

Incredible adventures of historical materialism

The method and people

Maxim Osadchuk

4 August 2021

Contents

Two souls of Marxism	4
“Fragment on machines”: the horizon of automation	6
Colonization of Marx	8
The proletariat against dialectics	9

“No social order is ever destroyed before all the productive forces for which it is sufficient have been developed, and new superior relations of production never replace older ones before the material conditions for their existence have matured within the framework of the old society.”

Karl Marx. A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy. 1859.

“I have a feeling that one fine day, thanks to the helplessness and spinelessness of all the others, our party will find itself forced into power, whereupon it will have to enact things that are not immediately in our own, but rather in the general, revolutionary and specifically petty-bourgeois interest; in which event, spurred on by the proletarian populus and bound by our own published statements and plans — more or less wrongly interpreted and more or less impulsively pushed through in the midst of party strife — we shall find ourselves compelled to make communist experiments and leaps which no-one knows better than ourselves to be untimely. One then proceeds to lose one’s head — only physique parlant I hope —, a reaction sets in and, until such time as the world is capable of passing historical judgment of this kind of thing, one will be regarded, not only as a brute beast, which wouldn’t matter a rap, but, also as bête, and that’s far worse.”

Friedrich Engels. Letter to Joseph Weydemeyer dated 12 April 1853.

To be born outside “your” time is the tragedy that makes a person “odd”. The plot is well known and developed in world literature. Can we say that such a sad fate awaits ideas or even whole theoretical systems if they appear in society earlier than the conditions necessary for their healthy perception? The classic case here is the story of Giordano Bruno (1548–1600). His cosmology, the doctrine of many worlds and stars in the sky as analogs of the Sun in their own systems, became a significant part of the development of scientific astronomy.

However, the recognition caught up with the genius burned by the Inquisition only two centuries after his death. In the XVI century, Bruno, with his groundbreaking view of things, could most likely either remain silent for the rest of his life, taking the quiet insights into the coffin, or finish precisely as he had finished. Thus, the discussion is only about the extent to which the personal courage of the Italian Dominican heretic has contributed to the “acceleration” of human scientific progress in the long run.

From today’s observation deck, we evaluate Giordano as a genius and a hero because his positive contribution to the present is undeniable. These are exclusive attractions of activity in the scientific and cultural planes. In these areas, it is not so easy to really “harm”, but we can safely expect the recognition of significant achievements in the eyes of society, even if it takes 200–300 years. Another thing is public opinion and its practical dimension, politics.

From today’s observation deck, we evaluate Giordano as a genius and a hero because his positive contribution to the present is undeniable. These are exclusive attractions of activity in the scientific and cultural planes. In these areas, it is not so easy to really “harm”, but we can safely expect the recognition of significant achievements in the eyes of society, even if it takes 200–300 years. Another thing is public opinion and its practical dimension, politics.

Those continents of discourse that are endowed with political shores also have their roadmaps. A worldview system based on social philosophy, in most cases, is unable to refrain from recommending to its adherents a specific direction of political action. The mix of science, philosophy,

and politics forms a boiling mixture, each element of which plays to enhance the overall degree. This cocktail can inspire even the brightest heads of their time. It provokes the temptation to feel like a prophet, which means to start a church.

The desire to carry out an active transformation of society, based on the belief in the exclusive possession of truth, leads to bigotry. And it is by definition not inclined to count the victims. Albert Camus once aptly remarked that when politics mixes with religion, the Inquisition is born.

Rest assured, it will definitely not refrain from burning Giordano Bruno again. And it does not matter how many years he previously gave to the monastic ministry.

Two souls of Marxism

The turbulent life of Marxism, or “scientific communism,” as the founding fathers preferred to call their brainchild, was marked by several birth traumas. The attempts of some theorists who came out of this overcoat to accuse the preachers of the second, third, or subsequent generations of “deforming” Marxism did not stand up to criticism. It is useless to look for a bifurcation point when communism turns from a progressive humanist doctrine, a product of the European Enlightenment, into a totalitarian parody of itself. Both components were present in it from the very beginning – we can, therefore, speak of two “souls” of Marxism: rational-analytical and political-passionate. The primary birth defects of the doctrine are dialectically connected with the genius – and blindness – of Karl Marx. The method of historical analysis he invented proved to be so productive that it seemed to make the author believe in his predictive abilities on the verge of a prophetic gift. The greatest left-wing historian of the twentieth century, the British Eric Hobsbawm, once remarked: *“The materialist conception of history, which is the core of Marxism, is applicable everywhere and always. It should have been applied, for example, to the countries of so-called real socialism. But, unfortunately, no one did, although there was such a need and such an opportunity.”*

The problem, however, is much more profound. This concept was not applied in time to the very “classical Marxism” of the second half of the XIX century as a complex concrete-historical phenomenon.

