *We Don't Fear Anarchy* 187). At the Basel Congress, one of Bakunin's resolution received a majority vote, but was eventually struck down once abstentions were included, which deprived it of the absolute majority it needed to be ratified (Graham *We Don't Fear Anarchy* 190). But when one of Marx's resolution faced a similar scenario, as happened at the Hague Congress in September 1872, abstentions were not

included, which allowed the resolution to pass despite not obtaining the absolute majority needed (Graham *We Don't Fear Anarchy* 191).

There is also a tendency among Marxist historians to ignore the documented resistance put up by the anarchists. At first, the anarchists responded by attempting to preserve the administrative character of the General Council as this was laid out in the "General Rules" and when this failed, by establishing counter-councils and counter-federations as a way to draw attention to these issues. So it was after the London Congress the anarchists decided to hold their own 'unsanctioned' congress in Sonvillier. Bakunin would cite the Basel resolution when in the Sonvillier circular he denounced the authoritarianism of the General Council. "Made up for five years running of the same personnel, re-elected time after time, and endowed by the Basel resolutions with very great power over the Sections, it ended up looking upon itself as the legitimate leader of the International" (Bakunin *Sonvillier Circular* 96). He adds, "In the hands of a few individuals the mandate of General Council members has turned into something akin to a personal possession…" which inevitably lead to the situation where to these few "it was natural that their own particular ideas should come to appear to them as the official theory enjoying exclusive rights within the Association" (*Sonvillier Circular* 96-97). In the end, any sort of dissenting view, Bakunin lamented, was looked upon suspiciously as "out and out heresy"(*Sonvillier Circular* 97).

In a companion piece to the Sonvillier circular, Bakunin reiterates many of the same anti-authoritarian, and anti-state themes but with a greater emphasis on the question of organizational form. In *The Organization of the International,* he acknowledges the need for working-class organization, but distinguishes between "a natural organization of

action, of a greater or lesser number of individuals, inspired and united by the general aim of influencing [by example] the opinion, the will, and the action of the masses" and those organizations such as the State, which "by contrast, impose themselves upon the masses and force them to obey their decrees, without for the most part taking into consideration their feelings, their needs, and their will" (94).

And from his piece *Statism and Anarchy* it becomes clear Bakunin places the distinction between state and government at the center of his critique of Marxism. "If there is a State," Bakunin explains, "there must be domination of one class by another and, as a result, slavery; the State without slavery is unthinkable" ("Statism and Anarchy"). Taking aim at Marxist strategy, he asks, "is it possible for the whole of the proletariat to stand at the head of the government?" ("Statism and Anarchy"). His answer:

> Ultimately, from whatever point of view we look at this question, we come always to the same sad conclusion, the rule of the great masses of the people by a privileged minority. The Marxists say that this minority will consist of workers. Yes, possibly of former workers, who, as soon as they become the rulers of the representatives of the people, will cease to be workers and will look down at the plain working masses from the governing heights of the State; they will no longer represent the people, but only themselves and their claims to rulership over the people. Those who doubt this know very little about human nature.
>
> These elected representatives, say the Marxists, will be dedicated and learned socialists. The expressions "learned socialist," "scientific socialism," etc., which continuously appear in the speeches and writings of the followers of Lassalle and Marx, prove that the pseudo-People's State will be nothing but a despotic control of the populace by a new and not at all numerous aristocracy of real and pseudo-scientists. The "uneducated" people will be totally relieved of the cares of administration, and will be treated as a regimented herd. A beautiful liberation, indeed! ("Statism and Anarchy")

Bakunin also draws a link between authoritarian institutions and the fetish character of intellectual activity when rhetorically and in a sarcastic voice he asks, "is it not enough

for the International to contain a group of men who possess the knowledge, the philosophy, and the policy of Socialism…in order for the majority, the people of the International, faithfully obeying [the former's] *fraternal command*…to be sure of following the path leading to the full emancipation of the proletariat?" ("The Organization of the International" 95). Without grounding the character of this fetish relation between authority and knowledge in the social division of labour, Bakunin is nonetheless able to frame the actions of Marxists in its light, stating "that is the argument which the …authoritarian party within the International has often expressed, not openly—they are neither sincere nor courageous enough—but clandestinely" ("The Organization of the International"95).

So it was, then, by the time the resolutions passed during The Hague Congress in September 1872, which removed whatever degree of autonomy remained of the various sections by granting to the General Council the power to suspend any branch and any provincial and federal section, there was one final voice of dissent. The Belgian delegation (who had a seat on the General Council) argued it was the Belgian opinion that the General Council should not act as a political center enforcing a specific doctrinal theory (Stekloff *History of the First International* 232). Now that the General Council had the power to enforce the implementations of previous resolutions a process concomitant with the founding of the International was complete.

Bakunin's *Sonvillier Circular*, *The Organization of the International,* and *Statism and Anarchy* strike right at the heart of the matter, insofar as the question of organizational form was placed firmly at the crossroads between the Association's principle of self-emancipation and its rule establishing the General Council's function as

an administrative body and not as a governing controlling body. To the Marxists, he put the question straightforwardly: “How can we expect an egalitarian and free society to emerge from an authoritarian organization?” (“The Organization of the International” 98).

Originally, the International was established as a networking entity connecting working-class organizations across borders and across the technical divisions of labour. But when the element responsible for orchestrating this coordinating function assumed an autonomy independent of this function it is in this hypostatization/reification that the real source of its authority, the organizations coordinating themselves through its medium, are then placed under the authority of their own alienated social network. With the centralization of power in the General Council an inversion typical to fetishized practices occurs. What is originally a predicate becomes the subject. The Association goes from a medium through which working-class organizations communicate and coordinate to a centralized power dominating, on the one hand, rival factions internally, and on the other hand, determining in advance that the type of local working class organization capable of becoming affiliated with the International were the ones ready to submit themselves to the authority of the General Council.

Conclusion

In the sectarian struggles of the first International there becomes visible a contradiction internal to Marxism’s approach to politics which burdens the principle of self-emancipation upon which the approach is based with opposed conceptions of authority. Between Marxism and anarchism, the anarchists represented the progressive pole, insofar as they understood, in however elementary a form, the freedom achieved

through a process of self-emancipation required a specific organizational framework, one whose social arrangements distributed power horizontally across the social landscape. In this sense, they represented the *pactum societatis* lineage found also in Marxism but suppressed by the *pactum subjectionis* lineage appropriated from and reinstated by Marxism's Hegelian heritage. Where anarchism remained abstract in this vision was its assumption it could achieve its aims by inspiring among its followers a fidelity to an ethical ideal,—"a natural organization of action"—which placed its realization at the level of individual choice—"united and inspired by a general aim." Anarchists failed, in other words, to recognize the power they sought to distribute laterally has its basis in an impersonal mechanism—the market—by which socially necessary labour is proportionally distributed in accordance with the requirements of social reproduction. This power is a function of the social division of labour not the sphere of ethics pertaining to theories of the individual.

Marxism, on the other hand, understood the importance of controlling this mechanism, something it recognized as a historical development, and the need for its reconfiguration as a condition of a transition to a socialist society. Where it remained abstract in its vision was that it could reconfigure it solely by confronting and dominating the class benefiting from its current form. Marxism failed to recognize, ultimately, that reconfiguring this mechanism away from its market-form cannot take place outside the social arrangements in and by which its new form is established.

One consequence of this first set of political experiences was that Marxism, during Marx's life, could only formally pose the solution to the problem of fetishism in politics as a question of organizational content and not *organizational form* even though

it did so through the institution of the International. That the Marxist form of political leadership failed to establish an enduring series of socialist institutions came down to the fact its leadership relied on a type of authority grounded in *pactum societatis*. As a result, it was only able to realize between the class and its leadership a set of relations structurally homologous to those realized in the capital/labour relation (and only comprehended in an elementary way by the anarchists). While aspects of this may have been obvious to anarchists, it would not be until the end of the century that Marxists, in the context of the German Social Democratic Party, would be confronted again with the paradox of self-emancipation. Even though this similarity became much more evident with the rise of parliamentary socialism, the success this form had in ameliorating working class conditions meant the paradoxes of self-emancipation became that much more obscure in the way it was articulated in and by the revisionist debates, the consideration of which the study takes up in the next chapter.

CHAPTER II. REVISIONISM

Introduction

In the second section—"II. The Means of Circulation"—of the third chapter—"Money, or the Circulation of Commodities"—of the first volume of *Capital*, Marx makes a statement about the character of "reconciliation"—or what in dialectical logic describes the infamous "negation of the negation"— as this process pertains to the (logical and not historical) emergence of the (capitalist) money-form out of the inner contradiction of the value-form. Opening the section, Marx reiterates how "the exchange of commodities implies contradictory and mutually exclusive conditions" and then explains that, "the further development of the commodity does not abolish these contradictions, but rather provides the form within which they have room to move. This, he concludes, "is the way in which real contradictions are [reconciled]" (198).[36]

Crucially, Marx points out that this formation is only a pseudo-resolution since the inconsistency, or rather, the antagonism binding the opposed entities is not so much swept away in the new form as *sublated by it*: the reconciliation only displaces the antagonism such that within the new form, which in different translations of *Capital* is described as a "*modus vivendi" —"*form of life*"*[37]—the contradiction reappears, but through different characteristics, ones that are appropriate to the new form.

[36] This translation, by Ben Fowkes, uses the word "resolved." Others, like the Moore and Aveling translation from the fourth German edition printed 1887, use "reconciled," which I think better conveys the point Marx is making here. "Resolved" connotes a finality that puts it at odds with Marx's main point, which is that "the further development of the commodity does not abolish these contradictions." "Reconciled" is clearly more appropriate, since it preserves this meaning and so only accentuates Marx's point.

[37] With its basis in Roman law, the term "modus vivendi," i.e., a "form of life," refers to a type of compromise formation in which conflicting parties are able to coexist.

In Marxism's political history, the German Social Democratic Party (SPD) was just such a *modus vivendi*, whose purpose reconciled the inner inconsistency of Marxism's approach to labour politics. If in the International Workingmen's Association Marxist authoritarianism—which I have conceptualized as the contradiction between a didactic principle and a principle of self-emancipation—assumed the form of a sectarian struggle, in the framework of the German Social Democratic Party, which given its clear delineation between party leadership and membership achieved at the level of organizational form a reconciliation of this opposition, the contradiction reemerges in the form of the revisionist debates.

Historically, these debates took place in response to a glaring lacuna that had opened between the revolutionary rhetoric (theory) of social democratic Marxists and the successes of their political activities (practice), that is, their participation in parliamentary politics. As a result, some within the party leadership began questioning the need to continue using the revolutionary rhetoric of Marxism. In addition, with the rise of monopoly capital the object of Marx's original critique appeared to have undergone internal developments of such magnitude and consequence further doubt was cast on the continued relevance of the theory's basic proof—the demonstration of the objectivity of the exploitation of labour by capital—from which were deduced the commitments to revolutionary politics.

To date, much of the critical literature interpreting the place of these debates within the political history of Marxism has failed to grasp their genuine political significance if only because they fell into the trap of juxtaposing a contaminated legacy (revisionism) against the purity of the original, when in actual fact it is the opposite: it is

the inner deficiency of the original that appears now as the defects in the legacy. Italian Marxist Lucio Colletti is a perfect example.[38] To Colletti, Marxist labour leaders such as Edward Bernstein, Karl Kautsky and Georgi Plekhanov made the wrong decisions because they misunderstood the premises of Marx's critique of capitalism. What eludes Colletti's otherwise rigorous focus, however, is the structural place of leadership within the movement, and the role Marxism, despite itself, plays in affirming this place.

In speaking of reconciliation, Marx is also speaking of the formal pattern of an object's historical development, which means he is also speaking of a specific kind of response theory has to developments in the object of knowledge. This is, after all, the central premise of the phenomenon of revisionism, mainly, that different stages in the development of theory deal with different historical stages in the development of the object. But in Marx's understanding of reconciliation, which acknowledges it to be a pseudo kind of resolution, the object in its historical development does not transcend itself and become a different object altogether. It simply adopts an augmented form, a *modus vivendi*, which grants its internal divisions a temporary reprieve from their ongoing struggles. Revisionists, however, mistook the gap between theory and practice as evidence on the one hand of a new object and on the other, of the redundancy of the old theories.

But by considering the revisionist debates as a moment in the reconciliation of a real contradiction animating Marxism's approach to politics the significance of

[38] While his post-WWII studies offer a detailed and persuasive reading of the period, his emphasis on cataloguing the numerous theoretical misinterpretations committed by Social Democratic Marxists leads him to explain their political misadventures as the result of bad leadership. By doing so, he uncritically affirms the intellectual character of political leadership within the European labour movement, overlooking the contentious role of centralized decision-making to a movement predicated upon the promotion of the self-emancipation of labour.

revisionism to Marxism's political history becomes clear: as a response to both the emergence of monopoly capital and the success of parliamentary socialist activities, the revisionist debates reveal a structural homology between the didactic principle in Marxism, as the source of the intellectual character of labour's political leadership, and a postulate of the capitalist social division of labour, as the site of the social origin of this intellectual character. That the identity of this principle and postulate inscribes itself into the institutional form of labour's political organizations, which in the context of the Social Democratic Party acquires a more objective shape, means simply that Marxism replicated at the level of the socio-political the same dominative relations already defining labour's socio-economic experience. In this way, Marxist politics did for labour's political subjectivity what economics does for its creative subjectivity. As the site in which all this is concentrated, the phenomenon of revisionism is, therefore, the second form of appearance of fetishism in Marxism's political history.

I. Social Democracy: from Gotha to Erfurt

On the heels of two attempts on Kaiser Wilhelm I's life, and three years after the German Social Democratic Party was unified doctrinally at the congress of Gotha, the "Law against the public danger of Social Democratic endeavours,", i.e., the anti-socialist laws, was passed on October 19, 1878. And while the law did not ban the Social Democrats outright, it might just as well have, since it made it illegal to espouse Social Democratic principles. Furthermore, the law provided the Prussian state with the necessary legal framework with which it tactically moved against the German working class's political mobilization outlawing and smashing trade unions on the one hand, while

censoring or shutting the movement's newspapers and communication networks on the other (Rees *The Algebra of Revolution* 123).

Despite the state-sanctioned persecutions, the SPD was to emerge from the period with an enlarged electoral base. In fact, during these oppressive years the number of votes the party received grew five-fold (from 311,961 in 1881 to 1,427,298 in 1890) (Rees *The Algebra of Revolution* 123). For instance, in the Reichstag elections of 1887, the party garnered 10% of the vote and in 1890, that share had grown to 19.7%. And following the expiration of the anti-socialist laws, the party's vote share continued to grow, up to 23.3% in 1893 and by the following year, it received 27.7% of the vote before swelling to over 31% by 1903 (Rees *The Algebra of Revolution* 123).

In October of 1891, one year after Chancellor Bismarck's resignation and the expiration of the anti-socialist laws, and for the first time since the congress at Gotha (in 1875), the SPD convened in order to ratify a new program stating anew its principles and its demands. And, like the Gotha Program, the new program bore the name of the congress' host city, Erfurt. On many important issues, the Erfurt Program reaffirmed the demands laid out in the Gotha Program. The demands for universal suffrage, the extension of a series of political rights and freedoms, greater protections of life and health, eight-hour workdays, prohibitions on child labour all remained unchanged if only because the basic principle the program's series of demands sought to remedy also remained unaltered: that the exploitation of labour, which it was believed lead to a general state of misery, was a consequence of the monopolization of the means of production by the capitalist class and so would only end when this monopoly was destroyed.

However, what was novel about the new program was how it intentionally prioritized the political process, framing it explicitly as the means to labour's economic emancipation from capital. Unlike Gotha, which did not observe this distinction—in an effort to appease the Lasellean faction, which drew the ire of both Marx and Engels—the Erfurt Program was explicit about what "the German Social Democratic Party demands" and what the German Social Democratic Party demands "For the protection of the working classes" (Social Democratic Party of Germany). To Engels (Marx was, of course, dead by this time), who was sensitive to this change acknowledging and discussing it in his critical comments on the program, it signalled the ideological triumph of Marxism over the Lassalleans at the same time as it heralded the arrival of a Marxist hegemony within (and over) the party. Were it not for this fact, though, the programs would have been otherwise indistinguishable.

What Engels could not foresee is how this distinction would come to take on an entirely different meaning, one which would mobilize itself to strike at the heart of Marxian politics, mainly, its commitment to proletarian revolution.[39] To Engels, politics was not only a sphere of activity autonomous from the production process; it was a sphere of human action whose consequences carried universal significance and so could meaningfully impact they way in which labour was integrated into production. In the realm of politics, the proletariat as Marx and Engels saw it was going to build the universal dimension of its identity as a class. So long as labour continued to restrict its political mobilizations to those articulated by trade unionism, the universal character of the struggle against capital remained an inarticulate and latent possibility. Each separate

[39] To Engels, the separation harkened to his and Marx's critique of the limits of trade unionism. To Edward Bernstein, however, the separation laid the groundwork for a strategic shift from revolutionary to reform politics, a shift that would further concretize the autonomy of the political from the socio-economic.

trade union struggle proved incapable of achieving the sorts of society-wide changes necessary to definitively eliminate the grievances of the various trades, the sum total of which express labour's structural subordination to capital.

It is this understanding of politics that Engels has in mind when in his critical comments of the Erfurt Program he praises its "theoretical aspect" for being firmly "based on present-day science" (i.e., Marxist theory), and when he expresses his overall approval stating "The present draft differs very favourably from the former program [at Gotha]" ("A Critique"). But he is also quick to point out that despite the universal aspirations of this sort of political action, labour's politics remains distinct from bourgeois politics which likewise articulates a universal identity, but in the form of a national identity—i.e., the citizenry.

In an effort to draw attention to this distinction, Engels considers some of the limitations of parliamentary activity as they have made themselves known in Germany over the past few decades. To the leadership of the SPD he points out, quoting the program, how absurd it is "to wish 'to transform all the instruments of labour into common property' on the basis of this [the 1871] constitution [of the German Federation] and the system of small states sanctioned by it" ("A Critique"). Continuing, he derisively points out to them the 1871 Constitution (also colloquially known as Bismarck's Imperial Constitution), is but "a copy" of the Prussian Constitution of 1850 (a compromise formation with the National Assembly in which the monarchy re-established control over the executive suite unsettled during the revolutions of 1848-50). Engels' line of reasoning notes quite clearly that, if the Reichstag was unable to put an end to Absolutism, how could it ever possess the power to put an end to capitalism?

In these criticisms Engels, it would seem, is drawing on the lessons Marx took from the 1848-50 revolutions. The events of those years secured in Marx's mind how entrenched the hesitant and conservative character of the German bourgeois was vis-à-vis the aim of seizing political power. What Engels witnessed over the course of the following forty years did little to convince him otherwise. What must have been present to his mind were the protracted struggles of the French Republic to assert itself over the old order on the one hand, and the political lethargy achieved in England under its constitutional monarchy, on the other. The German situation seemed amenable to both, as non-preferable as each scenario was. While conceding the possibility of socialism peacefully replacing capitalism, Engels qualifies this possibility as likely only for those societies that have already become democratic republics, such as the United States or France (as the situation suggested at the end of the nineteenth century). Such an option, argued Engels, was not open to a country like Germany "where the government is almost omnipotent and the Reichstag and all other representative bodies have no real power" ("A Critique"). "To advocate such a thing in Germany," he continued, would mean, "removing the fig-leaf from absolutism and becoming oneself a screen for its nakedness" ("A Critique"). For Engels, to go beyond the limits of *German* parliamentary activity, a revolutionary tide would have to surge across the *whole* land, and not just the chambers of the National Assembly in Berlin.

Engels' critique of German parliamentarianism draws also from Marx's critique of the legal category of right. Marx's critique of right is significant because by demonstrating the non-transferable character of bourgeois political forms to proletarian politics, it grasps the political limits of the former while outlining the distinctive and

autonomous character of the latter. Prior to the party's congress at Gotha,[40] Marx and Engels were given an advanced draft of the party's program to comment on. The result was the famously scathing *Critique of the Gotha Program*, which took aim squarely at the presence in the program of the theories of Ferdinand Lassalle, who by this time had died (killed in a duel in 1864), but who had in his lifetime achieved significant influence over the German working class, having in 1863 helped form the General German Workers Association (GGWA). It was the desire on the part of the party leadership to incorporate the GGWA's extensive membership that prompted them to include a Lassellean perspective. As a result, the program in Marx and Engels eyes ended up placing an undue emphasis on a form of politics aiming for the extension of individual rights.

To Marx, Lassalle's main problem was that he theorized by way of abstract universals. The uncritical attitude he took with respect to his own methodology therefore filtered into the political prescriptions deduced on its basis. Consider the very first principle of the Gotha Program as it is built on Lassalle's conception of labour: "Labour is the source of all wealth and of all civilization, AND SINCE useful labour is possible only in and through society, the proceeds of labour belong, undiminished and in equal right to all members of society" ("Gotha" 528). The principle is built of two parts. There is first a two-part theoretical definition of labour—"labour is the source of all wealth and

[40] In 1875 a doctrinal dispute divided the nascent German Social Democratic Party between its Eisenach faction (named for the city where the party was founded, but programmatically affiliated with Marx and Engels) on one side and the Lassellean faction on the other (whose membership came to the Social Democrats through the General German Workers' Association and whose principles were connected to the theories of Ferdinand Lassalle). In an effort to mend the split and restore party unity officials organized a congress to be held in May of the same year in the city of Gotha. The draft program, an eclectic document of mixed Marxist and liberal principles, was according to August Bebel's recollection an "adroit tactic," the result of "clever calculations" since it did what it was designed to do—unify the party (*My Life* 287). To Marx and Engels, however, the program was an "untidy, confused, disconnected, illogical and discreditable" program ("Engel's to Bebel October 1875").

culture" and then the more qualified definition that "useful labour is possible only in and through society." This is followed by the second part, a political proscription—" the proceeds of labour belong, undiminished and in equal right to all members of society"—which is presented as a logical deduction—"AND SINCE"—stemming from the relation of the two parts of the theoretical definitions of labour with one another. It remains unclear, as Marx observed, how a fair distribution can distribute the proceeds of labour "undiminished" and at the same time as an "equal right" among *all* members of society, prompting him to exclaim exasperatedly in the face of this glaring lacuna: "To all members of society? To those who do not work as well? What remains then of the 'undiminished proceeds of labour'? Only to those members of society who work? What then of the 'equal right' of all members of society?" (*Critique* 528).

To Marx the concept of the "undiminished proceeds of labour" was nonsensical for the simple reason that these proceeds support more than just the immediate producers. In terms of immediate personal consumption, this product supports the families of the immediate producers, as well as whatever other kinds of dependents they may have; and in terms of productive consumption, the product must divide from itself the portion needed to replenish the means and materials for further production, the portion invested in the expansion of production (if necessary), and the portion stored as insurance against accidents and foreseen or unseen natural calamities.[41] It is therefore impossible that Lassalle's cooperative regulation of production based on labour's equal right could result in the envisioned "fair distribution."

[41] "It is true that animals also produce. They build nests and dwellings, like the bee, the beaver, the ant, etc. But they produce only their own immediate needs or those of their young; they produce one-sidedly, while man produces universally" (Marx *Early Writings* 329).

There is, therefore, nothing politically revolutionary in this stance as far as Marx was concerned. In fact, it was the appeal to an "equal right" that cast Lassalle's politics in a conservative light. As Marx argued, the bourgeois conception of equality and the conception of rights based on it is nothing more than a derivative of the postulates of equivalent exchange.[42] As is the case when applied to the abstract individual, when applied to the abstract worker, an equal standard effaces the myriad differences in physical and mental capacities among working individuals. As such, equal right can only be an unequal right among unequal labour. "It recognizes no class differences, because everyone is a worker like everyone else; but it **tacitly recognizes** unequal individual endowment and thus productive capacity as natural privileges. *It is therefore, a right of inequality, in its content, like every right*." (Marx "Gotha" 530). A proletarian politics seeking to transition from "each according to his abilities, to each according to his needs" cannot rely on the most progressive elements of bourgeois politics, but must, as Marx previously concluded, generate its very own revolutionary practice.

In *Critique of the Gotha Program,* Marx offers us a glimpse of what is otherwise extraordinarily difficult to come by in his writings, a vision of socialized production, that is, emancipated labour:

[42] "For example, the social working day consists of the sum of the individual hours of work; the individual labor time of the individual producer is the part of the social working day contributed by him, his share in it. He receives a certificate from society that he has furnished such-and-such an amount of labor (after deducting his labor for the common funds); and with this certificate, he draws from the social stock of means of consumption as much as the same amount of labor cost. The same amount of labor, which he has given to society in one form, he receives back in another. Here, obviously, the same principle prevails as that which regulates the exchange of commodities, as far as this is exchange of equal values. Content and form are changed, because under the altered circumstances no one can give anything except his labor, and because, on the other hand, nothing can pass to the ownership of individuals, except individual means of consumption. But as far as the distribution of the latter among the individual producers is concerned, the same principle prevails as in the exchange of commodity equivalents: a given amount of labor in one form is exchanged for an equal amount of labor in another form" ("Gotha" 530).

> 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 of the total labour. ("Gotha" 529)

The abolition of the law of value (the exchange of equivalents) does two things: first it depicts a social relation no longer determined by market relations—"the producers do not exchange their products"— and second, it implies the unity of labour with the means of production as a necessary condition of this emancipated social relation—"individual labour no longer appears in an indirect fashion," meaning that if exchange is no longer the mechanism by which the social character of labour is realized, labour no longer appears as a commodity, and therefore, the means of production also no longer (exclusively) assume the form of a commodity. Since exchange no longer mediates the allocation of social labour among the various branches comprising the production process, there is a direct relation between individual labour and what Marx termed "total labour," the aggregate of labour-processes necessary to a certain societal existence over a specified period of time. It follows from this direct relation that labour would no longer be divided between its manual and its intellectual modes as well. In order for individual labour to relate to total labour, the latter should appear to the former as a transparent fully socialized totality under the conscious control of each instance of individual labour (opposed to the "enchanted" world of commodities where labour is made to "appear here *as the value* of these products").

Marx's concept of revolution cannot be based on anything but a transformation of the overall character of the network of social labour having been made perceptive by the

forces of capitalist production, but also mystified by capitalist social relations. For Marxism, the transformation of the network of social labour becomes visible in a politics that takes as its aim the unity of labour internally between its intellectual and manual modes and externally with the means of production (that is, in the elimination of private property regulated by exchange relations). These two conditions constitute the emancipatory logic immanent to labour's structural subordination from which is deduced the interests of labour as a class and from which proletarian politics acquires its autonomous and thus revolutionary character.

