

# MARXISM & RENEWAL

## IN THE 21<sup>st</sup> CENTURY

new challenges, new thinking

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In this supplement on 'Marxism and renewal in the 21st Century, we explore new sources of Marxism in an effort to enhance theoretical analysis. This may serve as a basis for shaping new anti-capitalist politics and envisioning alternatives (such as eco-socialism, solidarity economy and feminism). The following articles take stock of Marxism today and interrogate its potential for navigating alternatives in the future. The authors span a wide range of issues and perspectives, all having to do in some way with Marxism. One of the main themes is **Marxism and Global capitalism** where Burawoy reperiodises Marxism along three waves of commodification and Satgas explores the globalising of Gramscian Marxism. Another is **Marxism and Anti-capitalism**, discussed by Pillay in an article on Eco-Marxism, Jacklyn Cock on Feminism and Van der Walt on Anarchism's engagement with Marxism. Although John Saul did not appear at the conference, his views on the working class as an agent of change is relevant to this supplement. His article and that of Daryl Glaser on Marxism and Africa are the **Marxism and Socialism** section. The authors raise concrete questions about contemporary forms of activism and explore emerging themes around which to organise, such as ecological issues, forms of production (cooperatives), green-red alliances, etc.



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# Rethinking Marxism

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By Michael Burawoy

WHAT SHOULD BE OUR ORIENTATION TO MARXISM today? The most common response is to bury it. Marxism, as Talcott Parsons used to say, was a theory whose significance was wholly confined to the 19th century – a version of 19th century utilitarianism of no relevance to the 20th century. Ironically enough, he penned these lines in 1968 in the midst of a major revival of Marxism across the globe, a revival that rejected Soviet Marxism as a ruling ideology, a revival that reclaimed Marxism's democratic and prefigurative heritage. The revival did not last long but suffered defeat after defeat as revolutionary hope turned to repression and dictatorship. With the collapse of the Soviet order in 1989 and 1991, and the market transition in China, the grave diggers pronounced Marxism finally dead and bells tolled across the world.

Facing such anti-Marxist euphoria, the last hold-outs appeared dogmatic and irrelevant. Some Marxists have, indeed, obliged their enemies by confirming their religious fervour. They defend Marxism in its pristine form, revealed in the scriptures of Marx and Engels. The disciples that followed Marx and Engels – Lenin, Plekhanov, Trotsky, Bukharin, Luxemburg, Kautsky, Lukács, Gramsci, Fanon, Amin, Mao – were but a gloss on the original bible. Today's epigones do not place Marx and Engels in their time, as fallible beings reflecting the period in which they lived, but regard them as Christ-like figures, and, thus, the source of eternal truth. They can speak no falsehood.

The third response is more measured. Neither burial nor revelation, many in the social sciences and beyond have appropriated what they consider to be salvageable, which might include Marxism's analysis of the creative power of capitalism, their ideas of exploitation, and their notion of class struggle. These neo-Marxists and post-Marxists often combine the ideas of Marx and Marxism with those of other social theorists – Weber, Durkheim, Foucault, Bourdieu, Habermas, etc. Indeed, these latter theorists had themselves absorbed many Marxist notions, often without acknowledging their debt, and sometimes even mired in hostility to Marxism. The neo-Marxist selectively pick and choose from Marxism as though they were entering a supermarket. They take what pleases them and leave behind what doesn't, sometimes paying at the checkout, sometimes simply stealing – ready to discard what doesn't suit the times.

The fourth approach, the one adopted here, is that Marxism is a living tradition that enjoys renewal and reconstruction as the world it describes and seeks to transform undergoes change. After all, at the heart of Marxism is the idea that beliefs – scientific or ideological – necessarily change with society. Thus, as the world changes so must Marxism. Equally, Marxism assumes a different form in different parts of the world, according to the social and economic structure. At the same time, Marxism is not content with sitting back and reflecting the world; it also seeks to understand in order to change. But a changing world, once again, requires a changing theory if its interventions are to be effective.

## Marxism as an evolving tradition

WHAT MAKES MARXISM MARXISM? WHAT IS ITS unchanging core irrespective of the period, irrespective of the national terrain? What do all branches of Marxism have in common? We can think of the Marxist tradition as an ever-growing tree. We can then ask: What are its roots? What defines its trunk? What are its branches? The roots themselves migrate over time – yesterday it may have been the postulates of historical materialism as found in the preface to the *Critique of Political Economy*, today it might be the premises of history as found in *The German Ideology*, tomorrow it might lie in the *Paris Manuscripts* with the notion of alienation but also his ecological writings. The trunk of the Marxist tree might be the theory of capitalism, as laid out in the three volumes of *Capital* – and how that theory has grown over the last century and a half! Then, there are the successive branches of Marxism – German Marxism, Russian-Soviet Marxism, Western Marxism, Third World Marxism – some branches dead, others dying, and yet others flourishing. Each branch takes off from its own reconstruction of Marxism, responding to specific historical circumstances: German Marxism to the reformist tendencies within the German socialist movement of 1890 to 1920 as well as capitalism's capacity to absorb the crises it generates; Russian Marxism to the dilemmas of the combined and uneven development of capitalism on a world scale, and to the battle over socialism in one country; Western Marxism as a response to Soviet Marxism, fascism and the failure of revolution the West; Third World Marxism grapples with the dilemmas of underdevelopment as well as colonial and post-colonial struggles.

When we examine this tree we see that Marxism may have begun as a small-scale project that did indeed link people across national boundaries – think of the First and Second Internationals. As Classical Marxism garnered popular support it became tied to national politics (Russian, German, French, etc.), from which it expanded into regional blocs – Soviet, Western and Third World Marxism. Where does Marxism today locate itself? Marxism increasingly takes on a global character because now we no longer respond only to local, national or regional constellations, but also to global issues, issues that affect the entire planet. To reconstruct Marxism of a global scale requires rethinking the material basis of Marxism through the lens of the market, but not in terms of its geographical scope (since markets have always been global as well as local), nor even in terms of neoliberal ascendancy (since markets have always moved through periods of expansion and contraction) but in terms of the novel entities it commodifies.

In brief, there have been three waves of marketisation that have swept the world: the first spanning the 19th century, the second beginning after World War I, and the third beginning in the middle 1970s. Associated with each wave is the commodification of a novel but crucial force of production, successively labour, money and nature. These are Karl Polanyi's (1944) three fictitious commodities whose commodification, he claimed, destroys their use value. Thus, when labour is subject to unregulated exchange it loses its use value – it cannot be productive; if money is subject to unregulated exchange the value money



becomes so volatile that businesses go out of business; and if nature is turned into a commodity it destroys our means of existence –the air we breath, the water we drink, the land upon which we grow food, the bodies we inhabit. Each wave of commodification spawns a counter-movement that organises itself on an ever-widening scale: local, national and, presumably, global. Finally, to each counter-movement there corresponds a new configuration of Marxism – Classical Marxism, based on the projection of an economic utopia; Soviet, Western, and Third World Marxism based on state regulation; and, finally, Global Marxism based on an expanding and self-regulating civil society.

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## Transnationalising Gramscian Marxism in the 21st century

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By Viswas Satgar

### Introduction

Antonio Gramsci (1891–1937), the most original Marxist thinker of the 20th century, was imprisoned by Mussolini's regime in 1926 for his radical ideas and his leadership of the Italian Communist Party. He began writing his highly influential *Prison Notebooks* in 1929, the year the New York stock exchange crashed and capitalism entered the Great Depression of the 20th century. A central aspect of the problematic informing the *Notebooks* is the ability of capitalism to reproduce itself through ruling class strategies. At the same time, Gramsci's *Notebooks* pondered how to elaborate a politics capable of transforming capitalism without degenerating into revolutionary voluntarism, on the one hand, and not being held back by economic determinism on the other. Gramsci understood that Marxism was never finished and it had to constantly make sense of a changing social world. Hence, there was always room for Marxism to evolve as it grappled with concrete historical situations. This was different from the general level of abstraction utilised by Marx to understand capitalism as a mode of production.

Thus for Gramsci, Marxism was always open to new ideas and concepts as its line of enquiry moved from the general level of abstraction to concrete historical circumstances. Through this practice, new concepts, new perspectives and new anti-capitalist politics were easily inspired by Gramsci's Marxism and hence it provides a fertile ground for the renewal of Marxism in the 21st century. Today the world is living through and experiencing the 'Great Depression' of the 21st century. In this context, reading and drawing on Gramsci's theoretical corpus in a critical way is extremely important in providing insight into the nature of the crisis, but also to think about how ruling classes are responding to it and how struggles for alternatives can be waged.

In this contribution on transnationalising Gramsci's Marxism, I begin by clarifying which Gramscian Marxism has to be transnationalised. This is important given that Gramsci's own Marxism has been overlaid and in some senses obscured by varied interpretations, readings and sometimes abuses. The second crucial move in this regard relates to locating and tracing how Gramsci's historical materialism has been brought into international relations and global political economy. This brings into view the emergence of a Neo-Gramscian transnational historical materialism and how this has disrupted established Marxist ways of understanding the dynamics of capitalism.