Marx himself was the first to sin against historical materialism when he refused to apply this scientific method to the study of his political program. The “Manifesto of the Communist Party,” like many volumes of their work with Engels, is woven of contradictions. The intellectual brilliance and hypnotic clarity of the analysis of the connection between technological progress, the development of productive forces, and its repercussions in the evolution of production relations and, consequently, the social order, paradoxically combined with the inability of the “classics” to look soberly at the historical situation of their political movement – “Communist League” (1847) and later the International Workingmen’s Association (The First International, 1864). Already made in the Manifesto, the call for a proletarian revolution, which is about to put an end to capitalism, does not find a solid foundation in the study of the degree of capitalism development at that time in Western Europe itself. Not to mention the whole world, from which the readiness to become the property of the victorious proletariat was sincerely expected. According to Hobsbawm’s apt assessment, in the texts of the early period Marx and Engels did not describe a world already transformed by capitalism, but only a world which *it must become* under the pressure of

a supposedly completely transparent logic of capitalistic development¹. This, however, did not prevent both from behaving in public as if the coming communism was already knocking on the door.

According to the modern French philosopher Alain Badiou, the “passion of the Real” – the ecstatic desire to implement ideological projects through political practice, not too much despite “resistance to materials” – defined the destructive nature of the XX century². The dialectical dispute between the two parts of Marx’s famous eleventh thesis on Feuerbach (“*Philosophers have only explained the world differently, but the point is to change it*”) illustrates an essential dichotomy of communist thought throughout its existence: knowledge of the logic of historical development, which claims to be scientific and objective, is intertwined with a vital desire to transform the world here and now.

The red thread of this innate contradiction of Marxism stretches from the “Communist Manifesto” to the October Revolution. From there, splitting into colorful lace reaches the Stalinist modernization of the USSR, the “cultural revolution” in China the Khmer Rouge movement in Cambodia. At each of these stages, the second “activist” part of the Eleventh Thesis intensifies, and the first, no less important to the founders of Marxism, weakens³. Until it eventually turns into a Soviet “dialectical materialism” or North Korean “Juche” – a collection of ritual spells from the arsenal of necromancy, which allows in retrospect to justify any fluctuations in the general line of the party. Hanna Arendt, with her inherent insight, drew attention to the lack of a conditional relationship between ideological doctrine and the practical policies of Stalinist regimes:

The fact that the most perfect education in Marxism and Leninism was no guide whatsoever for political behavior—that, on the contrary, one could follow the party line only if one repeated each morning what Stalin had announced the night before—naturally resulted in the same state of mind, the same concentrated obedience, undivided by any attempt to understand what one was doing, that Himmler’s ingenious watchword for his SS-men expressed: “My honor is my loyalty.”⁴

To claim today that Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels are directly personally responsible for the age-old red wheel of terror and the rape of a rebellious reality is a sign of bad manners. On the other hand, to deny that their intellectual inconsistency within the XIX century made such things potentially possible under the banner of the movement they founded is a sign of stupidity or meanness.

Does all this mean that the part of the legacy of primary Marxism that concerns predictions for the future should be wholly rejected and buried? Not likely, because the modern world gives enough material to reread the “classics” carefully. As the well-known financier George Soros

¹ Eric Hobsbawm. *How to Change the World: Marx and Marxism, 1840–2011*. Little, Brown. Great Britain, 2011. — P. 112.

² Бадью, Алєн. *Століття / З французької переклав Андрій Репа*. — Львів: Кальварія; К.: Ніка-Центр, 2014.

³ Theodore Adorno, one of the leading thinkers of the so-called Frankfurt School, describes this process as follows: “The requirement of the unity of practice and theory has continually reduced the latter to the status of a servant, eliminating in her what she should perform in this unity. The visa stamp of practice, which was required of any theory, became a stamp of censorship. In fact, in the famous theory-practice, the first component was subordinate, and the second – devoid of concepts, became part of the policy that it should promote beyond its borders; was handed over to the authorities.” — Adorno, T. W., 1998. *Negative Dialektik*. Frankfurt/M. — P. 146.