Marx's concept of revolution is, therefore, not just a political concept expressing the overturning of one particular social order by another, but also a concept expressing the historically determined dimension of labour's alienated self-relation as the site of its revolutionary replacement by the category of total labour (i.e., a fully socialized network of social labour). Unlike in Lassalle's theory of labour where labour's equal right, a pretext to a 'fair distribution,' is deduced from abstract labour,[43] a generic and ahistoric conception, the abstract character of labour leads Marx to a conception of "total labour" or, what is in other words, a fully transparent relationship between individual labour and its social character measured in terms of its relation to an aggregate (of labour necessary for social reproduction across all branches of production).

It is this radical character of Marx's critique that informs Engels' attitude as he advises the leadership of the SPD on the inherent limitation of a strategy that takes parliamentary activity as its basic tactic. By the final months of his life, however, and in response to the electoral gains made by the SPD, Engels appeared to have a change of

[43] Not to be confused with Marx's critical concept of abstract labour.

heart. Gone, it seemed, was his fidelity to the revolutionary act, abandoned in favour of the steady momentum of parliamentary activity.

II. Parliamentary Socialism and the Tasks of the Party

In a new introduction he wrote for the 1895 edition of Marx's *The Class Struggle in France* Engels praises the timeliness of the SPD's exclusive commitment to parliamentary activity, stating,

> Thanks to the intelligent use which the German workers made of the universal suffrage introduced in 1866, the astonishing growth of the party is made plain to all the world by incontestable figures: 1871, 102,000; 1874, 352,000; 1877, 493,000 Social Democratic votes. Then came recognition of this advance by high authority in the shape of the Anti-Socialist Laws; the party was temporarily broken up, the number of votes dropped to 312,000 in 1881. But that was quickly overcome, and then, under the pressure of the Exceptional Law, without a press, without a legal organisation and without the right of association and assembly, rapid expansion began in earnest: 1884, 550,000; 1887, 763,000; 1890, 1,427,000 votes. The hand of the state was paralysed. The Anti-Socialist Law disappeared; the socialist vote rose to 1,787,000, over a quarter of all the votes cast. The government and the ruling classes had exhausted all their expedients – uselessly, pointlessly, unsuccessfully. The tangible proofs of their impotence, which the authorities, from night watchman to the imperial chancellor had had to accept – and that from the despised workers! – these proofs were counted in millions. The state was at the end of its tether, the workers only at the beginning of theirs. (Engels "Introduction")

This he does while also seemingly renouncing his and Marx's myopic conception of revolution, based as it was on a conception of minority insurrection:

> All revolutions up to the present day have resulted in the displacement of the rule of one class by the rule of another; but all ruling classes up to now have been only small minorities in relation to the ruled mass of the people. One ruling minority was thus overthrown; another minority seized the helm of state in its stead and refashioned the state institutions to suit its own interests…but if we disregard the concrete content in each case, the common form of all these revolutions was that they were minority revolutions. (Engels "Introduction")

So when the February 1848 revolution erupted, Engels continues,

> …all of us, as far as our conceptions of the conditions and the course of revolutionary movements were concerned, were under the spell of previous historical experience, particularly that of France. It was, indeed, the latter, which had dominated the whole of European history since 1789, and from which now once again, the signal had gone forth for general revolutionary change. It was, therefore, natural and unavoidable that our conceptions of the nature and the course of the "social" revolution proclaimed in Paris in February 1848, of the revolution of the proletariat, should be strongly coloured by memories of the prototypes of 1789 and 1830. (Engels "Introduction")

The prototypes of 1789, 1830, and 1848 can also be seen colouring Marx's conception of revolution in 1870 (and which was completely at odds with the implications of the emancipatory logic lurking within it as well). For instance, at a meeting of the General Council of the International Workingmen's Association on New Year's Day 1870 Marx penned a resolution declaring England "to be the lever which will bring about a really serious economic revolution" (qtd. Stekloff *History of the First International* 218). Having its headquarters in London meant the International's General Council, a minority group by any definition, was strategically placed and so in a position to take advantage of the advanced coalescence of historic social forces shaping England's social landscape. England's special place atop the capitalist world order meant in Marx's eyes it was "the only country where the capitalist method…has made itself master of nearly the whole of production" (Marx qtd. Stekloff *History of the First International* 219). The General Council, therefore in Marx's words, found itself in "the fortunate position of having its hand upon this great lever of the proletarian revolution" (qtd. Stekloff *History of the First International* 219). Exemplary of the "spell" Engels in 1895 felt himself finally breaking away from are Marx's opinion of the British working class in 1870, an opinion he

expressed in his opposition to the idea of Britain forming and therefore having its own federal council in the International despite (or rather according to Marx, because of) the fact London housed the International's headquarters: "How foolish…how criminal," Marx exclaimed, "it would be to allow this lever to pass under the control of purely British hands" (qtd. Stekloff *History of the International* 219). The British proletariat he argued lacked "the spirit of generalization and revolutionary fervour" espoused only by Marxists, a minority in the European labour movement (Marx qtd. Stekloff *History of the First International* 219).

All of which leads Engels to reflect that because history has revealed "our point of view at that time as an illusion" it has subsequently "completely transformed the conditions under which the proletariat has to fight" (Engels "Introduction"). To Engels it is now clear that

> where it is a question of a complete transformation of the social organization, the masses themselves must also be in it, must themselves already have grasped what is at stake, what they are going in for, body and soul. The history of the last fifty years has taught us that. But in order that the masses may understand what is to be done, long persistent work is required and it is just this work… slow propaganda work and parliamentary activity… which we are now pursuing and with a success which drives the enemy to despair. (Engels "Introduction")

Carrying out this work, "propaganda work and parliamentary activity," Engels concludes, is "the immediate task of the party" (Engels "Introduction").

Engels' shift in attitude, while seemingly progressive, if not overtly opportunistic, disguises a specific continuity. It appears to invert the contradictory determinants of Marxist politics with the claim about the participation of the masses, but it does this by reframing the emphasis it places on the relations established by a didactic principle: if at

the time of Erfurt, he warned the party leadership they were neglecting the revolutionary potential of the proletariat in favor of a politics much too conservative in its practices, in the face of recent electoral successes it is now these practices that are revolutionary and the original conception that has proven conservative. It is not the form but the content that has changed: out is the revolutionary avant-garde, Engels' "revolution by minority," and in are the people's representatives. In either instance, though, a minority still acts in place of and on behalf of an altogether passive majority, albeit apropos parliamentary activity, the mandate carried forth by the people's representatives is technically derived from the masses.

By shifting the level of analysis to the character and form of social relations, the following things about the party become apparent: the party—through the work of "slow propaganda—relates to the class as the educator relates to the pupil. The party educates the class as to its interests as a class who then give their consent to the party to act as the representative of these interests. A didactic principle, therefore, structures the most immediate relation of the party to the class, "in order," as Engels put it, "that the masses may understand what is to be done." On the basis of this principle, the party separates itself from the class so that the proletariat can "see its own class consciousness given shape," as Georg Lukács put it some years later while discussing the role of the Communist Party ("Towards a Methodology" 326). But in this external relation to the class, the party does not model the emancipated relations socialism aims to establish. It claims only to possess knowledge of the conditions necessary for this emancipation. With this knowledge it also establishes another set of relations, one that allows it to carry out its other function, mainly, parliamentary activity.

Since the series of political and social revolutions that began in England in the seventeenth century and the United States and France in the eighteenth century, the processes of the consolidation of the capitalist political apparatus continued throughout nineteenth-century Europe. As perhaps the most distinct element of this apparatus, its representational institution, that is, parliament, house of representatives, etc., emerged throughout this period in hybrid ways appearing in its general form at times within arrangements with the remnants of the *ancien regime* and at other times in its developed form, having already delivered to the feudal lords their *coup de grâce*.

In the events in which the developed form of parliamentarianism struggled to take shape in France during the 1848 revolutions, Marx perceived what he thought to be "the comprehensive contradiction" of parliamentarianism, mainly that

> The classes whose social slavery the constitution is to perpetuate – proletariat, peasantry, petty bourgeoisie – it puts in possession of political power through universal suffrage. And from the class whose old social power it sanctions**,** the bourgeoisie, it withdraws the political guarantees of this power. It forces the political rule of the bourgeoisie into democratic conditions, which at every moment help the hostile classes to victory and jeopardize the very foundations of bourgeois society. From the first group it demands that they should not go forward from political to social emancipation; from the others that they should not go back from social to political restoration. (*The Class Struggle in France* 35)

In this passage Marx addresses the formal and the historical aspects of the capitalist state.[44] That the constitution is to *perpetuate* the social slavery of labour suggests the development of the capitalist state does not stem from the (strictly) logical requirement of capital, but has emerged historically in the course of the class struggle. At the same time, the basis of a formal analysis is also present, since the limitations (i.e., democratic

[44] These aspects would later divide Marxists over what constituted real revolutionary tactics and what produced only reformist strategies.

conditions) the state places on bourgeois political rule function in a neutral sense in that it "helps the hostile classes to victory."

On their own, each of these aspects directs attention away from the main point Marx was putting forth, however, which is that the historically distinct form of *this* political apparatus resides in the way it perpetuates the social slavery immanent to capitalist society while appearing as though it were in fact neutral in its disposition towards the class struggle. The way it does this is by putting political power into the hands of the subaltern, but only on the condition they do not "go forward from political to social emancipation." What needs to be considered, then, is this form of political power and how it is that by placing it in the hands of labour, it perpetuates labour's structural subordination to capital.

III. Capital as Self-determining Principle and the Autonomization of Bourgeois Politics

From the perspective of labour, which is given its shape in Marxist theory, the didactic principle determines the form of its political agency. It does this by structuring labour's primary political relation, which is the relation of the individual worker to the party. Labour's political power appears to itself as the authority of the party's leadership, grounded as it is in the party's commitment to the defense of labour's class interests. In its parliamentary activity, the party on the other hand relates not to the class, but to the political apparatus of capitalist society. In this relation, the party functions as labour's plenipotentiary, representing its class interests to the state. But from the perspective of the capitalist political apparatus, things appear different.

Between it—the capitalist political apparatus encompassing the executive, legislative and judicial branches—and the various political parties vying for majority status within the apparatus' representational organs, it is the center towards which each party strives. In this way, recalling Meaney's comments on Hegel's notion of "Absolute Mechanism" from the previous chapter, the autonomy of the political party from the working class is at the same time the inclusion of the party in the capitalist political apparatus and the latters inclusion within the "immanent form" of capitalist society. In other words, in its (i.e., the party's) external relation to the class, this externality is the form in which the objectivity of it (i.e., the interests of capital in the form of the capitalist political apparatus) particularizes itself. Regardless of the degree to which it is conscious of all this, in its identity with the capitalist political apparatus the function of the party is to form labour into a class not so it can commence with the business of socializing production, but so it can be given political power as the means of its integration into the framework of the capitalist state. And it is at this point that the form of this relation begins to bear a striking resemblance to that posited by Hobbes' *pactum subjectionis*. Here Hobbes lurks again in the depths of Hegel's notion of a mediated immanence in which a self-determining entity articulates its autonomy, its sovereignty. For if, in assuming control over the party, the capitalist political apparatus also assumes control over labour, it does so at the point of its political articulation as a class.

Since, the "sovereign maketh no covenant with the people beforehand," as Hobbes put it, it is in the context of parliamentarianism that this covenant is made (*Leviathan* 108). Through the didactic relations the party establishes between it and labour, labour is made into an object of singular identity: the working class. The party,

then, represents the interests of the class to the sovereign in hopes that its petitions might secure certain concessions lessening the burden of labour's fate. This is the parliamentary work Engels so enthusiastically claimed was one of the immediate tasks of the party.

While being necessary, the party's external relation to the class is in itself not a sufficient condition to explain its fetishized form. Perhaps this is what is off about Lukács' standard explanation that the party's (in this case the Communist Party's) separation from the class allows the working class the opportunity to "see its own class consciousness given shape." What Lukacs—and much of the critical literature concerned with the issue—overlooks is that this externalization is still only a distinction occurring within (the consciousness of) labour *as a determination of capital.*

The standpoint of labour given scientific (i.e., systemic) expression in Marxism is still a standpoint grounded in a reality where labour continues to be a function of capital. It is true the historical appearance of Marxism signals an important moment in the development of proletarian class-consciousness, but this development is not so much a break with the social reality of capitalist society than it is a breach in its reified structure. Because the didactic relation with which the class relates to itself does not establish the emancipatory relations in which labour could be said to determine itself, but imparts only the knowledge of the conditions of this emancipation, the party's external relation to the class is akin to the distinction between thought and being *within thought:* a class conscious proletariat introduces a distinction between labour and capital *within capitalist society*.

Here a question appears: how exactly does the social power of capital, as the self-determining principle, particularize its objective universality in the party? So far, only the

formal framework of this identity has been posed with the focus being on the external relation between the party and the capitalist political apparatus. If Marxism is the repudiation of capitalism at the level of its ideological being, how and in what ways can capital be seen bypassing this repudiation? First, it does not entirely by-pass its ideological repudiation; it confronts it, but not directly, or exclusively as idea against idea. Rather, it grows in the mind of its opponent by first regulating the conditions of its opponent's objective experience. It does not do this at the level of individual consciousness, but at the more substantial level of social form. This is actually what the phenomenon of revisionism really represents in the political history of Marxism. It appeared in the mind of certain Marxist political leaders that a point had been reached where Marxism's revolutionary strategies had become invalidated not because apologist literature had convinced them of this, but because from their particular vantage point, the point of view of the "political leader," this is how things really appeared.

IV. Revisionism

To Edward Bernstein, the principal protagonist in the revisionism debates, Engels' endorsement of the SPD's parliamentary work was at the same time a validation of the doubts he had by this time begun harboring over the validity of the SPD's continued commitment to revolutionary politics. Given the gains made by the SPD and the processes of socialization seemingly accompanying the emergence of monopoly capital across the continent, parliamentary democracy appeared to many to be an effective bulwark against capitalist exploitation. According to Bernstein, as a result of this scenario a gap had opened between the theoretical premises of Marxism and the practical results of the activities of parliamentary socialists. The gap, in Bernstein's view,

was largely a result, on the one hand, of objective and historical transformations that had taken place in the structure of the capitalist system, in which was included labour's greater political participation, and, on the other, a predilection in Marx's thought towards dialectics and its concomitant recourse to antagonism and contradiction.

There are three main facets to the revisionist platform around which subsequent debates swirled. The first is two-sided: on one side is the error of the theory of breakdown included in which is the idea of the progressive immiseration of the working classes and, on the other, the socialization of wealth. In the Foreword to his *Preconditions of Socialism* published as a single text in 1899 (also known as *Evolutionary Socialism*), Bernstein writes:

> The intensification of social relations has not in fact occurred as the [Communist] Manifesto depicts it. It is not only useless but extremely foolish to conceal this fact from ourselves. The number of property-owners has grown, not diminished. The enormous increase in social wealth has been accompanied not by a fall in the number of capitalist magnates but by an increase in the number of capitalists of all grades. The middle classes are changing in character, but they are not disappearing from the social spectrum. (2)

And since the necessity of the category of revolution was deduced from the premise of the objectivity of labour's exploitation the second facet in the revisionist platform addresses the incorrect assumption a socio-economic revolution could only be carried out by armed insurrection. In the text's conclusion, Bernstein makes the claim that

> no socialist capable of thinking, dreams to-day in England of an imminent victory for socialism by means of a violent revolution -none dreams of a quick conquest of Parliament by a revolutionary proletariat. But they rely more and more on work in the municipalities and other self-governing bodies. The early contempt for the trade union movement has been given up; a closer sympathy has been won for it and, here and there also, for the co-operative movement. (192)

To Bernstein, these errors were not accidents but the direct consequences of Marx's vision of historical development having been articulated in terms of dialectical antitheses, the expulsion of which is the third facet of the platform. Again, in the conclusion of *The Preconditions of Socialism,* he writes

> That the number of the wealthy increases and does not diminish is not an invention of bourgeois "harmony economists", but a fact established by the boards of assessment for taxes, often to the chagrin of those concerned, a fact, which can no longer be disputed. But what is the significance of this fact as regards the victory of socialism? Why should the realisation of socialism depend on its refutation? Well, simply for this reason: because the dialectical scheme seems so to prescribe it; because a post threatens to fall out of the scaffolding if one admits that the social surplus product is appropriated by an increasing instead of a decreasing number of possessors.[45] But it is only the speculative theory that is affected by this matter... (200)

Naturally enough Bernstein was attacked on all sides. From Kautsky to Plekhanov, to Luxemburg, Lenin and Lukács, all the major figures of the era and those that would come to prominence later wrote rebukes to Bernstein's work.[46] This dissertation is, however,

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[45] Revisionism is a falsified perspective in that it fails to perceive how a relative alleviation of exploitation can take place in a context of its absolute increase. *In fact, all incremental gains, so long as they continue to exist in a field determined by the law of value, can only every be the relative exception that proves the rule*. As Marx proved of the forces animating the organic composition of capital, a relative decrease in variable capital can be a function of its absolute increase. Marx is referring here to a trend associated with industrialization and the transition from an agrarian economy to an industrial one, or what is otherwise known as an economic and social configuration according to the law of value. Lenin confirms this law in his analysis of the development of capitalism in Russia;—see section II of chapter one in his *The Development of Capitalism in Russia*. The absolute expansion of the field of capitalist production, i.e., expanded reproduction, comprises within it opposing moments such as the relative increases and decreases in the organic composition of capital configuring specific branches of production at any one time. A similar trend is observable in the context of globalized capitalist development as well. The relative decrease of variable capital associated with advanced industrial production is taking place with its absolute increase globally. The process of proletarianization is an expression of such a law's operation and is a sine qua non of capitalist production. Globalization is the overcoming of the regional limitation to capitalist production even though in order to do so it requires the development of regional trading blocs, the EU, NAFTA, ASEAN, the Trans Pacific partnership deals (TPP), a phenomenon representative of the movement of this same law.

[46] See Karl Kautsky *Bernstein und das Sozial demokratische Programm* [1899]; Rosa Luxemburg *Reform or Revolution?* [1900]; The chapter "Dogmatism and Freedom of Criticism" in Lenin *What is to be Done?* [1902]; or Georgi Plekhanov's article published in *Neue Zeit* "Bernstein and Materialism" [July 1898] As well, criticisms of Bernstein are abundantly strewn about the essays in Georg Lukacs' *History and Class*

not the place for a detailed survey of the ins and outs of these debates. Too often such a survey ends up providing a forum for a discussion of "real" Marxism opposed to "vulgar Marxism." The trappings of this juxtaposition form a blind spot in the critical literature on the subject.[47] Insofar as it misplaces its critical emphasis on the subjective errors of the party leadership it fails to focus on the objective role of political leadership in the class struggle. It therefore misses the way this juxtaposition is only the ideological image of the juxtaposition between leadership and class at the heart of the organizational form of the party.

Consciousness [1922]. For a taste of the basic tone of much of these rebukes, consider a statement from Jack Fitzgerald's 1909 review of Bernstein's *Evolutionary Socialism*

> Marx and Engels were no penny-a-liners, as Bernstein, but men of immense knowledge and intellectual power, and a critic who would show them in error must be prepared to handle vast quantities of information in a scientific manner and logical style. Does Bernstein do this? Let one of his supporters, Mr. Austin F. Harrison, answer—'His [Bernstein's] criticism was purely negative; his language—and probably intentionally so—obscure; his arguments a labyrinth of antitheses, discussions and digressions. (Fitzgerald)

[47] With one exception: George Sorel. Sorel was the first and perhaps only radical socialist of the era to ground, via a consideration of the fetish character of language, the contradiction between what parliamentary socialists *said* and what they *did* in the organizational framework of the political party. At different points in *Reflections on Violence*, published nine years after Bernstein's *Evolutionary Socialism,* Sorel speaks of "the idolatry of words" in both the contemporary labour movement and in the general history of ideologies. In one passage, he links this idolatry to the very structure of the socialist political party: "The emancipation of the workers must be the work of the workers themselves—their newspapers repeat this every day,—but real emancipation consists in voting for a professional politician, in securing *for him* the means of obtaining a comfortable situation in the world, *in subjecting oneself to a leader*'" [italics added] (121).

Sorel's words paint a clear vision of the logic of fetishism, that is, his words work to visualize the complex of contradictory relations parliamentary socialism embroils the working classes in. At the level of language, the commitment to self-emancipation is affirmed—"The emancipation of the workers must be the work of the workers themselves"—and at the level of practice a collective activity is undertaken—voting—in which the principle of self-emancipation appears to find adequate expression. And yet, at the level of reality, this praxis results "in subjecting oneself to a leader." Voting, at least as it is practiced within the framework of a representational system, cannot realize the aim of self-emancipation since it results in a leader who relates externally to the collective from which he emerged. The parliamentary form provides, in this sense, a modus vivendi, a kind of pseudo-coincidence of opposites. Within this form, the will of the collective is nothing but the form of appearance of the private interests of the leader. It has no choice but to express itself through the material body of the leader. The leader is then the form of appearance of the (ideal) expression of the collective will.

As it turns out, then, the relation of the collective to itself, mediated through its relation to a leader remains contradictory since, on one level, the relation between the premise of the collective will—self-emancipation—and the practical expression of this will not only fail to correspond, but, on another level, actually produce the opposite—the realization of the private interest of the leader—as a result of the practical efforts aimed at realizing the theoretical premises. The contradiction between theory and practice is at the same time a contradiction between practice and reality.

One example should suffice to illustrate this point. Lucio Colletti, for instance, focuses his critique, which is otherwise compelling and convincing, on establishing a genealogy of the theoretical misinterpretation typical of Bernstein and other figures of the period. Ultimately, he traces its source to Engels (thereby relieving Marx of much culpability). For instance, he writes,

> The theory of the State in the Marxism of the Second International was the theory in Engels' *Origins of the Family, Private Property and the State* (1884). This text, like all the Marxist discussions of the State which followed, is characterized by a transposition of the specific features of the modern representative State to the State in general, whatever the historical epoch or economic social regime underlying it. (*From Rousseau to Lenin* 105)

The same transposition appears in Kautsky's *The Class Struggle*, the theoretical companion piece to the Erfurt Program. There he writes that while the Erfurt Program commits the SPD to parliamentary activities, the party nevertheless remains conscious of the necessity of transforming the bourgeois state into "a self-sufficient cooperative commonwealth" (Kautsky). According to Kautsky, it is exactly this insight that gives the SPD its aim: "to call the working class to conquer state power" (Kautsky).

And yet, even though Kautsky acknowledges the need to transform the state, he proceeds to define it, following Engels, as being "like all previous systems of government" in that it "is preeminently an instrument intended to guard the interests of the ruling class" (Kautsky). This, of course raises the question, given the predominance of this quality, how it is that the state should transform itself into a "self-sufficient cooperative commonwealth" simply by virtue of its control by the leading representatives of the working class (without recourse to rationalizations grounded in their moral superiority). Evidently, Kautsky assumed, along with many Marxists (both those who

came before and many who came after him), that the proletariat rules so long as it controls the state and that by controlling the state the working class establishes its rule.

Colletti goes on to frame the most important aspects of his critique, the act of separating at the level of theory mutually determining categories such as economy and society, materialism and history and the tendency to reason according to abstract universals, in terms that point to the effects of the logic of fetishism in the revisionist position. While the litany of offenses committed by "vulgar Marxism" is long indeed, the most basic defect—and therefore the most significant insight—continues to go unacknowledged. This is because the critical literature, of which Colletti is an excellent representative, fell into the trap of juxtaposing a copy against *an idealized* original. As a result, it was only able to conceive Marxism's inner deficiency, i.e., the contradictory relations established by didacticism and the emancipatory interests of the class, as the legacy (i.e., Marxism's first generation of disciples) contaminating the purity of the original, when in actual fact it is the opposite: it is the inner deficiency of the original which needs to be grasped as defects in the legacy.

Colletti was led to posit this fetishism as arising first in the mind of the theorist/party leader who then transfers it to their political judgements. For example, he interprets the emphasis on politics in the Erfurt Program in exactly these terms. Of the program he writes, "Having reached the point of its fullest development, the party now had to confront the difficult and complex transition from a phase of simple propaganda to one of concrete political choices and constant coordinated and practical action" (*Rousseau* 104). The shortcomings of Colletti's concern are rooted in his efforts to ground the ineffectively 'revolutionary' politics of the Second International in the

theoretical limitations of labour's political leadership, rather than in the form of leadership itself, a form that condenses the struggle down to the subjective whims of a few individuals. In actual fact, the separation at the level of theory is *practiced first in the form political activity assumes*, then is it converted into the methodological abstraction, at which point it is then seen informing political judgement.

So while Colletti's argument is adept at *describing* the instances where revisionism is demonstratively in error, because he was only willing to trace these errors back to their common basis in method, he was unable to ground them in the organizational framework that showed itself capable of accommodating Bernstein's revisionism alongside Kautsky's 'revolutionary' Marxism. Colletti is in fact not alone in his unwillingness to use the theory of fetishism as the basis of an analysis of political phenomenon. In his 1983 article on the capitalist state, Simon Clarke dismisses as analytically unhelpful Marx's theory of fetishism. After surveying the differences between formal, abstract, and historical theories of the state, he concludes, "To derive the abstract character of the state form from the abstract character of the commodity is to treat the state as an institution that can only relate to capitalist social relations as they appear on the surface" ("State, Class Struggle" 4). But this dismissal sits at odds with his stated aim, which is to confront the "problem of explaining how a form of class rule can appear in the fetishized form of a neutral administrative apparatus" ("State, Class Struggle" 3). It is also at odds with the explicit link Marx drew between Lassalle's socially conservative politics and fetishism, since the former, as pointed out in the *Critique of the Gotha Program*, had its roots in the postulates of commodity exchange (Marx 530).

Given that the fetishism peculiar to capitalist society arises *from* the value-form, and that the expansive character of the accumulation process requires the capital/labour relation to replicate itself on an ever-expanding scale, to develop an analysis of the state on the basis of Marx's theory of fetishism would be to provide the analysis with the surface-depth framework it needs if it aspires to explain *"*how a form of class rule can appear in the fetishized form of a neutral administrative apparatus."

