

UNEXPLORED MARX

Socialism and the Individual in Marx's Work

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MARX'S POINT OF departure is the transitoriness of capital (ism). It is a historical and not an absolute, eternal, category, and its historical task is precisely to create the conditions for the advent of a new, higher form of society. As soon as this task is accomplished, capitalism is asked to "be gone and give room to a higher form of society" (1857-58 manuscripts).

First, a word on the meaning of socialism. Following the conventional wisdom, where, paradoxically, there is a convergence of views of the dominant Left and the Right, socialism, conceived as a society, is fundamentally characterized by the existence of a regime under a single society-wide political authority, usually the communist party, and public-basically state-ownership of the means of production. This is the basic model of socialism with variations in details which has universally prevailed starting with Bolshevik victory in Russia in 1917. It is not difficult to see that this socialism, even though governed by a group professing to be the authentic disciples of Marx, has little to do with what Marx envisaged as socialism following the disappearance of capitalism. Marx called this post-capitalist society identically and indifferently, communism, socialism, republic of labour, cooperative society, union of free individuals, society of free and associated producers, or simply-and more often- association. The basic reason for this complete divergence is that this so-called 'real' socialism of the last century, far from being able to go beyond capitalism, carries over the latter's basic characteristics intact- commodity production, wage labour together with the state, all of which directly contradict freedom of the individuals and enslave them and, naturally, form no part of socialism as envisaged by Marx. It could also be rigorously shown that this vaunted public property in the means of production has nothing public about it. Following Marx's concept of private property in the means of production this public or state property is in fact a variety of private property. For Marx private property in the means of production exists whenever these means of production, separated from the producers, belong to a minority in society, leaving the great majority nothing but labour power to sell, Marx calls this "ownership of a definite class" or "private ownership of a part of society" whatever be the specific institutional form of this property (see *Theories of Surplus Value*, Vol I, *Communist Manifesto*, *Civil War in France*). One could assert that the existence of wage labour is a necessary and sufficient condition for the existence of private property in the means of production.

Coming to socialism, it is capitalism which creates the material and subjective conditions for the advent of socialism, and the latter is the outcome of the self-emancipatory social revolution of the labouring people. This revolution revolutionizes the whole mode of production. The new mode of production Marx calls the 'Associated Mode of Production' (AMP) as opposed to the

capitalist mode of production (CMP). As opposed to CMP's defining characteristic of separation of the immediate producers from the means of production which, owned and dominated by the capitalists, confront the immediate producers as an independent, alien power, the relation of production under AMP is the (re)union of the immediate producers with the means of production where the producers dominate the means of production, their own creation. In conformity with the new production relation there is new ownership relation. In place of the earlier private ownership - individual or collective-of the means of production from which the great majority of society-the labouring individuals were excluded, there is now collective appropriation by society as a whole where all are only producers. And with the disappearance of production by private labours, executed in reciprocal independence, there appears the form of socially collective production. In the same way the new production relation automatically signifies the disappearance of the old society's indirectly social labour giving place to the directly social labour making commodity form of product irrelevant. As Marx stresses, in the 'cooperative society' producers do not exchange their products (*Critique of the Gotha Programme*). There is now only allocation/distribution of the products on the one hand among the different branches of production and on the other among the members of the new society. This allocation/distribution does not require any mediation through individual exchange-contrary to capitalism-it is directly operated. One part of the total social product goes for the enlarged reproduction of society's productive apparatus and society's insurance and reserve funds against uncertainty. The rest goes for individual and collective consumption of the society's members. Finally, let us note that in socialism, according to Marx, the "organisation" of society is "essentially economic-the establishment of the conditions of the union of individual" (*German Ideology*). In the socialist society, which is classless by definition, there is no political power. This is explicitly stated both in Marx's 1847 polemic with Proudhon and in the 1848 *Communist Manifesto*. In fact Marx always thought that state and human freedom are irreconcilable. Only during what Marx called the "revolutionary transformation period" *preceding socialism*, the new state arising after the destruction of the old state machine, as the class power (no *Party power* in the name of the class, of course) of the labouring class representing society's "immense majority in the interest of the immense majority" (*Manifesto 1848*) is necessary to put down any attempted rebellion by the old society's "slave holders". (See *Civil War in France* and Marx's *Bakunin Critique*, 1874). It should be clear that this last state-as a kind of necessary evil-presided over by the "immense majority in the interest of the immense majority" is, by nature of things, also the least repressive state appearing so far in social evolution.

