
the relative value-form
of a commodity is mediated
namely through its relationship
another commodity
use-value becomes the form of manifestation,
e phenomenal form form of its opposite, value
It would be possible to write quite a hist
inventions made since 1830, for the sole
supplying capital with weapons against t
of the working class
on the one hand it presents itself historically as
progress and as a necessary phase in the economic
development of society, on the other hand it is a
refined and civilized method of exploitation
Reading
Capital
Politically
as the number of co-op
sistance to the domination of capital
the material conditions to blow this foundation sky-hig
The simplest commodity-form contains the whole
secret of the money-form and with it, in embryo,
of all the bourgeois forms of the product of labour
Harry Cleaver
dissembled between the capitalist class a
working class

Reading *Capital* Politically

Harry Cleaver



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To Ondine and Alicia

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Preface

New prefaces to old works are problematical. What to say about something you wrote a quarter of a century ago? Instead of writing a preface, it's tempting to simply rewrite the book in ways that would bring it up to date with your current ideas and formulations. However, books, as some have pointed out, take on a life of their own after they've been published and the generous leave them unmolested, not tinkered with, but allowed to follow their own course. About all you can do is introduce them, tell a bit of their story and then leave them to the mercy of their readers. This makes sense to me. So here I tell something of the genesis of this book, about how it came to be, and then something of the subsequent implications of its ideas for my own work since.[1]

Some books are intentionally crafted. Conceived and written as part of a political project with a particular purpose, an objective, they are designed from the start as a contribution. The first volume of Karl Marx's *Capital* is such a book. He conceived and wrote *Capital* as one step in a larger project of laying out his analysis of the nature of capitalism. That laying out was, in turn, part of an even larger project of contributing to the overthrow and transcendence of capitalism. His writing was part of his contribution to the ongoing struggles of workers against their exploitation and alienation and for the crafting of better, alternative forms of social life.

Other books are accidental by-products. Marx's *Grundrisse* is such a book. Originally it was merely a series of notebooks written during the onset of the crisis of 1857 in a urgent attempt to gather his thoughts, to pull together his theoretical work and his studies of the evolution of the class struggle. The notebooks were never meant for publication; they were merely the formulations generated as he worked out his

1 In as much as this preface tells the story of this book by resituating it within a political and intellectual trajectory, the footnotes provide references to various relevant publications along the way.

ideas. They were a moment of synthesis in years of work that would produce other manuscripts and eventually *Capital* in the 1860s. The notebooks only became a 'book' years after Marx's death when scholars recognized their coherency and decided to publish them.

The core of this book, *Reading Capital Politically*, had a genesis that makes it much more like the *Grundrisse* than *Capital*, much more an accidental by-product than an intentional product crafted as a conceptualized intervention in political life. Like the *Grundrisse* it originated as a set of notes written as part of a particular moment of intellectual work. In this case the project was an exploration of Marx's writings on the labour theory of value to discover an interpretation which made sense to me — because all of those which had been handed down by earlier Marxist scholars had left me dissatisfied.

The genesis of the book

The motivation for this exploration lay partly in the changing terrain of class struggle in the early and mid 1970s and partly in a growing dissatisfaction with my understanding of Marxism in those years. I had begun studying Marx, and the Marxist tradition, in reaction to the inability of mainstream economics to usefully interpret either the war against Vietnam or the social engineering that made up a considerable component of the 'nation building' that the United States was undertaking in Southeast Asia to expand its influence in the 1950s and 1960s.

As part of the anti-war movement, in the years that I was a graduate student at Stanford (1967–1971), I investigated the role of the university within the complexity of the whole US counterinsurgency effort. That investigation led me, along with a number of others to form a study group to focus on the introduction of new high-yielding rice to the area. That introduction was being done with the purpose of increasing food production in order to undercut peasant discontent and support for revolution against the neocolonialism of the time. In order to grasp theoretically this political use of technology to transform rural Asian society I was led to Marx and to Marxist analyses of the transformation of precapitalist modes of production by capitalism through processes of more or less primitive accumulation.[2] Unfortunately, the more I studied the history, the more one-sided and narrow this analysis seemed to me. While it highlighted and made some sense of what US policy makers were doing, it virtually ignored the self-activity of the peasants in Southeast Asia against whose struggles the new technologies and 'nation/elite building' were aimed.

During this same period of the early 1970s the cutting edge of capitalist strategy on a world level was also shifting. Policy makers were replacing Keynesian growth management with a more repressive use of money: cut backs in social spending, flexible exchange rates, financial deregulation and eventually severely tight monetary

2 A first synthesis of that research on the introduction of high-yielding grain varieties was published as Harry Cleaver, 'The Contradictions of the Green Revolution', *American Economic Review*, May 1972 and *Monthly Review*, June 1972. In that article the reader will find little hint of the theoretical perspective of this book, other than a preoccupation with class struggle. The same was true of my dissertation on the subject, *The Origins of the Green Revolution*, that was even more explicitly framed within the context of 'mode of production' analysis.

policies and an international debt crisis. Studying this shift, I saw that just as the introduction of new agricultural technology in the Third World had been a reaction against peasant struggle, so too was the shift from Keynesianism to monetarism a reaction against popular struggle, in this case the international cycle of struggle that swept the world in the late 1960s and early 1970s, a cycle of which Vietnam was only one moment. [3]

What these two sets of observations forced me to recognize was that the kinds of interpretations of Marx that I had been using involved an overly one-sided focus on the dynamics of capitalist exploitation. Precisely because of this focus, the interpretations failed to grasp the initiative of those resisting and attacking capital and, by so failing, they could not even accurately understand the actions of capital itself — which always developed in an interplay with that resistance and those attacks. Taking this perception seriously meant for me nothing less than the need for a complete rethinking of Marxian theory to see if it could be understood in a way that was not one-sided and which grasped both sides of the social conflicts I had been studying and involved in.

By that time my work on Marx had led me to be certain about at least one thing: that the labour theory of value was the indispensable core of his theory. The fact that some had set aside that theory and still called their analysis 'Marxist' made no sense to me. Because his concepts of value were the fundamental conceptual tools and building blocks from the 1940s onward, any rethinking had to begin with those concepts. The usefulness of his theory as a coherent whole, it seemed to me, depended on whether I could find an interpretation of his value theory that helped me to understand and to find ways of intervening in the dynamics of struggle.

Therefore in the summer of 1975 I gathered together every scrap of Marx's writing on value theory that I could find (in what were then my two working languages: English and French) and began to pore over them. I analysed and dissected it. I compared earlier and later formulations. I compared drafts and final documents. I compared and contrasted the *1844 Manuscripts*, the *Grundrisse*, *Capital*, and many other fragments and notes, to see if I could come up with an interpretation in which the concepts and constructs of the theory expressed and provided the means to understand the two-sided dynamic of struggle in Vietnam that I had studied, of the civil rights and anti-War movements in which I had participated and, more generally, the conflicts of that period of history. If I could construct such an interpretation, I would use it. If I could not, I would relegate Marx's work to that shelf of great books from which we all draw, from time to time, a useful bit of insight and clarification.

The result of that work was a set of notes that I gradually reworked into a fairly comprehensive and, it seemed to me, meaningful interpretation of Marx's value theory. The knitting together of that interpretation took the form of a manuscript organized

3 This analysis was originally set out in the two published issues of *Zerowork* in 1975 and 1977. For more recent expositions see: Harry Cleaver, 'The Subversion of Money-as-Command in the Current Crisis' and the other articles in the collection: Werner Bonefeld and John Holloway, eds. *Global Capital, National State and the Politics of Money*; this collection also includes an article first published (in English) in *Zerowork* 2, Christian Marazzi's 'Money in the World Crisis: The New Basis of Capitalist Power'. The journal *Midnight Notes* has continued and added to this line of analysis.

around the first three sections of chapter one of volume one of *Capital* — in many ways Marx's most pedantic yet also most systematic exposition of the theory.[4] At least tentatively satisfied, I began to use the ideas that I had worked out within various areas of my research and political involvement.[5]

The manuscript itself was useful in my teaching, first at the New School for Social Research in New York and later, beginning in the fall of 1976, at the University of Texas. It provided my students with a textual exposition of the ideas that I was discussing in class. And there, on my desk and on those of my students, it might have remained indefinitely. (I have, unfortunately, the very bad habit of working out ideas, writing them up to my own satisfaction, and then not bothering to get them published.) However, it did not work out that way.

One of my graduate students had a friend working as an editor of the University of Texas Press and it occurred to her that the manuscript might be publishable. So, she showed it to her friend who subsequently asked me if the Press could, indeed, publish it. The editor's only requests were for me to clean up the text and draft an introduction which would situate the theory within the history of Marxism. The result was the long introduction that prefaces the manuscript itself.

In order to complete that introduction, however, I felt the need to deepen some research I had been doing since 1975 on the genesis of certain strains of Marxist theory that I felt were akin, in one way or another, to my own reinterpretation of value theory. While I was teaching at the New School I had collaborated in the production of the journal *Zerowork* as well as some pamphlets designed as political interventions into struggles around the New York City fiscal crisis in the years 1975–76. (Those were the years when the banks refused to roll over New York City debt and set off what was, in retrospect, a microcosm of the great international debt crisis of the 1980s. The imposition of austerity on the workers of New York through wage cutbacks of city workers, fare increases on the transit system, etc., presaged the more generalized imposition of austerity by the International Monetary Fund and the international banking system in the next decade.[6])

Others brought to the *Zerowork* project distillations of distinct but connected threads of ideas with which I had been previously unfamiliar. One was American, an evolution of ideas that had originated in the work of C.L.R. James and Raya Dunayevskaya, who had broken from Trotskyism in the late 1940s and gone on to establish their own spheres of influence in the 1950s and 1960s. Another, influenced as it turned out by the Americans, was Italian, a thread that had originated in the activities of 'workerist'

4 The fourth section of Chapter One, on fetishism, receives no separate treatment in the book because the methodology at work throughout undertakes, in part, the defetishization of Marx's own concepts through the process of discovering the moments of class struggle that they grasp.

5 One application was to the politics of public health technologies: see Harry Cleaver, 'Malaria, the Politics of Public Health and the International Crisis', *Review of Radical Political Economy*, Spring 1977. Another was to the rethinking of the issue of the introduction of high-yielding grain varieties within the class struggle. See: Harry Cleaver, 'Food, Famine and the International Crisis', *Zerowork* 2, 1977. Such case studies led to a more general formulation: Harry Cleaver, 'Technology as Political Weaponry', in Robert S. Anderson, Paul R. Brass, Edwin Levy and Barrie M. Morrison, eds. *Science, Politics and the Agricultural Revolution in Asia*.

6 See Donna Demac and Philip Mattera, 'Developing and Underdeveloping New York: The 'Fiscal Crisis' and the Imposition of Austerity', *Zerowork* 2, 1977 and Harry Cleaver, 'Close the IMF, Abolish Debt and End Development: A Class Analysis of the International Debt Crisis', *Capital & Class* (UK) 39, Winter 1989.

militants such as Danilo Montaldi, Raniero Panzieri and Romano Alquati, who had come from the Italian Socialist and Communist Parties to develop ideas central to the Italian New (or 'Extraparliamentary') Left. Their efforts, in turn, influenced those active in the 'political space of autonomia' such as Mario Tronti, Antonio Negri, Sergio Bologna, Bruno Cartosio, Ferruccio Gambino, Mariarosa Della Costa and others. Yet another, although also influenced by the Americans, was British, a thread that ran from the first generation of 'bottom-up' British Marxist historians such as E.P. Thompson and Christopher Hill through a second generation that includes Peter Linebaugh and the other authors of *Albion's Fatal Tree*. All of these threads interwove in different ways in the work of the various editors of *Zerowork*.

Trying to understand these threads and the lines of their influence on my collaborators in that journal led me to Europe in the summer of 1978. In a whole series of encounters that proved enormously informative, I began to piece together the political and intellectual history of the various ideas and politics.

In England I met with John Merrington and Ed Emery, two key figures in the circulation of Italian New Left ideas into England, and hence to the U.S. In John's Offord Road apartment I spent many hours in conversation about intellectual and political developments in Italy and their influence in England. I also spent several days reading through his handwritten translations of Italian texts, many of which had not been published at that time. With Ed Emery I discovered *Red Notes*, a series of publications that included translations from the Italian produced by John and him to influence the pattern of workers' struggles in England.

In France I met Yann Moulier, translator of Mario Tronti and later Toni Negri and activist in the development of 'autonomist' politics in Paris, especially, though not uniquely, around the struggles of immigrant workers. Yann at that time was collaborating in the production of a militant journal *Camarades*, would later publish *Babylone*, help edit *Futur Antérieur* and today is involved in the quarterly journal *Multitudes*.

In Italy I met historians Bruno Cartosio and Sergio Bologna in Milan who worked on the journal *Primo Maggio*. In conversations with them I added to my understanding of the struggles in Italy and, once again, spent hour after hour in Bruno's office reading — this time a variety of texts of C.L.R. James, Raya Dunayevskaya and their collaborators like George Rawick and Martin Glaberman that Bruno had gathered in his own studies of that American tradition. In Milan I also met with Toni Negri, a central figure in the development of the political space of 'autonomia' and gave him a copy of the manuscript whose introduction I was in the process of crafting. It was then that I learned of his own reinterpretation of Marx's theory in the *Grundrisse*, a reinterpretation which had just been presented to Louis Althusser's Spring 1978 seminar in Paris and would eventually be published as *Marx Beyond Marx*. When I eventually obtained his book, I discovered that there were certain parallels in our interpretations, along with many differences. In Padua I met with Ferruccio Gambino, another editor of *Primo Maggio*, and at that time another key figure in the international circulation of what I would later come to call 'autonomist' ideas and politics.

Along with all these discussions, and my efforts to reconstruct the threads of

ideas I had come to study, I also began to gather historical materials, key texts in which these ideas had been laid out and developed. It was clear that I would have to learn Italian, at least a reading comprehension, to come to grips with the very large numbers of books, journal articles and pamphlets generated in the tumultuous and creative world of the Italian New Left — most of which were untranslated and unknown in the English speaking world despite the valiant efforts of John Merrington and Ed Emery. A first synthetic reconstruction of the history of these ideas, based on these discussions and on the materials gathered, makes up a substantial portion of the latter half of the introduction to this book. The materials themselves make up the sizeable collection contained in The Texas Archives of Autonomist Marxism.[7]

The introduction, as you will see, was constructed in three parts. The first was a brief analysis of the surprising blossoming of interest in Marxism that occurred in the US in the late 1960s and early 1970s during the cycle of struggle which had thrown the post-war Keynesian era into crisis. That blossoming was responsible not only for the willingness of the University of Texas Press to publish such a manuscript as I had constructed, but also for my own job — which had been created in response to student demands to study Marx. The second was a gloss on the main lines of the Marxist tradition that included critiques of several then prominent strains that I found (and still consider) lacking, especially orthodox Marxist-Leninism (including the work of Althusser) and critical theory from the Frankfurt School to its more contemporary manifestations. The most basic critique, which had prompted my own reexploration of Marx's value theory, was the one-sidedness of most of these Marxist traditions with their focus on the mechanisms of capitalist exploitation and their inability to theorize working class self-activity. The third part consisted of a narrative of those threads of the Marxist tradition that I perceived to have overcome such one-sidedness, in one way or another, and which I perceived to have parallels with or direct influence on my own work. The core of that narrative drew on the work of reconstruction I had done of the American and Italian threads discussed above.

After the book

After the book was published in 1979, I continued my research on these intellectual and political traditions, gradually broadening my reading to include other threads that seemed more or less closely related. At first my preoccupation continued with ferreting out those writings that reflected a recognition and appreciation of the ability of workers to take the initiative in the class struggle. More recently I've come to focus on the positive content of such initiative and the ways people's imagination and creativity carry them beyond both capital and their status as workers.

Along the way I discovered and learned from the political writings of Rosa Luxemburg, of the Council Communists such as Anton Pannekoek and Paul Mattick and later of the Anarcho-communists like Emma Goldman and Peter Kropotkin.[8] That

7 An index to this collection is available on-line at url: http://www.eco.utexas.edu/faculty/Cleaver/txarchintro.html
8 On the similarities between the work of Kropotkin and that of 'autonomist Marxists', see Harry Cleaver, 'Kropotkin, Self-valorization and the Crisis of Marxism', *Anarchist Studies* (Lancaster, UK) 2, 1994.

the former were ideologically 'Marxist' and the latter were not, interested me less than their common perception and sympathy for the power of workers to act autonomously. Similarly, as I explored the early tradition of British 'bottom-up' Marxist history, I was less interested by their formal political connections (often with the very orthodox British Communist Party) and more with their success in rewriting history in ways which brought out the hitherto neglected autonomous activity of workers and peasants in the making and evolution of capitalist society. It was precisely this recurring theme in the work of diverse Marxist writers and militants that led me to coin the term 'autonomist' Marxism that I now use to refer to such awareness and emphasis.[9]

But even as this commonality became clear, I was also forced to recognize the amazing diversity of those I was regrouping under this label. Not only would some, e.g. Goldman and Kropotkin, certainly refuse the label 'Marxist', but there were also substantial differences among them about many key issues including crisis theory, the definition of the working class, attitudes toward work and the notion of the future in the present.

For example, among many writing in the first half of the 20th century, often a great deal of their 'economic' theory was inconsistent with their political appreciation of workers' autonomy. For example, although Rosa Luxemburg leavened her attachment to the Party with close attention to the direction of struggle set by the workers themselves, when she elaborated her theories of capitalist crisis and imperialism that self-activity faded completely from view. In the place of a theory embodying the dynamics of class struggle she substituted an interpretation of Marx's schemes of expanded reproduction which turned them into a two-sector growth model that would collapse on its own quite independently of the struggles of workers.[10]

A similar inconsistency marked the work of Paul Mattick, probably the best known Council Communist of the post-World War II period. On the one hand, he, and others in the tradition, considered the workers' self-directed creation of workers councils in Western Europe (or soviets in Russia) prime examples of the ability of workers to organize themselves autonomously of any Party, social democratic or Leninist. On the other hand, like Luxemburg, in his theories of the crises of capitalism that autonomy disappeared. In its place was a reworking of Grossman's very mechanical theory of crisis and a critique of post-WWII Keynesian capitalism that argued its inevitable doom in a logic quite independent of any dialectic of struggle. Recognition of such contradictions led some of us, over time, to reinterpret Marx's theory of crisis in class terms using the interpretation of value theory contained in this book.[11] But, at the same time, such a reinterpretation implied the need to shift the critique of

9 See Massimo de Angelis, 'Intervista a Harry Cleaver', *Vis à Vis: Quaderni per l'autonomia di classe* (Italy) 1, autumno 1993 (available in English on-line at url: http://www.geocities.com/CapitolHill/3843/cleaver.htlm).
10 For further discussion of this see: Harry Cleaver, 'Karl Marx: Economist or Revolutionary?' in Suzanne W. Helburn and David F. Bramhall, eds. *Marx, Schumpeter and Keynes*.
11 One such reinterpretation was Harry Cleaver and Peter Bell, 'Marx's Theory of Crisis as a Theory of Class Struggle', *Research in Political Economy*, Vol. 5, 1982. Another formulation is offered succinctly in Harry Cleaver, 'Theses on Secular Crises in Capitalism: The Insurpassability of Class Antagonisms', in C. Polychroniou and H. R. Targ, eds. *Marxism Today: Essays on Capitalism, Socialism and Strategies for Social Change*.

mainstream economics and policy making from a criticism of its ideological content to a focus on its strategic role in the class struggle.[12]

Another major difference that I discovered in my archeological studies of these traditions, was between those who had a very limited understanding of what constituted 'the working class', that is to say of who was included and who should be understood as being outside of that class, and those who came later and considerably expanded the applicability of the category. Just as Luxemburg's and Mattick's 'crisis theories' were orthodox in being one-sided expositions of capital's 'laws of motion', so too was their, and many others', notion of the working class which they limited to the waged industrial proletariat. Even by the mid-1970s, I could no longer accept such a limited perspective.

Over time, the evolution of the struggles of unwaged people led many to a redefinition in terms. The self-mobilization of a variety of groups, such as women, students and peasants in 1960s and 1970s implied a real scope of 'workers' autonomy' far greater than previously recognized. Moreover, not only were a wider variety of people acting autonomously of capital, but they often acted independently vis-à-vis other groups, e.g. blacks autonomously from whites, women autonomously of men. An awareness of this reality influenced both those who were studying the working class in the present and those who studied it in the past.[13]

In the tradition of 'bottom-up' history, a new generation of historians such as Peter Linebaugh and his collaborators studying crime and social struggle and the formation of the British proletariat — recognized and began to make clear how the wage was but one form through which capital has forced people to work and exploited them.[14] George Rawick's studies of North American slave self-activity, *From Sundown to Sunup,* shifted attention away from the previously all-engrossing preoccupation of earlier Marxist historians of slavery with the master's exploitation during the long days of plantation toil.[15]

The emergence of autonomous struggles of unwaged housewives led other

12 See for example, Harry Cleaver, 'Supply-side Economics: The New Phase of Capitalist Strategy in the Crisis', in the French journal *Babylone* (Fall 1981) and the Italian journal *Metropoli* (Rome, 1981) and Harry Cleaver, 'Nature, Neoliberalism and Sustainable Development: Between Charybdis & Scylla', in Allessandro Marucci, ed. *Camminare Domandando: La rivoluzione zapatista* (also on the web in English at http://www.eco.utexas.edu/faculty/Cleaver/hmchtmlpapers.html. Also see George Caffentzis, *Clipped Coins, Abused Words and Civil Government: John Locke's Philosophy of Money*, Massimo de Angelis, *Keynesianism, Social Conflict and Political Economy*, and a dissertation by Carl Wennerlind on the concept of scarcity.
13 Some, of course, refused to recognize the working-class character of these struggles, either regarding them as secondary phenomena (the approach of many orthodox Marxists) or celebrating them as constituting 'new social movements' which were seen eclipsing the old 'labour movement' (the approach of anti-Marxists happy to accept uncritically the vulnerable old orthodox definition of working class as a convenient target for critique).
14 See, for example, Peter Linebaugh, *The London Hanged*, that demonstrates, through a detailed analysis of a large number of 18th century examples, how the working class predates the hegemony of the wage and thus the inadequacy of orthodox conceptions. Linebaugh and Marcus Rediger (author of *Between the Devil and the Deep Blue Sea* — a study of seamen's struggles in the 17th century) are currently working jointly on a new book, *The Many-headed Hydra,* about the formation of the Atlantic proletariat. The general thrust of that analysis can be obtained through their article of that name in Ron Sakolsky and James Koehnline, eds. *Gone to Croatan: Origins of North American Dropout Culture*. See also Yann Moulier-Boutang, *De l'esclavage au salariat: Economie historique du salariat bride*, a sweeping survey and analysis of the history of primitive accumulation and the making of the working class in all its forms, waged and unwaged.
15 George P. Rawick, *From Sundown to Sunup: The Making of the Black Community.*

Marxists, such as Mariarosa Dalla Costa, Selma James and Silvia Federici to analyse the work against which women fought and to recognize how that work was, at least in part, work for capital and from which the latter profited through a reduction in the value of labour power.[16] They also pointed out that because men often mediated the imposition of that work and benefited from it, women's rebellion had to be autonomous from that of men. Men's mediation could be confronted or bypassed for a direct attack on capital, but men could not be counted on to take up women's interests as their own. Similarly, work on peasants in Mexico, Nigeria and elsewhere demonstrated how their unwaged work contributed to the expanded reproduction of capital and how their struggles, often autonomous of those of waged workers, had the power to rupture such accumulation.[17] The broadened notion of 'working class' that such understanding implied, along with the appreciation of divisions and autonomy within the class, differentiated contemporary 'autonomist' Marxists from many of their forerunners.

Another historical shift in the understanding of many of those who recognized the autonomy of workers struggles resulted from a change in workers' attitudes toward work. Many in earlier generations of those Marxists who had appreciated workers' ability to take the initiative in the class struggle clung to the very orthodox belief that the object of revolution was the liberation of work from the domination of capital, and hence from alienation and exploitation. For many anarchists, the Council Communists and even the ex-Trotskyists regrouped around C. L. R. James and Raya Dunayevskaya, the formation of workers' councils (say by Hungarian workers during the revolution of 1956) to take over and manage production seemed the epitome of 'revolution' and the freeing of labour. But two tendencies forced a more contemporary generation beyond such formulations. First, the continuing spread of Taylorist and Fordist deskilling produced such an alienation of young workers from work that, by the 1960s, the desire to take over work and make it less alienating was being more and more replaced by its simple refusal. They didn't want control; they wanted out. Second, the refusal of work on the job was increasingly accompanied by a refusal of the unwaged work of reproducing labour power in life outside the formal job. Moreover, the refusal of both kinds of work was accompanied by new kinds of non-work activity. Against the 'cultural' mechanisms of domination, highlighted and analyzed by the critical theorists, was being pitted a 'cultural revolution' in the 1960s that continued on into the 1970s and since. Indeed, the self-activity of the women's movement, the student movement, the environmental movement and of many peasant struggles quite self-consciously set out to elaborate new ways of being, new relationships among people and between humans and nature. As opposed to the traditional Leninist view that building a new society could only occur after revolution-as-overthrow-of-capital, these new movements that were rapidly undermining the Keynesian capitalist

16 All of these women were central figures in the Wages for Housework Movement. Their reinterpretation of the role of housework in the reproduction of labour power and the genesis of capitalist profit triggered an extensive debate among Marxists on the subject.
17 Ann Lucas de Rouffignac, *The Contemporary Peasantry in Mexico*; Ezielen Agbon, *Class and Economic Development in Nigeria 1900–1980*, Ph. D dissertation, University of Texas at Austin, 1985.

world order demanded, and indeed were undertaking, the building of 'the future' in the present.

With the persistence into the 1980s and 1990s of such positive forms of struggle, of such efforts not just to resist capital but to create alternatives to it, my own agenda of research underwent something of a shift in emphasis. The shift in my work described above, from a focus on capitalist domination to working class self-activity, was followed by a shift from the study of working class resistance to the study of what Toni Negri has called working class self-valorization, i.e. the autonomous elaboration of new ways of being, of new social relationships alternative to those of capitalism. While this term 'self-valorization' has its problems (Marx originally used the term to refer to capitalist valorization), it provides a useful concept to draw our attention to struggles that go beyond resistance to various kinds of positive, socially constitutive self-activity.[18] The concept can designate not only work that escapes capitalist control, but all forms of working class self-activity that imagines and creates new ways of being.[19]

The very existence of such positive, autonomous activity that elaborates alternative social relationships, however, implies that those who are doing the elaboration are actually moving beyond their class status. In other words, to the degree that workers 'autonomously valorize' their lives, they move beyond being 'workers' and constitute themselves as some other kind of social category. At this point we discover a new kind of limitation to the concept of 'working class'. Not only has it, in the past, been far too restrictive in terms of designating who gets exploited by capital and who resists, but the presence of self-valorization shows how it has failed to grasp the newness, the otherness, being created in the process. Where we have self-valorization we not only have class struggle but also the emergence, however fleeting or durable, of new worlds and new kinds of people.[20]

In short, in the history of the traditions that I call 'autonomist Marxist' we find an evolution toward an extension of the political appreciation of the ability of workers to act autonomously, toward a reconceptualization of crisis theory that grasps it as a crisis of class power, toward a redefinition of 'working class' that both broadens it to include the unwaged, deepens the understanding of autonomy to intraclass relations and also recognizes the efforts of 'workers' to escape their class status and to become something more.

It was from this theoretical and political perspective that I greeted with some curiosity the Zapatista rebellion that exploded in the southern Mexican state of Chiapas on January 1, 1994. Was this another Central American Marxist-Leninist uprising, led

18 See Harry Cleaver, 'The Inversion of Class Perspective in Marxian Theory: from Valorization to Self-valorization', in Werner Bonefeld, R. Gunn and K. Psychopedis, eds. *Open Marxism*, Vol. II.
19 This said, it should also be obvious that just as working class 'autonomy' is inevitably limited by the mere fact that it develops within the context of capitalist society (and thus must, to some degree, be defined by it and not totally 'autonomous'), so too the activities of self- or autonomous-valorization, being a subset of such struggles, are inevitably marked and scarred by the society within which they emerge.
20 I have argued this point in Harry Cleaver, 'Marxist Categories, the Crisis of Capital and the Constitution of Social Subjectivity Today', *Common Sense* (Scotland), 14, October 1993. One example of such positive self-determination in Mexico City can be found in Harry Cleaver, 'The Uses of an Earthquake', *Midnight Notes*, No. 9, May 1988.

by some Old Left party still intact despite the collapse of the Soviet regime in 1989?[21] Or was it something new? Asked by the editors of the Italian journal *Riff-Raff* (Padua) to write something about what was happening, my first reaction was to protest that I was not an expert on Chiapas. As they insisted, however, I poured over the various press stories and flood of Internet reports and analyses to see if I had anything to say which had not already been said.

Two things struck me forcefully. First, there was indeed something new. Immediately evident was a surprisingly articulate and refreshingly new self-presentation of what seemed to be a genuine indigenous rebellion. In the place of the usual hackneyed Marxist-Leninist jargon was a straightforward language clearly expressive of the diverse local indigenous cultures in Chiapas. Moreover, the Zapatista communiqués expressed not only a fierce resistance to 500 years of forced work and exploitation but also a clear vision of alternative forms of self-organization. In the words from the South I read a concern with self-valorisation that I had previously found in the barrios of Mexico City some years before.[22] I also could see that the rebellion sought the political space and power to build diverse and autonomous new worlds. Not only was the traditional unitary project of 'socialism' absent, but the notion of autonomy was not that of secession for the formation of new nation states. Unlike nationalist demands for autonomy in the Balkans, the indigenous of Chiapas were seeking a cultural and political autonomy against the centralized power of Mexican and international capital. Finally, the Zapatista analysis of the international context of the rebellion replaced the usual excoriation of 'imperialism' by a cogent analysis of an increasingly global capitalist strategy: the free movement of industrial, financial and commodity capital coupled with the imposition of constraints on the working class via austerity, structural adjustment and repression that in Latin America goes by the name of 'neoliberalism'.

Second, I was struck by the role played by the Internet in the wide array of grassroots mobilizations, in both Mexico and elsewhere in the world, that forced the Mexican government to halt its attempts to repress the rebellion militarily and to enter into negotiations. In 1990–91 I had noticed the roles of cyberspacial communications in the failed tri-national efforts to block the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) and in the widespread opposition to the Gulf War. But the role of the Internet in the mobilizations of early 1994 in support of the Zapatistas seemed not only more central but also more widespread, more intense and more successful. Massive circulation of information bypassed the efforts of the Mexican government to block knowledge of the rebellion and made up for limited mainstream press coverage. Moreover, the Internet lists and conferences where that information circulated also provided public space for the organization of political actions and for the sharing and analysis of those actions in ways that dramatically accelerated the process of

21 For those unfamiliar with the history of struggle in the region, after 1989 there was a widespread collapse of Left parties, many of whose disillusioned members abandoned any kind of revolutionary activity and some of whom went so far as to join the state to seek marginal reforms.
22 See 'The Uses of an Earthquake', op. cit.

mobilization. Finally, the international circulation of the Zapatista analysis of neoliberalism and their vision of diverse alternatives to it, seemed to resonate in many contemporary struggles around the world. As subsequent events would demonstrate, that resonance would give them a power of convocation and example unequaled by any other group in the present period.

As a result of these observations, I not only wrote an article for *Riff-Raff* on the rebellion but focused in part on the role of the Internet in the rapid circulation of the struggle.[23] The positive reception and widespread translation and reproduction of that article encouraged me to continue work in these two areas: the Zapatista rebellion itself and the role of the Internet in the acceleration of opposition to global neoliberalism. Not only has the rebellion continued to have a character worthy of respect and support, but its ability to go beyond solidarity to construct networks of interconnected struggle has clearly continued to provide inspiration and example to many others fighting against neoliberalism and for their own self-determination around the world. Similarly, as subsequent interntional actions against neoliberalism have demonstrated, the Internet is playing an ever more important role in the weaving of an international fabric of resistance and alternatives.[24] The recent mobilizations against the World Trade Organization that brought thousands into the streets, first in Geneva and then in Seattle, are excellent examples. The Internet played a key role first in organizing and then, especially in the case of the Independent Media Center set up in Seattle, in circulating the experience around the world as the events themselves unfolded. Learning from all such experiences seems to be accelerating and contributing to the construction of a new spectre to haunt the nightmares of capitalist policy makers: a vast world network of self-active, autonomous struggles with the growing capacity to act in complementary ways against capitalist globalization in all its forms.[25]

★ ★ ★ ★ ★

If I were to rewrite this book today, I might change various formulations, but I would leave the basic insights intact. Subsequent research and the production of teaching materials involving the extension of this kind of reinterpretation from Chapter One to virtually the whole of Volume I of *Capital* and to other texts have provided the opportunity to test the ability of the ideas to produce a consistent and meaningful reinterpretation of a substantial portion of Marx's theoretical writings. The results, to my mind, verify the original set of ideas. Moreover, since this book was written in the mid-1970s I have found that its fundamental insights have provided a useful framework for understanding the dynamics of capitalist development in terms of class

23 Harry Cleaver, 'The Chiapas Uprising: The Future of Class Struggle in the New World Order', *Riff-Raff*, marzo 1994 (in Italian) and *Common Sense*, No. 15, April 1994 (in English). A subsequent and more in-depth treatment can be found in Harry Cleaver, 'The Zapatistas and the Electronic Fabric of Struggle', in John Holloway and Eloina Pelaez, eds. *Zapatista!*

24 See Harry Cleaver, 'The Zapatista Effect: The Internet and the Rise of an Alternative Political Fabric', *Journal of International Affairs*, Vol. 51, No. 2, Spring 1998.

25 See Harry Cleaver, 'Computer-linked Social Movements and the Global Threat to Capitalism', draft at url: http://www.eco.utexas.edu/faculty/Cleaver/hmchtmlpapers.html.

struggle. And, precisely because this interpretation of value theory provides a clear understanding of the class relationships that capital has sought to impose and maintain, it also has made it possible to recognize the ways in which struggles have not only threatened or undermined those relationships but have also gone beyond them toward the crafting of new, alternative ways of being. These are my conclusions, readers can draw their own.

Austin, Texas
January 2000

Introduction

In this book I re-examine Karl Marx's analysis of value through a detailed study of Chapter One of Volume I of *Capital*. The object of this study is to bring out the political usefulness of the analysis of value by situating the abstract concepts of Chapter One within Marx's overall analysis of the class struggles of capitalist society. I intend to return to what I believe was Marx's original purpose: he wrote *Capital* to put a weapon in the hands of workers. In it he presented a detailed analysis of the fundamental dynamics of the struggles between the capitalist and the working classes.[1] By reading *Capital* as a political document, workers could study in depth the various ways in which the capitalist class sought to dominate them as well as the methods they themselves used to struggle against that domination.

During the last half-century, however, not only has *Capital* very rarely been read in this manner but it also has been largely neglected. It is not much of an exaggeration to say that, despite *Capital*'s world-wide reputation and quasi-religious status in the socialist world, its serious study has been a rare and isolated phenomenon in both East and West. Many have spoken of it, but few have really studied it. When it has been read, more often than not, it has been treated by Marxists of various persuasions as a work of political economy, of economic history, of sociology, or even of philosophy. Thus it has been an object of academic study rather than a political tool. The legacy

1 For Marx, and for most Marxists who followed him, the term 'working class' has referred primarily to the industrial working class of waged workers producing commodities (be they manufactured goods, agricultural products, or services). For reasons which will become clearer later in this text, I use the term 'working class' to designate not only industrial waged workers but also a wide variety of unwaged workers. These include housewives, children, students, and peasants whose work under capitalism consists primarily of the production and reproduction of the ability and willingness to carry out activities (including industrial work) which contribute to the maintenance of the system.

of this Marxist tradition has served to all but remove the book from the battlefields of the class struggle.

This neglect has recently been replaced by a world-wide revival of the close study of Marx's writings, especially *Capital*. This revival has seen a proliferation of various Marxist 'schools of thought', among both academic and activist groups. Unfortunately, much of this new study is duplicating those past interpretations which have ignored or underestimated the usefulness of *Capital* as a political tool in the hands of workers. Those who have rediscovered *Capital* as a weapon and have read it politically have been few and widely scattered. This introduction outlines the various traditional and contemporary approaches to the interpretation of Marx and situates those political readings of *Capital* among them. The body of this book aims to contribute to such a reading of *Capital* as a whole by carrying out a political reading of Marx's analysis of value.

In order to outline the various approaches to Marx, I begin by discussing the general nature of the contemporary revival, locating it within the larger drama of which it is one moment: the global crisis of the capitalist system. It was the onset of the current crisis that led many back to the theoretical and political ideas of Marx.

Once I have sketched the various approaches to reading Marx, including the nature of recent political readings, I turn to the analysis of Chapter One itself. In Chapter II, I discuss the political reasons why it made sense for Marx to begin with the analysis of commodities — because the commodity-form is the basic form of the capitalist imposition of work and thus of the class struggle. In Chapter III, I interpret Marx's analysis of the substance of value as capitalist-imposed work and discuss the struggles over the time of work which underlie the measure of value — socially necessary labour time. In Chapter IV, I sequentially analyse the ways the various forms of value (the simple, expanded, general, and money forms) express the class relations in capitalist society and the lessons they teach us about working-class struggle.

By carrying out this study within the context of Marx's overall understanding of *Capital*, by bringing to bear on the reading of the first chapter the material of subsequent chapters, and by trying to grasp the various determinations of value within the context of the contemporary crisis, it is my hope to make some contribution to demystifying 'value theory' and to increasing its usefulness in the development of workers' strategies for dealing with capital.

The capitalist crisis

The current crisis of capitalism began to emerge in the 1960s in the form of a wide variety of seemingly unrelated disorders in which a number of basic social institutions began to fall apart under the impact of a multiplicity of new social conflicts. In the beginning the black civil rights demands in the United States, the growing unrest of students and women in many parts of the world, and renewed peasant struggles of Asia, Africa, and Latin America appeared as simply different independent acts of resistance to the spread of post-World War II capitalism and American hegemony. Racial discrimination, academic regimentation, alienation, exploitation, imperialism,

dehumanization, sexual repression, consumerism, environmental destruction — one after another these evils of modern society were exposed in a confusing array of conflicts that seemed to threaten the very disintegration of that society.

As these social conflicts found verbal and physical expression and grew into social movements, it became increasingly apparent that their mutual independence was only a surface illusion. In the United States the revolt against racial discrimination swept out of the rural South to explode in the northern ghettos in urban guerrilla war and the welfare rights movements. As business sought to get the young blacks out of the streets, they carried their militancy into the factories, making the fight against 'niggermation' a critical part of the growing industrial revolt against work. The black revolt also spread into the schools and the army, again becoming a key element in the struggle against regimentation, the university as factory, and then the draft for war against Vietnam. The antiwar movement joined many of these diverse struggles, and its linkage with the peasants of Southeast Asia became complete with the slogan of 'Victory to the NLF' and with the flying of Vietcong flags from occupied campus buildings. Nor were the links between these social upheavals limited to the American-Southeast Asian connection.

North of Vietnam the great Chinese cultural revolution drew world-wide attention as it raised the banner of popular revolt within the socialist camp — both a reminder of Budapest and a foreshadowing of Prague. Also in northern Asia, Japan — the capitalist miracle of the East — was shaken by rising and interconnected revolts of students, workers, and peasants as the Spring Offensive and the Red Army ended the myth of Japanese stability. In Europe similar revolts broke out in critical areas. French demonstrations sympathetic to the Vietnam cause helped incubate the historic uprising of May 1968 when millions of students and workers carried the red and black flags of revolt to the barricades of Paris. It was both student and worker unrest in Eastern Europe against local repression and Soviet domination that helped provoke, first, economic and political reform and, then, the invasion by Russian tanks. In Italy the Hot Autumn of 1969 was only one explosion in an increasingly chronic social emergency. In Portugal the American experience was repeated even more dramatically as protracted colonial wars in Africa tore both Portugal's society and its army apart, bringing a revolution at home in response to those abroad.

Within all aspects of the American 'movement', as well as those elsewhere, the revolt of women matured and blasted the actions of male 'leadership', transcending the 'sexual freedom' of hippiedom and the Left into the autonomous demand for women's liberation as an irreducible moment of all these struggles. Indeed it was the fierce autonomy of women, blacks, browns, native Americans, and various 'nationalities' which partially hid the high degree of complementarity of the struggles. Even the international population and ecology movements, originally crafted by the architects of capitalism for their own ends, were partially transformed into radical challenges to an order that attacked people instead of poverty and spread death-dealing herbicides and poisons in Southeast Asia while preaching environmental cleanliness.[2]

2 Steve Weissman, 'Why the Population Bomb Is a Rockefeller Baby', *Ramparts* 8, no. 11 (May 1970): 42–47.

As these conflicts, in all their sectoral and global diversity, circulated and melded, they came to constitute a tremendous rising tide of danger for the international capitalist system. They formed a global cycle of struggles, a complex yet interlocked whole that shook the entire capitalist social order to its roots and pitched it headlong into a crisis of historic proportions.[3]

Yet in some ways the globality of these struggles and the depth of this crisis became really apparent only in the 1970s as several crises of universally recognized international dimension followed one another in rapid succession. In June of 1971, détente and Richard Nixon's opening to China marked the end of the long bipolar Cold War, as well as the beginning of diplomatic problems between the United States and Japan. In August, Nixon's abandonment of dollar convertibility into gold destroyed the post-World War II international monetary arrangements of the Western capitalist system. This action together with the import surcharge created a new diplomatic crisis, now with Canada and Western Europe as well as Japan. All these actions, coupled with the imposition of austerity at home, announced the end of the ideology of growth and the end of the Great Society, of the New Frontier, and the Development Decade.

These changes were rapidly followed by others. First, the global food crisis of 1972–74 in which prices were raised sharply in the West and mass starvation was allowed in Asia and Africa. Second, the global energy crisis of 1973–74 in which oil prices were raised dramatically and the focal point of capitalist development appeared to be shifting to the OPEC countries while the north-eastern United States, Great Britain, and much of Western Europe plunged into the global recession of 1974–75. Finally, in 1975 and 1976 these same food and energy crises erupted in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union as socialist planners also raised the prices of these commodities — provoking widespread social unrest. At that point the cycle was complete. The globality as well as the depth of the crisis could no longer be doubted.

The revival of Marx

It was in the midst of these cycles of social conflict and global crisis that the revival of interest in Marx emerged and that *Capital* began to be reread and studied around the world. This interest in Marx can be seen to constitute one element of the widespread efforts to comprehend and to deal with all these crises. On the one hand, the turn to Marx by those making the social struggles of this period constituted a search for both self-clarification and strategy in a situation beyond all previous experience. It has been this search that has given birth to the study of Marx by independent groups in schools, factories, prisons, and a wide variety of social activist organizations. Faced with the sterility of both reformist and traditional leftist theories and strategic formulae, these groups have been returning to the evaluation of Marx's analysis of class struggle and revolution against capitalism.

At the same time, within the universities, as the result of a long series of demands,

3 A partial analysis of that cycle of struggles is set out in *Zerowork* 1 (1975) and 2 (1977).

this same search has forced the creation of official courses, even degrees, in Marxism.[4] The civil rights movement demanded ethnic studies. The antiwar movement generated support for revisionist history, insurgent sociology, and radical economics. The women's movement forced the creation of women's studies programs. Within these new radical spaces opened in the traditional structure of education, the study of Marx himself has taken a larger and larger place as radical students and professors have come up against the same limits of conventional radical wisdom as do their counterparts outside academia: the failure of those approaches either to explain the current social crisis or to provide the means to usefully evaluate alternative strategies of action.

Yet it would be a mistake to see the revival of Marxism only in terms of the problems and needs of the various individuals and groups that have formed the core of the social revolts of the 1960s and 1970s. The crisis has been, above all, a crisis of the capitalist system and thus a crisis for the ideologues and planners of capitalism. As a result they too have an interest in a reassessment of Marx. To understand this we must recognize that this crisis is every bit as deep and fundamental (and perhaps even more so) as the last major crisis of the global capitalist system: the Great Depression of the thirties. That period formed a profound turning point in the historical development of capitalism because it showed that the relations of power between the classes and thus the basic social structure had been so altered that the old cyclical business downturn could no longer provide a solution to social upheaval through the classic means of rising unemployment and falling wages. The growth in workers' struggles and power during the 1920s and 1930s made that impossible by preventing any substantial fall in wages and by increasing demands on the state as collective capitalist for jobs and more social services. In order to survive that crisis capitalism required a new strategy and a new ideology to replace 'laissez faire'. The solution which emerged was the ideology of growth and full employment based on a strategy of harnessing workers' struggles for higher wages through productivity deals negotiated in collective bargaining. That wages and thus consumer demand would not rise faster than productivity would be guaranteed by state intervention with monetary and fiscal policy. In other words, the American answer to the last crisis of capitalism was Keynesianism as a strategy and thus an ideology.[5] The defeat of German and Italian fascism in World War II and the containment of Soviet and Chinese socialism after the war meant that the American answer became the solution for the entire capitalist West. This solution was institutionalized internationally through the

4 The struggles of the 1960s transformed the situation of the 1950s, in which there was only one tenured Marxist teaching economics in an American university (Paul Baran at Stanford), into one in which there are today dozens of Marxists teaching in universities throughout the country, many with tenure. There are degree programs leading to what amounts to a Ph.D. in Marxism at several universities, including the University of Massachusetts (Amherst), the New School for Social Research (New York), and American University (Washington, D. C.). At others, such as Stanford, University of Texas, Yale, and Harvard, students can take field specialisations in Marxist economics and find enough sympathetic readers to write Marxist dissertations.
5 This analysis has been developed in Mario Tronti, 'Workers and Capital', *Telos* 14 (Winter 1972): 25–62; Guido Baldi, 'Theses on Mass Worker and Social Capital', *Radical America* 6, no. 1 (May–June): 3–21; and Antonio Negri, 'John M. Keynes e la teoria capitalistica dello stato nel '29', in *Operai e Stato*, by Sergio Bologna *et al* [in English as 'Keynes and the Capitalist Theory of the State post-1929', in Negri, *Revolution Retrieved*]. A more detailed discussion of this analysis is presented below in the section on reading *Capital* politically.

United Nations system, and the International Monetary Fund agreements signed at Bretton Woods in 1944.

What we must now see is that the international cycle of social conflicts in the late 1960s signalled the collapse of that Keynesian strategy within individual countries and that the collapse of the international monetary system in 1971 showed that the crisis constituted a breakdown in the Keynesian era globally. It is because they are faced with this kind of profound historical crisis of the total system that the theoreticians and architects of capitalist economic and social policy have an interest in a re-evaluation of Marx. In these times of general systemic rupture, when the fiscal and monetary adjustments of Keynesian economists and technocrats are daily proving their inadequacy, we should not be surprised to find a new tolerance for all totalizing theories of crisis and societal development.[6] Because the policy makers of capitalism have not been able to find any more creative answers to the global social breakdown than crisis itself, they are willing to listen to any new conceptualization that might give them help in finding a solution. In other words, they would like to use the revival of Marx to see if anything useful can be learned.

While this might at first sound a bit farfetched, even a brief review of the Marxist tradition will show important instances where Marx has been used not to further revolution but to contain it. Business cycle theorists, growth theory specialists, industrial organization experts, and other orthodox economists have often drawn on Marx's writings in the development of their work.[7] Perhaps one of the best known examples is that of Wassily Leontief, the father of the modern techniques of input-output analysis that are the basis of many contemporary capitalist planning models. The roots of his ideas, as he is quick to recognize, come partly from Marx's reproduction schemes in Volume II of *Capital*. Perhaps even more obvious and far-reaching in implication have been the uses to which the Soviet state has put many orthodox interpretations of Marx in justifying its policies of repression and counterrevolution. Given this history it should not be hard to see why funding for Marxist studies has become available and why space in national newspapers and academic journals has sometimes been allocated to keeping track of and evaluating the course of the new Marxist researches.[8]

6 Parallel to the revival of Marx has also been the revival of Hegel, the only bourgeois thinker whose totalizing vision matched Marx's own. For surveys of the Hegel revival, see Antony Quinton, 'Spreading Hegel's Wings', *New York Review of Books*, May 29, 1975, 34–37; Mark Poster, 'The Hegel Renaissance', *Telos* 16 (Summer 1973): 109–127; and John Heckman, 'Hyppolite and the Hegel Revival in France', *Telos* 16 (Summer 1973): 128–145.