Furthermore, I do not see how an analysis of the state based on Marx's theory of fetishism would conflict with the conclusion Clarke reaches in his article. He writes, "The necessity of the state is, therefore, not formal or abstract, it is the historical necessity, emerging from the development of the class struggle, for a collective instrument of class domination: the state has not developed logically out of the requirements of capital, it has developed historically out of the class struggle" ("State, Class Struggle" 5). By making abstraction, form, and history separate analytic categories and by maintaining the separation between them Clarke overlooks a crucial aspect of Marx's method of analysis. As Sohn-Rethel put it, "the Marxian mode of thought is characterized by a conception of form that distinguishes it from other schools of thinking...For Marx, form is time-bound" (*Intellectual and Manual Labour* 17). The requirements of capital cannot be abstracted from the class struggle, since it is precisely the former that constitutes the historically distinct character of the latter. Marx's analysis of the commodity-form is not abstract in the sense Clarke seems to imply it is. The analysis of its formal-structure not only reveals the inner contradiction of the value-form, it provides the framework for the theoretical development of the concept of labour *in its*

determination by capital. As such, it also provides the framework for the theoretical development of a concept of the state *as a determination of capital.*[48]

V. The Social Division of Labour

If revisionism is the symptom of a process that appears on the surface as a process of autonomization of working class politics (from its bourgeois counterpart), as the interests of the working class given shape in the form of the Social Democratic Parties of Europe, in the depths of social development it is in actual fact an integration, a process of the expansion of capitalism's self-determination through the subsumption of the external objectivity of the political agency of the working class. But, again, how exactly does the social power of capital, as the self-determining principle, particularize its universality in the Party? To answer this question, it is necessary to recognize how the process of autonomization taking place in politics mimics or represents the expansion of a process that has already resulted in the autonomization of the social process of production.

Marx spoke of this process on numerous occasions, but the comments he made on it in reference to the circulation of money are particularly helpful. In reference to the role of money in circulation (as a process of exchange distinct from direct exchange), Marx writes, "the owners of commodities therefore find out that the same social division of labour which turns them into independent private producers also makes the social process of production and the relations of the individual producers to each other within that

[48] Because in capitalism people relate to their own, as well as other people's labour through the relations the products of their labour enter into with each other, the social character of people's labour appear to them as something else, as value: as the objective quality of things that allows for their social equalization, an equalization that assumes quantitative ratios. The conversion of a relation into a thing is what Marx refers to as fetishism. And because the political apparatus against which the revolutionary working class moves is *capitalism's political apparatus,* the concept and theory of fetishism lends its analytic framework to a critique of Marxism's political experiences defined as they are not just by the terrain of this political apparatus, but by the social reality it was configured to further develop.

process independent of the producers themselves" (*Capital* 202).[49] The link Marx makes between the social division of labour and the autonomization of the production process is key to understanding the development of this process in the political sphere. Circulation is a process conducive to the capitalist and the interests of capital, it must be remembered, more than to labour and labour's interests, since so long as labour has access to means of production it can enter into a series of direct exchange relations without any of them having to constitute a process of circulation.

Marx defined the social division of labour in terms of a separation between labour's intellectual and manual modes. Historically, as Marx points out, it is in machinery that this separation acquires its most concrete objectivity. "The separation of the intellectual faculties of the production process from manual labour, and the transformation of these faculties into powers exercised by capital over labour, is," Marx tells us, "finally completed by large-scale industry erected on the foundation of machinery" (*Capital* 548). The character of this separation becomes obscured when it is understood one-sidedly as a hierarchy of the technical division of labour within and between different spheres of production (considered as a whole). But Marx distinguishes between a technical and social division of labour. Again, in *Capital* he writes,

> The special skill of each individual machine-operator, who has now been deprived of all significance, vanishes as an infinitesimal quantity in the face of the science, the gigantic natural forces, and the mass of social labour embodied in the system of machinery, which together with these three forces, constitutes the power of the 'master'. This 'master', therefore, in whose mind the machinery and his monopoly of it are inseparable united, contemptuously tells his 'hands', whenever he comes into conflict with them: 'The factory operatives should keep in wholesome remembrance the fact that theirs is really a low species of skilled labour; and that there is no-one which is more easily acquired." (549)

[49] The autonomy of the process is a feature of circulation and the extended sequences it encompasses compared to the closed and limited character of direct exchange.

The fetish character of intellectual labour, which in its distilled form is akin to the sovereign decision and which appears as though it determines reality, is here described by Marx as "the power of the master." The master's power appears socially (not technically) in his command over; a) skilled labour; b) science (knowledge of the labour process); c) natural forces, and d) the mass of social labour embodied in the system of machinery.

While intuitively it appears as though the division of labour is structured according to a scale moving from less skilled to more skilled labour, a social division of labour frames the technical division, such that the specific character of the latter is a consequence of those characteristics distinctive of the former. The social division structuring the technical division of labour is obscured when the degree to which one kind of labour is seen as more skilled than other kinds is measured by the proportional magnitude of its intellectual quotient, which in turn also functions as an expression of its social necessity.

One way to gauge one form of labour's social necessity is to inquire into the level of training as an expression of its skill level, since its skill level functions as an expression of its social necessity. It would seem, then, the interpretation of the separation between head and hand from the perspective of a technical division of labour contents itself with knowledge of the secret content of the diverse types of labour. The level of social investment in training measures the social necessity of the labour, which in turn determines its hierarchical ordering from which it follows at the top of this hierarchy, is naturally enough, those captains of industry whose social necessity appears beyond dispute.

However, in the same way political economy according to Marx analysed the commodity, "however incompletely," and discovered labour and labour-time as the secret content determining the magnitude of value, the perspective of the technical division of labour discloses only the secret content of the form of this division and not the secret of the form itself. In other words, even though it can explain the logic of the hierarchy, this perspective cannot explain why, as Marx put it, the "this separation develops into a hostile antagonism (*Capital* 643), if only because it has never asked why the social character of labour should appear as a division between its intellectual and manual modes and why it should be the case the former dominates the latter?

One of the most important insights Marx made into the common variations of the theme of the individual's mystified (for better or for worse) relation to society was that which explained the market as the source of this mystification. Since any society is at its core a network of productive relations, "in a society where the network of social labour establishes itself through the private exchange of the individual products of labour", it will necessarily be the case, "the form in which this proportional distribution ensures is precisely the exchange-value of the products" ("Marx's Letter" 246). Since capitalist society regulates itself through a network of exchange relations, people experience the postulate of exchange, i.e., the separation of exchange from use, as an objective social law.

The strict observance of this law of exchange is a definitive feature of capitalist relations of production. Once under the control of the capitalist, "the labour-process is a process between things the capitalist has purchased," says Marx (*Capital* 292). As such, the capitalist stands outside the production process while inside of it labour relates—as

something the capitalist has purchased (on credit!)—to that other category of "things the capitalist has purchased" i.e., the means of production, as the property of the capitalist.

Two important consequences follow from this arrangement: first, because the capitalist stands outside the production process, to the capitalist and to society at large (insofar as the standpoint of capital is assumed to be self-evident), the production process appears automatic (a postulate that is given greater objectivity by machinery) and in its autonomous operation it unfolds and orders itself according to a technical division of labour distinguishing in the process between its manual and intellectual modes as differing degrees of skill. Second, the separation of the immediate producers from the means of production (both being things the capitalist has bought) is actually and at the same time a consequence of the social division of labour, that is, the separation of intellectual and manual labour.

In this sense, intellectual labour within *the social division of labour* refers exclusively to the external relation of the capitalist as overseer of the production process. Intellectual labour in this sense is defined in terms of the calculations involved in decision-making. Manual labour, then, refers to the labour involved in production directly. It is wage (or salaried) labour. Waged labour can therefore be predominantly intellectual in scope and still be manual. In fact, in his analysis of monopoly capital, Lenin pointed out how in the expansion of the division of labour there occurs a kind of 'manualization' of activities originally seen, within the period in which competition was dominant, as aspects of the capitalist's intellectual activity. In *Imperialism: The Highest Stage of Capitalism,* quoting a report compiled by Professor Schulze-Gaevernitz,[50] Lenin is interested in the professor's observation that "Thirty years ago, businessmen, freely

[50] Who Lenin calls "an apologist of German imperialism" (*Imperialism* 36).

competing against one another, performed nine-tenths of the work connected with their business other than manual labour. At the present time, nine-tenths of this 'brain work' is performed by *employees"* (9). Within the Marxist vernacular "manual labour" refers to any sort of productive labour (labour productive of surplus-value that is), while "intellectual labour" is intended to denote the function of the capitalist. The term "manual labour," then, is not limited to types of labour considered more bodily or physical than other types commonly regarded as more "intellectual."[51]

The rise to prominence of monopoly capital by the end of the nineteenth century does not signal the emergence of a new mode of production. Rather, it signals the arrival of a more mature stage in the historical development of capitalism. In the passage from competition to monopoly a postulate of the capitalist social division of labour, which oversees the separation of intellectual from manual modes of labour and which establishes in this separation the external place of the capitalists vis-à-vis the process of production, acquires a greater objectivity, a more perfect form. A theory that must contend with the appearance of contradictory facts, Marx's notion of the reconciliation of real contradictions reminds us, is still dealing with the same object, although now this object extends across different stages of its own historical development. And it is in this passage between stages that the inner structure of the object reveals itself to theory just as it is by virtue of their disappearance in the same passages that certain facts reveal themselves to be accidental, that is, inconsequential to the theory.

Thus, with the rise of monopoly capital the external place of the capitalist in his relation to production (and therefore labour!) acquired a greater objectivity. In finding

[51] This does not, however, prevent this distinction from forming the basis of stratifications within the working class, between middle class professionals and construction workers, or between data specialists and minimum wage service industry workers, etc.

himself displaced further from immediate production, via the framework of the joint-stock ownership structure, the capitalist is reduced to the role of money capital, to being the financier of the process. At the same time, this development greatly simplifies the capitalist's decision-making process, distilling it to its purest, most abstract, form—to buy or to sell.[52] Herein lies the origin of the fetish character of intellectual labour, of the tendency for the capitalist's activity to appear as though it enters into a more intimate relation with reality than manual modes of labour.[53]

The fetish character of intellectual labour is a function of the external relation of capital to a process over which it exercises control, a control that extends to the life activity of working people as component parts to this process. In fact, herein also lies the real basis of the domination of manual by intellectual labour, the development of what Marx regarded as its "hostile antagonism." As an ideal activity, intellectual labour posits the material activity of manual labour as the conditions of its own mediation by and through external reality. It simply overlooks the fact it is an alienated aspect of a unified productive process. *It is the alienated mind of the world thinking within its alienated arrangements.* It does not see how its influence on reality is the expression of an internal diremption wherein one aspect is separated from the whole and in its abstraction is imposed metonymically on itself.[54] It is just this sort of structure Marx refers to as

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[52] This abstraction is a historical development that designates the place of capital in relation to labour.

[53] All of which is not to say that capitalists are all subjective idealists (although they themselves might fancy it so) reducing everything to the contents of their own consciousness, since as Marx pointed out each individual capitalist is only the personification of his capital, the material expression of its will. While the capitalist is the repository of the "conscious" decision-making process, these processes are dictated by the impersonal fluctuations of prices on the market. The market and its movements can ruin any individual capitalist just as labour can suddenly find itself superfluous to the needs of capital accumulation. Of course, the difference is when things are good, the capitalist experience this alienation as an expression of his personal power.

[54] Hiroshi Uchida has a succinct description of this process in *Marx's Grundrisse and Hegel's Logic*. Uchida writes, "Marx reads the *Logic* as a work in which the ideal subject or 'idea' alienates itself, i.e.

fetishism. In simplifying the decision-making process, then, monopoly provides capital with a form more suited to its postulates than that provided it in the phase of competition. It might be put that monopoly unburdens the capitalist of many of the responsibilities it previously bore in the phase of competition.

Something similar occurs in the passage of Marxism from the International to the Social Democratic Party. If, in order to impress its identity on the International, Marxists had to enter into a sectarian struggle against the association's anarchists, and in the process of this struggle Marxists were prompted to subvert the International's democratic framework thereby transforming from democratic to authoritarian the character and form of the social relations established by this framework, no such actions were required in the SPD. For, it is not necessary to transform the structure of the party to establish a centralized authority, if only because decision-making is already entrusted to a leadership group separate from both the class and the party rank and file.

What Bernstein took to be a process of socialization—what he called the appropriation of "the social surplus product…by an increasing…number of possessors"—occurring through a transformation of the structure of ownership concomitant with the rise of monopoly capital was in fact a process in which a postulate of the social division of labour, far from being overcome, was in fact acquiring a greater objectivity. *And what he utterly failed to comprehend was the fact his very activity was itself an instance of this greater objectivity.* The shift in aim from the radical negation of the capitalist mode of production by its revolutionary overthrow to the mutual adaptation

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posits the concrete or the real, as the social logic of value-consciousness in the person who recognizes value in property. The relation of private exchange necessitates a subjective or ideal activity to equate products and to effect their exchange. Because of that, the activity becomes a subject which appears as if it should posit the concrete or the real" (21).

of capital and labour to each other through negotiated compromise made the interests of the party leadership either synonymous with or, ideally, preferential to the interests of the working class *in toto.* If socialist parties chose to rest on their laurels, it was because their laurels enfranchised a privileged minority. This sort of substitution, which swaps general with particular, is a primary instance of the sort of fetishism that characterizes an organizational structure whose essential form facilitates the advancements of private interests (of an individual or a group).

The relations established by the capitalist social division of labour ensured that the function of knowledge was to define the material interests of the party, in particular its leadership structure, as the interests of the class as a whole. In this identity the character and form of the working class' relation to its own political agency changed. As it acquired an alienated form it lost its revolutionary character. A significant consequence of this change, which acquired its first decisive form with the revisionism of Social Democrats, was that the vocabulary supplied by Marxist theory was unable to find any correspondence with the 'revolutionary' practices it prescribed.

At the level of its organizational form, the Social Democratic Political Party provides a framework more conducive to the relations established by the didactic principle, while also ascribing a clear place for the class from whose perspective having the option to vote in-line with their class interests in itself constitutes an important victory of sorts. Thus, in the Social Democratic Party the contradictory principles animating Marxism's approach to politics are able to co-exist. In this sense, social democracy is to the International as monopoly capital is to competition: a modus vivendi. In the identity of the relation between these ordered pairs lies the structural homology between a

postulate of the capitalist social division of labour and the Social Democratic Party of Germany.

Conclusion

The structural homology between the Marxist political party and the capitalist social division of labour appears in the intellectual character of the proletarian political leadership**.** The party leadership is to the political subjectivity of the working class what the capitalist class is to their economic subjectivity; that is, the former replicates a postulate of the social division of labour and so shares, as a feature of this structural homology, the asymmetrical relations found in the latter. Within the SPD (and all other social democratic parties for that matter) membership and leadership circumscribed opposed realms much in the same way as capital and labour circumscribed opposed moments of the labour process.

The essential character of this organizational form is, as Max Weber put it, comprised of "a nucleus of people who are in active control" (*Economy and Society* 169). In terms of tactics, then, the point becomes to "gather around them the 'members' whose role is essentially more passive" (*Economy and Society* 169) in the hopes of satisfying the interests of the leadership in the reproduction of their roles as leaders. This is the way the social power of capital particularizes itself in the party, at the level of its institutional form, which it subsumes within itself as an element of its (i.e., capital's) objective universality (i.e., its immanent form built around a notion of mediated immanence). In the same way capital configures the conditions of production from outside production, so too does political leadership configure the conditions of struggle from outside not only the struggle, but outside the site of its most acute battles—i.e., production. It does this as

political leadership, as a select few who reserve for themselves the right to make political decisions. This they do, as their predecessors did, by grounding the source of their authority, not in the model of emancipated relations, but in the knowledge of the conditions of these relations. The content of the relation may change, but despite this the form abides: one commands; one obeys.

In this division, the same structure arises as that in which the value-relation of the commodity appears. Only in this context, it is not the value-relation but the power-relation among groups. The power relation distributes political activity among two poles, leadership and membership. As it is with value and commodities, the corporal and palpable form of each is only the form of expression of a different thing: the power of authority as the authority of power. The physical mass of the party membership becomes the form of appearance of the ideal essence, i.e., the power and authority of the party leadership. From the perspective of membership, this authority appears as the essence of leadership only because it fails to recognize that what is represented in this relation as a thing, a power possessed as some natural attribute of the leaders, *is the alienated form of the proletariat's political activity*. Therefore, what appeared in the minds of Marxists as the didactic principle is from the perspective of the revolutionary proletariat a postulate of the capitalist social division of labour.

Even though the Social Democratic Party remained relevant throughout the period leading up to and following the First World War, it was not enough to placate the contradictions animating Marxism's approach to working class politics. From the Social Democratic Parties came the Communist Parties, and in Russia this development formed the penultimate period to the European labour movement's totalitarian dénouement. It is,

therefore, in the context of the Russian Communist party, or more specifically, in Lenin's theory of the party as vanguard, that the contradiction between the didactic principle and the emancipatory interests of the working class reach maturity becoming consequential not just to working class politics, but to Russian society as a whole. To these events the study now turns.

CHAPTER III. LENINISM

Introduction

Marxists celebrate the Russian revolution as an *event*. But what are they actually celebrating? Marxists, *including Marx,* imagined themselves as educators of the working class. The Marxist approach to politics was, therefore, built on a didactic principle. This principle established Marxism as the mediating term between the working class and its own political activity. Insofar as Marxism used the knowledge of labour's experience under capital—i.e., the proof of the objectivity of labour's exploitation, as the ground upon which it attempted to build the political authority of the working class, the relation it created between itself and the proletariat replicated the social relation established in the separation of intellectual from manual labour. Behind the didactic principle, then, there is the postulate of the capitalist social division of labour.

As it pertained to the development of the contradiction this postulate introduced into Marxist politics, the revolutionary event served as the form of mediation between the postulate in its particularity, as the form organizing the Marxist political party and its relation to the working class, and the postulate as a universality structuring the whole of Russian society. As this happened, it is as if Marxism relived the previous moments of its political experience. For instance, before the Bolsheviks rose to power, their experience was marked by both a sectarian struggle and a campaign against revisionism. After taking power, the Bolsheviks were then made to confront the structural effects sectarianism and revisionism represented in Marxism's earlier political experiences. In one moment, the exercise of power on the part of the Bolsheviks opened a gap between, if not exactly their

theory and practice, then, the language used to describe the reality of the social relations Bolshevik power established; in another moment, the necessary condition of the exercise of power required the Bolsheviks to subvert the revolutionary democracy of the Soviet model by imposing on it the organizational form of Lenin's theory of the party as vanguard, thereby subjecting the system of worker soviets to an authority that was in its essence the alienated form of their social-economic political network.

The didactic principle ordering Marxism's conception of politics establishes the character of the party's relation to the working class as well as the internal organization of the party itself. This is the basis of the most concrete objectification of the postulate represented theoretically, as this chapter will demonstrate, in Lenin's theory of the vanguard, and concretely in the organization of the Soviet State apparatus.

I. The Rise of Capitalism in Russia

The industrial boom Russia experienced in the second half of the nineteenth century was spurred on by an influx of foreign capital attracted to the prospect of higher profit rates abroad, just as much as it was repelled by falling rates at home. The most rapid growth occurred in the metallurgical and fuel (coal) industries, which, as auxiliaries to railway construction, provided the latter enterprise its two basic materials (Rothstein and Dutt *History* 42). By the time the nineteenth century came to a close, over fourteen thousand miles of track striated Russian territory (Rothstein and Dutt *History* 42).

As well, Russia's labour-force underwent significant transformations. In lockstep with the industrial boom there occurred the proletarianization of the Russian labour force. In *The Development of Capitalism in Russia,* V.I. Lenin notes the Russian character of "the development of the commodity economy eo ipso means the divorcement of an ever-

growing part of the population from agriculture" (41). As capitalist industry supplanted agrarian economics in Russia, the former absorbed more than half a million workers from agriculture and other industries with a pre-capitalist character (Rothstein and Dutt *History* 42).

Capitalist development in Russia also had an impact on the character of Russian politics. Amongst the republican aspirations of the Russian intelligentsia (the progressive faction that is) and alongside the formation of industrial centres, the swelling of populations around these centres and the first steps towards an industrialization of agriculture, there germinated the first stirrings of a radical working class political consciousness, all of which, as Georgi Plekhanov put it, comprised the "preliminary conditions of [the Russian working-class'] economic emancipation" ("Programme of the Social-Democratic Emancipation of Labour Group"). The first Russian Marxist group, the Emancipation of Labour Group, was founded in 1883 ("Emancipation of Labour Group"). Being based, however, in Switzerland meant its impact on and importance to the lives of Russian workers was severely limited. Nonetheless, Lenin, who was not a founding member of the group, would later reflect that the group "took the first steps towards the working-class movement in Russia" and so should be credited with having "laid the theoretical foundations for the Social Democratic movement" (Lenin "The Ideological Struggle").

Lenin would go on to become a founding member of the first Marxist group in Russia. Established in the fall of 1895, the heroically titled League of Struggle for the Emancipation of the Working Class was comprised of around twenty Marxist study groups ("League of Struggle"). Devoting itself to the distribution of radical literature and

strike agitation, the League experienced its first political success when the following year it helped organize a strike among textile workers in St. Petersburg (Cliff *Lenin* 58). Lenin, having been jailed the previous December, did not take part in the action ("League of Struggle").

The development of Marxism among working-class political organizations in Russia followed the pattern established elsewhere and under different conditions. Lenin worked to cultivate the political identity of the Russian working class out of the nascent trade union movement through greater cooperation and amalgamation with other groups opposed to, if not yet the social domination of labour by capital, then, at this stage of things, the political autocracy in Russia (Utechin "Introduction" 19). A significant step in this process occurred in the city of Minsk, Belarus, on the first of March 1898, when the Russian Social Democratic Labour Party (RSDLP) was formed. Similar to its Western European counterparts and similar to the League's own process of genesis, the RSDLP's formation proceeded on the basis of the amalgamation of distinct organizations. The largest groups amalgamated were the Jewish Labour Bund, a secular socialist organization operative across the Russian empire, known for among other things its progressive views on gender equality and its links to the General German Workers' Association,[55] followed by the aforementioned St. Petersburg-based League of Struggle for the Emancipation of Working Class (Shepard, *A Price Below Rubies* 139).

The RSDLP was immediately confronted by two major impediments to its viability. The first came from without. Given the heavy-handed way the Russian

[55] The General German Workers Association represented a large segment of the German working class. It was the desire to count them as members in the German Social Democratic Party that led to the inclusion of Ferdinand Lassalle's ideas into the party's program, prompting Marx to rebuke it in the famous *Critique of the Gotha Program*.

autocracy confronted internal dissent, socialist groups operated, much like their counterparts in Western Europe up until 1891 (when the German anti-socialist laws expired), in conditions of illegality. As a result, both their organizational frameworks and their operations—which continued to focus on the dissemination of radical literature supplemented by strike agitation—were for the most part clandestine, relying on underground networks and conspiratorial intrigues. As cells were uprooted, members were imprisoned, exiled or simply melted back into obscurity.

Coupled with this external pressure, however, there was an even more pressing internal need. As Marx himself came to know from his experience in the International and again with the Lassallians in the formation of the German Social Democratic Party, amalgamation came at a price: eclecticism in outlook. Aside from combating the populist ideology of Narodism, Russian Marxists had to contend with opportunism in their own ranks, not to mention the residual mishmash of other obscure and populist perspectives (Rothstein and Dutt *History* 43). In attempting to address the issue of an organization's ideological homogeneity, Lenin would, in a novel gesture (at least as it pertained to Marxist political organizations) turn his attention to understanding ideological fidelity not simply as a question of subjective attitude but also, and more importantly, as a function of organizational form. In this gesture lay the origins of Leninism.

II. Leninism and its Critical Framing

Much of the critical literature approaches the rise of Leninism and its relation to authoritarian practices in one of two ways. Either, it is explained through those cultural and historical contextualization that emphasize the cross currents animating the tradition of Russia's radical intelligentsia; or, Leninism is evaluated and measured against

Marxism, in which case it is either a development of the latter, a misinterpretation of it, or some combination of both.

For instance, in *Lenin Lives! The Lenin Cult in Soviet Russia,* Nina Tumarkin argues Leninism, or what she calls "the cult of Lenin" was "the culmination of a gradual process of evolution within the radical intelligentsia" (12). The intelligentsia became prone to radicalization, the author argues, because under the autocratic rule of Nicholas I (1825-1855), the regime "allowed for no political activity except that directed by the crown" (12). Under these conditions literature became a vehicle for "the public expression of 'truth' in Russia," which in turn motivated an idle and frustrated intelligentsia towards the "politicization of its writer-heroes" (12).

Even though the author acknowledges that Lenin found the practice of "god-building" repugnant, the propensity to venerate important figures was too deeply rooted in the Russian psyche to be overcome despite the radical and unprecedented character of the Bolshevik revolution (Tumarkin *Lenin Lives!* 23). For the most part, Tumarkin understands Leninism to be the result of the persistence of an imbrication in the Russian psyche of "older conceptions of power and divinity" (Tumarkin *Lenin Lives* 1). Thus, the intelligentsia were 'Russian' in the same way the peasantry were Russian, since both, according to Tumarkin, had their "own calendar of saints" (12).

Other accounts of the origins of Leninism similarly stress the relation between political oppression and a radicalized intelligentsia, while avoiding any mention of the institutional influence of religious traditions. In *History of the Communist Party of the USSR: Past and Present,* Rudolph Schlesinger notes the participation of novelist Nikolai Chernyshevsky in the founding of Zemlya I Volya (Land and Liberty) in 1861 provided

Lenin with the pattern he was to later emulate. In the same way the first iteration of Lenin's theory of the vanguard assumed the form of a radical underground periodical, i.e., *Iskra* (Spark), Zemlya I Volya, Schlesinger notes, formed following a preparatory period in which the underground periodical *Velikoruss* disseminated materials espousing liberal democratic ideas (3).

Interpretations that attempt to situate and therefore explain Leninism within the tradition of Russia's intelligentsia also shore up their arguments by grounding their interpretations in biographical sketches they think help paint a picture of "the man" behind the vision. As David Priestland notes, the biographical details of the protagonist in Chernyshevsky's most popular novel, *What is to be Done?* mirror those of Lenin. Chernyshevsky's protagonist Rakhmetov is "an ascetic revolutionary" who was willing to suffer for the sake of the Cause, just as Lenin did throughout his periods of exile and imprisonment (Priestland *The Red Flag* 68). Both, Priestland explains, "hail from an ancient aristocratic family"; both are "of mixed Eastern and Western blood"; and both have "the dual virtues of both the intellectual and the man of the people" (*The Red Flag* 68). As if proving Tumarkin's point about the Russian intelligentsia's penchant for "politicizing its writer-heroes," Priestland quotes Lenin, who is reported to have declared in private conversations that Chernyshevsky "not only showed that every right thinking and really honest man must be a revolutionary, but he also showed—and this is his greatest merit—what a revolutionary must be like, what his principles must be, how he must approach his aim, and what methods he must use to achieve it" (*The Red Flag* 75).[56]

[56] The original source Priestland cites is Nikolay Valentinov's *Encounters with Lenin.* The actual statement belongs, in fact, to Valentinov, who was recalling from memory a passage he had read from a manuscript

Finally, there is, of course, a point where Marxism, Lenin's own words and the tradition of Russia's intelligentsia all come together. In the "Introduction" to a 1963 edition of Lenin's *What is to be Done?* S.V. Utechin claims these factors converge in Lenin's famous claim about revolutionary practice needing first a revolutionary theory ("Introduction" 17). For the significance of this claim, as Utechin notes, is not that it seems to simply state the obvious, but that with it Lenin is passing judgement on the Russian proletariat who he regarded as incapable of spontaneously producing such a theory ("Introduction" 17). Given its importance to revolutionary practice such a task fell to those who had historically proven themselves capable of tackling it—i.e., the intellectuals. In *What is to be Done?* Lenin explains that socialist theory "has grown out of the philosophical, historical, and economic theories that were worked out by the educated representatives of the propertied class—the intelligentsia. The founders of modern scientific socialism, Marx and Engels, themselves belong by social status to the bourgeois intelligentsia" (Lenin *What is to be Done?* 63).

