

5 MAY 2018: THE 200TH BIRTHDAY OF KARL MARX. CRITIQUE OF POLITICAL ECONOMY, CRITIQUE OF OUR SOCIETY, SELF-CRITIQUE OF THE LEFT

CALL FOR PAPERS

ON THE UNFINISHED BOOK III. THE PROCESS OF CAPITALIST PRODUCTION AS A WHOLE.

Karl Marx's Capital. A Critique of Political Economy, Volume III, edited by Friedrich Engels, friend and 'literary executor' (Engels 1891, p. 133)

'In accordance with Marx's whole attitude, his book on Capital is not a Bible containing final and unalterable truths, but rather an inexhaustible source of stimulation for further study, further scientific investigations and further struggles for truth' (Luxemburg 1918, p. 371). So reads one of the first sentences of Rosa Luxemburg's contribution to Franz Mehring's Karl Marx: The Story of His Life, published in 1918 (1935 in English) to mark the occasion of Marx's 100th birthday. That we now return to Luxemburg on the eve of his 200th birthday is due to our interest in volumes II and III of Capital, rendered readable by Engels, but nevertheless remaining fragmentary, as a 'stimulus to thought, to criticism and self-criticism, and this is the essence of the lessons which Marx gave the working class' (Luxemburg 1918, p. 379). Luxemburg invited her readers to join, via Marx, in a process of learning and discovery. Above all, her aim was to encourage workers to think independently and base their actions on the principle of solidarity. She sought to endow the working class of her time with the ability to reflect critically upon their conditions of life and on relations of power and domination, and to struggle relentlessly for a society of the free and equal. Antonio Gramsci was one of her followers. In the 10th of his Prison Notebooks in particular, he raises questions about Engels' treatment of the sources, about the content of the law of the tendency of the rate of profit to fall and its interpretations, and about the precise understanding of critical economy. As the teacher Luxemburg, her student Gramsci has been interested in developing educational materials to teach people about the reproduction of relations of dominance in order to better criticise them in actual practice. Such books ought to address the interconnection between the volumes of Capital while also reflecting prior works and other classic texts, new developments, problems, experiences and insights (Gramsci 1932-1935, §32-38. §41VI-VII).

Luxemburg's and Gramsci's treatment of Marx's legacy and the emancipatory and solidarity-oriented struggles of the anti-capitalist movements have remained rather marginal within these: They have often been opposed, met with incomprehension or even with rejection, usually motivated by arrogance and fear. This explains, on the one hand, why the dominant ways of reception of the Marxian doctrine have produced superficial versions of Marxism, omitting any analysis and critique of more complex relations of power and domination. This is particularly true with regard to gender relations, hierarchies based on place of birth as well as ethnic and cultural background, power structures in inter-regional and international relations, and metabolic relations with the natural world. Taken together, these omissions constitute one of the essential reasons for the weakness of the left today.

We seek to take on this weakness in a pro-active manner, in order to regain the offensive by developing a more comprehensive 'critique of political economy' and thus of social relations of domination and power. We are, therefore, confronted with the challenge of contributing to the analysis of the overall process of capital accumulation, the reproduction of the dominance of the capitalist mode of production, which entails five interrelated tasks:

- to critically analyse the mode in which socially unequal humans produce, distribute,

circulate and utilise means of life, of production and of luxury;

- in so doing to examine and to reveal the social, ecological and global effects of capital accumulation;
- to criticise the ideologies and so-called sciences which explain away the capitalist mode of production as a historical form of domination;
- to formulate, publish and discuss research findings;
- to contribute to enabling individuals as a mass to oppose, to structurally weaken and ultimately overcome social conditions which debase, enslave, forsake and atomise them (with reference to Marx 1844, p.182).

Moreover, this requires exploring the development of contradictions within social relations and thereby the necessary preconditions of such relations, self-critically reflecting upon one's own experience, one's own thought, one's own reasoning and action – that is to say, adopting the working method of the author of Capital, his 'literary executor' Friedrich Engels, Rosa Luxemburg, Antonio Gramsci and their comrades.

