



ONLINE-PUBLIKATION

Michael Brie and Alex Demirović

Karl Marx: Strategy and the Philosophy of Praxis

**Towards a re-appropriation of his
thinking in order to provide a radical
perspective for liberation**



**ROSA
LUXEMBURG
STIFTUNG**

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IMPRESSUM

ONLINE-Publikation 6/2018

is published by the Rosa-Luxemburg-Stiftung

Responsible: Henning Heine

Franz-Mehring-Platz 1 · 10243 Berlin, Germany · www.rosalux.de

ISSN 2567-1235 · Editorial deadline: April 2018

Translation: Lyam Bittar for *lingua•trans•fair*; Nivene Rafft

Editing/Proofreading: Joanna Mitchell for *lingua•trans•fair*, Michael Brie; Lydia Baldwin

Layout/Production: MediaService GmbH Druck und Kommunikation

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INTRODUCTION

On 5 May 2018, Karl Marx would have been 200 years old. Many celebrate him as a great thinker, maybe one of the greatest, but also seem to think that he is no longer relevant, or, that he's a 'dead dog'. Others, disregarding his political perspectives, extol his crisis theory. Then there are those who try to blame the real movement inspired by him and Engels – communism – for real socialism, atrocities of all sorts and the gulag system. In doing so, they stigmatise as dangerous any yearning for a non-capitalist future.

Clearly, any practice that builds on Marx will require critical (self)reflection, but also critical recovery – a re-appropriation – of his thinking and action in order to provide a radical perspective for liberation. And so that it can act as a compass for something "so simple, yet so hard to achieve" (Brecht), as a practice guided by the principle to overthrow 'all relations in which man is a debased, enslaved, abandoned, despicable essence' (Marx).

How can we continue Marx's work today? And how can we do so in a way that does not focus on the canon of his work, but instead turns the theory into a measure of a transformative theory and practice – a space for reflection on emancipation and liberation. The left hardly ever discuss Marx as a politician, yet he has much to teach us about current questions of strategy. And how should we deal with the tension that exists between theory/science and socialist world views (Weltanschauung) under current conditions?

With this online publication the Rosa-Luxemburg-Stiftung we are documenting two texts by Michael Brie and Alex Demirović in English. They were originally published in German in the edition 2–3/2017 of the magazine "LuXemburg" (<http://www.zeitschrift-luxemburg.de/zwischen-wissenschaft-und-weltauffassung>).

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MICHAEL BRIE

“... BEFORE ALL ELSE A REVOLUTIONIST”

MARX AND THE QUESTION OF STRATEGY

The multiple crisis of capitalism goes hand in hand with a multiple crisis of the left. And amidst this crisis, we find ourselves commemorating the 200th birthday of Karl Marx and the 150th anniversary of the publication of the first volume of *Capital*. But how are we to treat Marx and his works? How important is he for us today – for our capacity to transform the world in practice?

Reading through the flood of new publications, one cannot help but think that the reception of Marx’s works fails to see the proverbial living forest for all the trees that have been felled. Painting Marx as a lone thinker, seconded by Engels at best, they fail to trace the why, the driving forces that shaped Marx’s works. As Wolfgang Schieder writes in one of the few books devoted to Marx as a politician, “his entire thinking was essentially geared towards political praxis” (1991, 16). This political praxis was embedded in a pluralistic and often fragmented, but very dynamic Left. Without reconstructing the debates he was involved in, we simply cannot understand Marx. If we begin listening to the voices of those he conversed with, we can stop seeing Marx as the source of infinite quotes and begin to view him instead as a comrade on a common path – a path that he walked before us, always in conversation, and often in dispute, with many of his contemporaries.

CONVERSATIONS WITH MARX

In spring 2017, Marx could be seen all across Germany, on advertising columns, poster walls, and in cinemas. Experts on Marx complained about the many errors the film “The Young Karl Marx” contained, ignoring that its portrait had succeeded in capturing what was most essential: that Marx was a young, brilliant intellectual, a spitfire of a man willing to overthrow the world to make it more humane. Writing about the 23-year-old, Moses Hess commented: “Imagine Rousseau, Voltaire, Lessing, Heine, and Hegel united into one character, I tell you: united, not thrown together – and you have Dr. Marx” (quoted in Mönke 1980, XXXV).