Obviously, Lenin's approach to revolutionary politics was shaped by Russia's political climate and the traditions of resistance grown there. In these interpretations, however, there is an altogether uncritical approach to the category of the intellectual. Psychological profiles which seek out patterns of subjective identification have little

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written by Vatslav Vorovsky, who claims to have had the conversation with Lenin. Lenin's fondness for Chernyshevsky acquired a political character as it provided an alternative source to Lenin's revolutionary disposition other than Marx. As Valentinov put it,

> The October Revolution of 1917 put many slogans of the young Russia of 1862 into practice. Even such slogans as the abolition of marriage and the family were honored for over ten years. Noteworthy also is a letter found in Sleptov's archives from Zaychevsky to an unidentified Andrey Mikhaylovich in 1889. Replying to a question about what the authors of 'Young Russia' had known and read, Zaychenevsky answered: 'At that time we hadn't read the Marxist stuff yet.' A most interesting remark. The inference seems obvious that the October Revolution led by Lenin could have been accomplished without any 'Marxist stuff', simply by following the precepts of Chernyshevsky, who had 'transformed' Lenin's mind. (*Encounters* 76)

explanatory power since they ultimately resolve the question of authoritarianism in Marxism as, on the one hand, a matter of the wrong ideas—"older conceptions of power and divinity"—and on the other, a consequence of individual character and subjective dispositions—"an ascetic revolutionary" who will sacrifice everything (including the premise upon which the Cause is built—i.e., emancipation, freedom, democracy, etc.) for the Cause. In this approach, whether sympathetic or critical of Lenin or Marxism, the category of the intellectual is a combination of ideas and idiosyncrasies. History, social relations and the development of productive forces, when acknowledged, are thereby reduced to being effects of the interaction of ideas on different personalities.

Marxism, if it is consistent with itself, considers the intellectual from the perspective of the class struggle. The dominant ideas are in each instance expressions of the material interests of a ruling class. Where these ideas encounter resistance and are challenged is by an opposing class' efforts to advance its own material interests. The ideas are neither a subjective result, the product of a great mind, nor ahistorical ideals pertaining to the human condition as such, although this is the form opposing ideas often take.

Marxism attempts to dissolve the idea of the intellectual into its social function by situating it at a point of intersection between the forces and relations of production. When in *One Step Forward, Two Steps Back: The Crisis in our Party*, Lenin insists the Russian radical intelligentsia are "a social element alien to [the working class]" he is doing something quite different than signalling his own social background or revealing something about his psychological make-up (Lenin). He is responding to the opportunist and revisionist faction in the RSDLP because he is concerned with the tendencies these

factions are attempting to establish within the party. "The influence of the *intelligentsia*, who do not take a direct part in exploitation, who are trained to play with general phrases and concepts, who are in for every 'good' idea and who sometimes stupidly elevate their mid-class position to a *principle* of non-class parties and non-class politics," Lenin warns, "*the influence of this bourgeois intelligentsia over the people is dangerous*" ("Class, Intelligentsia, Liberals, Women" 66).

Lenin's attitude towards the class-determined character of the intellectual can be seen as an extrapolation of the claim Marx and Engels make in *The Communist Manifesto*: "in times when the class struggle nears the decisive hour, the process of dissolution going on within the ruling class…assumes such a violent, glaring character, that a small section of the ruling class cuts itself adrift and joins the revolutionary class" (481). Like the radical intelligentsia of the mid-nineteenth century (whose social origins were aristocratic but whose allegiance was now with the nascent bourgeoisie), the proponents of 'revisionist Marxism' in the RSDLP have (if only impatiently) broken from the future ruling class and have tossed their lot in with the (working) class which they are convinced is the ascending class without recognizing the counter-revolutionary impulses they introduce into the movement. For Lenin, the concrete functions of the intellectual are, on the one hand, a means to gauge, thermometer like, the temperature of the class struggle, and, on the other, an active force (whether consciousness or not) in the struggle.

If the class struggle serves as the backdrop to Lenin's understanding of the social function of the intellectual, and the class struggle is a basic premise of Marxist theory, the other approach to a critical analysis of Leninism focuses on this relation—that is, the

relation of Leninism to Marxism. In this context, there is no dispute over whether or not the theory of the vanguard party is Lenin's quintessential contribution to Marxism. The difference in opinion comes down to whether or not this contribution is seen in a positive or negative light.

Of course, in the Soviet Union, the righteousness of this 'fact' became standard dogma. Steeped in bad faith, the typical platitudes robotically lavish praise: "Marxist-Leninism is an integral and consistent world outlook…It is developed and enriched through the cognition of the objective laws of social development and their application in the revolutionary transformative activities of the working class led by the Marxist-Leninist Party" (Lashin *Socialism* 17); or, "Lenin was the first Marxist to see that the working class needed a party of a *new type*... He proved that it was necessary to reorganize completely the whole work of the party along the lines of educating and preparing the masses for revolution" (Rothstein and Dutt *History* 60).

Outside and alongside the sphere of Soviet influence there remained both doubt and debate as to Lenin's contribution, particularly among liberal historians and scholars sympathetic to Marxism. For instance, in his sweeping survey of communism in the twentieth century, historian David Priestland writes, "Initially Lenin's idea of a centralized, vanguard party was not controversial among Marxists, and in strictly ideological terms it may not have been new. But Lenin's idea of the ideal party culture was very different from the assumptions of Kautsky (and indeed Marx). Lenin's approach to politics was militant, sectarian, and hostile to compromise" (*The Red Flag* 77). George Lichtheim took a similarly critical approach, but argued towards a different conclusion:

> The term vanguard—with its implication that it was simply a matter of forcing the pace and giving battle at a point in time chosen in advance of circumstances visible to the whole movement—concealed a crucial difficulty: the Party was not in fact the most forward section of the proletarian army at all, but a 'classless' force which had imposed itself upon an immature labour movement. This was not at all what Marx had in mind when he told the workers they would get nowhere without an adequate awareness of their ultimate aims. (*Lukács* 51)

What these seemingly opposed perspectives share, however, is the uncritical assumption a comparative analysis is in each instance between two self-identical, i.e., non-contradictory, entities—the work of Lenin on one hand, and the work of Marx on the other. The form of such juxtaposition determines in advance three possible outcomes, all of which are represented above. To the dogmatic (Lashin), with absolute certainty the contribution is positive, Lenin develops Marx—he saw the need for a "*new type*" of party, one more in line with what Marx imagined (even if he never stated it as such). To the sympathetic skeptic (Lichtheim), the contribution is negative: Lenin simply misinterprets Marx—"this is not at all what Marx had in mind." And to the liberal skeptic (Priestland), there is, unsurprisingly, a positive and a negative contribution: Lenin's thought is consistent with Marx's—the idea of a vanguard initially "was not controversial"—but he also manages to misinterpret him—the "idea of the ideal party culture was very different."

The limitations of these sorts of juxtapositions are particularly evident in Lichtheim's case. Wherever the first generation of Marxists are shown to have "gotten something wrong" as to their understanding of Marx and "orthodox Marxism," it is invariably because they had the misfortune of being mislead by Engels' efforts to systematize and codify Marxist theory as "dialectical materialism." As a philosophy,

Leninism, Lichtheim argues, "committed [its] followers to Engel's 'dialectical materialism'; so described by the 'founder of Russian Marxism, G.V. Plekhanov" (*Lukács* 57). The result was a representation of Marx's materialism as though it were merely an extension of eighteenth-century French materialism (which it was not), a perspective that Lucio Colletti notes took matter (opposed to spirit or consciousness) to be in all instance primary, that is, first in both reality and time (*From Rousseau to Lenin* 70).[57] The motive of this approach, repeated in the works of Colletti, Terry Eagleton, Seyla Benhabib, is to, in a way, let Marx off the hook more or less by throwing Engels under the bus. While Engels' errors are undeniable and so point to a tension in Lenin's vision of orthodox Marxism, their impact is largely overestimated. Had these errors not occurred, it is likely the case that the political errors, which were assumed to follow from and be explained in terms of the philosophical/theoretical errors, would have still happened, if only because it was not until Lenin that a theory of the organization and its form moved to the center of the movement's theoretical consciousness, and even at this point its fetish character was still not fully perceived.

This is where comparative analysis could have an impact on understanding authoritarianism in the European and Marxist labour movement. Where Leninism deviated philosophically from orthodox Marxism, it remained consistent and faithful on

[57] Elaborating on this claim Colletti writes,

> The primary result of this outlook is precisely to submerge, or better surpass, the specific level of historical-materialist analysis, Marx's socio- economic problematic, in a cosmology and cosmogony which is called 'materialist' but is nothing but a philosophical fiction. Everything becomes the dialectical evolution of Matter. And this evolution is realized, at every level, by generic, omnipresent 'laws' which govern not only mechanical movement and natural development, but also human society and thought. Marx's 'economic base' thus becomes Matter. This matter is not specified or determinate ; it is simultaneously everything and nothing, a mere metaphysical hypothesis and hence anti-materialist by its very nature. (*From Rousseau to Lenin* 70)

the political front. Lenin was committed to a political movement as the mature expression and transcendence of the limitations of the economic movement, i.e., trade unionism. Marx envisioned politics as the mode of activity in which the working class could give their emancipatory interests a "general form" so that they might then acquire a "socially-binding force" ("Marx to Friedrich Bolte" 258). Marx alludes to the need to train the proletariat for this task where it is not sufficiently organized ("Marx to Friedrich Bolte" 258). The didactic principle organizing Marx's conception of politics establishes the party's relation to the class. What Lenin did with the theory of the vanguard party is, as he might have put it, "elevate this principle to the level of consciousness." As he did this, Lenin expanded the conscious understanding of the principle's application so that, in addition to organizing the party's relation to the class, it also organizes the internal structure of the party itself. In this lies Lenin's Marxist orthodoxy and what became Marxist-Leninism.

Now, as Lenin did this, he encountered the contradiction immanent to Marxism's conception of politics, if only because in both its theoretical form and its practice, the vanguard is a more perfect objectification of the postulate Marxism uncritically appropriated from the capitalist social division of labour and incorporated into the framework of its political associations. Lenin is consistent with Marx to the extent his work appropriates the inconsistencies underlying the (orthodox) Marxist conception of politics. At the level of theory, then, the contradiction appears in the vanguard party's opposed determinations and Lenin's efforts to reconcile them.

III. The Vanguard and the Didactic Principle behind Marxism's Conception of Politics

Following the end of a three-year Siberian exile in 1900, Lenin returned to St. Petersburg to find the Russian Social Democratic Labour Party (RSDLP) adrift in the plethora of perspectives composing Russia's labour movement. Beholden to a desire to appeal to workers across the spectrum of the technical division of labour, the party's program appeared diluted and inconsistent between its different regional organizations, each of which attempted to accommodate itself to the spectrum of labour most concentrated in its region. If, according to Lenin, social democracy aims "to carry definite socialist ideals into the spontaneous labour movement" it would have to find a more effective way to do this than simply pandering to the movement's spontaneous attitudes as they were distributed across the spectrum of labour's technical divisions (qtd in Schlesinger 35).

Lenin became preoccupied with the dilemma of centralizing the party in a way that did not alienate it from the labour movement or endear it to some minority faction within it. To solve this dilemma, he proposed the party establish an All-Russian newspaper. In "Where to Begin?", a preparatory article to the more famous *What is to be Done?* Lenin argued, "A newspaper is what we most of all need; without it we cannot conduct that systematic, all-round propaganda and agitation, consistent in principle, which is the chief and permanent task of Social-Democracy in general and, in particular, the pressing task of the moment" (Lenin).

In addition to lending consistency to the party's principles, the paper could form a point of integration between local labour and the party's local affiliates. As Lenin saw it, "The mere technical task of regularly supplying the newspaper with copy and of promoting regular distribution will necessitate a network of local agents of the united

party" (Lenin "Where to Begin?"). In this sense, the paper would be more than just "a collective propagandist and a collective agitator," but "also a collective organizer" (Lenin "Where to Begin?"). As a "collective organizer," the paper would be the medium through which the Russian workers could form themselves into a politically effective class, since the paper's "network of agents will form the skeleton of precisely the kind of organization we need—one that is sufficiently large to embrace the whole country," at which point the paper could "test [its] strength in the organization of various revolutionary actions" (Lenin "Where to Begin?"). By the end of 1900, the RSDLP had established Iskra (Spark), the party's official newspaper.

To a certain extent, this approach yielded success for the RSDLP. More than anything, it allowed the party to standardize its Marxist platform and set the terms of the debate through which the party interacted with the Russian working classes. No sooner had Iskra succeeded in this regard (immunizing the party to the movement's more spontaneous and eclectic viewpoints), then was its forward momentum forced to wade into the revisionist debates currently gripping the party's Western European counterparts.

If the revisionists in Western Europe saw themselves as forcing Marxists to confront questions pertaining to recent historical developments and the way these developments were problematizing Marxism's commitment to pursuing a political revolution, Russian Marxists (i.e., Lenin) answered this challenge by reaffirming the orthodox position and by theorizing the framework of an entirely new party suitable to this orthodoxy. In turning his attention to combatting revisionist trends in the RSDLP, Lenin arrived at the notion that ideological homogeneity was neither a prerequisite to nor a sufficient enough condition for a centralized party. Since the current frameworks were

either conducive or vulnerable to perspectives and practices that lead the working class away from revolutionary activity (towards opportunism and eclecticism), it would be necessary to build an entirely new type of political party, one that could ensure that Marxism's revolutionary theory would continue to advance unimpeded by trivial digressions, polemics, sectarian struggles, etc., and focus on formulating the tactics the party and the working class would use to overthrow and dismantle Russia's autocratic state structure. As he had already begun considering this question in articles like "Where to Begin?," the mature version of the theory of this organizational framework appears across a series of texts Lenin published, beginning in 1902 with *What is to be Done?*

As it did in the context of the International Workingmen's Association, the contradiction immanent to the Marxist approach to politics assumes, in the context of the RSDLP, the form of a sectarian struggle. As Lenin explains in the "Preface" for *What is to be Done?* the backdrop of the work's polemic character concerns the political implications that follow from the theoretical disagreements distinguishing Economism, i.e., a brand of revisionism, from orthodox Marxism specific to the Russian context, both of which constituted the "two trends in Russian Social Democracy" (38). He writes the original plan for *What is to be Done?* was to focus on three issues: "the character and main content of our political agitation; our organizational tasks; and the plan for building…a militant, all-Russian organization" (38). However, given the "tenacious" shift in the RSDLP towards Economism, Lenin notes it proved "quite impractical to confine this pamphlet to its original intention," which was to set forth views on these issues without "resorting to polemics" (38).

Lenin saw Economism in the same way Marx viewed trade-union struggles: that is, as a retrograde trend whose only outcome could be to "reduce [the political struggle] to petty activities" ("A Talk with Defenders of Economism"). To Economists, Lenin's orthodox Marxism was "infantile" in its "sectarian intolerance" ("A Letter to the RSD Press"). Each opposed the other on the basis of what role they envisioned the party playing in the Russian labour movement. In "Credo," a revisionist manifesto marking the growing influence of revisionist tendencies in Russia, the authors note Marxism's political strategy has "reached a point of intense difficulty almost impossible to surpass" ("Credo"). Having exhausted itself on parliamentary activity,[58] and having found no success in organizing the mass of workers to insurrection, "intolerant" and "primitive" Marxism, as Economists labeled it, was in the midst of a crisis it was incapable of overcoming without abandoning the basic tenets of its position ("Credo"). As both a response to and expression of this crisis, Economism viewed itself as the "radical change in [the party's] practical activity" ("Credo"):

> The change will not only be towards a more energetic prosecution of the economic struggle and consolidation of the economic organisations, but also, and most importantly, towards a change in the party's attitude to other opposition parties. Intolerant Marxism, negative Marxism, primitive Marxism (whose conception of the class division of society is too schematic) will give way to democratic Marxism, and the social position of the party within modern society must undergo a sharp change. The party *will recognise* society; its narrow corporative and, in the majority of cases, sectarian tasks will be widened to social tasks, and its striving to seize power will be transformed into a striving for change, a striving to

[58] The Economists in the Russian Social Democratic Labour Party were in many ways closer to the anarchists of the first International then to the revisionists of the German Social Democrats. They advocated for a brand of trade unionism supported and supplemented by the party, which was to function in a way similar to the International's General Council, that is, as a facilitator not as a centralized authority. This faction would eventually dissipate, its advocates assimilating themselves into the ranks of the Mensheviks. As participants in the Provisional Government set up after the Tsar's abdication in February 1917, they would ultimately come to defend parliamentary socialism.

> reform present-day society on democratic lines adapted to the present state of affairs, with the object of protecting the rights (all rights) of the labouring classes in the most effective and fullest way. The concept 'politics' will be enlarged and will acquire a truly social meaning, and the practical demands of the moment will acquire greater weight and will be able to count on receiving greater attention than they have been getting up to now. ("Credo")

Economism was anathema to the orthodox Marxist approach to politics. The drive to centralize the party organization epitomized the "narrow" and "corporative" tasks "primitive" and "intolerant" Marxism attempted to carry out. Economists imagined social democratic organizations as facilitators coordinating the interactions of the organic groups arising in the working classes' economic struggles. Towards this end the organization had to remain flexible so as to accommodate the diversity it encountered when engaging and working with these groups.

In their opposition to centralization, advocates of Economism objected to the use of *Iskra* for this purpose. In a letter written to and published by *Iskra*'s editorial board in December 1901 titled "A Talk with Defenders of Economism," a "group of comrades" argued, "the principal drawback of the paper is the exaggerated importance it attaches to the influence which the ideologists of the movement exert upon its various tendencies" ("A Letter to RSD Press"). "Iskra," they continue, "gives too little consideration to the material elements and the material environment of the movement, whose interaction creates a definite type of labour movement and determines its path, the path from which the ideologists, despite all their efforts, are incapable of diverting it" ("A Letter to RSD Press"). Without naming Lenin specifically, the group describes the paper's position as "partly an echo of internecine squabbles that have flared up among Russian political exiles in Western Europe" and warn that "these disagreements exercise almost no

influence upon the actual course of the Russian Social-Democratic movement, except perhaps to damage it by bringing an undesirable schism into the midst of the comrades working in Russia" ("A Letter to RSD Press").

In Iskra's response to the "group of comrades'" letter the paper, i.e., Lenin,[59] counters,

> They fail to understand that the "ideologist" is worthy of the name only when he *precedes* the spontaneous movement, points out the road, and is able ahead of all others to solve all the theoretical, political, tactical, and organisational questions which the "material elements" of the movement spontaneously encounter. In order truly to give "consideration to the material elements of the movement", one must view them critically; one must be able to point out the dangers and defects of spontaneity and *to elevate* it to the level of consciousness. ("A Talk with Defenders")

For all intents and purposes, Lenin's argument proved fatal to Economism in the RSDLP. By the time of the party's Second Congress, of the fifty-one delegates present, only three were self-professed advocates of Economism (Lenin "Account of the Second Congress").[60]

At first sight it might appear that Lenin is opposing the Economists on the grounds that their brand of materialism eliminates human agency, and that it represents a type of mechanical or deterministic materialism. In response, then, Lenin appears as though he is attempting to re-inscribe human agency back into the Economists

[59] Lenin is the assumed author. This article appears under his name in the on-line Marxist archive. It is reasonable to assume he wrote it given the composition of Iskra's editorial board and the eventual schism that precipitated Lenin resigning as an editor after the RSDLP's Second Congress in 1903. Iskra had a six-member editorial board. It is reasonable to assume that of those six, several were partial to if not Economism then some sort of version of revisionism and it was this partiality that motivated Iskra to address the discontent among party members, even if it meant the grievances would be 'officially' rebuked. Lenin left Iskra after he was unable to reduce the editorial board from six to three members, an effort that was likely preceded by a failed attempt to staff the board with allies of his own vision.

[60] In breaking down the ideological fault-lines of the delegates Lenin refers to the Economists as the "three *Rabocheye Dyelo*-ists" (Account of the Second Congress). Rabocheye Dyelo (Workers' Cause) was the Economists journal.

understanding of the interaction between "material elements" and the "material environment." Insofar as this is the case, it is Lenin and not the Economists who have erred.

It would not be a stretch to acknowledge that by "material element" Economists had in mind the productive forces, and by "material environment" they, implicitly at least, had in mind the stage of development reached by the productive forces animating Russian society. From the Economist perspective, then, especially as things pertained to the situation in Russia, labour was not yet at the stage where its political organization could assume the power of a material force. While it was nevertheless true that capitalism had taken root in Russia, the Russian economy by the turn of the twentieth century was still overwhelmingly agrarian in character (a character it would retain up to and following the revolution). As a consequence, the transformations capitalism was to introduce into the composition of the labour-force were as yet still taking place. As Marx and Engels pointed out in the *Manifesto of the Communist Party*,

> with the development of industry, the proletariat not only increases in number; it becomes concentrated in greater masses, its strength grows, and it feels that strength more. The various interests and conditions of life within the ranks of the proletariat are more and more equalised, in proportion as machinery obliterates all distinctions of labour, and nearly everywhere reduces wages to the same low level. (480)

The concentration of labour is one of the most significant developments capitalism introduces into the productive forces of modern European society. Capitalism not only transforms labour into a commodity, but also concentrates, disciplines and organizes it according to an immense and interconnected process of production. As a result, it creates the conditions in which labour comes to *have common interests* it in turn becomes

increasingly more conscious of. By becoming conscious of its common interests, labour then begins contemplating itself as a class. And it is by turning its attention towards pursuing its interests that the proletariat becomes a politically charged "material element."

Although the current trajectory of development suggested this would be the case in Russia, the process, according to the Economists, had thus far produced only the rudimentary character of such material elements. As a result, labour in Russia did not yet have these interests. There was only the anticipation of them. To the Economists, the labour movement cannot interact with its material environment in a way that suggests it possesses qualities it presently does not possess.

Yet, it is not at this level that this debate needs to be considered. What is important is the consideration of the role such debates and the claims contained therein play in establishing labour's relation to its own political activity. In both instances, knowledge is made to function as the source from which labour's political leadership extracts its power and authority. As such, it also becomes the form of mediation between the working class and its own revolutionary political activity.

It is therefore not the difference in perspective between Lenin and the Economists, but the degree to which each perspective can be shown to be conscious of the relations this knowledge establishes between it and the working class. From this perspective, both assume as the party's organizing principle a postulate of the capitalist social division of labour, which lends to intellectual activity a fetish character that at its most basic is expressed in the right to make decisions. The main difference in this regard is that Lenin 'elevated to the level of consciousness' this postulate. It is with his theory of

the vanguard that it becomes explicit. With the Economists within the RSDLP, the postulate remains as it did with Marx, in a latent state describing only the party's relation to the class. With Lenin, not only does the postulate organize the party's relation to the class, it also organizes the internal framework of the party. It is with Lenin's theory of the vanguard that this postulate is poised to acquire a greater objectivity than in any previous framework.

Now, while it is true Lenin is the first to conceptualize this postulate, to raise it to the level of consciousness, it does not appear in its naked form but in an ideological guise as a principle of didacticism extrapolated from the Marxist approach to politics. Because the proletariat cannot spontaneously arrive at a political class-consciousness—"This consciousness could only be brought to them from outside" writes Lenin (*What is to be Done?* 63)—the most advanced, i.e., militant segments of the working class must build, in collaboration with the most militant segment of the radical intelligentsia, an organization that can do two things: lead by example and school the proletariat in its historical mission.

The organization's form, as Lenin realized, is the stone that kills both of these birds, since not only does it provide the framework of theory's conversion into practice, but the results of its practices in turn become both the example by which it leads and the materials with which it educates the working class. That this framework privileges theory and the activity of the theorists, speaks on the one hand to the fact fetishism is an objective feature of capitalist social reality, that social perception and reality diverge in significant ways, making knowledge a necessary component in the overturning of this upside down reality; and on the other hand, it also speaks to the way labour's political

associations replicate the separation of intellectual from manual labour and so organize themselves according to a postulate of the capitalist social division of labour.

On the surface, then, the composition of the vanguard party appears to organize itself according to a separation of intellectual and manual labour. Lenin seems to suggest as much when towards the end of *What is to be Done?* he makes recourse to a masonry analogy so as to emphasize the seminal role of intellectual labour. "Pray tell me," Lenin asks,

> When bricklayers lay bricks in different parts of an enormous structure the life of which has never been seen before, is it 'paper' work to lay down a thread that helps them to find the correct place in which to put each brick, that indicates the final goal of the common work that enables them to make use not only of every brick, but even of every fraction of brick which, joining with the preceding and following bricks, forms a complete and all-embracing line? And are we not now living through a moment in our party life when we have both the bricks and the bricklayers but lack precisely a thread, visible to everyone, which all could grasp? (177)

The crucial moment in this analogy is not the simple way it allegorically frames the process of building a new society, but in the ambiguous way it imagines the division of labour necessary to this task. On the surface, it appears as though the division between "'paper' work" and bricklaying is only technical, since each is partaking in the "common work" necessary to realizing "the final goal." And yet, because it is arguing for the separation of these modes of activity, it is also possible there remains an antagonism in the social character of this division, particularly since the most important decisions appear to remain the prerogative of those doing the "'paper' work".

It is precisely this possibility that seems to galvanize opposition to Lenin's theory. In "Chapter H" of Lenin's *One Step Forward, Two Steps Back: The Crisis in our Party,* he acknowledges and attempts to address the concerns party members raise regarding the

possible authoritarian implications of the theory. He cites a Comrade Goldblatt, whom he recounts inveighed against his "'monstrous' centralization, claiming it would lead to the destruction of the lower organizations," if only because the theory "is permeated through and through with the desire to give the center unrestricted powers and the unrestricted right to interfere in everything" ("Chapter H"). While Lenin calls these concerns "false phrase mongering," he does appear elsewhere to offer a modified version aimed at placating the anxiety of his critics ("Chapter H").