7 A number of bourgeois evaluations of the usefulness of Marx to bourgeois theory are included in David Horowitz, *Marx and Modern Economics*. See especially the essays by O. Lange, W. Leontief, J. Robinson, Fan-Hung, L. R. Klein, and S. Tsuru. Others who have explicitly drawn on Marx in their work have included William Baumol in his *Economic Dynamics* and Irma Adelman in her *Theories of Economic Growth and Development*. The debt of such economists as Joseph Schumpeter to Marx is well known.

8 Examples of such surveys of radical thought in professional journals and the elite press are Martin Bronfenbrenner, 'Radical Economics in America: A 1970 Survey', *Journal of Economic Literature* 8, no. 3 (September 1970): 747–766; S. T. Worland, 'Radical Political Economics as a "Scientific Revolution"', *Southern Economics Journal* 39, no. 2 (October 1972): 274–284; and 'The Marx Men', *Wall Street Journal*, February 5, 1975. The *New York Times* went so far as to ask radical economist David Gordon of the New School to present his views on the current crisis in the *New York Times Magazine* ('Recession Is Capitalism as Usual'), April 27, 1975.

Alternative approaches to Marx

Given the two-sided source of interest in the revival of Marxism — those wishing to use Marx to further social change and those wishing to use him to contain it — it is important to be clear about the different approaches to the reading of his works and about the implications of those approaches. The basic form of the revival has been the retrieval and study of Marx's own works and of those of his major disciples and interpreters. Together these works make up the totality of the 'Marxist tradition' understood as an accumulating body of thought. To some degree the revival of Marxism has also included somewhat more useful attempts to study that tradition within its historical context — to study 'Marxist thought' as part of the developing social history. In both cases there are various possible ways to categorize both the literature of the revival and that tradition upon which it has drawn in terms of the approaches to the reading of Marx in general and of *Capital* in particular.

One common approach to such a breakdown is along differing ideological lines, especially the break between orthodox Marxism — by which is normally meant Marxism-Leninism of various Stalinist or Trotskyist varieties — and nonorthodox Marxism — within which different kinds of revisionist tendencies can be distinguished, ranging from the social democracy of the Second International through the Council Communists and so-called Western Marxists of the interwar period to the various neo-Marxist tendencies of the post-World War II decade. Unfortunately, such an analysis leads us more directly to a comparison of the political conclusions reached than of the approaches taken to the reading of Marx.

A second much more useful break is one between those readings of Marx which are essentially ideological — regardless of line — and those readings of Marx which one might call strategic. This distinction is meant to differentiate between readings of Marx which see his work as fundamentally constituting an ideological critique, or critical interpretation, of capitalism and readings which see his work as both a critique of ideology and a strategic deciphering of the class war.

The concept of a strategic reading here is very much in the military sense because it seeks in Marx's thought only weapons for use in the class war. To the objection that ideology is a kind of weapon, I would agree. But, to push the military analogy, I am speaking here of the difference between a weapon like propaganda, which is a narrow tactic, and the weapon of strategy, which is on a very different level. To paraphrase Karl von Clausewitz's terms, strategy allows us to grasp the basic form of the class war, to situate the different struggles which compose it, to evaluate the opposing tactics in each of those struggles, and to see how the different tactics and different struggles can be better linked to achieve victory.[9]

In this case a further distinction must be made as to whether the strategic deciphering is from the point of view of capital or from that of the working class. In the former case we find the kind of reading which Leontief did — one which helps to

9 Clausewitz's statement is: 'Strategy forms the plan of the war, maps out the proposed course of the different campaigns which compose the war, and regulates the battles to be fought in each' (cited in B. H. Liddell Hart's *Strategy*: 319).

develop capitalist strategy. In the latter we find readings which help to clarify and develop working-class struggle.

Cutting across this breakdown between ideological and strategic readings of Marx is a third breakdown which is primarily important because of its usefulness in understanding the current status of Marxist studies. This is the distinction between reading Marx as philosophy, reading him, especially *Capital*, as political economy, and reading him politically. To read Marx philosophically is at best to read his works as critical interpretations, as one form of ideology. To read Marx as political economy can include elements of ideology — when the aim is to critique capitalism — but it can also, and more importantly, include elements of a strategic reading in the interests of capital. This includes readings of *Capital* as a work of economic theory within a framework of historical materialism. At the very least the weaknesses and dangers of reading Marx as philosophy or as political economy are those of all ideological readings. No matter how critical they are of various features of capitalism, they are basically no more than passive interpretations of the social situation. With respect to such critical theories, one does well to never forget Marx's justly famous injunction: 'The problem with the philosophers is that they have only interpreted the world, the point is to change it.'[10] It is not just that interpretations are simply useless. If they are accurate ones, they may provide exactly one of the things capital needs to help plan its strategies. Those political economy readings which develop interpretations of Marx's thought in ways that bring out potentially useful strategic implications for capital in this period are not simply innocuous but must be viewed as potentially dangerous to the working class.

There remains to define what I mean by a political reading of Marx. All readings are political in that their execution involves real political choices and implications with respect to the class relations. Yet I would monopolize the term 'political' here to designate that strategic reading of Marx which is done from the point of view of the working class. It is a reading that self-consciously and unilaterally structures its approach to determine the meaning and relevance of every concept to the immediate development of working-class struggle. It is a reading which eschews all detached interpretation and abstract theorising in favour of grasping concepts only within that concrete totality of struggle whose determinations they designate. This I would argue is the only kind of reading of Marx which can properly be said to be from a working-class perspective because it is the only one which speaks directly to that class's needs for clarifying the scope and structure of its own power and strategy.

The diagram (Figure 1) illustrates the principal distinctions made among the various approaches to the reading of Marx. These are certainly not the only possible distinctions between approaches to the reading of Marx, but I have found them helpful in sorting out the various strands of the current Marxist revival and the traditions on which they are based. Since I have tried to write this present work as a political reading of *Capital*, I will now attempt to further clarify these distinctions so as to situate the

10 This is the Eleventh Thesis on Feuerbach.

present work and to indicate why the approach it embodies represents a sharp break with others. I undertake this clarification by sketching some of the history and basic characteristics and weaknesses of the traditional readings of Marx as political economy and as philosophy and then elaborate on what it means to read Marx politically and illustrate how this approach allows a useful political reinterpretation of many of the other approaches' insights at the same time it avoids their errors.

Figure 1: Approaches to the reading of Marx

	Ideological Readings	**Strategic Readings**
Political Economy Readings	From capital's perspective	From capital's perspective
Philosophical Readings	From capital's perspective	*Empty set*
Political Readings	*Empty set*	From a working-class perspective

Reading *Capital* as political economy

One of the strongest facets of the current Marxist revival is the return to the reading of *Capital* as a work in political economy. This approach has a long tradition that began in the period of the Second International (1898–1914) and has run through the history of orthodox Marxism and through a number of revisionist approaches outside orthodoxy. To define *Capital* as a work of political economy, as so many have, requires explaining not only what the field of political economy is, but also what those fields are which are excluded from its purview.

The political economy of the Second International

The traditional way of making this distinction has been to define 'political economy' in the terms of the classical political economists from Adam Smith to David Ricardo. Accordingly, political economy deals with the social sphere that includes the production, exchange, and distribution of commodities. Based on a reading of Marx's now famous remarks in the Preface to the *Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*, this sphere of political economy is identified with the 'economic base' of society 'on which arises a legal and political superstructure'.[11] Within this economic base the mode of production is seen as the determining instance whose own development was determined by the dialectical interaction of the material productive forces (technology,

11 Karl Marx, *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*: 20–21.

organization, etc.) and the social relations of production (capitalists versus workers). Within this base/superstructure framework *Capital* was interpreted by Engels and those who followed him as being the truest, most scientific analysis of the capitalist mode of production and the relations of exchange and distribution based on it. If it were pointed out that Marx had titled the *Contribution*, and subtitled *Capital*, a critique of political economy, the response was that the critique was of classical political economy and what Marx had done was to correct its errors and constitute a more scientific work. In other words, Marx's *Capital* differed from Ricardo's *Principles* primarily by being more correct. He is seen either as fulfilling its promise or as having corrected its errors.[12]

In this view what *Capital* did not provide was a theory of the so-called superstructure, especially a theory of politics and of the state. This sharp dichotomy between politics and political economy was a primary characteristic of the debates of the Second International (and those that followed). It confined *Capital*, and ultimately Marx, to the realm of 'economics' and left the terrain of politics to the Marxist politicians of the day: the social democrats (e.g. Karl Kautsky, Eduard Bernstein), on the one hand, and the revolutionary party builders (e.g. Rosa Luxemburg, Lenin), on the other. This dichotomy was the intellectual and political expression of the structure of German social democracy and the dual character of working-class struggle in that period: militancy of the workers at the factory level and the rise of the political party as an answer to the organizational problem of class unity. This unmediated split between the economic and the political shaped all sides of the debate during and after that period. In his theory, Bernstein would emphasize the 'economic' struggle and hence the critical need for trade union organization, while supporting in practice a party which acted only at the parliamentary level. The Bolsheviks and Lenin would attack this 'economism' and develop a theory of the autonomy of the political sphere which would explain social democracy at the same time that it would rationalize a centralized vanguard party acting in the name of the working class. In each case politics was brought in alongside the economic analysis of Marx (which all sides of the debate shared — though they differed in their interpretations).[13]

Despite being confined by this dichotomy to the sphere of political economy, the reading of *Capital* provided the basis for a key aspect of the Bernstein Debate: the theory of crisis. In his *Evolutionary Socialism*, Bernstein argued that according to his reading of *Capital* Marx's theory of economic crisis was predicated on a high level of anarchic competition between capitalists. Pointing to the rise of monopoly capital, he argued that the decline of competition reduced the anarchy of capital and made sufficient capitalist planning possible so that a crisis could be avoided.[14] As Lucio Colletti has pointed out, some such position as this was a natural response to the

12 Such distinctions as to whether Marx was completing the work of the classical economists or remedying their errors preoccupied Henryk Grossman in his 'Marx, Classical Political Economy and the Problem of Dynamics', *Capital and Class* 2 (Summer 1977): 32–55.
13 For further analysis of the relations discussed here, see Tronti, 'Workers and Capital': 31–37, and Sergio Bologna, 'Class Composition and the Theory of the Party at the Origin of the Workers-Councils Movement', *Telos* 13 (Fall 1972): 14–21.
14 Eduard Bernstein, *Evolutionary Socialism*.

failure of an expected crisis to occur before World War I and the resultant relatively long period of boom. It was also an economic theory which buttressed Bernstein's political position that emphasized 'economic' struggle and social democratic reformism.[15]

To these arguments Rosa Luxemburg responded with her own reading of *Capital* — first in *Reform or Revolution* (1900) and then in *The Accumulation of Capital* (1913), she argued the inevitability of crisis.[16] To build her argument she reversed Bernstein's reasoning to say that the rise of monopoly capital raised the level of capitalist anarchy to the conflict between nation-states and she produced a theory of imperialism that foreshadowed World War I. In *The Accumulation of Capital* she drew on the reproduction schemes of Volume II to argue the impossibility of smoothly expanding accumulation. Her economic theory, like Bernstein, supported her political position, in this case against reformism and for the preparation of violent revolution.

These works were the beginning of a long series of writings devoted to developing theories of crisis and imperialism based on the reading of *Capital* as political economy. Among the most important of the writers in this tradition during the period of the Second International and World War I were the Austrian Rudolf Hilferding, whose *Finanzkapital* appeared in 1910 and who like Bernstein tried to take into account the rise of monopoly and the expanded role of the banks; Otto Bauer, another Austrian, who critiqued Luxemburg's *Accumulation* in *Die Neue Zeit* (1913); and Nikolai Bukharin who published his *Imperialism* in 1915 (preceding and outdoing Lenin's of 1916).[17] After the Russian Revolution and World War I, with the exception of Bukharin who published an extended critique of Luxemburg's *Accumulation* in 1924, most of this kind of work was concentrated in Western Europe. In 1926 Fritz Sternberg published his *Imperialism* developing the Luxemburg approach.[18] Three years later in 1929, Henryk Grossman collected his lectures at the Institute of Social Research in Frankfurt, Germany, into 'The Law of Accumulation and the Collapse of the Capitalist System'.[19] Both Sternberg and Grossman were critiqued by Natalie Moszkowska in her 'Theories of Crisis' (1935) and 'Dynamics of Late Capitalism' (1934).[20] Grossman, Bauer, and Luxemburg were all criticized in 1934 by the Dutch Marxist Anton Pannekoek. His fellow Council Communists, like Paul Mattick who moved to the United States in the 1930s, also contributed to these debates on the political economy of crisis and imperialism through such journals as *Ratekorrespondenz* and *Living Marxism*.[21]

15 Lucio Colletti, 'Bernstein and the Marxism of the Second International', in his *From Rousseau to Lenin*.
16 Rosa Luxemburg's *Reform or Revolution* is made up of two articles published in *Leipziger Volkszeitung* in 1898 and 1899.
17 There is an underground English translation of Hilferding, but it has not yet appeared in print. [An English translation was published in 1981.] Otto Bauer's critique appeared in *Neue Zeit*, March 7–14, 1913.
18 Fritz Sternberg, *Der Imperialismus*.
19 Henryk Grossman, *Die Akkumulations und Zusammenbruchsgesetz des Kapitalistischen Systems*, not yet translated into English. [An abridged English translation was published in 1992.]
20 Neither of Natalie Moszkowska's books (*Zur Kritik Moderner Krisentheorien* and *Zur Dynamik des Spätkapitalismus*) has been translated into English, but a short presentation of some of her argument can be found in Karl Schoer, 'Natalie Moszkowska and the Falling Rate of Profit', *New Left Review* 95 (January–February): 92–96.
21 Anton Pannekoek, 'The Theory of the Collapse of Capitalism', *Capital and Class* 1 (Spring 1977): 59–82. This article was originally published in *Ratekorrespondenz* 1 (June 1934). For Paul Mattick's view, see his *Marx and Keynes* and the references in Peter Rachleff's recent book, *Marxism and Council Communism.*

The particular arguments of these debating authors varied considerably, either refuting, developing, or taking new directions from those who came earlier. But while their work can usefully be re-evaluated in terms of the political conjuncture and class composition of their times (and not by the usual sterile contrasting to Marx), the main point that concerns me is neither the variety nor the relative acuity of the analysis. It is rather that, despite the fact that most of these authors tired to take into account newly developing aspects of capital, their restriction of the scope of *Capital* and of the derived theories of crisis and imperialism to the realm of political economy both limited the comprehensiveness of their analysis, leaving major aspects of the system uncriticized, and made it one-sided: they analysed capitalist growth and accumulation independently of working-class initiative. Because of this it is of secondary importance that some of these authors endorsed social democracy and/or collaborated with capitalist governments (e.g. Bernstein, Kautsky, Hilferding, Bauer, Sternberg), while others endorsed a 'revolutionary' perspective (e.g. Luxemburg, Lenin, Pannekoek, Mattick). In all cases, by reading *Capital* as political economy they limited themselves to a critique of capitalist anarchical instability or exploitative nature. As a result they were bound to seek (by reform or revolution) the cure for these bad aspects of capitalism in socialist planning (either the central bureaucratic or the workers' council variety) and the end of private property. Of the authors mentioned, only the Council Communists developed a coherent critique of the emerging Soviet state as a collective capitalist planner.[22] This demand for the rationalization of capitalist anarchy has been characteristic of the entire Left. The Trotskyists, for example, who made no notable contribution to these debates during this period and totally embraced the state capitalist solution that emerged in response to the Russian Revolution, could only offer the extremely narrow and politically useless critique of Soviet bureaucracy (the one from which Leon Trotsky had been purged).

Communist Marxism

In the Soviet Union itself, following the defeat of the 1917 revolution, the study of *Capital* in all forms, political economy or otherwise, was rapidly sterilized. Bukharin's critique of Luxemburg, published in 1924, was an exception soon to be excised under the Stalinist purges.[23] The supposed 'heroic period' of the application of Marxism to the problem of socialist accumulation in the middle 1920s was in fact one of the best examples of the attempt by Soviet capital to use Marx to justify its policies of exploitation and industrialization.[24] The study of Marx's works was replaced by the recitation of his major interpreters: Lenin and Stalin. As the Bolshevik party turned from the seizure of state power to the development of the socialist solution to revolution

22 Rachleff, *Marxism and Council Communism*.
23 For Nikolai Bukharin's critique of Luxemburg, see his 'Imperialism and the Accumulation of Capital', in *The Accumulation of Capital — an Anti-Critique* and K. Tarbuck, ed. *Imperialism and the Accumulation of Capital*.
24 This term, 'the heroic period', is used by Horowitz in his introduction to the collection *Marx and Modern Economics*. He finds correctly, but incredibly notes approvingly, that 'the problems raised and the answers given in the U.S.S.R. anticipate to an astonishing degree the work done in the same field [industrialization or growth theory] at a much higher level of sophistication, within a different conceptual framework, by economists outside the Soviet orbit during the last two decades': 13).

— the planned orchestration of accumulation — it moved to dismantle any independence of the worker soviets and to impose a new discipline of work and maximized production. In this movement the Leninism of centralized party power was emphasized over their Marxist analysis of the nature of exploitation in class society. Marx's works, especially *Capital*, were after all an analysis of capitalism and had not capitalism been overthrown in the Soviet Union and later in China? What relevance could *Capital* have for the development of socialism? Better to focus on the writings of the new architects of socialism. Stalin, for one, explicitly argued that Leninism was the fullest development of Marxism and that the study of Marx's texts could be dispensed with.[25] This clearly served the ideological purposes of avoiding too close a scrutiny of the relation between capitalism and socialism, especially the similarities of state repression and working-class struggles in both systems.

Among the more respectable 'Marxists' whose reinterpretation of Marx played an important part in his abandonment in the East was the Polish economist Oskar Lange. Lange, who became chairman of the Economic Council of Poland, early on in his career (1935) reduced the 'significance' of Marxism to its ability to provide a long-run view of the evolutionary tendencies of capitalism. He completely jettisoned Marx's theory of value as being an inadequate, general equilibrium model of exchange and declared, quite correctly and more honestly than many Eastern economists, that Marshallian economics 'offers more for the current administration of the economic system of Soviet Russia than Marxian economics does'. Given that Lange's problem, like that of other socialist administrators, was the organization of capital accumulation, he was quite right that neo-classical economics offers more precise tools for the extraction of surplus value — at least when those administrators have the power to use them.[26]

In China, also, as the peasant revolution grew in strength, and with it the power and prestige of Mao Tse-tung, Marx was an often evoked but unstudied authority. In his place stood Chairman Mao whose essays, pamphlets, and quotations, rather than Marx's writings, provided the main material for discussion among both cadre and the masses. As a result of such development, reference to Marx became primarily a religious gesture. Indeed the title 'Marxist' was largely replaced by the term 'Marxist-Leninist', with the emphasis overwhelmingly on the second term.

If this nonreading of Marx had been only a disappearance of Marxism, it would have been one thing. But communist leaders, both in the socialist countries and in their allied parties abroad, have also turned their interpretation of Marx into a weapon against workers. Domestically and internationally, the Communist Party of the Soviet Union has continued its dedication not to encouraging revolution but to containing it. Within Mother Russia, Soviet Marxism was used in the 1920s and 1930s to justify the crushing of both peasantry and industrial workers in the name of socialist accumulation. When working-class and peasant revolt broke out in the new Eastern European satellites

25 Cited in Douglas Kellner, 'Korsch's Revolutionary Historicism', *Telos* 26 (Winter 1975-1976): 70–93. As Kellner points out, even Korsch endorsed Stalin's position in the early 1920s.
26 Oskar Lange, 'Marxian Economics and Modern Economic Theory', *Review of Economic Studies*, June 1935; reprinted in *Marx and Modern Economics,* ed. Horowitz: 68–87.

in the 1950s, Soviet Marxism was used again to justify intervention and repression, of which the crushing of the Hungarian revolution was only the most obvious example. Even in the 1960s, when the Soviet and Eastern European communists introduced their own brand of communist Keynesianism, to foster growth with some increase in real wages, the aim was still control, as the invasion of Czechoslovakia pointed up. Only the Soviet government's provision of arms to Vietnam and its economic support for Cuba gave the illusion of supporting its claims to be a progressive pro-revolutionary force in the world. Elsewhere in the Third World and in Europe the role of the Moscow-oriented Communist parties and their orthodox Marxism were blatantly reactionary and counterrevolutionary.

Nowhere was this more obvious than in Latin America and parts of Asia where the Party took strong positions in support of local groups of capitalists and against revolutionary movements to destroy them. Here their Marxist political economy was employed to argue that the real enemy was feudalism and that its overthrow by the emerging middle classes was necessary to strengthen the capitalist nation-state against other imperial powers and to lay the basis for some future nationalistic socialist revolution which just might be achieved peaceably. In Latin America this took the form of opposition to the generalization of the Cuban model of rural guerrilla insurgency and of support for social democracy.[27] In India this took the form of support for the Congress Party and its development plans which were deemed progressive vis-à-vis the Indian landholding elite.[28]

On the European continent, as the struggle of industrial workers, immigrant workers, students, women, and peasants accelerated in the 1960s, they came into increasing conflict with Party policy. As a result political and theoretical breakaways occurred repeatedly as they had elsewhere. Such events as the worker and student upheavals in France in May 1968 or Italy's Hot Autumn in 1969 brought out the growing separation between the struggles and the Communist Party/trade union hierarchies. In both cases the Party sided with the bourgeoisie against the workers. By its actions it showed its own bankruptcy as an organ of working-class struggle. By its attempts at ideological justification of its own role and of Soviet imperialism, it showed the bankruptcy of its political strategy and of its ossified interpretation of Marxism. As elsewhere, these developments led to the growth of new organizational and theoretical alternatives — and both would involve a revaluation of a Marx freed from Party scholasticism and opportunism.

Neo-Marxist Keynesianism and the New Left

Emerging at first parallel to this tradition of Marxist political economy and then joining with it at certain points was the work of a number of Western economists whose work

27 It is not hard to see the combination of Soviet pressure on local Communist Parties to reject insurgency, in combination with its economic aid to Cuba to help it develop at home, as amounting to a major contribution to the capitalist stabilization of Latin America.

28 The position of the Communist Party of India varied considerably over time, but after the aborted Telengana Revolt (1946–1951), it became, for the most part, a staunch ally of the Congress. This position resulted in multiple splits producing the CPI-M and various CPI-MLs and lasted right up through the Ghandian Emergency.

before and during World War II was sharply influenced by the rapidly changing composition of the working class and the rise of the Keynesian state. These included such authors as Michael Kalecki, Joan Robinson, Paul Sweezy, and Paul Baran. Kalecki's work on the political business cycle anticipated much of Keynes' own efforts but was developed with a distinct Marxist flavour despite his non-use of the Marxian categories of *Capital*.[29] In Joan Robinson's *Essay on Marxian Economics* (1942), Marx is re-evaluated positively vis-à-vis classical orthodoxy but found to contain certain limitations where 'it is necessary to call in Keynes' analysis to complete' his theories. In the process she completely rejects Marx's labour theory of value as 'much ado about nothing' and recasts his work within the framework of aggregate Keynesian variables. In her later work, helping to develop the so-called Cambridge Theory, she added to her use of Keynes and Kalecki the work of Piero Sraffa, whose models of the production of commodities by commodities are partly based on Marx's reproduction schemes but lead in quite different directions.[30]

Perhaps the most important, because the most politically influential, of Western economists who evolved from a strictly neo-classical analysis toward some form of Marxism have been Paul Sweezy and Paul Baran. Sweezy's work on Marxian political economy is not only some of the best done by economists influenced by Marx but it also typifies the problems raised by a nonorthodox political economy reading of *Capital*. Sweezy's first major contribution to the literature of Marxian political economy, *The Theory of Capitalist Development*, appeared in 1942[31] and constitutes an extremely informative link between the older tradition of debate over crises and imperialism that I sketched above and the newer neo-Marxism of those like Kalecki and Robinson, who were heavily influenced by the changing social relations of the Great Depression and sympathetic to Keynesian theoretical approaches. In his book Sweezy passes in review not only Marx's 'economics' but also the major interpreters of Marx from Bernstein to Grossman. The outcome of his review and thinking was to reinterpret Marx's theory of crisis into a form of underconsumptionism very close to that of Bauer, whom he found to be 'essentially correct' and whom he reformulated and corrected in the mathematical terms of modern growth theory.[32] Ultimately his work can be seen to be even closer to that of Keynes, whose language and forms of analysis he increasingly adopted. Perhaps most obvious in this regard is his collaboration with Shigeto Tsuru, whose direct translation of Marxism into Keynesian concepts is included in the book as an appendix.[33] In the development of Sweezy's work we can see that, while his Marxism represented a rupture with his prior orthodox economics, the theory

29 See Michael Kalecki's *Essays in the Theory of Economic Fluctuations*, *Studies in Economic Dynamics*, and *Theory of Economic Dynamics*.

30 See Joan Robinson, *An Essay on Marxian Economics*, and her article 'Marx and Keynes', *Critica Economica*, November 1948, reprinted in *Marx and Modern Economics*, ed. Horowitz: 103–116. Robinson's views on Marx have remained virtually unchanged over the last thirty years. For a recent statement of them, see her review of Ronald Meek's *Studies in the Labor Theory of Value* in *Monthly Review* 29, no. 7 (December 1977): 50–59, where she briefly summarises her own position and that of Sraffa.

31 Paul Sweezy, *The Theory of Capitalist Development*.

32 Ibid.: 186–189.

33 Ibid.: 365–374. Also see Shigeto Tsuru, 'Keynes versus Marx: The Methodology of Aggregates', in *Marx and Modern Economics*, ed. Horowitz.

he developed, insofar as it moved beyond the old debates, ultimately tried to reconcile Marx's views with those of the new Keynesian macroeconomics. In so doing he joined Kalecki and Robinson in abandoning Marx's value analysis as the basis of his analytical work. Like the work of these other authors, Sweezy's evolution can be interpreted to have developed as a moment in the general process of disillusionment which accompanied the rise of fascism and the successful Keynesian response to the working-class struggles of the 1930s, first with the Second World War and then later with the defeat of the united fronts in Europe by the Marshall Plan, the collapse of the post-war strike wave in the United States, and the emergence of a new period of capitalist growth within the context of the new American empire. All this certainly must help explain Sweezy's abandonment of the Marxian theoretical framework in favour of that of ascendant Keynesianism. Added to this in Sweezy's case was also the growing dissatisfaction which he shared with many others over the continued excesses of Stalinism — a phenomenon that also seemed to point up the inability of Marxism to explain and predict the pattern of socialist development.[34]

Nor did Sweezy work alone in this loss of faith in the core of Marxist theory. Economist Paul Baran of Stanford University, who became his closest collaborator, shared these doubts. In both Baran's *Political Economy of Growth*, published in 1956, and their joint work, *Monopoly Capital*, which appeared in 1964, the basic analytical weapons brought to bear in analysing capitalist development in underdeveloped and developed countries were variants of orthodox neo-classical and Keynesian political economy.[35] Marxism was, for the most part, reduced to supplying the rhetoric and the moral background of these works.

In the *Political Economy of Growth*, for example, Baran not only bases his discussion of monopoly capital on the neo-classical theory of the market behaviour of the monopoly firm, but also quite explicitly throws out Marx's concept of surplus value (and thus that of value) and substitutes a generic concept of surplus which can fit almost any orthodox growth theory model.[36] At the same time that he made a lasting contribution by explaining the 'roots of backwardness' in the underdeveloped world in terms of the imperialist extraction of its surplus, he did so in a way which ignored both value and the class relations which it expresses. He thus laid the basis for a paradigm of underdevelopment devoid of an analysis of the struggles between classes. Similarly, in *Monopoly Capital*, Baran and Sweezy redeploy the surplus concept and study what they think is the problem of its 'disposal' in terms of the limitations they find in the ability of Keynesian fiscal and monetary policy to manipulate aggregate

34 For an analysis of the history of Sweezy's position on the Soviet Union and China, see Peter Clecak, *Radical Paradoxes*.
35 Paul Baran, *The Political Economy of Growth*, and Paul Baran and Paul Sweezy, *Monopoly Capital*.
36 Baran's concept of 'actual surplus' is simply the Keynesian savings out of current income available for investment. His much maligned concept of 'potential surplus' is in some ways more interesting. Although his definitions of 'essential' consumption and 'potential' output are the creations of his own notions of rationality, which he juxtaposes to the irrationality of capitalism, they are nevertheless at least suggestive of a working-class viewpoint. It is true that capital has its own 'rationality' and that it is futile to moralistically label it 'irrational' as Baran and Sweezy do. But it is also true that the working class has its own rationality and one can, quite legitimately, do as Marx did and point out how capital does not respond to working-class needs.

demand. In this way they continue a trend started in their earlier works of seeing the problem of surplus not in terms of both its production and realization but only in terms of the latter. This would seem to reflect their evaluation of the post-war working class as having been first defeated and then bought off by capital, in such a manner that its struggles in production had been neutralized, so that the only hope for revolution was seen to be in the Third World and in the nonworking-class groups of blacks and students in the developed world.

Given the circumstances in which they found themselves in the 1950s and the bankrupt nature of the ossified version of Marxism as political economy to which they fell heir, these developments, even if regrettable, are certainly understandable. Indeed, one can argue persuasively that in those years a careful reading of Keynes was undoubtedly more enlightening as to the reality of early post-war capitalism than any reading of orthodox Marxism.[37]

During the cycle of struggles of the 1960s, despite these limitations, and perhaps partly because of their rejection of Marxism as it was then being interpreted, Baran and Sweezy's books appeared to provide a distinct alternative to the orthodox neo-classical synthesis, to orthodox Marxist political economy, and to the politics both implied.

In the United States, where sectarian Marxism had long since been discredited by the time of the rise of the civil rights, the black power, the women's power, the welfare rights, and the antiwar movements, the 'New Left' found in such neo-marxist theories as those of Baran and Sweezy a more appealing and useful interpretation than those of the old dogmatisms. Seeing their time as full of new developments, the New Left saw their struggles as falling into the realm of revolt against alienation, or discrimination and imperialism, products of a stifling, increasingly regimented 'industrial society', or of sexism and racism *per se*. Baran and Sweezy's analysis provided an account of capitalist crisis which put the onus for current problems on an irrational 'system' and explained the Vietnam war as the outcome of American imperialism. Yet at the same time the analysis of capitalist crisis remained locked within the old categories of political economy. Baran and Sweezy, and those who followed them, still defined the working class only as wage workers and thus identified the struggles of unemployed Black Panthers, militant Students for a Democratic Society, radical feminists, or welfare rights activists as being outside that class.[38] All that could be seen of the working class within this perspective were the hard-hat attacks on antiwar demonstrators. What place could there be for Marx in a vision in which the working class had sold out and allied with the capitalist class and the only true revolutionaries were nonworking-class students, women, Third World minorities,

37 The persistence of most Marxist political economists in criticizing bourgeois economists like Keynes because they are not Marxists (for example, see Mattick's *Marx and Keynes*) is, to my mind, regrettable. The real interest in Keynes or any other author is what we can learn about the nature and parameters of the class conflict and the strategies used in it. From the point of view of those engaged in struggle, whether workers or capitalists, Keynes' work was not essentially theoretical; it was strategic. And if today we are in a post-Keynesian world it is not because his 'theories' are deficient, but because his strategies have been defeated by the working class.

38 This shows up clearly in their book *Monopoly Capital* and in the pages of Sweezy's journal, *Monthly Review*.

and peasants? In the place of the vision of the working class as the major protagonist in the struggle emerged that of 'the people'.

This critical activist rejection of what was then traditional Marxist theory was an important point of reference for the new generation of radical intellectuals that emerged in the United States in the late 1960s. These intellectuals were in the beginning overwhelmingly non-Marxist but were united by their opposition to the policies of capitalism at home and abroad. They faced the need to explain the global scope of counterinsurgency efforts of the Kennedy and Johnson administrations that had such misleading titles as the New Frontier, the Alliance for Progress, and the Great Society. They also sought to understand the rising global resistance to these efforts that was spreading under the banner of Guevarra's battle cry, 'Two, three, many Vietnams!' and guided by Lin Piao's prescription for rural guerrilla warfare to 'surround the cities'.

Their response to these phenomena was twofold. On the one hand, these activists-turned-intellectuals looked inward and discovered the ways in which the universities and academic disciplines were heavily involved in supporting the system at home and overseas.[39] They consequently focused much of their attention on those institutions, producing shut-it-down strikes and a new wave of militancy. On the other hand, they sought to theorize these phenomena and gathered together in new groupings of alternative professional organizations, such as the Union for Radical Political Economists. United more by their opposition to a dominant social order and its theoretical paradigms than by a coherent vision of their own — Marxist or otherwise — they nevertheless began serious study of the cycle of struggles in which they were involved. As they did, many turned to political economy and sought to develop the theories of Baran and Sweezy.

Important among the results of the elaboration of neo-Marxist political economy were the theories of those like Andre Gunder Frank who helped develop the alternative theory of imperialism and revolution. Frank and others argued that the feudalism attacked by the orthodox Marxists in Latin America and Asia was an illusion. Capitalism was and had been from the beginning an international system which incorporated all prior social systems into itself — into an international hierarchy of metropolises and satellite relations. These theories implied the rejection of the Communist Party's support for local bourgeois forces. These last were seen as mere comprador, or caretaker, capitalists, lower-level mangers of the international capitalist system. Support for them could only mean support for the system as a whole and a reduction rather than an increase in the possibilities of successful working-class revolution.[40]

These theories were more in tune with the interests of workers and peasants than those of the Old Left. They expressed more accurately both the new cycle of struggles

39 For an example of this kind of strategic evaluation of the political role of the universities that laid the basis for action against them, see Anne Bauer and Harry Cleaver, 'Minority Report on the Stanford Research Institute', in *The Radical Attack on Business*, ed. Charles Perrow.

40 See Andre Gunder Frank's *Capitalism and Underdevelopment in Latin America*, *Lumpenbourgeoisie: Lumpendevelopment*, and 'Not Feudalism — Capitalism', *Monthly Review* (December 1963): 468–478. Also see Martin Nicolaus, 'Who Will Bring the Mother Down?' in *Readings in U.S. Imperialism*, eds. K. T. Fann and D. C. Hodges, and *Monthly Review* generally.

and its international dimension. And in general they supported the revolutionary upheavals among the peasantry, as well as among blacks, students, and women, identifying both capitalism and orthodox communism as the enemy. Yet at the same time they were theoretically weak in many ways. Not based either on Marx or directly on contemporary bourgeois economic theory, their formulations of the mechanisms and dynamics of imperialism were an inconsistent mélange of Marxist rhetoric about exploitation and dependency and of bourgeois trade and Keynesian development theory. Unwilling to accept the tools of bourgeois theory outright yet having abandoned Marx's theories of value and surplus value, their writings were sometimes brilliant with insights but often murky in construction and weak in logical consistency.

The revival of orthodoxy

As a result of these weaknesses, these New Left political economists left themselves open to counterattack from the Old Left on the terrain of political economy from at least two different directions. The first aspect of the riposte came through the employment of the conceptual foil of 'mode of production' against their failure to integrate their theory of a global capitalist economic system linked by trade and capital flows with a theory of production which could explain the vast variation in production conditions within that system. To this problem of the specificity of production relationships — which was particularly marked in the Third World — French Communist Party theoretician Louis Althusser and those he influenced brought the concept of different but articulated modes of production where one mode dominated others.[41] Ernesto Laclau, for example, directly attacked Frank's work on Latin America by zeroing in on the structural differences between the forms, or modes, of production in urban capitalist industry and in rural agricultural society still dominated by mini- or latifundias.[42] The success of this thrust can be measured by the degree to which the analysis of struggles in the Third World has been replaced by a debate over the exact specification of 'peripheral social formations' or of the nature of the mode of production in various agricultures. Not only has this new histomat (historical materialism) been reanimated as a weapon of the Communist Party but it also has been accepted as the theoretical ground of debate by a wide variety of leftist writers both within and without the Old Left parties — including a number of Marxist anthropologists, sociologists, and political economists.[43] Debate has been particularly prolonged in Latin America and Asia where it has profound political significance for strategy.[44] But it has also permeated certain circles of political economists in the United States and Western Europe where its political ramifications are less direct but

41 Louis Althusser and Etienne Balibar's *Reading Capital* was one of the opening shots in this counterattack. The philosophical and political underpinnings will be briefly examined in the next section.
42 Ernesto Laclau, 'Feudalism and Capitalism in Latin America', *New Left Review* 67 (1971): 19–38.
43 Among the better known of the Marxist anthropologists who have been deeply affected by these concepts are Claude Meillasoux, Maurice Godelier, Emmanuel Terray, and Pierre-Phillippe Rey.
44 For a summary and critique of the Indian debate, see Harry Cleaver, 'The Internationalization of Capital and the Mode of Production in Agriculture', *Economic and Political Weekly*, March 27, 1976: A2–A16. For part of the Latin American debate, see *Latin American Perspectives* 1, no 1 (Spring 1974), Special Issue: 'Dependency Theory: A Reassessment'.

the underlying conflicts are as real. Attempts to reconcile the neo-Marxist political economy of those like Baran, Sweezy, and Frank with such 'mode of production' analysis — such as the attempts by Samir Amin — have produced only incoherent eclectic conglomerations.[45]

The other side of the attack on neo-Marxist political economy by a renovated orthodoxy has been in the economic theory of capitalism, especially in the political economy of crisis. This has occurred mainly in the developed world during the current international crisis where the role of the peasantry is vastly less important and the national economies are generally agreed by all concerned to be overwhelmingly capitalist. For all the flood of literature in this attack — which has constituted an important moment of the current revival of Marxist political economy — it has represented for the most part not a return to Marx but a return to the framework and problems of pre-World War II Marxism. We find during the last few years only revised versions of theories of the past. From an older generation have come writers like Ernest Mandel, theorist of the Trotskyist Fourth International, and Paul Mattick, the last of the original Council Communists.[46] From a younger generation have sprung those like Mario Cogoy, David Yaffe, or Michael Kidron.[47] Wielding the weapons of traditional interpretations of Marx's theory of value and, often, of his theory of the tendency of the rate of profit to fall against neo-Marxism's Keynesian underconsumptionism, they have forced it to fall back and regroup.

Backtracking before this onslaught, Sweezy has reformulated his arguments in Marxist rather than Keynesian terms and relaunched his particular version of underconsumptionist theory of crisis against these foes.[48] Unfortunately, this refurbished theory uses the same basic concepts of value as do his opponents. As a result we find many of the battles of the period 1900–1940 being fought over again in almost exactly the same terms with which they were fought years ago. This arcane spectacle is a bizarre one and has a distinct macabre character. One might have expected to find the 'reappropriation' of Marxism to be something like an exercise in archaeology designed to uncover the nature of the political weapons developed during the history of class conflict with an eye to their possible usefulness today in a time of crisis. Instead what we find all too often is an exercise in necromancy in which one or

45 Samir Amin's basic idea to analyse the subject in *The Accumulation of Capital on a World Scale* is magnificent. Unfortunately, despite points of brilliance and insight, the way he jumps back and forth between theoretical frameworks, Marxist here, bourgeois there, makes of the book a cut-and-paste patchwork without any internal consistency. In short, he completely fails to integrate neo-Marxian Keynesianism with either a mode-of-production approach or a Marxist value theory.

46 See Ernest Mandel's books, *Marxist Economic Theory* and *Late Capitalism*, as well as his 'Where Is America Going', in *Readings in U.S. Imperialism*, eds. Fann and Hodges, and 'The Laws of Uneven Development', *New Left Review*, January–February 1970: 19–38. For Paul Mattick's attack on Baran and Sweezy, see his 'Marxism and "Monopoly Capital"', *Progressive Labor* 6, no. 1 (May 1967): 34–49.

47 Mario Cogoy, 'Les Theories neo-Marxistes, Marx et l'accumulation du capital', *Les Temps Modernes* 314–315 (September–October 1972): 396–426, and 'The Fall of the Rate of Profit and the Theory of Accumulation of Capital: A Reply to Paul Sweezy', *Bulletin of the Conference of Socialist Economists* (Winter 1973): 52–67; David Yaffe, 'Marxian Theory of Crisis, Capital and the State', *Bulletin of the Conference of Socialist Economists*. (Winter 1972): 5–58; and Michael Kidron, *Western Capitalism since the War*.

48 Paul Sweezy, 'On the Theory of Monopoly Capitalism', *Monthly Review* 23, no. 11 (April 1972): 1–23, and 'Some Problems in the Theory of Capital Accumulation', *Monthly Review* 25, no. 12.

another long-dead spirit is summoned from the grave to direct the battles of the present. One might have expected to find attempts to grasp the theories and practice of these great historical figures of Marxism within the class struggles of their time as input into the solving of our own problems (and leaving them at rest once the lessons they have to teach us have been learned). Instead time and again we see a very un-Marxist blindness to the historical specificity of our period and a desire to find the key to the present somewhere in the past.

The limits of political economy

We thus find in this current literature all the fundamental limitations of reading Marx as political economy that have plagued the approach from the beginning. Whether in the case of orthodoxy, revisionism, or neo-Marxism, the field of examination is strictly confined to economics, and Marxism as political economy becomes at best an ideological prop to political positions which are brought in alongside these critiques of capitalism. In each case we can see how the various authors remain locked into a world where concepts designate abstract relations and the source of crisis or imperialism is to be found in the system's mysterious economic 'laws of motion' that regulate the behaviour of the capitalist class.

What we have here is a reading of *Capital* that is not only limited to being a passive interpretation, but which also, by restricting itself to the 'economic' sphere or 'base' effectively, makes of political economy the theory of the capitalist factory and its waged workers alone.[49] This has the effect of excluding the rest of society from the analysis — not only the state and party politics but also the unemployed, the family, the school, health care, the media, art, and so on. As a result political economists who would try to take these things into account find themselves rummaging through Marx's writings looking for suggestive titbits of 'other' theories.[50] Yet it is precisely in these 'other' social spheres that many of the major social conflicts of today are occurring. At the turn of the century, when working-class struggle was located primarily (but not uniquely by any means) in the factory, there was perhaps some excuse for reading *Capital* as a theoretical model of the capitalist factory. But as a result of the extensive social engineering of the 1920s and 1930s through which capitalist social planners sought to restructure virtually all of society, and as a result of the nature of recent social struggles against such planning, such interpretations today are grossly inadequate. The New Left correctly sensed this and avoided orthodox interpretations. The inadequacy of both orthodox and neo-Marxist theories became abundantly clear in the late 1960s. Both were unequipped to explain the revolts of the unwaged and were forced to appeal to ad hoc solutions. Orthodoxy revived historical materialism and

49 'Capitalist factory' is used here as a metaphor for the whole network of industrial firms which constitutes industrial capital. It is in these firms that the 'productive' workers are said to be found, and it is what happens in the production and sale of the commodities these waged workers produce that is generally considered to determine all else.

50 Some of these efforts will be examined in the next section. The two areas of social life outside the factory which have probably received the most attention by political economists have been the school and the home. For an example, see Samuel Bowles and Herbert Gintis, *Schooling in Capitalist America*; Martin Carnoy, *Education as Cultural Imperialism*; and Wendy Edmond and Suzie Fleming, eds. *All Work and No Pay*.

tried to shove peasant revolts into the box of pre-capitalist modes of production. Student revolts were classified as either petty bourgeois or lumpen. Women's revolts were within the framework of some 'domestic' mode of production. All were thus set aside as unimportant secondary phenomena because they were not truly working class. This of course set up the Party once again as the mediating interpreter of the real working-class interests and justified the attempt to repress or co-opt these struggles.

Although the neo-Marxism of the New Left made these struggles central to its notion of revolution, it fared little better theoretically. Because it accepted orthodoxy's exclusion of these groups from the working class, all it could offer were vague evocations of 'the people's' interests. In as much as either they fell outside the 'economic' sphere or their place within it was obscure, these revolts had to be seen as by-products of the general irrationality of the system. We can thus see that one great weakness of reading Marx as political economy has been to isolate and reduce his analysis to that of the factory. But if this is a weakness which has made both orthodox and neo-Marxism utterly incapable of accounting for the present crisis, it is not the only problem.

Even more important is the one-sidedness of all these analyses, from those of the Second International right up through the contemporary debates on crisis theory. This one-sidedness lies in the limited way in which the working class, however defined, makes an appearance in these models. When it appears on the scene at all, it comes in from the outside and usually as a victim fighting defensive battles. This is why I would label the Marxist or neo-Marxist categories employed in these models 'reified'. They are 'reified' in that instead of being understood as designating social relations between the classes they have been turned into designations of things, things within capital separate from the social relation. In fact the concept of capital itself in these models usually designates not the class relation (that is sometimes thrown in as an afterthought) but rather the means of production, money capital, commodity capital, and labour power, all circulating as mindless entities through the ups and downs of their circuits. Where does the impulse to movement, technological change, or expansion come from in these models? Why, it comes from within capital, of course, usually the blind result of competition among capitalists. When competition breaks down in monopoly capital, Marxists like Baran, Sweezy, and Josef Steindl deduce a necessary tendency to stagnation. In either case the working class is only a spectator to the global waltz of capital's autonomous self-activating development.

This was not Marx's view of the world. Not only did he repeatedly insist that capital was a social relation of classes, but he also explicitly stated that at the level of the class the so-called economic relations were in fact political relations:

> Every movement in which the working class comes out *as a class* against the ruling classes and attempts to force them by pressure from without is a political movement. For instance, the attempt in a particular factory or even a particular industry to force a shorter working day out of the capitalists by strikes, etc., is a purely economic movement. On the other hand the movement to force an eight hour day, etc., *law* is a *political* movement. And in this way, out of the separate

> economic movements of the workers there grows up everywhere a *political* movement, that is to say a movement of the *class*, with the object of achieving its interests in a general form, in a form possessing a general social force of compulsion.[51]

The point here is that as the struggle for the eight-hour day develops, as it becomes generalized, it moves beyond the particular demands of a narrowly defined group of workers and becomes a demand of the whole class and thus political. This corresponds to a historical movement which begins with the demands of a quantitatively small number of workers but which circulates to become a new qualitative focal point of the class struggle. Such demands spread if they correspond to the underlying social conditions of the class generally. Marx sought out and analysed several of these struggles — over the length of the working day, the intensity of work, productivity, mechanization, the social wage, and so on. In *Capital* he lays out both the specific history of their development in England and their general place within capital, that is, within the overall class struggle. From the time when these areas of contention become generalized, they are branded as class and hence political relations. At any given moment particular groups of workers may or may not be actively struggling for one or another demand, but if they do, the individual struggle at each factory or industry can no longer be considered an isolated 'purely economic' struggle but must be grasped as a part of the whole, as a political struggle for power. Today we can see this even more clearly than in Marx's time because of the transformed role of the state. The rise of the Keynesian state has meant the virtual merging of not only the state and the 'economy' but of the state and 'society' itself.

This is a second fundamental danger of reading Marx as political economy and as ideology. We are presented with elaborately detailed critical interpretations of this self-activating monster in a way that completely ignores the way actual working-class power forces and checks capitalist development. Marx saw how the successful struggle for a shorter working day caused a crisis for capital. These political economists do not: they see absolute surplus value as a reified abstract concept. Marx saw how that struggle forced the development of productivity-raising innovations which raised the organic composition of capital. He thus saw relative surplus value as a strategic capitalist response. These political economists do not: they see only competition between capitalists. Marx saw how workers' wage struggles could help precipitate capitalist crises. These political economists see only abstract 'laws of motion'.[52] These kinds of interpretations glorify the dynamic of capital, however evil, and portray

51 Marx to Bolte, London, November 23, 1871, in Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *Correspondence 1846–1895*: 315–319.