While Neo-Gramscian perspectives on global capitalism are both novel and creative, this project is far from complete in terms of transnationalising Gramscian Marxism.

### Returning to Gramsci's historical materialism

IN THE COURSE OF THE 20TH CENTURY GRAMSCI'S Marxism has been characterised as 'defeated', 'a philosophical Western Marxism', a staunch Italian Marxism-Leninism and more generally the expressions of a great 'Italian thinker'. These interpretations of Gramsci's thought and practice are post-Gramsci and provide us with bounded understandings of Gramsci. While there might be some merit in these approaches to Gramsci, these representations of Gramsci's Marxism also obscure the universal and critical core of Gramsci's own historical materialism. As part of transnationalising Gramsci's Marxism in the 20th century, it is necessary to retrieve this universal and critical core by, firstly, reading Gramsci through Gramsci and, secondly, thinking in a Gramscian way about social reality.

#### *Reading Gramsci through Gramsci*

Within Gramsci's writings there are guidelines to assist us to think with Gramsci in the present but also to go beyond Gramsci. In particular, he emphasises the following: (i) ideas are a product of social relations and sometime ideas outlive their social context; (ii) the past and present are connected – the past is an integral part of the present and this would also include ideas; (iii) ideas from the past in the present need to be selected based on the relevance of these ideas to solving a practical political problem and the extent to which ideas have become part of mass consciousness.

#### *Thinking in a Gramscian way about social reality*

To think in a Gramscian way about social reality means engaging social reality through Gramsci's understanding of historical materialism. While Gramsci accepted Marx's critique of capitalism and his dialectical understanding of historical change, Gramsci also emphasised the need for historical materialism to be unencumbered by dogmatic, voluntarist and mechanical understandings of history. In this regard, other dimensions of Gramsci's historicism are crucial. Firstly, such historicism rejects economism. That is an understanding that history is made only by the 'economic last instance'. This understanding liberates Marx's 'base-superstructure' metaphor from a deterministic straightjacket and brings to the fore a role for



politics, culture and ideology in shaping history. Second, and as corollary to the previous point, Gramsci rejected the positivism and law-like approach to understanding capitalism. He preferred to explain capitalism by understanding how its structures were constituted and challenged through class struggles. In other words, he had an appreciation of the dialectic of structure and agency.

At the same time, Gramsci's historical materialism affirms the following: (i) transience, which means nothing socially constructed is permanent – to this extent Gramsci's mode of historical analysis necessitates a rigour when engaging historical reality; (ii) 'limits of the possible': various limits like ideas, institutions, power relations etc. that constrain social agency. While structures condition action, collective social action also impacts on structures; (iii) ideas are implicated in social change: knowledge and even philosophy emerge out of struggle. In this regard, ideology (including philosophy and culture) had to be taken seriously. Ideology for Gramsci shaped 'common sense' or understandings of the world to which human beings ascribe. Such common sense includes scientific understandings, folklore and traditional beliefs, for example. Moreover, common sense for Gramsci reflected the intellectual capacity of all human beings. At the same time, common sense had to be contested on the terrain of civil society to ensure 'good sense' prevailed. To this extent, for Gramsci a living and non-dogmatic Marxism was an important expression of 'good sense' in that it provided an integral outlook which contained the elements that could provide the basis for a new civilisation.

## Transnationalising Gramscian Marxism

IN THE 20TH CENTURY, LENIN'S UNDERSTANDING OF imperialism and neo-Marxist world systems theory dominated understanding of how the expansionary tendencies of capitalism needed to be understood. For Lenin (1977), imperialism was not fleeting or a policy that could be changed, but rather an expression of an inevitable consequence of monopoly capitalism. As a result, Lenin's conception of imperialism has been instrumentalised and reified as the basis of revolutionary Marxism. As a lens through which to understand contemporary capitalism and its dynamics, it is extremely inadequate.

From another theoretical tradition within Marxism, world systems theory expressed the fundamental contradiction of contemporary capitalism as between the rich North or centres versus the poor South or peripheries. This world system has its origins within mercantile capitalism, circa the 16th century, which has evolved different regimes of labour control and a hierarchy of states corresponding to these regimes of labour control. Core, semi-peripheries and peripheries engender states that enable global accumulation and unequal exchange. Through unequal exchange, a polarising logic dominates centre-periphery relations, which explains underdevelopment. Hegemonic states with material capacities (political, military and economic) dominate such a world system. Today, world systems theory is at the cutting edge of debates about the decline of the US hegemony and the rise of China. While world systems theory has a lot to offer in terms of contemporary analysis of global capitalism, it is

also limited. It doesn't appreciate the role of struggles and class conflicts as the basis for social change.

For the greater part of the 20th century, classic theories of imperialism (like Lenin's) and world systems theory provided common sense understandings of the international relations of global capitalism, both in the academy and beyond. However, with the reception of Gramsci's work in the English-speaking West in the early 1970s and the evoking of *transnational relations* to explain how US capitalism has penetrated and dominated post-war Western European capitalism, the ground was set for bringing in Gramsci's Marxism into international relations. This has given rise to a Neo-Gramscian transnational historical materialism. Such a perspective draws on Gramsci's conceptual framework but attempts to understand the dynamics and structures of global capitalism rather than only national capitalism. This has led to a body of work which maps a more complex frame to understand power dynamics as it relates to hegemony and world order, social relations of force, a historical understanding of structure-agency dynamics and the place of hegemony and passive revolution within global uneven development. This is a new contribution to Marxism and the transnationalising of Gramsci's Marxism. At the same time, such an approach is further characterised by its willingness to go beyond Gramsci's thought in trying to understand contemporary global capitalism. In many ways, this is a non-dogmatic approach which draws on other critical readings of Gramsci and other critical theoretical approaches to explain global capitalism.

## New themes for a transnationalising Gramscian Marxism

WHILE NEO-GRAMSCIAN THINKING HAS SPAWNED WORK on global capitalist restructuring, transnational neoliberalism, US hegemony and transnational class theory, it is evolving and has to take on new themes to further transnationalise Gramscian Marxism. In this regard, there are three crucial themes.

First, a Neo-Gramscian perspective has to be developed on the conjunctural and systemic nature of the current crisis of global capitalism. In this regard, some of the following questions have to be answered: (i) How are relations of production changing in the context of the global crisis and what does this mean for the rule of transnational capital? (ii) How are state-society complexes changing in the US and across the world? (iii) How are historical blocs being affected and reconstituted? (iv) What new concepts of control or class strategies are coming to the fore? and (v) What are the limits and contradictions of these class strategies in the context of the anti-capitalist struggle?

Second, the ecological dimensions of Gramsci's historical materialism have to be engaged, and more generally the relationships between power, production and ecology in Neo-Gramscian perspectives have to be clarified. Essentially, Gramsci's thought as well as Neo-Gramscian perspectives have to be 'greened'.

Finally, Neo-Gramscian analysis has to develop a keener appreciation of anti-capitalist politics and its alternatives. In this regard, research and perspectives have to be developed



on new forms and practices of anti-capitalist politics and what this means for transforming the world order.

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## Ecological Marxism and the eco-logic of fossil capitalism

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By Devan Pillay

Do Marxists have anything to say about the natural environment and the crisis of sustainability? Has Marx been misrepresented by the many varieties of Marxism that have used his name over the past century?

During the height of the economic crisis, the president of a leading industrialised nation, France, questioned the growth/consumption paradigm based on the supposed abundant availability of natural resources, in particular fossil fuels such as oil. The sustainability of economic growth is in doubt because of the rapid depletion of non-renewable fossil fuels, and because of carbon emissions from the use of these fossil fuels in production and consumption processes, as well as general pollution of the air, soil and water.

This *eco-logic* of industrial capitalism (or perhaps more accurately, *fossil capitalism*) is an intimate web of economic and ecological processes that feed off each other, with very specific social consequences. While the social critique of capitalism (pivoted around the exploitation of labour) is associated with Marxist and neo-Marxist paradigms, the ecological critique has mainly been the preserve of environmentalists who have drawn inspiration from non-Western thought (including native American and eastern philosophical thought).

Indeed, Marx and the varieties of Marxism that flowed out of his thinking over the past century have usually been lumped together with other products of the Enlightenment. They allegedly share a similar anthropocentric belief in the domination of Nature (itself a product of Roman and Christian thinking), but departing from Christianity in its belief in the wonders of science and technology, and the idea of historical *progress* pivoted around economic growth, increased production and increased consumption. In other words, 20th-century Marxists and critics alike agreed that Marx did not care much for the natural environment.

John Bellamy Foster, Paul Burkett and a new generation of Marxist ecologists disagree. They are adamant that, all along, Marx had a *systemic approach* to nature and to environmental degradation (Foster, 1999; Burkett, 2005) – even if he gave prominence to the social crisis, given the pressing issues of his time. Had Marx lived today, and witnessed the extent of the ecological crisis, it is most likely that he would have placed equal emphasis on it alongside the social crisis.

Marx's writings, from the time of his PhD thesis, contained a strong appreciation of nature. Indeed, Marx explicitly said that both labour and nature are the original sources of value.

