

Communism and “conscious economic planning” - Postliterate - Medium

By Postliterate

Source: <https://medium.com/@postliterate/communism-and-conscious-economic-planning-ba87ba12182c>

The most vulgar and yet conceptually sharp understanding of communism is a conception of the “conscious” overtaking of economy — in other words, of the abolition of the “unconscious” economic processes that characterize modernity. There is strength and weakness to this conception. Among its strengths are that it — at least in awkward potential — bypasses the productivist conception of communism as a transfiguration of capitalist economic processes into ones merely geared towards the needs of “the people.” It thus partially turns the conversation away from one about what the *ends* of economy are (i.e., “for the people” or “for the capitalists,” etc.), to one about what the *content* of economy is (i.e., does it carry on blindly, or is it under conscious control.) It recognizes that the problem of capitalism is not merely who benefits, but also who *doesn't* — i.e., who is dominated by structures which seem beyond their control. A seizure of economy for the purpose of taking it entirely under “conscious” rule also allows it to become very clear how both the internal content and the ends of economy could be changed. The realm of possibility for economy is *completely* opened up, and no aspect of economy (e.g. labor, commodity, capital, production) is left an unspoken, unconscious presupposition. Nothing can any longer dominate us before we are aware of it.

There are, however, weaknesses to this conception. A conscious overtaking of economy is not in itself an abolition of economy; it allows almost infinite transfiguration of its processes, but it does not allow itself to be changed *in itself*, i.e. as economy *sans phrase*. The other related weakness is that it relies too heavily on a general feeling of hyper-rationalization: no economy should be left unconscious, all should be rationalized — but rationalization itself is a form of domination emergent in capitalist social relations. Hyper-rationalization does not have the capacity to be seized for communist ends because it is in itself an inherent form of domination. One cannot dominate in a liberatory way.

Communist planning as such is partially beyond the bare conception of hyper-rationalization. The issue with capitalism is not that it has failed to rationalized *enough*, the issue (albeit not the central one) is that it has rationalized *too much*; communism thus lies beyond a simple rational/irrational dynamism (Postone, 18). It is at once “rational,” in the sense of abolishing the blind retroactive socialization of commodity relations, and at once “irrational,” in its abolition of economy for which rationality itself depends upon. The dynamism should no longer work — the foundations of rationalization and its opposite are undermined. One “plans” for a community which is no longer purely economic, and one carries on in peace in activities which are no longer alienated and subsequently rationalized. In some sense one could say about rationality as Gilles Dauvé said of democracy: “[rationality] is [a] form unable to create its content, and only the realisation of the content can achieve what [rationality] pretends to achieve...” (14).

However, planning and rationality, despite becoming incomplete measures of communism, do not completely disappear. They are bound up with a general understanding of mediation as such — a proper understanding of mediation being absolutely crucial to an understanding of the social ontology for which communism grounds itself conceptually. It is mediation

itself — or rather the *double mediation* (i.e., between social and natural beings) which characterizes human social life — that even allows for a realm of possibility in human social reproduction.

“Marx’s critique of capitalism is [...] a critique ‘of forms of social mediation, not a critique of mediation from the standpoint of immediacy’. In this he is a true student of Hegel, for whom immediacy always reveals itself to be mediated...” (*Mau, 98–99*).

Dauvé, Gilles. *From Crisis to Communitisation*. The Anarchist Library, 2019.

Mau, Søren. *Mute Compulsion, A Theory of the Economic Power of Capital*. University of Southern Denmark, 2019.

Postone, Moishe. *Time, Labor, and Social Domination*. Cambridge University Press, 1993.