In "A Letter to a Comrade on Our Organizational Tasks" Lenin attempts to reconcile the division organizing the vanguard party's internal composition, suggesting that,

> our Party can and should have *two* leading centres: a C.O. (Central Organ) and a C. C. (Central Committee). The former should be responsible for ideological leadership, and the latter—for direct and practical leadership. Unity of action and the necessary solidarity between these groups should be ensured, not only by a single Party programme, but also by the *composition of the two groups* (both groups, the C.O. and the C.C., should be made up of people who are in complete harmony with one another), and by the institution of regular and systematic joint conferences. Only then will the C.O., on the one hand, be placed beyond the reach of the Russian gendarmes and assured of consistency and continuity, while, on the other hand, the C.C. will always be at one with the C.O. on all essential matters and have sufficient freedom to *take* direct *charge* of all the practical aspects of the movement. (234)

In the end, however, Lenin's suggestion proved to be futile for the simple fact his theory and the opposition it encountered reflected an intractable sectarian divide in the RSDLP.

It was at the RSDLP's Second Congress held in the summer of 1903 that the sectarian split became official. The final point of contention proved to be a squabble over membership rules with Lenin demanding the party be made of committed activists only while fellow *Iskra* editor and soon to be Menshevik leader Lulii Martov pushing for a

more open and broader membership base (Priestland *The Red Flag* 73). Significantly, though, a great deal of the Congress was devoted to debating the Party's internal composition, particularly its executive structure. Lenin's initial determination that the party could and should have two leading centers appeared to reconcile the seemingly authoritarian framework he initially advanced in *What is to be Done?* However, this only raised the question of how to regulate the interaction of the two centers. While having two centres eliminated the possibility of an unsustainable concentration of power, it did not eliminate the possibility of power struggles between the two centers. There was thus the very real chance such a conflict could encourage corruption within the party or worse paralyze it at a decisive moment.

The idea of a separate institution, the Party Council, devoted to mediating any conflicts that may arise between the two centers was floated, at which point, again, the congress delegates set about debating whether or not the Council should then be a supreme institution or a regulatory one. The twenty-fifth session of the Second Congress dealt exclusively with this issue. At one point during the session the minutes record Trotsky, perhaps sardonically, reminding the delegates of the original issue about which they were debating. He says,

> Let me recall how the idea of the Party Council arose. We proceeded from the proposition that the existence of two centres is inevitable. And since it is inevitable, then equally inevitable is the existence of a regulator of the activities of these two centres. The Party Council is to be this regulator. Now, when we are confronted with the question of setting up the Council, some comrades, like Gusev and, especially, Rusov, want to fix the Council as the Party's one and only effective centre. And so we are starting afresh. (Russian Social-Democratic Labour Party)

Lenin reflects on this event in *One Step Forward, Two Steps Back: The Crisis in Our Party*. After surveying the conflicting attitudes and opinions regarding the Council's composition and its role, Lenin points out that those arguing the Party Council should become a supreme institution, and so appearing to support Lenin's basic position of a hierarchical party structure, fail to follow this through to an understanding of what this means for the Council's composition. They end up proposing a composition no different from "that of a 'conciliation board' or court of arbitration: two members from each of the central bodies and a fifth to be invited by these four" ("One Step Forward" 332). They fail to recognize that "between such a composition of the Council and its mission of becoming the supreme Party institution there is an irreconcilable contradiction" ("One Step Forward" 332). The Council cannot function in a supreme capacity when its composition allows for the possibility its members could be split over the decision of who should occupy the executive seat of power.

Therefore, in each instance the division between leadership, which is invariably of an intellectual character, and membership, which is of a passive character, re-inscribes itself into the composition of the party's central institutions: in numerical terms, each must be composed of an odd number of members in order to ensure *a decision* will always be made in every instance should the other members (totalling an even number) be unable to resolve some deadlock.[61] Whether it is a third, fifth, seventh position, it functions as a One, the absolute seat of power. Regardless of whether or not a balance of powers can be established the party's composition will always attenuate to an executive point giving to one member's decision the form of the Party's Will. Should each of the

[61] Lenin's attempt to reduce Iskra's editorial board from six to three members is one such example of the vanguard party's composition in action.

party's three centers assume this composition, each guarantees its existence making the possibility of party-wide paralysis impossible. A decision, for better or worse, will always give the party its directives.

There is, however, one passage in *What is to be Done?* that appears to completely upend the balance of power vs. centralization debate. It does this by forcing the reader to consider the social character of the "ideologist's" authority as something qualitatively distinct from the social character of the more traditional forms of authoritarianism, be they imperialist, autocratic, absolutist, plutocratic, etc.

While discussing the differences between economic organizations and the Social Democratic Party, Lenin concludes the exposition with an astonishing claim:

> The political struggle of Social Democracy is far more extensive and complex than the economic struggle of the workers against the employers and the government. Similarly (indeed for that reason), the organisation of the revolutionary Social-Democratic Party must inevitably be of *a kind different* from the organisation of the workers designed for this struggle. The workers' organisation must in the first place be a trade union organisation; secondly, it must be as broad as possible; and thirdly, it must be as public as conditions will allow (here, and further on, of course, I refer only to absolutist Russia). On the other hand, the organisation of the revolutionaries must consist first and foremost of people who make revolutionary activity their profession (for which reason I speak of the organisation of *revolutionaries*, meaning revolutionary Social-Democrats). In view of this common characteristic of the members of such an organisation, *all distinctions as between workers and intellectuals*, not to speak of distinctions of trade and profession, in both categories, *must be effaced*. (*What is to be Done?* 132)

Not only does this claim contradict Lenin's masonry analogy (now the composition of the vanguard both effaces the separation of intellectual and manual labour *and* organizes itself according to it), it also ascribes to the exercise of authority within the Party a completely different social character, one no longer defined by the separation of

intellectual and manual modes of activity. At the same time, it exposes the uncritical attitude of Lenin's opponents, whose conception of authority, even within a balance of power framework, maintains and relies on exactly this sort of separation, a separation also responsible for the fetish character of knowledge particularly as it grounds the authority of political leadership.

Apart from the fact that Lenin's conception of the vanguard party appears to rely on contradictory definitions, the claim that the vanguard effaces the distinction between workers and intellectuals deserves a much closer look. For if the professional revolutionary can engage in a practice in which the social division of labour structuring social relations under capitalist conditions is *effaced*, the vanguard, then, can do something extraordinary: it can provide a model of emancipated socio-productive relations, meaning the vanguard, as Lenin has theorized it, appears to provide the revolutionary framework in which a sustained coincidence of the subject of emancipation and the emancipated subject can take place. In that case, Lenin's professional revolutionary is that "classless force" George Lichtheim claimed proved Lenin had misunderstood Marx. Far from misunderstanding him, Lenin, the above passage suggests, possessed a much more thorough understanding of Marx than perhaps the man himself.

What, then, is the source of the "professional revolutionary's" ability to efface the capitalist social division of labour? Lenin seems to suggest it is the condition of illegality the Russian professional revolutionary must operate in. Recalling the comments Lenin made in "Where to Begin?" regarding the operation of an underground publication, he referred to the paper as "a collective organizer." He stated that the "technical task of regularly supplying the newspaper…will necessitate a network of local agents of the

united party" which, in turn, will become the movement's "skeleton" enabling it to commence carrying out "revolutionary actions."

Revolutionary activity, as a mode of political action, is reliant on an inseparable skilled technical division of labour. Whether illegal or not, a newspaper, like any other enterprise, requires for its functioning an extensive and skilled technical division of labour, particularly if it is going to span the entirety of Russian territory and at the level of technological development obtaining at the beginning of the twentieth century. It must have distribution networks, printing presses, writers, journalists, photographers (and or illustrators), editors, suppliers from whom it can acquire materials such as paper, ink, type setting bits, even twine to bundle publications, etc., individuals to transport editions, to distribute them, etc. However, since *Iskra is illegal,* this condition changes *the social character of the labour* involved in running the paper, while at the same time leaving intact its technical framework and content. Because the movement is organized around *this fact*: those who participate in it, those who lend it their skill and devotion, do so knowing full well their activity is illegal. As a result, knowledge of this condition makes present in their actions the informed and free decision that is the starting point of their real and effective revolutionary activity.

The impact the condition of illegality had on Lenin's thought can likewise be seen informing his intransigence regarding the first rule for party membership: "Party membership. 1) A member of the Russian Social-Democratic Labour Party is one who, accepting its programme, works actively to accomplish its aims under the control and direction of the organs of the Party" (Lenin "Chapter G"). Lenin's obstinacy on the issue is widely acknowledged to be the point in the history of the RSDLP where its sectarian

divides proved intractable, splitting the party into its Bolshevik (majority) and its Menshevik (minority) factions. Some historians, notably, David Priestland, suggest such a split was inevitable given Lenin's approach to politics was "militant, sectarian, and hostile to compromise" (*The Red Flag* 77). This claim, however, completely misses the significance of what was at stake in the debate over membership rules.

Lenin's position, far from expressing some character flaw or idiosyncrasy, was cognizant of the way illegality created the condition in which the decision to accept the party's revolutionary program placed the individual outside the law, thereby inducing a change in the social character of their activities. The significance of this change is not that it is illegal, but that it is tantamount to the unification of head and hand. Put another way, the professional revolutionary's decision immediately impacts their reality by causing their activity (mobilized in service of whatever revolutionary action) to detach itself from its social form (a form expressing capitalist property relations) since whatever type of work they undertake to "accomplish [the movement's] aims" will no longer continue to aid the turnover and reproduction of capital. It will instead contribute to generating the conditions in which their activity retains and maintains a different social character, one no longer determined by the law of value or illegality.

It should also be clearer now why Lenin was so dismissive of Comrade Goldblatt's criticism—what, again, he called "false phrase mongering." *In theory* there can be no authoritarianism when everyone has agreed to the party program, a program with revolutionary aims operating under conditions of illegality. The rules make it impossible for the party to operate as an authoritarian organization, at least in the traditional sense as it pertained to the autocratic rule of Russia's Tsars.

Of course, in light of the Bolshevik revolution's authoritarian dénouement the decision to accept the party program did not effect a permanent change in the social character of labour. The unity of head and hand the vanguard afforded the professional revolutionary proved unable to survive the revolution and the transition into legality, a fact made irrefutable by Lenin's decision in his *New Economic Policy* to reinstate capitalist relations in key areas of industrial production. What did survive the transition, though, was the organizational logic of the vanguard party. Once the same framework with which Lenin organized the vanguard organized the Soviet state apparatus the revolution completed its process, a process that required that it function as the form of mediation between the postulate in its particularity as a political party and the postulate in its universality as the organizing principle of Soviet society.

IV. The Bolsheviks and the Soviets

Against the backdrop of heavy military loses, a collapsing economy, and a general strike that had shut down the capital Petrograd, at the end of February 1917, Russia's Tsar, Nicholas II of the Romanov dynasty, abdicated the throne after his government's authority collapsed following the mutiny of the Petrograd Army Garrison (against the orders to put down the strike). By September of the same year, the Bolsheviks had acquired a majority in both the Moscow and the Petrograd soviets and Lenin was pushing the party to leverage the situation by seizing state power. On October 25th 1917, the Bolsheviks overthrew Russia's Provisional Government, establishing the world's first proletarian state.

It is, however, important that the approach to the revolutionary events of October 1917 and their aftermath occur through a consideration of what *did not take place* as a strategy for bringing fresh thoughts to established facts. There is, after all, no shortage of interpretations attempting to explain the moment the Bolshevik revolution took its Thermidorian turn. For Lucio Colletti, ever the Trotskyist, it was the fact the Russian revolution was made to stand alone, that it was unaccompanied by similar events across Europe. Echoing Marx's claim that communism cannot be a "local event"[62] he writes, "Socialism is not a national process but a world process" (*Rousseau* 226). For David Priestland, it was also Europe's revolutionary non-events, but explained in terms of Germany's continued military aggression against Russia.[63] "As the Germans marched into Ukraine," Priestland argues, "it was at this point that Lenin realized that the promises of 1917 were incompatible with the preservation of the new regime" (*The Red Flag* 92).

There are other factors, of course, some of which played only a bit part—Lenin's death, for instance—while others had more of a walk-on role—the collapse of labour discipline, for example, which Lenin himself lamented—and still others whose supporting roles threatened to steal the show, like the civil war which involved, among other actors, British imperialists, who financed and armed counter-revolutionary forces. Lists such as these tend to suggest that had any one of these factors been mitigated, things might have been different, which on one level might possibly contain some truth. And yet, on another perhaps more profound level, it completely misses how things did in fact

[62] A claim made in *The German Ideology,* which is followed with "The proletariat can thus only exist on the *world-historical* plane, just as communism, its activity, can only have a world-historical existence" (57).
[63] Which ceased once the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk was finally signed in early March 1918 bringing Russia's involvement in the First World War to its official end. Withdrawing from the war, however, had been a major concern for the Bolsheviks throughout the wars duration. The moment the Bolsheviks seized power Lenin stated, "The new workers' and peasants' government will immediately propose a just and democratic peace to all belligerent nations" ("Meeting of the Petrograd Soviet" 163).

go according to plan, how the revolution realized exactly what it was capable of realizing—only the outcome did not look the way it was imagined it would look. In short, like Lenin, these perspectives mistook the fruit of the revolution's flowering for some external obstacle thwarting its full bloom. The task, then, is to recognize what was realized in what did not take place.

What is it that did not take place? What did not take place is that, after having overthrown the Provisional Government, the Bolsheviks did not do what they said they would do after they took power, which was to turn control of the system of production and distribution over to the workers. Doing so would have established labour's collective ownership of the means of production, effectively realizing in the process communist relations of production. On the day of the revolution, at a meeting of the Petrograd Soviet of workers' and soldiers' deputies, Lenin triumphantly announced, "the workers' and peasants' revolution…has been accomplished" ("Meeting of the Petrograd Soviet" 162). He continued in a prophetic tone to proclaim, "A single decree putting an end to landed proprietorship will win us the confidence of the peasants. The peasants will understand that the salvation of the peasantry lies only in an alliance with the workers. *We shall institute genuine worker's control over production*" [italics added] ("Meeting of the Petrograd Soviet" 163). But the end of landed property did not win the Bolsheviks the confidence of the peasantry, a fact Lenin parlayed into the justification for the Bolsheviks' decision to not organize production around worker-controlled initiatives.

Insofar as capitalism provides the form in which the development of society's productive forces reaches a point that also contains the material prerequisites for a transition to communism, the primary obstacle to the transition to a communist mode of

production in Russia was the underdeveloped character of this process. The proletarianization of Russia's labour-force indicated, it is true, workers were being drawn into industry from agriculture, but, crucially, the process had yet to begin working in the opposite direction. Russia's economic infrastructure at the time of the revolution was still organized predominantly along agrarian lines. As a result, the mentality of the peasantry was what it had been for at least the last century, if not longer: mainly, of a petty bourgeois character.

Peasants were closer to small artisans in outlook than to (industrial) wage labourers, meaning they related to their productive activity in a fundamentally different way than the proletariat did. For one, the peasantry brought the products of their labour to market, something the proletariat, who simply traded labour for wages, did not do. By assuming the peasants' attitude towards the abolition of landed property would be synonymous with the proletariat's attitude towards its emancipation from capital, Lenin, in fact, grossly overestimated his understanding of Russia's peasantry. This truth took on a glaring character when despite the law abolishing landed property[64] the peasants were unwilling to distribute their grain outside of a market framework (Priestland *The Red Flag* 99). This in turn made the Bolsheviks look very inept, especially in the context of ongoing and wide spread food shortages.[65] In the end, Lenin conceded to the peasants' demands to sell grain on the open market (Priestland *The Red Flag* 99).

The peasant experience prompted the Bolsheviks to begin reconsidering the feasibility of any immediate implementation of communist production. Towards the end

[64] In the days following the Bolshevik revolution, Lenin wrote a 'Decree on Land," which in its first provision stated, "Landed proprietorship is abolished forthwith without any compensation" ("Decree on Land").

[65] It also led to some of the most abhorrent episodes by which the new regime undermined itself. While there are numerous examples, forced collectivization is among the most disastrous.

of 1921 this shift in attitude had finally made its way into the government's economic policy. In the *New Economic Policy,* Lenin addresses the Bolsheviks' mistakes, writing,

> Partly owing to the war problems that overwhelmed us and partly owing to the desperate position in which the Republic found itself when the imperialist war ended—owing to these circumstances, and a number of others, we made the mistake of deciding to go over directly to communist production and distribution. We thought that under the surplus-food appropriation system the peasants would provide us with the required quantity of grain, which we could distribute among the factories and thus achieve communist production and distribution." (62)

Because the petty bourgeois mentality of the peasants was more entrenched than Lenin had anticipated, he concludes, "The surplus-food appropriation system in the rural districts—this direct communist approach to the problem of urban development—hindered the growth of the productive forces and proved to be the main cause of the profound economic and political crisis that we experienced in the spring of 1921" (*New Economic Policy* 63). The economic crisis, which was intensified by a famine, rippled across Russia causing production to drop off in everything from cotton to coal. Exasperated by *prodrazyorstka*, the grain requisition, or "surplus-food appropriation system," the economic crisis soon enough began morphing into a series of political crises, the most significant of which, at least in terms of the level of violence accompanying it—tens of thousands were killed, executed and exiled—was the Kronstadt rebellion (Figes *A People's Tragedy* 395).

After the revolution, the reality of Russia's underdeveloped productive forces asserted itself in the same way (as Marx put it in relation to the impact of labour-time on value's magnitude) as the "law of gravity asserts itself when a person's house collapses on top of him" (*Capital* 168). In an effort to avoid worsening an already calamitous

situation, Lenin turned his attention to the development of Russia's productive forces. He thus conceded:

> The New Economic Policy means substituting a tax for the requisitioning of food; it means reverting to capitalism to a considerable extent—to what extent we do not know. Concessions to foreign capitalists (true, only very few have been accepted, especially when compared with the number we have offered) and leasing enterprises to private capitalists definitely mean restoring capitalism, and this is part and parcel of the New Economic Policy; for the abolition of the surplus-food appropriation system means allowing the peasants to trade freely in their surplus agricultural produce, in whatever is left over after the tax is collected—and the tax takes only a small share of that produce. The peasants constitute a huge section of our population and of our entire economy, and that is why capitalism must grow out of this soil of free trading. (Lenin *New Economic Policy*)

The prescriptions laid out in the *New Economic Policy*, therefore, called for the reinstatement of capitalist development proving perhaps the Hegelian adage that Zeitgeists are like Rhodes: neither can be leapt over.[66]

There are two things that can be gleaned from a consideration of the Bolsheviks' decision to not institute worker control over production and to restore capitalist production relations. *First*, at its most immediate the decision expresses the new Soviet state's sovereignty. Given the decision contradicts an earlier promise as an expression of sovereignty, it bears a striking familiarity to the sovereignty of the state apparatus dismantled by the February revolution. Consider Hegel's description of the Prussian monarchy, a state apparatus not unlike its Russian counterpart. Hegel locates sovereignty in the crown. As he argues in *The Philosophy of Right,* "The power of the crown contains in itself the three moments of the whole " (179). These three moments refer to the schema

[66] The quotation, taken from the "Preface" to *the Philosophy of Right* is as follows, "As for the individual, everyone is a son of his time; so philosophy also is its time apprehended in thoughts. It is just as foolish to fancy that any philosophy can transcend its present world, as that an individual could leap out of his time or jump over Rhodes" (Hegel "Preface" xx).

of logical categories: Universal, Particular, and Individual. That the crown in its universality consults councils, whose role is to present the crown with particularity, i.e., differences of opinion, strategy, options pertaining to the state's interests, etc., and ultimately retains "the moment of ultimate decision" (Hegel *Philosophy of Right* 179), means that the distinctive principle of sovereign identity, what accounts for the individuality of the monarchical system, resides in the right to decide.

Lenin, of course, would not see it this way. In "The Impending Catastrophe and How to Combat It," written almost immediately following the Bolshevik revolution, he argues the difference between sovereigns comes down to whose interests the state apparatus serves:

> For if a huge capitalist undertaking becomes a monopoly, it means that it serves the whole nation. If it has become a state monopoly, it means that the state (i.e., the armed organisation of the population, the workers and peasants above all, provided there is *revolutionary* democracy) directs the whole undertaking. In whose interest? Either in the interest of the landowners and capitalists, in which case we have not a revolutionary-democratic but a reactionary-bureaucratic state, an imperialist republic. Or in the interest of revolutionary democracy—and then *it is a step towards socialism*. For socialism is merely the next step forward from state-capitalist monopoly. Or, in other words, socialism is merely state-capitalist monopoly*, which is made to serve the interests of the whole people* and has to that extent *ceased* to be capitalist monopoly. (98-99)

While Lenin's recourse to class interests do provide a useful criteria for distinguishing between different forms of sovereignty, things get considerably more complicated when the decisions made in service of the interests of revolutionary democracy call for the restoration of a reactionary-bureaucratic state that in turn reinstates the interests of capital as the principle organizing force of social production. That this was the case suggests one

thing: the interests of the working class in Russia lacked the material basis for their realization.

The initial determination of the general interest of the proletariat as a class is an interest in emancipation that comes about in the awareness it acquires of its own structural subordination to capital. It thereby lacks definition and substance, making it different from the more concrete interests of the ruling class it opposes. The interests of the ruling class are not only expressed, but also served by already established practices, which makes of them a material force in society. The class interest Marxism believed it could, through the political organization of the proletariat, give a general and social binding form to lacked this material dimension, if only because it refused to acknowledge collective ownership and the organization of production according to democratic principles must already have an established practice somewhere in a society's productive forces. The organization of the producers by the producers is itself the practice by which labour establishes its revolutionary agency as a material force in society.

As the strategy aiming to conquer political power exemplifies, the Bolsheviks approached politics as if a formalized social relation could posit or invoke a process of evolution of the concrete world. It is one thing to destroy the externalized character of bourgeois politics by demolishing its state apparatus or by preventing it from developing in the first place; but it is something else altogether to think that by doing so the way is cleared for the unhampered growth of socialist production relations. For it is these relations which comprise the concrete world revolutionary politics is to assimilate and reproduce as a formalized social relation. What the Bolsheviks attempted to do was to impose an abstraction on to reality with the hope it would become real.

Even though the emancipatory interests of the working class were rooted in social conditions, by lacking the material basis of their realization they were really only aspirations associated with how labour would relate to society if it were no longer subordinate to capital. Interests that have as their content aspirations (which do not point to already established practices, however nascent,) aspire towards something that is as yet not real, or, is in embryo. The aspirations contained in the working classes' emancipatory interests denote more their structural subordination than the thing/goal towards which they aspire. These interests are, therefore, of a more abstract character than interests rooted in already established practices, practices that figure as productive relations into the function of society's productive forces. The interests of the proletariat that figure into the Bolshevik decision making processes are not practices, but the theoretical knowledge of the conditions of such practices. They are theoretical deductions arrived at from a process of reasoning by negative inference; i.e., a conceptual dialectic.

Because there was no actual communist practice the Bolsheviks could formulate through their political activity into a "binding social force," what became the binding social force in Soviet Russia was the hypostatized knowledge of labour's revolutionary class interests. What these interests need to be, however, is the theoretical conceptualization of the interests that have originated in a real social context comprising a set of practices and the relations established on the basis of these practices. Where this is not the case, the theoretical deductions and the negative inferences contained within ultimately acquire a fetishized form**.** The relations they are intended to express are replaced by the concept of the relations and instead of representing these actual relations they depict only the idea of them.

The decision to not institute worker control over production is the decision to not unify labour with the means of production. It is the decision to hold this unity in abeyance. One consequence of the abeyance is it opens a massive breach not so much between Bolshevik theory and practice, since the former can be adjusted to justify the latter, but between words and the reality of the practices and relations established on the back of such decisions. The Soviet Union said of itself it is a worker's state, a communist society, but there is no collective ownership of the means of production. The Soviet state is said to be the dictatorship of the proletariat realized, but the proletariat's labour is still a commodity (the exploitation of which produces a surplus-value) and is, therefore, in reality subjected to the dictatorship of the market. As Lucio Colletti put it around the midpoint of the twentieth century, "the countries we call socialist are only socialist metaphorically" (*Rousseau* 226).

Second, the Bolsheviks' decision to not institute worker control over production demonstrates that the unity of head and hand achieved in the organizational form of the vanguard party and embodied in the figure of the "professional revolutionary" is lost in the transition from illegality to sovereignty. The decision to reinstate capitalist production relations also reinstates the development of the technical division of labour (as a element of the development of the productive forces) along the lines of a division between intellectual and manual labour pertaining originally to the postulate of capitalism's social division of labour. It does not matter that white collar workers, the bourgeoisie's army of experts and technicians, are *also* wage-labourers and therefore proletarian, but that the development of the productive forces occur through the organization of production in accordance with this separation.

A whole segment of the working class therefore remains bereft of the broader knowledge of production they would have otherwise become privy to under conditions of collective ownership. At the same time, another segment of the working class uses this knowledge to obfuscate the real conditions of their existence preferring instead imaginary relations behind which sink those class interests Lenin was so certain he understood. As a class, labour remains bereft of the capacity to participate in the decisions that determine the social character of its labour. In addition, then, to holding in abeyance the unity of labour and the means of production, the decision also perpetuates the scission of labour between its mental and manual modes. One consequence of this abeyance is the network of soviets, that is, the institutional framework designed to embody the identity of labour's head and hand undergoes a transformation; or to state it more accurately, it fails to become the thing it was envisioned it would become, meaning it is also not the thing it is discussed as being.

When Colletti praises Lenin's approach to the soviet model in *The State and Revolution* his words cannot avoid coming across as nostalgic since they so obviously clash with the reality to which they allude. To Colletti, the book's power lies in its enlightened perspective, which sets it apart from the whole of Marxism during the period particularly as it pertained to the way Marx's concept of 'dictatorship' was understood. In his mind the work expresses "[Lenin's] discovery that the 'dictatorship of the proletariat' is not the dictatorship of the party but the Paris Commune" (*Rousseau* 224). An earlier iteration of this thought appears in Lenin's mid-1917 writings when he describes the soviet model as "the ready-made form of the dictatorship of the proletariat" ("On Slogans" 63).

