

Enough with the Proletariat, enough with labor, enough with the State

By Postliterate

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(Part 2 of a polemic on value)

Now, at the advent of post-scarcity, at the glimmering moment of clarity in a world gone mad, there is still talk of “proletarian society,” “class lines,” “pro-labor republics”? Trade unions, councils, “workers’ states,” syndicates, co-ops, and every movement towards “worker control of the means of production” or, God forbid, “worker control of the state,” has been nothing short of reformism.

They have succeeded and they have failed, they have won and lost, but rarely have they ever broken free of the mechanics of capital. We are told it is the fault of adolescence, that the true “worker’s paradise” will require additional decades of the same stagnant movements, the same rhetoric, and the same works of theory from over 100 years ago. But they must be crazy to believe nothing has substantially changed in the mechanics of capital since the days of Lenin. Furthermore, they must be nothing short of religious zealots to discourage all study outside of Marx, Engels, Lenin, and Trotsky (other groups may add Stalin and Mao), taking what used to be a “ruthless criticism of everything existing” and turning it into a dogma which cannot be criticized. To sit in their archaic bubble is to admit

they have succumbed to capitalist realism and can only imagine a world beyond capital by relying on imagination of possibilities that belonged to a long-past age of capital.

And yet, when it is their turn to praise the Soviet Union, China, Cuba, etc. they throw all of their theories out the window. They would jump in excitement for a social democracy if it was run by a “worker’s party,” just as they do with those tepid perks that came alongside these nations’ brutally rapid industrialization processes. All of a sudden, primitive accumulation is praised as some great achievement, capital expansion hailed as positive growth, repression defended as necessary. When the industrialization process finishes (which is to say, when they have expanded their capital sufficiently), these countries open up their markets and liberalize, and these nations’ defenders claim some individual freak accident was the cause of it, making it necessary to purge *more*, repress *more*, and do everything again but simply *more of it*.

It is not correct to say the USSR or China were failed experiments. That is not to say no mistakes were made, but that materially, they were doing everything expected of them. It is those who do not understand their material conditions and methods that believed they had done something terribly wrong. The parties of these nations were “proletarian” insofar as their purpose was to create the proletariat class from scratch, and they were “communist” insofar as they existed in order to rapidly expand capital in order to *prepare* for some far-off socialism. In this sense, their “achievements” were the achievements of capital, their perks the perks of social democracy.

Yet, what even these nations’ detractors don’t seem to understand, is that their capitalist nature was embodied in their mode of organization as well. The vanguard party, the “dictatorship of the proletariat,” the centrally planned economy, were all furnished for the facilitation of a capitalist revolution. They were bourgeois because they were “proletarian,” capitalist because they were “pro-labor.”

What I mean by this is that it is their emphasis on the proletariat and on labor which reflected not their desire to break free from capital, but to expand and perpetuate it (which was their stated goal.) Both categories are bourgeois categories, existing only insofar as capital does, and the attempt to reconcile capital via its inner contradictions is the definition of reformism. Rather than break free of capital, reformers help the poor and downtrodden workers simply by allowing them more say in the system, or by guaranteeing them jobs, healthcare, etc. Attempting to fix issues within the system's functions means it cannot go beyond the system which reproduces these issues.

“[T]he social opposition of capital and labor is only the opposition of different (albeit unequally powerful) interests within the capitalist end-in-itself. Class struggle was the form of battling out opposite interests on the common social ground and reference system of the commodity-producing system. It was germane to the inner dynamics of capital accumulation. Whether the struggle was for higher wages, civil rights, better working conditions or more jobs, the all-embracing social treadmill with its irrational principles was always its implied presupposition.”

— Krisis-Group, *Manifesto Against Labor*

If it is the desire of a socialist to make all into wage-laborers (whether by way of the money-commodity or by way of the “labor-note”), then it is merely her desire to perpetuate capitalist relations. The same is true for the state, a tool of pure reformism for the same reason.

These tools are reformist also because they are regressive. Rather than make the final push towards the abolition of capital, they turn back and rest at some yet incorrigibly capitalist stage of development. The obsession over “socialism must come before communism” reflects this, and this desire to wait for communism rather than actually take on the burden of producing its relations, allows the already far-off goal of communism to be stretched farther and father away. Today there are those that defend current

China, after all of its market reforms and total desertion of Marxism altogether, as still being capable of communism, but simply more and more generations away. This tendency to stretch what need not be stretched reflects an impotence for the now.

The final result of all of this madness is that young socialists today have grown up believing socialism can be brought about simply by giving workers control over the means of production, and that such is the entire definition of socialism. The most extreme example of this is Richard Wolff's proposal for a "Mondragon socialism" (my term) which effectively works the same as capitalism does now, except that within each firm workers have more say in its organization. It is social democracy, a mild reform of capitalism, but it is called "market socialism," which is a contradiction in terms. It is believed to be socialism because it is believed that socialism is simply worker ownership.

Wolff's desire to abolish bosses and replace them with elected leaders means he desires an economy of 100% workers only. Yet, by generalizing the condition of the worker, he is doing nothing more than perpetuating capital. The worker is *not* the antithesis to capitalism, nor is labor the antithesis to capital. All four are products of capital, created and sustained by it. The resolution of their contradictions (communism) cannot be anything less than the departure from all four terms altogether: a society of *no* workers and *no* labor. A society built on labor and workers in its principles is a bourgeois society in some form or another.