



The Public Interest No.2

Combat Economism!

Introduction

We find it necessary to address certain retrograde tendencies which have arisen in the thinking of some of the most conscious elements of the socialist workers' movement. We are referring primarily to *economism* and a related mystification known as *workism*. Marxism is often accused of class reductionism, meaning that all issues can be understood in relation to income, workplace relations, poverty, and people's basic needs. Such claims are often rooted in the belief that social theorists and social scientists ought to also attempt to understand the social problems of race, gender, sexuality, and so on...

Marxism properly understood is a comprehensive critique of the totality of class society, not just class identity. The formation of bourgeois classes is a symptom of class society, namely its most critical social categories: private property and the state. We can speak of race, gender, and national oppression, but we cannot pretend that these other social determinations exist outside of the social relations of class society. For example, we can not provide a solution for the struggles of single mothers without attempting to transform society to provision for such needs. Nearly all provisions in advanced capitalist society are founded on labour.

The distinction between Marxism, and all other revolutionary programs hinges on recognition of the historical necessity of the dictatorship of the proletariat in the making of the new society. The remaking of the new society is not only the abolition of the dictatorship of the bourgeoisie; but it is also the abolition of the proletariat as a class. We do not mean dictatorship over the proletariat. Later, we will set about recovering the historical meanings of dictatorship, and emergency powers, and their relationship to popular sovereignty.

Concerning the title of this article, our criticism of economism sprung from our desire to place a correct understanding of political economy in the center of our thinking of strategy and tactics. In the twilight of the neoliberalism age, politics has become *pseudo-politics*. We lack any political party that represents the needs of working-class families. No discernible political action is taken towards the bread and butter issues that increasingly immiserate working Canadians. In the small towns, the sense of this economic immiseration is translated into resentment towards a metropolitan elite and its cosmopolitanism culture. This is the recognition of a real problem —albeit mystified. Conservative political elites opportunistically jump to translate the uneven development of capital into culture war.

Culture war is everywhere. Even as more people come to realize that culture war only creates pointless division, we still find ourselves captured by the media cycle, which has the effect of particularizing moments of the totality of capitalist society. Economism is a reaction formation. It is an expression of exasperation with the status quo, and the total mystification of capitalism as the source of many of the current woes facing society, especially those facing young people. Economism is a higher stage of political thinking to the culture warrior, but it still remains sub-political.

People who fall into the trap of economism believe that their thinking is immensely practical. They say *follow the money*. At minimum, economism correctly understands money as a social power. But it thinks the quantitative dimension of money can account for an exhaustive explanation of consciousness. On matters of social critique, economism can never transcend the populist politics of a William Jennings Bryan. It remains the thinking of the petty-bourgeois, the thinking of a small shop bookkeeper. Economism is empiricism; it is undialectical thinking.

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It is class reductionism in the sense that it transforms class into dogmatic a priori. Class character is substantial in so far as classes are critical categories which are emerging from social relations. This is why Marx's mature social theory begins with a critique of exchange value and commodity fetishism. In the last chapter of Capital Volume 3, Marx dies without writing much about classes. This was not the result of a lack of importance, but rather the difficulty of the task.

The desire to leap over this period of critical reflection creates a reification of the working-class. This reification is also translated to an uncritical celebration of yellow trade unions as institutions of workers' consciousness. The reality is that workers' movement is absent in North America. In resuming the struggle, we must think on the level of the totality of bourgeois society.

Workerism

One significant ill of economic thinking is the mystified politics of *workerism*. The workerism we are critiquing turns the worker into a category of identity politics. The reappearance of workerism was partly a social reaction to the dominance of identity politics on the middle-class Left. After the total failure of Occupy, the culture of activism sunk deeper into petit-bourgeois radicalism. The class struggle was pushed into the background. Everything from race, sexuality, gender, anti-War, and ecocide, was a political aim; everything but class. When Obama-era ZIRP programs failed to deliver any gains for the working-class, people became more open to class politics.

After the Eurocrisis a series of seriously organized Left politics were formed and socialism became mainstream. But Syriza, Podemos, Corbyn's Labour and the Bernie Sanders campaign all ended in failure. The reasons were multifaceted and could not be reduced to a single cause. In the U.S. the democratic establishment mobilized identitarianism against the Bernie Campaign. In response to the failure to win power, the more class conscious elements of the progressive movement attempted to theorize this disaster.