⁴ Арєндт Ханна. *Истоки тоталитаризма / Пер. сангл. И. В. Борисовой, ю. А. Кимелева, А. Д. Ковалева, ю. Б. Мишкенене, Л. А. Седова* Послесл. Ю. Н. Давыдова. Под ред. М. С. Ковалевой, Д. М. Носова. М.: ЦентрКом, 1996. — С. 431.

remarked at the turn of the millennium: “That man discovered something about capitalism 150 years ago that we must take notice of.”⁵ Right now, the global West, following the critical thesis of historical materialism about the uneven development of regions on the world map, is rushing to automate production. Marx commented on a similar tendency in his brilliant *Fragment on Machines* (1858). This text is worth a closer look because it contains a very specific sketch of the application of historical materialism to modernity, given in the senses despite it was written a century and a half ago.

“Fragment on machines”: the horizon of automation

Examining the trajectory of the development of the so-called “fixed capital” – the means of production, which determine the degree of evolution of the capitalist formation as a whole, Marx predicts the advent of fully automated production. It is clear that in his time, it looked more like science fiction, but the trend itself is described exhaustively:

However, being included in the process of capital production, the means of production goes through various metamorphoses, the last of which is a machine or, more precisely, an automatic machine system (a machine system that is automatic is only the most perfect, most adequate form of machine system machine in the system), driven by an automated machine, such a driving force that drives itself. This automatic factory consists of many mechanical and intellectual organs so that the workers themselves are defined only as its conscious members. In the machine, and even more – in the set of machines, which acts as an automatic system, the means of production at its consumer value, i.e., by its material existence, passes into reality, adequate to fixed capital and capital in general, and the form in which the means of production in quality of the blunt instrument of labor was included in the process of capital production, is destroyed, becoming a form imposed by capital itself and its corresponding⁶.

In this way, according to Marx, the natural desire of every socio-economic system for self-excellence, recorded in the epigraph to this text, must be realized: “*No social order is ever destroyed before all the productive forces for which it is sufficient have been developed, and new superior relations of production never replace older ones before the material conditions for their existence have matured within the framework of the old society*”. The study of the objective nature of this process is the absolute value of historical materialism as a scientific method that is not distorted by “too human” passions of political will. Importantly, Marx directly asserts the frontier of automation as the natural limit of the existence of capital as such:

Thus, the system of machines acts as the most adequate form of fixed capital, and fixed capital, because capital is considered concerning itself – as the most adequate form of capital in general.

This thesis, in fact, made in the original title of the whole “*Fragment on machines*”: “*Development of fixed capital as an indicator of the development of capitalist production*”. Moreover, the

⁵ Eric Hobsbawm. *How to Change the World: Marx and Marxism...* — P. 5–6.

⁶ Here and further quotes are from: Развитие основного капитала как показатель развития капиталистического производства // Карл Маркс и Фридрих Энгельс. Полное собрание сочинений. Том 46. Ч. II.

author allows himself here openly seditious regarding his political declarations about the revolutionary role of the proletariat reverences towards capital⁷ as a “representative of general social labor”:

Since, further, the system of machines develops along with the accumulation of social knowledge and productive force in general, so much not the worker, but capital acts as a representative of the prevailing social labor. The productive power of society is measured by fixed capital, exists in it in the material form, and, conversely, along with this general progress, which capital appropriates for free, the productive power of capital develops. This should not be considered in the development of the machine system in all its details; it is necessary here only in the most general form, because the means of production, becoming fixed capital, lose – on its material side – its direct form and materially opposes the worker as capital. Knowledge acts in the system of machines as something alien to the worker, something that is outside them and living labor acts as a subordinate to an independent factor of materialized labor. The worker acts as redundant unless their activity is due to the need for [capital].

And further:

Therefore, capital tends to give the production a scientific character and to reduce direct labor to only the moment of the production process. As in the analysis of the transformation of value into capital, and in considering the further development of capital, it turns out that capital, on the one hand, presupposes an inevitable historical development of productive forces – among these productive forces also the development of science – and on the other hand drives them forward and accelerates their growth.