52 There are today a few political economists who have begun to see that the power of the working class does play a role in the emergence of capitalist crisis. Unfortunately, they remain bound within the terms of Marx's discussion of *Values, Price and Profit* and Chapter 25 of *Capital* (Volume I), where these struggles are essentially over distributive shares, are at best responsible for inflation, and are always effectively checked by capitalist crisis. See, for example, A. Glyn and B. Sutcliffe, *British Capitalism, Workers and the Profits Squeeze*; R. Boddy and J. Crotty, 'Class Conflict, Keynesian Policies, and the Business Cycle', *Monthly Review* 26, no. 5 (October 1974): 1–17; and John G. Gurley, 'Unemployment and Inflation', *Monthly Review* 29, no. 7 (December 1977): 23–29.

the working class as a hapless victim. Because of this, even if one wishes to see ideological critique as a weapon in the class struggle, one must conclude that such theories which accord all power to capital can only be in its interest. Such critiques are particularly well suited to the needs of Leninist parties or any other elitist groups which would present themselves as the only solution for the class. If the class is powerless in the 'economic' struggle, as the theories say, then its only solution is obviously 'to join the Party and smash the state'. How this mass of hapless victims is to achieve such a feat would seem to be a mystery understood only by the Party hierarchy, who will provide the necessary leadership and wisdom. But the truth is that the class is not powerless at all and that the Party leaders seek to mobilize its power as a prelude to taking control themselves and becoming the managers of a rationalized, planned 'socialist' economy in which the workers, they hope, will work even harder than before.

Because of these limitations and dangers of political economy readings of *Capital* there have been those who have tried to go beyond them. The first limitation — the inability of Marxist political economy to grasp the full scope of capitalist social relations outside the factory and the consequent inability to explain the social crises of the mid-twentieth century — opened political economy historically to a deep critique that was developed over several decades by a number of Marxists seeking to fill the void. Their efforts will be examined in the next section. We will see that the second and deeper failure — to ignore the working class — runs through the work not only of the political economists but of their critics as well.

Reading Marx philosophically

The tradition of reading Marx as a philosopher is at least as old, and much more varied, as that of reading him as a political economist. During the Marxist revival of the 1960s and 1970s the tradition of philosophical Marxism has occupied a prominent place. Within that tradition we can outline two general tendencies: orthodox and revisionist. The first, by far the narrowest, is that adopted by communist Marxism: dialectical materialism whose evolution runs from Engels' work through the Stalinist era to its latest 'reformulation' by Althusser and followers. The revisionist tendency, much broader and more complex, regroups all those attempts to reinterpret Marx in the light of other philosophers and of new elements in the development of capitalism. Included here must be such diverse currents as the so-called Western Marxism of György Lukács, Antonio Gramsci, and Karl Korsch, who all emphasized Hegel's influence on Marx; the neo-Kantianism of Galvano Delavolpe and Lucio Colletti; the Marxist Hegelianism of Jean Hyppolite and Alexandre Kojève; the existentialism of Jean-Paul Sartre, Simone de Beauvoir, and Maurice Merleau-Ponty; the phenomenological Marxism of Tran Duc Thao and Karel Kosik; and the critical theory of those associated with the Frankfurt School for example, Herbert Marcuse, Max Horkheimer, Theodor Adorno, and Jürgen Habermas. The vast sweep of philosophical questions investigated by these authors, orthodox or revisionist, defies any short summary of this tradition,

as was possible with political economy. In lieu of such a summary, I will discuss briefly two elements of this tradition to illustrate some of the limitations of reading Marx as a philosopher: (a) the contemporary attempt to revive diamat (dialectical materialism) through a 'philosophical' reading of *Capital* by Louis Althusser, and (b) some aspects of the analysis of the 'cultural sphere' of advanced capitalism in Western Marxism and critical theory.

Born-again orthodoxy

It is unfortunate but true that one of the most politically important of the philosophical readings of *Capital* in this period is that of Louis Althusser, a leading theoretician of the French Communist Party. In *For Marx* (1965) and *Reading Capital* (1965), Althusser and his colleagues set out to reinterpret the full sweep of Marx's opus from his youth to his maturity with the aim of revitalizing dialectical materialism as an ideology to mediate the widely discredited political practices of the French Communist Party.[53] Their work represents the most thorough attempt of the old orthodox Marxism to cleanse itself and recoup the ground lost during previous decades.

As the orthodox version of Marxism-as-philosophy, diamat dates from Engels' formulations in *Anti-Dühring*, *Ludwig Feuerbach*, and the *Dialectics of Nature*.[54] In those works he sought to expand Marx's analysis of capital into a universal philosophical system which would englobe not only the entirety of human history but the entire cosmos of the natural world as well. This project meant a return to the terrain of debate with German idealism that Marx had abandoned after completing the *Holy Family*, the *German Ideology*, and his study of Feuerbach.[55] Ignoring the Eleventh Thesis on Feuerbach with which Marx had closed his accounts with philosophy, Engels undertook a reinterpretation of the relation between Marx and Hegel that presented 'Marxism' as both a reversal and a correction of the Hegelian system. Confusing both Hegel and Marx's critique, Engels interpreted Marx's formula that the Hegelian dialectic was 'standing on its head' and 'must be turned right side up again if you would discover the rational kernel within the mystical shell' as saying that Hegel's dialectic was a method (the rational kernel) that could be extricated from his idealism (the mystical shell) and applied within a framework of materialism — thus the formulation 'dialectical materialism'. This interpretation understood the idealism of Hegel as being an affirmation that only ideas were real and material reality merely a pale reflection of those ideas. According to Engels, materialism reversed the relation, making ideas a reflection of material reality. But this constituted a complete misreading of Hegel's concept of 'real', which referred not to existence but to logic. Instead of seeing that Hegel's *Zeitgeist* was ultimately a philosophical formulation of the dialectic of capital and that his idealism lay in the perception of an infinite capacity to logically resolve

53 Louis Althusser, *For Marx*, and Althusser and Balibar, *Reading Capital*.
54 *Anti-Dühring* was written in 1876–78, *Ludwig Feuerbach* in 1886, and the *Dialectics of Nature* over the period of 1873 to 1883.
55 Marx and Engels wrote 'The Holy Family or a Critique of Critical Criticism' in 1844 (*Collected Works*, IV: 5–211); they wrote 'The German Ideology' in 1845–46 (*Collected Works*, V: 19–539); and Marx wrote 'Theses on Feuerbach' in 1845 (*Collected Works*, V: 3–5).

the contradictions within capitalist society, Engels thought the problem was to adapt that dialectic to the analysis of the world. He thus set a pattern, which in some quarters survives to this day, of understanding the dialectic not as a characteristic of capital that working-class struggle seeks to destroy but rather as a universal logic and method to be adopted! Ironically, Engels, and those who followed him, thus preserved in a distorted way the Hegelian vision of a dialectical cosmos — a vision that can be seen as an optimistic moment of bourgeois philosophy that theorizes capital's tendency to impute and impose its own logic on the world.

Once the dialectic was divorced from capital, once materialism was no longer understood as the working class's ability to destroy capital's idealism but as 'matter' in the abstract, once, in short, the dialectical form was divorced from its content, Engels could apply that form anywhere: in the analysis of both nature and human history. In the former case, as Lucio Colletti has usefully shown, the result was little more than a pretentious reworking of Hegel.[56] In particular, in Colletti's view, Engels' *Dialectics of Nature* is a distorted adaptation of Hegel's *Philosophy of Nature* that completely missed the point that all of Hegel's work was based on the dialectics of matter within an infinitely totalizing movement.[57] In the case of analysing human history, Engels reworked the ideas of the *German Ideology* and the Preface to the *Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy* into 'historical materialism' — wherein the dialectic (of capital) is projected backward onto all previous societies. The result was the analysis of society in terms of the famous base/superstructure dichotomy where the superstructure of politics, law, culture, and so on is determined by the economic base that is founded on a given 'mode of production'. The development of the mode in turn was explained by the dialectical interaction of the forces and relations of production.

This simple formulation was adopted in one form or another by the participants in the Second International (e.g. Kautsky in 'The Agrarian Question', Lenin in 'The Development of Capitalism in Russia').[58] The difficulties of this formulation are notorious. The usual presentation smacks of pure economic determinism — the economics of the mode of production unilaterally determine the superstructure. Despite Engels' famous letter to Joseph Bloch denying any such intention, the problem of the meaning of reciprocal interaction of base and superstructure remain unresolved.[59] Among other well-known problems is that of analysing the interaction of varying models (e.g. capitalist/socialist) to explain complex or transitional societies. Histomat was ultimately simplified even further by Stalin into a rigid unilinear progression of modes through which all social groups had to pass.[60] In its Stalinist incarnation histomat became a

56 See Colletti's 'From Hegel to Marcuse' in his *From Rousseau to Lenin*.
57 Ibid.: 123–128.
58 Karl Kautsky, *La Question Agraire*. This is a facsimile reprint of the 1900 edition by Giard et Briere. See also V. I. Lenin, 'The Development of Capitalism in Russia', in *Collected Works*, vol. 3.
59 Engels' statement to Bloch was: 'Marx and I are ourselves partly to blame for the fact that the younger people sometimes lay more stress on the economic side than is due it. We had to emphasize the main principle vis-à-vis our adversaries, who denied it, and we had not always the time, the place or the opportunity to give their due to the other factors involved in the interaction' (Engels to J. Bloch, September 21, 1890, *Marx–Engels Selected Correspondence*: 396).
60 Joseph Stalin, *Dialectical and Historical Materialism*.

blatant ideology of domination — the theoretical justification for the exploitation of Russian workers.[61] This purpose was served by interpreting the interaction between the relations and forces of production as a veritable technological determinism. Marx's remarks in the Preface on the forces bursting the fetters imposed by the relations of production were transformed into a theory that the development of the productive forces was not only necessary but also sufficient to guarantee permanent transformation of the relations of production. This provided an ideological justification for the use of force in pushing ahead at all possible speed with 'socialist' accumulation to guarantee no recrudescence of 'capitalism' in the Soviet Union. The obviously reactionary role played by both histomat and diamat in the Soviet Union was one reason for their abandonment by political economists in the West in the post-World War II period (see above). In the East, the Chinese communists reformulated histomat to meet their own needs. They avoided the economic and technological determinism of Stalin by emphasizing the relative autonomy of the superstructure (politics) on the economic base (economy). This constituted a reversed interpretation that a cynic might suggest was useful in justifying Party intervention and attempted political regimentation of all spheres of production through ideological re-education.[62]

This, then, was the sorry condition of orthodox Marxist philosophy in the 1950s. Beginning with Engels' early misguided attempts to convert Marx into a philosopher, orthodox Marxism had evolved into a pretentious but sterile and dogmatic ideology of domination. It was from this discredited position that Althusser and friends set out to rescue it in the early 1960s.

We have already seen in the preceding section the political role played by their reinterpretation of historical materialism — in the Communist Party riposte against those political economists who attacked the Party's support for capitalist development against 'feudal elements' in the Third World. That reworking of histomat was presented in *Reading Capital* as a new 'science of history' and was based on a number of philosophical positions concerning the nature of Marxism and of Marxist methodology.

In the beginning of *Reading Capital*, Althusser explicitly outlined his project as a philosopher's reading of *Capital* as opposed to that of an economist, a historian, or a logician.[63] This project he defines as posing the question of the 'specific object' of Marx's discourse and as discovering the 'epistemological status' that distinguishes the unity of the discourse and its object from other forms of discourse. What is the point of this? To discover 'the place that *Capital* occupies in the history of knowledge'. From the beginning, then, we know to expect a purely theoretical exercise in ideology. When Althusser goes on to lecture his readers on the analysis of the 'silences' and 'invisibilities' in a discourse, we are inevitably led to discover in Althusser himself total silence on the working class's real struggles and revolutionary trials.[64] For Althusser there is no such history. There is only the 'science of history'. What is this 'science'

61 Charles Bettleheim, *Class Struggles in the USSR*.
62 See, for example, Hung Hsueh-ping, 'The Essence of 'Theory of Productive Forces' Is to Oppose Proletarian Revolution', *Peking Review* (September 19, 1969): 5–8.
63 Althusser and Balibar, *Reading Capital*: 14–15.
64 Ibid.: 19–28.

that Althusser would construct by totally ignoring history? It is the construction of an ahistorical, frozen conceptualization of ethereal theoretical structures. It is the reconstruction of an old dogmatism.

To refound this old dogmatism, Althusser proceeded in at least two ways. First, he ruled out of consideration Marx's early works like the *Manuscripts of 1844* by asserting an epistemological break between a young misguided Hegelian Marx and a mature 'scientific' Marx — the Marx of *Capital*.[65] This position neatly eliminated a whole series of questions about the nature and quality of work (e.g. the problematic of alienation) that are today just as embarrassing to the Soviet state — for which Althusser has continued to apologize — as they are in the West. Second, and more importantly, he argued that Marx's mature scientific work — *Capital* — was a purely theoretical work whose object, the concept of the capitalist mode of production, is analysed in an abstract manner. This concept is then generalized as the basic category of a theoretical science of history in which all human experience is classified into one mode or another.

By arguing the autonomy of his 'theoretical practice', Althusser was at once creating a space for his work within the French Communist Party and for a reading of *Capital* that totally divorced it from either the concrete history analysed therein or any other history in which it might be grasped. The historical material with which *Capital* is crammed full was dubbed of a merely illustrative nature and irrelevant to the developing theoretical model of the capitalist mode of production. In this fashion Althusser escapes by a slight of hand any embarrassing need to verify his theory in history (a normally essential aspect of any 'science') and simultaneously makes of his theory a boringly dogmatic scientism.[66]

Despite the doubts of some of the Party hierarchy about this 'new' approach, from their point of view the nice thing about this structuralist Marxism (as it was quickly dubbed by commentators) had to be that to all intents and purposes it continued to remove the class struggle from centre stage and to consign it to a substructure of a structure (the relations of production within the economic structure). *Capital* is thus deemed to analyse the concept of capital independently of class struggle that may (or may not) be brought in later as a further, derived development. This interpretation is obviously a convenient one for a French Communist Party dedicated to playing down working-class struggle and keeping it in check. To solve the sticky problems of economic and technological determinism, Althusser could only borrow from Freud the concept of overdetermination and from Mao the 'relative autonomy' of the superstructure. The result is a hodgepodge: an admission of any number of 'determinations' while the right of determination in the last instance (whose meaning is never clearly defined) is preserved for the economy. This reformulation amounts to only a somewhat more sophisticated justification for a Marxism-Leninism in which Marxism continues to provide an analysis of economics and Leninism

65 See the introduction to Althusser's *For Marx*.
66 For one of the more enjoyable and thorough critiques of Althusser's scientism, see François George, 'Reading Althusser', *Telos* 7 (Spring 1971): 73–98.

to provide that of the political sphere which Marx never developed.

Despite the fact that Althusser in his *Elements d'autocritique* and Nicos Poulantzas — one of the most prolific Althusserians — in *New Left Review* have admitted that their previous works (*Reading Capital*, *For Marx*, *Political Power and Social Classes*) by and large ignored the class struggle, they have clung to their basic theoretical structure with all its political ramifications.[67] The limited extent of the revision Althusser has felt necessary is indicated by his change in the definition of philosophy from being a 'theory of theoretical practice' to being 'the class struggle in theory'. The only class struggle that he seems willing to address is the ideological battles of leftist intellectuals.

This whole exercise is both remarkable and depressing. It quickly becomes apparent to anyone who has read Engels and Stalin that Althusser and friends have added almost nothing to the original discussions of historical materialism except a more obscure vocabulary and a deeper scientific gloss. We are still left with a lifeless sociological taxonomy of modes of production, the unresolvable problems of the interactions between the base/superstructure dualism, the mystery of the articulation of modes,[68] the absence of class struggle, and a fetishism of production that justifies contemporary socialism.[69] The widespread acceptance of these positions by those who grasp at the promises of 'scientific method' and try to disengage the 'science' from the Party's political philosophy which engendered it bespeaks the intellectual and political isolation from concrete working-class struggles of many of those trying to revive Marx in this period.

At this point I will briefly recapitulate what has been said thus far concerning the reading of Marx during the contemporary revival as a point of reference for the discussion that will follow. One basic criticism of reading *Capital* as political economy was that it accepted the tradition of making a sharp dichotomy between economics and politics and confined *Capital* to the former sphere. As we have seen this tradition has also been justified 'philosophically' in the various forms of diamat, including the Althusserian version. Whether in the case of the revived Marxist tradition of crisis theory or in the case of neo-Marxist Keynesianism, the analysis focuses predominantly on the development of capital itself — defined autonomously from the class struggle. Political economy, in short, has concerned the theorization of the capitalist factory as the site of the production of surplus value together with the circulation and realization of value. Within the factory capitalist domination is seen to be virtually complete. Although workers might legitimately struggle to keep wages from being depressed in periods of crisis, such 'economistic' struggles are ultimately confined within the dynamic of capitalist growth and cannot pose any real threat to its existence. The

67 Nicos Poulantzas' somewhat grudging admission that he and Balibar 'underestimated' the 'role' of class struggle is to be found in his 'The Capitalist State', *New Left Review* 95 (January–February 1976), especially pp. 74, 78. For Althusser's self-criticism, see his *Elements d'Autocritique*.

68 For one of the most serious attempts to work out a theory of the 'articulation' of modes which demonstrates the limits of the concept, see Pierre-Phillippe Rey, *Les Alliances de Classes*.

69 For a useful critique of the fetishism of production by many Marxists, see Jean Baudrillard's *The Mirror of Production*. Unfortunately, his use of structural linguistics and his misunderstanding of Marx limit the usefulness of his work to that critique.

inevitable conclusion of this kind of analysis is to place all hope for effective struggle in the 'political' sphere, which usually implies support for some form of party organization. In such a situation the discussion of the rise and organization of class struggle generally turns around the question of 'class consciousness'. Under what circumstances and through what processes do workers gain the consciousness of themselves as a class that is deemed essential for them to be organized to overthrow capital? With respect to this issue, as we have seen, Marxist orthodoxy has been associated with the answer given by the Lenin of *What Is to Be Done?*: namely that the workers would be educated by a specialized party of professional revolutionaries who alone can see beyond the particular economistic interests of each group of workers to the interests of the class as a whole.[70]

Critical Theory: the factory and the cultural sphere

It is against the backdrop of this Marxist-Leninist tradition that we can examine that of Western Marxism and Critical Theory and begin to see both its innovations and its similarities. In what follows I will focus on only two of the possible points of comparison: (a) the analysis of the capitalist factory, in which the critical theories of the Frankfurt School show remarkable similarity with the basic thrust of traditional Marxist political economy, and (b) the analysis of the cultural sphere in which Western Marxism and Critical Theory advance beyond orthodox Marxism at the same time that they reproduce its most basic failing.

Technological rationality and planning

Western Marxism and Critical Theory are most commonly associated with the return to Hegel and the problematics of consciousness, alienation, and culture — a return that occurred in the context of an attempt to rethink Marxism in the light of the collapse of the Second International in 1914, the Russian Revolution of 1917, and the experiences of the workers' councils in the early post-World War I years. Yet, behind these defining cultural themes lay implicit and at times explicit positions on the traditional Marxist themes of political economy. This can be seen to varying degrees in the work of Korsch, Gramsci, and Lukács, but it is particularly true of the Frankfurt School. In fact, as Critical Theory developed around the Frankfurt Institute of Social Research there was considerable discussion about political economy in debate with exponents of more traditional views like Henryk Grossman and Council Communists Paul Mattick and Anton Pannekoek (whose work was mentioned in the previous section on reading *Capital* as political economy). Much of this discussion centred on the question of capitalist crisis and the political implications of seeing or not seeing its inevitability. Positions varied widely with respect to both inevitability and its implications. Lukács, for example, embraced the concept of blind crisis laws in *History and Class Consciousness* and in the end remained faithful to the Leninist party. Grossman, Mattick, and Horkheimer also accepted the inevitability of collapse, yet they all refused the Leninist political

70 That *What Is to Be Done?* was neither the only nor the last position on organization held by Lenin has been ably demonstrated in Antonio Carlo, 'Lenin on the Party', *Telos* 17 (Fall 1973): 2–40.

conclusion. On the other hand, Pannekoek and Korsch (in the end) rejected both inevitability and Leninist politics.[71] Ultimately, however, the debate about crisis theory was a derived issue. The basis of the whole discussion was a shared certainty of absolute capitalist domination in the economic sphere — of capitalist despotism in the factory. At this level they differed only in their formulations of the character of that control. And at this level the Critical Theorists pushed even further than most political economists in analysing the character of that despotism.

The fundamental thrust that, in this area, carried those associated with the Frankfurt School beyond traditional Marxist political economy was their analysis of technological domination, on the one hand, and of capitalist planning, on the other. During the late 1920s and 1930s, critical Marxism had to come to terms not only with the failure of the workers' councils but also with the subsequent dramatic shifts in the management of capitalist accumulation associated with the rise of European fascism, of 'socialist' accumulation in the Soviet Union, and of the Keynesian state during the American New Deal. The end results of that coming to terms are fairly well known. They include the analysis of the Soviet Union as state capitalism (a position shared by the Council Communists), Marcuse's discussion of one dimensionality, and Horkheimer's formulation of state capitalism, whether of the 'liberal', 'fascist', or 'socialist' variety, as the authoritarian state. The essential underpinnings of these positions have been less well recognized until recently: the understanding that capitalism had overcome its crises of the 1920s and the 1930s through the implementation of systematic economic planning, not only by the Soviet bureaucracy but also by the capitalist states in the West. A key figure in the clarification of this analysis was Friedrich Pollock of the Institute at Frankfurt.[72] His studies of economic planning, East and West, led him to conclude that the old 'automatic' mechanisms of capitalist market competition that had led to the recent international crisis were being abandoned by capital in favour of an 'economically planned new order' based on state intervention. This new, centrally administered accumulation of capital was the essence of 'state capitalism' and of the 'authoritarian state'. For Pollock this development was an outgrowth of the growing concentration of capital that made possible the extension of the factory model of despotic control to society as a whole. Integral to his development of this view was his research into the new way of organizing technology as domination within the plan of monopoly capital: automation. 'Among the most serious consequences of automation,' he wrote, is 'the danger that it strengthens the already existing trend toward a totalitarian society.'[73] This helps explain how Critical Theory could turn its attention toward the analysis of the 'cultural realm'. Because it assumed total capitalist control in the factory and saw the authoritarian state as extending that hegemony to the rest of society, the obvious implication was the study of the emerging new forms of domination that made up that extension.

71 Russell Jacoby, 'The Politics of the Crisis Theory: Towards the Critique of Automatic Marxism II', *Telos* 23 (Spring 1975): 3–52.
72 The importance of Pollock's work and influence on Critical Theory was emphasized in Giacomo Marramao, 'Political Economy and Critical Theory', *Telos* 24 (Summer 1975): 56–80.
73 Friedrich Pollock, *Automation*, cited in Marramao, 'Political Economy and Critical Theory': 75.

With this background it should be clear that the general preoccupation of Western Marxism and Critical Theory with 'cultural' themes was immanently political and was not, at least in its most fruitful years (1930s), a retreat to 'purely philosophical' realms of speculation as some have claimed.[74] The abandonment in the 1940s and 1950s by Horkheimer, Adorno, and others of the project of founding a politically radical critique of capitalist society was a separate chapter in the evolution of Critical Theory. For example, Gramsci's many writings on the role of intellectuals and educational, religious, and other cultural institutions in the 1920s were part of his attempts to analyse how capital achieved hegemony through the ideological inculcation of consent — a problematic whose importance grew with the increasing penetration and planning of these institutions by the capitalist state. Although in the 1930s and 1940s Adorno, Horkheimer, and Marcuse all took up and expanded Pollock's work on the tyranny of technological rationality as well as the extension of factory regimentation and the commodity-form to the entire society, it was primarily through the work of Marcuse in the 1960s that these ideas were preserved and became widely known and influential in the New Left.

In *One Dimensional Man*, Marcuse elaborated the fundamental ideas of the Frankfurt School's critique of the new 'affluent society'.[75] The Keynesian state as collective capitalist is interpreted as the administration not only of the collective factory but also of the sphere of consumption in which working-class demands are instrumentalized by a new consumerist logic of domination. By meeting the working class's quantitative demands at the same time that it manipulates and shapes those demands qualitatively, advanced capitalism is able to integrate workers' economistic struggles within capital and thus blunt the formation of working-class consciousness and revolt. This is the 'cultural' aspect of planning. It is no longer the game of crushing workers' wage struggles through periodic crises but rather of managing working-class needs quantitatively and qualitatively so that they do not challenge the system. With the extension of the commodity-form to all aspects of life, this involves the control of virtually the whole cultural sphere through the manipulation of consumption. In such institutions as the educational system this kind of control is complemented by other forms of integration, which also take the form of co-optation rather than direct repression. This was the basic concept of Marcuse's famous essay on the 'repressive tolerance' of dissent within the framework of academic 'freedom', which was published in 1965.[76] Here we find in a new context the reiteration of many of the themes of the Frankfurt School of the 1940s. Marcuse's attack on the institutionalized violence of capital evokes Horkheimer's 1940 analysis of the pervasive repressiveness of the authoritarian state.[77]

It was also in the 1960s that Critical Theory again, tenuously, linked with political economy. Marcuse's analysis of capitalist hegemony, which in *An Essay on Liberation*

74 See, for example, Perry Anderson in his *Considerations on Western Marxism*. In his efforts to vindicate the Trotskyist version of Marxism-Leninism, he fails to come to grips with the real insights of Western Marxism and misses its basic thrust by misgrouping under that title such anti-Hegelians as Althusser, Delavolpe, and Colletti.
75 Herbert Marcuse, *One Dimensional Man*.
76 R. P. Wolff, B. Moore, Jr., and H. Marcuse, *A Critique of Pure Tolerance*.
77 Max Horkheimer, 'The Authoritarian State', *Telos* 15 (Spring 1973): 3–20.

is explicitly understood as a global phenomenon, found an echo in the writings of Baran and Sweezy.[78] A certain influence of the Frankfurt School had already been apparent in *The Political Economy of Growth* (1956), by Baran, who had spent a formative year as Pollock's undergraduate research assistant in Frankfurt in 1931.[79] That influence had appeared not only in Baran's arguments that the American working class was totally integrated into an American 'people's' imperialism but also in his formulation of the contradiction between capitalist rationality and the progress of historical reason.[80] In *Monopoly Capital*, Baran and Sweezy's critique of the 'irrationality' of advanced capital, and their continued dismissal of the revolutionary potential of the U.S. working class, paralleled Marcuse's work, as did their search for revolutionary agents 'outside' capital among nonworking-class groups of Third World peasants, disaffected students, and the black unemployed.[81] Like Marcuse they deplored the consumerism, waste, and violence of Keynesian capitalism as integral parts of its economic and cultural hegemony. In all these aspects Marcuse, Baran, and Sweezy expressed major issues of the cycle of struggles of the 1960s in a way that simultaneously eclipsed the ossified theories of orthodox Marxism and the Old Left and revived the advances made by Western Marxism and Critical Theory in the 1930s and 1940s. Unfortunately, as was indicated in the earlier discussion of Baran and Sweezy and must be reiterated here about Marcuse and Critical Theory, these approaches contain a basic flaw which undermines their ability to fully grasp the import of the struggles of the 1960s or of the subsequent period of capitalist counterattack in the 1970s.

The flaw that lies at the very heart of Critical Theory's concept of bourgeois cultural hegemony (just as it lurks within political economy's theory of capitalist technological domination in the factory) is its total one-sidedness. The positing of cultural hegemony, like that of an all-powerful technological rationality, reflects the inability to recognize or theorize the growth of any working-class power capable of threatening the system. Although the theory may have accurately reflected the new issues that accompanied the rise of Hitler, Stalin, and Roosevelt, its exaggerated pessimism became manifested in the 1960s. The logic of the theory of absolute consumerist integration forced Marcuse, Baran, and Sweezy to interpret the upheavals of the time as falling 'outside' the class struggle and they built their hopes on what they saw as revolts against racial and sexual repression and against the general irrationality of the system. This exteriorization of contradiction blinded them all to the effectiveness of the actual struggles of wage workers as well as their interaction with the complementary struggles of the unwaged. As a result Marcuse could see only defeat in the dissolution of the 'movement' in the early 1970s and the rising danger of a new fascism. Unable to grasp how the cycle of struggles of the 1960s had thrown capital into crisis, Marcuse was forced back to the political economy of Baran and Sweezy for an explanation of the

78 Herbert Marcuse, *An Essay on Liberation*.
79 Paul M. Sweezy and Leo Huberman, eds. *Paul Baran: A Collective Portrait*: 32–33.
80 Baran, *Political Economy of Growth*: 119.
81 See Chapters 9 and 10, 'The Quality of Monopoly Capitalist Society' and 'The Irrational System', in Baran and Sweezy, *Monopoly Capital*.

international economic crisis of the 1970s.[82] It is ironic that, while he has spoken of a capitalist 'counterrevolution' that could lead to 1984, he cannot see the 'revolution' to which it is a counter and can only proclaim it a 'preventive' action by capital.[83] He does see the revolt against work but interprets its rampant absenteeism, falling productivity, industrial sabotage, wildcat strikes, and school dropouts as simply 'prepolitical' signs of discontent and of the possible crumbling of bourgeois cultural hegemony via managed consumerism.[84] As a result he has begun, in *Counterrevolution and Revolt* (1972), to remodel his critical theory into one of how the consumerist logic of contemporary capitalism may be undermining itself by the production of nonintegrable, transcendent needs. He postulates a growing divergence between the consumerist promises of capitalist ideology propagated by the mass media and the willingness to deliver in a period of economic crisis: 'a contradiction between that which is and that which is possible and ought to be'.[85] The political conclusions Marcuse draws from this analysis formulate the current political situation in terms of the ideological question of whether growing popular dissatisfaction can be crafted by a revitalized New Left educational and organizational effort into a real threat to the system. Despite his affirmation that consumerism has enlarged the base of exploitation and political revolt, and his calls for a New Left revival, it must be said that he repeatedly points to what sometimes seems to be insurmountable difficulties in carrying out this program. Given his insistence on the isolation of radicals, his repeated affirmation of the 'political weakness and the non-revolutionary attitude of the majority of the working class', and his endorsement of the necessity of a 'long march through the institutions' (working within the system), one is not surprised to find in his final declaration the traditional Old Left evocation of the 'long road': 'the next revolution will be the concern of generations and the 'final crisis of capitalism' may take all but a century.'[86] Gone is his sense of optimism that rode the wave of struggles of the 1960s. Marcuse seems to have rediscovered the inherent pessimism of the Frankfurt School's concept of hegemony as well as its limited political program for a long process of 'building consciousness' through the ideological critique of society. Blind to the real power developed and held by workers today, Marcuse cannot see either the extent and difficulties of current capitalist attempts at restructuring or how the continuing struggles of workers are thwarting those efforts. Of this drama he can capture only the repressive side of the capitalist offensive and falls back into a more or less traditional leftist program of defence against authoritarian state capitalism via the ideological struggles of Critical Theory.

To summarise: despite the originality and usefulness of their research into the mechanisms of capitalist domination in both the economic and cultural spheres, and indeed precisely in the formulation of those mechanisms as one-sidedly hegemonic, Critical Theorists have remained blind to the ability of working-class struggles to

82 Herbert Marcuse, *Counterrevolution and Revolt*: 5n.
83 Ibid.: 1–2.
84 Ibid.: 21–23.
85 Ibid.: 16–21.
86 Ibid.: 134.

transform and threaten the very existence of capital. Their concept of domination is so complete that the 'dominated' virtually disappears as an active historical subject. In consequence, these philosophers have failed to escape the framework of mere ideological critique of capitalist society.

To return to the military analogy used earlier in this introduction, we can pose the difficulty this way: if one's attention is focused uniquely on the enemy's activities on the battlefield, the battle will assuredly be lost. In the class war, as in conventional military encounters, one must begin with the closest study of one's own forces, that is, the structure of working-class power. Without an understanding of one's own power, the ebb and flow of the battle lines can appear as an endless process driven only by the enemy's unilateral self-activity. When the enemy regroups or restructures, as capital is doing in the present crisis, its actions must be grasped in terms of the defeat of prior tactics or strategies by our forces — not simply as another clever move. That an analysis of enemy strategy is necessary is obvious. The essential point is that an adequate understanding of that strategy can be obtained only by grasping it in relation to our own strengths and weaknesses.

In the movie *Patton* there is a highly instructive scene in which Patton sees that he will defeat Rommel's armour in North Africa and cries, 'I read your book, you bastard!' He is referring to a translation of Rommel's book on tank warfare. If Patton had read that book of his declared opponent the way Critical Theorists read bourgeois authors, he would still have been sitting in his quarters writing 'critiques' of this point or that when Rommel rolled over him with his army. Instead, he read the book as an enemy weapon, which it was, in order to develop better strategies to defeat him. It would also have done him little good if, when he finally faced Rommel's army, he had had no understanding of the strengths of his own firepower.[87]

It serves little purpose to study the structures of capitalist domination unless they are recognized as strategies that capital must struggle to impose. Revolutionary strategy cannot be created from an ideological critique; it develops within the actual ongoing growth of working-class struggle. Blindness to this inevitably forces one back into the realm of 'consciousness raising' as the only way to bridge the perceived gap between working-class powerlessness (capitalist hegemony) and working-class victory (revolutionary defeat of capital).

This brief sketch of Critical Theory in no way pretends to give a complete picture of its development and breadth — only a sense of its basic thrust and limitations. Thorough evaluation of the work done by Critical Theorists would have to deal with the full range of work of the authors mentioned, as well as with such contemporary figures

87 Although the use of military analogies is helpful in conceptualizing the class struggle as a class war, there are definite limitations to this line of thought. Perhaps the most obvious is the fact that wars between armies, unlike those between classes, usually are conducted by generals. To conceptualize working-class strategy as being formulated and applied by generals would come very close to the usual concept of the Marxist-Leninist vanguard. While it is true that the capitalist class does have something like the joint chiefs of staff in the bodies of its planning institutions, it is rare that the working class has very centralized organization (Leninist pretensions notwithstanding). Therefore, the concept of working-class strategy has to be understood in terms of the effective thrust of working-class struggle. The effective unity of strategy depends on the degree of complementarity of strategies of the various sectors of the class.

as Oskar Negt, Alfred Schmidt, and, especially, Jürgen Habermas. However, as a reading of works like Habermas' *Legitimation Crisis* will show, the basic characteristics of the analysis remain its commitment to ideological critique and its impotence in dealing with the growth and development of working-class power.

Reading *Capital* politically

The alternative to ideological critique, whether of the political economy or the philosophical variety, is to begin from a strategic analysis of the pattern of development of working-class power as the only possible ground for answering the question of how that power can be increased. Such an analysis requires starting from an examination of workers' actual struggles: their content, how they have developed, and where they are headed. By this I mean the struggles of the workers themselves, not of their 'official' organizations (trade unions, parties, etc.). The actions of these organizations may accurately express the struggles of the workers themselves, or they may not. They are often completely at odds with them. It is because of this that we must begin with the unmediated struggles themselves. Since the class is not monolithic but is divided — capital rules by division — the examination of such struggles necessitates an analysis of the different sectors of the class and their interrelations, especially how the struggles of one sector are, or are not, circulating to other sectors. It is only through a circulation of struggles, in which those of various sectors of the class interlink to become complementary, that real unity against capital is achieved. Without such complementarity, 'class consciousness' is only an ideological gloss; with it, 'class consciousness' is superfluous. Therefore, it is essential for an assessment of present working-class power to clearly perceive both the divisions within the class — which must be understood as basically hierarchical divisions of power vis-à-vis capital — and the degree to which those divisions are being overcome. It is only within this framework that we can correctly situate the role of the 'official' organizations of the class. It is also only within this framework that we can fruitfully evaluate capital's initiatives both in the factory and in the broader 'cultural' sphere.

In order to undertake such an evaluation of the class struggle from a working-class point of view, it is first necessary to perceive its point of departure: the self-activity of the class that makes it more than a victimized cog in the machinery of capital and more than a fragmented mass requiring instruction in its class interests. This basic perception is one that seems to have been repeatedly forced on at least some Marxists during periods of revolutionary upheaval, and too frequently lost again in periods of defeat. For Marx, his understanding of working-class autonomy vis-à-vis other classes was spurred by his participation in the revolutions of 1848 and by his studies of the Commune in 1871 and confirmed in his detailed studies of the historical development of capitalism. We find many striking examples of this understanding in *Capital*, for example, his analysis of worker struggles to shorten the working day (see below, Chapter II).

For Lenin, the rapid development of the Soviets by Russian workers in 1905 and again in 1917 forced him to rethink his previous analysis of *What Is to Be Done?* (1902).

He had previously insisted on the fragmented and defensive nature of workers' struggles and the need for professional revolutionaries to teach the class its interests. As a result of the demonstrated autonomy of the Soviets vis-à-vis both capital and the Bolsheviks, he returned to the example of the Commune in writing *State and Revolution* and launched the slogan 'All Power to the Soviets'. Later, with the bureaucratization of the Soviets and the struggle for 'socialist accumulation', the concept of workers' autonomous power was erased from the lexicon of the Soviet planners and orthodox Marxism.[88]

As we saw in the previous section, despite their experience in the workers' councils, the Council Communists failed to develop any lasting concept of workers' autonomy. For example, Karl Korsch, who participated in the aborted German workers' governments of 1923, retained a Leninist position of the *What Is to Be Done?* variety all through the period. When he later abandoned this position, it was in the context of his expulsion from the German Communist Party and of an analysis of worker struggles in the Soviet Union itself. By that time (1927), however, the counterrevolution was well entrenched both in Western Europe and in the Soviet Union, and workers' struggles were predominantly defensive.[89] This background helps explain the inability of the Western Marxists to conceptualize any autonomous role of working-class struggle within capital.

The Johnson-Forest Tendency

One important moment of recognition of the reality of autonomy is to be found in the work of the so-called Johnson-Forest Tendency, which arose within the Trotskyist movement in the 1940s and then split from it in 1950.[90] The Johnson-Forest Tendency took its name from the pseudonyms J. R. Johnson and F. Forest taken by C. L. R. James and Raya Dunayevskaya, respectively, during that period. The struggle by those in the Tendency for the recognition of workers' self-activity and against the Leninist party concepts of *What Is to Be Done?* took place on many levels.

A black from Trinidad, James seems to have come to his position through his participation in, or ties to, a variety of workers' struggles, for example, the independence movement in Trinidad and the struggles of American blacks in the South and in the auto factories of Detroit. From the late 1930s on, he argued for the recognition of the vitality and importance of the independence of black struggles in the United States and against any attempt to subsume them within a leftist party. Indeed, by the late 1940s, James argued that black workers constituted 'the vanguard

88 Carlo, 'Lenin on the Party'.
89 See Douglas Kellner's discussion of the change in Korsch's position in his 'Korsch's Revolutionary Historicism'.
90 The Johnson-Forest Tendency first emerged in 1941 within the Trotskyist Workers party which had split off from the Socialist Workers party (U.S. branch of the Fourth International) the year before. In 1947 Johnson-Forest left the Workers party to return to the SWP where it remained until finally leaving the Trotskyist movement altogether in 1950. The only history of this Tendency and of the subsequent groups associated with it that I have found written by an outsider is Bruno Cartosio's introduction to an edited Italian collection of Martin Glaberman's writings, *Classe Operaia, Imperialismo e Rivoluzione negli USA*. Several of the Tendency's own documents discuss its development and there is a partisan account by Raya Dunayevskaya in her *For the Record, the Johnson-Forest Tendency or the Theory of State-Capitalism, 1941–51: Its Vicissitudes and Ramifications*. A great many of the documents of the Tendency can be found in the Archives of Labor History and Urban Affairs, Walter Reuther Library, Wayne State University, Detroit, Michigan.

of the workers' struggles' in the auto industry and elsewhere.[91]

However, the recognition of autonomy by those in the Tendency went beyond that of black workers. They also recognized the autonomy of the working class itself, from capital and from its 'official' organizations: the Party and the unions. This stands out clearly in their treatment of developments in the United States and in the Soviet Union in the 1930s and 1940s. During the 1940s both James and Dunayevskaya carried out intensive studies of the nature of the system in the Soviet Union and its relation to Western capitalism as part of their attempts to understand that period of class struggle and the meaning of World War II. As their analysis proceeded, they came into increasing conflict with the orthodox Trotskyist analysis of the situation in the United States and of the USSR as a 'degenerate workers' state', as well as with the conceptions of correct political directions these analyses implied. In a series of articles, pamphlets, and statements, they set out their own positions on these issues. Perhaps the most important of the documents of this period, because it was the culminating one, was *State Capitalism and World Revolution*, which seems to have been written primarily by C. L. R. James and submitted to the 1950 Convention of the Socialist Workers Party.[92] It was shortly after this convention that the Tendency officially split away to reconstitute itself in 1951 as the Correspondence Publishing Committee.

In *State Capitalism and World Revolution*, James analysed the mode of production in the United States and argued that the rise of Taylorism and Fordism heralded a new phase in the class struggle. Like those of the Frankfurt School, though without any direct connection that I can find, he saw that the new technologies constituted new methods of domination. Unlike them, he also saw workers' power and he was well aware of the fundamental importance of this recognition.

Taylorism, he argued, had moved from a pre-World War I phase of experimental application to become a 'social system' wherein the factory is 'laid out for continuous flow of production, and advanced planning for production, operating and control'.[93] And then Fordism, between 1924 and 1928, added a further 'rationalization of production' associated with 'the constantly growing subdivision of Labor, decrease in the need of skills, and determination of the sequence of operations and speed by the machine'.[94] This new organization of production provided the ground of modern totalitarianism not only in the United States but also in Germany and the Soviet Union. 'Ford's regime before unionization,' he wrote, 'is the prototype of production relations in fascist Germany and Stalinist Russia.'[95] But where James and the Johnson-Forest Tendency differed radically from others who also saw domination was in their equal

91 See C. L. R. James, 'The Revolutionary Solution to the Negro Problem in the United States (1947)', *Radical America* 4, no. 4 (May 1974): 18, a special issue on C. L. R. James.
92 C. L. R. James, *State Capitalism and World Revolution*: 22. The essay was originally presented as a document and was subsequently published in book form. Glaberman gives his formulation of its authorship in the introduction: 'The origin of this work as the collective viewpoint of the Johnson-Forest Tendency also dictated that its authorship be anonymous. It is gratifying to be able to record that, with the kinds of assistance from other members of his grouping that are usual for political documents, the author was C. L. R. James.'
93 Ibid.: 39.
94 Ibid.: 40.
95 Ibid.

insistence on the power of workers to oppose these new forms: 'But — and without this, *all* Marxism is lost — inextricably intertwined with the totalitarian *tendency* is the response of the working class. A whole new layer of workers, the result of economic development, burst into revolt in the CIO.'[96]

When he then analysed the subsequent period, in which the union bureaucracies were turned against the workers and transformed 'into an instrument of capitalist production', he again saw more than simple domination. He saw instead autonomous rank-and-file revolt against both speedup and the union: 'But along with this intensification of capitalist production and this binding of the worker for five years [with the contract] *must* go inevitably the increase of revolt, wildcat strikes ... That is precisely why the bureaucracy, after vainly trying to stop wildcat strikes by prohibiting them in the contract, has now taken up itself the task of repressing by force this interruption of production.'[97]

The critique of the Soviet Union by James and Dunayevskaya was also similar to that of the Frankfurt School. They argued that the Soviet Union was state-capitalist and basically only a variation in the present historical phase of capitalist development.[98] 'The Stalinist bureaucracy,' James wrote, 'is the American bureaucracy carried to its ultimate and logical conclusion, both of them products of capitalist production in the epoch of state-capitalism.'[99] As with Friedrich Pollock's work, this conclusion was based on a study of the organization of production in the Soviet Union. James traced the pattern of introduction of unpaid labour, piecework, and the Taylor system. But, despite the Stalinist success and the defeats of workers in this period, he argued that they were only temporary and that workers would once again gain the initiative. The organization of that initiative would not come, in his view, through traditional Leninist organizations. 'The proletariat,' he wrote, 'always breaks up the old organization by impulse, a leap ... The new organization, the new organism will begin with spontaneity, i.e. free creative activity, as its necessity.'[100] Moreover, as workers develop new forms of 'disciplined spontaneity', he argued, it would mean the destruction of the Communist parties which had become agents of capital. When revolt did break out in 1956, James supported the Hungarian workers' councils against Soviet intervention. As long as the Johnson-Forest Tendency remained a faction of the Trotskyist movement, there were limitations on the clarity with which their rejection of the old formulas of organization cold be set out. Once they split, however, they addressed this question very clearly indeed. In the Preface to the second edition (1956) of *State Capitalism and World Revolution*, the attack on Leninism was direct: 'The political conclusions of this economic analysis can be summed up in its total repudiation of the theory and practice of the Leninist theory of the Vanguard Party for our era.'[101]

96 Ibid.
97 Ibid.: 41.
98 While both James and Dunayevskaya wrote on the state-capitalism theory of the Soviet Union, the larger part of the research seems to have been done by the latter working in the Slavic Division of the Library of Congress. For an example of this early work, see Raya Dunayevskaya, *The Original Historical Analysis: Russia as State Capitalist Society* (1942).
99 James, *State Capitalism and World Revolution*: 42.
100 James, 'Notes on the Dialectic', *Radical America* 4, no. 4 (May 1974): i.
101 James, *State Capitalism and World Revolution*: 10.

As to the nature of new organizational forms which would be appropriate to the new era, James and those holding similar positions looked to the workers' movements themselves:

> The great organizations of the masses of the people and of workers in the past were not worked out by any theoretical elite or vanguard. They arose from the experience of millions of people and their need to overcome the intolerable pressures which society had imposed upon them for generations … the new organizations will come as Lilburne's Leveller Party came, as the sections and popular societies of Paris in 1793, as the Commune in 1871 and the Soviets in 1905, with not a single soul having any concrete ideas about them until they appeared in all their power and glory.
>
> But once we have a clear historical perspective we can see outlines of the future in the rising in Eastern Germany in 1953, the great strike in Nantes in 1955, the general strike against Reuther of the UAW … the incredible 10 year struggle of the British dockers, and now, as we write, the Coventry workers … All these struggles, varied as they are in scope and significance, have this in common, that they all embody formations and activity which over-ride, bypass or consciously aim at substituting new social forms for the traditional workers' organizations. However high they soar *they build upon shop floor organizations and action on the job*. [My emphasis][102]

This emphasis on the initiative of workers at the base, of the rank-and-file, grew out of studies of and contacts with factory workers by those in the Johnson-Forest Tendency and then in the Correspondence Publishing Committee and was the hallmark of the political tendency they represented. From this point of view, perhaps the most important of their publications were those which presented and analysed struggles of rank-and-file workers against both management and unions. These included such essays as *The American Worker* (1947) dealing with daily struggles in an automobile plant, *Punching Out* (1952) on factory life, and *Union Committeemen and Wild Cat Strikes* (1955) on the 1955 wildcats in auto and the role of radical union committeemen.[103] Throughout the 1950s and early 1960s, they kept alive the politics of workers' self-activity through study, writing, and active intervention into workers' struggles.[104]

102 Ibid.: 10–11.

103 Phil Romano and Ria Stone [Raya Dunayevskaya], *The American Worker*; Martin Glaberman, *Punching Out* and *Union Committeemen and Wild Cat Strikes*. There were many sides to the work of the Johnson-Forest Tendency and the groups which grew out of it. Both James and Dunayevskaya have had, from the beginning, a noticeable predilection for philosophical generalization. As part of their theoretical work during their break with Trotskyism, they reread and restudied not only Marx but also Hegel. The strong Hegelian side to their Marxism is obvious in such works as James' *Notes on Dialectics* (1948) and Dunayevskaya's *Philosophy and Revolution* (1973). Any attempt to analyse their development as a whole would have to take such diverse concerns into account, as well as their evolution.