Capitalist production, therefore, only develops the techniques and the degree of combination of the social process of production by simultaneously *undermining the original sources of all wealth – the soil and the worker*. (Marx, *Capital* Vol. 1, cited in Foster, 2009: 176) [my emphasis]

This quote from the little-read Volume 3 of *Capital* reveals an explicit view of 'sustainable development' a century before the famed Brundtland Commission of 1982, which defined 'sustainability' as development that preserves the natural environment for future generations. According to Marx:

From the standpoint of a higher socio-economic formation, the private property of particular individuals in the earth will appear just as absurd as the private property of one man in other men. Even an entire society, a nation or all simultaneously existing societies taken together, are not owners of the earth, they are simply its possessors, its beneficiaries, and have to bequeath it in an improved state to succeeding generations, as *boni patres familias* [good heads of households]. (*Capital* Vol. 3)

Of course Marx goes way beyond Brundtland, which was a compromise between environmentalists who wanted real ecological sustainability, and big business which wanted continued economic growth. The end result was 'sustainability' that was subsumed under the growth imperative – allowing corporations to proceed with accelerated accumulation over the past 30 years, resulting in increased carbon emissions and heightened climate change – but under the cover of 'greenwashing'.

Marx's theory of the 'metabolic rift' between town and countryside, which he mentions in the *Communist Manifesto*, is also about the rift between humans and nature. Marx, unlike anthropocentric thinkers, saw humans as part of nature, and as such had to respect the laws of nature. A further aspect of this metabolic rift concerns the 'isolation' of rural communities from developments in the sciences and the arts in cities. Indeed, this observation of Marx and Engels in the *Communist Manifesto*, as social theorist Hal Draper discovered in the 1970s (Foster, 1999 and 2009), was mistranslated as the 'idiocy of rural life', and for the past century this has been quoted extensively as proof that Marx and Engels looked down upon the peasantry – giving force to the Promethean perspective that capitalist industrialisation was a necessary precursor to socialism/communism. As Foster (1999) argues, Marx at the same time as he wrote the *Manifesto* also expressed great admiration for peasant leaders such as Thomas Muntzer.

If all this was so self-evident, why has a century of Marxism gone by without ecology being at the forefront of Marxist thought? Well, as Marx once said, 'I am not a



Marxist.' Nevertheless, according to Foster (1999), Marxists did address ecological issues in the early part of last century – including Lenin, Luxemburg, Bukharin, and early Soviet scientists. However, after Lenin died, Stalin embarked on a rapid industrialisation path, and obliterated the ecological movement within the Soviet Union. The blind pursuit of industrial development at all costs, in the form of 'state capitalism', was little different from the production treadmill of the capitalist west – except that a bureaucratic bourgeoisie was at the helm. This path was celebrated by Soviet-inclined Marxists in the post-war race with the West.

While the horrors of Stalinism produced a wide range of responses from more democratically minded Marxists, few of these departed from the Promethean emphasis of Stalin. Indeed, as Foster (1999) observes, Western Marxism's aversion to positivism and the natural sciences led to a neglect of Marx's ecology, with a few exceptions like British Marxist Christopher Caudwell. It is only from the 1970s, with the rise of the environmental movement, that Marxists have begun to take ecology seriously again.

Marx, however, did expect the imminence of the socialist revolution, based on the *social* contradiction, as the working class movement began to emerge during his time. He thus focused more on the exploitation of labour as the gravedigger of capitalism, rather than the contradictions of nature. He devoted more attention to ecology in post-capitalist society, as a form of sustainable human development. This features prominently in the latter (but little understood) part of the *Communist Manifesto*, where explicit reference to the need for a metabolic restoration between town and country is made.

Is it important whether Marx had an ecological perspective or not? Yes, for three reasons: firstly, to set the record straight, as Marx remains a foundational thinker within the social sciences; secondly, to provide a deeper analysis of the ecological crisis, and to point to possible limitations in current ecological thinking around the internalisation of environmental costs, without looking at the social relations of production (who owns and controls the economy); and thirdly, to build a broader red–brown–green alliance (of socialists, urban ecologists and conservationists) against fossil capitalism. Traditional Marxist groups need to revise their approach towards ecology, and environmental groups likewise need to see the inter-connections between environmental issues and capitalism as an economic system.

Marx's vision of 'communism' was that of *sustainable human development*, where human beings lived as part of nature, not separate and above it. His 'communism', clearly, was not the state-dominated authoritarian experiment in 'actually existing socialism', where 'democracy' was emptied of most of its content. Does it include a role for the market and the state, or is it an ideal of workers'/citizens' self-management in (presumably) small, local communities that will always remain an aspiration rather than a realisable utopia? These remain questions of struggle and further theoretical reflection, as an open-ended set of questions in keeping with Marx's approach to continuous critical enquiry.

The transcending of capitalism is of course not on the immediate agenda – except in parts of Latin America,

with countries like Bolivia under Evo Morales pursuing an explicit green socialist development strategy (Morales, 2009). Whether or not a 'Green New Deal' is pursued as a stepping stone towards more fundamental options in the longer term, it is worthwhile remembering these words of Morales:

For us, what has failed is the model of 'living better' (than others), of unlimited development, industrialisation without frontiers, of modernity that deprecates history, of increasing accumulation of goods at the expense of others and nature. For that reason we promote the idea of Living Well, in harmony with other human beings and with our Mother Earth. (Quoted in Foster, 2009: 35)

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# Marxism and feminism: 'unhappy marriage' or creative partnership?

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By Jacklyn Cock

## Introduction

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN MARXISM AND FEMINISM has been a long-standing preoccupation among progressive feminist analysts. In an influential intervention published 30 years ago, Heidi Hartmann complained that the relationship between Marxism and feminism was marked by extreme inequality. She compared it to the marriage between husband and wife depicted in English common law at the time: 'Marxism and feminism are one, and that one is Marxism.' She concluded that 'either we need a healthier marriage or we need a divorce' (Hartmann, 1981: 2).

This article argues that it is only very recently that the 'marriage' between Marxism and feminism has become 'healthier.' The relationship has always involved tensions, partly because of radically different objects of analysis. However, a connection is necessary because, as Hartmann wrote, 'while Marxist analysis offers essential insight into the laws of historical development, and those of capital in particular, the categories of Marxism are sex-blind. Only a specifically feminist analysis reveals the systemic character of relations between men and women. Yet feminist analysis by itself is inadequate because it has been blind to history and insufficiently materialist' (Hartmann, 1981: 2). Furthermore, particularly in the South African context,



an analysis centred on the primary contradiction between capital and labour using categories which are *also* 'race-blind' is particularly problematic.

## Classical Marxist analysis

CLASSICAL MARXISM RECOGNISED WOMEN'S OPPRESSION, but the focus in the treatment of 'the women question' was on the relationship of women to the economic system rather than gender relations. These early Marxists failed to focus sufficiently on gender differences – on the difference between women and men's experiences under capitalism. Generally, women's participation in the labour force was understood as the key to their emancipation. Engels argued that as women were incorporated into wage labour, they would become economically independent and the authority of the male head of the household would be weakened and patriarchal relations destroyed.

In similar terms, Alexandra Kollontai understood the family as the source of women's oppression. Remembered largely as the proponent of the 'glass of water theory', the theory that sex should be as easy and uncomplicated as drinking a glass of water, she wrote of the necessity of introducing public services of every kind that would free women from the petty cares of everyday life involved in social reproduction. Sensitive to the double load of housework and wage work, she emphasised the solution to women's oppression as the collectivisation of domestic labour under socialism. This provision of such public services was necessary to bring women into politics. She argued that 'society should relieve women of all those petty household cares which are at present unavoidable (given the existence of individual, scattered, domestic economies)' and take over 'responsibility for the younger generation' (Kollontai, 1911, 1977: 68). But for Kollontai, the struggle for women's liberation was part of the struggle for socialism. In her view, there should be no separate women's movement. She was dismissive of 'the feminists' because 'they seek equality in the framework of the existing class society; in no way do they attack the basis of this society' (Kollontai, 1909: 59).

Lenin was similarly dismissive of feminism but understood women's position in both the household and the paid workforce as problematic. For Lenin, a housewife was a domestic 'slave', and women's unpaid labour within the family was a major obstacle to progress. Writing in 1919, Lenin points out that despite 'all the laws emancipating the woman, she continues to be a domestic slave, because petty housework crushes, strangles, stultifies and degrades her, chains her to the kitchen and the nursery, and she wastes her labor on barbarously unproductive, petty, nerve-racking, stultifying and crushing drudgery' (Lenin, cited by Vogel, 1983: 121). 'No matter how much democracy there is under capitalism, the woman remains a "domestic slave", a slave locked up in the bedroom, nursery, kitchen' (Lenin, cited by Vogel, 1983: 119). Hence Lenin argued strongly for the socialisation of domestic labour, to 'transform petty housekeeping into a series of large-scale socialized services: community kitchens, public dining rooms, laundries, repair shops, nurseries, kindergartens and so forth' (Lenin, cited by Vogel, 1983: 122). However only a specifically feminist politics can ensure that these

'socialised services' are not performed exclusively by women workers.