Dialectical logic forces Marx to take the next step here and postulate: the inherent gradual automation of capitalism, which is constantly growing in number with the increase in the share of fixed capital in the structure of the economy of developed countries, leads to the process going beyond the very “mother formation”:

But if capital acquires its adequate form as a consumer value within the production process only in the system of machines and in other material forms [...] – then this does not mean that this consumer value, this system of machines is in itself capital, or that its existence as a system of machines is identical with its existence as capital. Just as gold would not lose its consumer value of gold if it ceased to be money, so the machine system would not lose its consumer value if it ceased to be capital. From the fact that the machine system is the most adequate form of consumer value of fixed capital, it does not follow at all that subordination to capitalist social relations is the most adequate and best social production relation for the application of the machine system.

⁷ This admiration for Marx’s revolutionary influence of capital did not escape the watchful eye of the British literary critic Terry Eagleton: “...This is not to say that Marx regarded capitalism as a Bad Thing, something like admiring Sarah Palin or puffing cigarette smoke over your child’s eyes. On the contrary, with his inherent extravagance, Marx praised the class-creator of capitalism – and this fact both critics and students of Marx hid for their own pleasure.” Terry Eagleton. In Praise of Marx. April 10, 2011 [www.chronicle.com/].

After all, the author summarizes, the consequences of these processes in the creation of a beautiful new world are difficult to overestimate:

Labor is no longer so much as included in the production process but as a work in which a person, on the contrary, refers to the production process itself as its controller and regulator. Instead of being the leading agent of the production process, the worker stands next to it. [...] In this transformation, the principal basis of production and wealth is not the direct work performed by the human, and not the time during which he works, but the appropriation of its general productive force, its understanding of nature, and domination over it as a result of its existence as a social organism, in a word – the development of the social individual. The theft of someone's working time, on which modern wealth is based, looks like a pathetic basis compared to this foundation created by the most prominent industry. As soon as labor in its immediate [human, physical] form ceases to be a great source of wealth, working time ceases and must cease to be a measure of wealth, and therefore exchange value ends to be a measure of consumer value. Additional labor of workers ceased to be a condition for the development of general wealth, just as non-labor of the few ceased to be a condition for the development of the general forces of the human head. Thus, production based on exchange value is destroyed, and the straightforward process of material production itself loses the form of poverty and antagonism. There is a free development of individuals, and therefore there is no reduction of the required working time through the absorption of additional labor, but in general, the reduction of the necessary labor of society to a minimum, which in these conditions corresponds to artistic, scientific, etc. development of individuals due to free time and the means, created for that.

According to the mature Marx, the measure of wealth in the future world without the physical labor of human, which will arise as a result of automation, will no longer be working, but free time, which the individual uses in their interests as they please. And this thesis takes us directly into the world of modern discussions around the idea of the Universal basic income (UBI).

Colonization of Marx

The above-mentioned conflicting nature of the relationship between the economic base of society, determined by the level of technological development (in Marx's terms: the degree of development of fixed capital), and the set of social relations forces even such industry leaders as Elon Musk and Mark Zuckerberg to support the implementation of the Universal basic income. Such a socialist measure as the state-guaranteed level of income for every citizen, sufficient for life, reproduction, quality medical and educational services, can put an end to one of the foundations of the capitalist formation – keeping wages at the level needed to reproduce their labor force. For all the achievements of consumer society during the second half of the XX century, this rule remains broadly decisive for the capitalist mode of production organized around “the consumption of a single commodity capable of creating new value” – human labor. One of Marx's fundamental insights, let us recall, was that wage labor in the capitalist market conditions is also

a commodity that has its value. In general, wages – the price of labor of the employee in the market – is determined by the cost of maintaining and reproducing their labor:

Wages are not what they seem to be, not the cost – or price – of labor, but only a disguised form of the value – or price – of labor. Wages are a monetary expression of the value of labor, its price, which acts as the price of labor⁸

The appropriation by the capitalists of the surplus value created by the unpaid part of the wage labor of the worker, (*“Production of surplus value or profit – this is the absolute law of this method of production”*⁹) which again makes capitalism itself, is gradually becoming increasingly problematic under the pressure of the relentless automation of industry. Even the most intelligent mechanism, unlike man, cannot be exploited in the capitalist sense, that is, to take away the surplus value created by his labor. The money needed to maintain the industrial functions of automated production is 100 percent what Marx once called “permanent capital.” However, surplus value can be obtained in market conditions only through games with “variable capital” – the monetary maintenance of living people. Moving in the trajectory of constant modernization, capitalism gradually overcomes its basic laws, surpasses itself under the pressure of technological development and internal contradictions, and, in fact, moves towards the dawn of a new socio-economic order. Whether this coming new world should be called “socialism” is a discursive rather than a practical question. Meanwhile, the position of the most advanced technology entrepreneurs speaks for itself: to protect society from disintegration and collapse in the new economic realities, governments must take unprecedented measures of social support in the long run. People who lose their jobs through automation must remain active consumers of goods produced by automated enterprises, continuing to lubricate the gears of the market engine “demand-supply” with their money. And they need to be taken from somewhere. Universal basic income seems to be the only systemic way out of the deadlock in the long run. In the words of the same Elon Musk: “I do not think we will have a choice. I think it will be a necessity. Today, more and more professions with which work can cope better.”