104 Because my only interest here lies in focusing on the recognition of the autonomous power of workers by those in the Johnson-Forest Tendency, I do not go into any greater detail of the evolution of those involved. Those interested in the subsequent history, which includes the 1955 split, when Raya Dunayevskaya and those around her broke off to form the News and Letters Committee, and the 1962 split, when James and Grace Lee Boggs left and the Correspondence Publishing Committee changed its name to Facing Reality, can consult the materials cited in note 90 above.

Socialisme ou Barbarie

The growing crisis of Trotskyism in the United States during and after World War II, out of which the Johnson-Forest Tendency emerged, was paralleled by a similar crisis in Europe. The same dissatisfaction with Trotsky's analysis of the Soviet Union and the role of the Party led several members of the French section of the Fourth International (the Partie Communiste Internationale) to form first an opposition faction and then an entirely separate group which published the review *Socialisme ou Barbarie* (1949–1965).[105] Not only did the evolution of the group around *Socialisme ou Barbarie* have many striking parallels with the Johnson-Forest Tendency but also the two groups were in direct contact with each other, published each others' materials, and co-signed various documents indicating the similarities of their views. Most importantly for my interests here, they shared a similar conception of the fundamental role of working-class autonomy and pursued similar projects of investigating and analysing the concrete reality of workers' struggles.

Like Johnson-Forest, *Socialisme ou Barbarie* had two major spokesmen: in this case, Cornelius Castoriadis, a Greek economist, and Claude Lefort. Castoriadis' break with Trotskyism originated in his experiences in Greece during World War II when he began to see that the Trotskyist analysis of the Communist Party was dangerously inadequate. That party, he saw, was no more likely to become 'unstable' if it came to power (which the Trotskyists in Greece supported) than the Russian Communist Party, which had emerged from the war stronger than ever. Like his American counterparts, he thought that the reality of the growing power of the Russian bureaucracy dogmatically contradicted Trotsky's theory of a 'degenerate Workers State'.[106] Lefort, who shared this perception, also brought to the critique of Trotskyist orthodoxy the influence of his one-time teacher, the philosopher Merleau-Ponty, and a strong dose of existential phenomenology.[107] Together with others in their group they pushed forward not only a detailed analysis of the Soviet Union (like the work of James and Dunayevskaya based on study of the social relations of production) but also the inevitable critique of Leninist concepts of the Party and of socialism.[108]

Although the critique of bureaucracy developed in *Socialisme ou Barbarie* differed in very important respects from the theory of state-capitalism, both the French and American groups shared a rejection of the reified categories of orthodox Marxism and an emphasis on the analysis of workers' struggles in production and in the community unmediated by any official organizations. In a recent (1975) interview dealing with the evolution of *Socialisme ou Barbarie*, Claude Lefort commented on

105 As with the Johnson-Forest Tendency, there is no adequate history/analysis of *Socialisme ou Barbarie*. However, the interested reader can consult, in English, Dick Howard's introductory notes to an Interview with Castoriadis as well as that interview, which contains some historical material, in *Telos* 23 (Spring 1975): 131–155; a similar interview with Claude Lefort in Telos 30 (Winter 1976–1977): 173–192; and Andre Liebich's 'Socialisme ou Barbarie, a Radical Critique of Bureaucracy', *Our Generation* 12, no. 2 (Fall 1977): 55–62. These essays, especially the last, contain many further references to the works of Castoriadis and Lefort available in English and in French.
106 See 'An Interview with C. Castoriadis': 131–132.
107 See 'An Interview with Claude Lefort': 173–174.
108 For examples of this work, see Cornelius Castoriadis, 'From Bolshevism to the Bureaucracy', *Our Generation* 12, no. 2 (Fall 1977): 43–54; and Claude Lefort, 'What Is Bureaucracy?' *Telos* 22 (Winter 1974–1975).

their relation to the American group: 'They [C. L. R. James and R. Dunayevskaya] had come to conclusions similar to ours concerning the USSR, bureaucracy, and the conditions for an autonomous struggle of the exploited. Their conception of workers' daily resistance in industry was particularly fruitful.'[109] The interest of Castoriadis and Lefort in that conception was expressed first by translating and reprinting *The American Worker* (as a series beginning with the first issue of *Socialisme ou Barbarie*) and then through many articles in which this approach was developed in the French context. This work was undertaken partly by Daniel Mothé and Henri Simon, who were workers and trade union militants like Paul Romano. Where Romano had written of his struggles in a General Motors auto plant, Mothé wrote of his struggles in a Renault plant, and Simon of his work in a large insurance company. Castoriadis, as well as others, also contributed to the analysis of such struggles in a variety of articles.

In the case of both *Socialisme ou Barbarie* and the Johnson-Forest Tendency, their unorthodox Marxism and focus on workers' struggles also led them beyond the factory into the community. In the United States, James' work on the struggles of blacks anticipated the later rise of the civil rights and black power movements. In both the United States and France the two groups were among the earliest to focus attention on nonfactory struggles, including those of youth and women, which were to become so important in the subsequent decade.

Despite the fact that both groups remained small throughout their existence and despite the fact that, at least in the case of Castoriadis and Lefort, their major spokesmen came to reject not only orthodox Marxism but all Marxism, their contribution to the development of a useful understanding of workers' struggles in contemporary society has been enduring. On the one hand, through their writings they have left invaluable and still relevant documentation of their analyses of such themes as the nature of Soviet society, the forms and character of workers' struggles, the critique of orthodox Marxism, and the question of organization. On the other hand, although the distribution of their work was limited and their members few, their work nevertheless constituted an important experience and point of reference for many who followed. Just as recognition and appreciation of their writings seem to be only now beginning to catch up with its importance, so also are the lines of influence they exerted only beginning to be studied. One important line of influence which will be mentioned, if not adequately explored, in the next section was the impact of their analyses of autonomous workers' struggles on important figures of the 'workers' autonomy' wing of the Italian New Left in the 1960s and 1970s.

The Italian New Left

The new awareness of workers' autonomy that emerged in the 1960s produced much new analysis of the theoretical and political implications of this phenomenon. This was especially true in France and Italy where the growth of workers' insurgency took the form of confrontation and rejection of the powerful Communist Party by large numbers of industrial workers, students, and intellectuals. Unlike the situation in the United States

109 'An Interview with Claude Lefort': 177.

where the return to Marx took place against the predominant influence of neo-Marxism, in Italy and France it emerged out of conflict with the Communist Party and the communist-dominated trade unions. This confrontation arose as the rapid circulation of new forms of working-class struggles in both factory and community began to escape the Party's control. In France, the breaking point came in the dramatic events of May 1968, when millions of workers and hundreds of thousands of students seized factories and threw up barricades in an autonomous upheaval that took the Party as well as the government completely by surprise. In Italy, the revolt was less dramatic but grew rapidly through the 1960s, escaping both the control and the understanding of Marxist orthodoxy. When, in both cases, the Communist Party joined with capitalist forces to try to contain the movements of revolt, it revealed its nature as an organization within capital. As in Asia and Latin America, the increasing conflict between working-class and intellectual militants and the 'official' organizations of the class led to breakaways and the formation of new organizations and new theories as part of a new politics. An essential element in several of these new groups was the centrality of the concept of workers' autonomy.

In Italy some of the most important analyses of those associated with the new tendencies of the 'extraparliamentary' Left were published in a series of new journals: for example, *Quaderni Rossi* (1960–1966), *Classe Operaia* (1964–1967), *Lavoro Zero* (1975–), *Contropiano* (1967–1972), *Primo Maggio* (1973–), and *Quaderni del Territorio* (1976–). The extraparliamentary groups formed during this period included organizations like Potere Operaio, Il Manifesto, and Lotta Continua.

The central fact that working-class struggles repeatedly surged forward autonomously from, and often against, the influence of either trade unions or the Party was a fundamental subject of discussion, theorization, and debate among that new generation of militants. From the study of the reality of autonomy among rank-and-file workers, and from a reassessment of the history of working-class struggle, especially in the United States, they were able to articulate with new sharpness and depth the position that the working class is not a passive, reactive victim, which defends its interest against capitalist onslaught, and that its ultimate power to overthrow capital is grounded in its existing power to initiate struggle and to force capital to reorganize and develop itself.

The studies of insurgency in Italian factories and of working-class history involved and were informed by a reworking of some of the best Marxist analysis of earlier periods. For example, one leading figure in *Quaderni Rossi*, Raniero Panzieri, combined an analysis of the growth of Fordism in Italy and the emergence of the deskilled 'mass worker' with a re-evaluation of the work of the Frankfurt School and a rereading of Marx on technological domination. In the process he rediscovered the ideas set forward earlier (by Critical Theorists and those in the Johnson-Forest and *Socialisme ou Barbarie* groups) that the organization of labour constituted a capitalist plan for the division and control of the working class. And if the Johnson-Forest and *Socialisme ou Barbarie* people had gone beyond Pollock in seeing working-class power against such domination, Panzieri went even further. Through his studies he was able to formulate the technological evolution of capital in terms of capitalist response to working-class struggle through rising levels of planning. In his article 'Surplus Value

and Planning: Notes on the Reading of *Capital*', Panzieri set out an analysis of how autonomous working-class struggle overcomes capital's divisions and forces it to reorganize production in the factory and broaden its planning to higher levels.[110] He is thus able to situate the new phase of capitalist planning of the 1930s, identified by the Frankfurt School and James, within a general theoretical framework for analysing the revolutions of capitalist technology and workers' organization within the dynamic of class struggle. In fact, what emerges from his work is the concept that, ultimately, the only unplannable element of capital is the working class. This constituted both a theoretical and a political advance beyond the Frankfurt School, which had seen only capitalist planning, and a theoretical advance beyond those who had emphasized autonomous working-class struggle against such planning but had not worked out such a general theory. The incorporation of working-class autonomy into the theory of capitalist development implied a new way of grasping the analysis of the class struggle in the evolving structure of the capitalist division of labour. Not only is the division of labour seen as a hierarchical division of power to weaken the class — a certain composition of power — but also, against this capitalist use of technology, the working class is seen to struggle against these divisions, politically recomposing the power relations in its interests. This, in turn, implied a new way of understanding both the nature of capital and the problem of working-class organization.

If autonomous workers' power forces reorganization and changes in capital that develop it, then capital cannot be understood as an outside force independent of the working class. It must be understood as the class relation itself. This led to the re-emphasis by Mario Tronti, another major figure in *Quaderni Rossi* and later in *Classe Operaia*, of Marx's theoretical juxtaposition of labour-power to working class. In other words, capital seeks to incorporate the working class within itself as simply labour-power, whereas the working class affirms itself as an independent class-for-itself only through struggles which rupture capital's self-reproduction.[111]

These kinds of considerations informed two kinds of further studies. The first was the concrete study of contemporary class struggles. As indicated by the work of Danilo Montaldi, who had translated *The American Worker* into Italian from the French version published in *Socialisme ou Barbarie* and who had also translated some of Daniel Mothé's work from the same journal, the Italians were influenced by and drew on this Franco-American experience of the direct examination of workers' struggles.[112]

110 Raniero Panzieri, 'Surplus Value and Planning: Notes on the Reading of Capital', in *The Labour Process and Class Strategies*: 4–25.
111 Mario Tronti, 'Social Capital', *Telos* 17 (Fall 1973): 113–121.
112 Montaldi's translation of *The American Worker* appeared in *Battaglia Communista*, February–March 1954. The American example has been an important reference point throughout the theoretical and political development of this Italian work. The reasons for this are to be found not only in the pathbreaking work done by people associated with the Johnson-Forest Tendency (works by C. L. R. James, James Boggs, George Rawick, and Martin Glaberman, among others, have been translated into Italian and probably received wider circulation and discussion in Italy than in the United States) but also in the perception that, just as American capitalism is the most advanced in the world and therefore particularly important to study, so too must the struggles of American workers, which have forced and continue to challenge that development, be of particular importance for workers everywhere. As many have said, probably correctly, the evolution of revolutionary struggles in the United States is determinant for struggles everywhere.

Added to this was the rediscovery of Marx's *Workers' Inquiry*, an outline that Marx drew up of a proposed empirical study of workers' lives and struggles. It was translated into Italian and analysed in *Quaderni Rossi*.[113] The implementation of this kind of work in Italy was spearheaded by a friend of Montaldi, Romano Alquati, who began to interview workers in Italian factories and studied the concrete processes of composition and political recomposition of the Italian working class.[114] The second kind of study involved a reassessment of earlier struggles in the history of the working class internationally. Mario Tronti, Sergio Bologna, and others undertook the re-examination of the experience of the European and American working classes, both in terms of their struggles with capitalist planning and in terms of their organizational history. Retracing and going behind the rise of Fordism, they examined the relation between class composition and working-class organization. In his article 'Class Composition and the Theory of the Party', Bologna located the experience of the soviets and German workers' councils form of organization in the concentration of skilled workers whose pre-existent partial control over their instruments of production led them to conceive of organization in terms of taking over their tools completely.[115] He juxtaposed this experience to that of the American IWW whose very different organizational experience reflected a different class composition — the highly mobile unskilled labour force of the American West. In 'Workers and Capital', Tronti similarly retraced the experience of both the period of German social democracy and American industrial unionism in terms of the underlying class composition and the interaction between workers' struggles and capitalist planning.[116] In these studies we see a rich development of the fundamental point made by C. L. R. James a decade earlier: 'The proletariat always breaks up the old organization by impulse, [and makes] a leap.' Working-class struggles only achieve the recomposition of a certain division of labour (e.g. skilled labour or mass worker) through appropriate organizational forms (e.g. workers' councils or industrial unions). In other words, at each stage of class composition the appropriate form of organization changes. These studies founded a new Marxist understanding of both working-class autonomy and organization. By showing how workers developed and discarded various forms of organization according to the concrete character of the class relation, trade unionism, social democracy, workers' councils, and the Leninist party were all shown to have been particular historical products. By shifting the focus of study from the self-development of capital to that of the working class, these authors revealed the idealism of those Marxists who treat both the form of capital and the form of working-class organization as eternally given

113 See Dario Lanzardo, 'Intervento Socialista nella lotta operaia: l'Inchiesta Operaia di Marx', *Quaderni Rossi* 5: 1–30. The translation of the inquiry by Maniuccia Salvati and Piero Scaramucci was attached as an appendix to Lanzardo's analysis.
114 See Romano Alquati, *Sulla Fiat e Altri Scritti*.
115 Bologna, 'Class Composition and the Theory of the Party at the Origin of the Workers-Councils Movement'.
116 Tronti, 'Workers and Capital'. It must be pointed out that this essay is a translation from the 1970 postscript to Tronti's book *Operai e Capitale*, which was written *after* Tronti's return to the Italian Communist Party. Therefore, despite its useful historical analysis, his interpretation is geared to providing a justification for current social democratic programs of the Italian Communist Party. His assessment of the degree to which American workers made gains in their struggles of the 1930s is taken as a model for workers in Italy today — a conservative argument for limiting struggles to trade union activities and confiding the future to the Party.

(see Chapter 5 below). In this way they elaborated a theoretical framework for understanding the growing disaffection of Italian workers with their 'official' organizations as well as shifting their own frame of reference in such a way as to be able to 'see' emerging new forms of organization.

These concepts were applied not only to the factory studies of the mass worker (e.g. Alquati) but also to the study of the role of the Keynesian state in the Italian post-war 'economic miracle'. Here again important advances were made beyond previous work. I have mentioned briefly the Frankfurt School's perception of Keynesianism as the satisfaction of workers' quantitative needs while those same needs are shaped qualitatively to control the class through a new consumerist logic. The analysis of Keynesianism by such theorists as Tronti and Antonio Negri during this period constitutes an important partial answer to these theories of domination.[117] First, by grasping the Keynesian strategy as capital's response to workers' success in making wages 'sticky downward', they recognized that strategy as a response to working-class power — not as simply another crafty scheme. Second, through a reworking of Marx's analysis of relative surplus value and crisis, and through a close study of the Keynesian strategy, they were able to specify the core of the 'quantitative strategy': the Keynesian productivity deal which tried to tie wage increases to productivity increases and thus harness working-class struggle as a motor of capitalist development. (James and his followers had also studied the wage/productivity trade-off in the 1950s, as well as workers' resistance.) When this understanding met with their studies of Italian workers' struggles in the 1960s, they realized that exploding wage demands and a growing revolt against work and productivity were rupturing those deals. It became obvious that the Keynesian 'quantitative' strategy as applied by the Italian government's incomes policies was already collapsing. In fact, they located the growing crisis of the Italian economy partly in this rupture of the productivity deal. By grasping the Keynesian economic strategy as a political response by capital to the crisis of the 1930s and 1940s, which was itself caused in part by the growth or workers' power, they were led to see that the distinction between economics and politics that dominated leftist thinking since the Second International had already been collapsed by capital in a new and dramatic way.

In Italy, these considerations carried considerable political significance. On the basis of the analysis, groups like Potere Operaio (PO) attacked the Communist Party's participation in government efforts to enforce Keynesian-type productivity deals on Italian workers as complicity with a capitalist strategy to control and harness workers' power. PO supported the workers' autonomous strategy of demanding more wages and less work, less productivity — a strategy whose thrust was to directly undermine the Keynesian strategy.[118]

This position was also supported theoretically by the abandonment of the old

117 Negri, 'John M. Keynes e la teoria capitalistica dello stato nel '29'.
118 Potere Operaio, 'Italy 1969-70: A Wave of Struggles', supplement to *Potere Operaio*, June 27–July 3, 1970; idem, 'The Communism of the Working Class'; idem, 'Italy 1973: Workers' Struggles and the Capitalist Crisis', *Radical America* 7, no. 2 (March–April): 15–32.

leftist perspective on work (which was rooted in the skilled workers' experience from the period of early capitalism through the councils and soviets): that the struggle was to liberate work from capital, to achieve nonalienated work. As Tronti pointed out, under the conditions of the unskilled mass worker, work itself could only be seen as a means of social control to be abolished, not upgraded. This understanding led directly to the realization that the basic characteristic of working-class struggle in this period is not only an escape from capital but also an escape from existence as working class. The aim of the mass worker is to cease to be a worker, not to make a religion of work.[119] This, again, represented a step beyond earlier work. James, for example, who had recognized and studied workers' autonomous struggles against work in the United States of the 1950s had nevertheless retained the traditional view that what the workers really sought was 'satisfaction in the work itself'.[120] In the United States this recognition that the revolt against factory work goes beyond the rejection of 'alienating' work is to be found in the analyses of those like John Zerzan ('Organized Labor versus the Revolt against Work' [1974]) and the authors of the journal *Zerowork*.[121]

In this fashion, through study and the experience of workers' struggles in the 1950s and 1960s, the old theories of total capitalist domination in the factory have been undermined. The new theories that have emerged, and the politics of which they are a part, have been able to both incorporate and yet go beyond the earlier concepts of capitalist technology of Marxist political economists. In the place of old theories that saw technological change as a by-product of competition, or more advanced Frankfurt School analyses of technological rationality, we have today examples of analyses that go beyond one-sided concepts of capitalist autonomy and dominations. They integrate factory technology, capitalist strategy, and working-class autonomy into a real dialectical understanding of class struggle from the perspective of the strategic needs of the working class. The studies in which this integration has been achieved include the investigation of a variety of different industrial sectors as well as the study of capitalist strategy at the level of the state, both nationally and internationally. In Italy, for example, several studies have been done on the petrochemical sector, which is being reorganized as part of an attempt to deal with workers' struggles in the current crisis.[122] Similar studies of restructuring in the auto sector have been carried out not only in Italy, but also in Britain and in the United States.[123] Still others have been carried out on extractive industries, such as mines and agriculture.[124] In all these

119 Mario Tronti, 'The Struggle against Labor', *Radical America* 6, no. 1 (May–June 1972): 22–25.
120 James Special Issue, *Radical America* 4, no. 4 (May 1974): 23.
121 John Zerzan, 'Organized Labor versus "The Revolt against Work": The Critical Contest', *Telos* 21 (Autumn 1974): 194–206.
122 Sergio Bologna, 'Questions of Method for Analysis of the Chemical Plan', from *Quaderni Piacentini*, January 1973. Potere Operaio, 'Porto Marghera: An Analysis of Workers' Struggles and the Capitalists' Attempts to Restructure the Chemical Industry, a Worker's Inquiry', from *Potere Operaio*, November 1971.
123 Ferrucio Gambino, 'Workers' Struggles and the Development of Ford in Britain', *Bulletin of the Conference of Socialist Economists*, March 1976: 1–18. Peter Linebaugh and Bruno Ramierez, 'Crisis in the Auto Sector', *Zerowork* 1 (December 1975): 60–84.
124 William Cleaver, 'Wildcats in the Appalachian Coal Fields', *Zerowork* 1 (December 1975): 113–126; and Harry Cleaver, 'Food, Famine and the International Crisis', *Zerowork* 2 (Fall 1977): 7–70.

studies the object has been to study the interplay of working-class and capitalist power as the basis of building the former. At the same time the basic recognition of working-class self-activity not only has informed these factory or industrial studies, but also has bounded a rethinking of the structure of capitalist society as a whole — including the 'cultural sphere' of consumption and 'quality'.

Starting from the recognition that capital includes the working class within itself (until its struggles to break out succeed), Mario Tronti returned to Marx to analyse the total process of accumulation. It was not hard for him to locate the fundamental point in *Capital* in which Marx insists that the process of accumulation is, at its core, the process of the 'accumulation of the classes, of the capitalist class and of the working class'. In his article 'Capital's Plan', first published in *Quaderni Rossi* in 1963, he moves on from this observation to examine the various ways Marx analysed the 'total social capital'.[125] He focuses on how the analysis of circulation and reproduction in Volume II of *Capital* also involved the reproduction of the classes. This insight meant that the equation of capital with the 'factory', characteristic of Marxist political economy, was clearly inadequate. The reproduction of the working class involves not only work in the factory but also work in the home and in the community of homes. This realization brought into sharp focus the importance of Marx's long discussion of the reserve army in Volume I's chapters on accumulation. Accumulation means accumulation of the reserve army as well as the active army, of those who worked at reproducing the class as well as those who produced other commodities (besides labour-power). The 'factory' where the working class worked was the society as a whole, a social factory. The working class had to be redefined to include nonfactory workers. This theory provided a point of departure for understanding within a Marxist analysis not only the increasing number of struggles in the 1960s which involved students, women, and the unemployed in Italy, but also similar struggles elsewhere in Europe and the United States as well as those of peasants in the Third World.

The concept of capital as social control, or as social factory, amounts to a reformulation of the problematic of the 'cultural sphere' posited by the Critical Theorists. Where they see a centrality of 'consumption' that throws into question the whole relevance of Marxism (understood to see production as fundamentally determining instance), Tronti's work amounts to a reintegration of that vision within Marxism by understanding 'consumption' as the production and reproduction of labour-power. Like the Critical Theorists, he sees capital's plan as englobing the totality of society, but, unlike them, he sees more than the production of the quiescence of inculcated consent. He understands capital's plan as a strategy to deal with a working-class insurgency that has spread through the community outside the factory. And, as in the factory, he sees that strategy as being increasingly threatened by that insurgency. From the perspective of seeing workers' revolt as being against their status as workers, it is not far to see the revolt in the community, or cultural sphere, as amounting to a disruption of the production of labour-power. In place of the one-sided theory of

125 Tronti's article was published in English as 'Social Capital'.

bourgeois cultural hegemony, we have the basis of a dialectical theory of struggle in this sector of the social factory. This approach allows the adaptation of much of the new (and old) Marxist analysis of the industrial division of labour to the cultural sphere, and the possibility of integrating many of the useful insights of the Frankfurt School, while avoiding its flaws.

In Italy the implications of these insights into the nature of the social factory were immediate for many involved in these extraparliamentary struggles. The various struggles that were emerging in the community outside the industrial factory could be understood and supported as integral components of working-class struggle against capitalist labour in all its forms. While some groups, like PO, continued to focus primarily on factory struggles, others like Lotta Continua moved increasingly to support community conflicts (such as those around the self-reduction of housing, food, and utility prices) and to attempt to help link those conflicts with factory struggles. Their efforts led to such linkages as factory workers in Turin setting up mobilization committees in support of self-reduction struggles led by housewives against the state-controlled electricity corporation.[126] These were the kinds of battles which both engendered the theoretical developments and were clarified by them.

An extremely important political moment in the development of these struggles in the community, and in their theorization, was the coalescence of the autonomous struggles of women into self-conscious, organized political groups. In this development we can see the kind of autonomy which C. L. R. James saw two decades ago in his analysis of black struggles in the United States: the autonomy of a sector of the working class from other sectors.[127] This new autonomous movement arose through struggle against what many women saw as the domination of the New Left organizations by men, and their overemphasis on the factory. Those women grasped not only the theoretical concept of the social factory but also the key role of the struggle of nonfactory workers — most of whom are women. Mario Tronti and other men in PO could see that the reproduction schemes of Volume II of *Capital* included the reproduction of labour. The women in PO could see that it was their labour which accomplishes that reproduction, and that it had been the struggle of women against that labour in the community which was at the core of the self-reduction movement and other community struggles in Italy and elsewhere.

As a part of their struggles to bring this issue to the fore, women like Mariarosa Dalla Costa developed both new theoretical emphases and new organizations. Organizationally, they broke with PO and organized Lotta Femminista in Italy and, subsequently, an international Wages for Housework campaign. On the theoretical level they vastly expanded Tronti's work on the nonfactory part of the working class. They focused on the key role of the wage in hiding not only the unpaid part of the working day in the factory, but also unpaid work outside it. They drew on Marx's work on the reserve army and the wage, yet they went beyond it in seeing the reproduction

126 Bruno Ramierz, 'The Working Class Struggle against the Crisis: Self-Reduction of Prices in Italy', *Zerowork* 1 (December 1975): 142–150.
127 James, 'The Revolutionary Solution to the Negro Problem in the United States'.

of labour-power as within capitalist planning. They brought out the way the wage divides the class hierarchically into wage (factory) and unwaged (housewives, students, peasants, etc.) sectors, such that the latter groups appear to be outside the working class simply because they are not paid a wage. They pushed forward the analysis of the work of reproducing labour-power and analysed its structure both within the home and in the socialized forms of schools, hospitals, and so on.[128]

This understanding of the wage as the fundamental tool for the hierarchical division of the class brought a key insight to the old problem of the role of sexism and racism in capital. As Selma James has argued in her path-breaking work on this issue, sexism and racism can be understood as particular cases of division which are almost always simultaneously wage division.[129] This is true even when the racial or sexual divisions are among the unwaged. Here the hierarchy is that of unwaged income. Her extension of this analysis to the case of the peasantry opened the door to a re-conceptualization of the international character of capital and to a rigorous redefinition of the role of the peasantry within the international capitalist system as a whole. Here was the answer to Althusser's renovated but sterile historical materialism of modes of production as well as a more solid basis for the rejection of the politics of that theory. If the neo-Marxists like Frank had correctly grasped the global nature of capital but failed to develop a theory to explain the wide variety of production arrangements — especially among the peasantry — then James' work provided that theory, especially when combined with the concepts of working-class autonomy and political recomposition to explain the evolution of the structure of production over time.

The political implications of these new insights were far-reaching. As women, the members of Lotta Femminista and Wages for Housework could see that leftist strategies for women calling for their 'joining' the working class by moving into the factories were counterproductive. Not only did going into the factories mean double work, women were already working for capital at home, but also, once in the factories, the wage hierarchies of capital, perpetuated by the unions and the Party, would either keep women down as a group or divide them up over that same hierarchy and thus destroy their collective power. Just as C. L. R. James had argued for the necessary autonomy of the black movement, so did they refuse to be subsumed in such organizations.[130] These women saw that the basic difference between the waged and the unwaged was one of power. The wage — money — gives power, the material resources as a basis for struggle. Hence they put forward the qualitative demand that wages be paid for housework by the collective capitalist: the state. As to the quantitative determination of wages, that would be based on women's power, not on any capitalist productivity measure. It was a demand aimed against the waged/unwaged division. It sought to increase both women's power and, in so doing, that of the working class as a whole by raising that of the lowest level.[131]

128 Mariarosa Dalla Costa, and Selma James, *The Power of Women and the Subversion of the Community*.
129 Selma James, *Sex, Race and Class*, and 'Wageless of the World', in Edmond and Fleming, eds. *All Work and No Pay*.
130 Selma James, 'Women, the Unions and Work, or… What Is Not To Be Done', *Radical America* 7, nos. 4–5 (July–October 1973): 51–72. Originally a pamphlet by the Notting Hill Women's Liberation Workshop Group, 1972.
131 Silvia Federici, *Wages against Housework*.

This work formed a decisive advance over the earlier work by Tronti and others. It not only allowed a more adequate grasp of the political recomposition of the Italian working class, but also opened the path to the generalization of earlier work on the capitalist crisis to the global level. The identification of the leading role of the unwaged in the struggles of the 1960s in Italy, and the extension of the concept to the peasantry, provided a theoretical framework within which the struggles of American and European students and housewives, the unemployed, ethnic and racial minorities, and Third World peasants could all be grasped as moments of an international cycle of working-class struggle.

By incorporating the work of Dalla Costa, James, and others in Wages for Housework into the analysis of the capitalist crisis, it was possible to extend that analysis to the United States and to the world as a whole. A growing number of articles in both the United States and Europe have underlined the position and importance of the unwaged in the current crisis. For example, *Operaio Multinazionale* (1974) contains a number of articles which seek, through the analysis of the immigrant or 'multinational' worker, to integrate our understanding of the connection between peasant struggles in the Third World, the student, women and 'Third World' struggles in the developed countries, and those of the waged working class.[132] These articles help locate the origins of the current international crisis as being of the social factory as a whole and thus see it as immeasurably more profound than generally recognized.

In 1975 the first issue of the journal *Zerowork* argued, through detailed studies of struggles in the United States, that they were of the same sort as those Italian conflicts demonstrated by PO to have undermined the post-war Keynesian order and forced capital to adopt crisis as a strategy to regain control — to call a political strike on investments. But the collapse of the Keynesian attempt to mobilize working-class energy was not simply at the level of productivity deal in the factory. Analysis of the civil rights/black power movement, the student power, antiwar and women's movements showed that the collapse had been throughout the social factory. Not only had industrial investment in leading sectors like auto and mining faltered under the blows of a new working-class insurgency, but also the human capital investments of the Kennedy-Johnson era in ghetto and university had been undermined by the new movements of the unwaged. All these struggles had been seen before by the New Left theoreticians, but never before had it been possible to integrate their analysis within that of the working class, or to see the autonomy of those struggles, or to analyse the pattern of their circulation among sectors of the class.[133]

Further work on the struggles of the waged and unwaged in the Third World and in the socialist block in the second issue of *Zerowork* has brought out the truly international character of the cycle of struggles. A re-evaluation of peasant and farm-worker struggles in Eastern Europe, the Soviet Union, and Vietnam showed that the pattern of both worker offensive and capitalist strategy had much in common with peasant and agricultural-worker struggles in the 'West'. These studies contribute to

132 Alessandro Serafini, *et al.*, *L'Operaio Multinazionale in Europa*.
133 *Zerowork* 1 (December 1975).

the reinterpretation of a number of key phenomena, such as the role of access to land and the role of multinational workers. Against the traditional views of land ownership as simply a petty bourgeois or feudal characteristic, these studies brought out the way land appears at once as a guarantor of income and as a tool for dividing the unwaged. Against the view of labour migration as simply a spectacle of victimized workers driven by capitalist manipulation, the role of autonomous labour mobility as a form of struggle against capital is emphasized.[134]

All this has led to a fundamental reinterpretation of Marx's crisis theory. With the working class understood as being within capital yet capable of autonomous power to disrupt the accumulation process and thus break out of capital, crisis can no longer be thought of as a blind 'breakdown' generated by the mysteriously invisible laws of competition. Beginning with Antonio Negri's work on Marx's crisis theory, crisis has been reinterpreted in terms of the power relations between the classes and competition has been located as only one organization of this relation.[135] Marx's understanding of crisis as a means to restore the conditions of growth is seen in terms of restoring adequate control over the working class. Thus 'the' modern crisis emerges as a phenomenon of two moments: a first, in which working-class struggle imposes crisis on capital, and a second, in which capital tries to turn the crisis against the working class to restore command. Thus in the present cycle of international crisis, the 1960s figure as the period in which capital lost control of the social factory as a whole due to an international cycle of working-class offensive. And the 1970s figure as the period in which capital has launched an international offensive in which the direct manipulation of the prices of food and energy and of exchange rates and international debt is being used to achieve through international channels what Keynesian policies failed to do nationally: regain control by containing wage struggles within the limits of rising productivity. At the same time capital's organization of this second phase of the international crisis has included the attempt to decompose working-class unity by restructuring the class technologically and geographically. In terms of theory this has also involved a new assessment of Marx's analysis of the long-term trend in capital to substitute constant for variable capital — a trend which Marx saw as leading to a fundamental crisis for a system based on the employment of labour.[136]

These are some of the major insights which together constitute the beginning of a strategic analysis of the pattern of working-class power: (1) the working class as an autonomous power; (2) capital as including the working class within it, capital thus as the class struggle; (3) technology as a particular division of working-class power produced through the class struggle; (4) working-class organization as a function of the composition of the class and thus the historical specificity of trade unionism, social

134 *Zerowork* 2 (Fall 1977).
135 Antonio Negri, 'Marx sul ciclo e la crisi', in *Operai e Stato*, by Bologna *et al* [in English as 'Marx on Cycle and Crisis', in Negri, *Revolution Retrieved*]. See also Sergio Bologna, 'Moneta e crisi: Marx Corrispondente della 'New York Daily Tribune,' 1856–57', in *Crisi e Organizzazione Operaia*, by S. Bologna, P. Carpignano and A. Negri.
136 See the final pages of Mario Montano, 'Notes on the International Crisis', *Zerowork* 1 (December 1975): 32–59. For an overview of the differences between the kind of crisis theory implied by this work and the traditional approaches of political economy, see Peter F. Bell, 'Marxist Theory, Class Struggle and the Crisis of Capitalism', in *The Subtle Anatomy of Capitalism*, ed. J. Schwartz.

democracy, and Leninism, as valid working-class organizational solutions; (5) political recomposition as the working class overcoming capital's division; (6) the working class as including the waged and unwaged; and thus (7) capital as social capital or as social factory; (8) capitalist crisis as crisis of power between the classes; and (9) working-class political recomposition and capitalist decomposition as the substance of the two moments of crisis.

In the foregoing sketch, I have tried to bring out how the rereading of Marx has been an important moment in the development of these elements. Panzieri's rereading of Marx on the organization of work, Tronti's rereading of *Capital* on accumulation, Wages for Housework's rereading of Marx's discussion of the reserve army and of the wage, *Zerowork*'s rereading of the *Grundrisse* on the end of the work, among others, have been necessary and important moments in the development of an analysis which is of greater strategic use to the development of working-class power than either orthodox or Western Marxism. What kind of rereadings are these? How, if at all, do they differ from traditional approaches? They are not, it seems to me, exercises in ideology or in capitalist strategy building. They do not seek a critique of capitalism. They seek rather new tools for developing working-class power. Panzieri discovers working-class autonomy in forcing the transformation of capitalist technology and planning. Tronti discovers the theoretical grounds for exploring how to link factory and nonfactory struggles. Wages for Housework rediscovers the wage as a key to power in overcoming divisions of the class. *Zerowork* locates contemporary struggles against work as creating a historical crisis of capital.

Given the goal of a strategic or political reading of *Capital* (derived from the needs of contemporary struggles), what is there in *Capital* which makes it possible for us to separate it from its nineteenth-century origins and to use it to illuminate the struggles of the present crisis? The answer is that it provides a fundamental insight into the nature of categories and relations in capitalist society: *there are always two perspectives, capital's versus the working class's!* The analysis of every category and phenomenon must be two-sided; there is no objective place beyond these two perspectives. Althusser's and others' search for an 'objective science' is as futile as that of classical political economy or of Karl Mannheim. To recognize the inevitable two-sided character of analysis is not to merely reflect the class struggle but to reproduce it.

As an example, consider Marx's discussion of the wage. First, the wage is revenue for a worker but it is a cost for a capitalist. Second, capital uses the wage-form to hide its exploitation and the separation of variable capital and surplus value. But then the working class uses wage demands to attack this exploitation. Finally, the wage is a key instrument to divide the working class and weaken it, to ensure its exploitability. But at the same time it can be turned into a weapon to attack that very division.

It is by applying such a two-sided, or class, analysis, which explores the meaning of each category from the differing perspectives of the two classes, to all the other categories of *Capital*, that we can interpret Marx and discover how his work can be of use to us. We must not get bogged down with the mystifications of philosophy or of political economy which, by failing to show how the determinations of capital are

both imposed on the working class and shaped by its struggles against them, at best reveal the one-sided perspective of capital itself. We need not be content with such approaches because through the optic of current struggles we can now see how Marx's work reveals the workers' standpoint as both antithetical to capital and as having the power to destroy capital's determination. Revolutionary strategy is not something extra. It is an essential part of the study of the class relation. Though this relation is constantly shifting, though the nineteenth century is long gone, the two-sided nature of capital remains. Its analysis is not simple, but at the same time we have no vested interest in revelling in the supposedly incomprehensible complexities by which 'professional Marxists' obscure the meaning of *Capital*.

This seems to me to be an important lesson of the recent work sketched above. It implies a way of reading *Capital* politically that involves two steps: *to show how each category and relationship relates to and clarifies the nature of the class struggle* and *to show what that means for the political strategy of the working class*.[137] These two moments are immediately interrelated and often to do the former is already to do the latter implicitly. For example, by showing us how money is an integral part of capital — a mediation imposed by capital as part of the commodity-form — Marx is implicitly saying that any working-class strategy to destroy capital must ultimately involve the destruction of money.

This demand that each category be explicitly related to the class struggle is not to reduce everything to the class struggle, because class struggle is not an independent, outside cause of the categories and relations. Nor is it an exterior, derived consequence of them. *Capital*, as we have begun to see, is the class relation, and that relation is one of struggle. Class struggle is the confrontation of the capitalist class's attempt to impose its social order — with all its categories and determinations — and the working class's attempts to assert its autonomous interests. Working-class struggle is that revolutionary activity which puts the 'rules of the game' of capitalist society into question. This is why all those rules and determinations must be read from a perspective which insists on evaluating every aspect of capital from the point of view of working-class strategy. This is the source of the two-sided character of capitalist categories. The 'science' of the philosophers and the political economists is only capital's view of itself. The political reading of *Capital*, and of capital, is a strategic activity of the working class. There is no third, objective point above the struggle, because revolutionary activity reveals the other side everywhere. The vital significance of the work I have briefly surveyed above is that it has rediscovered this fact and begun to carry out this strategic project.

This project is exactly the project called for in Marx's discussion of fetishism. We must remember that it is after the detailed discussion of the commodity-form in Chapter One that Marx brings us up short by denouncing the analysis he has just undertaken

137 In a discussion of Marshall's principles, Mario Tronti points out Marshall's one-sidedness and the need to see the working-class viewpoint: 'This is exactly opposite the truth from our viewpoint where every discovery of an objective social science can and must be translated in the language of the struggles. The most abstract theoretical problem will have the most concrete class meaning' ('Workers and Capital': 30).

as being fetishistic because it deals only with the relations between things rather than the social relations between classes. We must, Marx argues, see behind that fetishism of commodities in which they appear, like religious ideas, as 'independent beings endowed with life, and entering into relation both with one another and the human race'. We must, in other words, see behind Marx's own exposition of the commodity-form in which commodities appeared to interact with one another on their own. When Marx goes on in Chapter Two to analyse exchange as an activity between people and then, in the rest of the book, to analyse other aspects of the social relations of capital, he is doing exactly what he prescribes — putting commodities and all their determinations into their place within the class relation. This is an important part of the project I have outlined above: to analyse the meaning of each category of capital within the context of the class confrontation.

There are certainly regularities, or 'laws', of commodity exchange just as there is a logic to the commodity-form itself, but that logic and those laws are only those which capital succeeds in imposing. What Marx shows us in *Capital* are the 'rules of the game' laid down by capital. These rules reflect its own internal structure — the contradictory struggle of two classes. Our problem is to clarify the importance and meaning for the working class of each of these determinations and 'rules' and not simply to accept them as objectively given.

Reading Chapter One

One of the most basic concepts in *Capital*, which has been central to those readings of Marx that I outlined above, is that of value. Unfortunately, the concept itself has never, to my knowledge, been subjected to a political reading and this has led to some confusing and contradictory usage. This seems to me to be avoidable through a political reading of Marx's analysis of value in Chapter One of Volume I of *Capital*. To do this, I have tried to bring to bear on the elucidation and interpretation of the various concepts and categories of Chapter One the two-sided approach which I have described above.

The 'reading' of this chapter requires care, because Marx is dealing with only a few of the determinations of capital — what he calls the commodity-form. Many of the other determinations of capital are carefully laid out in the rest of Volume I and in Volumes II and III, in what he (and Engels, who edited Volumes II and III) felt was a logically developing progression of ever more complex determinations. This is why labour-power as a commodity, surplus value, capital, accumulation, profit, wages, and so on do not, for the most part, appear in this chapter. Paradoxically, because of this, Chapter One's difficulty lies, not in its complexity, but in its simplicity. This is one reason why its interpretation has traditionally been difficult, even mysterious. Because the first chapter excludes most explicit discussion of the relation between the commodity-form and capitalism, many interpreters have fallen into exactly the trap of commodity fetishism which Marx warns against. They have looked at the determinations of the commodity-form as being abstract characteristics of any and all commodity

exchange — from those of a simple or 'petty commodity mode of production' to the commodity exchange of capital. In this way the whole analysis of Part I, including that of exchange in Chapter Two and of money in Chapter Three, has been treated as being separable from the analysis of capital, which is seen as entering only in Part II in 'The Transformation of Money into Capital' — as if the money of Part I were either some ahistorical category or that of some precapitalist mode of production.

But the order of Marx's exposition is neither ahistorical nor aimed at reproducing a historical development with the precapitalist-category money preceding the categories of capital. 'It would be inexpedient and wrong, therefore, to present the economics categories successively in the order in which they have played the dominant role in history. On the contrary, their order of succession is determined by their mutual relation in modern bourgeois society'.[138]

As far as the question of the nature of value and money in pre-capitalist society goes, I would only say the following at this point. It is a good idea to take seriously Marx's admonition in the 'Introduction' to the *Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy* that it is not valid to apply categories appropriate to capitalism to other social systems without modification. 'Bourgeois economy thus provides the key to the economy of antiquity, etc. But it is quite impossible [to gain this insight] in the manner of those economists who obliterate all historical differences and who see in all social phenomena only bourgeois phenomena. If one knows rent, it is possible to understand tribute, tithe, etc., but they do not have to be treated as identical.'[139]

As a part of this methodological discussion, Marx discusses the case of money explicitly. He notes that, while it is certainly true that 'money may exist and has existed in historical time before capital, banks, wage-labour, etc. came into being', it is nevertheless the case that that 'money' was less developed in precapitalist society, and thus different. 'Although the simpler category [money] therefore may have existed historically before the more concrete category [capital], its complete intensive and extensive development can nevertheless only occur in a complex social formation.'[140]

Thus, if one wishes to analyse the nature of value and money in precapitalist society — which is not my aim here — then one would do well to follow Marx's example and attempt to see how the theory in *Capital*, which is appropriate for capitalism, needs to be modified in order to be useful in other situations.

Chapter One lays out the determinations of a fully developed system of commodity exchange — a system which has only existed as an aspect of capitalism. Because capitalism is such a fully developed system — for reasons I will discuss in the next chapter — those determinations are also determinations of capital and must be understood as such. If Marx made a distinction between money employed as capital in the hiring of wage labour and money employed not as capital in the purchasing of personal services, as he did, it was because he perceived situations in which capital was unsuccessful in completely using money in the expansion of its system. This

138 Marx, 'Introduction', to *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*: 213.
139 Ibid.: 211.
140 Ibid.: 209.

distinction is certainly a valid one, as is the differentiation of the working class's use of money or the *rentier*'s use of money. But these uses are not of money as some abstract money *per se* but of money in a particular historical class context. From capital's point of view all these employments of money must be subordinated to and integrated within capital's own expanded reproduction. If they are not, then they are not functioning as money for capital. What this brings out is exactly why it is vital to understand value and money as integral parts of capital. We must understand why they are forms appropriate to and reproduced by capital in order to understand what it means to destroy them.

Another problem is that it is too easy to interpret Marx as accepting as natural fact the relations he is laying out. To do so involves an error, often repeated by Marxist political economists, of seeing Marx's analysis of the commodity-form as different from that of classical political economy only by its correctness. Marx does see and correct the 'errors' of his predecessors — that is the project of Volume IV of *Capital* on theories of surplus value. He is able to better show us the logical consistency of the set of rules associated with the commodity-form. But, he could do this exactly because he stepped outside their perspective (that of capital) and could see the commodity-form as inherent in capital — both as the form by which it compels the working class to work 'freely' for it and as the way it masks that compulsion by an appeal to market relations. Marx is not showing why the 'invisible hand' functioned even better than Adam Smith thought it did. He is showing the ideal structure that capital tries to impose and the way it at once achieves and camouflages this imposition through the mediation of commodities — a camouflage which is reproduced fetishistically in the economic theory of the invisible hand.

Our problem is different than Marx's one of exposition. To understand the theory of value in Chapter One is to see how to do what Marx tells us we must do: integrate the discussion of the commodity-form into our understanding of the class relations which he developed further on in *Capital* and which we are today extending even further. To do this *we must bring to bear on a reading of this first chapter all our knowledge and interpretations of the rest of* Capital *and of the class struggle it analyses*. Marx spread out his analysis in a logical progression for the sake of clear exposition. *We must reintegrate the totality* and relate each separate part to each other part. It is not enough to assert as a methodological principle that the discussion of surplus value includes that of value because the former is a more developed form of the latter. We must explicitly show how the determinations of value are preserved and added to in surplus value, just as we must show how the determinations of surplus value are preserved and added to in the totality of the class relations. This is the sense of the political reading of *Capital* that I discussed above. It is only by doing this that we can see 'how each category and relationship relates to and clarifies the nature of the class struggle.' It is the only way we can begin to see what value and money mean 'for the political strategy of the working class in general'. And it is only by grasping these relations not as abstract moments of an abstract model but as real moments of the contemporary actuality of the class confrontation that we can discover what they

mean, in particular, today. It is on the basis of such an understanding of value that I think we can evaluate to what extent the rest of *Capital* and its extensions have been, or can be, reinterpreted consistently and usefully.

In what follows, I 'reread' Sections 1, 2, and 3 of Chapter One, in that order, and deal sequentially with the commodity-form within capital; the analysis of the commodity-form into use-value and exchange-value and into qualitative and quantitative aspects; abstract labour as the substance of value; socially necessary labour time as the measure of abstract labour; the forms of value (winding up with the money-form); and, finally, those aspects of money brought out by the money-form. In each case I have attempted to bring out the two class perspectives and briefly discuss the implications for working-class struggle. I give no separate analysis of Section 4 of Chapter One which deals with fetishism, simply because, as I have already explained, this whole essay involves the work of going behind the appearances of the commodity-form to get at the social relations. In conclusion, I sum up some of the major results of reading this chapter.

II The commodity-form

Why does Marx begin his study of capital with the analysis of commodities — of useful products of human labour that are bought and sold? He gives us one answer in the very first two sentences of Chapter One: 'The wealth of societies in which the capitalist mode of production prevails appears as "an immense collection of commodities", the individual commodity appears as its elementary form. Our investigation therefore begins with the analysis of a commodity.'[1] He begins with the commodity because it is the elementary form of wealth in capitalist society. When we read the rest of *Capital* we discover why it is that all wealth takes the commodity-form in bourgeois society. That knowledge makes even clearer why we should begin with commodities: because *the commodity-form is the fundamental form of capital.* It is my purpose in this chapter to clarify this fundamental point by specifying those basic aspects of capital that Marx designates by 'commodity-form' and by sketching the historical development of capital in terms of that form.