Setting Colletti's nostalgia aside, it is clear that when in *The State and Revolution* Lenin spoke of "a gigantic replacement of certain institutions by other institutions of an essentially different kind" (38) he had in mind less a vision of how the soviets might organize Russian society and more a vision of how the soviets might organize themselves *should they adopt the Bolshevik vision*, which, shrewdly enough, advocated for a transfer of state power from the Provisional Government and its General Assembly to the soviets and the Council of Workers' and Soldiers' (and eventually Peasant) Deputies. So while the October Revolution is popularly equated with the Bolsheviks' overthrow of the Provisional Government, the real *coup d'état* occurred when the Bolsheviks acquired a majority backing in both the Moscow and Petrograd workers' soviets. As Lenin proclaimed in a letter to the Central Committee of the RSDLP, "The Bolsheviks, having obtained a majority in the Soviets of Workers' and Soldiers' Deputies of both capitals, can and must take state power into their own hands" ("The Bolsheviks Must Assume Power"113). Once the Bolsheviks did so, it was not the network of soviets that held state power, but a 'supreme' soviet, the All-Russian Central Executive Committee of Soviets.

In November of 1918, John Reed, a western observer and commentator on the Bolshevik revolution, described the soviet system as a model of "decentralization" in which "local soviets create the central government, and not the central government the local soviets" (Reed). Nothing could have been further from the truth. So long as the decision to institute worker control over the production and distribution of goods remained the prerogative of the Central Executive Committee, the soviet system was not decentralized as Reed imagined it, but concentrated hierarchically.

The soviet state apparatus replicated on a national scale the organizational form of the vanguard party. Like the party with its two centers, the soviet apparatus funnelled power to an apex, the All-Russian Congress of Soviets out of which came the All-Russian Central Executive Committee. Under Article Two, Chapter Five of the General Provisions of the Constitution of the Russian Socialist Federal Soviet Republic, it is stated, "The supreme power of the RSFSR belongs to the All-Russian Congress of Soviets, and, in periods between the convocation of the congress, to the All Russian Central Executive Committee" (*Constitution of the RSFSR*).

Sitting, then, at the apex of the soviet state apparatus is an executive suite, a sovereign decision. The Russian term "reshenie" refers to the concept of party decision. As a generic term it is not explicitly codified in soviet political philosophy. Nevertheless, it does occupy a major place in Soviet Communist thinking according to Robert H. McNeal, who observes, "It is clear that the essence of the party decision is its legitimacy as an expression of the full authority of the party" (McNeal *Decisions of the CPU* ix-x). Where it does make an explicit appearance is, significantly, in the rules of party membership appearing in the first article of the RSDLP's rules (inducing the sectarian divide in 1903), which stated a party member is one who accepts the party programme and pledges to carry out all *party decisions*.

In the same way capital consolidated its power over society the moment it transformed labour into a commodity, the Bolsheviks consolidated their power over Russian society the moment the network of soviets was organized according to the form assumed by Lenin's vanguard party. It was at this point that the postulate upon which Marxism built its approach to revolutionary politics acquired its most complete

objectification, for it is by making Russian society over in its own image that the relations contained and established in the postulate acquired universality becoming the dominant form of social relation in Soviet Russia.

Herein lies the basis of authoritarianism in Marxist politics, which I have argued needs to be read as the form of appearance of a contradiction immanent to Marxism's approach to politics. The historically progressive character of Marx's critique of capitalist society demonstrated the real historical possibility of the self-emancipation of the working class. The political form this emancipation took, however, organized itself around an uncritical adoption of a postulate of the capitalist social division of labour. Organizing the political frameworks of the working class revolution around this postulate replicated the same social divide the revolution aimed to eliminate. In short, rather than overcome labour's alienated self-relation, the Marxist approach to politics continued to hold in abeyance labour's external separation from the means of production and its internal division between its mental and manual modes.

As the institutional arrangement in which the working class was to exercise control over production and distribution, the network of soviets were the organizational form in which Marxism would have realized the series of emancipated relations in which labour no longer related to itself, its product and the process of production as to "an alien thing" (Marx *1844* 71). The source of the soviets' authority would have arisen in the networks they established, which would have then allowed them to regulate production and distribution in accordance with society's needs as they arose and developed over time.

The purpose of all soviets 'above' the district level, i.e., city, municipal, county, provincial, national, etc., was to facilitate communication among the 'lowest' level soviets, the ones whose proximity to production and the workers was most immediate. Yet, so long as the national-level soviet, the All-Russian Central Executive Committee Soviet, functioned as a centralized power, it corrupted the network, mistaking its own hypostatized independence for a genuinely new type of power. As was the fate of the International Workingmen's Association, the moment the General Council acquired an autonomy from the network of working class organizations, its purpose was to aid in the coordination of, once a supreme soviet arose out of the network of soviets, the latter became subject to the authority of their own alienated network.

Conclusion

As long as capitalist relations continued to organize labour's productive experiences, the soviet system could not function as a platform in which labour's participation in the soviets was at the same time an exercise of its common and collective control over both the production and distribution of goods. As with all categories of a social nature, politics is a label intended to convey a set of determinate social relations. The predominant relation established under Marxist political practices was didactic in character. As a result, knowledge was the common currency of this relation, if only because the mystifications inherent to capitalist society thrust on knowledge this political role. Initially, then, this knowledge was of a positive character, even though it only countered, at the level of ideology, the capitalist discourse on freedom and equality. This knowledge represented to the proletariat the real conditions of its existence. Knowledge is made to play a politically important part against capitalist society if only because

capitalist society is inherently abstract, meaning social perception and reality diverge in significant ways, ways that figure into the system's reproductive strategies.

Knowledge gives to the proletariat the conceptual vocabulary with which it names its exploitation. It does not eliminate this exploitation, however. It merely calls it by its name. On the other hand, this positive knowledge functions as the starting point of a series of negative inferences which do not correspond with actual socialist practices, i.e., co-operation, collective ownership, etc., but only with an understanding of the conditions necessary for these practices. It is at this point that knowledge is hypostatized in Marxist politics. Knowledge mediates the way the working class relates to its own political activity. For this reason knowledge is a fetish. Knowledge and the consciousness of it go from being predicates of the experience of labour under capitalism to active subjects within the proletariat's political associations.

As it came to politics, then, Marxism jumped the gun. Before its political activities could advance the interests of the working class, labour must have already begun developing its cooperative practices *at the level of production*. It must have more than the knowledge of the possibility of these practices. It must have more than a desire for their reality. It must have already started placing democratic principles and collective ownership at the centre of as many different processes of production as it can. Its cooperative practices, in other words, must have already become a tangible productive force. Collective ownership must be the productive relation inside which develops conscious and deliberate cooperation as a productive force. Cooperation based on collective ownership must itself be a productive force. From here it will come to know its interests because these interests will be its own; they will be relatable to the activities

Labour is already engaged in or is aware others are engaged in. It is these interests to which labour wants to give a socially binding force. As labour's class interests, however, they were unable to find expression in the organizational form of labour's political activity. The working class remained bound to the conditions of its structural subordination, which is why it reproduced a version of this subordination when its "interests" did acquire a socially binding force.

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At one point in his dissertation, which was focused on the work of considering the differences between Epicurean and Democritean philosophies of nature, Marx made note of the following pattern common to the world's great philosophies:

> When philosophy turns itself as will against the world of appearance, then the system is lowered to an abstract totality, that is, it has become one aspect of the world, which opposes another one. Its relationship to the world is that of reflection. Inspired by the urge to realise itself, it enters into tension against the other. The inner self-contentment and completeness has been broken. What was inner light has become consuming flame turning outwards. The result is that as the world becomes philosophical, philosophy also becomes worldly, that its realisation is also its loss, that what it struggles against on the outside is its own inner deficiency, that in the very struggle it falls precisely into those defects which it fights as defects in the opposite camp, and that it can only overcome these defects by falling into them. That which opposes it and that which it fights is always the same as itself, only with factors inverted. ("To Make the World Philosophical" 10)

Could not the same be said of Marxism when considered in terms of its political history? If with Marx philosophy again became worldly, it was during the period of the European labour movement's most pronounced political activity that the world became philosophical. Inspired by the urge to realize the historical mission of the proletariat, Marxism entered into "tension against the other" played not by capitalist society, but by

the anarchists of the International, followed by the Social Democratic revisionists of the era of parliamentary socialism, and then finally by Lenin's Bolsheviks and their struggle against the workers' and soldiers' soviets.

As a result, Marxism's "inner self-contentment" was broken. But from this loss comes the knowledge what it struggled against as "defects in the opposite camp," defects it regarded as its opponents' naiveté or their uncritical appropriation of bourgeois principles of social and political organization, turned out to be literally Marxism's "own inner defects." Then, by falling into these defects, in the form of the Bolshevik revolution, did it become possible to overcome them; a possibility, the theoretical expression of which, I argue resides in Lukács' thesis "organization is the form of mediation between theory and practice" ("Towards a Methodology" 299).

All of which is to say, in fighting the *fetishized* world of commodities, in turning the inner light into consuming flame, Marxism fell into *political* fetishism, the name given its "own inner deficiency," which it fought precisely as "defects in the opposite camp."[67] By explaining the social origin of the phenomenon of authoritarianism, the concept of political fetishism brings some much needed clarity to Marxism's political history: what appeared in the mind of Marxists, or in Lenin's words, the "professional revolutionary," as the didactic principle was from the perspective of the working class the authority of its political leadership. Unlike forms of political authority rooted in the threat of physical force buttressed by the material means to follow through on the threat, until the time it was able to act otherwise the authority of labour's political leadership

[67] For fetishism is precisely a question of inverted factors: the abstract over the concrete in labour; the dead over the living in the productive forces; the private over the social in production; the ideal over the historical material in thought; exchange over use in circulation; the head over the hand in the social division of labour; and finally, leadership over the lead in the revolutionary politics of the European working class.

grounded itself in a knowledge of the forces and processes of history (i.e., Marxist theory). But from the perspective of the revolutionary proletariat, once its leadership was able to act otherwise, it became clear what both perspectives expressed as opposites was in fact the alienated relation of labour to its own revolutionary agency.

The uncritical incorporation into labour's political organization of a postulate indigenous to the capitalist social division of labour and the development of this postulate through successive institutional frameworks was the form of appearance of Marxism's own inner defects. In short, authoritarianism is the alienated form of labour's revolutionary political agency rooted in its emancipatory class interests but superseded by the principle of didacticism implicit in this agency as one of its conditions.

The concept of political fetishism allows Marxism to confront its political history and theoretically posit its "own inner defects" as the uncritical conflation of the politically important role knowledge plays in labour politics (didacticism), and the impact the fetish character of intellectual activity (postulate of the social division of labour) has had on interpreting this fact. The critical upshot of this analytic separation is that it becomes possible for Marxism to theoretically rehabilitate its political imaginary by recovering the emancipatory class interests eclipsed by the principle of didacticism and its transmutation by the postulate of the social division of labour into an authoritarian politics.

Conclusion

Introduction

There can be no getting around the politically important function of knowledge in the labour movement. In a society organized according to the social postulates of the capitalist exchange relation on the one hand, and to the imperative to produce and accumulate surplus value on the other, knowledge acquires its political function as a response to the separation these postulates enforce between social perception and reality. "As commodity production develops and becomes the typical form of production," notes Alfred Sohn-Rethel, "man's imagination grows more and more separate from his actions" (*Intellectual and Manual Labour* 26). Similarly, when in his most influential essay "Reification and the Consciousness of the Proletariat" Georg Lukács refers to the commodity-form as "the central problem of capitalist society in all its aspects," the defining feature of this problem, which is illustrated by the principle of rationalization, is framed precisely as the divergence of perception and practice ("Reification" 83).

All of which is to say no more than what is already implicit in Marx's theory of commodity fetishism. The unofficial Marxist definition of ideology—*Sie Wissen das night, aber Sie tun es*: they don't know it, but they are doing it—expresses a fact of the division of labour under capitalism, which, on one the hand, "turns [commodity owners] into independent private producers," while on the other "makes the social process of production…independent of the producers themselves" (Marx *Capital* 202). Given, then, the necessity of a didactic principle to the organizational framework of the labour movement would it not appear Marxism's integration into the university system of

Western capitalist societies in the period following the Bolshevik revolution has finally provided this principle with the institution most conducive to its premises?

Where else but in the education system is it possible for the form of authority governing the formal inequality of the didactic relation to acquire its ideal shape? Is it not the case that overtime, as the assimilation of knowledge takes place, formal inequality is replaced by a social relation of real equality based upon a common understanding arising from a shared possession of knowledge? Is it not its temporally limited character that makes inequality within a didactic relation only formal and so makes the form of its authority, in fact, ideal? And is this not a predominant feature of the didactic character of social relations realized within the university between student and teacher? Considering all this, would not the presence within the academy of a Marxist discourse, then, be a good thing, a step in the right direction?

The integration of Marxist theory into the university system of late capitalism has aided the former's ability to track and theorize the proliferation of the logic of capital across diverse social fields. But at the same time, it has left a vast lacuna in which disappears any critical self-reflection centered on the relation between the university and Marxism. It is certainly telling that in Western Marxism's appropriation of Lukács' work, the focus was solely on his theory of reification if only for the way it engaged the major philosophical themes underpinning Marx's work, which at the time were a source of speculation until the publication of Marx's 1844 writings a decade later. By that time, his theory of organization all but receded from view despite, in Lukács' opinion, it being the thesis of "the crucial essay in [his] book" (Lukács *A Defense of History and Class*

Consciousness 94). Except for a scattering of largely polemical pieces,[68] and to the best of my knowledge nowhere in the work of academic Marxism is the institutional logic of the university, let alone its possible influences on Marxist theory, subjected to a sustained critique, *a ruthless criticism* in other words. Nowhere is the university considered in terms of what it means for it to be the form of mediation between Marxist theory and a Marxist practice. As a result, it remains uncertain as to exactly what academic Marxism is producing when it "practices" theory within capitalism's institutions of higher learning.

[68] Two examples: first, Doug Dowd's "Marxism for the Few: Or, Let'em eat Theory" originally published in *Monthly Reviews'* April 1982 issue. Here Dowd laments how "the Marxists, mostly out of, or still connected with, universities, tend to function like a suburban swimming pool: self-contained and self-purifying" ("Marxism for the Few"). His analysis ultimately drifts away from a consideration of the impact Marxism's integration into the academia (and the latters incorporation into global capitalism) have on the process of theorizing itself. He concludes that while radical intellectuals have "become trapped in the academic mould" he nonetheless declares intellectuals "are now one of the two main hopes for rebuilding an effective socialist movement in the United States" ("Marxism for the Few").

Second, consider Vivek Chibber's 2008 article "Whatever Happened to Class?" Here Chibber does an excellent job tracing the decline of Marxist influence in South Asia's progressive intellectual circles. "For the past two decades," Chibber explains, "class analysis has been in decline in South Asian studies, and at an accelerating pace. This is not in itself surprising, since it is symptomatic of Marxism's decline as an intellectual and political force more broadly, and the Marxist tradition has historically been the main source of class-related theory" ("Whatever Happened to Class?"). Chibber quite rightly points out the alarming thing about this trend is how the vacuum Marxism's decline has left in progressive circles has been filled by the intellectual trends of post-structuralism and post-colonial theory. Why this is worrying to Chibber is because both trends and their practitioners "show not only a suspicion of class theory and the Marxist tradition, but an outright hostility to them" ("Whatever Happened to Class?").

Yet, Chibber's analysis moves entirely within the parameters established by Althusser's equivalence of the academia with ideological reproduction. Of the academia's "institutional environment" he writes, "a college education is a means of social mobility. Even though [the] origin [of many students] may be in the working class, their aspirations are of a more elite nature. For those students who make it into college, the mere fact of social advancement serves to confirm central elements of the dominant ideology, which insists on the fluidity of social hierarchies, and the absence of structural constraints" (Whatever Happened to Class?"). In conceiving of the "institutional environment" of academia as a space serving to confirm "central elements of the dominant ideology," Chibber adopts an Althusserian view and so accepts the methodological distinction between society and economy. As a result, his analysis is unable to arrive at a place were those discourses hostile to class analysis and their presence within academia can be seen as an effect of the fetish character of intellectual labour, a character that is ultimately grounded in the social postulates of capitalist production. Chibber is therefore unable to uncover in these intellectual trends their grounding in liberalism and hence the pro-capitalist mentality they promote because his analysis assumes academia is an institution located within the realm of ideology, not production, and is thereby class-neutral in its basic form (even though its current organization serves the interests of the capitalist class).

With this in mind, I want to suggest that Marx's account of the subsumption process can help shed light on the specific ways the organizational logic of the university has impacted the direction of Marxism's ongoing critique of capitalism. I find Marx's account of the subsumption process useful because it depicts social change as a pattern of development specific to the dynamics unleashed by the expanded reproduction of capital, which makes the phenomena arising within these dynamics amenable to an analysis based on Marx's theory of fetishism. Subsumption allows Marx to describe the impact the social relations of production have on the development of the forces of production. The primary aim of the subsumption process is to increase the production of (relative) surplus-value. And the only way this happens is if the process "completely revolutionizes the technical processes of labour" (Marx *Capital* 645). Most significantly, the subsumption process brings about what Marx called a "transmutation" wherein the "development of the productive forces" henceforth "takes the form of the productive power of capital" (*Capital* 1024).

As the subsumption process develops the scope of the system, living labour is exchanged for objectified labour, or what Marx in his analyses calls "fixed capital." The exchange of living labour for objectified labour leads to, among other things, science becoming a productive force, which henceforth develops seemingly under its own momentum. Marx designates science's status as a productive force with the concept "the general intellect." And herein lies the function of the university within the system of global capitalism: its role is to facilitate through pedagogy and through the intellectual labour of research and the scientific development of technological and organizational innovations the expanded reproduction of capitalist production. The university

participates in the subsumption process insofar as the results of its mandate— instruction, research, and development—contributes to the modification of the technical processes of labour processes at the stage of their formal subsumption by capital. Its role in the subsumption process is to bring about the developed form of capital through the real subsumption of labour The university is, therefore, a pivot point wherein labour's formal subsumption becomes real as capital passes from its general into its developed form. The question, then, is if the real subsumption "revolutionizes the technical processes of labour," what does this look like with respect to the intellectual labour involved in the preservation and development of Marxist theory in particular? Is it the case this labour undergoes its own subsumption by capital, or does it merely conspire with capital in the subsumption of other labour-processes?

If with the development of science knowledge becomes a productive force, the productivity of this force owes itself to a very specific ability: abstraction. As a function of the general intellect, then, it is the processes of abstraction that designate the presence in academic Marxism of capital, or put differently, the presence of the social relations of production in the productive forces. It is, therefore, within the context of the subsumption process that the impact of the university on Marxist theory can be critically theorized. The impact of this process appears in Marxist theory as a shift in the status and function of abstraction. The process expresses itself at the level of the concept, the product of intellectual labour, in two ways: as a tendency to think in ideal abstractions and a tendency to conceive social phenomena ahistorically. And it is in this fashion that the intellectual activity of labour's critical analysis of capitalism is made to express the productive power of capital. What appears, then, in the mind of the academic Marxist as a

property of their inherent cognitive capabilities, is in actuality an expression of the productive power of capital mediated by the role the academy plays in the processes of capitalism's expanded reproduction. Such is the class struggle in theory.

I. Educational State Apparatuses, Subsumption, Abstraction

The lacuna around which the work of academic Marxists steps becomes gapping in Louis Althusser's essay "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses," since it is this essay that expresses a "Marxist interpretation" of capitalist education. Althusser opens the essay by stating his aim is to contemplate further the notion "the ultimate condition of production is, therefore, the reproduction of the conditions of production" ("Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses" 85). During the course of his contemplation he is led to conclude that because "the school teaches 'know-how,' but in forms which ensure *subjection to the ruling ideology* or the mastery of its practice," of all the social institutions comprising modern (French) society (such as the family, the church, the military, etc.,) the one that "has been installed in the *dominant* position" from the perspective of the ultimate condition of production, "is the *educational ideological apparatus*" (ESA) ("Ideology" 89, 103).

Althusser's analysis is predicated on the analytic separation of the "region of ideology" from a "sphere of production," which has its basis in a specific interpretation of Marxism justified usually by recourse to Marx's "Preface" to his *Contribution to a Critique of Political Economy.*[69] Consequently, Althusser's thesis generates the

[69] The passage in question reads, "The sum total of these relations of production constitutes the economic structure of society, the real foundation , on which rises a legal and political superstructure and to which corresponds definite forms of social consciousness" (Marx "Preface" 4). Later on in the same passage Marx refers to social forms of consciousness as "the ideological forms in which men become conscious of this conflict [the class struggle] and fight it out" ("Preface" 5).

impression the ESA cannot be or become an immediate site of capitalist exploitation, since exploitation is a feature of a different region, the "region of production." As a result, the attitude a certain social group, like intellectuals, is outside or at least on the periphery of the class struggle is reinforced in even those perspectives that take class struggle as an object. This may in part explain why academic Marxism feels little need to critically reflect on the deeper implications of its relationship with the university. Lukács addressed this attitude in an essay on Moses Hess and idealist dialectics. Speaking of the role he played in the "True Socialism" movement of 1840's Germany, Lukács writes Hess possessed the "fond belief" he "inhabits a sphere above all class antagonisms and all egoistical interests of his fellow-men," which Lukács concludes, "is typical of the intellectual who does not participate – directly – in the process of production" ("Moses Hess and the Problem of Idealist Dialectics" 571).

But as the broader imbrication of ESA and the circuits of capitalist accumulation demonstrate—from the exponential rise in tuition costs to the concomitant explosion in both the magnitude and scope of student debt, or from the proletarianization of academic and pedagogical labour (so-called precarious forms of labour) to the abandonment of humanities and social science research funding (to say nothing of the 'public'-private partnerships between science and engineering faculties) to the state and its market-based logic of funding allocation[70]—the premise of the analytical separation of ideological

[70] No amount of slickly produced departmental promotional videos can eliminate the fact that since the beginning of the new millennium student debt loads have increased by over forty percent, or that the typical Canadian student graduates with an average debt of twenty-eight thousand dollars, or that it will on average take them at the very minimum fourteen years to pay off that debt ("By the Numbers"). Nor is there any relief found in the knowledge that of the hundreds of thousands of students sold into debt bondage, a few earn scholarships that lessen the burden. The fact remains that student debt is now recognized as a distinguishing factor in (what is ridiculously called) wealth accumulation, "as non-borrowers [an equally ridiculous term] are found to own almost double the assets and three-times the net-worth" as so-called "borrowers" (Bryce "Inequality Explained").

reproduction from the sphere of production, while perhaps still evident in Althusser's time, has as a result of the system's ongoing expansion become untenable. That this analytic separation has become untenable is in large part a consequence of the system's expanded reproduction, that is, the process of labour's subsumption by capital.

In Marx's critique of political economy capitalist society is presented as a whole, as a self-expanding, self-reproducing totality. The term he uses to describe the dynamic principle at work in this totality is subsumption. In his analysis subsumption appears in two modes: formal and real. Both act as complimentary levels of analytic abstraction expressing on one level the extent of formal subsumption, the general form of capitalist production, and on another level the extent of real subsumption, the system's developed form.

An important feature of the subsumption process, Marx explains, "entails the *new creation of wage labourers,*" which are "the means to realize and increase the available amount of capital" (*Capital* 1061). Capital does this either by "extending its rule to sections of the population not previously subject to itself, such as women or children; or else it subjugates a section of the labouring masses that has accrued through the natural growth of the population" (Marx *Capital* 1061). From this Marx concludes that because "labour produces its conditions of production as *capital*, and capital produces labour as the means of its realization as capital, as wage labour," the immanent form of "capitalist production is not only the reproduction of the [capital/labour] relation, it is its reproduction on a steadily increasing scale" (*Capital* 1061-62).

The image of capitalist development depicted in the subsumption process is that of a widening gyre. As a self-determining entity, capital involves an ongoing process by

means of which it imposes on "sections of the population not previously subject to itself" its "intrinsic feature," i.e., "the *process of accumulation"* [of surplus-value] (Marx *Capital* 1061). Marx consistently framed his definition of capitalism this way, as a unity of the production and valorization processes: "The process of production is the *immediate* unity of labour process and valorization process, just as its immediate result, the commodity, is the *immediate* unity of use-value and exchange-value" (*Capital* 991); "The *worker* who performs *productive work* is *productive* and the work he performs is productive if it directly creates *surplus-value,* i.e., if it valorizes capital" (Marx *Capital* 1039). As the self-determining principle, capital brings external sections into its sphere of influence incorporating them into its immanent form.

So, despite possessing as Lukács' put it the "fond belief" they inhabit a place external to the class struggle, both Althusser and Hess have come by this common trait for different reasons, which must be accounted for. With Hess, the reasons lie with Germany's relatively underdeveloped capitalist class structure (Lukács "Moses Hess and the Problems of Idealist Dialectics" 538). German capitalism during Hess's time related to its social prerequisites, in this case the German intelligentsia, in their as-yet-abandoned feudal forms. Hess could thus reasonably act and think like someone outside "production" because for all intents and purposes he was. But with Althusser, this same assumption occurs at much more developed stages of capitalism's historical development and so occurs in a significantly different context. What originally appeared in Hess's time as a precondition of, or, peripheral concern to, capitalist development appears with Althusser as posited by European (and global) capitalism, meaning that by the middle of the last century the European "intelligentsia" no longer appeared as an antecedent of

capital, that is, as an independent class. Rather, by this time the intelligentsia was a consequence of capital having already become, in Hegel's words, an "objective universality," as having already incorporated the intelligentsia into its "immanent form." In the same way, then, as Hess's attitude reflected the German intelligentsia at a time when its intoxication with republicanism was causing it to stray from its feudal patronage, so Althusser's reflects that of the European intelligentsia in the aftermath of its subsumption by capital.

Althusser's problem is not that he overlooks class differences as Hess does, but that he imagines his looking at them is unaffected by the fact his particular vantage point is located within the Educational State Apparatus. Therefore, even though his work acknowledges a relation between the academy and capital in that it considers the ESA at the level of its reproductive functions, Althusser's analysis still clearly begs the question of the ESA's influence on Marxism since by his own reasoning and by virtue of its presence within the ESA, the expanding body of Marxist knowledge must also contribute to the ideological reproduction of the dominant relations of production.[71] Perhaps this is what Michel Pêcheux, a student of Althusser's, was responding to when in *Language, Semantics and Ideology*, he offers this slightly modified framework stating,

> In writing 'reproduction/transformation,' I mean to designate the nodally contradictory character of *any mode of production, which is based on a division into classes, i.e., whose 'principle' is class struggle.* This means, in particular, that I consider it mistaken to locate at different points on the one hand what contributes to the reproduction of the relations of production and on the other what contributes to their transformation: the

[71] How? Should Althusser include in his analysis the position from which he contemplates the "ultimate condition of production," he might easily extrapolate that in being an ideological phenomenon alongside other ideological phenomenon *within the ESA*, Marxism supplies its subjects with the constellation of "imaginary relations" by means of which they relate to "the real conditions of existence" (*Althusser* "Ideology" 109). Marxism would, therefore, contribute to the ideological reproduction of the dominant relations of production in exactly the same way as other ideological phenomena do.

