

Beyond the Imagination of Marx

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Was not it beyond the imagination of Marx that a group of workers, about 200, would forcibly occupy a factory in Chicago in the United States, the centre of the centre of the present world system? Was not it beyond the imagination of Marx that a president-elect in the US, Barack Obama, would extend support to the workers occupying the factory, an act of challenge to the system safeguarding property? The dynamics of reality that do not follow laws of mechanical motion have outwitted Marx. And, this happened in near-mid-December of 2008, the last days of this *annus mirabilis*, year of wonders.

The Chicago workers were expecting to go to jail, but were amazed by supporters, politicians and journalists assembling outside the seized factory. The workers' demand included severance and vacation pay. AP, a news agency, said that the workers became "a national symbol for thousands of employees laid off nationwide as the economy continues to sour." The workers occupied the plant of Republic Windows and Doors after the company abruptly fired them. At a news conference Obama said that the company should follow through on its commitment to its workers. He said, "The workers ... asking for the benefits and payments ... are absolutely right." Jesse Jackson delivered turkeys to the workers and extended the support of Rainbow / Push Coalition, his civil rights group. He said, "These workers deserve their wages, deserve fair notice, deserve health security. This may be the beginning of long struggle of worker resistance finally." The Bank of America that received \$25 billion from the bailout programme cancelled Republic's financing. So the workers' placards had the slogan: "You got bailed out, we got sold out". BOA declined its any responsibility with the Republic-incident. The related attorney general expressed extreme concern with the actions of this company. A worker said, "We're making history." Citizens turned up there in the factory with food and to extend their support. An AP story informed that a citizen said, "This is an impressive historical event." Rep. Jan Schakowsky, an Illinois Democrat, called it the start of a movement. She said, "This story has resonated around the world." The company officials did not turn in a meeting arranged by Rep. Luis Gutierrez, a Chicago Democrat. An organizer said, "We are in a very drastic time and the workers have taken measures to win what they are owed."

Marx penned many pieces on the US, its economy and politics, discussed the issue of slavery in that land of plenty and that land with migrants looking for liberty reciprocated by carrying on many of Marx's articles in *New York Daily Tribune*, a liberal news paper. At periods NYDT was the only newspaper in the world that provided Marx the opportunity to write. An immigrant worker in New York contributed his last savings to bring out a book by Marx that no publisher in Europe agreed to publish. And, it was in Chicago that the workers raised in resistance demanding 8-hours workday that became the universal banner of the working people. But all those were the days of initiation and maturation of the working people's struggle based on a scientific analysis and capital was expanding to continents.

Then the world witnessed the emergence of finance capital, two great wars getting generated from crises of the capital, rise of the working people's states and post-revolutionary societies with its contradictions, changes in the maps of Asia and Africa, the cold war and its bleeding effects on the Soviet Union, the set-back in the post-revolutionary societies, the rise of the much propagated monopolar world, a term erroneous in terms of reality but actually the expression of the dominance of the largest empire in human history, the neo-cons' dominance and spread of vulgar ideas — end of history, end of science, end of physics, market knows best, and participation, decentralization and good governance without class mooring. Appalling eyes all over the world saw the trampling down of a cradle of civilization by a war machine with

firepower unparalleled in world history. The neo-cons' crusade "against" poverty brought prosperity in the life of the few and sufferings in the life of the billions on this planet. Equity and equality lost ground.

It was not less bad in the land of prosperity : in 2001, as J B Foster, editor, *Monthly Review*, informs, the top 1 percent of holders of financial wealth, excluding equity in owner-occupied houses, owned more than four times as much as the bottom 80 percent of the population. The richest 1 percent of the population in the US held \$1.9 trillion in stocks about equal to that of the rest 99 percent. The widening income gap in the US in the last few decades compelled Bernanke, the Fed boss, to voice the truth in 2007 : "a long-term trend toward greater inequality seen in real wages." 'New York Times' in its March 1, 2007 issue informed that the richest 60 Americans in September 2006 owned an estimated \$630 billion worth of wealth. But the real wages in the US were stagnant or felled. Borrowing kept the lifestyle moving. The rapid increases in inequality, Foster tells, have become built-in necessities of the monopoly-finance capital.

This inequality sharpens contradictions in the body-politic and anger and frustration breeds among John Q Public. The neo-cons' cruel stupidities were getting exposed. "In the case of [US] households", *Time* informed, "debt rose from about 50% of GDP in 1980 to a peak of 100% in 2006. In other words, households now owe as much as the entire US economy can produce in a year. Much of the increase in debt was used to invest in real estate. "The result was a bubble", identified by Sweezy and Magdoff years ago as a major source of instability in the US economy, that, as bubbles always do, burst out, the financial instruments devised by the speculators stood hapless, and the ugly legs of market marched over the temples of capital. The state came forward to salvage the drowning financial speculators.

There in the Capitol Hill the first bail out plan was defeated despite unprecedented efforts by and marathon negotiations in the White House and despite a bipartisan agreement. A compromise second rescue package was later passed in the House. 'Time', the conservative weekly told after the defeat of the first effort in October, 2008 : "Trust us, said the voices of Washington. First the Bush Administration: Trust us! We'll end gridlock in Washington. We have surpluses as far as the eye can see. The economy is fundamentally strong. Then the Democrats: Trust us! Now that we've taken back Congress, Washington is going to change. As crisis has gripped the American economy, with equity markets roiling and credit markets seizing up, Washington went to the well once more. But the well of trust had long run dry. [Washington's] own credibility crisis might take longer to repair." The first defeat reflects, according to *Time*, "a lack of trust, a loss of confidence, a popular revolt." It said in an October issue: "Nearly every major political leader in the US supported the...bail out bill. The president, the vice-president, the treasury secretary, the chairman of the Federal Reserve, the chairman of the Securities and Exchange Commission, the Democratic and Republican nominees for president, the Democratic and Republican leadership of the House and Senate. All of them said the same thing: vote yes. But majority of these politicians anointed by the Constitution to reflect the will of the people voted no. This is a remarkable event, the culmination of a historic betrayal that Americans have long felt for their representatives in Washington. The nation's credit crisis ... exposed a much deeper and more fundamental problem: a crisis of political credibility that now threatens to harm our nation further..."