Our focus on the third volume of Capital stems from the aforementioned challenge, as well as from five considerations related to its text, to the 'gaps' in Marx's original work, to the problems remaining in Engels's editorial changes, and to more recent developments:

1. It is precisely the book's incompleteness that proves particularly inspiring for an engagement with the Marxian 'critique of political economy', his research method and his method of presentation. The work being conducted within the framework of MEGA provides attractive research material in this regard.
2. 'The overall process of capitalist production', the dynamics 'on the surface, on the official stage of society' (Luxemburg 1918, p. 377) multiply the compulsions, problems and phenomena which make it so difficult for wage workers to conceive alternatives to heteronomy and exploitation and see these alternatives as viable, to desire them, to fight for them.
3. During Marx's work on Capital, socialisation in a capitalist form has advanced to the extent that a new quality of capital – finance capital – and a new capitalist form of socialisation, or rather, a modified mode of socialisation has emerged. What calls for further inquiry and research, then, are the changes in societal relations which generate new conditions for conflicts between the exploited and oppressed and their exploiters and oppressors.
4. In the analysis of social change, Social Democratic theoreticians – in Germany these have included Eduard Bernstein, Karl Renner and Fritz Tarnow – conducted a revision of the theoretical base for Arbeiterpolitik ('worker politics'), ultimately resulting in revisionism, which was later continued by the representatives of capitalist breakdown theory Henryk Grossmann and Fritz Sternberg. At the same time, theoretical insights concerning finance capital produced by Rosa Luxemburg, Vladimir Lenin, Karl Kautsky and Rudolf Hilferding were either not taken up at all, or only selectively and in a fragmented manner. Murder and terror, war and revolution, capitulation and opportunism, unspeakably brutal fascism and blood-drenched Stalinism all have brought about the elimination and destruction of an important possibility human life and creativity, also with regard to critical theory, and have produced long-lasting destructive impacts. The consequences include tragic defeats of emancipatory movements and the dramatic failure of the first socialist experiments.
5. The analysis of the formation of class relations and class interests from the perspective of the comprehensive reproduction of capital requires a) analysing the history, the factors and the dimensions of its structural power-political inferiority; b) revealing and discussing one's own contribution to the current situation, not least through reflecting upon certain scenarios and historical breaking points; c) developing scenarios of social development for the coming 10 to 15 years, and while so doing to demonstrate possibilities for changing both oneself as well as the balance of social forces; d) developing and implementing political conclusions for one's own

political strategy.

The tasks at hand include an engagement with history, particularly with one's own history, a critique of political economy as an historical science, and a self-transformation of the left towards the humanisation and ecologisation of society as transformatory process.

Our call for papers is directed at individuals and groups of researchers who share our approach and seek to enter into an exchange relating to the challenges contained in the third volume of Capital as described here:

- on the evolution of the work, on the method of research and representation;
- on the history of productive forces, as well as on economic, intellectual and political history, which may help (further) explain the work itself on the one hand, and its historical treatment on the other, while specifically contributing to a contemporary critique of political economy;
- on political-economic analyses of the development of capital relations – key terms here are finance capital and financialisation – of metabolic interaction with the natural world, of gender relations, of the hierarchies within internationalised and globalised processes of socialisation in their various forms and dimensions;
- on the specific analysis, based on political economy, of changes within social structures, lifestyles and modes of life within society since the early 20th century;
- on the insights pertaining to the struggle for a socialist transformation contained within the critique of political economy – and for the self-transformation of its protagonists.

Fully in the spirit of Rosa Luxemburg herself, this exchange should serve as a 'stimulus to thought, to criticism and self-criticism' and to establish new working contacts and common projects. Our planned publication of an anthology will be a positive side-effect which we intend to make available for political education.

We ask for the submission of abstracts of no more than **1,000 words by 15 June 2016**. **Abstracts may be submitted in English or German.** Abstracts should state the specific subject matter, the particular content-related question or research question, as well as the intended mode of answering this question. We will select a number of abstracts by 30. June 2016 and invite authors to produce longer elaborations. The final texts are to be submitted no later than 1 January 2017.

Please direct any further questions, as well as abstracts, to the e-mail address of Judith Dellheim dellheim@rosalux.de

References

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