In order to read Marx’s works from a politico-strategic perspective, one must take him seriously as the subject of his own intentions and decisions. His writings are far too often treated as revelations, as a channel through which the very “being” of capitalist societies is disclosed to us. But Marx is first and foremost a narrator intent on analyzing, a narrator who wants his narratives to intervene, or, as he writes in one of the letters to Arnold Ruge, his co-editor on the “Deutsch–Französische Jahrbücher”, in 1844:

“Our whole object can only be ... to give religious and philosophical questions the form corresponding to man who has become conscious of himself. ... Hence, our motto must be: reform of consciousness not through dogmas, but by analyzing the mystical consciousness that is unintelligible to itself, whether it manifests itself in a religious or a political form. It will then become evident that the world has long dreamed of something of which it has only to be conscious in order to possess it in reality.” (Marx 1844b, 144)

For Marx, this consciousness resided in analyzing the real conditions under which individuals develop their own consciousness. His political goal decisively shaped his analyses, and brought him into competition with other socialists and communists who were, like him, working towards and contributing to this consciousness. In October 1842, Marx had written that the newspaper *Rheinische Zeitung* “does not admit that communist ideas in their present form possess even *theoretical reality*, and therefore can still less desire their *practical realisation*” (Marx 1842, 220). However, he went on to add:

“We are firmly convinced that the real danger lies not in *practical attempts*, but in the *theoretical elaboration* of communist ideas, for practical attempts, even *mass attempts*, can be answered by *cannon* as soon as they become dangerous, whereas *ideas*, which have conquered our intellect and taken possession of our minds, ideas to which reason has fettered our conscience, are chains from which one cannot free oneself without a broken heart; they are demons which human beings can vanquish only by submitting to them.” (Marx 1842, 220f.)

If one wants to understand Marx, one must consider both his change of orientation towards communism *and* his search for a new critical theory. For Marx, proletarian communism offered up a response to two questions: Which alternative to bourgeois society do we want to pursue, and: Who should be the actor to push forward this alternative? It was this idea that he “chained” himself to in the decades after 1843. Critical theory, by contrast, in his eyes served to formulate the tasks of intellectuals in the respective struggles that would ensue.

The escalating crises of the mid-1840s provided the stimulus for Marx's change of political orientation. Europe was heading into a profound political crisis, which erupted in the European revolutions of 1848–49, marking the overall dominance of the bourgeois industrial age. In England, a broad Owenite socialist and a Chartist labor movement formed; in France, socialist and communist tendencies coalesced with the emerging labor movement, thus adding a new type of revolution to the political agenda. The German radical *intelligentsia* was at the height of its criticism, but (still) impotent in political terms.

It was Marx's experiences as the editor in chief of the *Rheinische Zeitung* and the political discourse that increasingly radicalized in the years leading up to the Revolution of 1848 that caused him to reframe his approach to critical theory in 1843–44. Intellectually, he drew on Left Hegelianism and Feuerbach as well as Hegel's *Philosophy of Right*. The change of orientation taken by Marx during these months in 1843 was clear and irrevocable: He completed the transition away from radical democracy towards proletarian communism. To this end, he joined forces with those who were expecting the antagonisms of bourgeois capitalist societies to be overthrown by a communist revolution, with the proletarians as its driving force. In this sense, Marx took a *double* decision: for communism and for the industrial working class. These decisions preceded any comprehensive socio-scientific analysis, and were motivated by politico-philosophical concerns. Both will be characterized in brief, along with the problems they raise.

FOR COMMUNISM

Marx's first decision was to embrace communism. He was intent on solving the problems of his times – radically, by addressing the root of their causes. In doing so, he broke with Hegel's attempt to consolidate the contradictions between bourgeois society (the individual as a *bourgeois*) and the state (the individual as *citoyen*). He was not seeking to find new ways to address these contradictions, but to dissolve them as such. To this end, Marx redefined the concept of emancipation and, in "On the Jewish Question", stated:

"All emancipation is a *reduction* of the human world and relationships to *man himself*. ... Only when the real, individual man re-absorbs in himself the abstract citizen, and as an individual human being has become a *species-being* in his everyday life, in his particular work, and in his particular situation, only when man has recognized and organized his 'own powers' as *social powers*, and, consequently, no longer separates social power from himself in the shape of *political* power, only then will human emancipation have been accomplished" (Marx 1844c, 168).

From this position, he moved on to the standpoint of communism. In the first volume of *Capital*, he wrote about communist society:

"Let us ... picture to ourselves ... a community of free individuals, carrying on their work with the means of production in common, in which the labor power of all the different individuals is consciously applied as the combined labor power of the community. All the characteristics of Robinson's labor are here repeated, but with this difference, that they are social, instead of individual." (Marx 1996, 89)

Communist society appears here as a single subject (*Monosubjekt*) in which the contradiction between social, collective, and individual work does not exist. With the full thrust of its radical momentum, this vision encapsulates what, for Marx, is indispensable: a society that is based on solidarity and in which individual development, rather than coming at the cost of others and the community at large, contributes to the development of the many – especially of those who are the least privileged. This forces us to resolutely question every specific step, and each reform measure, while at the same time constitutes the necessary groundwork toward even conceiving the form of revolutionary realpolitik envisioned by Rosa Luxemburg.