This narrow legacy of the 'women question' of classical Marxism was not the only problem for feminists of the 20th century. Throughout the century, a 'specifically feminist politics' has been weakened, not only by those Marxists who dismissed women's concerns as of secondary import and divisive of working class struggles, but also by sectarianism and fragmentation within feminism.

## Many varieties of feminism

A MAJOR SOURCE OF DIFFICULTY IN CONSTRUCTING A 'creative partnership' between Marxism and feminism is that there are many varieties of both. The history of 20th-century feminism has been scarred by struggles for primacy: struggles over whether class or sex is the determinant feature of social organisation. These could be divided into three strands: liberal feminists seeking equality within the existing order, Marxist or socialist feminists prioritising class inequalities and radical feminists such as Millett (1971) and Firestone (1972) who located unequal gender relations as the primary contradiction of social organisation.

## Dualistic analysis

MANY OF THE ATTEMPTS OF SOCIALIST FEMINISTS TO integrate Marxism and feminism involved a dualistic form of analysis which posited two separate structures: the mode of production and patriarchy. Others reduced patriarchy to an ideological structure. A more materialist definition is provided by Hartman, who defines patriarchy in terms of men's control of women's labour power both in terms of their sexuality and access to resources. However, patriarchy remained a universal, trans-historical category.

Besides the problem of dualism, there are other criticisms which have been made of attempts to provide a coherent Marxist-feminist analysis such as an essentialism, a tendency to universalise the experiences of women in the global North (in the seventies derided as 'western feminism') and a Marxist functionalism or reductionism which reduces women's oppression to an effect of the operations of capital.

Many of these weaknesses, especially a crude Marxist functionalism, are apparent in the Marxist feminist concern with the relation of housework to capital, what came to be called, 'the domestic labour debate'.

## The domestic labour debate

THIS FOCUSED MAINLY ON THE CONTRIBUTION OF domestic labour to the circuit of capitalist accumulation. Central to this debate was the observation by Marx that 'the most indispensable means of production' is the worker and that the 'maintenance and reproduction of the working class remains a necessary condition for the reproduction of capital' (Marx, [1867] 1976: 718). What he neglected was that this 'maintenance' and 'reproduction' involved a great deal of work done by women. Contributors to the domestic labour debate tried to bring this work – housework and childrearing – into the sphere of Marxist analysis by arguing that housewives' unpaid labour reduces the value of labour power and thus cheapens the cost of wage labour



to capital (Dalla Costa and James, 1970; Zaretsky, 1973; Secombe, 1974). But their analysis of the reproduction of labour power failed to explain the sexual division of labour whereby it is women who perform the domestic work involved. Most contributors tended to subsume the feminist struggle into the struggle against capital.

## Social reproduction

CONTEMPORARY DEBATES LOCATE DOMESTIC LABOUR IN the broader notion of social reproduction. The concept of social reproduction refers 'to the activities and attitudes, behaviours and emotions, responsibilities and relationships directly involved in the maintenance of life on a daily basis and intergenerationally. Among other things, social reproduction includes how food, clothing and shelter are made available for immediate consumption, the ways in which the care and socialization of children are provided, the care of the infirm and the elderly, and the social organisation of sexuality' (Luxton, 2006: 36).

An analytical framework based on social reproduction leads to new ways of understanding women's situation in capitalist society. The 'concept builds on and deepens debates about domestic labour and women's economic roles in capitalist societies ... it offers a basis for understanding how various institutions (such as the state, the market, the family/household) interact and balance power so that the work involved in the daily and generational production and maintenance of people is completed' (Bezanson and Luxton, 2006:3). The emphasis is on analysing society as a totality, a totality in which social reproduction is central at various levels.

As Bezanson writes, 'Social reproduction is ... a central aspect of the capitalist economic system':

1. at the level of *production* because labour is considered a produced input to production but one that is produced outside that sphere
2. at the level of *distribution*, because savings on the costs of social reproduction of the labouring population lead to higher profits
3. at the level of *circulation*, because the consumption of wage goods is the largest component of aggregate demand
4. at the *institutional level* because insecurity of access to the means of reproduction is the fundamental source of command over work processes
5. at the *political level* because the process of social reproduction implies a radical conflict between profit and the living standards of the whole labouring population. (Bezanson, 2006:28)

In his analysis of capitalism, Marx notes, 'When viewed ... as a connected whole, and in the constant flux of its incessant renewal, every social process of production is at the same time a process of reproduction' (Marx, [1887] 1976: 711, cited by Luxton, 2006: 29) The implication is that 'The capitalist process of production, therefore, seen as a total connected process, i.e. a process of reproduction, produces not only commodities, not only surplus value but it also produces and reproduces the capital-relation itself: on the one hand the capitalist, on the other the wage-labourer' (Marx, [1887] 1976: 724).

Further, drawing from Marx means recognising that these class relations render the capitalist totality fundamentally unstable. This is because there is a central contradiction between capital accumulation and social reproduction which is anchored in the capital-labour contradiction: 'it is expressed when workers through their unions try to improve working conditions, pay and benefits to ameliorate their livelihood, while employers resist and, under pressure to make profits, try to cut labour costs by reducing pay, benefits and working conditions' (Bezanson and Luxton, 2006: 8).

Following this approach means that contemporary analyses of commodified domestic labour pay close attention to the race, class, ethnic and gendered dimensions involved. Furthermore, the scope of analysis is expanded, for instance on how domestic labour is increasingly globalised, as women from the global South and European postsocialist countries have been recruited to service an exploding demand for domestic labour in the United States, Canada, the European Union, Hong Kong and the Middle East. This is 'the global care chain' of women moving from poor to rich countries, involving work for low wages under poor working conditions.

## Conclusion

CLEARLY MARXIST-FEMINISM IS NOT A MONOLITHIC theoretical entity. However, much progress has been made in the relation between Marxism and feminism. No one now attempts to appropriate Marxist concepts of value or productive and unproductive work and apply them uncritically in an attempt to establish the value of domestic work (Cock, 1981). The accusations of a white-feminist epistemological imperialism are no longer apt. No one assumes that a socialist order will necessarily guarantee gender equality. No one now presents women, irrespective of class, race, nationality, ethnicity, or sexual preference as comprising a homogeneous group bound together by their shared 'oppression'.

But much has also been lost. The early feminist emphasis on solidarity, the importance of group discussion and collective work has been eroded by the individualism spread by neoliberal capitalism. Many challenges lie ahead and ultimately a 'creative partnership' between Marxism and feminism depends on the further transformation of both parties.

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# What anarchism and syndicalism offer the South African left

By Lucien van der Walt

THE 21ST CENTURY IS A TIME OF BOTH DESPAIR AND hope: despair at the evils of contemporary society, hope that a new world is possible. The ideas of the broad anarchist tradition can contribute greatly to this new world. They are integrally tied to an inspiring body of practice in working-class, anti-capitalist, anti-imperialist and civil-rights struggles, back to the 1860s. And they are relevant to South Africa today.

## Aims

ANARCHISM'S BASIC AIM IS THE MOST COMPLETE realisation of a revolutionary democratic vision

- Abolishing hierarchy and exploitation;
- Ending social and economic inequality – including by race, nation and gender – to create a society based on free, cooperating individuals;
- Revolutionary reconstruction of the family as a site of freedom and cooperation;
- Participatory-democratic control of the means of production, coercion and administration, through multi-tendency worker/community councils, not corporations and states; and
- Self-management at work, global economic participatory planning, and distribution on the basis of need, not markets.

## Strategy: counterpower

MIKHAIL BAKUNIN AND PETER KROPOTKIN – TWO anarchist luminaries – were clear that the 'new social order' must be constructed 'from the bottom up' by the 'organisation and power of the working masses'<sup>1</sup>, by revolutionary counterpower and counterculture, outside and against the ruling class, state and capital.

'Anarchist communism' must be created from below, through self-managed struggles, by participatory-democratic movements of the broad working class and peasantry. The movements must embody in the present the forms and values they seek – they must prefigure the future; to use hierarchy is to reproduce it.

Secondly, without a radical vision, Bakunin insisted, the popular classes will instead just see ruler replace ruler, exploiter replace exploiter. Thus the need for anarchism's

'new social philosophy'<sup>2</sup> to become the leading idea – as opposed to the leading party – of the movement.

## Reform, revolution?

FOR MOST ANARCHISTS, THIS MEANT 'MASS ANARCHISM': only mass movements can create revolutionary change; these are built through struggles around immediate issues, economic and political; anarchists participate to transform the movements into levers of revolutionary change, not 'civil society' pressure groups.

Reforms must be won from below: reforms-from-above breed passivity, patronage and state control. This is not a strategy of socialism through incremental gains. Every gain is valuable. But no reforms can alter the basic structure of contemporary society. So, struggles for reforms must help build a revolutionary movement.

## Against elections, corporatism

RATHER THAN SEEKING STATE POWER, ANARCHISTS favour a powerful, pluralistic, mass movement, forged in struggles and freely won to anarchism, as the new society emerging in the old, eventually overwhelming it. Power is *not* abolished, but held by everyone.