> class struggle traverses the mode of production as a whole, which, in the region of ideology, means the class struggle 'passes through' what Althusser has called the "ideological state apparatuses. (97-98)

It seems Pêcheux recognized how a consistent Althusserian position meant that their work *as Marxists* took on an overtly ideological character in that, *as also academics*, it must, in whatever small way, contribute to the ideological reproduction of the very society it opposes. Should this not be the case, it would mean Marxist theorists within academic institutions ascribe to themselves a privileged position vis-à-vis the class struggle they contemplate as both Marxists and academics, which, I would argue, is precisely what Althusser does. He is able to extricate himself from his own reasoning only by appeal to Marxism's privileged status vis-à-vis the class struggle if not as a universal science, then as "the science of social formations" (Althusser and Balibar *Reading Capital* 314). Science, in Althusser's mind, resides on a different epistemological plane than ideological knowledge, which strictly speaking pertains to perceptions of reality at the level of everyday life, even though ideology can and does at times appear as science (Jameson "Introduction" xiv).[72] It is his relation to knowledge and not to an alternative practice that elevates Althusser to a place of exception. Therefore, "true" i.e., scientific Marxism, of which Althusser is a practitioner, can appear within the ESA and yet not participate in the general function of ideological reproduction by virtue of its status as "science."

In his "Preface to *Capital*" Althusser explains scientific theories like Marx's are built of concepts, which in their specific arrangement constitute a system that together

[72] Where it has appeared otherwise, in its humanist variant for instance, lead by figures such as Eric Fromm or the Praxis School in 1960's Belgrade, Marxism was not Marxist in the Althusserian sense, but ideology appearing as science.

becomes a theory. Concepts are "abstract notions" says Althusser ("Preface" 48). At his most didactic, Althusser advises readers to "get used to the practice of abstraction" ("Preface" 48). But he also warns scientific abstractions are not just "abstract" in the sense of being "internal to consciousness," but "designate actually existing realities" ("Preface" 48). An abstraction is scientific if it designates a "concrete reality which certainly exists, but which it is impossible to touch with one's hands or see with one's eyes" ("Preface" 48). "Every abstract concept," Althusser tells us, "provides knowledge of reality whose existence it reveals" (48). Why the (Marxist) intellect alone has access to this "really existing…concrete reality" is left unexplained, again begging the question. But as a conceit of the fetish character of intellectual labour,—which imagines itself as capable of entering into a more intimate relation with reality than so-called "manual labour"—it does, however, point to abstraction as a privileged site at which the university's influence on Marxist theory is operative.

As a faculty belonging to the independent intellect, abstraction obviously pre-dates the capitalist epoch. But what makes it, as Hegel put it, "the most astonishing and mightiest of powers" is the role it plays in the social division of labour under capitalism ("Preface" *Phenomenology of Spirit* 18). Here it is more than just a property of mind, but an active element facilitating the accumulation of surplus-value through the subjugation of both nature and the labour-process. As a nascent productive force, the modern power of abstraction has its origins in Galileo's mathematical physics.

As Sohn-Rethel describes it, when Galileo extended the concept of inertia to movement he thereby initiated the science of dynamics, which laid the foundation for the development of the scientific method (*Intellectual and Manual Labour* 124). Inertial

motion opened mathematics to the calculations of natural phenomena of motion. It also formed the basis of an epistemology that allowed knowledge to develop beyond the scope determined by the principle of static inertia, a principle upheld since the time of Aristotle. While the assumptions of static inertia were able to account for movement in keeping with handicraft production, as Sohn-Rethel noted, "their rational use [was] limited to the solving of tasks lying within the scope of human strength and skill" (*Intellectual and Manual Labour* 124).

For Sohn-Rethel, the significance of the Galilean conception of inertial motion to an understanding of the relation between the rise of modern science and the rise of capitalism lies in the way it put forth an epistemic principle that made it possible to generate effective knowledge of nature from sources other than manual labour (Sohn-Rethel *Intellectual and Manual Labour* 128). This suited capital, which in the course of its development struggled against the obstinacy of skilled labour and the latter's unwillingness to concede its knowledge for fear of losing control over the production process.

Within the development brought about by Galileo's achievement a shift in the status and function of knowledge begins to take place. If under handicraft production knowledge functioned much like any other instruments of use to skilled labour, this was because its status within that world inscribed it within a production process in which labour understood itself inside the same relation in which it came to understand nature. If under capitalism the function of knowledge is to facilitate the accumulation of capital, this is because it has acquired, just like the production process in general, an autonomous status, which is to say, it has become a productive force in its own right. In the same way

feudal production relations were reflected in the epistemic principle of static inertia, the principle of inertial motion reflects the productive relations of capitalism—i.e., the external position of the capitalist vis-à-vis the production process and the subordinate place of labour within production as an autonomous process.

If with the development of science knowledge in its independence from skilled labour becomes a productive force, the productivity of this force owes itself to a very specific ability: abstraction. Unbeknownst to itself at the time, scientific knowledge, that is, knowledge produced from sources other than skilled labour (or ecclesiastical doctrine), produced knowledge of nature using concepts not found in nature. The principle of inertial motion, for example, assumes the motion it describes is a) rectilinear, and b) moves through empty space, that is, is free from any impediment to its motion including the atmosphere (Sohn-Rethel *Intellectual and Manual Labour* 125-126). Both premises cannot be confirmed empirically, which means scientific knowledge of nature is derived from non-empirical abstractions.

The question that naturally follows is how can mathematical physics be possible given this contradiction, which Sohn-Rethel answers deftly: "Our explanation of the principle of inertial motion is that it derives from a pattern of motion contained in the real abstraction of commodity exchange" (*Intellectual and Manual labour* 128). The pattern of motion contained in the real abstraction of commodity exchange assumes, as a necessary condition of the transference of property, there be an abstract linear movement through empty time and space of abstract substances, which suffer no material change while in motion (*Intellectual and Manual labour* 128). These premises therefore make the movement of property, like the movement of celestial objects, amenable to nothing

other than mathematical treatment. Lukács focuses on this treatment in his discussion of the principle of rationalization, which he defines as being "based on what is and *can be calculated*" ("Reification" 88). The mathematical analysis of the labour-process breaks it down into its component parts, each of which then becomes its own specialized and closed, but partial, system (Lukács "Reification" 88). Needless to say, this treatment does not occur at the site of the production process in question, nor is it undertaken by labour as the living element in this process, since it is also just a component part of the process subjected to "rational analysis."

The complex Sohn-Rethel lies out between exchange and consciousness describes the process of the determination of consciousness by its social being. Within this complex there occurs the conversion of the real abstraction of commodity exchange into the ideal abstractions of the independent intellect. When not grasped properly, the situation arises where relations internal to consciousness become confused with real relations existing independently of consciousness. And so, in reality things then appear the other way around, as though it is consciousness that determines social being. Capital in the form of an individual consciousness appears as though its intellectual functions bring it into a much more intimate relation with reality than the actual activities through which social reality appears. There is a near-absolute sovereignty to its decision-making (which in reality is prefigured in each instance by the conditions prevailing on the market at any given time). It can "do" things; it can make things "happen" simply by expressing the desire that it be so.

Therefore, Althusser's privileged position in relation to both the university and the class struggle expresses more than just an individual self-conceit, but is an *uncritical*

description of the way things have actually developed on the terrain of the capitalist social division of labour. Within the ongoing process of capitalism's expanded reproduction, the function of the university is to carry on the production of knowledge from sources other than manual labour. The intellectual labour involved in academic forms of research and development, while themselves labour-processes, pertains to production processes it does not directly partake in, yet remains materially bound to nevertheless. What appears, then, to Althusser as Marxism's exceptionalism, grounded in its status as the "science of social formations," is in actuality the uncritical description of the form of externality the university assumes vis-à-vis "production" within the processes of capitalism's expanded reproduction.

Anyone familiar with a critical understanding of the status and function of abstraction in Marx's method of analysis will sense there is something quite different about Althusser's "scientific abstractions." First, the "really existing realities" Althusser refers to have an ahistorical character. Consider the "arresting provisos" upon which Althusser "develops" Marx's concept of ideology (Jameson "Introduction" xiii). One of the conditions required in the development of a theory of "ideology *in general*" argues Althusser, is that it must abstract from the history of any particular ideology ("Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses" 107). This condition stipulates, "ideology has no history" (Althusser "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses 107). Being without history, or "omni-historical" as Althusser put it, also means "*ideology is eternal*" ("Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses" 109). And since there is "an absolutely positive sense" to the omni-historical and eternal character of ideology, Althusser's

concept of ideology-in-general, being a "scientific abstraction," refers to a "really existing reality" (Althusser "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses" 108).

Second, that Althusser's concepts are filled with ahistorical content suggest what he regards as "scientific abstractions" are, in fact, "ideal abstractions." Ideal abstractions, as the origins of the scientific method attest, spring from the conflation of simple and real abstractions. Unlike its simple and ideal counterparts, a real abstraction "is not thought induced; it does not originate in men's minds but in their actions" (Sohn-Rethel *Intellectual and Manual Labour* 20). Unlike real abstractions, then, simple abstractions are "thought induced." Even though they may refer to eternal or immutable properties of something, both the immutable properties and their expression as a simple abstraction designate a relation internal to consciousness and not to relations defining "really existing realities."

Ideal abstractions, on the other hand, conflate a relation internal to consciousness with real relations existing independently of consciousness. Should an object's immutable property designate a "really existing reality," it is only as either a hypostatization, (i.e., an ideal abstraction) or the result of historical developments, which, then, brings the ahistorical character of the abstraction into conflict with itself. The category of labour is exemplary in this regard. While it is certainly true that abstract labour, that is, the ability to produce as such, expresses an ancient relation, one common to all peoples in all societies, it is, as Marx noted, "actually true in this abstract form" only as a category of modern capitalist society: "the most general abstractions arise on the whole only when concrete development is most profuse, so that a specific quality is seen to be common to many phenomena, or common to all" (Marx *Contribution to a*

Critique 210). Since labour is "actually true in this abstract form" only in the "most advanced and complex historical organizations of production" where "individuals easily pass from one type of labour to another," what is expressed in the concept of abstract labour is not the immutable ability to work, but the real abstraction of labour, that is, the historically mediated relation of individuals to their own productive and creative agency (Marx *Contribution to a Critique* 210). With ideal abstractions, then, the hypostatized and the historical are conflated. As Marx pointed out, it becomes very difficult to gain insight if by abstraction historical differences are obliterated.

Third, it is not for nothing that Marx understood the difference between a mythological and an objective understanding of modern social history as coming down to the difference between a contemplative and a self-critical perspective (Marx *Contribution to a Critique* 211). To a contemplative attitude *standing outside its object,* things will look exactly as they appear, which is why Marx's critique of political economy focuses on the position from which one contemplates and not just the immediacy of the object as it appears in contemplation (Ilyenkov *Dialectics of the Abstract and the Concrete* 128). For Marx, rational knowledge, that is, systematized and concrete knowledge *of the whole* begins with the "assimilation and transformation of perception and images into concepts" (*Contribution to a Critique* 207). Like the relations into which individuals enter independently of their will, theory is also a process that begins *in medias res* and so enters into relations with pre-existing concepts, attitudes and perspectives. A concept is more than just a mental representation of an object external to the knowing subject. To Marx, concepts reflected "the historically mediated relations of men to those objects"

depicted conceptually (Schmidt *The Concept of Nature in Marx* 111).[73] So while Althusser contemplates "ideology *in general,*" as though from the outside, he looks through the real significance of his own observations, mainly, that the appearance in his mind of the general and eternal character of ideology is itself the result of a "concrete development," which as such is the real object of critical analysis.

It is in the framework of Marx's account of labour's real subsumption by capital that the details of this "concrete development" are revealed. Marx's basic thesis is that in the real subsumption the development of productive forces takes the form of the productive power of capital. Marx calls this "the transmutation of the immediate process of production" (*Capital* 1024). It differs from the formal process of subsumption in that within the general form, despite capital's role as "director, manager," the labour process is still "its *own* process" (*Capital* 1019). Since capital does not begin *ex nihilo,* but "takes over an *existing labour process,*" it is not until capital "completely revolutionizes the technical processes of labour**"** through organizational and technological innovations that the real subsumption of labour signals the industry-wide establishment of the developed form of capitalist production (Marx *Capital* 1021).

The primary means by which this development occurs is through the separation of the intellectual component of a labour-process from its technical aspects. It negates the

[73] Contrast Althusser's concept of ideology with Marx's concept of the means of production. It is empty insofar as it refers to the different elements of any given labour-process. It acquires its historical content once it becomes clear that prior to entering the labour-process each separate element appears first as a commodity, such that capitalist production is a process that involves "things the capitalist has purchased, things that belong to him" (Marx *Capital* 292). This includes labour as well. Labour, then, is a *means* rather than an *organizer* of production. The tasks of the latter fall now to the capitalist and so speak to the historical dimension of the concept's content. In its reified form, means of production refers to the elements of a labour-process conceived as ideal abstractions. In its critical form, the concept expresses labour's historically mediated relation to the conditions of its own realization and so expresses the alienated character of labour's self-relation as the character it has acquired historically under capitalism. Ahistorical knowledge serves an ideological function by presenting "what is" as "what has always been."

fact that as "its *own* process" human creativity is an organic amalgam of intellectual and manual acts. "Just as head and hand belong together in the system of nature," Marx explains, "so in the labour process mental and physical labour are united. Later on they become separate; and this separation develops into a hostile antagonism" (*Capital* 643). Within the context of its subsumption by capital the technical aspects of a labour-process become an expression of the productive power of capital and appear as independent forms of fixed capital like machinery and other such technologies. Similarly, the intellectual component of the labour process becomes an expression of the productive power of capital when it appears as an aspect of the autonomous development of science, or what Marx first referred to in the *Grundrisse* as "the general intellect." Insofar as it adopts the perspective of the university, the intellectual labour undertaken by academic Marxism becomes a function of the productive power of the general intellect. And it is through the activity of abstraction that this productive power expresses itself.

Some might argue, however, that recent developments have nullified or significantly altered a number of Marx's key concepts and theories, particularly the notion of the general intellect and the subsumption process. Specialized scientific-technical knowledge has come to be regarded by many contemporary theorists as by no means limited in its existence to fixed forms of capital. "In post-Fordism," argues Paul Virno, there are productively employed patterns of knowledge such as "conceptual constellations and logical schemata" irreducible to fixed forms of capital because they are "inseparable from the plurality of living subjects" (Virno "General Intellect" 5). As a result living labour has acquired "cognitive competencies that cannot be objectified in machinery," which leads Virno to claim a "progressive rupture" has occurred between

fixed capital and the general intellect (Virno "General Intellect" 6). In the wake of this rupture Virno suggests the general intellect appears less in its relation to fixed capital and more in the form of what he calls a kind of "mass intellectuality" (Virno "General Intellect" 6). I would agree with Virno's assessment, but not with the direction his colleague, Carlo Vercelloni, takes things. For Vercelloni, the post-Fordist production practices precipitating the developments Virno describes in the character of the general intellect demonstrates a new stage, the stage of "cognitive capitalism," has emerged superseding the stage of labour's real subsumption ("From Formal Subsumption to General Intellect" 16).

While the radically different character of capitalism at different stages of its historical development is obvious, Vercellone's argument, by emphasizing the linearity of historical development, loses sight of the real pattern of development Marx depicted as specific to capitalism. As this pertains to the difference between general and developed forms of capitalist production, Marx is clear that given the self-expanding character of capital's self-reproduction, the general form will always "be found as a particular form alongside the specifically capitalist mode of production in its developed form" (Marx *Capital* 1019).[74] So what Vercellone regards as a new stage is in actuality a description of

[74] Strictly speaking, then, it is not the general form of capitalist production that is superseded so much as the period in which the general form was the dominant form. In this sense, the general form does correspond with a nascent stage of capitalist development, but the supersession of this stage is not its elimination as a phenomenon of on going capitalist development. It remains a feature of capitalist development even to this day appearing in "neoliberal" practices of deregulation and privatization. It also appears in the processes David Harvey has described as "accumulation by dispossession."

Vercellone's example raises an important issue that highlights the struggles academic Marxism faces in its efforts to theoretically depict social change. Vercellone's position is, therefore, not unique; rather, it is an example of a broader tendency within the discourse to produce, almost incessantly, periodizing hypotheses. Competition, it is true, gave way to monopoly and imperialism, capitalism's 'late' stage; but then came post-industrial society, a society of the spectacle, and from imperialism came empire, a new spirit of capitalism, the rise of the paradigm of immaterial production, semio-capital, cognitive capitalism, a "new" imperialism, the cancer stage of capitalist growth, and on and on. Which is not to say that academic Marxists have mis-intuited the pace at which of historical change has accelerated across the

the real subsumption of intellectual labour-processes whose separation from a technical component occurred during the formal subsumption of the labour process to which they originally belonged.

Subjected to the rule of capital, the general intellect is the whole make-up of the interconnected, hierarchically structured complex of mental labour processes (Carchedi, *Behind the Crisis* 232). As determined by the circular character of the system's expanded reproduction, mental labour processes are subjected, on the one hand, to a constant tendency towards de-skilling and a concomitant devaluation of labour, and on the other, to a counter tendential re-skilling and creation of new, qualified positions (Carchedi, *Behind the Crisis* 232). Given, then, that labour remains "its *own* process" within the conditions of its *formal* subsumption by capital, the ways contemporary academic Marxism remain—as their politically focused antecedents remained—a determination of capital can only be grasped at the analytic level of labour's *real* subsumption where the production of relative surplus-value "completely revolutionizes the technical processes of labour."

II. Material Production and the Labour Process

The shift in the status and function of abstraction in Marxist theory—included in which are the tendencies to think with ideal abstractions and conceive social phenomena ahistorically—has been all the more difficult to detect, if only because between the Western tradition and Soviet orthodoxy, it was the former that carried on the critical analysis of capitalism while the latter turned towards the consolidation of the Soviet state.

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twentieth and into the twenty-first centuries. Rather, it is to question the way this change is understood as impacting the very theory attempting its conceptualization.

Despite this, there are two things to note about this shift. The first is that it predates the split between East and West, and so did not originate with Althusser in the context of the ESA, but with Engel's during the period of parliamentary socialism. And the second thing to note is despite originating with Engels the difference between Engels and Althusser is the same as that discussed earlier between Althusser and Hess. In the context of parliamentary socialism, ideal abstractions *reflected* the structural homology between labour's political organization and the postulates of the social division of labour. The authoritarian character of labour's political leadership reflected the authoritarianism latent to the social division of labour and manifested in the fetish character of intellectual activity. In the context of academic Marxism's relation to the university system of late capitalism, ideal abstractions express the presence of the social relations of production in the productive forces, which in this context concerns intellectual labour and its role in the system's expanded reproduction.

At his graveside in London Friedrich Engel's eulogized Marx with the following words:

> Just as Darwin discovered the law of development of organic nature, so Marx discovered the law of development of human history: the simple fact, hitherto concealed by an overgrowth of ideology, that mankind must first of all eat, drink, have shelter and clothing, before it can pursue politics, science, art, religion, etc.; that therefore the production of the immediate material means, and consequently the degree of economic development attained by a given people or during a given epoch, form the foundation upon which the state institutions, the legal conceptions, art, and even the ideas on religion, of the people concerned have been evolved, and in the light of which they must, therefore, be explained, instead of vice versa, as had hitherto been the case. ("Speech at the Graveside of Karl Marx" 681)

And so began the after life of Marx's materialist conception of history—the theoretical expression of the standpoint of the revolutionary proletariat—in a way not unfamiliar to how the afterlife of other estates of immense importance (intellectual or otherwise) began. That is to say, by the time the body is in the ground the fight over the inheritance is well under way.

The thing to note in Engel's eulogy is the abstract character of the concept of "production," reduced to "immediate material means," and the equally abstract character of the concepts of "politics, science, art, religion", which are likewise reduced as the "ideological forms" to epiphenomena of "production." As Lucio Colletti argues (much like Terry Eagleton and Perry Anderson), it was during the period of the Second international, from 1889-1916, that this distinctly different understanding of the concept of production became the standard interpretation in the theoretical works of Marxists. "The so-called 'economic sphere'—which in Marx had embraced both the production of *things* and the production (objectification) of *ideas*…—was now seen as *one isolated factor*, separated from the other 'moments'" (Colletti *Rousseau* 65). As a result, "*Social* production," concludes Colletti, was "transformed into 'production *techniques,*'" while "the object of political economy" became "the object of technology" (*Rousseau* 65). After falling from theoretical view, the production of social relations reappears within the "region of ideology" as separate from the "sphere of production."[75] Such were the "fruits" of Engel's stewardship of Marx's legacy.

[75] In this sense the concept of material production in Marxism becomes indistinguishable from modern American definitions of economics, which incorporates the standpoint of capital by narrowing the scope of the definition of economics to technical methods, allocation of scarce resources and theories of price formation. The political economic in Marxism, on the other hand, deals with production relations among people established in the process of social (re)production. Marxism, as is well known, is concerned with the social form of production. As Freddy Pearlman put it "Political economy asks why the productive forces of society develop within a particular social form" because it wants to know "how the working activity of

While Marx did not conceive production this way, one might be excused for thinking he did, particularly since across several texts, from *The Holy Family*[76] to the notorious "Preface" to a *Contribution to a Critique of Political Economy* he does speak of "material production." But the standard interpretation of the base/superstructure model presented there is complicated by the other oft-quoted phrase from the same text, that "It is not the consciousness of men that determines their being, but, on the contrary, their social being that determines their consciousness" (Marx "Preface" 4). In the movement from being to social being, "being" as such is cancelled. It is dismissed as an illegitimate abstraction, as a conceit of a fetishized "consciousness." In Marx, being as such has no reality. There is only the reality of *social* being. The content of the concept of a mode of production in Marx's thought, therefore, embraces the production of things *and* the production of social relations. As both he and Engels wrote nearly half a century earlier in *The German Ideology*, production "must not be considered as being production of the physical existence of…individuals," rather, "as individuals express their life, so they are. What they are, therefore, coincides with their production, both with what they produce and with how they produce" (Marx and Engels *The German Ideology* 150).

Marx did, however, conceive the concept of the "labour-process" as a simple abstraction independently of its social form. But this served a very specific, and effective, methodological purpose. For instance, by considering the labour-process as a simple abstraction, Marx was able to throw into relief those characteristics unique to the capitalist form, as well as those that distinguish it from pre-capitalist forms of the labour-

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people is regulated in a specific, historical form of economy" (Pearlman "Introduction: Commodity Fetishism" x).

[76] "Just as it separates thinking from the senses, the soul from the body, and itself from the world, so it separates history from natural science and industry, and sees history's point of origin not in coarse *material* production, but in vaporous clouds in the heavens" (Marx *The Holy Family* qtd. in Schmidt 21)

process. The simple abstraction, therefore, allowed him to locate amongst a unity-in-diversity the element within the diversity acting on the others in a determining way, giving them their unity. In the seventh chapter of *Capital*, "The Labour Process and the Valorization Process" Marx states, "labour is, first of all, a process between man and nature" (*Capital* 283). Even though the definition of labour *at this point* is described as referring to "the universal condition…[and] the everlasting nature-imposed condition of human existence…[which is] independent of every form of that existence, or rather…is common to all forms of society in which human beings live," as a simple abstraction it is quite different from Engels' equivocation of "production" with "immediate material means." Where Marx's simple and abstract definition has a general validity in that it refers to the "material world…translated into forms of thought," Engel's definition is more reminiscent of the ideal, or thought abstractions typical of those political economists Marx considered ideological thinkers (Schmidt *Marx's Conception of Nature* 124).

Rather than differentiate, ideal abstractions generalize. They are similar to simple abstractions in that an element of an object or process is held by theoretical thought in isolation. But ideal abstractions are in essence fetishized simple abstractions. The isolated element is hypostatized and regarded as though it possessed its own reality independent of the process or object to which it naturally pertains. Furthermore, with ideal abstractions the social and historical conditions of the object of knowledge are typically disregarded. Such conditions are made subordinate to the perpetually self-identical character of the content of the ideal abstraction (Musto "History, production and method" 7). Ultimately, the object of knowledge is reduced to one of its predicates. But this is not

in every instance a cognitive error, although it is characteristic of patterns of ideological thinking. But as the example of abstract labour demonstrates, processes of hypostatization, or reification, are also real processes happening independently of individual consciousness. As Alfred Sohn-Rethel argued in *Intellectual and Manual Labour* they arise "in the spatio-temporal sphere of human interrelations," that is, from the process of commodity production and exchange (20). Abstract labour, as considered above, is a simple abstraction *and* a real abstraction referring to value producing labour, that is, labour in its historical determination by capital.

As a simple abstraction, the labour-process does not refer to its own reality, as though it could exist independently of any particular historical social formation (Schmidt *The Concept of Nature in Marx* 124). As an ideal abstraction, it is treated as though it does. Marx did not share Engels' interpretation of "material production" as evidenced by the way he considered the tribal *community*, as the "first form of maintaining existence," to be a *precondition* of the appropriation of the soil rather than its result (Schmidt *The Concept of Nature in Marx* 172). Engels' eulogy, though, suggests it is the other way around; that the appropriation of the soil as "material production" is the foundation upon which the tribal community, as "state institution," arises.

Between Marx and Engels the function of abstraction can be shown to differ significantly. Because ideal abstractions reflect only those aspects of a thing common to all other objects of the same kind, their content tends to take on an ahistorical character. In confusing the labour process as a simple abstraction with material production as an ideal abstraction, Engels not only assumed material production referred to its own reality, he regarded it as perpetually self-identical and therefore impervious to historical

modifications. As Marx pointed out, ahistorical knowledge like this was the currency of a decidedly uncritical attitude. He criticized political economists on precisely these grounds, mocking them for seeing in all social phenomena past or present "only bourgeois phenomena" (*Contribution to a Critique* 211).