Yet this ideal of communist society coalesced into a single subject (*Monosubjekt*) has its downsides. For one thing, it allows us to dismiss all reforms, in as far as they merely reshape the contradictions inherent in complex modern society instead of resolving them, as mere sham reforms. This, in turn, gives rise to the impression that the dominance of capital can only be overcome by eliminating all market-based, legal, and political forms of mediation that modern societies have come to rely on. It becomes impossible to envision a socialism that accommodates markets. In discussion above all with Proudhon and his followers, Marx therefore comes to denounce as petty-bourgeois all approaches to post-capitalism that continue to build on markets and money, law and the state. For another, the genuine problems faced by post-capitalist society are only considered in the context of dismantling the contradictions of capitalism, and not of raising awareness for the emergence of new contradictions, for which new forms of approach will need to be found. Marx leaves it entirely up to future generations to solve these issues. His perspective widens only with his later analysis of the Paris Commune, even though this analysis fails to discuss the contradictions of this exceptional political form that owed much to Proudhonism and its followers.

Marx does not face intra-socialist criticisms of communism, and turns a deaf ear to Proudhon's or Bakunin's interventions that a society in which all forces are organized by society as a whole would be linked to a new form of authoritarianism. He dismisses the assumption that even the pursuit of such a society of centralized property would give rise to a new form of domination. He is aware of the many communist experiments of his day, aware of their contradictions and their failures. But from all this he draws a single conclusion: Only the dictatorship of the working class and a plan for society as a whole carry within themselves the potential to avoid this type of failure. For this reason, he advocates the concentration of all economic power. For him, the Paris Commune is an example of radical democracy and of a federal reconstitution of society. But it is characteristic of Marx that this does not lead him to develop a categorial framework that would systematically address the contradictions of transformation under the aspect of solidary emancipation.

From 1843 onward, Marx understood human rights only as the rights of private property owners, ignoring their character as rights to oppose all forms of oppression, exploitation, and humiliation. This has proven fateful. As Ernst Bloch wrote, aware of the problems associated with justified communist party rule: "Irrespective of their social class, no individual enjoys having, as Brecht puts it, a boot put in their face" (Bloch 2007, 232). After 1917, the Bolsheviks were not the only ones caught entirely unprepared for those contradictions that emerge when individuals organize their entire social force through society, leaving no room for individuals, autonomous groups, and dissenters in thought or action. The freedom of all individuals is the goal, but their full, even unconditional submission to the common collective will is the means of transition. From the standpoint of communism, in which everybody owns everything together and individuals are expected to retain nothing for themselves (except for a part of the means of consumption), already the mere laying claim to individuality, or dissidence, is interpreted as petty-bourgeois, if not hostile. Yet the socialization of all forces has its drawback: If all individuals delegate all their forces to society, they themselves become impotent. They then find themselves alienated, standing vis-à-vis the very social forces that they have consciously put forth. But this is not a post festum insight following the collapse of party-state socialism; rather, it was considered common sense among Proudhonists and Bakunists. They merely failed to see that without a revolutionary centralization of power, overthrowing the capitalist order is impossible. While Marx, along with Blanqui, preferred supremacy of power (*Übermacht*) and paid little attention to the property and autonomy rights of individuals and their associations, the Proudhonists, fearing the threat of dictatorship, pursued a politics of powerlessness in cases that surpassed the expansion of niches within the capitalist system.

MARX AND PROUDHON

In the second half of the 19th century, Marxism and Proudhonism were the two major representatives of the opposing poles in living socialism. However, Marx's view of Proudhon as a "false brother" of communism who had to be "demolished" (Marx 1859b, 377) clouded Marx's cognitive abilities – along with those of his followers. Rather than imagining a future society bleached of all contradictions, our conclusion for socialist politics in the 21st century should be to understand socialism as a movement and a goal, even in its fundamental contradictoriness. Individual emancipation and conscious social transformation are its constitutive extremes, and cannot be consolidated easily. The focus should lie on non-capitalist and non-statist forms of approaching these contradictions – beginning in the here and now. However, we should not delude ourselves: Especially non-antagonistic contradictions, which address issues of individual character, collectivity, and solidarity across society as a whole, can be particularly painful.

Marx is renowned primarily as a critical analyst of the capitalist mode of production. Exactly how political this analysis was becomes clear when, following the publication of "A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy", he asks Engels: "Should you write something, don't forget, 1. that it extirpates Proudhonism root and branch, 2. that the specifically social, by no means absolute, character of bourgeois production is analysed straight away in its simplest form, that of the commodity." (Marx 1859a, 473) The political goal ranks before the scientific, and together, they form an inextricable linkage! There were, at the time, two alternative socialist politico-economic responses – the first coming from Proudhon, who had put forward a coherent, in-depth analysis, while the second, from Marx, was in 1859 still in its early stages. The intra-socialist front against the Proudhonists greatly shaped Marx's *Capital*. Its focus on the representation of workers' struggles for shorter working hours and higher wages, as well as their union organizing, remains entirely incomprehensible if it is not read alongside the documents from the consultations of the International Workingmen's Association (IWA). The criticism directed at Proudhonist conceptions of socialist commodity production also influenced Marx in defining the central point of his work, namely the commodity as an elementary category.