The alternative to neo-liberalism is neither Keynesian nor nationalisation, but *autonomous* counterpower and counterculture.

Participation in parliaments, municipalities and corporatism bureaucratizes, weakens, and coopts movements. And in the neo-liberal era, even the best of the statist systems – the Nordic welfare states – are failed and fading.<sup>3</sup>

The state is a centralised organisation whereby a ruling minority oppresses the popular classes. For anarchists, class centres upon both ownership/control of the means of production and the means of coercion/administration. This is expressed through two interlocking centralised bodies, states and corporations – centralised so that a minority can rule.

The state-based ruling class segment has an autonomous power base in coercion/administration. It promotes capitalism, not as capital's servant, but because state managers' and private capitalists' interests largely converge.

Every elected politician is *part of the ruling class*. A new state leadership is a personnel change. Thus, the broken promises of Chiluba, Ebert, Lula, Mandela and Obama. As Bakunin said, the 'iron logic' of position makes them 'enemies of the people.'<sup>4</sup>

Many still believe their party will be different. But it is not parties that change the state: *it is the state that changes parties*.

## From UDF to ANC

THERE IS A FUNDAMENTAL INCOMPATIBILITY BETWEEN state power and popular self-management. 1980s South Africa saw the formation of structures of 'people's power'

1 Bakunin, M. 1953. *The Political Philosophy of Bakunin*, Place of publication: Free Press/Collier-Macmillan, pp. 300, 319, 378.

2 Bakunin, M. [1871] 1971. "The Programme of the Alliance," in *Bakunin on Anarchy*, Place of publication: George Allen and Unwin, pp. 249, 250-51.

3 Van der Walt, L. 2010. 'COSATU's Response to the Crisis: an Anarcho-Syndicalist Assessment and Alternative', *Zabalaza* 11.

4 Bakunin, 'Statism and Anarchy', *Bakunin*, p. 343.



and 'workers' control' that even aspired to replace the apartheid state and corporations with an alternative, participatory, socialist democracy.<sup>5</sup>

The 1990s deal – besides critically changing the personnel and form of the class system – also entailed popular demobilisation as politics moved 'from the people to the state'.<sup>6</sup> The ANC's role as nexus of the postcolonial elite was matched by its promotion of passivity and unaccountability.<sup>7</sup>

## Bakunin v. Marx

NO STATE CAN BREAK THIS MOULD. HISTORICAL MARXISM – the mainstream Marxist tradition, as opposed to could-have-beens – bears this out.

There *are* elements in Marxist thought with a democratic and emancipatory component, and anarchism is indebted to Marxist economics.<sup>8</sup>

However, the overwhelming tendency in Marxism is statist, centralist, and vanguardist, with rivals seen as necessarily anti-proletarian. Marxist theory is strikingly thin on human rights, participatory democracy, self-management – issues which define anarchism. Every single Marxist regime has been a brutal dictatorship.

Bakunin praised Marx's learning and commitment, but rejected Marx's outlook: capturing state power through revolutionary party; claiming that this party alone will 'always and everywhere' represent the proletariat; advocating state control of labour and the economy.<sup>9</sup>

## The East bloc

THIS WOULD LEAD, BAKUNIN SAID, TO A DICTATORIAL 'barracks' regime of 'centralised state-capitalism'.<sup>10</sup> This claim, central to the Marx/Bakunin debate, is vindicated by history.

The Soviet Union cannot be blamed on external forces, wartime conditions, etc.<sup>11</sup> At every step, the Bolsheviks followed the statist, centralist, one-party logic Marx outlined. V.I. Lenin and Leon Trotsky's repression of rivals, closure of soviet and military democracy, party-run secret police, Taylorism and one-man management, started before the May 1918 – November 1920 war and economic collapse.

Repression *increased* in 1921 and 1922, against Petrograd's general strike, Kronstadt's revolt, peasant struggles, the Ukrainians, Georgians and Armenians, reinforcing the pattern; the gulags, running since 1918, were full long before J.V. Stalin.

Lenin insisted 'the dictatorship of the proletariat *cannot* be exercised through an organization embracing the whole of that class ... *only* by a vanguard'.<sup>12</sup> In socialism,

Trotsky said, the 'working masses' must 'be thrown here and there, appointed, commanded', with 'deserters' formed into punitive battalions' or 'concentration camps'.<sup>13</sup> In the Trotsky/Stalin debate, both agreed on the need for forced industrialisation by a one-party state.<sup>14</sup>

Genuine popular democracy cannot be suspended to 'save' the revolution, anarchism argues, since this is an essential part of revolutionary means and ends.

## Strategy: syndicalism

SYNDICALISM – A MUCH ABUSED TERM – DOES NOT mean narrow bread-and-butter unionism, a narrow workplace focus.

It is an anarchist strategy, maintaining that unions are *potentially* revolutionary. Through coordinated occupation of workplaces, working people can take over production through union structures.

Not all unions can do this! Workplace councils must be prefigured in daily struggles, radically democratic practice, anarchist education, and an explicit counterpower project. Syndicalism promotes global solidarity, not national competitiveness; Global Wage minimum wages and rights, not protectionism; and struggle, not corporatist pacting.

Many such unions have existed, embedded in larger popular movements, central in community and political struggles, revolutionary propaganda and revolutionary risings.

## Record: struggle, justice

THE MOVEMENT WAS NOT MARXISM'S POOR COUSIN.

Into the 1920s, Benedict Anderson says, anarchism and syndicalism were 'the main vehicle of global opposition to industrial capitalism, autocracy, latifundism, and imperialism'.<sup>15</sup>

Anarchists/syndicalists have led the main unions in many countries, with powerful union minorities elsewhere, including Egypt, Mozambique and South Africa (where key activists included Bernard Sigamoney, T.W. Thibedi and S.P. Bunting).

They played an important role in national liberation struggles into the 1950s, led many insurrectionary risings, and three anarchist revolutions: Ukraine (1917–1921), Shinmin, Manchuria (1929–1931) and Spain (1936–1939).

Strong into the 1950s, they entered dark decades, partly due to severe repression by states, right and 'left'. Even then, they remained important in unions, armed struggles and undergrounds in Asia, Latin America and Europe into the 1980s.

Now, with the 1990s resurgence, anarchists are the main pole of attraction for many 'anti-globalisation' militants.<sup>16</sup> There is a global spread of anarchist values: bottom-up organising and direct action outside the official political

5 Neocosmos, M.. 1996. 'From People's Politics to State Politics: aspects of national liberation in South Africa, 1984–1994', *Politeia* 15(3): 73–119.

6 *Ibid.*, p. 77.

7 *Ibid.*, p. 114.

8 Van der Walt, L., and M. Schmidt. 2009. *Black Flame*, Place of publication: AK Press), chp. 3.

9 Marx, K. and F. Engels, [1848] 1954. *The Communist Manifesto*, Place of publication: Henry Regnery, pp. 40, 55–56, 58–78.

10 Bakunin, 'Letter to *La Liberté*', *Bakunin*, p. 284; P. Kropotkin, [1912] 1970, 'Modern Science and Anarchism', in *Kropotkin's Revolutionary Pamphlets*, Place of publication: Dover) pp. 170, 186.

11 See Van der Walt, L. 2011. 'Counterpower, Participatory Democracy, Revolutionary Defence: debating *Black Flame*, revolutionary anarchism and historical Marxism', *International Socialism* 130, pp. 191–206.

12 Lenin, V. I. [1920] 1962, 'The Trade Unions, the Present Situation and

Trotsky's Mistakes', in *Collected Works*, Place of publication: Progress Publishers), Volume 27, p. 21 [my emphasis].

13 Brinton, M. 1970. *The Bolsheviks and Workers Control, 1917–1921*, Place of publication: Solidarity, p. 61.

14 Marot, J.E. 2006. 'Trotsky, the Left Opposition and the Rise of Stalinism' in *Historical Materialism* 14(3): 175–206.

15 Anderson, B. 2006. *Under Three Flags: anarchism and the anti-colonial imagination*, Place of publication: Verso, pp. 2, 54.

16 Epstein, B. 2001. 'Anarchism and the Anti-Globalisation Movement', *Monthly Review* 53(4): 1–14.



system.<sup>17</sup> Anarchists played a key role in events like the 1999 Battle of Seattle, the 2008/9 Greek uprising, the 2010 Spanish general strike, and today's North African revolts. In Spain, the anarcho-syndicalist General Confederation of Workers (CGT) represents nearly two million workers.<sup>18</sup>

## Unfinished national liberation

AND LOCALLY? SOUTH AFRICA'S TRANSITION WAS A massive victory against national oppression, won from below. The most 'imperfect republic' is a 'thousand times better', said Bakunin, than the most 'enlightened monarchy'.<sup>19</sup>

It is nonsensical to speak of the current situation as 'white supremacy'. There have been huge gains in legal and social rights; many routine apartheid practices are illegal, while affirmative action etc. is mandatory; there has been the rapid expansion of the African ruling class segment, centred on the state.

Yet the national liberation struggle was left incomplete.