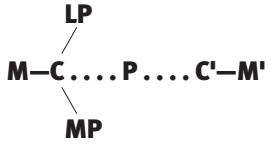
Capital is about capital. But what is capital? In Marx's view capital was above all a social relation, more specifically a social relation of struggle between the classes of bourgeois society: capitalist and working classes. If capital is basically the dynamic of the class struggle, then it would be reasonable to begin its study by examining the

1 In the traditional Moore and Aveling English translation from the third German edition, the first sentence reads, 'The wealth of those societies in which the capitalist mode of production prevails, presents itself as "an immense accumulation of commodities", *its unit* being a single commodity' (my emphasis). The new Ben Fowkes translation, from which the passage in the text is taken, translates the German 'elementarform' more accurately as 'elementary form'. In the preface to the first German edition, in which Marx talks about the method he uses in this chapter, he refers to the commodity-form as the 'cell-form': 'Moreover, in the analysis of economic forms neither microscopes nor chemical reagents are of assistance. The power of abstraction must replace both. But for bourgeois society, the commodity-form of the product of labour, or the value-form of the commodity, is the economics cell-form. To the superficial observer, the analysis of these forms seems to turn upon minutiae. It does in fact deal with minutiae, but so similarly does microscopic anatomy.' (Karl Marx, *Capital*, Volume I, translated by Ben Fowkes: 90).

most basic characteristics of that struggle. Although that is exactly what Marx does, the relation between commodities and class struggle is not immediately obvious. To clarify this relation, it must be understood that the class struggle is over the way the capitalist class imposes the commodity-form on the bulk of the population by forcing people to sell part of their lives as the commodity labour-power in order to survive and gain some access to social wealth. In other words, the overwhelming majority of the people are put in a situation where they are forced to work to avoid starvation. The capitalist class creates and maintains this situation of compulsion by achieving total control over all the means of producing social wealth. The generalized imposition of the commodity-form has meant that forced work has become the fundamental means of organizing society — of social control. It means the creation of a working class — a class of people who can survive only by selling their capacity to work to the class that controls the means of production.

It may sound paradoxical to say that capital is the struggle between capital and the working class. How can something be the struggle between itself and something else? Simply because the working class, as long as it works for capital, is not 'something else' — it exists as labour power within capital. Does that mean capital is both the whole and a part? No, it is always the whole, and that is the difficult point, because the working class finds itself opposed by the whole, including itself in a very special sense. Under the reign of capital, labour creates useful goods, commodities, revenue, and ultimately surplus value, or profit, that in turn, as managed by the capitalist class, are used to dominate labour — and ever more labour to boot. Thus, through the commodity-form, labour in the alienated 'dead' form of the products and value it creates dominates itself ('living labour') as capital. In this sense we can also see capital within labour as a particular kind of social distortion in which a very specific kind of social activity — work — takes on a zombie-like existence in its dead form and dominates all social activity by imposing ever more labour. In fact, *we can define capital as a social system based on the imposition of work through the commodity-form*. Because of the way in which dead labour not only dominated living labour but in that domination also sapped the latter's life force for its own expansion, Marx often referred to capital as being 'vampirelike'.

This understanding of the nature of capital is obviously markedly different from that of bourgeois economics and some interpretations of Marx, which see capital in a reified manner, that is, as simply things: means of production, profit, investable funds. These are indeed moments in the organization of the social relation but must not be mistaken for the relation itself. This point should be easy to remember if we keep in mind Marx's formulation of capital as a circular, self-reproducing set of relations that include all these aspects:



In this formulation, where dashes represent exchange relations and ellipsis points represent production relations, we can see how *investable funds* (*M*) purchase the *commodities* (*C*) used in *production* (means of production, *MP* and *labour-power LP*) in order to set them to *work* (*P*) producing *commodity-capital* (*C'*), which can be sold for *revenue* (*M'*) that yields a profit (*M'–M*). All are moments of the totality which is capital. An examination of each aspect of this totality is taken up in Volume I, although the analysis of the form of this process is most fully developed in Volume II of *Capital*, in which Marx analyses the circuits of reproduction in terms of each of these moments.[2]

If the commodity-form is the fundamental form of the class relation of capital, and if that form consists of the forcible creation of a situation in which the only access to social wealth (food, clothing, etc.) for workers is through the selling of their labour-power, then *it follows that all the products of labour must perforce take on the commodity-form*. This is simply because they must be sold to the working class to ensure its survival and growth. Since wealth for capital is nothing but the accumulation of labour and the products it produces, and since both labour and those products take the commodity-form in capital, then the individual commodity appears as the elementary form of that wealth.[3]

The commodity-form is thus a set of power relations. Whether and how it is imposed depend on capital's power, vis-à-vis the working class. The commodity-form is not some apolitical concept which simply describes or denotes a set of relations in capitalist society. Capital's power to impose the commodity-form is the power to maintain the system itself — a system in which life for most people is converted into labour-power. Herein lies the importance of the distinction between labour-power and working class. When it functions as part of capital the working class is labour-power, and capital defines the class by this fact. This can be clarified by using Marx's distinction between working class in itself and for itself. The working class in itself is constituted of all those who are forced to sell their labour-power to capital and thus to be labour-power. It is a definition based purely on a common set of characteristics within capital. The working class for itself (or working class as working class — defined politically) exists only when it asserts its autonomy as a class through its unity in struggle against its role as labour-power.[4] Paradoxically, then, on the basis of this distinction, *the working class is truly working class only when it struggles against its*

2 It is in Volume II, Part I, 'The Metamorphoses of Capital and Their Circuits', that Marx analyses the circuits of money-capital (*M*), productive capital (*P*), and commodity-capital (*C'*), both separately and together.

3 In Chapter One of Volume II, Marx makes this point explicitly. 'On the other hand if the wage-labourers, the mass of direct producers, are to perform the act *L–M–C*, they must constantly be faced with the necessary means of subsistence in purchasable form, i.e., in the form of commodities … When production by means of wage-labour becomes universal, commodity production is bound to be the general form of production' (*Capital*, Volume II, Chapter 1, Section 2: 33. All page references to the second and third volumes of *Capital* will be to the International Publishers edition. To facilitate finding quotes in other editions, I will also specify chapter and sections).

4 Marx's classic discussion of this distinction between class-in-itself and class-for-itself is to be found in his analysis of the French peasantry. He finds that they formed a class the way a sackfull of potatoes form a class. That is to say, they all had the same characteristics and were a class-in-itself, but because they failed to act together politically they did not form a class-for-itself. See Karl Marx, 'The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte', in *Surveys from Exile*, ed. David Fernbach: 238–239.

existence as a class. The outcome of the dialectic of working class in itself and for itself is not the creation of a pure working class after the revolutionary overthrow of capital but rather the dissolution of the working class as such.[5]

When we study the commodity-form that is imposed on the working class, it is important not to equate that imposition with the imposition of the money wage. This is the error of those who read Marx too narrowly and define the working class only as wage labour. To say that the working class sells its labour-power to capital must be understood broadly: the working class includes those who work for capital in various ways in exchange for a portion of the total social wealth they produce. As Marx pointed out in his discussion of wages in Part VI of *Capital*, and as the Wages for Housework Movement has emphasized, the money wage represents payment only for a part of that work. In the factory the unpaid and unwaged part counts as surplus value; the development of the analysis of the social factory (see Introduction) has brought out how capital is able to force the working class to do unwaged work for it in many other ways. The most closely analysed aspect of this is the work involved in the training and upkeep of labour-power itself — work performed by the wage worker but also by unwaged household workers — mainly wives and children. Other formally unwaged work includes such things as travel to and from the job, shopping, and those parts of schoolwork, community work, and church work that serve to reproduce labour-power for capital. Unwaged work is not unpaid; rather it is at least partially sold to capital in return for nonwage income. The important point here is that the analysis of the commodity-form in the class relation must include this kind of exchange as well as the direct exchange of wages for labour-power.

If the commodity-form is the basic form of the class relation, then its study is fundamental to the understanding of the character of the class struggle in any historical period of capital, including the present. This is not to say that understanding the basic determinations of the commodity-form is sufficient for comprehending the struggle, only that it is necessary. There are obviously many more determinations that must also be grasped to see the historical specificity. But to see this fundamental importance is to see why it is so vital to understand the seemingly arid abstractions of Chapter One. To drive this point home I will sketch the history of the class struggle as it is outlined in *Capital* in terms of the omnipresence of the commodity-form.

5 This basic point, that the working class struggles to end its existence as such, must be kept in mind in all discussions of 'Communism'. The fact that the revolutionary overthrow of capital will mean the end of the working class as such does not mean that class cannot fight together against capital, as Jean Cohen has recently suggested in his review of Agnes Heller's book, *The Theory of Need in Marx*. Cohen argues that the working class, as a class created within capital, cannot have demands or 'interests' which go beyond capital, and that the only such demands, which he would call 'radical needs', that threaten capital can come from individuals 'who challenge their status as workers and oppose the reduction of their needs, personality, activity, and individuality to the imperatives of class relations' (*Telos* 33 [Fall 1977]: 180). But the point is that those individuals do face capital as a class-in-itself — they all have the same basic characteristics vis-à-vis capital — and the only way they can obtain the power necessary to overthrow its system is by acting together as a class-for-itself. Once they have burst the doors and escaped the social factory, then the opposition to capital which presently binds them together will be gone and post-capitalist society can be created, as Marx said, for 'the free development of individualities' (*Grundrisse*, Notebook VII: 706).

Primitive accumulation

In Part VIII of Volume I of *Capital*, Marx shows us how capital originally imposed the commodity-form of the class relation. He shows how what he calls primitive accumulation was basically the original creation of the classes of capitalist society through the imposition of work and commodity exchange. In Chapter 27 he shows that the secret of this original imposition of the commodity-form was exactly that 'historical process of divorcing the producer from the means of production' (basically the land) which meant that workers would have to sell their labour-power to capital to obtain the means of subsistence, and that all the products of labour would thus have to take the form of commodities. In Chapter 28 Marx describes how the peasantry was driven off the land and into the city, where, along with ex-feudal retainers, they formed a potential source of labour-power for capital. Yet, Chapter 28 shows that this expropriation of the land, the source of food and clothing, was not enough to drive people into the factories, as many preferred vagabondage or a life of 'crime' to the oppressive conditions and low wages of capitalist industry. Their struggles against the new discipline of the capitalist organization of work forced those in power to enact 'bloody legislation' to force them into the factories. 'Thus were the agricultural people, first forcibly expropriated from the soil, driven from their homes, turned into vagabonds, and then whipped, branded, tortured by laws grotesquely terrible, into the discipline necessary for the wage system.'[6] In the *Grundrisse* manuscripts Marx had described the dilemma facing capital as follows: 'They must be *forced* to work within the conditions posited by capital. The propertyless are more inclined to become vagabonds and robbers and beggars than workers.'[7] As we see in Chapters 29 and 30, the counterpart of this creation of a working class compelled to sell its labour as a commodity was the emergence of the capitalist class responsible for this imposition — first agrarian and then industrial capitalists.

Although this 'primitive' creation/accumulation of a working class was first carried out in a massive way in England and Western Europe (the 'rosy dawn' of capitalism), it was also rapidly undertaken everywhere in the world. Capital, as it expanded, restructured the existing society in order to expropriate its wealth and to gain control over the labour of its population. Marx analyses this extension of primitive imposition of the commodity-form in Chapters 31–33. Over and over we see how the key to capitalist colonial expansion, beyond the initial rape of local wealth, lay in its ability to separate labour from the land, and other means of production, and thus create a working class, both waged (working in the factories, on the plantations, etc.) and unwaged (working to reproduce itself as a reserve vis-à-vis the waged). In some cases the creation of waged labour was entirely marginal. Capital often either reinforced existing forms of social control and production (e.g. indirect rule) or transformed existing societies into new forms that did not use wage labour yet were well integrated into capital (e.g. sixteenth–nineteenth century slavery; sharecropping after the Civil War). Such unwaged sectors of the working class formed a vital portion of capital's new,

6 Marx, *Capital*, Volume I, Chapter 28: 787 [International Publishers edition].
7 Marx, *Grundrisse*, Notebook VII: 736.

world-wide labour force. 'The veiled slavery of the wage-workers in England,' Marx wrote, 'needed, for its pedestal, slavery pure and simple in the new world.'[8] The ways in which the work performed by these unwaged workers has been important to capital have varied greatly, ranging from simple self-maintenance as a latent reserve army to the production of food and raw materials vital to capital's entire world order, as in the case of cotton slavery.

During such periods of original accumulation, the struggle between the emerging classes was about *whether* capital would be able to impose the commodity-form of class relations, that is, whether it had the power to drive peasants and tribal peoples from the land, to destroy their handicrafts and culture in order to create a new class of workers. *It is important to see that this was indeed a matter of struggle and not a one-sided manipulation.* Not only did the struggles of prospective workers make it difficult for capital through crime, vagabondage, uprisings, and wars of resistance, but also capital did not always 'win'. It never was, for example, able to convert the mass of American Indians into a sector of its working class. It could only eliminate them as a race through genocide and import black slaves and white immigrants to replace them.

The struggle over the working day

Where the possibilities of avoiding capital were reduced or eliminated, the struggle shifted from *whether* the commodity-form would be imposed to *how much* it could be imposed. In other words, the new class of workers, unable to avoid all work for capital, nevertheless fought to limit that part of their lives and energies which they had to give up in order to survive. The struggle over how long work would be became central.

Marx's analysis of the history of conflict over the length of the working day in Chapter 10 of Volume I shows clearly how the struggle over the degree of imposition of the commodity-form continued even after its existence was no longer in question. In Marx's analysis of this struggle there are only two actors: capital and the working class. In Section 5 of Chapter 10, he shows how in England, for a long time during its rise, capital sought to impose, often through the state, an ever lengthening working day on its growing labour force. During this time workers' efforts were directed at limiting and stopping this increasing drain on their time and energy. It was thus no easy matter to squeeze these additional hours out of the working class. As Marx points out, it took 'centuries of struggle between capitalist and labour' before the latter 'agrees, i.e. is compelled by social conditions to sell the whole of his active life, his very capacity to work, for the price of the necessaries of life, his birthright for a mess of pottage'. [9]

At the beginning of the colonial period capital had to use force to make the indigenous populations accept the commodity-form at all. In the face for continuing resistance to regular and extended labour, the colonial governments were repeatedly forced to use such means as massacre, money taxes, or displacement to poor land to force these populations to work enough to bring capital a profit. This refusal of work

8 Marx, *Capital*, Volume I, Chapter 21: 759–760 [International Publishers edition].
9 Ibid., Chapter 10, Section 5: 271.

was naturally called 'backwardness' by economists of capital (who developed a 'backward-bending' supply curve of labour to describe it), and the use of force was justified by bourgeois political scientists with appeals to the necessity of 'civilizing' primitive peoples.[10] This problem has always been most acute where land is plentiful (Western Hemisphere, Africa) and the 'backward' natives can flee to the hinterland. This flight to avoid capital must not be seen as simply an avoidance of 'capitalist' work and a preference for 'self-control' of work. But rather it must be recognized, as some recent anthropological work has shown (e.g. Marshall Sahlins' work on the 'original affluent society'),[11] that 'self-control' of work really meant less work and more time for other social activities. Today, we can rediscover Marx's awareness of this: 'The most developed machinery thus forces the worker to work longer than the savage does.'[12] As Marx's analysis of E. G. Wakefield's theory of colonialism in Chapter 33 shows, it was where the availability of land made such escape possible that the ideologues of capital saw its nature most clearly and thus most coherently enunciated the need to restrict that availability.

Under these conditions *the class struggle presented itself as the contradictory combination of two active classes.* The capitalists tried to shape and expand this new form of social control. The working class tried to escape and then to limit the imposition on their lives. Since capital had the initiative during this period it can correctly be seen as on the offensive and the working class as resistant and defensive in its attempts to set limits to its exploitation.

Yet as capital developed rapidly during the industrial revolution and the working class grew in size and strength, the latter's activity became increasingly aggressive; it began to assert its own autonomous demands against capital. At this point the recent work that brings out the notion of working-class autonomy also helps redirect our attention to certain aspects of Marx's analysis of the past. We can rediscover that Marx analyses how the struggle to limit the working day succeeded and, passing over to the attack, the workers sought to shorten that day — asserting an autonomous demand for less work. In Sections 6 and 7 of Chapter 10, Marx paints one of his most vivid analyses of the class struggle, outlining the growth of a working-class power and militancy which forced capital, via the state, to repeatedly shorten the working day. Here it is not capital but the working class whose rising power gives it the initiative. It passes from resistance over to the attack. Marx shows how, faced with this working-class offensive, 'the power of capital gradually weakened, whilst at the same time the power of attack of the working class grew'. This growing power repeatedly pushes down the workday from fifteen or more hours to the eight or so hours we consider

10 The 'backward-bending' supply curve of labour is based on a trade-off between wages and 'leisure'. At low wages, workers will work more as wages rise, but if wages rise beyond some point, they will begin to substitute 'leisure', and the number of hours worked will fall. In the colonies the response was often to set a 'hut tax', or a given money payment that had to be paid by the indigenous inhabitants to the colonial government. Since working in a mine or plantation was the only way to obtain money, indirectly forced labour was the result. Keeping the wage rate very low forced the local workers to work many days in order to gain the money necessary to pay the tax.
11 See Marshall Sahlins, *Stone-Age Economics*.
12 Marx, *Grundrisse*, Notebook VII: 708–709.

'normal' today. It also reduced the workweek from seven days to five, creating the weekend in the process. Thus, Marx shows us how the determination of the time period over which the commodity-form is formally imposed, how the 'creation of a normal working day', was 'the product of a protracted civil war more or less dissembled between the capitalist class and the working class'. [13]

This analysis of the time element of the commodity-form that shows how the official 'legally sanctioned' structure of the normal working day emerged is invaluable in helping us understand what Marx meant when he spoke of the 'laws' of the capitalist mode of production. Referring to those legal laws that regulated the time structure of work, Marx says 'these [legal] minutiae ... were not at all the products of Parliamentary fancy. They developed gradually out of circumstances as natural laws of the modern mode of production. Their formulation, official recognition, and proclamation by the State, were the result of a long struggle of classes.'[14] These 'natural laws' are hardly the metaphysical, unexplained regularities usually evoked by traditional Marxists. The 'laws of motion' of capitalist society *are the direct product of the class struggle* and denote only what capital has had the strength to impose, given the rising power of the working class. They occur 'behind the backs' of the actors only in the way they are the unforeseeable outcome of the confrontation of the two classes' power.

Moreover, we also discover the development of working-class power in the way it is also successful in maintaining and ever increasing its share of social wealth at the same time it works fewer hours. The working class can be seen, in effect, to have *used* capital to provide its needs at the same time it worked less. This is one phase of that long process Marx described in which the development of capital is also the development of the material foundation on which the working class can eventually move beyond capital.

Although the discussion of those periods in the history of the class struggle concerning the question of how much the commodity-form will be imposed has so far been couched in terms of how long, it should also be clear that it equally involves the questions of how hard and under what conditions work will be performed. The struggles over these questions are taken up by Marx in a number of places. In Chapter 10, on the working day, it is shown how the struggle over the length of the day is also, to a degree, a struggle over the conditions of work — for example, in Section 4 on day and night work. But the most detailed analysis of the questions of how hard and under what conditions appears in the analysis of Chapter 15. There, Marx demonstrates how the development of machinery, which proceeded rapidly as workers forced down the length of the working day, turned out to be not only a means of raising productivity but also a means of vastly increasing the speed and intensity of work. In Section 3, part c, Marx shows how machinery imposes on the worker 'increased expenditure of labour in a given time, heightened tension of labour-power, and closer filling up of the pores of the working day, or condensation of labour'.[15] This speed-up, he goes on to show in Sections 5, 9, and elsewhere, produces new kinds of struggles by the working class,

13 Marx, *Capital*, Volume I, Chapter 10, Section 6: 296 [International Publishers edition].
14 Ibid.: 283.
15 Ibid., Chapter 15, Section 3, part c: 410.

from Luddite sabotage of machines to the longer-term struggles against capital to limit and reduce the intensity of labour and to improve its conditions. All these struggles over the length, the intensity, and the conditions of work concern the labour-power which the working class is forced to sell to the capitalists. They are quantitative questions of *how much* the commodity-form will be imposed. As Marx says, 'The duration of labour and the degree of its intensity are two antithetical and mutually exclusive expressions for one and the same quantity of labour.'[16]

The struggle over productivity and the value of labour-power

The success of the working class in reducing work historically created a profound crisis for capital and forced it to seek new strategies. One response to a decrease of unpaid work in the factory was to extend the unwaged workday outside the factory. The analysis of the social factory has brought out how the shortening of hours and the exclusion of women and children from factory labour — a tendency which began after Marx wrote *Capital* — was partly offset for capital by an increase in work done in the home and in the school to maintain or improve the quality of labour-power. But given that these increases could not completely offset the decline in factory hours, a different kind of shift was needed. The other major way that capital found to maintain, reproduce, and expand its control was, as we have just seen, to substitute machinery for labour, so that less human labour would still produce as much or more than before. It is important to see that the attempt to raise productivity was not simply another aspect of capitalist exploitation but was a *shift in capital's strategic plan forced on it by the growth of workers' power.* For Marx there was no doubt about this: 'So soon as the gradually surging revolt of the working class compelled Parliament to shorten compulsorily the hours of labour, and to begin by imposing a normal working-day on factories proper, so soon consequently as an increased production of [absolute] surplus value by the prolongation of the working-day was once for all put a stop to, from that moment capital threw itself with all its might into the production of relative surplus value, by hastening on the further improvement of machinery.'[17]

At that point the struggle passed over from being one primarily concerned with *how much* the commodity-form will be imposed to one primarily concerned with *at what price* it will be imposed. The working class puts up with the commodity-form but demands a larger share of social wealth, that is, a higher price for its commodity, labour-power. Unable to offset a secular increase in the price of labour-power by an increase in the working day, capital turns to increased productivity as the only means both to pay the higher price and to maintain and increase profits. This is the relative-surplus-value strategy whereby it is possible for the wealth and hence the power of both capital and labour to grow absolutely: while the value of labour-power falls relative to surplus value thus raising profits, the absolute amount of use-values acquired by the working class can still rise.[18] The changing relation between price and productivity

16 Ibid.
17 Ibid.: 409.
18 See Chapter IV below, last section, for further discussion of relative surplus value.

determines the relative distribution of that power. In Marx we see that this relation emerged first through the separate efforts of individual capitals. Thanks to the work by Panzieri, whose rereading of *Capital* rediscovered the organization of work as a planned organization of the working class, and thanks to the work of Tronti and others on the Keynesian period, we can also see how capital tried to institutionalize relative surplus value through union contracts and the Keynesian 'productivity deal' in the United States in the 1940s and 1950s.[19] What a careful study of *Capital* brings out is how this possibility is inherent in the relative-surplus-value strategy. It also, I might add, finally brings post-Marx Marxism up to date with bourgeois economics, which has long grasped, albeit in a distorted way, both the essence of relative surplus value (the linking of wages to marginal productivity in neo-classical microeconomic theory) and, even more coherently, the essence of production as corporate planning of the power relations between the classes (the domain of both efficiency engineering and labour management generally).

By linking wages and productivity, capital tries to create a situation in which working-class struggle over the price of the commodity-form becomes the very motor of capital's growth in a new way. Just as working-class success in shortening the working day forces capital to develop new strategies, so also does the pressure for rising wages in the factory (and for rising income outside it) force capital to develop science and technology so that it can raise productivity apace. This occurs partly through the individual corporation's efforts to raise its own profits directly, as in Marx's day, and increasingly, as the pressure of the working class forces the capitalists to become conscious of their common class interests, through the combined efforts of the capitalist class as a whole — through the state as planner — through both the government and private planning institutions, such as the National Planning Association.[20] Each working-class attack becomes a spur to new forms of capitalist growth. To the degree that the strategy works, *this phase of the struggle over the commodity-form sees two active parties using each other for their own development.*

The working-class position, however, is ambiguous. While on the one hand it increasingly gains power — more wealth on which to base its struggle — and on the other accepts the commodity-form in a way that also permits capital's expansion, its activity is not against capital but for it. The struggle for a shorter workday presented a direct attack on capital's profits and control as unpaid labour time was reduced relative to paid labour time. But the productivity deal ensures capital's continued profits and power. Working-class struggle (as organized by labour unions) develops capital and, as it does, increases the intensity of work as well as expanding its imposition to new sectors.

Here we have a strange situation. The essential meaning of rising productivity (increased output in a given time) is that one gets more product with less work, but under the reign of capital productivity increases are transformed into more, rather

19 Panzieri, 'Surplus Value and Planning'; Tronti, 'Workers and Capital'.
20 For a brief introduction to the various institutions of capitalist planning, see William Domhoff, *The Higher Circles*.

than less, work: 'Hence, too, the economic paradox, that the most powerful instrument for shortening labour time [machinery] becomes the most unfailing means for placing every moment of the labourer's time and that of his family, at the disposal of the capitalist for the purpose of expanding the value of his capital.'[21] So much for the dreams of Aristotle, who Marx cites as having visualized the development of tools to such a point that 'there would be no need either of apprentices for the master workers, or of slaves for the lords.'[22] So much, too, for the working class, whose struggles have been largely dedicated to reducing the amount of work they have to do. This social paradox of increasing work at the same time as increasing productivity can only make sense from the point of view of a class whose basic means of social control is the imposition of work.

Yet, as the working class uses capital for its own development, it comes to see that exactly because of the incredible rises in productivity the social wealth which it desires decreasingly requires its labour. It sees that the evolution from labour-intensive methods of production (e.g. textile factories of Marx's day which required vast numbers of workers) to highly 'capital'-intensive methods (e.g. the petrochemical refineries of today which require very few) has been increasingly based on the development of science and technology by capital — under the pressure of working-class demands. Marx perceived this general tendency over a century ago: 'But to the degree that large industry develops, the creation of real wealth comes to depend less on labour time and on the amount of labour employed than on the power of the agencies [machinery, etc.] set in motion during labour time, whose "powerful effectiveness" [of those machines, etc.] is itself in turn out of all proportion to the direct labour time spent on their production, but depends rather on the general state of science and the progress of technology.'[23]

But the measure of capital's imposition of work is value and the index of its control is surplus value. If the development of machinery proceeds to the point where it eliminates the need for work, then capital is faced with a fundamental crisis. 'Capital itself is a moving contradiction, (in) that it presses to reduce labour time to a minimum, while it posits labour time, on the other side as the sole measure and source of wealth ... it wants to use labour time as the measuring rod for the giant social forces thereby created.'[24] The crisis appears because capitalist production is not concerned with production as such but with social control through the imposition of work through the commodity-form and thus the realization of value. But if 'labour in the direct form' ceases 'to be the great well-spring of wealth, labour time ceases and must cease to be its measure and hence exchange-value (must cease to be the measure) of use-value.'[25]

Marx saw in the development of this contradiction the growing potential for workers to liberate themselves from work and for the overthrow of capital. He saw

21 Marx, *Capital*, Volume I, Chapter 15, Section 3, part b: 408 [International Publishers edition].
22 Ibid.
23 Marx, *Grundrisse*, Notebook VII: 704–705.
24 Ibid.: 706.
25 Ibid.: 705.

that it would become increasingly difficult for capital to find ways of imposing work as productivity grew and that it would be increasingly obvious to the working class that work should be decreasing rather than increasing. With the growing contradiction between the rising level of social productivity and capital's continuing insistence on more work, working-class struggle has more and more taken on the character of a struggle against work. In the terms I have used here, this amounts to a reopening of the question of *whether* capital has the power to impose work through the commodity-form — at any price. Thus the depth of the current crisis. What is in question is the very survival of the system. Either capital finds new ways to impose work and hence realize value, or the working-class struggle against work explodes the system and founds a new one.

Today the creation of a new social order no longer requires a return to the land and handicrafts, as some socialists — romantic or scientific — think, but rather includes the fuller development of a highly productive social system of adequate wealth and of work which decreases, rather than increases, as productivity grows. In such a system, as Marx so brilliantly foresaw a century ago, 'the measure of wealth is then not any longer, in any way, labour time, but rather *disposable* time'.[26] Thus the development of capital, driven on by working-class demands, has created the real material foundation to go beyond 'the reduction of necessary labour so as to posit surplus labour' to a system devoted to 'the general reduction of the necessary labour of society to a minimum, which then corresponds to the artistic, scientific, etc., development of the individuals in the time set free, and with the means created, for all of them.'[27]

The foregoing classification of the class struggle by questions of *whether*, *how much*, and *at what price* the commodity-form will be imposed is both historical and analytical. While there is some general historical trend of development as Marx outlines, in which one or the other type dominates, it is also evident that these struggles are always mixed together. The point I want to emphasize is that in each case and throughout each period the struggle between capital and the working class is always about the commodity-form because it is always about work, and work in capital is imposed through the commodity-form. This is why a detailed dissection of the commodity is of interest today. It provides a point of departure for understanding the nature of the class struggle in the present crisis. Furthermore, if it is true that the very essence of the system is at stake in the present crisis, then we have all the more reason to be clear about just what the fundamental characteristics of that system are.

Marx's presentation of the fully dissected commodity in Chapter One begins with the apparent commodity-form, passes through a carefully organized and extremely detailed exposition of the nature of the *substance*, the *measure*, and the *form* of both the use-value and the value aspect of the commodity, and terminates in the money-form (see Figure 2). As indicated in the Introduction, there is a definite logic to the

26 Ibid.: 708.
27 Ibid.: 706.

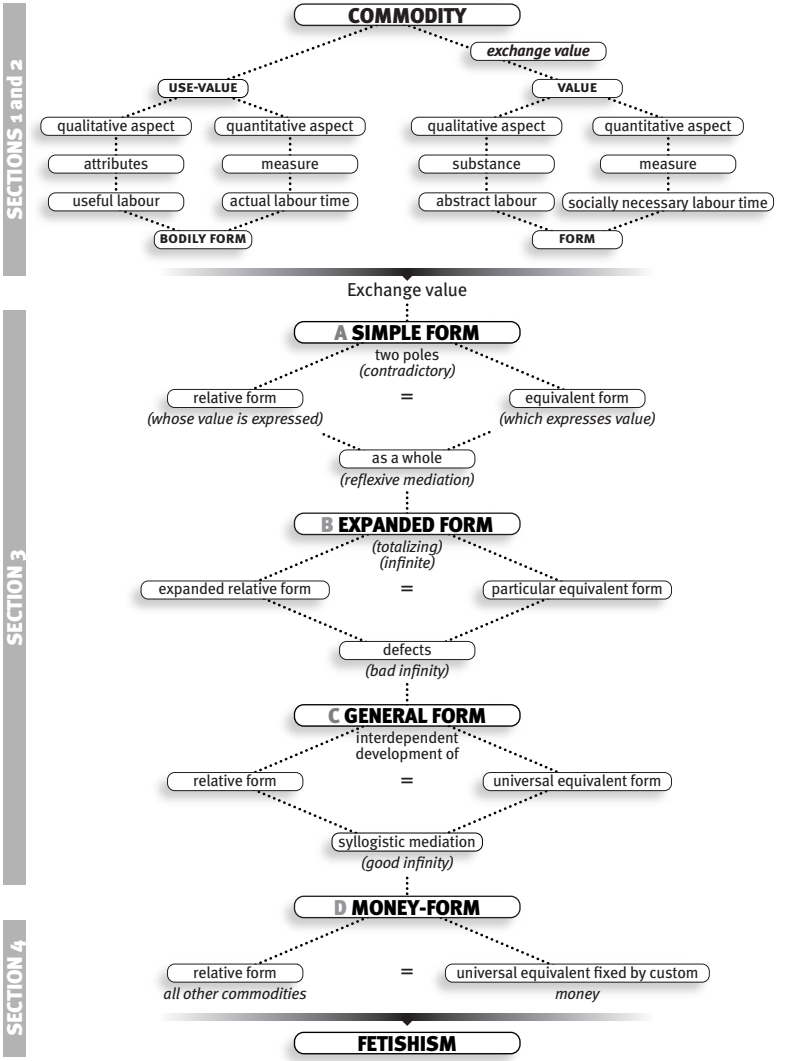


Figure 2: Diagram of the structure of Chapter One of Capital

mode of presentation used by Marx. After an initial analysis of the commodity into use-value and exchange-value, of use-value into a qualitative and a quantitative side, and of exchange-value into its qualitative essence (value), he then presents a synthetic progression in the exposition of the nature of value from relatively simple categories of few determinations (e.g. abstract labour) to increasingly complex categories (e.g. value forms), which are more concrete because they are syntheses of more and more determinations and therefore represent 'the unity of diverse aspects'. The *substance* of value is first discussed isolated from measure and form (Section 1). Its *measure* is then discussed related to substance (Sections 1 and 2). *Form* is then the developing expression of both substance and measure (Section 3). Moreover, the relations between the increasingly concrete concepts are 'dialectical' in that they reproduce particular aspects of the dialectical relations of capital. The presentation thus appears as an '*a priori* construction', which Marx hoped 'ideally reflects the life of the subject matter' — the class struggle — even though it was arrived at by years of painstaking analysis and piece-by-piece reconstruction.[28] As I have also indicated in the Introduction, the kind of reading which I do here requires the integration of the material in Chapter One with that in other parts of Marx's work. To the extent then that I bring to bear on the interpretation of certain passages material from other parts of *Capital*, or from other works, I do so with the aim of grasping Chapter One within the larger analysis, rather than reconstructing the evolution of what Marx wrote and thought.

28 Marx, *Capital*, Volume I, 'Afterword to the Second German Edition': 19 [International Publishers edition].

III The substance and magnitude of value

What is striking in the present crisis is not the rise in unemployment — that was a major characteristic of both the Great Depression and the recessions of the 1950s. It is rather the inflation which has accompanied the unemployment: the general rise in prices of almost every commodity we buy. Rising prices affect all people, whether they have a waged job or not. Whatever the form of one's income, inflation undercuts its real value. For the working class in particular, inflation has the direct effect of reducing the value of the one commodity that class has to sell: its labour-power.

For the capitalist class it is the reverse. Since they own the commodities whose prices are rising, their wealth, embodied in those commodities, tends to rise with the prices, and, therefore, so does their income derived from the sale of those commodities. Other factors assumed to be equal, inflation tends to reduce the income of the working class and increase that of capital — causing a shift of value from one class to the other, especially when rising unemployment has the effect of further reducing nominal working-class income.

The second striking feature of the crisis is its global character. Inflation today is not a national phenomenon, confined to certain countries while others deflate; it is an international phenomenon whose major elements are no mystery: the dramatic rise in food and energy prices that has occurred in the 1970s. These food and energy crises, involving price rises in the developed world and absolute unavailability in parts of the underdeveloped world, have been the result of explicit government policies. In the case of energy, it is well known how the OPEC countries dramatically raised their

prices of crude oil beginning in 1973. It is less well known in the United States how the American government also encouraged this move.[1] It is also not well known that the Soviet Union and China have followed the OPEC lead by raising their prices both at home and for export.[2] In the case of food, the sharp increases in prices in the United States, and hence in much of the international food market which the United States dominates, were also the result of government policy. A combination of export promotion, production restrictions, devaluation, and special sales to the Soviet Union in 1972 and 1975 drove food prices up and kept them up, causing reduced real income in the West and contributing to widespread famine in parts of Asia and Africa.[3]

These rising prices and supposed scarcities of food and energy have forced us to contemplate many aspects of these commodities as well as their price. Since commodities are allocated in capitalist society according to price, its increase has meant a reduction in availability and this has raised the quantitative question of scarcity — a concern which has been spurred on by the limits to growth literature. Is there, will there be, enough food, enough energy? Such questions necessarily lead to a fundamental questioning of the origin of commodities and the basis of their production. At the same time, questions that had been raised previously over the quality of these 'goods' have been given a new urgency by their growing expensiveness. What are we getting for our money? Are these commodities what we want? Are they safe for us, for our environment? If not, why not?

Along with this increased political awareness and questioning has grown a wide variety of struggles around these issues. The continued growth of consumer action groups, the ecology movement, and the antihunger movement are all outgrowths of these changes. Among those hardest hit by rising prices and lowered availability there has been growing militant direct action to counter the inevitable reduction of their income. They have passed from anger to direct appropriation and violent protest. Throughout the United States, business losses (and working-class gains) from shoplifting have been rising steadily as more and more of the lowest-paid workers refuse to pay the rising prices.[4] In the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe, stealing from the state has continued to grow.[5] In places as diverse as Turin, Italy, and Crystal City, Texas, workers have refused to pay rising gas and electricity bills and have practised what has become known as the 'self-reduction' of prices.[6] Ripping off Ma Bell has become a widespread practice in the United States. The 'Black Christmas' that occurred

1 See V H Oppenheim's article, 'Why Oil Prices Go Up [1] In The Past We Pushed Them', *Foreign Policy* 25 [Winter 1976–1977]: 24–57.
2 'OPEC Oil Price Change and COMECON Oil Prices', Radio Free Europe Research, RAD Background Report/244 [Eastern Europe] November 1929, 1976.
3 See Cleaver, 'Food, Famine and the International Crisis': 32–53.
4 See the two US Department of Commerce publications, 'The Cost of Crime against Business' and 'Crime in Retailing'. On a related form of direct appropriation, see Jerry Adler, 'Employee Thievery: A 6 Billion dollar Hand in the Till', *Sunday News Magazine of the New York Daily News*, September 11, 1977.
5 See 'Whoever Steals, Lives Better', *New York Times*, April 13, 1976. Not only is stealing from the state endemic in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe, but also, in the periodic explosions [e.g. Poland in June 1976], two favourite actions of protesters seem to be burning the Communist Party headquarters, on the one hand, and looting state stores on the other.
6 Ramirez, 'The Working Class Struggle against the Crisis'; Dick Merkel, 'Crystal Citizens Rejoice: Zavala Judge Blocks Cutoff', *San Antonio Express and News*, September 3, 1977: 1.

in New York during the recent power failure showed the widespread willingness to collectively bypass price entirely when possible.[7] Where workers have been able to identify the national government as responsible for price rises, they have attacked it, often violently. The events in Poland in June 1976 and Egypt in November 1976 are two of the most dramatic cases in which violent upheaval forced the government to reverse decreed increases in food prices.[8] In the United States, the beef boycott, the coffee boycott, and the refusal of dockworkers to load wheat for the Soviet Union were all actions undertaken to slow price rises.[9]

In such a period, when a critical area of class struggle turns around the prices, quantity, and quality of commodities, it is evident that an adequate analysis of what commodities are, who they serve, and what their prices represent takes on a new urgency. Workers feel under attack, and rightly so. What is essential is to understand the nature of the attack and how can it be counteracted. We will see that Marx's analysis does give us a beginning for understanding the class struggle of which these changes are an element. We will gain further insight by applying his analysis to the various individual commodities which play an important role in the crisis, for example, food and energy whose price rises have played the biggest role in the current inflation and labour-power whose value has been undercut by that inflation.

The commodity has two aspects: use-value and exchange-value

Marx begins his dissection of the commodity by analysing it into its two characteristics. He points out that each commodity has a dual existence. It is both a use-value and an exchange-value. Taking the first part of Figure 2, we have:



A commodity is a use-value because it has a value in use — a usefulness, or utility, it 'satisfies human wants of some sort or another'. It also is an exchange-value because it has a value in exchange; that is, it can be exchanged for something else.

The use-value and the exchange-value of a commodity are not just two different determinations, or aspects; they are contradictory determinations. A commodity is a use-value only if it is immediately useful to whoever has it. It is an exchange-value only if it is not immediately useful but is used only for exchange to get something

7 See many articles describing and analysing the events of July 13–14 in the *New York Times*, July 14–20, 1977. Black Christmas was only the most recent dramatic example of this kind of activity. The widespread direct appropriation during the big-city uprisings of the mid 1960s led to their being termed 'commodity riots'. See Russel Dynes and E L Quarantelli, 'What Looting in Civil Disturbances Really Means', *Transaction Magazine* 5, No 6 [May 1968]: 9–14. For an overall analysis of that period, see Paolo Carpignano, 'US Class Composition in the 1960s', *Zerowork* 1 [December 1975]: 7–31.

8 For a summary analysis of the Polish events, see Cleaver, 'Food, Famine and the International Crisis': 58–60. On Egypt, see *New York Times* articles 'Thousands in Egypt Riot over Price Rise', January 19, 1977; 'Cairo Eases Prices, but Rioting Goes On', January 19, 1977. 'Egypt's Cities Seem Calm after 2 Days of Price Riots', January 21, 1977.

9 Cleaver, 'Food, Famine and the International Crisis': 37–40.

else. Exchange-value is thus not only different from use-value; it is exactly its opposite; they are defined by their contradictory position with respect to each other. Yet they are only the twofold aspects of the commodity, and the commodity is the unity of these opposites. The strange combination of unity and opposition, in which the opposites only have their meaning vis-à-vis each other and are thus inextricably joined, is exactly what Marx means by a contradictory relation.

Yet this seems to be an impossible situation, because to be a use-value a thing must be used and not exchanged. And to be an exchange-value it must not be used but must be traded off. This contradictory situation, which Marx analysed more fully in the *Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*, can find its solution only in the actual exchange process: the exchange process must comprise both the evolution and the solution of these contradictions.[10] Marx calls the realization of the two contradictory aspects that occurs in the circulation process the metamorphosis of the commodity. Before a commodity is sold and consumed, use-value and exchange-value have only an abstract and potential existence. Once it is sold, exchanged for money *(C–M)*, then its character of exchange-value has been realized. But in this exchange the form of its exchange-value appears as the money that realized it. When that money is then exchanged for another commodity, which is consumed *(M–C)*, its exchange-value metamorphoses again into its other aspect as use-value, which is then realized. Because the complete analysis of this process requires an understanding of value, which is only developed later in Chapter One, as well as exchange, which is analysed in Chapter Two, Marx's discussion of how this solution can actually occur is presented in Chapter Three. In Chapter One we have only the abstract juxtaposition of use-value and exchange-value. Marx illustrates these relations with a variety of apparently innocuous commodities: linen, iron, watches, and corn (wheat). I say apparently because most of these commodities played a key role in the period of capitalist development which Marx analysed: linen in the textile industry, iron in the production of machinery and cannon, watches in the timing of work, wheat as the basic means of subsistence of the working class. To be just as careful in this exposition, I suggest that we focus on the key commodities of the current period: labour-power, food, and energy.

By focusing on the commodity labour-power, whose use-value and exchange-value Marx analyses in Parts II and III of Volume I of *Capital*, we go directly to the heart of capitalism. We saw in the previous chapter that labour-power, or the capacity to work, is a commodity because throughout the world the working class has been forced to sell its strength and abilities to capital. The use-value of labour-power, as Marx shows in Chapters Six and Seven, is its ability to work and to produce value and surplus value. Its exchange-value is the value the working class gets in return for its sale. The use-value and exchange-value of labour-power are clearly contradictory because labour-power can only be exchange-value for the working class (because it has no means of production) and not use-value. Yet the same labour-power does have use-value for the capitalists who buy it and put it to work.

10 Marx, *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*: 44.

In the case of that part of food which is produced as a commodity, an analysis of its twofold character is also revealing. Much food consumed in the United States and Western Europe today is produced by large capitalist agribusiness firms at home and abroad: the giant corporative wheat farms of the plains states, the banana plantations of Central America, and the beef ranches of the Argentine pampa are all capitalist producers selling their goods in an international market. By the time it reaches the table, that food includes not only the paid and unpaid labour of production and transport workers but also the labour of the cooks — mainly housewives. The use-value of food is generally said to lie in its nutritional and aesthetic qualities. Its exchange-value lies in the money that the agribusiness corporations and middlemen receive from its sale. As with labour-power and all other commodities, the realization of the two aspects is resolved through exchange.

These illustrations bring out something deeper in the commodity-form. The two categories of use-value and exchange-value are not just abstract concepts arrived at by mental reasoning with the tool of analytical abstraction. They do not exist only in the passage of the commodity through the exchange process. *These two aspects also express the two-sided contradiction characteristic of the class relations in capitalism*. Use-value and exchange-value are opposed in a contradictory unity in the same way that capitalist and working classes are opposed and united. Each is the opposite of the other but at the same time exists, as such, only in the relation. We can see how the class relation includes these aspects of the commodity-form and how the commodity-form is itself at least partially appropriate for this kind of class society.

Moreover, we can see how *the two aspects suggest two different class perspectives.* Most fundamentally, the view of the commodity as use-value is the perspective of the working class. It sees commodities (e.g. food or energy) primarily as objects of appropriation and consumption, things to be used to satisfy its needs. Capital sees these same commodities primarily as exchange-values — mere means toward the end of increasing itself and its social control via the realization of surplus value and profit. Yet the example of labour-power shows that these perspectives are not so simple and fixed. For, in the context of capital, we have seen the working class discover its own labour-power as an alienable commodity which can have only exchange-value for it, and not use-value. Similarly, capital's primary interest is not in the exchange-value of labour-power but rather in its use-value. But, since capital is interested in surplus value it must simultaneously be interested in the use-value of labour-power — the amount of value it can produce — and its exchange-value — the amount of value it must be paid. Similarly, the working class also takes an interest in the use to which its labour-power is put as it struggles over the conditions of work.

Returning to food, while the working class is primarily concerned with the use-value of food, the fact that food does have an exchange-value, a money price that limits workers' access to it, means that they must also be concerned with that exchange-value. Moreover, capital, if it would sell its products, must pay some attention to the use-value. Rotten food rarely sells; miracle rice must have an acceptable taste; bread must be white or dark depending on the group of workers to whom it is sold. We can

see how each perspective depends on the other. It is exactly because workers have needs (and no means of producing what they need) that capital can sell those use-values and realize the exchange-values it desires. It is exactly because labour-power is a use-value for capital that it is an exchange-value for labour.

This leads us to two further observations. First, for each class the significance of each commodity is not just one-sided but includes both use-value and exchange-value. The preoccupation of the working class with exchange-value and the preoccupation of capital with use-value, however, are both the outgrowth of capital's success in imposing its social system. Second, because the significance of a commodity differs for the working class and capital (being primarily a use-value for the one and primarily an exchange-value for the other), the meaning of the use-value and exchange-value of any given commodity is not the same for capital and for the working class. This brings to the fore the relevance of the approach outlined in the Introduction — the need to bring out the two-sided character of each category, the need to discover the two-class perspective on each category of analysis. We must see how the meanings of use-value and exchange-value differ for any commodity according to the perspectives of the two classes.

Let us examine these questions in the case of our three commodities. First, let us take labour-power. If we look at the question of the use-value of labour-power from the two class perspectives, we can see that they give quite distinct results. On the surface, the use-value of labour-power belongs entirely to the capitalist who has bought it and who consumes it in the productive process. As we have seen in the previous chapter, the ultimate use-value of work, which is the use-value of labour-power, is its role as the fundamental means of capitalist social control. For the capitalist to be able to impose work is to retain social control. But the use-value of labour-power for capital is also its ability to produce value and surplus value. Control and value, however, are not separate use-values. As we will see shortly, the substance of value is work and work is the means of social control.[11] Therefore, surplus value is not only surplus labour but also the aim of capitalist production and an index of its success in imposing itself as a social system.

But, even though the use-value of work is formally the domain of capital, that is only from capital's viewpoint. From the working-class point of view, work can also have certain kinds of use-values for it. if we put aside the politically dangerous romantic notion that the working class gets a use-value out of work itself — a notion perhaps appropriate to a bygone era of craftsmen — we can still see how the working class tries to turn the work which capital imposes on it to its own advantage. To the degree that the workers get some part of the product they produce, then, at least indirectly,

11 To separate the concept of value from that of social control under capital is, perhaps unintentionally, to reintroduce the dichotomy between economics [value] and politics [control]. This seems to the thrust of Montano's discussion of capital going 'beyond value', due to the decline in productive labour, to work as 'political control in its purest form' ['Notes on the International Crisis': 57–58]. This problematic formulation is also employed by Christian Marazzi in his 'Money and the World Crisis: The New Basis of Capitalist Power', *Zerowork* 2 [Fall 1977]: 94–95. What both authors forget, and what is a basic point of the present work, is that the substance of value [work] and of money [as the quintessential expression of value] is always social control — social control through forced labour.

the use-value of their work to them is as useful labour, labour that produces use-values which satisfy their needs. More directly, the combination of workers in factories provides an experience in joint action in which they learn to turn against capital through their organization as a class. Marx: 'as the number of the co-operating labourers increases, so too does their resistance to the domination of capital.'[12]

The exchange-value of labour-power is, as we have seen, the money which the working class receives for its sale. Yet for the working class this exchange-value is at once income and a source of power in its struggle with capital, while for the latter it is a cost and a deduction from total value produced, a threat to surplus value and thus to capital's power. Because of these differences there is often a struggle over the form in which the working class will receive the exchange-value of its labour-power: money wages, wages in kind, social services, welfare, unemployment benefits, pensions, and so forth.

