

Marx: Good-Bye To All That

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Inside the walled compound of a Buddhist monastery on the outskirts of Kyoto, Japan, the monks who reside there have created a meditation garden consisting of raked sand and about a dozen large stones. The stones are adroitly arranged so that no matter where one stands on the perimeter of the garden, at least one of the rocks is blocked from the sight of the viewer. The Zen wisdom behind this arrangement suggests that the world in all of its aspects is never completely knowable; that something always remains hidden.

If you are aware of being disadvantageously situated to view the entire panorama and move to see what you missed, another stone, previously within view, simply moves from sight, now blocked by the one you had at first not seen.

Zen parables aside, in that we live in an epoch where the mystification of the processes of daily life has been raised to levels of religiosity, it becomes imperative to try to get as clear a view of the world and our roles within it as possible. For many of us, Marxism became the critical tool for examining the world and the social relationships built into the economies which human beings have constructed.

Not only does Marxism purport to give a detailed (and in fact, the only) critique of capitalism, but it places into an apparently understandable context, the history of human societies as well as positing a humane view of the future. In this regard, Marxism stands alone in history (aside from religions) in providing this complete view of the human condition.

What always strengthened Marxism's claim to authenticity was its assertion that it was objectively examining the forces of history; that it was "scientific socialism" distinguishing itself from all "nonobjective," "non-scientific" varieties. Here, of course, is where we hark back to the Zen garden—one always assumed that Marxism provided a clear view of everything; that it hid nothing from view, which was exactly its great appeal.

However, upon examination, Marxism begins to appear so fraught with contradictions, so epoch-bound, that one can easily come to the conclusion that it actually disguises more than it reveals. Although many contemporary writers have taken Marxism to task for a variety of methodological and perceptual errors, it will have to remain within the scope of this article only to assault Marx and Marxism on the view of humans contained within its framework.

Humans As Workers

Few would dispute the contention of Marx that the reigning ideas of a given society are those of the ruling class or group at any given time. What has to be faced squarely, however, is not just that the Marxian concept of humans fails to transcend those of the ruling capitalist class, but that Marx's views and those of even his present-day advocates mesh exactly with those of the bourgeois model.

To Marx and his followers human beings are essentially producers and have never been anything else; here are Marx and Engels in *The German Ideology*: "As individuals express their life, so they are. What they are, therefore,

coincides with their production, both with what they produce and with how they produce. The nature of individuals thus depends on the material conditions determining their production.”

Or from a contemporary, non-authoritarian Marxist, Seymour Faber, writing in *Our Generation*, Vol. II, No. 3: “One of the assumptions underlying Karl Marx’s discussion of alienation was that production was not only a means of satisfying needs outside itself, but that which made man (*sic*) human.”

The only reason this view appears to make such “obvious” sense is that it is the world-view of the prevailing capitalist society and when it is repeated by Marx, it sounds just as reasonable. Instead, if this productivist model of society (societies defined by a supposed mode of production; the essence of humanness declared to be that of producer) is viewed within its historical context, it comes through clearly as the definition needed by the ascendant bourgeoisie to marshal the entire world out of the lethargy of feudal society and into the torrent of industrialization, commodity production and the accumulation of capital.

This self-perception of humans as producers was unknown in human history until the capitalist epoch. No one was ever defined as an element of production until capitalism. Marxism makes no break with this. Marx not only relishes the reproductivist model, he is its strongest advocate—whatever develops the means of production is good, for the higher the degree of development of capitalism, the greater its contradictions, the more developed the proletariat and the greater the material base for communism. He is a prophet of production extolling its virtues and denigrating its detractors.

The Most Enthusiastic Marxists

When workers at the dawn of capitalism began an assault on the productive system by breaking machines, burning factories and assassinating factory owners, knowing that they were being drawn into a system that would wreck their lives, Marx declared that it was the bourgeoisie who were the revolutionaries in this era and not the workers. It is no wonder then that the most enthusiastic exponents of Marxism today can be found in the emerging state capitalisms of the East—today’s ascendant bourgeoisie. [1]

As a vision of the future, Marxism offers only more of what capitalism has already presented us with—a continuation of the development of the means of production. No matter that the entire productive apparatus remains an externality to the humans involved—projects begun by capital and for capital—it is assumed that the quantitative development of the means of production will lead to a revolution of social relations.

This is nonsense; every material aspect of our lives is a thing of capital, a thing that was created only for the needs of capital and never for those of humans. Our jobs, workplaces, commodities, cities, transportation, schools, dwellings—all of it developed with humans fitting in as an afterthought if considered at all. The only thing Marxism advocates is to remove the capitalist class from this while continuing to develop production.

But exactly what is missed here is that the means of production are capital and their further development will only mean our further enslavement and capital’s continued domination. The very nature of the technology of capital demands centralized, political control and only after its dismantling, when human affairs are based on decentralized, human-operable technology can we begin to talk about a liberated future.

Those who envision a technocratic, “self-managed” future where automation and cybernation satisfy all of our wants continue to push the productivist model for coordinated economic and political control where humans continue to be reduced to workers. But it’s very possible that the people affected might not want to buy the program of the leftist politicians and planners. They may not want to continue massive auto or steel production even with a workers’ council in charge, as management.

Marxists, with their fetish of production, shudder at such a possibility, but let’s be through with them. If we are going to advocate anything, let it be a revolution of desire, one that really overturns everything and sweeps away the entirety of the muck of capitalism. Marxism stands squarely as an ideology of capital; a rigid fetter on the mind that can only make us shrink from the real potentials of a human existence.

Read and considered for this article

The Mirror of Production, Jean Baudrillard, Telos Press, \$2.50;

The Wandering of Humanity, Jacques Camatte, Black & Red, 75 cents.

Available from Ammunition Books.

1. NOTE. Some readers of this paper undoubtedly contend that Marxism can be divorced from the authoritarian utilization of its theories and become part of a larger theory of liberation. On closer examination this turns out to be impossible, for Marxism only has its “world historical moment” when linked with the political forces of Leninism. In other words, the hopes of radical intellectuals aside, Marxism only comes to power through the apparatus of the authoritarian political party with everything that implies.

The “libertarian” variant of Marxism remains confined to the university and exists with no efficacy in the real world. No one is interested in it except other intellectuals and ultimately, it, along with all of critical theory, becomes only the most interesting sector of sociology.

Since workers are not Marxists and have never been and since there has never been a Marxist revolution of the non-Leninist variety, its theory only makes the leap from university to the society-at-large in certain specific instances. This is when a “workers’” party is formed with Marxist intellectuals always at its head or when the triumphant party calls intellectuals from the university after the “revolution” to begin administering the “workers’ state.”

Marxism’s appeal has always been to the intellectuals of the petit-bourgeoisie—today, a class of managers—and when this social stratum gains the power of the state, they take up in the emerging state capitalist society the same function they would have within private entrepreneurial capitalism. They become the party functionaries and managers of the “new” society, bringing along their Marxism intact as a tool for production and political rule.

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