Marx's lifelong concern was the situation of the individual, particularly the labouring individual, in society, and this was his criterion for judging the quality of a society. In fact it is around the changing situation of (labouring) individual that Marx summed up the evolution of human society into three stages :

The relations of personal dependence are the first social forms in the midst of which the human productive activity develops (but) only in reduced proportion and in isolated places. Personal independence based on material dependence is the second great form within which is constituted a general metabolism made of universal relations faculties and needs. Free individuality

based on universal development of the individuals and their domination of their common, social productivity as their (own) social power is the third stage (1857-58 manuscripts).

The three stages of course refer to pre-capitalism, capitalism and socialism. A variation of this three stage development scheme of the situation of the labouring individual reappears a few years later in Marx's discourse (in English) before the London workers (1865) in a somewhat different way. Here the relation between "Man of Labour" and "Means of Labour" goes through the "original union", its "decomposition" and finally, the "restoration of the original union in a new historical form".

Thus with socialism which Marx characterizes as an Association of free individuals, the individual ceases to be either personally or materially dependent and gains 'free individuality'. When the *Communist Manifesto* underlines that the "free development of each is the condition of the free development of all" (and repeated in *Capital* I), the very basis of the new society, what is meant is this free individuality.

Coming to the labouring individual, very few readers of Marx have paid sufficient attention to Marx's important distinction—first made in his early manuscripts—between human 'activity' in general and 'labour' as a specific form of human activity. This has led to a gross misunderstanding of Marx's call for the 'abolition of labour' and of the 'division of labour' as the task of the communist revolution. This people read in Marx's 1844 Parisian manuscripts, and most explicitly in *German Ideology*, and in his manuscript on Friedrich List (1845). The so-called 'young' Marx has been called a 'Utopian' on this score. In which sense of 'labour' Marx speaks of abolition of the division of labour and of labour itself? It is, as he clarifies, in the sense of "labour as it has existed hitherto", that is, labour which is characterized as something which is "by its very nature servile, inhuman, antisocial" imposed on the individual by an "alien subject". It is not the labourer's freely chosen "self activity". "Labour is the negative form of self-activity". In the new society "this form of activity" will yield place to the individuals' 'self activity'. Marx would return to this profoundly emancipatory meaning of labour for socialism years later in his *Gotha Critique* (1875).

There is another aspect of labour which concerns in a vital way the labouring individual in socialism. In all modes of production, at least after the most primitive stage, total labour time of society is divided into necessary labour time and surplus labour time. Necessary labour is what is required for preserving and reproducing the labour power, while surplus labour is labour beyond necessary labour whose product takes the form of surplus value in capitalism. "For the capitalist it has all the charms of creation out of nothing". Once the capitalist form of production disappears, a part of the total human activity still remains necessary in the earlier sense of preserving and reproducing the labour power of the individual labourer through the provisions for collective and individual consumption—including food, housing, health and education. However, in contrast with capitalism the domain of necessary labour is much further extended in conformity with the requirements of the total development of the individual, subject only to the limit set by society's productive powers. The labour beyond this necessary labour—

the surplus labour—which under capitalism used to serve mainly capital accumulation, disappears.

On the other hand, a part of what is considered under capitalism as surplus labour, the part which to-day serves as reserve and accumulation funds would, in the absence of capital, be counted as necessary labour, for insurance, reserve funds and continuing enlarged reproduction of means of production keeping pace, not with the requirements of (non existing) capital accumulation but with the requirements of growing social needs of the associated individuals including provisions for those who are not in a position to work. All this falls in the domain of material production. So the whole labour devoted to material production is counted as necessary labour under socialism. The time beyond this necessary labour time required for material production is really the free time, disposable time which is wealth itself, on the one hand for enjoying the products and, on the other hand, for the free activity, activity which is not determined by the constraint of an external finality which has to be satisfied, a satisfaction which is a natural necessity or a social duty. Even the non-disposable, or necessary labour time in socialism has a qualitatively different character compared to the necessary labour time in a class society inasmuch as this time is not imposed by an alien power but is willingly undertaken by the associated producers as self-activity, as self affirmation. It seems that when Marx was speaking of labour not only as means of life, but as life's first need in the *Gothacritique*, (as referred to above), and, earlier in his inaugural address to the First International (1864) of the distinction between the previous kind of labour and “associated labour plying its toil with a willing hand, a ready mind and a joyous heart”, he was precisely referring to the ‘necessary labour’ in socialism in the sphere of material production. As regards the necessary labour time in socialism, bestowed on material production itself, the continuous development of productive forces at a high rate, helped by advancing science and technology, would allow continuous decrease of necessary labour time and corresponding increase of disposable, that is, free time for every individual. □□□