Let us now turn to food as a commodity and apply the same approach. For the working class, the use-value of food is above all its role as our fundamental consumption good — nourishment to live. Because of our need for this use-value of food, capital understood early on that its control over food as a commodity gave it control over workers. This was why the most basic means of production stripped from workers in the period of primitive accumulation was land — the traditionally necessary precondition for producing food. Thus the fundamental use-value of food for capital is the power to force the working class to work to get it. The need of the working class for this use-value has thus led capital to make scarcity — hunger — a basic ingredient of its social order. 'Everything therefore depends upon making hunger permanent among the working class.'[13] This is a very basic point which has immediate bearing on the current crisis, in which hunger is playing a deadly role in the struggle between the classes. Because food plays this role in capital's strategy against the working class, it means that the working class, too, recognizes in food a fundamental requirement for the development of its power against capital. Especially among the least-powerful sectors of the class, those on the lowest rungs of the income hierarchy, the use-value of food in its struggles is critical. It is not surprising that peasant struggles often turn to crop or land seizures. It is generally only on the basis of an adequate supply of food that such struggles can move to other levels.

These observations serve to clarify the importance of the two class perspectives on the exchange-value of food. As with other commodities, its exchange-value for capital is a source of surplus value; but for the working class the exchange-value of food, relative to the exchange-value of labour-power, determines its access to food and the use-values of nutrition and power it provides. Thus the exchange-value for food both undermines working-class income and power and strengthens capital's position in terms of both profits and control. Indeed, short of absolute scarcity, price (the money form or exchange-value) is capital's key weapon in making hunger permanent. When, as in the current crisis, it undertakes to engineer a global rise in

12 Marx, *Capital*, Volume I, Chapter 13: 331 [International Publishers Edition].
13 Ibid, Chapter 25, Section 4: 646.

the exchange value of food, it is not only increasing its profits but also increasing its power vis-à-vis the working class. Thus it should not be surprising that the response of various sectors of the working class to such an attack is a function of their power. Where they have little power, they cannot avoid starvation, as in the Sahel; where they have more power, they may be successful in rebuffing or limiting the impact of such attacks, as in Egypt, Poland, or the United States.

And what about energy, that other commodity whose price rise seems to be playing such a key role in the crisis? A class analysis of the use- and exchange-values of energy brings out a number of important relations. The kinds of energy which we usually think of as commodities are those like oil, gas, electricity or, in less-developed countries, wood, charcoal, or dung. When we question the nature of the use-value of these commodities from the two class perspectives we get some interesting results. From a working-class point of view some of these are commodities which are consumed more or less directly: electricity to power household appliances, lights, or heating equipment; natural gas, coal, wood, or dung to provide (in certain situations) energy for heating, cooking, and lighting; gasoline to provide energy for lawnmowers, boats, and, above all, automobiles. Like food they are consumption goods whose use-values lie in their ability to reduce work and make life more pleasant. There is also an apparent hierarchy of sorts in the usefulness of these energy commodities; they vary in their versatility and aesthetic value. Although ranking may vary for different uses and vary by culture, we can generally see that electricity or natural gas gives greater versatility and is easier to handle than say charcoal or dung.

At the same time it is also clear that several energy commodities are not commodities consumed by workers but are rather intermediary products that have a use-value of raw material only for the capitalist who has the means of production necessary to employ them. This is the case with crude oil, or uranium, or certain kinds of coal. They are used only to produce other kinds of energy commodities like gasoline or electricity which are then sold to workers. But, here again, it is obvious that great amounts of these energy commodities are not sold to consumers directly at all but are sold to other capitalists as intermediate inputs into the production of all kinds of commodities. In both cases energy appears as constant capital whose use-value for capital lies in the value it transfers to the product — a necessary step in the production of surplus value. This constant energy capital may not produce surplus value but it is necessary for its production.

But this brings out another facet that must be understood. In so far as energy is a substitute for human strength in the production process, and in so far as the working class has an interest in the expenditure of its own labour-power as use-value (in its struggles over the conditions of work), then it also can see in the energy commodity the use-value of reducing the required expenditure of human sweat. In other words, for the working class energy has the use-value not only of reducing work at home but also of reducing work in the factory. However, if the use-value of energy for the working class is its ability to reduce work, it is quite the contrary for capital. Historically, as Marx shows in Chapter 15 of *Capital*, the fundamental role of nonhuman energy in production

has been to render possible the creation of the machine and thus of the complex systems of machinery on which modern industry is based. On the one hand, the use-value which capital derives from this use of energy to power machinery lies in the rising productivity it produces. When this raises profits and investments it amounts to the conversion of rising productivity into a source of more work and more social control. Moreover, we can see that the increasing use of energy to power machinery has meant the creation of a 'productive organism that is purely objective, in which the labourer becomes a mere appendage to an already existing material condition of production'.[14] Here we see the use-value of energy to capital as allowing a reorganization of control over workers. In fact, as Marx points out in considerable detail, energy has been, over and over, the key to the decomposition of working-class power which threatened capital: 'According to Gaskell, the steam-engine was from the very first an antagonist of human power, an antagonist that enabled the capitalist to tread under foot the growing claims of the workmen, who threatened the newly born factory system with a crisis.'[15] What was true of steam engines then is equally true of internal combustion or nuclear engines more recently. And essential to the development of these weapons has been the continual development of new sources of energy commodities.

These observations should be enough to point beyond the current debate over the energy crisis in which the only alternative to capital's seemingly endless demands for more energy has been a back-to-the-land movement which has, often on ecological grounds, vaunted a reduction in energy usage in favour of a return to labour-intensive methods of production. The choices are not between sweat and toil versus wasteful plundering of natural resources; they are rather between a use of energy in the interests of the working class and a use of energy in the interests of capital. It is not necessary to reject automobiles — which do have a real use-value to workers — in order to reject the gas-guzzling, model-changing creations of capital which are aimed only at turnover and profit. It is not necessary to reject the use of energy to reduce toil in agriculture in order to reject the wasteful use of inorganic fertilisers that primarily benefits the oil companies.

This analysis of the differing use-values of energy commodities for the two classes also helps unravel the differing perspectives on their exchange-values. To begin with, it is clear enough that the increase in the exchange-value of energy, like that of food, has meant an increase in the profits of the sellers of energy commodities (e.g. the oil companies, coal companies) through a decrease in the exchange-value of labour-power for workers. This has occurred two ways: directly, in the case of energy purchased for consumption, and indirectly, in the case of energy used as an input in the production of other consumer goods. Because of this indirect effect, the reduction in the value of nonfarm wages due to rising food costs has not always meant a rise in farmer income. Rather, their income has been reduced by the rising exchange-value of the energy and energy-derived inputs into farming. In this way, increasing the

14 Ibid, Chapter 15, Section 1: 386.
15 Ibid, Section 5: 436.

exchange-value of energy has been a powerful weapon for capital to attack the income of the working class and to devalue labour-power both off the farm and on.

But the implications of this manipulation of exchange-value (for what we have here is a case where price is dramatically severed from value) go beyond the direct attack on the wage. We just saw that one fundamental use-value of energy for capital was as a substitute for labour-power, as constant capital in a rising organic composition of capital. But, in the post-World War II period, the versatility of that weapon was at least partly predicated on a low exchange-value of energy commodities. The ready availability of cheap oil fuelled the reconstruction of post-war Europe and generally made possible the reorganization of industrial labour and the expansion of capital in the Western World. How then can rising exchange-values of energy commodities serve capital's interest? In the first place, we must remember that this is a strategy of crisis —that capital has adopted the strategy of rising energy prices, not out of choice but out of necessity. In the second place, the rise in the price of energy is being used in at least two important ways which follow from our previous analysis. I have already examined the way it allows a massive transfer of value from the working class to capital. At the same time, it concentrates surplus value in the energy sector — especially in oil and petrochemicals — a sector which, along with American agriculture, already has the highest organic composition of capital in industry. There is thus a shift of capital from low to high organic composition within the existing industrial structure — a move which has some of the same effects as raising the organic composition through investment. Finally, it means that surplus value in the form of 'petrodollars' is funnelled and concentrated in a way that allows the planning of the pattern of capitalist expansion to a unusually high degree (through the control of recycling mechanisms).

In this way we can grasp at least some of the critical aspects of the current crisis by analysing food and energy as commodities in terms of the two class perspectives on their use-values and exchange-values. By undertaking such a political reading of these concepts in the particular historical situation, we can see that not only does the meaning of the use-value and the exchange-value of each commodity depend on the class perspective, and phase in the exchange-process, but also the class perspectives are contradictory. The use-value (or exchange-value) of an object for capital is not the same as the use-value (or exchange-value) of that same commodity for the working class. Exchange-value is generally recognized as a socially determined category. But even in the case of use-value it cannot be said to be given by its intrinsic properties (physical or otherwise) — it must be seized in the context of the class struggle at any given moment.

This should make clear one reason why some of Marx's comments on use-values in the *Contribution* should be interpreted with care and a grain of salt. Use-values, he says at one point, 'do not express the social relations of production'.[16] At another point he also says that 'use-value, as such, since it is independent of the determinate economic form, lies outside the sphere of investigation of political economy. It belongs in this sphere only when it is itself a determinate form.'[17] Now, it is undoubtedly true

16 Marx, *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*: 28.
17 Ibid.

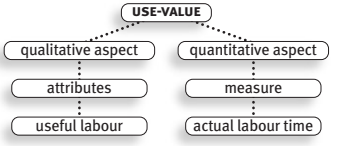
that use-value does not express the social relations of capital the same way exchange-value does. Nor is there any doubt that the latter is central to capital. Yet, as we have just seen, use-values are in many ways 'determinate forms'. Their nature and role definitely can express social relations. In *Capital* Marx discusses this in several ways: (a) the varying use-values of labour-power in the division of labour, (b) the particular use-value of means of production, and (c) the characteristics of the use-values produced and sold to the working class. Later on, in Volume II, we discover the important role of the distinctions between use-values in the reproduction schemes of part III. In Volume III is the discussion of the cheapening of the components of raw materials and many other places where the analysis of use-value plays an important role.

In his 'Marginal Notes on Adolph Wagner' (1879), Marx himself explicitly rejected as 'drivel' the interpretation that use-value has no place in his analysis beyond being one aspect of the commodity. He explicitly cites at least three different ways use-value enters into the analysis: (a) behind use-value is useful labour, one aspect of the twofold character of labour which produces commodities (see Chapter IV below); (b) 'in the development of the value form of the commodity ... the value of a commodity is represented in the use-value of the other [commodity]' (see Chapter V below); and (c) 'surplus value itself is derived from a 'specific' use-value of labour-power... etc., etc.' He concludes: 'thus for me use-value plays a far more important part than it has in economics hitherto.'[18]

The qualitative and quantitative aspects of use-value and exchange-value

The inflationary aspect of the current crisis, including the dramatic rise in food and energy prices, has meant that most of us have found ourselves buying both fewer commodities and consequently a smaller variety of commodities. Mealtime menus have become more narrower with smaller amounts of expensive foods like meat. The rising cost of gasoline cuts into the number and extent of trips and vacations. In general, consumption is restricted both quantitatively and qualitatively. These circumstances can only make the analysis of the qualitative and quantitative aspects of commodities immediately important.

We have just seen in the previous section that Marx analysed commodities first into use-value and exchange-value. And we saw that those categories embody certain aspects of the class nature of capitalist commodity-producing society. He then proceeds in Section 1 of Chapter One to further analyse each of these two aspects into a qualitative and a quantitative determination through the same process of abstraction. Taking the next step of Figure 2, we have:

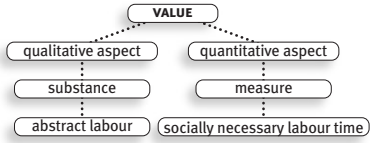


18 Marx, 'Marginal Notes on Adolph Wagner', in *Value: Studies by Karl Marx*, ed. Albert Dragstedt: 214–216.

The qualitative determination of use-value is expressed by attributes (e.g. physical attributes like weight, social attributes like control). The quantitative determination of these attributes is given by their magnitude and measure (e.g. tons, degree). Behind these particular attributes, or qualities, we later discover, lies the particular concrete, useful labour which produced them. Behind their amount, the actual labour time employed in their production.

The immediate quantitative aspect of exchange-value appears to be expressed by the 'proportion in which values in use of one sort are exchanged for those of another sort'.[19] But this remains vague and apparently accidental because the qualitative aspect of exchange-value has not yet been analysed. Because this requires further analysis of exchange-value, strictly speaking we cannot speak of the two aspects of exchange-value at this point. We can, however, make some preliminary comments on the meaning of these two aspects of the commodity-form in terms of use-value and exchange-value, keeping in mind what is to come.

First, we can note that these two determinations are not independent nor is their relationship random. With use-value, quality precedes quantity in the discussion. With exchange-value, the order at first seems reversed, but the 'quantitative determination' in fact remains veiled in mystery until the qualitative foundation is later revealed. When it is, we discover that the question was badly posed and that both the qualitative and the quantitative aspects of exchange-value are really those of value for which exchange-value is only the form of appearance. At that point we also realize that the commodity's two sides are actually those of use-value and value. In the analysis of value, as with use-value, consideration of its quality (substance or abstract labour, taken up in the next section) comes before that of its quantity (socially necessary labour time, taken up below in section 4).



The reason for the order is logical. To have a quantity, one must have a quantity of something, of some quality. Before we can speak of ten tons of wheat protein, or of forty tons of coal, we must first have grasped the qualities that make wheat protein or coal what they are — otherwise the measure is meaningless. Yet at the same time it is also clear that quality without quantity is meaningless. We can never confront wheat, coal, or value without confronting some quantity. The measure of that quantity is thus the combination of both quality and quantity.

Second, as with use-value and exchange-value, these qualitative and quantitative aspects are not simply two logically determined categories; they, too, *embody the*

19 Marx, *Capital*, Volume I, Chapter 1, Section 1: 36 [International Publishers Edition].

complex dialectic of two class perspectives and their struggle. Some of this was implicit in the foregoing discussion of class perspectives on use-value and exchange-value, but I will elaborate. At first, the *working-class perspective is primarily a qualitative one*. That is, the working class is basically concerned with the acquisition of certain kinds of things: food, clothing, housing, music — all those things which allow us to live the kind of life we desire. The quantity of the given qualities of use-values is secondary — not unimportant at all, but secondary. Certainly, one wants at least one whole house, two shoes, three meals a day — quantity is obviously a necessary ingredient; but the focus is first on the kind of life — protected feet, being sheltered, eating — and not its measure.

The perspective of capital is primarily quantitative. Capital is basically unconcerned with the particular qualities of the commodities it produces — except that they be exchange-values and carriers of surplus value. The other qualities are secondary. Whether a home is well built or poorly built, whether food is pure or adulterated are secondary, even if often functional, to how much exchange-value and profit can be realized. *More* would appear to be capital's byword, not *what kind*. What kind comes into play only inasmuch as it is necessary to produce such and such kind of commodity in order to sell more of it. The same is true in the case of the commodities capital buys as means of production. Here the primary concern is that the exchange-value of this constant capital be kept low so that the rate of profit will be high. Certain particular qualities of the means of production will obviously be required but they are means to an end.

It would, however, be erroneous to stop here, to romantically see the working class as having a monopoly on quality and to see capital as concerned only with the vulgar and quantitative. Within the class struggle the confrontation of perspectives is more complex. In its struggle with capital the working class is forced to become directly concerned with quantity. The struggle over wages, the length of the working day, and the intensity of labour are all over how much work will be done in exchange for income. The working class could not care less about value *per se*. What we want is a larger quantity of a larger variety of use-values for less work. Quantity becomes important only because it is through these quantitative struggles that we gain access to those particular qualitatively distinct commodities that we desire and to the time necessary to enjoy them. The quantitative limitation on the exchange-value of labour-power, necessary for capital's realization of surplus value, produces a qualitative limit on working-class consumption and thus is resisted.[20]

On the other side, as we saw earlier, capital in its efforts to maintain its control over the working class must become closely concerned with the nature of the labour-power that it sets to work, as well as with the structure of the industrial process through which it controls and plans that labour-power. Outside the factory it pays attention to the qualities of commodities it sells and through their use-values seeks to organize the social factory as a whole. As an example of these two concerns, we can

20 Marx, *Grundrisse*, Notebook II: 283.

note Marx's extended analysis of the role of the expansion of the qualities of commodities and of the production process in the production of relative surplus value. That production, he shows, requires both the quantitative expansion of existing variety of consumption and the production of new qualitatively different needs and use-values, which in turn implies the expansion of 'the circle of qualitative differences within labour'. Thus Marx shows how capital is driven by the working class's quantitative attack on labour time and absolute surplus value to explore all of nature in order to discover new, useful qualities in things and hence to cultivate 'all the qualities of the social human being'.[21] This is exactly that side of capital — the way it expands the variety of existence as it creates bourgeois society — which Marx saw as its historically positive side, in as much as it both represented an advance over previous societies and laid the basis for post-capitalist society.

But Marx did not stop with these general views on the implications of the dialectic of quantity and quality in the class struggle. He went on to show much more precisely how the contradictions of this process both developed capital and worked toward its dissolution. This was the process I discussed at the end of Chapter II above in which the quantitative increase in the amount of constant capital, especially machinery, per worker leads to a qualitative transformation of the capital/working-class relation and ultimately to the possibility of its destruction. This is the process in which the quantitative extension of work beyond necessary labour qualitatively transforms it into surplus value. The reinvestment of that surplus value in productivity-raising machinery tends to increase work both in intensity and through time. But the natural, and especially the social, limits to this extension (by working-class power) ultimately lead to a reduction in work time. As previously discussed, the very essence of productivity is to increase the amount of output from a given, and hence a lesser, amount of work. The quantitative reduction of necessary labour time as more and more machinery, science, and technology are brought to bear on the production process must ultimately lead to its qualitative transformation as labour 'in the direct form' ceases 'to be the great well-spring of wealth'. Under such circumstances, where the factory, or social factory, can no longer provide the space for the imposition of work the quality of that work as value is undermined.

The same crisis for capital, and opportunity for the working class, can be seen from the other side. The quantitative reduction in labour time is also a quantitative increase in disposable time. Capital's perpetual problem is to convert this expanding potential free time into work time. The processes mentioned above make this more and more difficult and the imposition of work, of surplus work, and thus of its qualitative control over society becomes more and more difficult. The very development of a capitalism that is founded on the imposition of work thus creates the 'material conditions to blow this foundation sky-high'.[22]

To pose this analysis in more concrete terms we can look at the development of capital in food-producing agriculture and in the energy sector. In both of these sectors

21 Ibid. Notebook IV: 408–409.
22 Ibid. Notebook VII: 706.

the development of technology and the substitution of constant for variable capital are among the most advanced — in at least the leading subsectors: American grain and meat production and the oil-petrochemical industry. In each case, analysis of these developments brings out, first, how the development and reorganization of production technologies have been in large part a response to the need to counteract working-class power and, second, how the exclusion of labour from production has created sectors which are decreasingly able to provide the work that capital needs for its social control. More generally these two sectors are prototypical of the factory as a whole. As the limits to the ability to impose factory work at profitable wage rates have grown more apparent in the United States and Western Europe, capital has sought two major solutions. One has been the multi-nationalization of labour-intensive sectors which have been reallocated to areas of the Third World (and increasingly to the socialist countries) where working-class power is weaker. The other is the restructuring of the rest of the social factory in order to expand the imposition of the work of reproducing labour-power. The depth and pervasiveness of the current crisis show how the struggles of both waged and unwaged have posed critical limits to these strategies — limits which capital has yet to find new strategies to circumvent.

This analysis of the dialectic of qualitative and quantitative in the class struggle helps clarify the political nature of the working-class attack on capital which produced the crisis. One way in which the old dichotomy between politics and economics has often been posed has been to label as 'economism' struggles by workers which are deemed solely quantitative, for example, more wages, shorter workday, and so on. These struggles are said to be within capital, which is itself essentially quantitative. 'Political' struggles are only those that challenge the 'quality' of capital itself, that is, that threaten the 'revolutionary' overthrow of capital via the seizure of state power. From what we have seen already, it should be apparent that struggles over the length and intensity of the workday (how much the commodity-form is imposed) are at once quantitative and qualitative: quantitative because they concern the amount of work that will be done for capital, qualitative because they put into question the realization of enough surplus value to maintain capitalist control. The 'quantitative' struggle over income also raises the question of the realization of surplus value and capital's survival.

The grain of truth about 'purely quantitative struggles' lies in the productivity deal. If increases in working-class income are successfully tied to increases in productivity, then the struggle is indeed bound within capital (see Chapter IV below). But even here, the rise in productivity, and the reorganization of the working class which it entails, creates a qualitative change in the class relations. Similarly, the growth in workers' access to wealth through the productivity deal expands the absolute base on which future struggles can be fought. It is exactly upon these qualitative changes that the working class developed the power to rupture the productivity deal and throw the system into a profound 'political' crisis.

Similarly, some workers' struggles that appear to be qualitative risk developing, rather than overthrowing, capital. For example, the strategy of 'workers' control' of the

factory can be seen to lead to workers' control of themselves, as well as of the means of production, for capital. Witness capital's strategy of participation in France, of co-determination in Germany, or of workers' control in Yugoslavia. As long as social control leads to more imposed work and accumulation, it hardly matters to capital whether the management has white collars or blue. Marx himself saw that capitalism could not be abolished simply by replacing the capitalist managers with worker/socialist managers: '...the idea held by some socialists that we need capital but not the capitalists is altogether wrong. It is posited within the concept of capital that the objective conditions of labour — and these are its own product — take on a *personality* toward it, or what is the same, that they are posited as the property of a personality alien to the worker. The concept of capital contains the capitalist.'[23] This passage shows Marx's understanding that there was no real difference between a 'capitalist' accumulation of capital and a 'socialist' accumulation of capital, once capital is understood as a class relation of work imposed through the commodity-form. Marx's primary experience in fighting such 'workers' control' strategies was in his conflicts with the Proudhonist plans for co-operatives. The implications in the case of present-day 'socialist' countries and present-day 'socialist' strategies for the working class are much wider. The class struggle, which is today at once economic and political, has both a quantitative and a qualitative side. Any attempt to forget one side or the other, or to fail to grasp their interrelation, is bound to lead to dangerous results.

Not exchange-value but value — whose substance is abstract labour

The process through which Marx shows how value lies behind exchange-value is another analytical exercise in abstraction. In order for there to be a quantitative equivalence in the exchange

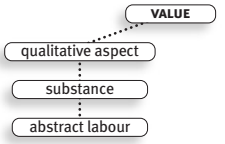
1 quarter corn = *x* cwt. iron

there must exist in the two different things something common to both so they can be compared quantitatively. As we saw above, in order to measure or compare quantities we must be clear about the quality which is being measured (and quantitatively compared). Before we can understand the quantitative comparison of '1 quarter' and '*x* cwt.', we must first discover that common quality in corn and iron which allows them to be equated in exchange at all. In order to discover this common element, Marx makes abstraction from what makes them different: the particular use-values of corn and iron. 'As use-values commodities are, above all, *different* qualities.' When Marx goes on to say 'as exchange-values they are merely *different* quantities', he is saying they are different quantities of some common quality.

But to make abstraction from their use-values is to make abstraction from their particular attributes. That, in turn, is to make abstraction from the special characteristics of the human labour which created those attributes and made them different from

23 Ibid. Notebook V: 512.

other commodities: grain farming and smelting. In abstraction from their material reality as use-values and as products of particular forms of useful labour, these commodities emerge as only products of human labour in abstraction from any particularity. This human labour that is common to them Marx calls abstract labour. As products of abstract human labour they are qualitatively equivalent and as such he calls them *values*.



In Marx's terminology these products of abstract labour *are* values. Just as those commodities *are* use-values and exchange-values when they *have* the same, so too *are* they values when they *have* value. However, to say that a commodity *has* value does not involve a subjective evaluation. It is to say simply that it is the product of abstract labour and that it will be exchanged. Another way of stating the relationship between value and abstract labour is to say that the *substance* of value is abstract labour. As we will see, the quantity of value may be more or less, but this concerns the measure of its essential quality, or substance: abstract labour. Similarly, the substance of value can be expressed more or less completely through different forms of exchange value. Its form and its measure are necessary to value but both must be differentiated from substance. This means that to recognize that value is the qualitative aspect of exchange-value means more than just one quality. Abstract labour is the essence of value — that which cannot be altered without losing the concept itself. Abstract labour is the substance, or essence, of the form of value: exchange-value. Or, inversely, Marx says that exchange-value is the phenomenal form, or the form of appearance of value — the mode through which value acquires a recognisable expression in capital. In other words, work for capital only has meaning and only appears as a social relation when it is embodied in a product that is exchanged (and, ultimately, that earns surplus value).

Marx began the analysis of the commodity on the level of appearance. He has moved analytically to the essence of exchange-value. He summarized this process in his 'Marginal Notes on Adolph Wagner': 'That [the commodity] is what I analyse, and first of all to be sure in *the form in which it appears*. Now I find at this point that it is, on the one hand, in its natural form *a thing of use-value*, alias *use-value*, and on the other hand that it is *bearer of exchange-value*, and is itself an exchange-value from this point of view. Through further analysis of the latter I discovered that exchange-value is only an appearance-*form*, an independent mode of manifestation of the *value* which is contained in the commodity, and then I approach the analysis of this value.'[24] How exactly this essence is manifested in appearance through exchange-value is

24 Marx, 'Marginal Notes on Adolph Wagner': 214.

shown in Chapter IV below, which analyses Marx's discussion of the form of value in Section 3 of Chapter One.

This analysis, this mental process of abstraction, through which we isolate a single determination, is not, however, a process outside the world. Nor are the concepts with which we denote those determinations. 'Abstract' labour is not simply an abstract concept, because the concept denotes the very real social quality of work under capitalism. This is not very clearly pointed out in Chapter One because of the degree of abstraction associated with Marx's mode of exposition. In order to adequately discover the complex class relations that lie behind 'abstract labour', we need to examine other parts of Marx's writing. What we discover is that he shows quite lucidly how the process of abstraction is not one which occurs only in our fancy. Quite the contrary, abstract labour is semantically meaningful as a concept but not because all human labour is basically alike, not because some common element is necessary for and revealed by equivalence in exchange. It is meaningful because capital itself, in its continual struggle with labour to create and maintain the division of labour which is the basis for commodity production, exchange, and social control, tries to continually make labour more malleable to its needs. This it must do by a continual shifting and displacement of labour to overcome workers' struggles. The goal is a flexible, adaptable labour supply in which any specific aspect of labour, for example, strength or skill, becomes less and less important. With the development of capital, labour is increasingly 'abstract' precisely in the real sense that it has fewer fixed determinations. In other words, a malleable labour force effectively amounts to a homogeneous mass, any part of which can be applied whenever capital needs it in the industrial machine. Perhaps Marx's clearest statement of this is in the Introduction to the *Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*:

> This abstraction of labour as such is not merely the mental product of a concrete totality of labours. Indifference toward specific labours corresponds to a form of society in which individuals can with ease transfer from one labour to another, and where the specific kind is a matter of chance for them, hence of indifference. Not only the category labour, but labour in reality has here become the means of creating wealth in general, and has ceased to be organically linked with particular individuals in any specific form. Such a state of affairs is at its most developed in the most modern form of existence of bourgeois society — in the United States. Here, then for the first time, the point of departure of modern economics, namely the abstraction of the category 'labour', 'labour as such', labour pure and simple, become true in practice.[25]

Abstract labour thus designates the homogeneity of labour that capital seeks to achieve through its growing division and control of work.

At this point, it is of the utmost importance not to forget our approach to this study. We must also see that there is another side to this attempt by capital to reduce labour to abstract labour. That is the activity of the working class. The creation of an increasingly

25 Marx, *Grundrisse*: 104–105.

homogeneous working class is not simply the result of capital's manipulations. It is also the outcome of the working class's struggles to achieve its own unity vis-à-vis capital. In their struggles for such common goals as the reduced working day, better conditions of work, minimum wages, and so on, workers gain cohesiveness as they act more and more as a distinct class-for-itself. The resulting homogeneity grows more and more dangerous to capital because it is a fundamental basis of working-class power. The unity sought by the working class is not the unity of abstract labour within capital but a unity outside and against it.

As a result of these contradictory meanings of homogeneity for the two classes, the only way for capital to achieve its need for the controllable homogeneity of abstract labour is, paradoxically, through the imposition of heterogeneity, through the division of workers. It is only by dividing and pitting one group of workers against another that capital can prevent their dangerous unity and keep the class weak enough to be controlled. The *contradiction between capitalist efforts to unify the class as labour-power through division and workers' efforts to overcome these divisions to unite against capital is one of the most fundamental and most important characteristics of the class struggle*.

In the application of its divide-and-conquer strategy, capital has always used historically given divisions that it inherited from the past, for example, divisions between races, between sexes, between age groups, between ethnic or nationality groups. At the same time, it has transformed, developed, and added to these divisions in innumerable ways. For example, all the so-called technical divisions of useful labour are also divisions of the working class, designed to keep it under control. Thus, we discover in Chapters 13 to 15 of Volume I of *Capital* that the key to capital's success in maintaining control over the productive power of co-operation — of the collective labourer in the factory — is its ability to impose a hierarchical wage division on workers that is associated with a certain division of useful labour and that pits them against each other. Similarly the larger divisions of labour, such as the division between town and country, the colonial division of labour, and the division of labour between industrial branches, all serve to divide the working class and help control it. The 'division of labour in manufacture', Marx writes, 'on the one hand it presents itself historically as a progress and as a necessary phase in the economic development of society, on the other hand it is a refined and civilized method of exploitation.'[26]

The wage hierarchy, which is critical to capital's control of the factory, also plays a crucial role in the larger social factory. Because the money wage as the exchange-value of labour-power is the most fully developed form of exchange between capital and labour, its presence or nonpresence is fundamental to determining both the relation of various parts of the working class to capital and the relations among those parts themselves. The work by Wages for Housework has brought out that in the discussion of the reserve army in Chapter 25 the basic division between the 'active' and 'reserve' sectors of the class is a division between a waged sector and an unwaged sector.

26 Marx, *Capital*, Volume I, Chapter 14, Section 5: 364 [International Publishers Edition].

Marx's own discussion of the key role of the unwaged reserve army in controlling the waged labour army shows how the waged/unwaged division is fundamental. Further work has brought out how all the so-called non-economic divisions, such as racial, sexual, or national divisions, are also hierarchical divisions and basically wage divisions (in this sense even the hierarchical income divisions of the unwaged are 'wage' divisions).[27]

Capital maintains its control through the dynamic manipulation of these divisions. For example, the success of one sector of the working class in achieving higher wages is used by capital, where possible, to accentuate the wage hierarchy. In this process we can see the intensely political character of this issue within the class struggle. Again and again Marx pointed out how capital quite consciously uses these divisions to maintain control over work as abstract labour. One of his most instructive discussions of this process is worth quoting at length.

> Every industrial and commercial centre in England now possesses a working class divided into two *hostile* camps, English proletarians and Irish proletarians. The ordinary English worker hates the Irish worker as a competitor who lowers his standard of life. In relation to the Irish worker he regards himself as a member of the *ruling* nation and consequently he becomes a tool of the English aristocrats and capitalists *against Ireland*, thus strengthening their *domination over himself*. He cherishes religious, social and national prejudices against the Irish worker. His attitude towards him is much the same as that of the 'poor whites' to the Negroes in the former slave states of the USA. The Irishman pays him back with interest in his own money. He sees in the English worker both the accomplice and the stupid tool of the *English rulers in Ireland*.
>
> This antagonism is artificially kept alive and intensified by the press, the pulpit, the comic papers, in short, by all the means at the disposal of the ruling classes. *This antagonism* is the *secret of the impotence of the English working class*, despite its organization. It is the secret by which the capitalist class maintains its power. And the latter is quite aware of this.[28]

The immediate contemporary relevance of this analysis can be found throughout the global capitalist system. Marx's analysis of the relation between the immigrant Irish and the English workers exemplifies recent attempts by capital to pit immigrant workers against local workers in North America, Northern Europe, and most recently the OPEC countries. Mexicanos or Puerto Ricans in the United States, Italians or Filipinos in Canada, Algerians or Portuguese in France, Turks or Italians in Germany, and South Koreans in Iran and Japan all can easily be seen to be the counterparts of Marx's Irish in England. And the lesson is not limited to national divisions but is equally applicable to various divisions within countries: blacks/whites, men/women.

Yet, to recognize the immediate relevance of this analysis for today is also to necessarily see the other side again — to see the working-class activity within and against these divisions. On the one hand, the international mobility of labour has

27 See James, *Sex, Race and Class*.
28 Marx to Meyer and Vogt, April 9, 1870, *Marx–Engels Selected Correspondence*.

been to a large degree an autonomous movement on the part of workers demanding more income and less arduous work — first a refusal of unwaged work and a demand for the wage, then in the struggle against waged work a tendency to break the tie between work and income and to convert the wage into a one-sided transfer of resources from capital to labour. On the other hand, one of the most important elements of the cycle of working-class struggles that created the current crisis for capital was the working class's ability to overcome these divisions and achieve new levels of its own kind of homogeneity against abstract labour.

The dynamic struggle between these two classes over the question of division/homogeneity can be fruitfully conceptualized through the concepts of composition, political recomposition, and decomposition. Grasped as a particular structure of power within the class, the division of labour is seen not technically but politically, as a certain composition of the working class. From capital's point of view a composition is desired that will sufficiently weaken the class to give capital control. For the working class that same composition is an obstacle. Its overcoming is designated as a political recomposition of the class in which the structure of power is recomposed more favourably for workers.[29] Such a political recomposition on the basis of a given division of labour undermines the usefulness of that division to capital. Capital in turn is forced to attempt to decompose the new level of workers' power through the imposition of a new technical or social division of labour through a process of repression and restructuring.

We can discover many examples of this process during the present crisis. If the new power achieved by immigrant workers during the last cycle of struggles was based on a political recomposition in which they overcame their division from local workers, then the current widespread capitalist attacks on immigrant labour must be seen as a new attempt by capital to decompose that level of power through mass deportations and global restructuring of the pattern of investment. Thus, we find efforts to expel workers from the United States and Western Europe and to either return them to their status of latent reserve army (Mexico) or dispatch them to new areas of capitalist development (e.g. the influx of workers into Eastern Europe and the Near East OPEC countries). Similarly, we find within particular sectors of production, such as agriculture and energy, attempts to introduce new technology and new work organization to decompose the growing level of working-class power. In the United States, for instance, we have the continuing effort to mechanize certain crops in the face of farm-worker struggles (both local and multinational workers). We also have the attempt to restructure the energy sector, especially with relation to oil and coal, in order to undermine the power of coal miners in Appalachia and the growing power of workers in the Middle East. In Europe we find similar examples in the attempts of the Mansholt plan to eliminate a recalcitrant peasantry, of the Soviet planners to industrialize meat

29 In *Zerowork* 1, the definition given of political recomposition is: 'By "political recomposition" we mean the level of unit and homogeneity that the working class reaches during a cycle of struggle in the process of going from one composition to another. Essentially, it involves the overthrow of capitalist divisions, the creation of new unities between different sectors of the class, and the expansion of the boundaries of what the "working class" comes to include.' [p 4; and Midnight Notes, *Midnight Oil*: 112]

production, of Italian capital to restructure its petrochemical sector, and of Europe generally to shift to nuclear energy in a great leap forward in the substitution of constant for variable capital.[30] In all these examples capital counters the working class's political recomposition with its own new level of organic composition.

The same processes are underway outside the factory as capital responds to the recomposition achieved in the 1960s by unwaged groups like students, the unemployed, welfare recipients, and housewives. Through new plans for restructuring education, unemployment benefit schemes, welfare programs, and the labour market open to women, capital seeks to reimpose new links between income and work. Thus we are confronted by the fiscal crisis of higher education, the expansion of industrial training programs, the growth of adult education recycling programs, the attempts to tie foodstamps and other welfare payments to work programs, and so on.[31]

This analysis of the struggle over abstract labour as the substance of value — capitalist-imposed work — provides a perspective from which we can avoid the usual pitfalls of seeing the divisions of the working class either as a sociological stratification in which the emergence of a 'middle class' has destroyed the relevance of Marx's analysis of a two-class struggle or as the one-sided outcome of an omnipotent capitalism which simply manipulates workers like pawns in a segmented labour market.[32] In both cases the study of the growth of workers' power is neglected. Instead we can see the actual pattern of stratification or labour-market segmentation as the outcome of a real and often violent class struggle in which both classes have autonomous power.

Once this fundamental process is understood, the particular configuration of divisions can be understood within the context of historically specific circumstances. For example, to understand the fact that male labour is generally rewarded more highly than female labour requires a historical analysis of the male/female hierarchy already present in the societies in which the commodity-form was imposed, as well as an analysis of how that hierarchy was reinforced or changed by the new order. The continuing existence of this division, as well as its particular structural evolution, can only be grasped adequately by analysing the pattern of working-class struggle and capitalist response discussed above. This kind of analysis does not reduce the phenomenon of sexism (or racism) to that of capitalism exactly because it requires some recognition and explanation of both the respective relation of men and women to capital and the fact that this division is based on male dominance over women and not vice versa. Similarly, it reduces the analysis neither to one of capital's manipulations nor to that of the struggles of the working class as a whole. Quite the contrary, an examination of the processes of political recomposition and decomposition involves the analysis of the autonomous activities of the various sectors of the class and the way they interact in order to confront capital as a class.

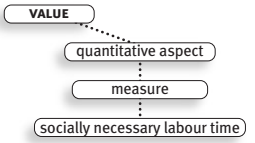
30 See the articles in *Zerowork* 2, Serafina *et al*., 'L'Operaia Multinazionale in Europa'; and Bologna, 'Questions of Method for Analysis of the Chemical Plan'.
31 See the articles in *Zerowork* 1 and 2 and compare with the discussions of the same programmes in Council of Economic Advisors, 'The Economic Report of the President: 1978'.
32 Michael Reich, David M Gordon and Richard C Edwards, 'A Theory of Labour Market Segmentation', *American Economic Review*, May 1973: 359–365.

The political importance of grasping the class nature of abstract labour and the processes which engender it cannot be overemphasized. By focusing our attention on the homogeneity that the working class opposes to capital's abstract labour and on the processes of political recomposition through which that homogeneity is achieved, this approach brings out the class politics of abstract labour and the division of labour on which it is based. By studying these actual processes, we leave behind the ideological world of class consciousness and the leftist party to discover how the working class is working out its own unity as well as the strengths and weaknesses of its strategies and tactics.

Some basic aspects of working-class organization are suggested by this analysis. Because the divisions are hierarchical ones, there are always dominant and dominated sides. In these circumstances the divisions have worked where capital has been able to play on the dominant side's profiting from the division. The divisions are not imaginary or simply ideological ones that can be overcome with 'class consciousness'. Men do benefit from women's work; whites do benefit from blacks' lower status; local workers do benefit from immigrant workers' taking the worst jobs. Therefore, the struggle to destroy the divisions generally finds its initiative in the dominated group, since the other side cannot be expected to always work to destroy its privileges. The efforts to overcome racism, sexism, imperialism, or the exploitation of students in the 1960s were led by the struggles of blacks not whites, women not men, peasants not Americans, students not professors or administrators. It was on the basis of these autonomous efforts that the struggles circulated to other sectors of the class, recomposing the structure of power. To subvert the autonomy of such sectors, as the Left and the unions generally try to do by dissolving them into their own hierarchical organizations, can only act to perpetuate the divisions useful to capital. The actuality of autonomy complicates the meaning of working-class homogeneity against capital. It suggests that working-class unity must be understood as being indirect like the homogeneity of capital (malleability through division). In other words, working-class unity is often achieved only indirectly through complementarity in the exercise of power against capital by different sectors of the class involved in the struggle, not in terms of the illusory kind of direct homogeneity of Leninist institutions.

Measure of value is socially necessary labour time — value

So far, Marx has shown us that value is the key to exchange-value and that the qualitative substance of value is abstract labour — which is to say work under capitalism. He then turns to the question of the measure of value in order to be able to carry out a quantitative as well as a qualitative analysis.



To measure value must mean to measure its substance: abstract labour. Marx argues that to measure the magnitude of abstract labour can only mean to measure the time during which it is performed. 'The quantity of labour … is measured by its duration.' Now the measure of time requires some unit, or quantum, of magnitude. Such a unit can apparently be selected according to convenience since we have many standard units of time: week, day, hour, minute. But the measure of abstract labour, its time, must be understood to be as much a social concept and phenomenon as is abstract labour itself. It is thus not directly measurable by clock or calendar. As with abstract labour, labour time must be grasped within the totality of capital. The measurement of abstract labour time can only be done within the framework of the total social mass of homogeneous, abstract labour time coerced from workers unit by 'innumerable unit'. But, even recognizing this we must be very careful how we approach this concept. Unfortunately, many tend to think that the magnitude of value of a commodity is determined by the amount of abstract labour time incorporated into it by the worker who produced it. But, to conceive of the value of a commodity as being the direct result of the work of producing that individual commodity is to lose the social character of value and to see it instead as some metaphysical substance that is magically injected into the product by the worker's touch. Such a theory of value is akin to the old chemical theory of phlogiston in which the principle of fire was conceived as a material substance incorporated into inflammable objects. A phlogiston theory of value leads to such bizarre and politically dangerous results as identifying 'value-producing' workers only as those who do physical work directly on the product. From here it is only one step to the ritualistic categorization of 'real' workers and 'unproductive' workers and the political positions usually associated with such an approach.

Marx shows us at least two ways to avoid this trap. In Chapter One he invites us to consider the fact that the quality of labour always varies from person to person. There are always hierarchies of productivity among workers due to variations in skill and equipment in producing the same commodity. Thus, at any point in time the 'homogeneity' of labour is actually reached only at the level of the social average in terms of both quality (abstract labour) and quantity (time) of labour. Marx writes: 'The labour-time socially necessary is that required to produce an article under the normal conditions of production, and with the average degree of skill and intensity prevalent at the time.'[33] In Chapters 14–16 on manufacture and modern industry, and in the 'unpublished 6th chapter', Marx later introduces an explicit discussion of the 'collective' or 'aggregate' worker that also leads us away from any phlogiston theory of value. In Chapter 16 Marx spoke of this with reference to the question of productive (value-producing) labour: 'In order to work productively, it is no longer necessary for the individual himself to put his hand to the object; it is sufficient for him to be an organ of the collective labourer, and to perform any one of its subordinate functions. The definition of productive labour given above, the original definition, is derived from the nature of material production itself, and it remains correct for the collective

33 Marx, *Capital*, Volume I, Chapter 1, Section 1: 39 [International Publishers Edition].

labourer considered as a whole. But it no longer holds good for each member taken individually.[34] In the 'unpublished 6th chapter' Marx spoke of this even more vividly in a passage that is worth quoting at length:

> ...the *real level* of the overall labour process is increasingly not the individual worker. Instead, *labour-power socially combined* and the various competing labour-powers which together form the entire production machine participate in very different ways in the immediate process of making commodities, or, more accurately in this context, creating the product. Some work better with their hands, others with their heads, one as a manager, engineer, technologist, etc., the other as overseer, the third as manual labourer or even drudge ... If we consider the aggregate *worker*, i.e. if we take all the members comprising the workshop together, then we see that their *combined activity* results materially in an *aggregate* product which is at the same time *a quantity of goods*. And here it is quite immaterial whether the job of a particular worker, who is merely a limb of this aggregate worker, is at a greater or smaller distance from the actual manual labour.[35]

These very important concepts should lead us once and for all away from any tendency to try to grasp value in terms of individual cases.

In understanding the measure of value the key distinction to see is that between the useful labour that produces commodities as use-values and the abstract labour that produces them as values. The direct measure of actual labour time can only be the measure of useful labour and never that of value. Between that useful labour time and value lies the social mediation which appears as an averaging. In other words, while the actual amount of useful labour time required to produce individual commodities of a given type may vary in different places, value expresses the social average which will give the 'normal' conditions of production prevalent in any given period. As always with Marx, the social determination is central; the individual particularity, derivative — the part is meaningful only within the framework of the whole. This means that the value of a commodity produced in one place, because it is determined by the socially necessary labour time, will be the same as those produced elsewhere even if it actually contains more/less useful labour time because the labourers producing it have a lower/higher productivity than the average.[36]

Although this social averaging appears at this point only as a conceptual necessity, it must also be understood as an actual social process of considerable importance in the development of several key capitalist strategies. It is an actual social process in the sense that capital has a tendency to redistribute itself from areas of low productivity to areas of high productivity (when this differential leads to a difference in profits). Such redistribution tends to produce a social average in fact as well as in principle. The mechanisms of such redistribution range from expanded corporate investment in plants of high productivity and the closing down of those of lower

34 Ibid, Chapter 16: 508–509.
35 Marx, *Capital*, Volume I, Appendix: Results of the Immediate Process of Production, Section II, part 5: 1039–1040 [Ben Fowkes translation, Penguin edition].
36 'Productivity' always refers to the amount of commodity produced by a given amount of useful labour with a given 'degree of skill and intensity'. See Chapter IV of this book for more discussion of this.

productivity to intercorporate competition and the dissemination of similar productivity-raising innovations across an industry.

At the same time, we also discover in Marx's analysis of relative surplus value and the introduction of machinery that labour time is actually increased in two different ways. First, the minimization of operating costs with machinery often calls for continuous twenty-four-hour operation so that a tendency is created both to lengthen the workday and to create night work. Second, the smooth regularity of machine operation tends to force the workers to work more continuously, thus 'filling up the pores of the workday'. This is a process that may be understood both as working harder and as eliminating the moments or minutes of respite that workers could otherwise steal during their work time. Both of these phenomena, by changing the amount of useful (and indirectly value-'producing') work done in a given period of time, change the nature of that time by making it 'produce' more value. Such 'heightened tension of labour power or condensation of labour' means more sweat, harder toil, and, often, increased accidents for the workers involved.[37]

This brings us to some further considerations on the nature of time itself under capitalism. So far we have seen the impossibility of conceiving of time simply in terms of the direct chronological time of production — because of the 'social average' character of abstract labour. We have also just seen that an increase in the intensity of labour certainly changes the meaning of a given period of work. But Marx's analysis of labour time suggests more than this. It is an exposition of one of the basic political elements of the class relations of capitalism. The labour time we have been examining is above all completely within the context of the structure of capitalist production. It is the only time that counts from the viewpoint of capital. In capital's perspective, 'labour time' is the only living time because that time makes money. More labour time means less loss or more surplus value and so capital seeks by every means it can dream up to increase it. Any time spent by the working class that is not work — exactly the time workers fight to increase — is dead time for capital. (I shall return shortly to how capital tries to convert such dead time to work time.) For the working class, on the other hand, labour time is time lost. It is, after all, something it has been forced to sell to the capitalist; it belongs to the capitalist and is time lost to the worker. Thus, in contradiction to capital, labour time is dead time for the worker. It is only during nonwork time that the worker is free to live and develop his or her own life.