IWA consultations honed in on strategic issues: Can union struggles for higher wages be successful in the long term? How are they related to the political emancipation of the working classes and the goal of seizing power as a path toward emancipation? But ultimately, they were concerned with one question: Is there the possibility of a reform-based transformation of bourgeois-capitalist societies that can simultaneously preserve these societies' economic institutions (private property, markets, competition, credit, banks, pensions, etc.) while also pushing them further, toward socialist forms of association? This was Proudhon's position. For him, the new would emerge from the old, on the basis of voluntary agreements between workers themselves. The task of socialist politics would be to create the necessary conditions to facilitate this emergence. It is an enabling strategy (*Strategie der Ermöglichung*). Marx, by contrast, had opted for a revolutionary approach: a democratic dictatorship of the proletariat that would, by socializing productive property, transform the modes of production and living to pave the way for a communist society. Marx believed that the centralized cooperation of all individuals, their collective dictatorship, would bring forth this new society. This is a coercive strategy (*Strategie der Erzwingung*).

MARX AS A CONNECTIVE INTELLECTUAL

The documents that Marx produced after 1864 on behalf of the IWA's general council reveal how much of a connective socialist intellectual he was at the time. Even though he disagreed with many of the positions put forward by Proudhonists, British union leaders or Blanquists, he did examine and consolidate several of them into a comprehensive, forward-looking strategy (see Musto 2014). Each of the IWA congresses led to highly productive discussions, which focused on the relationship with peasants, issues concerning the state and workers' struggles, and on inheritance issues and property struggles. Marx's unofficial leading role in the IWA grew from this ability to isolate the progressive and strategically valuable elements contained in each of the respective positions. This secured him a broad approval, for which the open discussions prior to and during the congresses, as well as the weekly General Council meetings in London were instrumental. In the face of growing disparities within the group and Marx's simultaneous attempts to impose his own views on the organization, the IWA fell apart after 1871 (see Neuhaus 2018). This is the fate suffered by every socialist or labor movement that aspires to be entirely Marxian (or Proudhonist or Bernsteinian). It eradicates those indispensable contradictions that make up the very vitality of these movements. Sometimes divisions are inevitable, and can lead the movement forward. And yet, each new organization will hardly be able to avoid reproducing the fundamental contradictions lying at the core of every socialist or communist movement.

The proletariat as revolutionary class

The second decision taken by Marx in 1843–44 was to endorse the proletariat as the socially dynamic force that would bring about radical emancipation, because it was a "class with *radical chains*" (Marx 1844a, 186) that would only be able to liberate itself by simultaneously liberating all other classes in the process. Building on his extensive reception of French historians and their analyses of the revolution of 1789, he concluded: "The role of *emancipator* therefore passes in dramatic motion to the various classes of the French nation one after the other until it finally comes to the class which implements social freedom no longer with the provision of certain conditions lying outside man and yet created by human society, but rather organizes all conditions of human existence on the premises of social freedom" (ibid.). And for Marx, this "dissolution of society as a particular estate is the *proletariat*" (ibid.).

Marx had already been exposed to Hegel's reception of bourgeois political economists, i.e. Adam Ferguson and Adam Smith. Engels' "Outlines of a Critique of Political Economy", which he included in the *Jahrbücher*, provided the ultimate impulse for him to give up the critique of politics and law and turn to the critique of political economy, because it became obvious that the situation of workers was conditioned by economic structures. From there, he then moved on to develop his materialist conception of history, his political strategy that was aimed at promoting an independent and self-confident labor movement, his capital. His focus always lay on substantiating the historical role of the proletariat.

But even this endorsement of the industrial working class as the main agent of a revolution to overthrow capitalism is so reductionist that it has given rise to endless theoretical and strategic debates. On the one hand, throughout the 19th century and beyond, the labor movement repeatedly found itself betrayed by the bourgeois classes, along with its legitimate social and democratic goals. The labor movement's political autonomy grew as a response to the waning progressivity of the bourgeoisie. But the stronger the labor movement grew, the more relevant the question of alliances became. Flora Tristan set out to campaign for a proletarian women's movement as early as 1843, proclaiming:

"I protest for women's rights because I am convinced that all the world's misfortunes derive from this scornful ignorance shown to this very day towards the natural and imprescriptible rights of the female person. ... I claim certain rights for women because there lies the sole means of obtaining her rehabilitation before the Church, the law and society. This rehabilitation must occur so that *the workers themselves may be rehabilitated.*" (Tristan 1983, 123).