The proletariat against dialectics

Another eloquent example of the internal contradictions of the legacy of “classical Marxism” is the view of the proletariat as a revolutionary class that must put an end to capitalism. Indeed, in Germany in the mid-nineteenth century or Victorian England, it was easy to convince oneself of the avant-garde role of the organized labor movement. Its rise as a shadow accompanied the rapid growth of the industry in Western Europe. The youth and fighting spirit of the proletariat reflected the success of his sister, the bourgeoisie, which, in its commercial interests, directed the comprehensive modernization of society. The creation of new trade unions and the growth of the number of social democratic parties on the continent promised the self-proclaimed leaders of the workers considerable political influence. However, attributing to this class the honorary function of the “graveyard of capitalism” meant a break with the dialectical logic of historical materialism, which so well served Marx in his analysis of the change in socioeconomic formations. The process of the previous social revolution – the transition from the feudal mode of production

⁸ К. Маркс. Критика Готской программы / К. Маркс, Ф. Энгельс. Избранные произведения. Т. II. 1948. – С. 20.

⁹ К. Маркс. Капитал. Т. I. 1953. – С. 624.

to capitalism — is best developed in Marxist historical thought. His example clearly shows how the materialist approach to the study of history works if the political ambitions of researchers do not distort it.

Obviously, it was not peasant revolts, no matter how great their scale, that made possible the end of European feudalism and the transit to the capitalist system. This process, stretched over several centuries, was due to the maturation in the depths of the old economic relations of the class, which, based on technological progress, began to reorganize economic life around their interests. The bourgeoisie, which formed the nucleus of the so-called “third estate” of feudal society, was recruited initially from commercial urban groups, the self-employed artisan population, and partly from the ranks of the main opposing classes of feudal society – the nobility and peasants¹⁰. According to the ascending logic of historical development, the new entrepreneurial state arises as a product of internal disintegration and self-transcendence of the old world. At the start, it is manifested as a socio-economic trend that gradually realizes itself politically – as a separate social group. Having finally felt the power, young and vigorous capital begins to apply it to the aggressive reorganization of the old world “in its special way”. Let us record the course of thought briefly: from the point of view of historical materialism, the feudal order is overthrown by the newborn leading class of capitalist society – the bourgeoisie, which, in turn, became the product of natural development of socio-economic relations of feudalism itself.

The main methodological conclusion here is that society puts forward a revolutionary force that can ensure progress towards the subsequent social formation at a particular stage of development. From a dialectical point of view, which focuses on the analysis of the internal structure of the system and the manifestation of its contradictions, one of the two main classes forming the historically given fundamental antagonism in each society cannot be the bearer of a new world. After all, it is a fundamental, structural and necessary part of the old. The famous “class consciousness of the proletariat” in the real world, outside of communist fantasies, is naturally determined by its social role in the capitalist division of labor: producing products and services within a system organized by capital. Outbreaks of workers’ self-government under the influence of revolutionary situations and/or the activity of the socialist intelligentsia throughout history have been temporary. In the vast majority of cases, they ended in the same way – a return to the usual and, frankly, psychologically comfortable for the most model of relations “owner-employee,” where the former is responsible for wages, processes, and the fate of the enterprise as a whole, and the latter – regulations obligations in the hope of appropriate monetary maintenance.