Capital tries to convince us that time is universal and just a physical entity. But we know it is not. One hour of work time is not equal to one hour of free time by any

37 To say, as is often done, that workers 'produce' value is misleading. It makes value sound like some metaphysical substance — a phlogiston of some sort. As we have seen, work under capital is the substance of value. The more work that is performed in a given time, the more value there is [assuming as always that the products of that work also take on the form of value, exchange value, through sale]. The same linguistical problem exists where we speak of constant capital 'transferring' its value to the product. The point is that the constant capital is necessary for production and requires a certain amount of labour to be produced. The final 'value' of a new product $c+v+s$ is simply equal to the sum of the [abstract] labour required to produce the constant capital [c], plus the new labour which has transformed the constant capital into that new product [$v+s$]. There is nothing metaphysical about these relations, and language which suggests that there is should be avoided.

means. One particularly vivid example of workers' consciousness of this fundamental fact is cited by Marx in the *Grundrisse*:

> The *Times* of November 1857 contains an utterly delightful cry of outrage on the part of a West-Indian plantation owner. This advocate analyses with great moral indignation — as a plea for the re-introduction of Negro slavery — how the *Quashees* (the free blacks of Jamaica) content themselves with producing only what is strictly necessary for their own consumption, and, alongside this use-values regard loafing (indulgence and idleness) as the real luxury good; how they do not care a damn for the sugar and the fixed capital invested in the plantations but rather observe the planter's impending bankruptcy with an ironic grin of malicious pleasure.[38]

This is one basic reason why time is a fundamental terrain of class struggle. Clocks have become tools of oppression within capital because minutes of labour time are gold for capital. While it is true that clocks cannot measure work directly because value is determined by the social average, they are nevertheless tools to extract as much labour time as possible in each work place — which indirectly, as we have seen, determines the amount of value produced.

The struggle over time between capital and the working class, which Marx later analyses in some depth in Chapter 10 on the working day, proceeds in the workshop in many ways. Some of those I discussed in the previous chapter — the open struggle over the 'normal' workday, for instance. Others, which Marx discusses, include both the struggle over the intensity of work time, which we just examined, and the 'nibbling' of the workday whereby capitalists (and workers — though Marx dealt less with this) seek to increase (or decrease) the amount of work at every opportunity: at the beginning and end of the day, at lunch breaks, restroom breaks, and so on. In Chapters 20 and 21 on time and piece wages, we also learn how capital tries to manipulate the form of payment of variable capital in order to increase the amount of work time, say, by keeping hourly or piece rates low. Today, when the question of the amount of work that capital can force workers to do is once again a major factor of conflict, we find much experimentation with new time — manipulation patterns, such as the four-day week or flexitime, in which both classes seek to improve their position.

But while the struggles over time in factory or office, over the time of waged work, are many and varied, it is the question of the struggle over time outside the 'official' working day which is the most problematic. In the nineteenth century, when Marx lived and wrote, the amount of time that workers had off the job was very short. Such time as they had was barely enough to achieve their reproduction as labour-power. In such circumstances activities like eating, sleeping, and sexual relations, which might normally be thought of as 'free-time' activities for the workers' enjoyment, were reduced to the work of patching up the damage (physical and psychological) incurred in the factory. In his discussion of simple reproduction in Chapter 23, Marx saw this as a situation in which 'the working class, even when not directly engaged in the labour process, is just as much an appendage of capital as the ordinary instruments of labour.'[39] Already

38 Marx, *Grundrisse*, Notebook III: 325–326.
39 Marx, *Capital*, Volume I, Chapter 23: 573 [International Publishers Edition].

the 'working day' included both factory work and 'free' time. In these conditions, Marx concluded that 'the capitalist may safely leave its [the reproduction of the working class] fulfilment to the labourer's instincts of self-preservation and of propagation.' [40]

Now, as we saw in the discussion of the commodity-form, Marx also perceived how the continual rise in productivity tended, by reducing socially necessary labour time, 'to reduce labour-time to a minimum', and how this tendency gets stronger and stronger with the progress of science and technology. This tendency to reduce labour time is at the same time a tendency to 'create disposable time' — free time for workers. Capital's recurring problem is to find ways to convert this free time into work time. Because of the rapidity of this development, Marx could see the fundamental crisis that it would eventually pose for a system based on the imposition of work. He could see that, when workers would 'themselves appropriate their own surplus labour', then 'disposable time would cease to have an antithetical existence' and would become the true measure of wealth. What he could not foresee, and this is apparent again and again in *Capital*, were the many ways capital would seek to restructure society as a whole, both in the factory and without, both during 'work' time and during 'free' time, in order to try to convert all time into work time. When Marx thought about capital's attempts to recuperate disposable time and convert it into work time, he thought about industrial expansion and the creation of new factory and office jobs. The only exception to this was the case of the reserve army, in which he clearly saw that 'free time' was integral and necessary to the functioning of capital's 'labour market'. But while this insight is fundamental, he never developed an analysis of the struggle over the content of free time between capital and the working class.

As we saw in the Introduction, the historical development of capital that came after Marx, and which he could not foresee, was the expansion of capitalist control in order to structure all of society into one great social factory so that all activities would contribute to the expanded reproduction of the system. When Marx wrote, for example, in Chapter 15, Section 3, on the employment of women and children, he saw these persons being drawn ever deeper into the industrial machine to be chewed up daily and left to recuperate at night in the same fashion as male workers. There was no need for any special theory about the family, housework, or schoolwork, because these constituted negligible parts of the day. But later, with the expulsion of women and children from the mines and the mills and the factories, with the creation of the modern nuclear family and public school system by capital, such a theory is vital. Today, we must study how capital structures 'free time' so as to expand value. We must see how housework has been structured by capital with home economics and television to ensure that women's time contributes only to the reproduction of their own, their husbands, and their children's labour-power. We must see the desire for the reproduction of life as labour-power behind capital's propaganda that it is in the interest of the individual or the family to have a 'nice' home or a 'good' education.

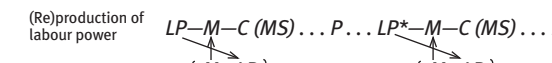
We must see how it developed home economics, not to teach future houseworkers

40 Ibid.: 572.

how to use the wealth (both commodities and free time) of society for their enrichment, but how to make do with what little they have. It is true that workers demanded easier access to education. But we must also see how capital shaped 'public' education, not for the 'enlightenment' of workers' children, but to meet its own need for particular skills, for new technology, for new social control strategies, and, above all, to inculcate discipline. Both housework and schoolwork are intended to contribute to keeping the value of labour-power low. The more work done by women in the home, the less value workers must receive from capital to reproduce themselves at a given level. The more work students do in the school, the less value must be invested in their training and disciplining for the factory (or home). Because of this, an increase of housework or schoolwork, by decreasing the amount of variable capital necessary for the reproduction of the working class, can contribute to the expansion of surplus value (or, inversely, a decrease can undermine that expansion — see below). In fact, we must see how the 'social' factory has emerged from workers' efforts to escape the industrial factory and from capital's social engineering — how it encompasses today virtually all of what the Critical Theorists call the 'cultural' sphere of life. Capital tries to shape all 'leisure', or free-time, activities — language, literature, art, music, television, news media, movies, theatres, museums, sports — in its own interests. Thus, rather than viewing unwaged 'non-labour time' automatically as free time or as time completely antithetical to capital, we are forced to recognize that capital has tried to integrate this time, too, within its process of accumulation so that recreation is only the re-creation of labour-power. Put another way, capital has tried to convert 'individual consumption' into 'productive consumption' by creating the social factory. When Marx formulated the circuit of labour power as *LP—M—C*, in which labour power *(LP)* was exchanged for the money wage *(M)*, which was then exchanged for consumption commodities *(C)*, workers' consumption appeared as the end product of the circuit. The effort to make that consumption 'productive' seeks to structure it as a production process whose product is labour-power. This is a situation perhaps better symbolized as a circuit of the reproduction of labour-power:

$$LP—M—C\ (MS)\ldots P\ldots LP^*$$

where *C (MS) . . . P* represents consumption as involving the work of producing the labour-power *(LP*)*. The asterisk on *LP** indicates change. Despite the fact that the work of child bearing and child rearing increases the population, work (e.g. housework) in *P* still implies a smaller value per capita and thus $LP^* < LP$. This has a positive impact on surplus due to the level of variable capital being lower than it would be otherwise. Capital's new organization of the social factory can thus be represented by the following diagram in which circuits of industrial capital and of the reproduction of labour power are interrelated:



If the circuit of individual capital is one producing consumption goods, then it will further interlock with the circuit of the reproduction of labour-power by selling its output *C'* to the workers as their means of subsistence *C(MS)* in exchange for their wages *(M)*, which become its revenues *(M')*.[41]

In this pattern of development, which has spread so rapidly in the twentieth century, we recognize both capital's eternal tendency to generalize and universalize itself (see the discussion of the expanded form of value below) and its response to the growing difficulty of finding factory work to impose as the means of social control. Marx foresaw the contradiction. He could not foresee this form of socialization of work forming at least a temporary solution.

However, here, as in every other aspect of capital, we must see that there are still two sides, there is still a struggle that has never been completely integrated. As I argued in the Introduction, we must avoid the blindness of those contemporary Marxists who see and analyse the various forms of capitalist domination in the cultural sphere but who fail to see how working-class struggle has repeatedly thrown that domination into crisis. Yes, capital plans all of social life; but we are not in the Brave New World. The working class has forcibly and repeatedly asserted its autonomy. Just as the working class's struggle in the factory has forced capital to reorganize itself, so, too, has its struggle in the 'cultural' sphere forced capital again and again to seek new ways to avoid complete loss of control. The history of 'cultural' revolt is a long one involving all spheres of community life, the family, education, art, literature, and music. What is vital to see is that capital's response has more often resembled a desperate search for a new tactic than the smoothly orchestrated process of assimilation visualized by the prophets of 'bourgeois cultural hegemony'.

The contemporary proof of the true autonomy of working-class struggles in these spheres has been their key contribution to the current crisis of capital. The family, one of the fundamental organizational units of capital's social factory, has been increasingly ripped apart because the struggles of women, children, and even men escaped all efforts to 'integrate' them. Capital is now seeking desperately for ways to either bind the family back up or find alternative institutions. The public school system, another of those fundamental institutions of 'cultural' hegemony, is also in almost complete disarray. The crisis of the schools, part of whose roots lie in the crisis of the family, which was so obviously a basic component of the cycle of struggles of the 1960s, continues. Capital is funding experiment after experiment to find methods of reshaping 'education' in ways adequate to control students. These are only two of the most obvious examples of the breakdown in the social factory, 'cultural' institutions of capital; there are many, many others. And as these institutions of control, these institutions which convert free time into work time, collapse, the working class gains more and more unstructured time in which to develop its struggle independent of capital. The collapse of such institutions thus not only is the sign of success in this conflict but also opens new space for expanded struggle.

41 Ibid.: 572.

There is no longer any need to preach against the 'work ethic', that 'strange affliction' which Paul Lafargue thought he saw infecting the working class years ago.[42] Workers have already rejected capital's definition of living time as work time and have not only demanded the 'Right to Be Lazy' but have also been increasingly achieving it. The twenty-four-hour workday (remember sleep 'learning') has become only a nostalgic dream for capital and a fantastic illusion for those Critical Theorists blind to the comprehensive character of the crisis. Capital has sought to become identical with society, but that identity has been rejected by the working class and that rejection now threatens the very existence of capital itself. In a period such as this, when high productivity makes possible the satisfaction of all the needs of the working class, and the crisis makes clear that capital will not do so, the refusal of all work, both in the factory and without, continues to be a major factor in the class conflict. Factory workers' demands for less work and higher pay are not integrable if their struggle against work keeps wages rising faster than productivity. School dropouts and the disruption of education cannot be seen as an element of capitalist development when lack of discipline permeates the schools, the unemployment lines, and the factory. In ways like this we can see that time always has content and there is a struggle over that content and its duration. Time appears as an increasingly important element in the class struggle and conflict over time has raised again the basic questions about the nature of both work and free time.

The emergence of increasing amounts of free time during the crisis, by providing the basis for expanded struggle, has shown itself to be antithetical to work time but still as much within as against capital. Ultimately, the working class, in the revolutionary overthrow of capital, will move beyond both work time and free time. For free time, as we have seen, is time that is free *from* work as much as it is free *for* the working class. Here Marx's term of disposable time perhaps carries fewer confusing connotations of some abstract 'freedom'.

These considerations of capital's socially necessary labour time and of the working class's struggle against it and its demands for free time can teach us much about the nature and limits of various political strategies. For example, there is not even any real disposability of time when the struggle is converted into political work. It is here that the party emerged as a basic institution within capital because, like the unions and so many other institutions, it structures 'free time' in ways which ultimately contribute to the reproduction of the system, albeit in a reorganized form. At the same time the integrative aspects of 're-creation', of leisure time, show the limits of the simple 'free enjoyment' of free time, of 'play'. It is true that workers fight for time to live, time to love, time to play. But we have seen how that time can be structured by capital and turned against them. As with factory work, it is never a question of whether one enjoys it or not, but rather one of whether the activity is imposed and structured to ensure the reproduction of the system. It is through linking confrontation with capital during all periods of time that time can be most effectively turned against capital. Partial demands can be met if capital can find ways to compensate. A shorter workday (and

42 Paul Lafargue's essay, 'The Right to be Lazy', was originally published in 1883 as an attack on the slogan 'Right to Work'.

hence more free time) can be provided if productivity rises and if that free time is structured. What is so exciting about the current crisis is just such convergence and complementarity of working-class attacks against the totality of capital's social factory. Not only are all kinds of workers demanding less work time, but also they are refusing to compensate for it. They not only are working less in the factory but they are also using free time to de-create their own labour-power. Those with full or part-time jobs use their 'free time' to gain strength, not to work, but to further refuse work. Those who are 'unemployed' and who are supposed to be doing the work of looking for work, of using their free time to make the labour market function, are instead using their time to avoid work and increase their demands for unemployment benefits, welfare payments, and so on. Here is the real danger to capital: the working class is saying, 'We want everything, including all our time — no more work time and thus no more free time, just life to be lived as we see fit.' Such a demand is totally unassimilable within capital, whose crisis continues because it has not yet found a strategy to defeat it.

Use-values and commodities as social processes

The final point, which is emphasized by Marx in the last paragraph of Section 1, is that 'commodity' is a social category. Marx's comments are not simply formalistic or definitional: that commodities are only commodities in so far as they are the unity of use-value and exchange-value implies that a product must be both exchanged and consumed in order to be a commodity. This is certainly true, but the main point is that the commodity-form must never be reified; it is never a thing. We do speak of commodities as things or things as commodities, but only because they pass through a specific series of social interactions. In this passage they are not things but social processes. As the analysis should have made clear by this point, things are things (use-values) only in their particular properties. Marx now points out that in order to be commodities these properties must be such as to make them social use-values. Even so, they are only latently use-values and they do not become actual use-values unless they are indeed consumed. 'Nothing,' Marx says in the last two sentences, 'can have value, without being an object of utility. If the thing is useless, so is the labour contained in it; the labour does not count as [abstract] labour, and therefore creates no value.' So all the categories are those of process. We have now seen that use-value, exchange-value, abstract labour, value, and socially necessary labour time are all social categories designating particular determinations of the commodity-form, which is fundamental to the most basic social process of all: the class struggle.

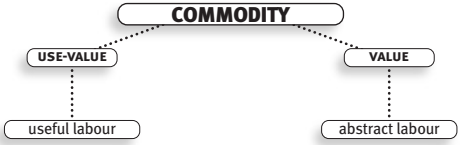
IV The twofold character of labour

When Marx says in Section 2 of Chapter One that the twofold character of labour 'is the pivot on which a clear comprehension of Political Economy turns', it is because he wants to especially emphasize what is new and peculiar to the capitalist mode of production. He wants to bring out how the generalized imposition of the commodity-form adds value to usefulness through the control over labour, a control which creates abstract labour in the ways we have seen above. It is difficult to overemphasize the importance of the distinction and inter-relation between useful and abstract labour. Marx himself, in a letter to Engels, wrote: '...the best points in my book are: the two-fold character of labour, according to whether it is expressed in use-value or exchange-value (all understanding of the facts depends upon this). It is emphasized immediately, in the *first* chapter.'[1]

The discussion of abstract labour has already revealed some of this importance. We saw how Marx arrived at abstract labour through an analysis of the useful labour that creates use-value. We also saw something of the dialectic of struggle over the division of useful labour through which capital tries to create value (abstract labour) and the working class tries to overcome it. In Section 2 he returns to the analysis of the twofold character of labour in three steps. First, he focuses on useful labour, which produces use-value. This then permits him to bring out the special character of value-producing labour (abstract labour). Finally, with these two perspectives in

1 Marx to Engels, August 24, 1867, *Marx–Engels Selected Correspondence*: 180.

hand, he clarifies the analysis of productivity and provides the necessary underpinning for his later exposition of capital's strategy of relative surplus value.



Useful labour

In order for capital to have commodity production and exchange, it must control a variety of kinds of concrete useful labour producing qualitatively different use-values. Without this, neither capitalist production nor exchange would take place. This implies a social division of useful labour in society. To have and control a growing number of kinds of production, capital must be able to allocate labour more or less as it sees fit — it must achieve just that malleability of labour which we saw underlying abstract labour. A constantly changing social division of labour implies that workers must be frequently shifted from one kind of useful labour to another.

Now the division of useful labour necessary for capitalist production occurs on several levels. Marx mentions the internal organization of the capitalist industrial factory as a place where the division of labour exists with no exchange between individual producers. We can see other branches of the larger social factory where this also holds. For example, in the family there is a division of labour among husbands, wives, and children. The production of use-values by each person is made available to the others with no market exchange. Yet, as we have seen, these divisions are essential aspects of the division of useful labour.

In his discussion, Marx makes the general assertion that useful labour, producing use-values, 'is a necessary condition, independent of all forms of society for the existence of the human race; it is an eternal nature imposed necessity'. By claiming that this situation is 'independent of all forms of society', he poses useful labour as a generic concept representing an aspect of human society present in all modes of production. This is parallel to his argument about production in the Introduction to the *Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*. In that discussion he distinguished between the general character of production present in all societies and the specific characteristics of production which are present in and distinguish different kinds of societies (as different modes of production).[2] The comments in *Capital* on useful labour (vs. abstract labour) further specify the general character of production as production of use-values.

To interpret this dichotomy between useful labour and abstract labour politically, we need to bring to bear the same kind of analysis that we have already applied to use-value and exchange-value. For example, as with use-value and exchange-value, we can

2 Marx, *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*, part 1 of the Introduction: 188–193.

easily see in useful labour the working-class 'side', and in abstract labour the capitalist 'side', simply because useful labour produces the use-values the working class wants and abstract labour is the substance of value and surplus value for capital. Unfortunately, Marxists have all too often stopped at this point and drawn the dangerous political conclusion that one could achieve the elimination of capital by simply eliminating the capitalist side of abstract labour while preserving useful labour. Indeed, in socialism and communism, the liberation of useful labour from value is argued to mean the liberation of the working class to achieve its full potential as a class involved in useful labour. This argument smacks of that approach of Proudhon which Marx criticized so thoroughly: the elimination of the bad side and the preservation of the good side.[3] One of the most infamous examples of this kind of reasoning is to be found in Lenin's proposition in 1918 that Taylorism should be rapidly adopted in the USSR as an advanced and scientific organization of useful labour.[4] He assumes that the capitalist side of Taylorism as a sophisticated form of exploitation disappears automatically with the elimination of private property and the capitalist class after the revolution.

The theoretical, not to say the political, flaws in such arguments appear immediately when we carry through our class analysis, remembering the intimate relation between useful labour and abstract labour analysed in the section on the substance of value. We see that the concern with abstract labour (value) drives capitalists to shape the division, and hence the very structure, of useful labour in order to realize the homogeneity of abstract labour. Because of this, *useful labour in capital must be seen as the very material out of which abstract labour is crafted.* The work that is imposed on people through the commodity-form, which constitutes the substance of value in capital, exists only in the fluid structure of concrete useful labour. The elimination of capitalist work or abstract labour can only mean the elimination of concrete useful labour, insofar as this is an activity imposed as a form of social control. Time and again in *Capital*, Marx shows how the form of useful labour is shaped in the class struggle. Co-operation, as the basic form of the organization of modern labour, is the product of capital and bears its stamp. Useful labour in industry, whether of the period of manufacturing or of that of machinery, is always shaped by capital's needs to control the class. Because useful labour is in this way the producer of value/control as well as use-value, it cannot be 'liberated'. It must be smashed in its present forms in order to smash value itself. Some of Lenin's comments on the problem of the overthrow of the capitalist state provide a better guide here: the state cannot be seized and used as is but must be destroyed. So, too, with useful labour as it exists in its concrete forms under capital.

To speak of postcapitalist 'useful labour' is as problematic as to speak of the postcapitalist state — its transformation must be both qualitative and quantitative. The concept of a postcapitalist state structured to 'wither away' — to be eliminated as

3 See Marx's *Poverty of Philosophy* or, for a short statement of his critique of Proudhon, see Marx to V. Annenkov, December 28, 1846, *Marx–Engels Selected Correspondence*: 29–39.
4 V. I. Lenin, *The Immediate Tasks of the Soviet Government*: 23–24.

quickly as possible — perhaps provides a useful analogy for one of postcapitalist 'work'. We have seen that it is the tendency under capital to constantly extend work. The quantitative as well as qualitative (division of labour) extension of useful labour as a means of social control underlies abstract labour and thus value. But we have also seen this extension to have been achieved only in the face of working-class opposition. We can postulate that, in postcapitalist society, the victory of these struggles will certainly mean the quantitative reduction of useful labour as an essential element of its qualitative transformation — 'the general reduction of the necessary labour of society to a minimum'.[5] Conversely, the perpetuation and expansion of useful labour in contemporary socialist society, like the perpetuation of the state, is one sure sign that capital has not been destroyed. Thus, it is not enough to speak only of the qualitative transformation of work in abstraction from its quantitative reduction. Those who attack 'alienated' work or who speak of the 'degradation' of work under capitalism do grasp the way capital transforms useful labour into a mode of domination.[6] Unfortunately, they miss the dialectical relation between the quantitative expansion of work as social control and its qualitative transformation. As we have seen, capital is, above all, quantitative in its expansion. It shapes quality as part of that expansion. To speak of the overthrow of capitalist work we must take both aspects into account. The only way to achieve 'unalienated' work — or work as an activity which is not a function of domination — is through the elimination of the element of compulsion which has been inseparable from its quantitative expansion.

In effect 'zerowork' means the conversion of 'useful labour' into one element of what Marx calls 'the full development of activity itself'. Capitalist development, he wrote, has created the material elements to permit, after the revolution, 'the development of the rich individuality which is all sided in its production as in its consumption, and whose labour also therefore appears no longer as labour, but as the full development of activity itself'.[7] What does 'activity itself' mean? In what kind of a situation is work not work? Marx had little to say on this subject, largely out of principle.[8] He rejected the utopian socialist project of outlining in advance the nature of postcapitalist society. He clearly felt that it would be invented in the process of revolution by the mass of workers on the basis of their possibilities and desires and not on the basis of some intellectual's fancy. When he did speak of the general nature of postcapitalist society, his most frequently reiterated comments evoked the artistic, scientific, etc. development of the individuals in the time set free by the reduction of necessary labour to a minimum.[9] Thus Marx saw the revolutionary process as both negative — freedom *from* capital and the end of a class defined by work — and positive — freedom *for* the development of a new stage in the evolution of humankind. His refusal to give

5 Marx, *Grundrisse*, Notebook III: 325.
6 See, for example, Harry Braverman, *Labor and Monopoly Capital*.
7 Marx, *Grundrisse*, Notebook III: 325.
8 Marx's only detailed discussion of the relation between work under capital and activity in general was that part of his analysis of alienation concerned with 'species-being' — an analysis which, significantly, he did not take up again in either the *Grundrisse* or *Capital*.
9 Marx, *Grundrisse*, Notebook VII: 706.

more than the briefest comments on that new stage is the clearest evidence of his commitment to its openendedness. What comments he did make came mainly from periods of revolution in which he would look to the actions of the workers themselves for indications of the direction of their struggle (e.g. during the Commune).[10] Thus, although he rejected utopian speculation, we can surmise that within the revolutionary process Marx would have warmly embraced the slogan 'All Power to the Imagination.'

To return to his discussion of useful labour within capital, human beings and Nature are presented as working together — both sources of wealth. But there is another problematic dichotomy here: an implied sharp division between the two that makes 'Nature' something outside to which humans are 'opposed'. When Marx takes up this analysis again in Volume I, in the chapter on the labour process, we find this distinction maintained. Nature appears as the object of work which is carried out by humans employing instruments and tools.[11] But, gradually, in *Capital* we begin to see another side, as Nature increasingly becomes one aspect of the social organization and is incorporated into it rather than standing outside it as an object on which individuals work as subjects. In Volume III, in the discussion of ground rent, it will be found that, as the soil (Nature) is increasingly worked up and capital invested in it, its original, or 'natural', fertility (the variations of which are one basis of differential rent) becomes largely unidentifiable. In short, we must recognize that any separate concept of Nature becomes increasingly diffuse as we see how capital englobes 'it' and transforms 'it' until it is no longer readily identifiable as something outside. These considerations are of paramount importance for understanding natural science and technology as integral elements of useful and hence abstract labour within capital. As we begin to see in the discussion of productivity-raising (and labour-reorganizing) innovations in Chapters 12–15 on relative surplus value, science and technology are inseparable from the class struggle.

Let us take two examples in the area of food production. In Volume III, Marx discusses the reticence of tenant farmers to invest in technological development because part or all of the extra profits will go to the landlord.[12] This slows change and keeps productivity down. More-recent studies have shown that the scientific research which led to the development of new strains of high-yielding grains for use in the Third World was a direct outgrowth of capitalist attempts to deal with working-class unrest and revolt in those parts of the globe.[13] More generally, one can argue that the very structure of science and the pattern of its development are shaped by their role in capitalist society and hence in the class struggle. Marx emphasizes this political side to science and invention, which is concretized in the ever changing forms of machinery and the useful labour associated with it: 'It would be possible to write quite a history of the inventions made since 1830, for the sole purpose of supplying capital with weapons against the revolts of the working class.'[14] The importance of this,

10 See Marx's analysis of the Commune in 'The Civil War in France', in *The First International and After*: 187–268.
11 Marx, *Capital*, Volume I, Chapter 7, Section 1.
12 Marx, *Capital*, Volume III, Chapter 47.
13 Harry Cleaver, *The Origins of the Green Revolution*.

from a working-class point of view, lies in the necessity of analysing and grasping the present and emerging forms of useful labour in their political aspect: as weapons of capital. Anytime that capital plans a new organization of useful labour, or the introduction of a new technology, such plans should be analysed in terms of their role in decomposing the present level of working-class power. The project is not the generation of a new-Ludditism but rather that of anticipating capitalist strategy and tactics in order to formulate counter strategies and tactics.[15]

Abstract labour

Elaborating on the origins and meaning of abstract labour, Marx explicitly brings in the mobility of labour in capitalism from one kind of useful labour to another. He refers to it here as a way the particularity of useful labour is overcome and abstract labour is generated: 'Moreover, we see at a glance that, in our capitalist society, a given portion of human labour is, in accordance with the varying demand, at one time employed in the form of tailoring, at another in the form of weaving. This change may possibly not take place without friction but take place it must.'[16]

To further explain this abstract labour, Marx notes that besides being qualitatively determined by mobility, and quantitatively determined by time, in a certain sense it has actual existence in the form of simple, or average, labour power. This is more completely explained in the *Contribution to the Critique*, where he states: 'This abstraction, human labour in general, *exists* in the form of average labour which, in a given society, the average person can perform, productive expenditure of a certain amount of human muscles, nerves, brain, etc. It is simple labour (English economists call it "unskilled labour") which any average individual can be trained to do.'[17] Now, this concept seems pretty vague. To bring in 'unskilled labour' is to evoke street sweeping, ditch digging, and other menial tasks. Yet, he clearly does not have in mind the lowest common physical denominator. 'This labour-power,' he says in *Capital*, 'must have attained a certain pitch of development before it can be expended in a multiplicity of modes.'[18] This is not a biological but a social determination, one which varies in character over time and in different countries. He seems to be saying that the labour an 'average person' can perform, say, in the United States of 1775 and in the United States of 1975, or in the United States of 1975 and in upland Papua of 1975, is quite different. When put concretely this way, the vagueness of the notion vanishes. Workers of all these periods and places could be trained to perform 'average labour' today in a New York City factory or office. But the amount of training our 1775 farmer or our 1975 tribesman would require would be substantially more and of a different order, involving not just linguistic, mathematical, or mechanical skills, but regularity and discipline. Certainly the concept of changes in 'average labour' is of the same

14 Marx, *Capital*, Volume I, Chapter 15, Section 5: 436 [International Publishers edition].
15 For examples of this kind of analysis, see the articles in *Zerowork* 1, and Gambino, 'Workers' Struggles and the Development of Ford in Britain'.
16 Marx, *Capital*, Volume I, Chapter 1, Section 2: 43–44 [International Publishers edition].
17 Marx, *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*: 31.
18 Marx, *Capital*, Volume I, Chapter 1, Section 2: 44 [International Publishers edition].

order of difficulty as the concept of changes in standards of living over time, that is, in the value of labour-power.

Productivity

Marx can now specify more precisely the meaning of a change in productivity in the light of the discussion of the twofold character of labour. 'Productive power,' he says, 'has reference, of course, only to labour of some useful concrete form, the efficacy of any special productive activity during a given time being dependent on its productiveness.' This means that a change in productivity is a change in useful labour and not a change in abstract labour. This is one of the most important reasons why the recognition of the difference between useful labour and abstract labour is 'the pivot'. Put another way, by grasping the distinct character of labour which capital tries to impose (abstract labour), he is for the first time able to analyse the meaning of productivity changes which have been such an important part of the class struggle. An example: to say twice as many use-values are produced in a given period of time, by the same number of workers, is to say that the productivity of useful labour has doubled. Since the time of labour remains the same (although he fails to mention it, one must also keep the intensity of work fixed in order for the amount of value to remain the same), then the amount of abstract labour or value in each unit of product is halved.

One of the most important strategies of capital is based on this phenomenon. In Chapter 12, on the concept of relative surplus value, we discover how capital is driven by the struggles of the working class (to shorten the workday, reduce intensity of work, raise wages) to raise the productivity of useful labour through the substitution of the means of production for labour-power.[19]

By raising the productivity of the useful labour that produces the means of subsistence (or the inputs into their production), capital reduces the value of the commodities the working class receives to reproduce itself. If the values of the means of subsistence fall, then capital can pay workers less value than before and yet they will still receive as many (or even more!) use-values. If the amount of variable capital that must be invested in labour-power can be reduced in this fashion, at the same time that the total amount of work and hence value remains the same, then the relative share of that value which capital receives as surplus will rise. This is the relative-surplus-value strategy.

Not only has relative surplus value long been one of capital's fundamental strategies in the class struggle, but also, as we saw in the Introduction, during the Keynesian era capital sought its institutionalization in 'productivity deals' that linked wage increases to productivity increases through union contracts and state policy. If we consider that one of the most fundamental aspects of the current international crisis is the way

19 In Chapter 25 of Volume I, Marx discusses this substitution of means of production (*MP*) for labour-power (*LP*) as a rise in the technical composition of capital (*MP/LP*) or, insofar as the value composition (*C/V*) reflects changes in the technical composition, as a rise in the organic composition of capital (*C/V*). As a mathematical ratio, the organic composition measures the technical composition in value terms, but as a political index, it represents a certain division of labour and the related political composition of class power.

working-class attacks against productivity (coupled with its wage demands) have ruptured these productivity deals and undermined relative surplus value, then this little Section 2 of Chapter One, which is often overlooked as a redundant exposition of points made in Section 1, begins to take on its true significance and the contemporary relevance of Marx's emphasis is revealed. Moreover, when we look around and see how capital's massive attack on the value of the wage through global inflation is being accomplished by a world-wide restructuring of the division of labour, we can see the importance of grasping the concrete manifestations of this strategy in order to better understand how to anticipate its directions and deal with it.

V The form of value

This section on the form of value begins with the simple value form and ends with the money-form. The path of this development leads us straight to the ultimate expression of value: money, whose determinations are further developed in the second and third chapters of *Capital*. The grasp of money as value with all that implies is of vital importance in the current crisis. There must be no obfuscation but only clarity about the role money plays in the current counterattack with which capital is responding during this period. It is not just that capital is trying to take money away from us directly, through layoffs and wage reductions, and indirectly, through higher prices (for food, clothing, transportation, etc.) and through reductions in the quantities and qualities of the services we obtain in return for our taxes (fire, health protection, etc.), but this crisis has also involved fundamental changes in the entire monetary system. The most dramatic of these changes have been the systematic devaluation of domestic money through inflation and the reorganization of the international monetary system of institutional agreements between capitalist nation-states on monetary matters. To even begin to interpret what is going on we must understand what money is all about.

What is money in capital? What roles does it play in the class struggle? Are these roles the same today as they were in Marx's time? These questions are not answered in *Capital*, of course, but we are given some fundamental insights into the nature of money and its place in capital which, for the most part, are as true today as when Marx wrote. With these insights it is easier to begin to understand what is going on today, that is, the way capital is using money as a weapon against us.

To illustrate the concept of money being used against the working class we do not have to wait for the exploration of Marx's analysis of the form of value; we can

immediately draw on the writing of bourgeois economists. One of the most important post-World War II roles of inflation, and one which shows how important it can be in class struggle, is the case of capital using inflation in the Third World with the explicit, calculated, and rationalized aim of indirectly transferring real income from the working class to capital. Such policies of development via inflation call for artificially inflating prices via government fiscal, or monetary, policy. This depreciation of the value of money results in a sharp decline in workers' real wages. Since capitalist assets rise in value with the inflation, this strategy achieves a transfer of value from the working class to capital. As a rationale for this attack on the working class, bourgeois development economists, such as W. A. Lewis, trotted out the same 'abstinence theory' that Marx debunked in Section 3 of Chapter 24 of Volume I a century ago.[1] Capitalists got that way, they said, because they had a greater propensity to save and invest their income than did the prodigal working class. Therefore, such 'development economists' argued, a transfer of real income from the irresponsible working class to the wise, forward-looking capitalists would lead directly to increased savings and increased investment. In other words, through a calculated, continuous devaluation of the money in the hands of the working class, capital sought to enrich itself and facilitate more rapid accumulation. This is indeed capital using money as a weapon. Today inflation, although generated by different methods, is again stripping workers of their real income with a vengeance and on a world scale.

Despite such flagrant examples of money being used as a weapon, the Left in general and Marxist economists in particular have had little to say about the form of value, the money-form, or money itself in capital. One might be tempted to simply attribute this to an intellectual error — the general tendency to treat the circulation of commodities as a 'surface' phenomenon which reacts to changes in the 'underlying' production relations. Value is 'created' in production and only 'realized' in the circulation of commodities. In these circumstances the substance of value is taken as that which is really important — the essential and independent reality of value. The form of value is viewed as something external and indifferent to its content, as a mere unessential formality. Changes in the form, such as the devaluation of money in inflation, are taken as uncontrollable derivatives of changes in production. In other words, because circulation is seen as only a reflection of struggles in and around production, money and commodities are not seen as important elements in the struggle itself. But we should not attribute the politics of the Left's unconcern with the form of value and money simply to an underlying intellectual misunderstanding — about the relation between circulation and production, or about anything else. Rather we must explain the inverse: why the politics of the Left has led repeatedly to such a neglect of the form of value.

One critical period in this development was that of the Second International. I have already mentioned the debates of that time over party/trade unions/parliament and economics/politics. In a certain measure these debates concerned form — the

1 W. A. Lewis, 'Economic Development with Unlimited Supplies of Labor,' *Manchester School*, May 1954: 139–191.

form of working-class organization. The social democrats, on the one hand, argued for organizational forms they felt appropriate to the struggles over the length, intensity, and wages of the workday — trade unions and parliament. The Bolsheviks, on the other hand, argued for the rejection of these forms and for another — the Leninist party. Their rejection of social democratic forms was not simply due to the preference for another but concerned the immediate centrality of the basic content of the class struggle — the overthrow of capitalism. For Lenin and others, this meant struggle for the seizure of state power in the midst of other, well-organized, nonworking-class political groups. The Bolshevik success in carrying out such a seizure of power in Russia in 1917 guaranteed the ascendancy of the focus on 'content' (overthrow of the state) within a given form (party) and ended orthodox Marxist discussion of organizational form for decades. Henceforth non-party organization and a whole series of struggles were branded as secondary and unessential.

With the Party in control, the fundamental form of class control well established, it was argued that other problems could be handled. Sometimes Lenin recognized that the reimposition of bourgeois forms of production organization (i.e. wage hierarchies) were steps backward. Sometimes he was simply blind to the relations between form and class content. We can see this, for example, in his views on the Taylor system cited in the last chapter. This tendency to separate form and content (to ignore or distort the class content of forms) grew steadily as 'development' and the accumulation of capital became the overriding aims of the Party. The Party's opposition to other forms of organization can be seen in its negative attitude toward the 'workers' councils' experiences in Western Europe after World War I and its crushing of the 'soviets' in Russia itself. Perhaps the most dramatic instance of the obfuscation of form and content was the representation of the forced-labour camps of the Gulag, not as a form of controlling the working class but as a form appropriate to revolutionary aims of defending the working class.

While the tremendous problems of the time — for example, peasant/worker relations, foreign intervention, and the low level of industrial development — certainly make these trends more understandable, they have wrongly been treated by the Left as exterior to the question of the form of struggle and organization. Instead of seeing both how the old formula of Party dominance was historically determined and how it was involved in the failure of the Russian Revolution, the orthodox Left quite ahistorically takes that formula as given for all time — a form rigidified for all eternity.[2] 'Join the party and smash the state' has become its slogan — whatever party and whatever state.

And for afterward? Once again the discussions of 'socialist' development, by confusing the questions of form and content, hide the class character of the proposed 'development'. They hide the aim of putting one and all back to work to increase accumulation. Only here the emphasis is reversed. In discussing 'socialism' the Left speaks only of form (the organization of production) and never of content (the imposition of work). Behind the masks of working-class party, or even of workers' control, lies the

2 On the changing relation between organization and class composition, see Bologna, 'Class Composition and the Theory of the Party'.

promise of that continuing paradox of capital which Marx so often attacked: a rising productivity which, rather than freeing the working class from work — and thus from its nature as working class — will result in ever more work and ever more accumulation.

These political tendencies were reflected in the debates of Marxist political economists about value which have arisen from time to time during the last sixty years. In the United States today, the legacy of the last generation of Marxism in the area of value theory is very much in this tradition. For example, both Paul Sweezy and Ronald Meek, two widely read and influential Marxist economists, focus on the substance and measure of value to the almost total exclusion of the form. Sweezy's 'qualitative value problem' concerns only the qualities of abstract labour and socially necessary labour time and ignores form completely.[3] Meek's commentary on Chapter One devotes fifteen pages to the quantitative reduction problem and only one very short paragraph to the form of value (to which Marx devotes 24 pages).[4] Despite the fact that Marxists like Baran and Sweezy recognized the Keynesian period as a new one — and even adopted some of Keynes' tools — they failed to understand or focus on the role of money *per se* in the Keynesian melding of state and economy. Despite the fact that they saw that the struggles of blacks, students, and women were the major struggles of the 1960s, they failed to understand them as the struggles of the unwaged part of the working class and hence to see the importance of money in those struggles, or to anticipate the importance of money in capital's counterattack. In this period in which money is being used as an instrument of the capitalist state against the working class, in a crisis in which capital's attack is partially characterized by the devaluation of the working class's money through administered pricing of food and energy, we cannot accept any theoretical/political discussion that ignores these elements.

Nor can we accept discussions of working-class organization that attempt to restrict our options to old formulas. The social democratic preoccupation with the forms of parliamentary democracy that ignore their bourgeois content, and thus their limited usefulness to the working class, and the Left's preoccupation with the substance of the class struggle, which reduces the form of that struggle to the party, are two political directions that seek to bind the working class within capital. For the social democrats, recourse to extralegal actions are undemocratic and antisocial(ist). For the Left, after the seizure of state power (i.e. within socialist countries), struggles over the length of the working day or over wages are counterrevolutionary and seditious. In both cases the use of state police force is supported to protect capital and discipline the working class. Watts and Budapest, Detroit and Prague, the analogies come easily to mind.

But the working-class struggles have repeatedly burst beyond both of these attempted restraints. In both bourgeois and socialist democracies the working class continues to refuse capital's 'legal' limits by actions that range from direct appropriation to wildcat strikes to armed struggle. From the coalfields and cities of the

3 Sweezy, *The Theory of Capitalist Development*: 23–40.
4 Ronald Meek, *Studies in the Labour Theory of Value*: 173–174. A. Leontiev gives about four pages to the form of value in his Political Economy: 64–67, and I. I. Rubin in his *Essays on Marx's Theory of Value*: 115–123, does only a little better.

United States to the wheatfields of Russia and the factories of southern China, working-class struggle continues. One of the notable factors in the present world crisis is the emergence of *a multiplicity of forms of struggle by the working class*. As a basis for understanding these forms and developing even stronger organization, we must grasp the most fundamental form of the class struggle itself. Several aspects of this form are brought out in Marx's analysis of the form of value.

His analysis of exchange-value as form, or of the form of value, is divided into four sections *(see Figure 2, page 93)*:

1. Simple, or elementary, form
2. Expanded form
3. General form
4. Money-form

These sections are analytical ones and deal with four stages in the determination of the value form. Marx moves from the simplest form he can identify: the relation between two singular exchangeable commodities: *xA = yB*, to the fully developed form *xA = y$*. At each stage the form of value receives a more complete determination as a distinct element of the commodity. Marx shows us how, just as use-value receives an expression and existence in the bodily form of the commodity, so too does value receive an independent expression and existence in the form of money. The progress through the stages is a progress in expressing value phenomenally in an ever more general way — beginning with an accidentally chosen single other commodity, then a variety of commodities, then any given commodity which is universally exchangeable with all others, and finally a given commodity fixed by social custom: money. We thus discover not only the fully developed expression of value but also, at the same time, exactly the defining characteristic of money in a capitalist economy. In the *Grundrisse*, before Marx had worked out the mode of presentation used in *Capital*, it is obvious that the understanding of money was a central concern of his studies of value and abstract labour. In the notebooks comprising the 'chapter on money' a great many of the determinations of Chapter One are discussed, not as abstract qualities of commodities in general, but directly as determinations of money, and money appears directly as the ultimate commodity.

Elementary, accidental, or simple form of value

'The simplest commodity-form,' Marx wrote to Engels in 1867, 'contains the whole secret of the money-form and with it in embryo, of all the bourgeois forms of the product of labour.'[5] In Section 3 of Chapter One, Marx thus begins with that simplest commodity-form: an exchange of any two singular commodities of given amounts:

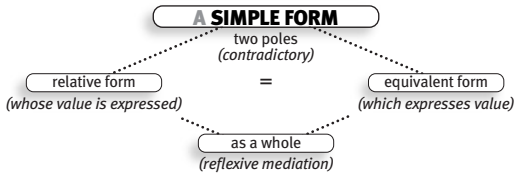
x commodity A = *y* commodity B
(is worth)

What he shows is fairly simple, namely how it is that through this exchange the value

5 Marx to Engels, June 22, 1867, *Marx–Engels Selected Correspondence*: 177.

of commodity *A* finds independent expression and concrete manifestation in commodity *B*. This simple, or elementary, exchange relation is called accidental because it is accidental which commodity expresses the value of the other. This relationship, although pictured above in the form of an equation, is not a mathematical, reversible equation. Marx is careful to explain that the equals sign is short for 'is worth'. The expression 'is worth' is not reversible. As it is written, this expression says that *xA* is worth *yB*. This is not the same as *yB* is worth *xA*. If *xA* is worth *yB* then *B* expresses the value of *A*. If *yB* is worth *xA* then *A* expresses the value of *B*. Most of the analysis of this part consists of analysing the workings and meanings of this nonreversible relation.

Marx first deals with the qualitative aspects of this relation, ignoring the quantitative constants *x* and *y*. He formalizes the unsymmetrical nature of the expression by analysing the forms within the form.



Commodity *A* is the relative value form because its value is expressed in, and relative to, commodity *B*. Commodity *B* is the equivalent form because it serves as the material equivalent for the value of commodity *A*. In other words, commodity *A* has the role of getting its value expressed, while (the corporeal use-value of) commodity *B* plays the role of providing a phenomenal form of appearance for the value of *A*. This is why the exchange-value is the form of value, because it is the form of appearance, or manifestation, of value. This is also why, in order to express the value of commodity *B*, it is necessary to reverse the equation to *yB* is worth *xA*. Then *B* has the relative form and *A* the equivalent form.

Once again, we find that we have both an opposition and a unity. We have an opposition because the relative value form and the equivalent form are exactly the opposite of each other and form two opposed, contradictory poles. We have unity because each pole is a partial expression of the simple form of exchange-value as a whole. Together they are 'mutually dependent and inseparable'. *A* cannot have the relative form unless it has an equivalent *B*, and vice versa. We find again that 'unity of opposites' we found in the case of use-value an exchange-value in the commodity. The two partial expressions of value represent the two sides of the actual exchange process. When a good is brought to market the owner finds out what it 'is worth' by exchanging it. What is acquired is the expression of its value. Formally speaking, to find out whether the owner got a 'fair' deal the equivalent would have to be sold again to see if what it 'is worth' was expressed by an equivalent equal to the original good. This unity of opposites, like that between use- and exchange-value, has the form of

the class struggle: two opposed perspectives and forces united in one contradictory totality. This is obvious in the case where the 'good' brought to market is the labour-power of the working-class. When labour-power is sold to capital, it has the relative form and the value received (via the wage or other income) has the equivalent form. An examination of each of these forms will further clarify the relation.

The relative form of value

Why is it value that is being expressed by *B* and not something else? Because the only thing that the other commodity has in common with *A* is value. This is guaranteed by their being different use-values. If they were not different, but the same — for example, twenty yards of linen is worth twenty yards of linen — then the expression could be expressing all the many common characteristics of the two quantities of linen. It would not be a value form and would largely be meaningless, as meaningless as any other expression of the form *A* equals *A*, taken by itself. Because the only thing in common is value, it is the only aspect of commodity *A* that can be expressed by the different bodily form of commodity *B*.

Thus commodity *A* has a representation of its value in *B* — its value achieves independent expression. But value is work and Marx points out that these relations between the two commodities necessarily represent the relations between the labour contained in them. It is through the equation of the two products of labour that we can see abstract labour separated from the useful labour which produced them as particular commodities. In other words, what we see is how the apparently fragmented exchange world of commodities nevertheless expresses the underlying social relations of capital and labour that gave it birth. The exchange equation expresses the reduction of the various kinds of useful labour to abstract labour that is accomplished by capital's social division and shifting of labour in the struggle with the working class. Just as the malleability and the shifting of labour implied the substitutability of one worker for another and hence the 'abstractness' of labour, so does exchange express the substitutability of embodied labour for embodied labour and hence value.

In his discussion of the quantitative aspect of the relative form of value, Marx makes two points. First, the only way magnitude can be expressed relatively is in terms of the same unit of quality. Once it has been established that the two commodities are alike in terms of value, then it is possible to see how the quantity of the value in one can be expressed by a quantity of use-value of the other. Second, he proceeds to show how the expression of value will vary with changes in the productivity of either commodity *A* or commodity *B*. Earlier, in Section 1, Marx discussed the impact of variations in productivity during the discussion of socially necessary labour time and in Section 2 he showed how this was grounded in relative changes in useful and abstract labour. It will be remembered, for example, that a rise of social productivity of some good will lower the per unit value, if the time and intensity of production are constant, because more use-value will embody the same total value. In this section he shows what the implications of this are for the simple form of value and the quantitative expression of the value of commodity *A*. This is fairly obvious. If the productivity of

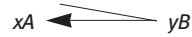
commodity *A* rises so that its value falls, then there must be a decrease in the exchanged amount of commodity *B* as long as the productivity of *B* has not changed. If the productivity of the useful labour producing *B* rises, so that its value per unit falls, then there must be an increase in the amount of *B* expressing the value of *A*. If the productivity of both change, then the quantitative variation can be calculated by taking both effects into account. What this implies is exactly why the relative value form is called relative. Thus the relative value of commodity *A* can change (because of a change in the value of commodity *B*), although its value (in terms of abstract labour time) remains the same. Or, its relative value can remain the same, even if the value of *A* changes.