Here, women's emancipation is made the prerequisite for the emancipation of the workers as a class. However, the labor movement's relationship with the middle classes, which toward the end of the 18th century were not in decline, but in fact growing in number, was also thematized. In today's highly developed countries, the industrial proletariat makes up a relevant, albeit relatively small minority of 10–20 percent. The relationship to the peasantry was a further issue of debate. The great socialist revolutions of the 20th century were joined workers' and peasant revolutions, such as in Russia, or exclusively peasant revolutions, such as in China – albeit under communist leadership. In the IWA, Marx demanded the labor movement become politically autonomous, while being simultaneously confronted with demands to forge an alliance with the petty bourgeois and peasant classes. The Paris Commune had once again made clear that without this type of alliance, victory would be impossible. The possibility of an anti-feudal, anti-Tsarist revolution in Russia and the anti-colonial struggles in Asia opened Marx's perspective to the possibility of connecting a socialist revolution in Western and Central Europe led by workers' parties with anti-colonial and anti-feudal revolutions in the East. It is these attempts to extend his focus on the working class to integrate broad anti-capitalist alliances that we can learn from today. Lenin had already learned this lesson, stating: "Whoever expects a 'pure' social revolution will *never* live to see it. Such a person pays lip-service to revolution without understanding what revolution is" (Lenin 1916, 356).

READING MARX STRATEGICALLY

Marx has to be read strategically because he intended his writings to have a political impact. But for that, we have to shatter the cosmos of text-immanent interpretation that has come to eclipse his works. At Marx's funeral, Friedrich Engels said:

"Marx was before all else a revolutionist. His real mission in life was to contribute, in one way or another, to the overthrow of capitalist society and of the state institutions which it had brought into being, to contribute to the liberation of the modern proletariat, which he was the first to make conscious of its own position and its needs, conscious of the conditions of its emancipation. Fighting was his element. And he fought with a passion, a tenacity and a success such as few could rival." (Engels 1883, 468)

Marx's fighting nature was embedded in the strong tide of socialist and workers' movements of his time from which he drew most of his ideas, and which he wanted to infuse with consciousness and direction. He was part of the socialist, the workers', and the revolutionary movement of his day. But he was not the movement as a whole, and should not be taken as such. To read Marx strategically therefore means to read him as an agent disrupting the strategic discourses of the contemporary Left. Without re-reading Pierre-Joseph Proudhon and Michail Bakunin, Flora Tristan and Ferdinand Lassalle, John Stuart Mill and Louise Michel, Louise Otto-Peters and Nikolay Chernyshevsky, this task will prove impossible. Understanding Marx's text in their entirety also means taking his opponents seriously in their autonomy and achievements. Looking back, his "false brothers" – and his still too often overlooked "sisters" – prove to be comrades treading a common path.

Only in solidary dispute were the socialist and communist forces of the 19th century able to give birth to the indispensable contradictoriness of a living socialism – or forced to admit their defeat. Within this contradictoriness, Marx identified and succinctly characterized some of the most poignant features of its opposing poles. His successes managed to highlight these features as indispensable elements of the whole, and instilled upon them a sense of direction in the context of revolutionary realpolitik. His political failures constitute his attempts to impose his analyses as autocratic ideas and "demolish" his opponents. Today's Left must be prepared to exploit upcoming events as opportunities for strategic change (Demirović 2014). In the early 21st century, reading Marx strategically therefore also requires the Left to grow aware of the opportunities for and the limits of its own strategic interventions. Driven by solidarity and following a clear direction, it can then develop its interventionist potential in regard to a break from neoliberal financial market capitalism and a move toward a double transformation (see Klein and Candeias[1] in *Luxemburg* 1/2017).

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ALEX DEMIROVIĆ

MARX'S THEORY AND PHILOSOPHY OF PRAxis BETWEEN ACADEMIA AND IDEOLOGY

Hungarian writer and historian György Dalos described his relationship to Marx in a short, reflective piece that appeared in the *Neue Zürcher Zeitung* on 25 October 2017. In it, he claims that Marx drew upon that age-old human ideal of a society living in wealth and security and without fear of violence or retribution; and that Karl Kautsky canonised Marx's teachings as "Isms". This involved a need to understand the principle of social evolution and its socioeconomic formations, starting with primitive-communal, moving to capitalist and then culminating in communist.

Dalos writes that the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, having secured the supposed legalities, was able to assert its claim that it would pull level with the advanced capitalist countries by the 1980s and then outpace them ten years later. Dalos states that we are now a generation further on from the collapse of the Soviet system. In light of these experiences, he writes that all political "Isms" are now a thing of the past for him. But Dalos also pensively asks if the world would be a better, more peaceful, more rational place without Isms? He wonders whether, without such doctrines and their reassuring, forward-looking regularities, we would be condemned to a lifelong present?