Why, then, is the proletariat the flesh of the flesh of capitalism, a class whose social role actually makes capitalist exploitation possible! – perceived in classical Marxism as a revolutionary force that leads humanity to a bright socialist future? Moreover, the beautiful new world announced by the emergence of the modern working class in Marxist eschatology promises liberation from the capital and the state and any social oppression in general. Unfortunately, as a true descendant of Hegel’s overcoat, Marx did not always find the strength to refrain from proclaiming various great “ends” and “beginnings.” The messianic role of the proletariat in the Manifesto and other texts of the “classics,” especially of the early period, emerges from an epistemological fog. Contrary to the sober analytical constructions of the authors regarding the previous historical stages, it is

¹⁰ See, for example: Wright E. O. *Classes*. London: Verso, 1985. It should be noted that in modern historiography, there are many theories around the question of the driving forces of the transition to capitalism in the Old World. Each of them emphasizes one of the intra-European factors or suggests a closer look at the “external” factors, such as the beginning of the colonial expansion of the West in the XV-XVI centuries.

substantiated largely ethically: through the suffering and forced alienation of workers from their humanity. The system of paths, a symbolic language used by Marx to advance the idea of a class chosen by History itself to save the human race, is also striking. The eloquence of the style in such places drew the attention of many researchers of its intellectual genesis:

Marxist eschatology assigns the proletariat the role of collective savior. The expressions used by the young Marx leave no doubt about the Judeo-Christian origin of the myth of a class chosen by its suffering for the redemption of humankind. The mission of the proletariat, the end of the previous period of history thanks to the revolution, the kingdom of freedom – the structure of millennial thought is easily recognizable: the Messiah, discord, the kingdom of God¹¹.

But even here, the followers confidently surpassed the teacher. For example, the Hungarian philosopher György (Georg) Lukacs in *History and Class Consciousness* (1923), who admittedly influenced Western Marxism no less than Antonio Gramsci's *Prison Notebooks*, came to an openly metaphysical sacralization of the proletariat, proclaiming it as the first in history "self-identified subject-object," the embodiment of practice and freedom. According to Lukacs, when the "total struggle" of the proletariat against capitalism is sufficiently unfolded, social necessity will be "switched off," the "subjective" factor of proletarian consciousness will triumph, and then economic laws and, finally, the economy itself will be overcome. In this way, the "totality" of Marxism will be realized. Such an approach allowed Lukacs to postulate strange things from a materialist point of view, such as "the power of any society is essentially a spiritual power," elegantly (in fact not) returning to a poorly buried idealism¹². It is difficult to find a critical method in such sophistication. Instead, you feel the hot breath of religious enthusiasm all over your skin. The book, conceived by the author as an attempt to revive the revolutionary potential of dialectics, quickly forgets about it at sharp political turns. In Lukacs' case, we again encounter a sincere desire to join the messianic crusade of the chosen class under the leadership of his church party, which is unfolding here (in Central Europe) and now (in the early 1920s). In *History and Class Consciousness*, he seems to claim the role of someone like a standard-bearer. Well, at least it was honorable.

It should be emphasized that Lukacs, however, did not invent anything new. He only zealously developed the same voluntaristic passion for "overcoming" objective reality with all its boring laws defining the above-mentioned second soul of Marxism. Revolutionary idealism thus re-challenges the analytical method – and once again defeats it.

From the point of view of the fidelity of the method, it would be much more consistent with recognizing that the proletariat, as a structural part of capitalism, is not and cannot be a revolutionary force bearing the model of the future post-capitalist world. Instead, it is logical to assume that the new revolutionary class, the bearer of the embryo of the subsequent formation, will be born in the depths of capitalist society under the pressure of its contradictions through technological and production progress. Just as the previous engine of world progress, the bourgeoisie, actually appeared in the arena of history. The "purpose" of such a new class, from the point of view of dialectical thinking, should be the "removal" (in Hegel's sense of the word) of the principal contradiction of the capitalist system – the antagonism between the social nature of labor and private appropriation of its results ("*... the product of social labor is appropriated by the individual*

¹¹ Арон Реймон. Опій інтелектуалів: 3 фр. пер. Г. Філіпчук. — К.: Юніверс, 2006. — С. 67.

¹² Lukacs G. *Geschichte und Klassenbewußtsein: Studien über marxistische Dialektik*. Berlin, 1923. S. 39. Lukacs G. *Politische Aufsätze. Ausgewählte Schriften*. Bd. IV. Neuwied; Berlin (West), 1967. S. 164, 267. Lukacs G. *Geschichte und Klassenbewußtsein*. 2. Auflage. Neuwied; Berlin (West), 1968. S. 267.

*capitalist. This is the central contradiction, whence all the inconsistencies in which modern society moves and which are especially clear in large-scale industry.” — F. Engels. Socialism: Utopian and Scientific*¹³.