How many times the House of Representatives has rejected bipartisan initiatives in the US congressional history? The US congress, its history tells, has seen coalitions in 1937, immediately after FDR's landslide reelection victory, during the World War II and during the post-war years and even during the Eisenhower years and those coalitions won major battles in the legislature. But, in 2008, the "nay" votes overriding the "yea"s on the first rescue plan have thus surfaced as a reflection of a deeper rift among the political oligopoly in the US. It is symptom of a deeper disease in the US

body-politic. An unprecedented event indeed it was! These, the White House meeting, the presidential address and the marathon negotiation, were the initial signs of the political crisis. The symptoms of the crisis took much definite appearance with the voting results in the House and the subsequent blaming of each other by both the parties and by accusing the House speaker.

It was a show of decadence in the political culture and of the mounting pressure of the crisis getting generated both within the ruling class and from the below in the broader society, the public opinion. The voices of dissent within both the parties—the Democrats and the Republicans—show a fracture in the understanding of the magnitude of the crisis within the class itself. The type of failure in understanding the magnitude of the problem faced by the capital itself is a reflection of the grave situation the class is facing. The first voting pattern shows that majority of the Democrats stood for a Republican administration proposed plan while majority of the Republicans dissented with it though leaders of both the parties agreed on the proposal earlier. The unity of the dissenters of both the parties defying party bosses is also a reflection of fracture among the ruling elites. It is a contradiction, an inner-contradiction. Fundamental contradictions outside the class will intensify such contradictions. The initial reluctance of the US House to extend its rescuing hands to the Wall Street is the surfacing of a contradiction that has roots simultaneously in the society and in the limitations of the state machine the capital has constructed to carry on duties delegated by the capital.. This is inherent in the case of the state.

The incapacities of the state to extend funds for the homeless, for the unemployed, for education and health care and the over-responsiveness of the state to extend public money in rescuing private property is the limitation of the state, is the limitation of the capital that has constructed the state and that in turn sows seeds of discontent that the state will one day be unable to brush aside. The following weeks unfolding the incidents were the historical moments that show these limits, the contradictions and a phase of a doomed destiny of a dominant capital.

None in both the parties and in the corridors of power overtly stood by the cream skimming CEOs, the personification of the capital in peril and the target of the present blame game for the crisis. Rather, there are talks around the tables to shackle them, to make them accountable, to make them pay for all the misdeeds. The House-rejected-first bailout plan proposed to impose control on the all-powerful CEOs, the group of persons in the role of one of the sentinels of the world encompassing capital who inspired a section of theoreticians in the service of capital to theorize that capital does not belong to the capitalists and the capital-owners do not control their capital. This shows the level of reflection of discontent to the capital personified. The establishment document, the bail out plan, could not escape the discontent of the greater society to these persons.

The “theoretical” explanation to the majority House Republicans casting “nay” votes, the Republicans were seemingly against imposition of a socialist or near-to-it system, the state control of the companies, shows not only the theoretical infantile of the ruling elite and its company but also its intellectual inertia. The House Republican members are not that ignorant of equating the proposed government oversight of the companies at the expense of public money with the socialist system implemented by a different class and its allies with the theory based on a completely different philosophy. The theoreticians, the commentators and the media that tried to sell that explanation failed, on the one hand, to find a proper explanation and, on the other hand, tried to befool its audience, the common persons, which itself is a show of theoretical and intellectual decadence of the class itself. A class loses dominance in the realm of theory and intellectual exercise before losing ground in the domain of political power. The process may continue for centuries.

The same goes with the blame game: finding out persons, parties and practices responsible for the current credit crunch, for the bursting out of the bubble of housing.

The “irresponsible” or the “over-jealous” behaviour of a number of finance institutions—banks, mortgagers, derivatives, hedge funds and insurers—were identified as were the CEOs were named as a group. The “morality” of bankers and financiers were also questioned. But would not it have sound ridiculous if a slave-owning society would have questioned the morality of engaging slaves for the creation of life-blood of the society? Does not the argument apply in case of a feudal society or a society whose one of the life lines is profit through financing, a society that has “invented” excellent “financial” commodities that are imaginary in most cases and that add no resource to the society other than putting values in the pockets of a few finance-speculators? When a society gets content with such trifling answers to the fundamental questions related to its existence the society confirms its state of moribund of “mind” that is generated by the type of production the society predominantly engages in.

These were followed by the pleading of the auto-bosses in crisis: first, a \$25 billion bail out package, then it rose to \$38 billion. While the auto-executives were facing grilling questions in the concerned Senate committee Obama uttered a stern suggestion to the bosses from the auto giants: GM, Ford and Chrysler: adjust to the drastic reform measures or be sacked. How many times in the US history the bosses of the powerful auto industry have faced such situation. Then they were offered the “dole”, a \$14 billion, less than one-third of their desired dream. Then came the Chicago factory occupation incident.

Marx never imagined the “treatment” the auto-bosses faced in the US capital in the last days of 2008 as he failed to imagine the factory occupation. Rules of contradictions in body-politic, rules of decadence and decline in a power structure only were penned by him and the present dynamics of event do nothing but confirm those rules and only surpass in pace and thus reconfirm those rules. □□□