The question that must be asked, however, is a different one, as it would be disastrous to once again bind the promise of a more open future to legalities. Is it not true that it is precisely Marx who claims that materialist theory is involved in those very efforts of people to collectively – and with knowledge and awareness – shape their own circumstances independently and avoid having to follow laws? One could then additionally ask if the Left's refusal to use "Marx-Isms" separates them from this contradiction-laden history, from their experiences and their understanding, and from being spurred on by historical struggles to develop materialist theory further? Does the loss of "Marx-Isms" not contribute to individuals and political groups losing their ability to interpret and take a stance towards constant changes and contradictory processes; does it not deny them a terminology that would allow them to collectively understand their world and a common vocabulary to agree on shared practices, even if such progress is steeped in conflict? Is that why, when confronted with the many questions thrown up by everyday life, they uncreatively reach for seemingly obvious ideologemes, for prevailing approaches, ideas and feelings that hold out promises of inspiring action and suggest certain goals? A less promising alternative seems to be emerging: if Marx's scientific theory on philosophy of history and ideology is reduced to a general "Isms", it becomes authoritarian; if it is done away with entirely, the theory no longer performs its intended function precisely within the social-political conflict, namely when social conflicts arise, explaining them, revolutionising common sense and thereby helping to bring about a more comprehensive, emancipatory scope for action.

THEORISTS OF CONSCIOUS PRAxis TO REDEFINE STRUCTURES

In light of this dilemma, it would be conceivable to consider Marx solely as a scholar. He rejected any canonisation and dogmatisation of his theories – after all, that would compromise the very scientific character of his work. Before the eyes of those that invoked his writing, he professed that he himself was no Marxist. He expressly rejected the idea that his theories were an a priori construction, or even that they held the historical and philosophical key to every secret and had an answer ready to every question ("It's the economy, stupid!"). He considered research and the conceptual penetration of the subject to be key points in materialistic attitudes to the world, and as relationships are changing as a result of human practices, materialist theory is not gradually merging with reality, moving towards a conclusive end; it is intrinsically linked with these practices, refining them and thus systematically remaining open. Marx believed that he was contributing to an academic revolution. The object of his analysis was the capitalist mode of production in its ideal standard. After decades of academic research, he himself only managed to uncover parts of the "anatomy" of this mode of production, not the overall process, i.e. of capital and standard bourgeois society. He suggested this was the aspiration of his research programme. Despite a series of analyses of specific social struggles, he left behind no political, philosophical, legal or moral theories that were comparable with critiques of political economy; at best, they were possible avenues for exploration. Many who cited him and who comprised the Marxist school focused on expanding such analyses and even added several additional research fields.

Marx himself opted to observe economic conditions with all the precision and rigour of a scientist. At the same time, however, he stressed that the principles of the capitalist mode of production were transitory and that their inherent logic of capitalist reproduction would one day drive them to their limits. Such reflections are not the product of a philosophical consideration of history; rather, they are the result of sober, abstract and empirical analysis. Marx's theory aims to make understandable precisely those internal dynamics by which the struggles within the capitalist mode of production were taking place. The problems created by the capitalist generation of wealth cannot be solved by the bourgeoisie, they can only be deferred. One could argue that Marx already considered that the knowledge he had developed would go some way to help solve these problems and that humanity thus had the means to change its own course. Of course, there is no way that Marx could have known the dimensions social relations would take within the class struggle. But he was able to name the consequences of the bourgeois idea of wealth and those contradictory movements which would lead to wealth being created: the compulsion for growth and the destruction of capital (i.e. factories, plants, workplaces, human skills), the constant alternation between prosperity and crises both large and small, market liberalisation and regulation, democracies and dictatorships, unrest and repression, "surplus" and underpopulation, workers being granted a share of the wealth they had generated and their renewed impoverishment. All of these and other movements were already taking shape during Marx's lifetime. And he was constantly willing to flesh out his understanding of the ideal standard of the mode of capitalist production, that is to specify, firstly, what would inevitably and logically be its defining features; secondly, set out what the historical impacts of a specific society would be; and, thirdly, define rapidly moving current events. In light of where capitalism was on its historical trajectory, Marx was at the time unable to contribute any musings on the way in which the logic of accumulation, of the global market, of class relations and of the different forms of the capitalist state, as well as the many superstructures, were shifting. This led to premature revisions and to theories being refuted. When during the era of the Fordist welfare state it was suggested that poor working conditions, unemployment, starvation wages and precarious pay structures were all a thing of the past, not only was this an attempt to whitewash the continuing structures of exploitation, violence and discipline; it was also an inadmissible generalisation. This is because the contradictory movements were not suspended but reproduced on a larger and more destructive scale (democracy, human rights, and the expansion of access to education and mass consumption went hand in hand with ecological destruction, military conflict and genocide, authoritarianism and "surplus" population on an international scale) and today they affect the lives of the entire global population. Neoliberal policies have resulted in a resurgence of precarious living conditions, such as low wages, insecure prospects, exhausting working conditions and rising competition among labourers, including for many wage earners in developed capitalist states. Marx was neither an evolutionist nor was he a voluntarist; his academic opinions and his political analyses and activities aimed to contribute to a social organisation in which people could live with one another free from all forms of domination.