Reading the tea leaves what specific features such a future class could be endowed with is ungrateful. However, we can reasonably afford to look for hints of its appearance in modern times, based on the idea of the historically given configuration of the contradictions of capitalism outlined above. Either its most important feature must be the combination of the roles of owner and employee of a socialized enterprise in one person. Marx himself can present an exciting guide. Already in the last century, observing the rapid emergence of large corporate structures, managed not by direct owners but by boards of directors, hired top managers, he outlined the primary trend of the process: “*This is the abolition of capital as private property within the most capitalist mode of production*”¹⁴. Over the past century and a half, Western economies have made significant progress. Some of the largest corporations, such as technology giants Google and Tesla, have long implemented employee corporatization practices in addition to traditional wages. Of course, it would be naive to claim that their workers become full co-owners of companies in this way. Still, the phenomenon itself should be looked at closely as an internal deformation of capitalism, dispersion, and diffusion of ownership of the means of production.

Another practical solution to the contradiction between the collective nature of labor and the private form of ownership are cooperatives – economic communities known long before the emergence of “scientific socialism.” The basis of a cooperative enterprise is the idea of joint ownership of the means of production and equal distribution of profits between the participants. In most cases, the same people are also workers who collectively create surplus value in the common interest. Today, enterprises, fully or partially based on the cooperative model of the organization, produce a significant share of world GDP. The total capitalization of the world’s 300 largest cooperatives has long been measured in trillions of US dollars. More than 800 million people on earth work in the cooperative sector. It’s about a family business with several employees and giant holdings like the Spanish Mondragon Corporation, which unites more than 80,000 people. One of the most famous companies with a close to a cooperative model of distribution of power and assets is the developer and publisher of computer games Valve Corporation. We can predict that under the influence of the tendency to increasing automation of manual labor, on the one hand, and the need for the proactive and intellectually developed workforce in practical management and information and communication activities – on the other hand, the degree of socialization of enterprises in various forms will only grow. It is clear that not so much because of the “goodwill” of the capitalists, but because of the need to increase efficiency under the pressure of the most ruthless weapon of progress – market competition.

Historical materialism teaches that no phenomenon can be understood outside its social context, the scope of which is determined by the existing degree of technological progress. One of the consequences of applying this approach to the history of the last two centuries is the assumption that its prematurity predetermined the terrible fate of the communist project we know. Marx’s guilt in this aspect seems to be the reverse of his passionate mind. The temptation to lead a revolutionary political movement on a world scale, to “accelerate history,” which mainline and

¹³ К. Маркс, Ф. Энгельс. Собр. соч. Изд. 2, т. 19. — С. 228.

¹⁴ Карл Маркс. Капітал. Критика політичної економії. Том третій, частина перша / Переклад з першого німецького видання за редакцією Д. Рабіновича. Київ: Партвидав ЦК КП(б)У, 1936. — С. 413.

patterns he described so aptly, proved too strong. The global socialist experiment of the twentieth century, founded by Marx and Engels in the nineteenth century, was born as the abortion of the new millennium, which did not find a solid foothold in the then level of development of the productive forces. The torments of his premature birth – and death – have caused the death, injury, and misery of hundreds of millions of people.

However, at the heart of any vision of the future is the social imagination. No wonder the role of science fiction writers of the XIX-XX centuries in constructing our present is so significant. To think of a new society means to take the first step towards its realization – and at the same time the inevitable deformation under the pressure of multidimensional, complexly determined world development. An objective, as far as possible, analysis of conditions and trends, the allocation of the main directions of movement of large systems within their logic outlines the red lines within which one can experiment without striving to create a totalitarian sect. Society remains “open” as long as it recognizes its complexity and resists any reduction. Political will is a valuable instrument of progress, but it instantly becomes its mortal enemy when it receives sacred status. It doesn't matter, from God or from a teleological doctrine claiming to be scientific. Because of this, Bolshevism, imbued with quasi-religious and voluntarist eschatology, has long been in the graveyard of socialist currents with all its innumerable shoots. Meanwhile, the tradition of European social democracy, even in deep crisis, continues to have the potential to renew society.

The Anarchist Library
Anti-Copyright



Maxim Osadchuk
Incredible adventures of historical materialism
The method and people
4 August 2021

Retrieved on 20th February 2022 from www.nihilist.li
English translation by Daria Lobanova.

theanarchistlibrary.org