Said Bakunin: an 'exclusively political revolution' that did not 'aim at the immediate and real political and economic emancipation of the people' will end 'a false revolution', controlled by elites.<sup>20</sup>

The country has dangerous levels of racial and national divisions. The ruling class itself is split along African/white lines, corresponding to the state manager/private capitalist division.

The majority of the working class historically suffered capitalist exploitation and national oppression. The ruling class can hardly abolish the former. It can end the legacy of national oppression for the African ruling class, not the working class; a redistribution of incomes and power cannot be resolved in the context of a crisis-ridden semi-industrial economy.

The working class majority's national liberation struggle needs a class-based, African-centred, yet multi-national, movement of counterpower and counterculture. This movement's fight includes an end to the racialised division of labour, wealth and power, and to the racialised state, and a break with colonial culture and attitudes, as part of the anarchist project.

This cannot be waged through the ANC, a ruling class party that fosters racism and anti-immigrant sentiment, that breaks township risings while its leading cadre enriches themselves.

## Red and black

IT IS INCREASINGLY ACCEPTED THAT SOCIALISM requires participatory democracy. Anarchism/syndicalism has historically been the core repository of these ideals; mistakes have been made, but they have no history of statist tyranny or betrayal. That is why this praxis is being rebuilt by people across the world today.

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17 Goaman, K. 2004. 'The Anarchist Travelling Circus', in J. Purkis, and J. Bowen (eds), *Changing Anarchism*, Place of publication: Manchester UP, pp. 173-74.

18 In terms of the 2004 union election process: 'Spain: CGT Is Now the Third Biggest Union', *Alternative Libertaire*, November 2004.

19 Bakunin, 'The International and Karl Marx', *Bakunin*, p. 318.

20 Bakunin, 'Federalism, Socialism, Anti-Theologism', *Bakunin*, p. 99.

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# Marxism in power in Africa: the rise and fall

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By Daryl Glaser

Marxism-Leninism as a movement and form of regime in Africa attained the height of its powers – certainly of its access to state power – between the mid-1970s and the mid-1980s. Its 'moment' followed in the wake of an earlier failed experiment in 'African socialism' that lasted from the late 1950s through to, roughly, the early 1970s. The subsequent 'Afro-Marxist' regimes began abandoning their socialist experiments in the mid-1980s, a retreat formalised at the beginning of the 1990s. Marxism qua *movement* has also been in general decline since then except, arguably, in South Africa, which never went through the harrowing experience of actually living under a Marxist-Leninist or kindred authoritarian left-nationalist regime.

Unlike African socialism, which promised to recover an ostensibly communalistic precolonial African past and experimented with new forms of mass party, the Afro-Marxists never laid claim to originality. Most saw Marxism-Leninism as a ready-made formula that could be applied to African conditions, suitably filtered through the experiences of Marxist regimes that had previously come to power in peasant majority societies like their own rather than in the advanced capitalist countries that Marxists classically saw as leading the world socialist revolution. There were, however, a few original African contributions. Madagascar's Marxists were innovative in their institutionalisation of multiparty democracy amongst socialist parties; the Somali Marxists idiosyncratically synthesised Marxism and Islam; the anti-Mengistu Marxists in Ethiopia offered unusually explicit (in African terms) recognition of the right of ethnonational groups to self-determination. Franz Fanon, who rode the African-socialist rather than the later Afro-Marxist wave, is admired for his theories of psychological liberation and diagnosis of postcolonial betrayal by nationalist leaders. Amilcar Cabral of Guinea-Bissau had some interesting things to say about the role of culture and 'returning to the source' in anticolonial resistance. Marxist intellectuals writing in or about Africa generally played a notable role in theorising the impact of capitalism in Africa, the character of African revolutions and the limitations of post-independence African states as vehicles of progressive transformation.

The Marxist-Leninists came to power by two methods. Some, like those in Benin, Congo-Brazzaville, Somalia, Ethiopia and Burkina Faso, attained power in military coups led by radical officers against independent African states. A second set, principally in the Portuguese colonies of Mozambique, Angola and Guinea-Bissau, won power in protracted guerrilla wars led by national liberation movements. Some originally Marxist-inspired movements led guerrilla wars against independent African states, but by the time they secured power – in Uganda, Ethiopia, Eritrea, recently South Sudan – socialism was off the agenda. The Marxist-Leninist regimes during their heyday sought to build modernising people's democracies rooted



in alliances of peasant majorities, small working classes and progressive middle-class elements. In power they sought to convert left-wing military movements and broad-based liberation movements into Marxist-Leninist 'proletarian' vanguard parties whose task it was to guide societies through people's democracy and ultimately towards socialism. They were often in practice anchored in cross-class urban milieus centred on capital cities.

Despite claims by some romantics that the guerrilla movements were more organically rooted in the populace, less militaristic and more dedicatedly socialist than the coup-initiated Marxist-Leninist regimes, there was very little to separate their political systems and economic programmes in practice. Virtually all established one-party political monopolies across state and society nationalised domestic enterprises and sought to build rudimentary welfare states. Both types of Marxist-Leninist regime tended to be militaristic. And guerrilla regimes capitulated as readily to global capitalism as did coup-initiated ones.

Why did Africa's Marxist regimes fail, like their African-socialist predecessors? And what can be learnt by the democratic left from their failures? It is possible to identify a range of factors that subverted what started out as a hopeful experiment.

Some of these fit the classic 'scarcity plus encirclement' scenario often invoked to explain the difficulties faced by leftist governments. Socialist governments in Africa inherited undeveloped agrarian economies in which growth had centred on a few enclaves. Colonial education systems generated few skilled people, their number further depleted when settlers and expatriates fled Guinea-Conakry, Mozambique and Angola after independence. The Derg inherited a long history of land degradation in the Ethiopian highlands – a factor at least contributory to the devastating famine of 1983–6 in which a million people died. The MPLA and FRELIMO faced extremely costly, externally backed armed insurgencies that wrecked promising social programmes. Cold War superpowers fought proxy wars in Angola and the Horn of Africa while apartheid South Africa actively destabilised much of southern Africa. Though commentators from the late 1980s began properly to underline the extent to which socialist governments brought difficulties upon themselves, inherited underdevelopment and military pressure were enough on their own to render economic reconstruction formidably difficult.

Endogenous failings were nevertheless many. One was a radical impatience that led African socialists and Marxists to require too much too soon of states that were hampered by insufficient pools of skilled personnel and other resources. Overconfident socialist rulers did not hesitate to vest in the hands of flimsy states the task of centrally planning entire economies. They also overestimated the capacity of their societies to industrialise rapidly from a low base in a context of capital and skill shortages and limited economies of scale. The fallout of this over-ambition included bureaucratic paralysis, loss-making urban and rural enterprises and, in several cases, high levels of debt. Given what we know now about the necessity for some sort of market under feasible socialism, it would have been more prudent for these governments to provide space for

private enterprise while developing the state's capacity to collect revenue, supply social benefits, redistribute wealth and engage in overall economic steering. And given the costs and uncertainty attending large-scale, capital intensive projects, it would have been more sensible not to take on external debt to finance them. Rapid debt accumulation was the undoing of socialism in Benin and Madagascar.

In keeping with their radical ambition, socialist governments overestimated the ripeness of the countryside for fast-track socialism or indeed rapid modernisation. Socialist incumbents tried, understandably, to rearrange rural life to facilitate welfare provision, higher productivity, egalitarian land distribution and social cooperation – and in Ethiopia, in the mid-1980s, simply to avoid mass starvation. The methods they chose to achieve these objectives were generally resented by rural populations. It is not that the peasants were pro-capitalist: they did not, for the most part, want a free market in land and mostly welcomed redistribution of land from state holdings and big land-owners. At the same time, peasants mostly did not wish to work on cooperatives or collective farms or, in Ethiopia, to be relocated to supposedly more fertile land hundreds of miles away. Faced with peasant reluctance to join such arrangements, Marxist governments, like some of their African-socialist predecessors, turned to force. Peasant agriculture suffered anyway from a range of factors that were not fully under state control, from drought and war to shortages of capacity, but the use of coercion against peasants must be counted as a deliberate and reckless forfeiture of goodwill. Many peasants also resented the way urban-based leaders disparaged their animist beliefs and sidelined traditional leaders, often coercively. If there is a clear message from countries like Mozambique, but also, say, Afghanistan under the Soviets, it is that urban elites need to treat the countryside and its ways with care, employing methods of consultation and persuasion wherever possible rather than force in realising modern values. Alienation of peasants directly fuelled armed opposition in Mozambique, Angola and Ethiopia and passive non-cooperation in other cases.

It is generally striking how ready Marxist regimes were, on first coming to power, gratuitously to alienate whole swathes of the societies they intended to govern. The purification-by-purge of vanguard parties isolated party elites from potential camp followers. For a decade, Mozambique's ruling Frelimo and (to a lesser degree) Angola's ruling MPLA harassed already suspicious Christian churches, guaranteeing their outright hostility. While foreign capital was courted, domestic capital seemed often to face an undifferentiating animus. Ethnic identity was commonly demeaned, for example by denial of indigenous language rights, while ethnic out-groups were under-represented in state bodies. Eritrean demands for independence were ignored by a Derg determined to transform the Ethiopian empire into an effectively unitary state with only limited concessions to national groups. Clearly, socialist governments were convinced that, in imposing modernisation, history was on their side; they also faced some determined class and ideological enemies.