ACADEMIA OR IDEOLOGY?

Attempts to dogmatically pin social development down to specific legalities in Marx's name and commanding actions to ensure its final completion marked a terrible regression to the bourgeois materialism of the 18th century. These efforts failed on such a monumental scale that to this day the praxis of parties, trade unions and movements largely ignores the traditions of that other form of Marxism, the one that advocates radical emancipation and freedom. The theory is restricted to critical political economy or the occasional use of Marxist terminology for individual research disciplines. This broadly corresponds to what Marx might have referred to as contemplative materialism, which takes the reality "out there" for granted and then feels it has the right to simply take terms used in different schools of thought, including Marxist theory, and – using a detached comparison – pick and choose from them depending on their purported usefulness. Here the connection between theories and specific social trends and social practices is forgotten; the dominant definitions of existing problems are accepted. The adoption of such knowledge practices indirectly suggests that drawing upon the Marxist school of critical economic theory offers little insight into many social processes – and that perhaps no insight ought to be sought, as this would unduly overstretch the theory's specific terminology. To then go one step further and use them to construct a "Marx-ism" would suggest that all that was required to deduce certain guidelines from Marx's works, which could then be used to solve all those issues and problems confronting modern-day citizens in their political decisions and everyday lives, was the correct interpretation of or further reflection on his texts. Certain actors could use "Marx-ism" as a pretext to impose their own views and modes of living, despite the fact that such acts would undermine the theory's scientific credibility.

Radically speaking, it is true that, as a crucial component of critical theory, Marxist theory follows the logic of no particular viewpoint – if, that is, a viewpoint is understood as a place that can be occupied and from where it is possible to speak and judge others. Marx takes a critical stance against those scholars who well-meaningly argue from a staunch bourgeois perspective and betray the scientific truth. But Marx's theory is also not an unbiased, empirical, analytical academic discipline. It resolutely sides with labour within society and advocates the creation of a collective world and the emancipation of humanity. For Marx, the antagonistic social principle – a society's living labour capital – was symbolically embodied by the proletariat. Marx has a critical understanding of class: his aim is to overcome the class-based society and to emancipate the individual from all forms of power imbalance, including forced labour. Viewed from this angle, Marxist theory challenges the totality of existing modes of living and the way society is organised. Historically speaking, "Marx-ism" claimed to be representing the interests of the working class. It was inevitable that it would be completely incapable of acknowledging the differential emancipatory needs within the class and in many other social groups, or could generally do so only within the scope of instrumental viewpoints. By taking a critical stance against this problematic generalisation, social movements not only forgot about this particular class entirely – many of their intellectual proponents even contested the fact that the "proletariat" could be that empty signifier which contained the general sense of emancipation. As they pursued their own individual emancipatory goals, "Marx-ism" was subjected to a volley of criticism for all manner of reasons: for the reductionist one sidedness of its partiality towards a single class, for its economism, its claim to classification as well as its academic rationalism and Eurocentrism – but the call for emancipation from domination brought to the fore by Marx was simply abandoned.

TOWARD A NEW WORLD VIEW

These criticisms are an opportunity to reflect on the status of Marxist theory. If it is simply understood as an academic theory, and perpetuated as such, it loses almost every link to everyday lives, to concepts and convictions as felt by the individual, and to their everyday experiences of contradictions, habits and struggles. This type of positivistic understanding of the theory suggests that what we are dealing with is standard academia, i.e. research conducted in isolation and thus separated from political practices and the individual's mode of living. Such a conclusion has far-reaching consequences. Firstly, the authority of Marxist theory becomes limited: there are too many aspects of the macro social process to which it does not apply. As a result, an eclectic range of other theories are cited. However, as a theory that emerged from conflict and which sees itself as integral to a process of the struggle gaining its own sense of self, it is partial in every issue and insists upon full emancipation. Secondly, this has significant consequences for scholars as they may consider themselves experts in the critique of political economy and cultivate Marxist-philological or specific specialist knowledge. It can be observed that this understanding of materialism can lead them to believe that they are facing the harshness of material living conditions, and are thus superior to all those who still hold on to illusions inherent to the exploitative drive behind capital or who are taken in by its fetishistic character in some other way. But in all other aspects they can be ignorant, or even cold, devoid of any reflexivity on their own communication and authoritative behavioural patterns; blind towards sexism; ignorant to ecological concerns about the dominant mode of living and towards prevailing cultural practices. They themselves might foster conventional bourgeois modes of living, or even affirm them: zealous consumption of meat, that liberated feeling of a ride in a sports car, extensive travel and the hedonistic nature of the creative industries. Any criticism is rebuffed as a form of moralising asceticism. Lifestyles and everyday habits appear to have no inherent connection to the theory. Which brings us, thirdly, to the question of why individuals should be convinced by the logical value of this theory when there remain a multitude of everyday and political practices in which it is not applied. Holding firm to the theory when it is challenged by political actors or scholars requires a unique level of conviction. Fourthly, Marxist theory is ultimately losing its autonomy from current academic research. This means it is not seen as the struggle to achieve human emancipation without recourse to a religious, ethical or purely political rationale as was the criticism levelled by Marx in his disputes with the early socialists.