The equivalent form

As we have seen, the commodity in the equivalent form is one that expresses through its corporeal form, its use-value, the relative value of the other commodity. Let us examine this relation more closely. When we say that *B* expresses the value of *A*, we are speaking of a relation of mediation known as reflection. In this relation, commodity *A* is related to an aspect of itself (value) through another commodity, somewhat in the manner of persons who come to know their image through a mirror or their personality through the comments of others about it.[6] In speaking of how the equivalent performs such a service, Marx says: 'In order to act as such a mirror of value, the labour of tailoring [producing commodity *B*] must *reflect* nothing besides its own abstract quality of being human labour generally.'[7] In a footnote Marx notes that Hegel called this kind of relation 'reflex-categories'.[8] In the first German edition of *Capital*, Marx wrote: 'Its [coat's] status as an equivalent is [so to speak] only a *reflexion-determination* of linen.'[9] Also, 'the relative value-form of a commodity is *mediated*; namely through its relationship to another commodity'.[10] In other words, commodity *A* can come explicitly into relation to itself as value only through the mediation of another commodity whose very otherness is *A*'s opposite or negative, and can thus express a single aspect of commodity *A*. In this way we can see how the

6 For a detailed analysis of this kind of relation, see the discussion of *l'Autrui* in Jean-Paul Sartre, *L'Etre et le Néant*.
7 Marx, *Capital*, Volume I, Chapter 1, Section 3, part a, sub-section 3:58 [International Publishers edition].
8 Ibid.: 55n. This analysis by Marx is similar to Hegel's analysis of reflection in the *Logic*, and undoubtedly Marx drew on that discussion. Hegel's discussion appears fittingly in the Book of Essence, which is divided into three parts: essence, appearance, and actuality. For Hegel, essence is 'being coming into mediation with itself through the negativity of itself' (*A* related to its value through *B*). The metaphor of a mirror which Marx uses to discuss the revelation of essence through reflection is also used by Hegel: 'The word reflection is originally applied, when a ray of light in a straight line impinging upon the surface of a mirror is thrown back from it.' Or, 'reflection or light thrown into itself, constitutes the distinction between essence and immediate being, and is the peculiar characteristic of essence itself' (para. 112). In turn we discover that, for Hegel, appearance is the way in which essence 'shines forth' or expresses itself. Moreover, this expression is a real one that actually exists: 'Essence accordingly is not something beyond or behind appearance, but — just because it is the essence which exists — the existence is Appearance (Forth-shining).' This existence however must be grounded 'not in itself but on something else' (para. 131), not in commodity *A* but *B*. Marx's discussion is thus very close to Hegel's and the lecture of the latter can inform the analysis of the former. The fact that Hegel is indulging in an exercise in philosophy while Marx is analysing the commodity-form of the class struggle should not obscure this relationship. It should only keep us on our toes to be able to grasp not only the similarities but also the differences between the two. See *Hegel's Logic*, translated by William Wallace.
9 Marx, 'The Commodity' (Chapter 1 of the first German edition of *Capital*, Volume I).
10 In *Value: Studies by Karl Marx*, ed. Dragstedt: 60.

appearance, or phenomenal form (exchange-value), of value expresses its essence — value itself. We might represent this relation of reflective mediation as:



This relationship of reflection is an aspect of the commodity-form of the class relations themselves. We can now see more deeply than the simple polarity/unity discussed above. I noted that relative value form and equivalent form stand as opposite poles just as do the working class and capital. We can see now that just as the relative value form finds its meaning only in the equivalent form so it is that the working class recognizes itself as working class only through its relation to capital. Indeed, it is working class only within that relation. The relative form thus expresses the perspective of the working class. Destroy capital and there is no more working class as such. And, conversely, the refusal to function as working class (i.e. to work) acts to destroy capital. Put in the language above, the mass of workers have their joint condition as working class reflected to them through capital acting as a mirror which mediates this recognition. It is thus that the class gains both definition and self-recognition. This is true both in terms of class-in-itself, in which all workers exchange their labour-power for income, and in that of class-for-itself in which workers discover their unity through struggle. Capital's perspective is that of the equivalent form. The equivalent form brings out and expresses a unique quality in commodities — value, just as capital tries to enforce and express the common quality of people as workers — as labour-power. Like the working class, capital is capital only when it is juxtaposed to the working class, but the relation is not parallel. The working class seeks to break out of this reciprocal relationship with capital — to smash the mirror — while capital tries to maintain and expand people's identity as workers.

In the English edition of *Capital*, Marx discusses the equivalent form under the heading of three 'peculiarities'. *First*, in the equivalent form 'the use-value becomes the form of manifestation, the phenomenal form of its opposite, value'. Because the value of commodity *A* is expressed as something other than itself, through its relation to another use-value, the distinctiveness of value as a social relation is made apparent. 'This expression itself indicates that some social relation lies at the bottom of it.' This we have seen. *Second*, similarly, the concrete useful labour, which underlies value, manifests itself. This, too, we have examined in the discussion of the twofold character of labour. *Third*, the labour of what are ostensibly 'private' individuals, 'takes the form of its opposite, labour directly social in its form'. Aristotle, Marx notes, despite his recognition that the exchange of two goods must imply some equality between them, was unable to grasp just what that commensurability was (value) because he lived in a society based on slavery where there was no social equality between labour. Hence, he could not formulate a notion either of value-producing labour or of how private exchange could express such social labour. The notion of value, and the role of the equivalent form, could be grasped only when commodity production was no longer sporadic but universalized by capitalist society and the relationships between humans

reduced to those of owners of commodities. In the first German edition of *Capital*, Marx included a fourth peculiarity that he discussed at some length: 'the way the fetishism of the commodity-form is more striking in the equivalent form than in the relative value form'.[11] In the third German edition, on which our present English translations are based, almost all discussion of the fetishism of the commodity-form (and that of its categories) is relegated to the fourth section. There remains only a passing reference to the 'enigmatic character of the equivalent form which escapes the notice of the bourgeois political economists'. That 'enigmatic character' is the way in which the equivalent form seems to be naturally endowed with its property of being an equivalent, because it is its bodily, or natural, form, which expresses the value of the other commodity. Capital, too, sees itself as a 'natural' relationship in as much as it presents the work of all as a manifestation of human nature rather than as an activity which they are compelled to undertake.

The deficiencies of the elementary form and the transition to the expanded form

The discussion of the relative and equivalent forms should have given a grasp of how this elementary form of exchange-value expresses the value of a commodity in an independent and definite way. Marx has, in the process, shown us how both the substance and the measure of value necessarily come into play, and receive expression, in the form. We also see how the internal contradiction in each commodity between use-value and value (reflecting the class relation) is made evident (apparent) externally by the juxtaposition of the two commodities. In the expression *xA* equals *yB*, the analysis shows the way in which the bodily form of the equivalent *B* figures only as the value form of *A*, while the bodily form of *A* figures only as a use-value whose value is expressed in *B*. This, together with the fact that value, both quantitatively and qualitatively, is the basis of the equality expressed, shows us how all the elements which we have analysed so far — use-value, exchange-value, abstract labour, socially necessary labour time, and so on — are combined in their elementary interrelationships in this simple value form. In the expanded, general, and money forms which follow, we are shown how further determinations are taken into account to achieve a more complete and more complex expression of value.

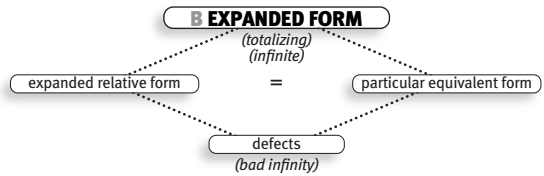
Marx's subsequent discussion of the more developed value forms brings out a number of aspects of the commodity-form not included in the simple form, which as a result remains deficient. In the simple form the value of *A* is expressed in the form of *B*. But while this gives its value an independent expression, there is nevertheless a contradiction between this form and the nature of value. In speaking of this 'deficiency', Marx says that the elementary form is 'far from expressing *A*'s qualitative equality and quantitative proportionality, to *all* commodities'. This is obviously true, but why should it? The reason lies in the previous analysis of value. There, we saw that value expressed abstract labour. Abstract labour, we also saw, was the product of a mode of production (capitalist) in which labour was universally subject to the imposition of the commodity-form such that there was generalized commodity production.

11 Ibid.: 59–60.

Moreover, we saw how the notion of socially necessary labour time was based on averages across the whole commodity-producing society. Now, if the substance and measure of value reflect his universality of the commodity-form, then so, obviously, must the phenomenal expression of value. The value form must represent these interconnections between all commodities. The development of the value form must involve progress in this direction. If, in the elementary form, *A* finds its expression in one other commodity, *B*, and if, furthermore, the *B* chosen is immaterial or accidental (and here we have another reason to call this the accidental form), then any commodity could be so chosen. 'In possibility,' Marx says, 'it has just as many different, simple, value-expressions as there exist commodities of a type differing from it.' This is why the second form of value, the expanded form of commodity *A*'s value, consists of a series, prolonged to any length, of the different elementary expressions of that value. In this way the immediate contradiction between the individual representation of *A*'s value and the multiplicity of commodities (universality of value) is resolved. This new form also has its contradictions, of course, which give rise to the succeeding form.

The expanded form of value

The discussion of the deficiencies of the elementary form has shown us why it does not express value in a complete way. Being accidental and confined to one-to-one relations between commodities, it fails to show the interconnections between each commodity and all the others. The obvious next step,



implied precisely by the accidental nature of the relation, we have seen to be the summation of all possible expressions of the value of a given commodity. This gives the familiar form of an endless sequence of simple value equations, for example:

$xA = yB$
$xA = wC$
$xA = zD$ etc.

or

$$xA = \begin{cases} yB \\ wC \\ zD \text{ etc.} \end{cases}$$

Each equation has the characteristics of the simple value form: the polarity between relative and equivalent forms, the unity of opposites, reflexiveness, and so on. In this way the previous form is preserved within the more complete form which

contains all the former's relations to the class struggle.

This form is endless, in the sense that the number of equations is limited only by the number of commodities and the number of commodities is constantly being increased by capital. That is, one can always add on one more — there is no theoretical limit expressed directly in the form. *This endlessness expresses one of the most basic characteristics of capital — its quest for infinitude*. It seeks, and tends, to constantly expand itself — forever bringing more and more people, materials, and production under its control — endless growth, whose only aim is expanded social control. It is not immediately pertinent here to discuss the sources of that growth (some ideas were mentioned in the Introduction) but only to note how the expanded form expresses that tendency toward infinity. This infinity, of course, is capital's own perspective on itself. That of the working class is quite different. Although at times working-class activity may have the effect of developing capital, that very development ultimately puts it in a position to refuse capital's pretensions to infinity and to destroy it.

On the other hand, *the working class discovers through capital a different kind of infinity* — that of the potentially infinite possibilities for living. In the very movement whereby capital opens up a world of ever growing goods and activities, the working class is shown the vast potential of society beyond the barriers of tradition, which capital constantly revolutionizes, and beyond capital itself, which tries to restrict possibilities to those in its own interest.[12]

In this second form the summation means that the relation of reflection, by which the relative value of *A* is given independent expression through a particular equivalent, is now expanded. 'Every other commodity now becomes a mirror of linen's value.' This is why Marx calls the relative form 'expanded'. The equivalent form remains particular in the sense that, although there is an endless list of equivalents, each is a particular expression of *A*'s relative value. It is only in the next form that the equivalent form is generalized.

In this expanded form of value the commodity *A*, whose relative value is to be expressed, is random. We thus have a situation in which all commodities but one serve as the expression of value for all others. In this way the various kinds of useful labour that produced all these commodities are expressed as equal through the interrelation of the products.

The importance for Marx of this new form is related directly to its comprehensiveness. Because all commodities are involved systematically, accidentality disappears. The form is one of social totality; that is, it reflects a situation that encompasses the whole of society, and this better represents the totality of generalized commodity production under capitalism.

So far, we have noted the relation between this form and the expression of the substance of value. But the form is also related to the magnitude of quantity of value. In the elementary form we saw that the quantitative proportions *x* and *y* of the exchange $xA = yB$, although actualized in exchanges, were given by the amount of labour

12 Marx, *Grundrisse*, Notebook IV: 408–409.

embodied in each. Yet one reason why this was also called the accidental form was because the proportion appeared to be random, or determined by chance. But in this expanded form, where accidentality and chance disappear, 'it now becomes plain, that it is not the exchange of commodities which regulates the magnitude of their value, but on the contrary, that it is the magnitude of their value which controls their exchange proportions'.

Deficiencies in the expanded form

Although this form gives us a more complete representation of value, by making manifest an aspect of the interrelationship among all commodities, Marx points out why even this form is inadequate. He lists its defects as three, seen first from the point of view of the relative value form:

1. The series of equations representing the relative expression of value is unfinished, or interminable.
2. The series is a pieced-together mosaic of independent expressions which, lacking links between each, falls asunder.
3. The relative value form of each commodity is different because the list is different. Thus, there is no common representation of value which would make the universality obvious.

And then from the point of view of the equivalent form:

1. Because we have particular equivalents, we have a series of unrelated, fragmentary equivalent forms.
2. The labour embodied in each equivalent thus appears only as particular not general, or abstract, labour.
3. Abstract labour is thus manifested only through the totality of its particular forms, but that totality is an ever incomplete series lacking internal unity.

In short, what Marx is saying is not only that an adequate expression of value must represent the interaction of all the (infinite) commodities of capital, but also that it must do so in a way that makes the theoretical interaction of them all explicit. The simple series of equations, of the sort we obtain in the expanded value relation, does not do this. Viewed from both sides of the equation, we have an unfinished, fragmented, and unlinked series. Because of this *the universal interaction that produces abstract labour remains unexpressed*. In the case of fragmentation, the problem is that in $xA = yB$, $xA = wC$, etc., B and C are unrelated and we have no unique or common expression for the value of A. In the case of the character of unfinishedness, the problem is that the addition of a new commodity in this form changes the expression of value. Since there will always be new commodities added (as long as capital manages to grow), the list of commodities will always be unfinished and a single representation of universal abstract labour is impossible. This critique by Marx of the expanded form is similar to Hegel's critique of the bad infinity — also an unlinked, interminable series.

How is this difficulty overcome? The answer is already contained in the form. If A

is exchanged against *B*, *C*, *D*, and so on, and the latter commodities express the value of the former, then it is also true that *B*, *C*, *D*, and so on are being exchanged for *A*. consequently, *A*, viewed as equivalent, expresses the value of *B*, *C*, *D*, and so on. In other words, we only have to change perspectives, to look at the exchange from the reverse point of view, to solve the problem. We already have seen this switch in perspective before — in the elementary value form: $xA = yB$. There we saw that the individual equations were nonreversible; that is, to reverse them changed their meaning. As it stands, $xA = yB$ expresses relative value of *A* in bodily form of *B*. To get an expression of value for B, we must change perspectives and write $yB = xA$. It is the same exchange taking place: of *A* for *B* and vice versa. Although the movement is the same, the consequences of changing perspective in the case of the expanded form is more far-reaching. Whereas, in the case of the simple form, after the reversal we get another simple form, here we pass from

$$xA = \begin{cases} y\text{B} \\ w\text{C} \\ z\text{D etc.} \end{cases}$$

to

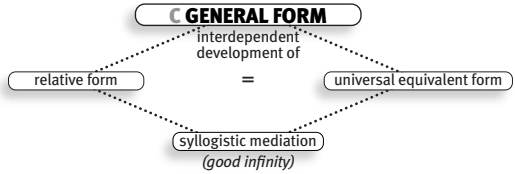
$$\left.\begin{matrix} y\text{B} \\ w\text{C} \\ z\text{D etc.} \end{matrix}\right\} = x\text{A}$$

It is more far-reaching because we now achieve that which we needed: a common expression for the value of all commodities, namely *xA*. We now have an infinite list, but one that is no longer fragmentary because each commodity is linked to each other through a common expression of value in *A*.

To sum up the characteristics of the value form (and hence of capital) which have been revealed by the analysis of the first two forms, we find that form to be *contradictory* — containing both the opposition and unity of two poles; *reflexive* — the poles, through their interaction, reveal the peculiar essence that unites them; *totalizing* — that essence is dependent on all elements and must be expressed by all; *infinite* — the commodity world of capital expands continuously. In Marx's discussion of the general form we find further refinement of these characteristics.

The general form of value

We now have seen how the general form arises. The expanded form was seen to be a natural extension of the simple form, since the equivalent chosen was arbitrary, and the general form, in turn, emerged from a change in perspective on the expanded form. We have moved from a simple, and accidental, partial expression of the relative value of different commodities to one which expresses value (of any commodity) in a single commodity. For each commodity the expression of its value takes place in a simple, or elementary, form (i.e. $yB = xA$), but, since the equivalent is the same for all, this form is also general and unified.



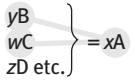
Value now has a single representative. By being equated to this single representative, the value of a commodity not only is distinguished from its bodily use-value, but also is, by the fact of the singularity of its representation, expressed as what is common to all commodities.

This form is general, or universal, in all its parts. The relative form of any given commodity is universal 'because it is the relative value-form of all other commodities at the same time'.[13] That is, the relative value of all commodities is expressed the same way, in the same equivalent. The equivalent form is universal because the equivalent has become the unique form of appearance of value for all commodities. Because of this, the labour producing it counts as the universal form of realization of human labour, as universal labour, or abstract labour. The universal equivalent has thus become the symbol, or representative, of exactly that social situation we discussed earlier as giving rise to abstract labour and the world of commodities: capital and its class structure. Although this is called the general form, and we speak of the universal equivalent and the universal relative value form, this by no means implies that the internal contradictions characteristic of the earlier forms have disappeared in some kind of universal harmony, either in the form itself or in the world of commodities. Quite the contrary, they are preserved in new ways. There are still the irreversible and contradictory polarity and reflexiveness of the simple form, and there are still the totalizing and infinite aspects of the expanded form. But now there is a new aspect. By the very fact that the universal equivalent has acquired the character of direct exchangeability with every other commodity, all those others have lost that quality. They can no longer be directly exchanged for each other but must first be exchanged for the universal equivalent.

This observation highlights a fundamental aspect of the general form — namely, that at the same time the equivalent form becomes the universal expression for the value of all other commodities, it also becomes the universal mediator between them all. Earlier, we saw how individual commodities related to their own value through the mediation of an equivalent (through reflection). We now see how this, as a characteristic of the general form, is part of another relation, namely the different kind of mediation played by the universal equivalent: 'All commodities by mirroring themselves in one and the same commodity as quantities of value, reflect themselves reciprocally as quantities of value'.[14] This reciprocity between any two commodities

13 Marx, 'The Commodity': 29.
14 Ibid.: 30.

(all combinations), this mutual reflection of commodities through which they relate as values, resembles that interaction of individual commodity owners which characterizes commodity-producing society. But, this kind of reciprocal relation is mediated through the universal equivalent.[15] Now, the equivalent is doubly a mediator: first, for the expression of value of each commodity; second, for the relation of each commodity to each other as values. This second form of mediation between two extremes resembles a syllogistic mediation. In the syllogism two extremes are united via a mediating middle term. In this case the universal equivalent mediates the relationship between any two commodities. To illustrate, note how the relation between *yB* and *wC* is mediated by their mutual relation to *xA*:



or

yB—xA—wC

What the universal mediator does is to bring out the particular characteristic of value of each individual commodity as the universal element which unites them. By so doing, the universal equivalent explicitly incorporates each individual into the universal value relation. Here, again, we can see how the general form achieves the union of the disparate elements of the series into a totality, no longer fragmented but grasped as a whole. The series of commodity equations remains growing and potentially infinite, but that infinity is no longer a tiresome addition of separate elements. The capitalist commodity world has now been expressed as an integrated and united infinity in which the appearance of a new commodity no longer means the creation of a new finite but the continuation of an infinite process grasped in its own activity.

This indeed is capital. Its extension is not random, nor does it come 'from the outside'. The world of capital is not 'added to' externally but generates its own self-expansion — one part of which is the expansion of the commodity world. It is infinite like an expanding universe — not like a shopping bag to which we add one commodity after another. Whether we are speaking of its expansion internationally, as different parts of the world are brought into the orbit of capital's imposition of social control through work, or of its expansion into all sectors of industrial production, or of its expansion into all aspects of the reproduction of labour power (the quest for the 24-hour workday), in each case the new 'areas' of control are not mere additions. Their control is an outgrowth of prior struggles and is intended by capital to serve in the overall organization. Colonialism brought raw materials to English factories. Control of textile production complemented control of clothing manufacture. Control of the bedroom is intended to help control labour supply, and so on.

15 This reciprocity between any two commodities is, in some ways, like that of Hegel's Civil Society. But the mediation of the reciprocal relation through a universal equivalent is different from Hegel's concept of reciprocity. Marx's introduction of the syllogistic mediation, which Hegel introduces in the Book of the Notion, makes it quite distinct.

The new form of mediation brought out in the general form, the mediation which ensures the interrelation of all the elements of the commodity (and capital's) world, is fundamental to the way capital organizes its control. The mediation of the universal equivalent between all elements certainly expresses capital's tendency to mediate all relations in the social factory. It intervenes everywhere: between commodity producers with money *C—M—C*, between managers and workers with wages and law, between parents and children with school, between men and women with marriage and contraceptives, between itself and whites with blacks, and so on.

But what does it mean to say that capital intervenes as a mediating force everywhere? In the examples just given, we find that the mediating entity which I am calling capital ranges from money to the state to groups of workers. This raises an issue discussed in the Introduction which must be re-emphasized here for such assertions to make sense, namely, that these mediating entities are all moments of capital itself. While seeing money as capital is perhaps not difficult (we will deal with that in the next section), seeing the state, or particular segments of the working class, as capital is more problematic. Earlier, I emphasized the point that the working class is part of capital, is capital, just as capital is not just one pole but includes, is, the working class — at least as long as the working class is functioning as labour-power, as long as it is working. Thus, one part of the working class can mediate as capital since in that role it is capital. For example, men mediate the relation between capital (industry or the state which pays the wage) and women in their role as housewives. Capital (*K*)—waged men (*M*)—unwaged women (*W*) — each of these three elements is a part of capital, but each plays a different role: capital imposes work (in exchange for income), men are waged workers in factory or office, women are unwaged workers in the home. Each of the elements mediates the other two in different ways. There is *K—M—W*, but there are also *K—W—M* and *M—K—W*. The three elements make up a totality — a subtotality of capitalist society but a totality nevertheless. In the first case, *K—M—W*, men mediate capital's relation to their housewives by making them work to reproduce the men's labour-power (by cooking, washing, making love, etc.) and by absorbing the brunt of women's revolt against their condition. In the second case, *K—W—M*, women mediate men's relation to capital. One way is through shopping, in which the real equivalence of the money wage to the means of subsistence is made clear — women have to stretch the buck, and if they do it poorly (given prices, etc.) they are blamed instead of capital. In the third case, *M—K—W*, capital mediates the relation between men and wives through marriage laws, birth control, and so on. Here capital appears as the state with its laws and police force.

This same kind of mediation is widely used by capital in its division of other segments of the working class. Let us briefly examine two other well-known cases: the school and the use of immigrant labour. In the case of the school, capital may be represented by the administration (*A*), whose problem is to organize its relations with two groups of workers: students (*S*) and professors (*P*). The usual hierarchical organization of the school places professors in the middle, mediating between the students and the school administration *A—P—S*. This role is at least twofold. The

professor must receive the administration guidelines, rules, grading system, and such, and impose them on the students. On the other hand, teachers must absorb any student discontent with their 'education'. Sometimes, in the case of teacher strikes or periods of layoffs and job shortage, capital tries to use the students to discipline the professors: *A—S—P*. Or this may occur occasionally when students intervene to protect a popular teacher from dismissal. In general, the administration mediates the relations between students and professors (*P—A—S*) through its various institutional structures, from class structure to the use of police. In the case of immigrant labour, there is the well-known attempt by capital to pit immigrant workers (*I*) against local workers (*L*). Employers (*E*) try to use immigrant demands for jobs and income to weaken trade unions dominated by local workers (*E—I—L*). At the same time the local wage workers are placed between the income demands of the immigrants and capital (*E—L—I*). Of course, in all of this capital plays its own role — for example, by structuring the relations between immigrants and local workers in both factory and community — so we have *L—E—I*.

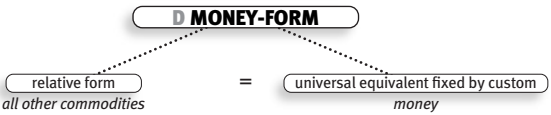
Understanding this kind of mediation in the class struggle not only helps make its complexity more understandable, but also brings out how working-class initiative and power can destroy this kind of determination and force a recomposition of the class relations. One way this happens is when the working class refuses the mediation and bypasses it. For example, when housewives demand a wage directly from capital, they are bypassing the mediation of men which capital tries to impose and establishing *K—W* directly. Or, when students storm the administration building to demand an end to the war, or no budget cuts, they are bypassing the mediation of professors and establishing *A—S*, a direct confrontation between themselves and capital. Another way this can happen is when the mediations planned by capital result in such harsh conflict that part of society begins to break down or is forced into new forms. For example, take the school again. In the universities during the sixties, students generally carried their struggles directly to the administration or beyond. But in the high schools it was rare that the primary thrust of student refusal of discipline was directed against the administration. Instead, it was directed against other students or against teachers. Teachers were to serve as mediators, but under the constantly growing pressure of the students — their passive resistance, their refusal of discipline, their violence — teachers' jobs grew so difficult that it forced a change in their relation to capital. The refusal of students to sit quietly and work was a major contributing factor (along with inflation, etc.) to the new demands of teachers for less work and more money. The need for more discipline in a classroom is the equivalent of speed-up on an assembly line — it increases the intensity of the workday and the value of labour-power. In these circumstances, teachers have moved to form militant new unions, which have created a whole new alignment of power in education. Faced with teacher refusal to try to impose discipline in dangerous situations, that is, refusal to work, the school administrations and city governments have been forced to pay higher wages, to bring in police, and security guards and so on. These developments represent a major breakdown in capital's control over the creation of new labour-power. At the same

time, it raises serious problems for working-class strategy. How can this growing power of students and teachers be organized so that it is directed more against capital than against each other? The autonomous power of students forced the creation of a new level of autonomous organization and power among teachers — a recomposition of the class structure. But as long as the dynamic and direction of these developments are not understood, there is the danger of ultimate collapse and defeat. Even in the universities we saw a similar, though less dramatic, development in the sixties. The antiwar struggles of students forced a recomposition of the teaching staff that included a new generation of radicals — one which has contributed to recent organizing among teachers at the university level. It has led to a general breakdown in the ability of higher education to discipline, plan, and organize the supply of labour. Grade tracking has crumbled under student pressure and been replaced by a grade inflation, of such a degree that a Ph.D. degree is no longer any guarantee of employment whatever. All these developments have led to the current attempt by capital to reimpose work discipline in the schools through the fiscal crisis, and a nation-wide restructuring of education. Such a restructuring must necessarily involve attempts to find new kinds of mediation to replace those which working-class struggle is breaking apart.

Ultimately, the class struggle is aimed at destroying the divisions which capital imposes on the working class. But while workers may seek unity of students and professors against the administration, or men and women against capital, or blacks and whites, nevertheless it is clear that the way to destroy the mediation is not so simple as 'unite and fight'. As I have argued before, in the section on abstract labour, the divisions are real and hierarchical; they are power divisions, and unity requires a power struggle not only of different segments of the working class against capital but also, at times, between those segments. The problem of political organization is how to develop those intraclass struggles to strengthen the class and not weaken it. The analysis of mediation brought out by the general form of value shows us more about the character of such struggles. It is at least one step in their resolution.

The money form of value

The transition from the general form to the money-form is much simpler than were the previous transitions. The only difference between the two is that in the money-form the universal equivalent has become fixed by social custom into some one commodity. Once this happens that universal equivalent functions as money and we have the money-form.



Because this is where the whole analysis has been leading, it is useful to formulate the relation in the reverse fashion. Money is partly defined as a universal equivalent

(more determinations come in later chapters of *Capital*). The money-form is the total relationship

$$\left.\begin{array}{l} y\text{B} \\ w\text{C} \\ z\text{D etc.} \end{array}\right\} = x \text{ gold}$$

and must be differentiated from money which, in this case, is gold. This money-form contains all the determinations of the prior forms. It has the contradictory unity and reflexive relations between the relative form and the equivalent form brought out in the simple form. It has the totality and infinitude brought out in the expanded form and welded together in the general form. And it has the mediated character discussed in the general form. Like capital, then, the money-form is contradictory, reflexive, totalizing, infinite, and mediated.

Money appears not as simply one element of this totality but as the expression of this totality in its role as universal equivalent. Money, at this point, is both one commodity among many and also the unique expression of their interactions as moments in the world of capital, that is, as value. Money, by expressing all commodities as values, expresses the domain of capital — the social relations which make all use-values into commodities. As a moment in the money-form, money is a part of capital and thus is capital. If capital is most basically the social relations of the commodity-form (of which the commodity world is a moment), then *money is the quintessential expression of the commodity-form itself*. In capitalist society, to have a coin in the hand is to have a golden drop of that society itself. Look deeply into that coin, as you might with a crystal ball, and behind its golden lustre, which has stopped many an eye, you discover the blood and sweat of the class struggle.

When we look back at the roles of the equivalent form in the various relations we have uncovered, we now know we were looking at the role of money. For example, money stands as equivalent in contradictory unity with labour-power. It does the same with all other commodities and, by so doing, shows them (through reflection) their character as values, and thus a part of capital. The tendency for capital to expand infinitely is partly the tendency to turn social relations into money relations, that is, to convert all use-values into values by setting them equal to money. Money becomes the magic wand by which new elements of the world are incorporated into capital.

To set an object equal to money is to give it a price. Thus the price-form is a subform of the money-form, in which any

$$yB = x \text{ gold}$$

But the price-form never stands alone. It is part of the money-form. *The commodity which is set equal to some quantity of money, that is, given a price, is instantly tied into the whole world of capital*.[16] How? By setting a price, it is affirmed that this use-value,

16 Already in his analysis of the production and circulation of commodities, Marx saw how setting a price on a product incorporated it into capital, even when it was produced in noncapitalist modes of production (*Capital*, Volume II, Chapter 4: 109–111). Today, from the perspective of the social factory, in which so-called noncapitalist modes of production are understood as ways of organizing unwaged labor, this is even more true.

having been produced by useful labour of some sort, is only one special product of that universal tool of capital's control: work. To set an object equal to money is to set it equal to all other commodities, and that is to equate the labour which produced it to all other labour, to affirm its abstractness. (We ignore, as Marx does, cases where prices are set on things that are not the products of labour.) It makes no more difference whether the quantity of embodied labour is socially necessary or not — as we have seen earlier, this is often not the case. The qualitative equality of work has been affirmed and the quantity set socially. Money shows to the commodity that it is a product of abstract labour — a value.

Money not only equates all commodities as products of labour but also stands as the universal mediator between all these different elements of capital. When labour-power is set equal to money, that money mediates its relation to capital. The money wage (*M*) is one way in which capital (*K*) mediates its relation to the working class (*LP*): (*K—M—LP*). There are many others, as we saw in the preceding section, but the money wage is the most fundamental and, because it is, this establishes the importance of the unwaged relation to capital. As we have seen, unwaged relations may be mediated in a variety of ways — for example, men mediating the relation of their unwaged wives to capital. For all workers it is a case of work being exchanged for means of subsistence, but it is not always done directly for a wage. Children work for capital to the extent that they produce their labour-power for future roles as workers (waged and unwaged), but they are not directly waged. They, like housewives, are supported by the resources (money) obtained by their waged father or mother. The relation with capital is mediated directly for the father by the money wage, but for the children and housewives there is also the father/husband. In these circumstances the fact that children and women in the family work for capital is hidden by their condition of wagelessness. They appear to stand only in some private relation to the male wage earner but not to capital.

This brings out an important consideration about money that is often overlooked — namely, that in order for money to play the role of mediator or universal equivalent, there must be many relations where it does not mediate directly. The place in *Capital* where Marx makes this clearest is with the discussion of the waged and unwaged. In order for capital to be able to use the money wage to mediate its relation to the working class as wage-workers, it must maintain itself. But to say that under capital there must always be the unwaged is to say that money is the universal mediator in a peculiar way. Ultimately, everyone must get commodities to survive, but not necessarily through the wage. Money, however, remains the universal mediator because it even defines its absence. The unwaged are defined with deference to the waged — defined by their lack of control over some money. Children may not receive money, but they receive what money buys — what they lack is control, but the money which supports them, which buys their food, circulates nevertheless. This is exactly why the struggle of the unwaged is for wages, not because they want to expand capital's dominion — they already suffer that — but in order to gain power, power to destroy it.

There are a multiplicity of ways in which the maintenance of nonmonied, or unwaged, relations are important to capital. The image of the milling crowd at the factory gates

is one traditional but limited vision. We have often discussed the cases of unwaged students, women, and ghetto dwellers in the developed world. But, as we saw in the discussion of primitive accumulation, the case of the Third World was even more dramatic. Capital created and maintained vast, partially self-supporting reserves of labour-power which were unwaged. This was one of the main aims of colonialism — the creation of a world-wide reserve army. And poverty continues to be the tool by which vast millions are kept alive but (it is hoped) easily available when it suits capital's purpose. These reserves are then drawn upon either for immigration into areas where their cheap labour can be used to hold down the wage demands of more powerful workers (e.g. Mexican and Caribbean labour drawn into the U.S.; workers from Mediterranean countries brought into northern Europe) or for employment in their own areas when runaway shops seek out their cheap labour locally. Of course, time and again things have not worked out so well and the struggles of the unwaged have made them unfit for capital's factories.

We can thus see that the waged/unwaged division is a fundamental aspect of the money-form. It is a subdivision between some commodities (some person's labour-power) and money. It brings out the basic division between the direct presence of the money-form and its indirect presence, or the necessary coexistence of monied and nonmonied relations in capital.

The fact that money is a mediator — is interposed between capital and the working class — means two things. First, from the working-class point of view, the attack on capital must both use and refuse this mediation, exactly as women and students have used and bypassed men and professors, respectively. Strikes are already cases of this tendency in capital as workers refuse the wage mediation and attack capital directly with refusal of work, sabotage, factory seizure, and so on. Another way the class struggle refuses the mediation of money is the refusal of price. This is the essence of direct appropriation and includes not only the price of labour-power but also the prices of other commodities. It involves self-reduction of utilities or housing prices, changing labels in a supermarket, using 15-cent slugs instead of 50-cent tokens in the subway, or total elimination of price through shoplifting, employee theft, or Black Christmases where commodities are seized. This refusal of price is a refusal of capital's rules of the game. The refusal to accept the role of money is the refusal to accept everything we have seen going into the determination of money — the whole set of value relations. This is the working-class perspective with a vengeance.

Second is the meaning for capital. Because money is a universal mediator, in all those cases where it is interposed between the working class and capital, it is the possible subject of manipulation. When the wage struggles of the working class put a stop to capital's traditional methods of manipulating the money wage in the United States and in Europe in the 1930s, it was only natural that capital, through the thinking of Keynes and others, sought new ways to use money in the class struggle. Keynesian ideas were basically about how to use state regulation through monetary and fiscal manipulation of the direction and amount of money flow to control the working class. As ideology, of course, it was presented differently. Monetary and fiscal policies were pictured as tools to guarantee growth and full employment. But 'growth' really meant

capital accumulation, and 'full employment' meant the imposition of work with the maintenance of the minimal necessary reserve army through the fine tuning of the economy. The Keynesian strategy uses money to judiciously stimulate the economy, or to 'cool it off'. This means managing working-class demand through recession or inflation. We are back to the example cited at the beginning of this section: the use of inflation to undercut the wage struggles of the working class and transfer value to capital. Now that we have seen what money is, and looked at it as the form of value incorporating its substance and measure, as mediator, this should make more sense. Inflation means rising prices due, not to increases in labour input, but to monetary deflation. Prices are the money equivalents of the value of commodities which are expressed in the price form. To raise prices means to increase the amount of money (gold or paper) being exchanged for goods. If the amount of money the working class holds is fixed, then the amount it can buy decreases accordingly. In this way, the amount of value the working class receives for its labour-power is reduced, and the amount of surplus value that capital gets is increased.

The only question one might ask is whether it makes any difference that today the working class does not get gold but paper money. Marx shows in Chapter Three that it does not. When money acts as means of circulation (as universal mediator), it need not exist in any corporeal form at all, neither as gold nor even as paper. And, in fact, the money which the working class receives is, as often as not, not even paper money but checking account balances which are then transferred back to capital bit by bit in exchange for commodities. Money in this case is simply money of account which keeps 'account' of the flow of value (in work and in commodities) but which need not exist at all. Moreover, the fact that money is paper, when it does exist, means that the value which it represents is easily manipulated. When $xB=y$ gold, then to raise the price would mean either raising the labour input into B, or lowering the labour input into gold production. But with paper, the cost of production is zero for all practical purposes and the paper only represents a certain amount of value. In these circumstances it is easy to raise prices simply by circulating more paper so that a given quantity of commodities, being represented by an increased quantity of paper, has higher prices (assuming velocity of money constant, etc.). This was just the idea of Keynes, then Lewis and others. The state could print more money, or expand money via the credit system, and thus raise prices, which would decrease the value of each unit of money and thus undercut working-class wages. This undercutting could be done whether working-class wages were constant or increasing. In the latter case there would be a natural tendency for capitalists to raise prices to offset increases in costs, but this would have to be accompanied by an adequate expansion of the money supply — which the state could guarantee.

In the current inflation this kind of manipulation of money has been joined by another — the administered increases in the prices of oil and food that have been achieved by restricting the availability of those basic commodities to back up the price increase, in the case of oil, and to produce it, in the case of food. This has been occurring not just in one or more countries, due to the action of the state, but throughout

the world, due to the combined action of multinational corporations and a number of states. In the case of oil we have OPEC, the seven sisters, and both Western and Eastern governments. In the case of food grains, we have producers, grain traders, and the United States and USSR. The resultant price increases, that is, the increase in the amount of money required to obtain a given amount of commodity value, have acted to undercut working-class wages all over the world and are part of a world-wide counteroffensive by capital to stem the wage offensive. The management of the capital flows produced by this inflation has increasingly been turned over by capital to its international state institutions like the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund.[17]

However the manipulation of money is achieved, whether through corporations, national governments, or international agreement, it should now be clear that the object of the manipulations is the value relation between the working class and capital. We have seen the complex way money expresses this class relation and the complex role it has at the heart of that relation. There are many roles and institutions of money which are not brought out in Chapter One of *Capital*, but the analysis of the universal equivalent in the money-form and the price-form has given us some fundamental and basic insights into the role of money as medium of circulation and as mediator between the classes. It permits us to see, if not the details, at least the basic character of money control and inflation in the current period of class struggle.

As with the other categories of this chapter, we have seen how going behind the 'fetishism' to the underlying class relations makes possible the discovery of at least some of the political roles of money. Money appears as a mediator for capital, which hides its control over work — the unwaged work in the factory and without. It is a tool for controlling the amount of value or wealth achieved by the working class. When working-class power rises to the point of being able to stop capital's direct manipulation of the money wage (to eliminate wage reductions), capital seeks to use money indirectly by altering value relations through inflation, which attacks the working-class wage in a roundabout fashion. This becomes increasingly important as the struggle by the unwaged for wages has brought the unwaged work out from behind the wage curtain. Similarly, the tendency of the working class to demand more money with less work, to sever the relationship between value produced and value received, has also made it imperative for capital to try to use new forms of the manipulation of money to overcome this. In the cycle of struggles of the 1960s, working-class struggle increasingly broke down capital's determinations of value and money/price relations and shifted them in its own interests. That put the very basis of capital in question — its control over work — and was the source of the present crisis for capital. Given the difficulty which capital is currently experiencing in restructuring relationships in its own interest, the problem of the day is that of making our struggles more efficient on the new terrain of continuing crisis.

17 On the expanding role of the International Monetary Fund in managing capital's use of money as a weapon against the working class, see Marazzi, 'Money in the World Crisis': 104–106.

VI Conclusion

The analysis of Chapter One has brought out many determinations of capital — the class struggle — both generally and of its various divisions.

In terms of the basic class relationship of capital/labour, we have seen that it is fundamentally a relationship of work which has the commodity form. Capital appears as a means of social control through work under circumstances in which capitalists control the means of production and thus force the working class to work for them. This is not accomplished easily because the working class, too, has initiative and there is a continual power struggle — the class struggle over work. The character of that struggle has varied — whether, how much, what price — but it is always about work, about the commodity form.

The analysis of that form into use-value and exchange-value brought out some of the determinations of that struggle over the commodity labour-power and also the related position of other commodities, such as food and energy. Since they play a role in the class struggle and are hence part of it, an examination of their use-value and exchange-value from the perspective of the two opposing classes was shown to be of help in defining and clarifying their roles and hence the nature of the struggle itself: a struggle over both material wealth and exchange-value, which is the key to wealth under capital. This was made more explicit by the development of the discussion of value — its ultimate expression being money. Money appears as capital vis-à-vis the working class (i.e. as command over work), and thus the struggle is at least partly one over money, as long as it remains within capital.

Yet, the analysis of value also brought out the way in which the class struggle is not monolithic but divided. The discussion of abstract labour showed the central role of the division of the working class and the struggle over the recomposition of that

division. This discussion also showed that these divisions were not horizontal divisions but vertical, hierarchical ones. Through the discussion of money we have also seen that there are always wage divisions, either between waged and unwaged or within the wage hierarchy. The existence and fundamental role of these divisions meant the necessity for working class struggle to deal with them directly in its organization. Recognition of these divisions is due to the Wages for Housework movement as one moment of a whole series of struggles for the wage and against hierarchy. Therefore, the demand for a wage is to overcome the capitalist division of waged and unwaged, to put all workers on the same footing, so all can struggle for income against work.

The discussion of the form of value also brought out the way capital tries to mediate its relation with one segment of the working class through another segment. This is one of the meanings and functions of the hierarchy in the divisions of the class. The waged are used to mediate the relation between capital and the unwaged. The higher waged are used to mediate relations between capital and the lower waged. Or, inversely, the unwaged are used by capital to discipline the waged; the low waged are used to discipline the high waged. The discussion of the measure of value, socially necessary labour time, also brought out some more determinations suggested by the waged/unwaged division, namely, that capital tries to extend its social control through work throughout society, not just on the factory floor — to create a social factory in which both waged and unwaged work. The struggle for a wage is thus the demand for recognition of this situation and the creation of a basis (more wealth) for autonomous struggle against it. Moreover, the social factory includes a struggle over labour time similar to that in the factory.

From these observations we were also able to draw some conclusions concerning working class strategy for dealing with capital. Since capital is seen as social control through work and limited access to wealth (wage), the struggle is for less work and more access to wealth (money). This has been the character of struggle in recent years, and as it ruptures the productivity deal it attacks the basis of capitalist control. This is not a simply quantitative struggle or an economistic one, because, by exploding the relations between work and income, it challenges the very nature of capital. Such struggle may be carried on in many areas; only the real extent of working class organization and power limits the ability to immediately abolish most work, to create unlimited access to wealth, and to channel rising productivity into the achievement of zerowork. The intensity of the struggle is dictated by the degree of power. When workers can organize sufficiently to directly appropriate wealth, they do so. At the same time, they struggle to obtain the kind of wealth they want — the work conditions, the leisure time activities, and the use values. In this sense, too, the struggle is qualitative as well as quantitative.

But, since the class is in fact divided, these struggles for less work and more money (wealth) reflect this division. Both the form and the aims of the struggle are different, depending on which segment of the working class is involved. Obviously, one overall aim of all segments of the class is to unite in order to have more power. But the unity can come only through the political interaction of different struggles, not the

subsuming of one into the other. We have seen that the different hierarchical segments are not on the same level of power vis-à-vis capital. Therefore the less powerful, especially, have been organizing autonomously, so that their less-powerful status is not merely reproduced within some broader organization. Each group organizes around its needs and makes alliances with other groups on the basis of mutual benefit. All may struggle for less work and more wealth, but the autonomous power of the less powerful will restrict the tendency for their interests to be sacrificed to those of the more powerful. At the same time, since the focus of their struggles is against capital, there is the possibility of all struggles coming together with common objectives.

Another organizational implication of the way the working class is divided between waged and unwaged — factory workers and community workers — includes the fact that the autonomous organizations I have mentioned exist within and between both the factory and the community. Their coordination means the coming together of the two areas of struggle. This means that the site of working class struggle and action and the site of an 'issue' may be geographically different but united by that action. Examples of this are community struggles in the Appalachian area over coal mine issues and the strikes by Italian factory workers over community issues. In this way, working class power is exerted at the level of the social factory, politically recomposing the division between factory and community.

Bibliography

We have attempted to update the bibliography to reflect the fact that since this book was first published in 1979 some books have been translated and published in English for the first time, others have simply been republished and some articles, which originally appeared in now hard-to-find journals, have been republished in new collections. This bibliography also includes material referred to in the new preface. Besides appearing in conventional printed books, journals or pamphlets, many texts have been scanned and uploaded onto computer archives, and more are continually being added. References marked [**M**] below are available electronically at the Marxists Internet Archive (see Internet Resources section on page 172).

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Internet resources

AK Press http://www.akuk.com [in the UK]
http://www.akpress.org/ [in the US]
... the co-publishers.

aut-op-sy http://lists.village.virginia.edu/~spoons/aut_html/index.html
A 'forum in which to explore the changing nature of class composition and class struggle within the planetary work machine': a discussion list; suggestions for further readings, some available electronically; an introduction to some of the ideas of autonomist Marxism; plus links.

Chumbawamba http://www.chumba.com
... who helped make this project possible.

Harry M. Cleaver, Jr. http://www.eco.utexas.edu/Homepages/Faculty/Cleaver/
The author's homepage: information about his teaching, research and contributions to policy (activism). Some writings are available on-line and there are links to The Texas Archives of Autonomist Marxism and materials relating to the Zapatistas/Chiapas.

Ed Emery, His Archive http://www.emery.archive.mcmail.com/
A fascinating collection of materials, both political and literary, written or translated by Ed Emery in recent years. The archive includes the results to date of Ed's ongoing project of translating and making available in English the entire collected works of Dario Fo and Franca Rame; original source material relating to the development of the revolutionary Left in Italy from the 1960s onwards; Ed's own 'occasional papers'; and more. We expect some of the articles referenced in this book to be uploaded onto this archive in the future.

Marxists Internet Archive
http://www.marxists.org/
http://www.marxists.org.uk/ [mirror site]
Writings of Marx and Engels, plus Bakunin, Connolly, Hegel, Lafargue, Lenin, Luxemburg, Pannekoek, Trotsky and many more, with separate archives relating to the First International and to the Spanish Revolution and Civil War. (The entire contents are also available on CD for about US$15.) References marked [**M**] *in this book's bibliography are available online here.*

Texas Archives of Autonomist Marxism
http://www.eco.utexas.edu/Homepages/Faculty/Cleaver/txarchintro.html
'The Texas Archives contain a wide variety of material related to those threads of the Marxist tradition which have emphasized the self-activity of the working class.' The index to the archive and some of the material are available online.

Just a few of the many other websites worth investigating:

Amnesty for Toni Negri
http://lists.village.virginia.edu/~forks/TNmain.htm

Aufheben
http://lists.village.virginia.edu/~spoons/aut_html/auf1edit.htm

Antagonism
http://www.geocities.com/CapitolHill//Lobby/3909/index.html

Collective Action Notes
http://www.geocities.com/CapitolHill/Lobby/2379/index.html

EZLN (Zapatistas)
http://www.ezln.org/

International Wages for Housework Campaign
http://womenstrike8m.server101.com

John Gray
http://www.geocities.com/~johngray/

Mersey Docks Dispute (UK)
http://www.geocities.com/CapitolHill/3843/dockhome.html

Midnight Notes
http://midnightnotes.org/

Reclaim the Streets (UK)
http://www.gn.apc.org/rts/

Subversion
http://www.geocities.com/Athens/Acropolis/8195/

Wildcat (Germany)
http://www.rhein-neckar.de/~wildcat/

Wildcat (UK)
http://www.webcom.com/wildcat/

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