When things went wrong, they needed scapegoats. But whatever the explanation, the politics was desperately inept.

Most problematic of all was the theory and practice of democracy. Socialist movements and regimes considered popular participation necessary to the realisation of democratic values and to the mobilisation of popular energies for development tasks. Their democratic idealism impressed quite a few observers, as did the neighbourhood committees, workplace councils, peasant associations and sectoral mass organisations established in liberated zones and by newly established socialist governments. Some observers thought that this participatory democracy more than compensated for the absence of representative-democratic institutions. Yet it is clear, now, that this democracy was a sham. In the playing out of the dialectic between leadership and mass action referred to by Saul and others (Saul 1990: 55), a commandist concept of leadership seemed relatively quickly to win out once socialists were in power. The result was a downgrading of participatory democracy. In many cases, its demotion was prompted by the fact that factional opponents of the government or military – in Congo, Benin, Angola and Ethiopia – had acquired bases in the participatory organs. In other, less dramatic cases, participatory organs, like the Grupos Dinamizadores in Mozambique and workers' self-management bodies in Algeria, Angola and Mozambique, were sacrificed to governments' search for discipline and centralised coordination.

More important, those organs were part of a misconceived model of democracy in the first place. When African-socialist and Marxist regimes spoke of participation they meant mobilisation of the population to realise collective ends defined by the ruling party. To be sure, this might require popular input through discussion and criticism, and such input might influence the choice between regime-vetted candidates, the technical details of policies and even the clauses of constitutions. But participators could not challenge the ruling party or its ideological direction. For the regime, participatory bodies served primarily as venues to explain already decided policies; alternatively, as mechanisms for co-opting dissent and subjecting the population to surveillance. The so-called 'mass organisations' of youth, workers, women and others were designed for their part as transmission belts between the regime and population. With a few exceptions, no autonomous associational realm was allowed to develop outside them. Nor were there other, compensating checks on the concentration of power. Elected national representative assemblies served as rubber stamps. Leninist democratic centralism eviscerated internal party democracy. Ruling parties were anyway invariably subordinated to powerful presidencies or (in Congo and Somalia) to military cabals.

A deeper democratic philosophy informed the operation of the participatory bodies. The socialist regimes put in place a democracy that was teleological rather than representative. They sought a state structured around the singular goal of building socialism rather than one enabling citizens to choose among diverse collective projects. If the system 'represented' anyone it was not actual but an ideal of higher people: that is, the people as they would think

and act if they were free of false consciousness and able to apprehend their real interests or the real good of society. In this sense, Africa's socialist regimes made a Rousseauian distinction between the will of all and the general will, with the party embodying the latter through its scientific grasp and farsightedness. During the transition to socialism and communism, strictly speaking, the regime would represent the higher will only of the proletariat and its class allies – though they in turn served as forebears of a still-to-come classless people.

In the early 1990s the once-socialist governments discarded the teleological democratic model in favour of a more open-ended representative one. Citizens can now, at least in principle, choose amongst competing collective projects embodied in rival programmes and parties. This means governing only with the revocable consent of actual, empirical peoples. Socialists thus have to persuade electorates that they offer innovative alternatives to the venal neoliberalism that has replaced dysfunctional socialism. In office they will have to find – this time within the framework of formal multiparty democracy (the only defensible framework there is), and within the manoeuvring room allowed by an unequal global economic order – new ways to limit social inequality, deepen democracy and generate sustainable economic growth. In developing their political and economic programmes they will certainly have to take on board the many negative lessons of Africa's experience with socialism and Marxism.

*This is an abridged and slightly revised version of 'African Marxism's Moment', originally published in Daryl Glaser and David Walker (eds). 2007. Twentieth-Century Marxism: A Global Introduction, London: Routledge.*

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## The Struggle – for Socialism – Continues

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John S. Saul

*This article seeks to identify ways in which those engaged in socialist practice in South Africa might hope to more clearly navigate their way forward. It asks, in short, what is to be done – and how?*

### I. Beyond the "working class": expanding the constituency

MARX HAD GOOD REASON TO EMPHASIZE THE ROLE OF the working class in looking toward potentially revolutionary contradictions within an emerging capitalist mode of production: members of the working class were the most exploited (at least in the technical sense in which he used the word) and were also brought together



as a potentially self-conscious class by the very capitalist dynamic of concentration and centralization that defined its exploitation. It is not surprising that this formulation has served as the staple of left understanding and action since the nineteenth century.

Of course, within that working class, there are also fissures and hierarchies and divisions (along lines of race, ethnicity, and gender) that impede its self-consciousness and its praxis. As Leo Panitch stated in a recent issue of *The Socialist Register*, “To speak of strategy for labour needs some justification today... Class, we have been reminded so often, is not everything.” Still, he feels moved to add immediately, “But nor is class nothing.” Fair enough, yet I sense that Marxists must go even further in thinking “outside the box” of rigid class identities, especially in analyzing the realities of the Global South. For there are, indeed, other things out there that are “not nothing” and they are entirely germane to revolutionary aspirations.

For starters, our sense of class contradictions – and of class belonging – has to be markedly expanded, especially with respect to the Global South. For there, in societies profoundly altered by the impact of capitalism, the roster of those exploited (and potentially available for class-based action) is far wider than narrow “classist” categories suggest. Here I have found the formulation of Ken Post and Phil Wright (in their *Socialism and Underdevelopment* [1989]) to be particularly instructive:

The working out of capitalism in parts of the periphery prepares not only the minority working class but peasants and other working people, women, youth and minorities for a socialist solution, even though the political manifestation of this may not initially take the form of a socialist movement. In the case of those who are *not* wage labourers... capitalism has still so permeated the social relations which determine their existences, even though it may not have followed the western European pattern of “freeing” their labour power, that to be liberated from it is their only salvation. The objective need for socialism of these elements can be no less than that of the worker imprisoned in the factory and disciplined by the whip of unemployment. The price [of capitalism] is paid in even the most ‘successful’ of the underdeveloped countries, and others additionally experience mass destitution. Finding another path has...become a desperate necessity if the alternative of continuing, if not increasing, barbarism is to be escaped.

We must, quite simply, think outside the frame of the most conventional of Marxisms and look for systemic contradictions where we can find them. And then, much more imaginatively than ever before, seek – in terms of clear principle and by means of compromise and assiduous political work - to develop effectively counter-hegemonic projects arising from such contradictions, projects that represent the “highest common factor” of their social location and that defy, collectively, the rule of capital.

But we cannot stop at merely a more expanded class definition of agency. We must make other tensions in society a positive force in our struggle for liberation.

As my old teacher and friend Ralph Miliband noted, capitalism’s grossly uneven development around the world has produced “extremely fertile terrain” for the kind of “pathological deformations” that now scar the global landscape – like predatory authoritarianisms and “demagogues and charlatans peddling their poisonous wares...of ethnic and religious exclusion and hatred.” To which I merely would add that it is easy for people to turn for social meaning to more ready-to-hand identities, often with fundamentalist fervour, when they lose confidence in socialist and other humanely modern projects. And yet, despite this, progressives committed to class struggle can and should continue to view such identities as contingent in their socio-political implications and as not being, in many cases, in contradiction with socialist purposes. And we should, when possible, invite the bearers of such identities – alongside feminists, environmentalists, anti-racists, activists around issues of sexual orientation and the like – to join us within a broader community-in-the-making and within a universalizing democratic project of global, anti-capitalist transformation.

In fact, as Miliband continues,

... everywhere there are common goals and aspirations — for democratic forms where they are denied and for more democratic forms where these are no more than a screen for oligarchic rule; for the achievement of a social order in which improvements in the condition of the most deprived – often a majority of the population – is the prime concern of governments... In all countries, there are people, in numbers large and small, who are moved by the vision of a new social order in which democracy, egalitarianism and cooperation – the essential values of socialism – would be prevailing principles of social organization. It is in the growth of their numbers and in the success of their struggles that lies the best hope for humankind.

But the corollary of this position is equally compelling: we on the left had better learn to operate in our complex world of diverse faiths, races and ethnic belongings, and to link such “belongings” to our cause of class liberation. Otherwise, they will return to haunt us – as divisive “identifiers” that can, at their worst, turn dangerous to humane purpose. So, too, must gender-defined and environmental projects be ever more assertively articulated as being, not reducible to, but coequal with and enlarged by, class considerations.

In short, one of our key goals must be to define “agency” not merely in terms of some rather abstractly defined “working class interest.” For that apparently simple slogan has presented far too open an invitation to arrogance and high-handedness (in the interest of the “working class”) and to essentialist vanguards of all kinds, ever quick to assert just what “the class” must and should do. Instead we need to embrace the range of shades of identity within and beyond strict class boundaries that can be won to revolutionary praxis. Not that tensions between diverse goals and purposes will then simply disappear, of course. Yet seeking to realize such an enlarged project of “class struggle” also entails much more democratic



methods of negotiation of both the means and the ends of revolutionary work than has characterized most past socialist undertakings.