Subsequently, in conflating simple and ideal abstractions Engels also conflates a relation between thought and reality *internal to consciousness* with real relations in reality *independent of consciousness.* A simple abstraction is a product of thought even though the content of that thought refers to a real process whose reality remains independent of thought. But it does not refer to the entirety of the process, only an element of it, which while *of* the process has no reality except in consciousness as a simple abstraction (unless in history it develops into a real abstraction the way abstract labour did). From this conflation springs the tendency to regard the development of an abstraction as a development in reality. Marx, of course, rebukes this tendency, stating the theoretical depiction of the concrete world is "by no means the process of evolution of the concrete world itself" (Marx *Contribution to a Critique* 207). When Engels mistakenly regards the simple abstraction as real in its own right he inverts the relations. A relation internal to the thinking subject between its categories and reality (i.e., the labour-process as simple abstraction) is hypostatized (as material production) and regarded as having the same objectivity as actually existing relations, such as those realized through the purchase and sale of labour-power.

III. Anti-Essentialism

And it is a conflation similar to this that drives the anti-essentialist critique, particularly at the peak of its development in the 1980's with Ernesto Laclau and Chantal

Mouffe's *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy.* Only in this context the conflation is not simply between an individual consciousness and reality, but between the logic of historical materialism and the expanded reproduction of the capitalist system on the eve of the collapse of Euro-Communism. The anti-essentialist critique is also significant because it embodies the highest point of academic Marxism's self-criticism.

While not always clear that its object is Soviet orthodoxy, anti-essentialism opposes in all forms of Marxism Engels' idea material production is the determining factor *in the last instance.* In *Knowledge and Class: A Marxian Critique of Political Economy*, Richard D. Wolff and Stephan A. Resnik layout the anti-essentialist position. There they write that among Marxists

> One kind of essentialism holds that within the complex of political, cultural, economic, and natural processes comprising society, the economic are the essential cause of historical change…Essentialist theories organize their fields of inquiry into contrasting poles of cause and effect, phenomenon and essence, and determined vs. determining…Anti-essentialism is the rejection of any presumption that complexities are reducible to simplicities of the cause-effect type…Every cause is itself an effect and vice versa. An anti-essentialist approach refuses to look for an essential cause. (Resnik and Wolfe *Knowledge and Class* 3)

In the imperative to reject "an essential cause," anti-essentialism does not reject causality so much as the category of necessity governing a mechanical kind of causality operative in theories of economic determinism. It stakes out its epistemological position in the non-reductive way it understands causality within the framework of the category of "overdetermination." As Wolff and Resnik put it, "overdetermination implies constitutivity" (*Knowledge and Class* 2). Overdetermination scatters causality across the social field acknowledging in any particular social phenomenon the ability "to effect" any other. Thus, it cannot be said economic forces alone determine all social phenomenon,

but that social phenomena are in every instance overdetermined "by each and every other process constituting that society" (Wolff and Resnik *Knowledge and Class* 2).

At first glance anti-essentialism, it could be argued, appears as though it seeks to recapture a dialectic of cause and effect already grounded in Marx's method of analysis and reflected in his comments on the critical presentation of economic categories. "It would be inexpedient and wrong," Marx tells us, "to present the economic categories successively in the order in which they have played the dominant role in history" (*Contribution to a Critique* 213). Rather, the order of their theoretical succession "is determined by their mutual relation in modern bourgeois society," which as Marx pointed out, "is quite the reverse of what appears to be natural to them or in accordance with the sequence of historical development" (*Contribution to a Critique* 213). Thus, the causality immanent or "natural" to the sequence in which categories unfolded historically is reconfigured in and by theory where the order of exposition is not determined by history and its linear logic, but by the role each category plays in "modern bourgeois society," that is, vis-à-vis capital as the objective universality, the self-determining principle of modern society.

Marx uses the place of agriculture to illustrate the sense of causality at play here. "Nothing seems more natural than to begin [a critical exposition of capitalism] with rent, i.e., landed property," he writes, "since it is associated with the earth, the source of all production and all life" (*Contribution to a Critique* 212). Rent, however, cannot lead to an understanding of capital, although "capital can be understood without rent" (Marx *Contribution to a Critique* 213). Being the "economic power that dominates everything in bourgeois society," capital "has to be expounded before landed property" (Marx

Contribution to a Critique 213). First in reality, however, is not the same as first in time, although because capital "has to be expounded before landed property" it appears as though first in reality is also first in time. But categories that were preconditions (i.e., causes) of capital are in "their mutual relation in modern bourgeois society," its determinations. All of which is to say, in Wolff and Resnik's words, a "cause is itself an effect and vice versa."

Anti-essentialism, however, interprets Marx's claim that because capital is the "economic power" dominating everything in contemporary society, economic power is of necessity in all cases determining. For this reason, overdetermination is adopted as the epistemological principle governing the anti-essentialist critique. It is what links the critique of dialectical logic in Marx's method with the critique of teleology in his conception of history. Among academic Marxists, as well as critics of Marxism, the argument is often made that dialectical logic is the "idealist element" in Marx's thought out of which metastasized the "belief in a dialectic objectively operating in history" (Breckman, *Adventures of the Symbolic* 3). As a result, Marxism's method of analysis was imprisoned in the "intellectual automatism of the dialectical happy-ending" (Berardi, *The Uprising* 8); dialectical schemas, an intellectual sickness unto death, ravished "Marxism's intellectual underpinnings," leaving them to lie "crumbled" (Breckman *Adventures of the Symbolic* 3). Seen now for what it really is, something "unreal" and "abstract," "only a cognitive model taken from…a narrow realm of experience," dialectical logic is, in the final analysis, "not a universal method," only the false consciousness of historical materialism, an "idealist residue within an otherwise active

materialist theory" (Wark *Molecular Red* 22). In other words, dialectical logic is the moment of Marxism's own *Sie Wissen das nicht, aber Sie tun es.*

The critique of teleology, which is predominant in works such as Leszek Kolakowski's *Main Currents of Marxism*, Jon Elster's *Making Sense of Marx,* and Gabriel Kolko's *After Socialism,* among others, is a variation of the critique of dialectical logic in that it traces these epistemological defects into Marx's conception of history. To Elster, there is "little doubt that Marx was indeed guided by a teleological view of history" (*Making Sense of Marx* 107). Kolko, like many others, locates this view in Marx's "profound debt to Hegel" (*After Socialism* 23). Kolakowski, meanwhile, concludes that as "a dream offering the prospect of a society of perfect unity" the eschatological dimensions of Marxism made it the twentieth century's "greatest fantasy" (*Main Currents* 1206).

Capital, it should be recalled, began as merchant capital, a form it held for millennia before it eventually wrestled from labour control over the production process. Even among the Phoenicians, where it enjoyed a certain amount of autonomy, capital (in its money-form) remained stunted by the predominance in antiquity of slave labour. And in the Middle Ages capital was, as Marx noted, not without "a specifically agrarian character" (*Contribution to a Critique* 213*).* Far from espousing an economic determinism, Marx's critical theory of capitalist society explains how a social relation native to a sphere of social life external to any specifically productive social activity, be it artistic, religious, filial, or industrial captured first the process of industrial production before establishing fronts on the border of all other spheres of social life, "modifying

their specific features" as though it was a light which cast upon everything "a particular hue" (Marx *Contribution to a Critique* 210).

Despite, in Wolff and Resnik's words, "Marxian theory's acute self-consciousness," irony, it would seem, governs the experience of academic Marxism (*Knowledge and Class* 1). And it does so if only because in its self-critical form as anti-essentialism, "Marxian theory" completely fails to recognize the way it has already adopted the perspective it opposes (and against which it constitutes its identity). Both commit the same error considered earlier in the context of Engels' transformation of the concept of labour-process as a simple abstraction into the concept of material production as an ideal abstraction. If, as an essentialist discourse, Soviet orthodoxy (as the most developed form of that pattern of thinking beginning with Engels' eulogy) believed there to be "a dialectic objectively operating in history," this was because it assumed the specific character of the category of necessity operative in the logic of *Capital'*s categorical exposition to be no different from the diverse forms of causality characterizing the interactions of elements in any social process such as the class struggle in Russia, or natural process such as the bud that gives way to the blossom that gives way to the fruit. Inversely, if, as an anti-essentialist discourse, academic Marxism "refuses to look for an essential cause," it is because it assumes the overdetermined character of the elements comprising any given social process is itself the principle determining the logic governing the theoretical arrangement of the categories in which the same social processes are expressed and reflected. Each isolates the particular character of causality pertaining to their respective starting points, the one epistemic, the other ontological, and assumes it holds across both domains.

Marx was clear, however, that "the concrete subject remains outside the intellect" and so as a rule "must also be envisioned therefore as a precondition of comprehension" (*Contribution to a Critique* 207). The order and logic of the categorical exposition in *Capital* is "simply the way in which thinking assimilates the concrete and reproduces it as a concrete mental category" (Marx *Contribution to a Critique* 206). The necessary character of the transition between categories refers to relations internal to theoretical consciousness and is reflective of the fact theoretical consciousness assimilates the world in "the only way open to it" (Marx *Contribution to a Critique* 207). Mistaking this order with the order of relations obtaining in reality (or history) is to follow Hegel in conceiving the "illusory idea that the real world is the result of thinking which causes its own synthesis" (Marx *Contribution to a Critique* 206).

On the one hand, the conflation of the logic of Marx's categorical exposition with real relations obtaining at the level of social reality explains one of the primary argumentative strategies of anti-essentialism, which is to shift the terrain of analysis from capitalist society to ontology, that is, from social being to Being; while on the other, it helps explain why academic Marxism sometimes presents anti-essentialism as a response to issues internal to the discourse and sometimes as a response to historical developments, but without any clear insight into what links the two.

Anti-essentialism appears perhaps in its most developed form with Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe's *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy.* In its opening pages, the authors indicate "the guiding thread" of their analysis is epistemological in character, since it involves the "transformations of the concept of hegemony" (*Hegemony and Socialist Strategy* 3). But its character is also ontological, since the purpose of the transformation

is for the concept to better reflect "a *logic of the social*" lost to the essentialist perspective of Soviet orthodoxy (*Hegemony and Socialist Strategy* 3). It is thus *also* in light of "ontic changes" in which "the problems of a globalized and information ruled society" are expressed that "the two ontological paradigms governing the field of Marxist discursivity" have become "unthinkable"("Preface to the Second Edition" x). For Laclau and Mouffe, the "ontic changes" of a globalized world refocus the purpose of critique directing its attention to ontological questions like "how entities have to be, so that the objectivity of a particular field is possible," so as to obtain an understanding of the new preconditions of critique ("Preface to the Second Edition" x).

Just as the abstractions of Galileo's mathematical physics yielded accurate if incomplete knowledge of nature, the shift to ontology in academic Marxism yields results of its own. The "logic of the social" refers to its (the social's) overdetermined character, which Laclau and Mouffe attempt to illustrate in the claim "the presence in some objects of the others" is what "prevents any of their identity from being fixed" (*Hegemony and Socialist Strategy* 104). But by this, Laclau and Mouffe, then, transform a transitory fact—that under conditions of *commodity fetishism* there appears an inherent instability to things (i.e., price fluctuations, unemployment, etc.,), that "all that is solid melts into air" —into an ontological principle—that identity in-itself lacks any sort of "ultimate literality" (Laclau and Mouffe *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy* 98). Laclau and Mouffe's "logic of the social" thus has the structure of an ideal abstraction. As an objective feature of capitalist social reality, the fetishism originally pertaining to commodity exchange is isolated from its historical context, which reifies both it and its

context. In this state, it functions as an abstract universal the contemplation of which yields "insight" into the principles of social ontology.

The same pattern characterizes more contemporary anti-essentialist arguments as well. Take the work of Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri for instance. On one hand, they argue "the modern dialectic of inside and outside has been replaced by a play of degrees and intensities, of hybridity and artificiality," meaning the social forces animating twenty-first century global capitalism have generated a field of conflicting and intersecting social relations in excess of production relations hitherto conceived (*Empire* 187-188). In their very multiplicity and plurality these forces trivialize, if not outright shatter, the classical binary configuration assumed to underpin Marxism's traditional class determined imaginary. On the other hand, they also claim dialectical logic was in fact never an appropriate foundation for a critical methodology, since, as its integral participation in colonial forms of racism testifies, it only ever functioned "by imposing binary structures and totalizing logics on social subjectivities, repressing their difference" (Hardt and Negri *Multitude* 144).

Like Laclau and Mouffe, though, Hardt and Negri's anti-essentialism is predicated on Engel's conception of "material production." When Hardt and Negri call for a neo-Marxist theory of value, it is because the "bio-political," that is, the "immaterial" labour process, "spills beyond the bounds of the economy traditionally to engage culture, society and politics directly" (Hardt and Negri *Multitude* 94). In contrast to industrial labour processes the "bio-political" labour-process produces "actual social relationships, and forms of life" (Hardt and Negri *Multitude* 94). "Bio-political" labour, they contend, is ultimately constitutive of "social life itself" (*Multitude* 109). They,

however, offer no explanation why they feel other forms of labour do not involve "actual social relations," or, why "material" or industrial forms of labour do not count as occurring in the context of a determinate "form of life." Nor do they suspect the special quality of immaterial labour to "spill beyond the bounds of the economy traditionally" makes sense so long as the economy is conceived narrowly as "material production," that is, as an ideal abstraction.

There are two things to note about Hardt and Negri's position. First, by identifying labour's primary analytic categories as "immaterial" (or biopolitical) and "material" (or industrial), they shift the focus of analysis on to the content and product of labour, be it industrialized or affective, immaterial or tangible, whereas Marx's focus was squarely on labour's social form. Significantly, the categories of "productive" and "unproductive" Marx used to differentiate between the social form of capitalist and pre-capitalist labour-processes pay no attention to the content and product of labour (although the content of the labour process does become an important area of analysis when Marx considers the difference between the general and the developed form of capitalist production). "Capitalist production is not merely the production of commodities," Marx writes in the first volume of *Capital*, "it is essentially the production of surplus-value":

> If we may take an example from outside the sphere of production of material objects, a schoolmaster is a productive labourer, when, in addition to belabouring the heads of his scholars, he works like a horse to enrich the school proprietor. That the latter has laid out his capital in a teaching factory, instead of in a sausage factory, does not alter the relation. Hence the notion of a productive labourer implies not merely a relation between work and useful effect, between labourer and product of labour, but also a specific, social relation of production, a relation that has sprung up historically and stamps the labourer as the direct means of creating surplus-value. (644)

The production of surplus value in no way depends upon the production of material goods. It is the relation of ownership that counts more than what is owned. "An actor, for example, or even a clown, according to this definition," Marx reiterates in *Theories of Surplus-Value,* "is a productive labourer if he works in the service of a capitalist (an entrepreneur) to whom he returns more labour than he receives from him in the form of wages" (Marx *Theories of Surplus-Value* qtd. in Rubin *Essays on Marx's Theory of Value* 261).[77]

Marx is concerned with labour engaged in a given social system of production. His analysis turned up the contradiction capitalism objectively creates in human creative activity: regardless of whether or not it is material or "biopolitical," one and the same labour is productive or unproductive (i.e. is included or not included in the capitalist system of production) depending on whether or not it is organized in the form of a capitalist enterprise. Thus, labour that produces things widely recognized as useful like food or clothing can appear as though it has no social value while labour that crunches numbers for multinational corporations does. Subsequently, Marx did not attach any great significance to the distinction between modes of labour except when it involved the social division of labour. In capitalist society, labour, both intellectual and manual, material and immaterial can be and is organized as wage labour, i.e., variable capital. Therefore, Hardt and Negri's categories of material and immaterial offer little critical insight.

[77] The quote continues, "while a jobbing tailor who comes to the capitalist's house and patches his trousers for him, producing a mere use-value for him, is an unproductive labourer. The former's labourer is exchanged with capital, the latter's with revenue" (Marx *Theories of Surplus-Value* qtd. in Rubin *Essays on Marx's Theory of Value* 261).

Secondly, these categories lack critical insight because rather than reflect historically mediated relations, they reflect the process of evolution of the concept of power.[78] In the passage from the disciplinary society to the society of control, as Michel Foucault envisions it, a shift in the function and status of power occurs, which given its intersection with the process of social production is what draws the attention of Hardt and Negri (*Empire* 22). What distinguishes the new form of power, "bio-power," from the old, Hardt and Negri explain, is that "bio-power" directs itself at "the social bios *itself"* (*Empire* 24-25). And it does so through a new form of labour, "bio-political" labour. Yet, the "social" the new labour-processes supposedly realize completely lacks definition and so, conceptually at least, has the structure of an ideal abstraction. Despite its framing as such, the "new" form of power is less a category distinguishing between two historically distinct societies than a process of evolution of power itself, which has assumed a form that makes it capable of reaching right "down to the ganglia of the social structure" (Hardt and Negri *Empire* 24-25).

In their antecedent existences the established labour-processes Marx analyzed each realized a qualitatively different set of social productive relations, and through these relations a qualitatively different social reality. As he put it early in the first volume of *Capital,* "whatever we may think, then, of the different roles in which men confront each other in [medieval European] society, the social relations between individuals in the performance of their labour appear at all events as their own personal relations" (170). In

[78] Hardt and Negri's analytic strategy is based on a transposition of Marxist theory onto the terrain of contemporary French philosophy. The latter is the source of their methodological eclecticism, which borrows aspects of Nietzsche's genealogical method found in Foucauldian discourse analysis and matches it with precepts of Derridian Deconstruction. Both are intended to signal an anti-essentialist mind-set. The presentation of the modern history of capitalist development from a perspective rooted in a Foucauldian analysis of discursive formations is the basis of Hardt and Negri's attempt to translate Marx's concept of capital into Foucault's concept of power.

a developed capitalist society, on the other hand, the social relations established through the labour-process no longer appear as personal but have become "disguised as social relations between things" (Marx *Capital* 170). In confronting established labour processes, capital confronts established social worlds. At no point does Marx's analysis make recourse to an abstract or ahistorical conception of any of its other major terms, whether capital, labour, or society. At all times each retains its historical content.

As it appears in Hardt and Negri's work, "power," between two supposedly distinct societies, is still power—only its operational strategies have changed. As a concept, power obfuscates the social content of productive relations expressed in Marx's critique of political economy. Whether as a thing or a relation, power remains a simple abstraction denoting the asymmetrical or antagonistic character of real social relations. As such it is a product of thought even though the content of that thought refers to a real process occurring independently of thought. Power has no reality separate from the process from which it was abstracted. In the passage from the disciplinary society to the society of control, in becoming "bio-power," power appears as though "it enters into a synthesis with itself," which Hardt and Negri then take to be "the process of the evolution of the concrete world itself." Power, they forget, is just the appearance in the theorist's mind of an alienated conception of the generic property of all uneven and antagonistic social relations. It is simply the hypostatization of this asymmetrical property—i.e., the common predicate of uneven and exploitative social relations, which in this context remain ill defined.

Conclusion

While academic Marxism speaks on behalf of the oppressed, the poor, and labour, anti-essentialist strategies express the standpoint of the university and so speak specifically to the role it plays within the subsumption process, itself a key process in the system's expanded reproduction. The shift in the status and function of abstraction accompanies a shift in Marxism's intellectual focus. As Perry Anderson put it in *Considerations on Western Marxism* "The progressive relinquishment of economic or political structures as the central concerns of theory was accompanied by a basic shift in the whole centre of gravity of European Marxism towards *philosophy*" (49). As Anderson sees it, the realignment in Marxism's intellectual focus at this time was just as much a response to the authoritarianism of the Soviet state as it was a condition of Marxism's admission to the European and North American university system (Anderson *Considerations on Western Marxism* 49-50).[79] If considered within the framework of Marx's account of the subsumption process, the "progressive relinquishment" Anderson describes appears instead as something else: a forced separation.

The separation of the intellectual component of labour's revolutionary politics from its technical and organizational elements, in effect, mimics the passage of a labour-process from its formal to its real subsumption by capital. The difference, of course, is that in this case, the technical and organizational elements of the process are not revolutionized. They simple disappear while the intellectual component is submitted to its own revolutionization, a process occurring within the general intellect governed by the principle of rationalization. And it is by means of this process that the intellectual

[79] He also cites the publication of Marx's 1844 manuscripts as playing an important role in if not orchestrating this shift, then, at least encouraging it. He comments that with this factor "Western Marxism as a whole thus paradoxically inverted the trajectory of Marx's own development itself" (*Considerations on Western Marxism* 52).

component of labour politics is transformed into a closed partial system. In this state, Marxist theory can perpetuate itself without ever having to measure its validity against any sort of class-based political initiatives.

Within academic Marxism the concept of theory itself comes to reflect the closed character of its process and so reflects the independent character of knowledge as a productive force. Wolff and Resnik, for instance, define the concept of theory in Marxism as "a process in society":

> It comprises the production, deployment, and organization of concepts. This is meant broadly to include the interpretation of concepts received from others as well as the rejection of those concepts found unacceptable in relation to other concepts of the theory. At any moment, a theory is a set of concepts. However, since theory is a process, the set of concepts undergoes continuous change. (Resnik and Wolfe *Knowledge and Class* 2)

In line with their anti-essentialist position, Wolff and Resnik further qualify "process" as "overdetermined," stating "theory is an over-determined process in society," meaning it "is determined by each and every other process constituting that society" (Resnik and Wolfe *Knowledge and Class* 2).

At first glance it appears as though the definition they advance has the structure of a simple abstraction. It sets aside socio-historical factors in order to consider the various component parts that together make theory a process: theory is a set of concepts; it also produces concepts, deploys and organizes them; its concepts change continuously; it is a process determined by other processes. But on second glance, it becomes clear Wolff and Resnik's concept of theory does not start with a simple abstraction, but with a historically determined fact they have attempted to interpret as a simple abstraction but end up presenting as an ideal abstraction. Simple abstractions, as the building blocks of concrete

concepts, differentiate rather than generalize. Wolff and Resnik's definition generalizes, and so identifies the common elements in diverse theories. As a simple abstraction, though, the point would be to differentiate between Theory as a process in society and theory as a process in *capitalist society.* While Theory is "theoretical" because "at any moment" Theory is comprised of "a set of concepts," Marxist theory is distinct from, say, theoretical physics or literary theory because the process determining it and which it seeks to in turn determine is the class struggle, just as the process determining theoretical physics is the experience of space and time or the process determining literary theory is the production and consumption of literature. Identifying these things does not place the theory in a deterministic relation to its object. It is what allows for its concrete character to be accurately reflected in its concept, which in turn contributes to the accuracy of the theory in which it is deployed and organized. Marxist theory is not a descendent of Theory in the same way apples, oranges and pears are not the being-other of Fruit.

Guglielmo Carchedi takes note of this fallacy in the anti-essentialist line of reasoning. He notes if all social processes are overdetermined the process of theorizing then "falls into infinite regression" (*Behind the Crisis* 34). In its academic form, that Marxist theory "falls into infinite regression" speaks of more than just logical fallacies. What the "infinite regression" indicates is the way Wolff and Resnik's definition of theory represents an uncritical description of the real and current state of Marxist theory. It indicates that within the context of the university system, the particular ability of Marxism to produce, deploy and organize concepts is an expression not of its own power, *but the productive power of capital*. What Wolff and Resnik describe, then, as the process of theory within which the set of concepts produced undergoes "continuous change" is, in

actuality, just an adjunct to the subsumption process facilitating the production and accumulation of (relative) surplus value.

Soviet philosopher Evald Ilyenkov actually presented this process, compete with a gesture to Marx's account of real subsumption, but *only in the form of an analogy* he crafted to explain the "practically necessary illusions" common to philosophers and political economists prior to Marx. In *Dialectical Logic* Ilyenkov explains how "Hegelian logic described the system of the objective forms of thought" and within these forms moved "the process of [the] *extended reproduction of the concept"* (146). Like the formal subsumption of labour by capital, this process "never began in its developed forms 'from the very beginning,' but took place as the *perfecting of already existing concepts*" (Ilyenkov *Dialectical Logic* 146). "By analogy with the production and accumulation of surplus-value," Ilyenkov concludes, "*logical forms* began to appear here as forms of the '*self-development'* of knowledge, and so were *mystified*" (*Dialectical Logic* 146-7).

But this is no analogy. What, from the perspective of the academic Marxist, appears as the overdetermined character of any social process in which occurs the production of theoretical concepts is, from the perspective of revolutionary Marxism, an expression of the productive power of capital mediating itself through the role the academy plays in the processes of the system's expanded reproduction. On the one hand, Wolff and Resnik's definition of theory internalizes the formal separation of theory from practice in Marxism, while on the other, it expresses the basis of the link between the production of knowledge and the production of surplus value. The modifications that end up reducing theory to a process producing concepts not only substitute a part for the whole, thereby consolidating the formal separation of theory from practice in Marxism,

they "revolutionize the technical processes" of critical theory such that theorizing becomes its own endless process. The reduction of Marxist theory to a process producing concepts is a consequence of the transmutation of the productive power of Marxist theory into the productive power of capital.

Therefore, an uncanny familiarity with the logic of capital accumulation restrains the efforts of academic Marxism. Unable to escape this logic it is as though each new concept and each new theory immediately becomes just another moment in an endless process of theorizing, the only purpose of which (outside individual achievement) seems to be an aimless and endless accumulation of knowledge. Is this not, then, the basis of an infinite deferral where theory comes to stand in for the actual revolutionary act much in the same way the inversion of the function of money as a means of payment into an end in itself is what gave rise to a singular commodity (labour-power) making possible (the potential for) the endless self-expansion of an original magnitude of capital, that is, dead labour?[80] In both instances, knowledge appears to self-expand on the basis that it is knowledge in the same way capital appears to self-expand on the basis of being capital.

In the shift in the status and function of abstraction in Marxist theory there is a shift in the status and function of the activity of critical theorizing such that it is closed in on itself. As a closed but partial system, it can seemingly perpetuate itself without ever having to measure itself against any sort of class-based political initiatives. In their uncritical attitude towards this state of affairs, academic Marxists come to contemplate the class struggle as though from some imaginary place outside it. But it is an altogether

[80] Or, to state this point more succinctly, not just "dead labour" but crystallized labour embodied in a product capable, thanks to the previous purchase of labour-power—and raw materials— of transforming itself into an expression of value represented by a magnitude of money quantitatively greater than that spent on labour-power.

uncritical type of practice that regards the process of labour's critical analysis of capitalism as aiming at no more than the production of concepts. Regardless of the degree of accuracy achieved in the manufacturing of these critical concepts, they will never on their own accord enter into the social reality they reflect because, as Marx put it, "the concrete subject remains outside the intellect and independent of it…so long as the intellect adopts a purely speculative, purely theoretical attitude" (*Contribution to a Critique* 207). With this the coordinates of the real contradiction between contemporary Marxist theory and Marxist "practice" are laid bear: the theoretical presentation of the concrete character of the object does not function as a condition of its negation, but as a means to the object's expanded reproduction. Within the university system of late capitalism, the productive power of Marxist theory expresses the productive power of capital. Such is the current state of the class struggle in theory.

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