

Notes on the Proletariat as Revolutionary Subject, 9/9/22

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Marxists have generally appeared only as quasi-populists, in an unsure territory between it and elitism. Whilst ostensibly asserting what *should* be a popular will, materially they find popular support in one place and impotence or refusal in another (D&G: “*Why do men fight for their servitude as stubbornly as though it were their salvation?*”) The perversion of Marx’s theory of ideology into one describing some “false consciousness,” the emergence of third-worldism or attempts to simply deny the existence of proletarians from conditions of popular right-wing politic, and even, to an extent, the perpetuation of vanguardism — can appear as cracks in the image of an otherwise “populist” platform.

The reason for this, ultimately, was that the notion of the proletariat as inherently revolutionary was false to begin with. This is not to say revolution can possibly lie in some other class (it can’t), but rather that it is not a feature of the proletarian condition that it seeks to propel itself beyond capital. The capitalist class struggle is not an issue with the system — it is the system itself — and as such the proletarian condition is as much indebted to capital as the bourgeois. The proletariat may be the only class in which it is possible to do so, but the immediate goal of this class must be to make its own condition obsolete — else even the most radical assertion of its will cannot extend beyond reform of the same content of abstract social domination.

Marx's central issue here stems, at bottom, from his mistake of labor and of seeing labor as relevant transhistorically. By defining man in terms of labor (moreover, by *distinguishing men from animals* via labor) and by invoking labor as the positive contradiction to capital's negative, Marx was already submitting himself to the logic of political economy itself. A Marxism which seeks so much reconciliation of what it deems as transhistorical categories, fails its own critique of political economy reflexively by partially denying its own historical basis. In the end, it fails to sever itself from modernity, with human self-comprehension still being understood via productivity, via labor.