From the perspective of full emancipation, Marx was clearly working on an unprecedented form of knowledge and sooth-saying that aims to reverse the separation between academia and "ideology". Despite the fact that Marx and Engels' work adhered to a materialist, critical understanding of the world, their criticism of Feuerbach suggests that this did not necessarily entail a detached view of the world as an object; rather, to use the words of Gramsci, it involves an active, appropriative and changing conception (*concezione del mondo*) that brings together spontaneous emotions and thoughts as a single bloc. Individuals should be capable of acknowledging both theory and the truth; the shape their coexistence takes should be determined by collective decisions that

everyone is able to come to using their own judgement, i.e. common sense. Freedom means that common sense is not a courthouse; it is shaped by collective cooperation. It is not some final authority; it is the medium of sharing.

REFLECTIVE MARXISM: A NEW FORM OF KNOWLEDGE AND SOOTH-SAYING

Among those theorists who expand upon Marx's work, there are some critical proposals that allow for Marxism to be discussed in a reflective manner. Those who represent more established schools of critical thought consider the idea of Marxism as a world view with scepticism, as it was reduced to formulaic textbook theory cut off from the experiences and contradictions of the individual. Marxist thinking hardly touched upon the individual's way of life. Conventional and authoritarian lifestyles, subaltern modes of thought and conformist attitudes were able to persist. The questions that subsequently arose were how everyday patterns of behaviour, thought and feeling could be changed in order to achieve emancipation, and how the individual could acquire a belief in their own autonomy. This encapsulates all areas – and as the gravitational pull of economic and political conditions meant that they were more difficult to change, Adorno proposed starting with subjectivity with the aim of strengthening the individual's sense of autonomy. This meant empowering a person to resist collective pressure, not to be afraid to appropriate challenging concepts, to tolerate contradictions and to expound the problems of harmonious, positive, smooth, as well as logically and theoretically sound ideas, to question the subordination of thought to praxis, to engage critically with one's own emotions, to allow space for introspection and self-reflexivity, and to examine one's everyday habits, i.e. enjoyable behaviours implicit to interactions with others.

In light of the Gramscian argument that everyone is a philosopher, but under the conditions of the authoritative organisation of the social division of labour, unable to fully realise their ability to appropriate the world in an active, conceptual way, focusing on the subject and their intellectual activities is by no means a half-baked solution. The subalterns frequently live at different speeds. Through their specific form of labour, they participate in state-of-the-art production methods to process the natural world; at the same time, they are incapable of rationally developing their common sense and continue to be subjected to religious, metaphysical, provincial or bourgeois aspects of the world as disseminated by schools or the creative industries. Their common sense is compiled in a bizarre fashion and makes them passive and incapable of action. In this respect, Gramsci understands the importance of the Philosophy of Practice as initiated by Marx. It helps the subalterns develop an independent world view that empowers them to participate in the highest level of culture and social life and make it their own; in being able to "actively participate in the shaping of world history" and to become their own leaders (Gramsci, Prison Notebooks, Book 11, 1375). The aim is to make truth the foundation of vital actions and a crucial element of the coordination of intellectual and moral relations between humans, i.e. a uniquely new moral and intellectual bloc. This is characterised by individuals – previously separated from their intellectual functions – who were capable of coherently reflecting on their actual present and of overcoming the heterogeneity of theory and praxis by rationally organising their coexistence based on a level of cooperation that encompasses every activity. That would be a far-reaching change as the context – shared existence – would no longer be experienced and understood through the valuation of social activities in the form of abstract labour, i.e. in the competition and conflicts between individuals within a sclerotic collective for whom world views, interpretive models and interpretations are still considered aspects of social struggles. The general concept would submit to the emancipated individual and their reconciled "metabolism" with nature.

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First published online on <https://marx200.org/en/debate/marxs-theory-and-philosophy-praxis>