## II. Globalization and a socialism of "expanded reproduction"

IT WOULD BE NAÏVE TO THINK THAT THE INCREASED globalization of the capitalist economy can somehow be ignored by advocates of a socialist alternative. Clearly, the "free" global market is central to efforts by global capital to impose its will, by force and/or by the seduction of Southern elites. And certainly the global market-place has its seductions, as a smorgasbord of sparkling goods on offer and as an apparent source of quick and relatively easy profits.

How, then, can the left balance – on some kind of national developmental balance-sheet – costs and benefits? And how can new and essential kinds of democratic control over such linkages be factored in? For only some such control can make countries of the Global South the beneficiaries rather than the victims of globalization. Without this, there is no intrinsic "magic of the market," no equal exchange between rich and poor. With the market left unchecked, there is only the upward redistribution of resources from poor to rich.

Small wonder that Samir Amin can point a way forward only through an ever more radical decolonization of central capitalist control and by calling for the actual "delinking" of the economies of the Global South from the Empire of Capital. For Amin, delinking is defined as "the submission of external relations [to internal requirements], the opposite of the internal adjustment of the peripheries to the demands of the polarizing worldwide expansion of capital" and it is seen as being "the only realistic alternative [since] reform of the [present] world system is utopian." For "history shows us that it is impossible to 'catch up' within the framework of world capitalism"; in fact, "only a very long transition" (with a self-conscious choice for delinking from the world of capitalist globalization as an essential first step) beyond the present global polarization will suffice.

Yet, as Amin readily admits, there is no realistic way of avoiding some involvement in the broader market (as opportunity, though not, he argues, as seduction). What must occur, however, is the substitution of the present political economy of recolonization with an alternative whose goal is "delinking." What would this programme of radical delinking from the current cancerous global capitalist system look like? The answer to this question can only be found in a new project of genuine socialist planning, on a national or regional scale, that seeks to destroy the crippling (il)logic of present "market limitations" on development.

This, in turn, suggests the need for a programme that embodies "the progressive convergence of the demand structure of the community and the needs of the population" (following the formulations of Clive Thomas) — in other words, the very reverse of the market fundamentalist's global orthodoxy. What is needed is a "socialism of expanded reproduction" - that avoids falling into the Stalinist trap of "violently repressing mass

consumption" in the name of the supposed requirements of accumulation. For, far from accumulation and mass consumption being warring opposites, in this alternative, accumulation could be driven forward precisely by finding outlets for production that meet the growing needs of the mass of the population!

An effective industrialization strategy would thus base its "expanded reproduction" on ever increasing exchanges between city and country, between industry and agriculture, with food and raw materials moving to the cities and with consumer goods and producer goods moving to the countryside. Collective saving geared toward investment could then be drawn from an expanding economic pool. Note that such a socialism of expanded reproduction makes the betterment of the people's lot a short-term rather than a long-term project, and thus promises a much sounder basis for an effective alliance of workers, peasants and others. As such it also promises a sounder basis for a democratic road to revolutionary socialism.

It is important to note that this formulation is not intended to underemphasize the potential importance of South-South relations or of linkages (foreshadowed in the World Social Forum) that seek to redefine the workings of the global economy. Nor is it a call for the destruction, within the national economy, of any and all market relations, dangerous though these undoubtedly can be in terms of the possible generation of class differentiation. For if democratic and needs-focused planning is maintained, thereby ensuring that the centre of gravity of the economy is egalitarian, collectively-premised, and popularly-centred, it can more than counter-balance the costs of any judicious deployment of the market. And in so doing, it can avoid the risk of unduly overburdening public enterprise and the planning mechanism. Yet a self-consciousness about societal transition away from market power and entrepreneurial class interest is obviously crucial. Quite simply, the bourgeoisie, foreign or domestic, plays no role that could justify its long-run claim for inordinate wealth or superordinate power.

## III. Democratizing the struggle: revolution by "structural reform" and popular empowerment

ONE FINAL TERM WE NEED TO INTERROGATE IS THE WORD "revolution" itself. It is a tempting word since we know just how big and aggressive is the capitalist enemy that must be overcome. But perhaps, despite this, it's just a bit too tempting – and somewhat too romantic – a notion. For what we have seen so far suggests that the "socialist revolution" will not spring easily from some sudden social upheaval nor be consolidated quickly or well, even under the leadership of some unusually wise vanguard.

In rethinking along such lines, particularly about southern Africa but also more broadly, I've been drawn, over the years, to the writing on "structural reform" of such authors as André Gorz and Boris Kagarlitsky. Gorz makes a key distinction right from the outset between a "genuinely socialist policy of reforms on the one hand [and] reformism of a neo-capitalist or 'social-democratic' type" on the other. He writes, "If immediate socialism is not possible, neither





is the achievement of reforms directly destructive of capitalism. [Yet] those who reject all lesser reforms on the grounds that they are merely reformist are in fact rejecting the whole possibility of a transitional strategy and of a process of transition to socialism.”

But what distinguishes “structural reform” from “mere reformism”? There are two chief attributes of such “reform.” One lies in the insistence that any reform, to be structural, must not be comfortably self-contained (a mere “improvement”) but must, instead, self-consciously involve other “necessary” reforms that flow from it as part of an emerging project of structural transformation in a coherently left-ward direction. Secondly, a structural reform cannot come from on high: instead it must root itself in popular initiatives in such a way as to foster further empowerment. It must lead to growing self-consciousness and organizational capacity for the vast mass of the population who thus strengthen themselves for further struggles, further victories. As Gorz argues in his *Socialism and Revolution* [1973], “The emancipation of the working class [and its allies] can become a total objective only if in the course of the struggle they have learned something about self-management, initiative and collective decision – in a word, if they have had a foretaste of what emancipation means.”

My own initial proposal of this approach to transformative/revolutionary/socialist endeavour (presented some years ago in *New Left Review*, and expanded in South Africa’s journal *Transformation* [#20]) elicited both favourable response and sharp critique. Alex Callinicos in a subsequent issue of *NLR* (#195) called my advocacy of “structural reform” “a detour on, rather than an abandonment of, the road to revolution” - but representing, nonetheless, a serious mistake on my part. And yet my claim was actually even bolder than Callinicos suggests, and I stand by it.

Quite specifically, I argued, there is good reason to insist that a strategy of structural reforms *not* be seen as being, some mere “detour” but rather, under most circumstances, as being the very essence of revolution itself. A strategy of structural reforms, while not suggesting immediate transformation of existing capitalist circumstances, still permits a definition of sites and modes of real struggle, and of tactics and strategies that can open up the possibility of moving towards just such a transformation. Moreover, structural reform entails focusing on substantive issues (rather than vague revolutionary nostrums) in terms of which leaderships can most effectively be held to democratic account by their constituencies. These constituencies can thus become increasingly conscious of their very “classness” – not as some theoretical given, but as the practical content of their own lives and public activities.

Of course, in the real world there are many temptations to abandon reasoned strategy in favour of militant rhetoric, and to abandon processes of negotiation among comrades in favour of vanguardist self-righteousness. The slow, negotiated accretion of a culture of socialist “common-sense” within which conflicting claims on the left can be democratically debated and resolved is key. We need to work towards the establishment of an emerging socialist

consensus, not at the expense of politics and difference, but as the ground for their fullest expression and debate -- real debate and struggle, in short, but on the grounds of shared socialist and democratic premises, not capitalist and liberal ones.

Callinicos, for his part, flags many dangers in such an approach. Certainly, one mustn’t be naïve: the side of resistance to revolutionary change – the dominant class, its military and its external backers – will often play pretty violent hard-ball indeed. Then the escalation of confrontation may sometimes, of necessity, pass beyond the boundaries of anything like “structural reform,” with long-term costs to socialist and democratic outcomes that can be very severe. After all, the cost, human and political, of such escalation is one of the main reasons many of us continue to fight so hard against the imperatives of class and profit that have too often put our Western governments on the wrong side of struggles for freedom in the Global South.

Yet to simultaneously caricature the claims (and virtues) of structural reform and of the creative tensions that it can engender, seems to mean, by definition, no opposing leaders, no conflicting political organizations or popular initiatives, no differences of opinion about strategy and tactics – in effect no politics - within the broader movement seeking a transition to socialism. Indeed, when a thinker like Callinicos comes up against the complexities that real politics can reveal, he tends to back away and merely invoke that magic talisman, “mass struggle,” to outrank competing arguments. Indeed, if we have learned nothing else from the history of “socialism,” it is that substituting the pure flame of “revolutionism” for the hard calculation and subtle politics of structural reform is a recipe for disaster.

As Kagarlitsky concludes (in his *The Dialectic of Change* [1998]), Marx himself “was convinced that reforms prepare not only for revolution but also for socialism. In other words, for Marx the value of reforms was not in that they undermined the old system – sometimes they even strengthen it – but in their creation of elements of the new system within the framework of the old society. This theme in Marx’s theory has been completely ignored by revolutionaries and reformist social democracy alike.” But such a silence cannot be allowed to continue if success in a long, wearing struggle for socialism is to become a real possibility.

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