Several popular commentaries on the failure of Left unity recovered a class category developed almost eighty years ago. Most of this social composition of this identitarian Left was said to come from the professional-managerial class (PMC), this class category was originally developed to speak of primarily functionaries of capital and the state, but now it has come to be expanded to anyone who has a university degree. This is a sizable part of the population, approaching 40% in Canada and the U.S. and the trend becomes increasingly skewed towards Millennials. The critiques of the PMC claim that a highly educated rank of activist is more inclined to use their comprehensive understanding of the current moral fads, to police and dominate social movements.

This line of critique develops a Nietzschean colouring in its analysis. The professional managerial class became a priest-caste within the social movements and they use their moral codes of

political correctness to dominate elements of the movement that remain more in touch with the working classes. While leftist activists may be dazzled by this kind of virtue signaling, the working classes find this politics extremely alienating. Many leftist critiques of this phenomena attempt to retreat from activist politics, and return to working class issues. To this extent, this development can be seen as an improvement. But this period of Millennial political fervor had a rearguard quality. The Left still experiences an acute anemoia for Fordism; they wish for the factories, the industrial policy, capital controls, strong unions, and a time when wage growth moved lock step with the growth of productivity.

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The model of the worker for many, was the industrial worker. Adding to this, much of the political action surrounded protecting the gains of the Fordist social compact from austerity measures.

The idealized working-class subject was projected back onto the mid 20th century. What is conceived as the ideal worker was actually a synecdoche for a historically defunct state-form. It is a banal point, but it must be restated every now and then; social roles are generated by discrete historical forms of society. Without a materialist analysis of the concrete appearances of capitalist society, we have no justification in privileging one sector of labour over another

Well intentioned intellectuals will speak of working class culture as more practical than their PMC peers. Many of these thinkers tend to be older tenured professors who have working-class backgrounds and they are deeply alienated from professional middle-class mores. But when they reject the insularity of elite discourse they claim a more supposedly authentic working-class politics. They draw up this image of their childhood; an image unsurprisingly of a world of strong industrial policy.



We hesitate to psychologize the mental process that crafts the worker as semblance. It could be a kind of academic survivor guilt, resentment, resignation or confusion. Regardless, this kind of reasoning has produced illusions that fail to understand the political situation. Even after decades of 'de-industrialization' and globalization, many on the left still believe that the industrial worker is the key to political success. As of now, industrial workers and agrarian workers combined, make up some 14% of the population in Anglo North America. Our despair would only grow when we discover that many in this sector are well paid and are homeowners. Some might have more to lose than their chains.

Why Not Fordism?

Fordism itself was only possible because of a nexus of historical factors that only existed for a brief thirty-years after World War II. The mass destruction of capital in Europe, and the rapid withering away of her empires left the United States as the capital of the 20th century. American capital made up over 50% of the global GDP. At the same time the USSR seemed like a success, as the bloc grew at a breakneck pace, seeming to overtake the capitalist powers in commodity production. Capitalism was in crisis.

The possibility of world communism and a developed labour movement, created a moment when the ruling class felt that they could lose all their power. But at the same time the post-war world was experiencing a period of rapid growth. This permitted capital to give labour a large degree of concessions. The immediate thirty years of post-war growth created the development of a relatively well paid industrial worker. Yet the nature of the concessions were not one-sided. The Fordist program required the integration of the trade unions into the state's regulatory aegis.

The epoch of Fordism is not limited to the hegemony of Keynesian economic policy, it came accompanied by positivist sociology. The development of the planned economy meant not only the regulation of capital, but also the regulation of labour. The post-war moment marked a shift in the thinking of the social worker as a helper of the destitute, into an administrator of the working-class family. Working people were expected to consume according to their needs. Part of the education of the working-class family was teaching wives to create household budgets. The shaping of the nuclear family was part of the design of industrial-labour relations. We can now trace many reified gender relations to this period. The New Left rightfully fought against the forms of social unfreedoms that emerged from the political regulation of the family. But the many forms of so-called sexual liberation were uncoupled from a critique of capital.

The gains of labour were fundamentally economic in nature. And the majority of the economic gains came at the cost of the political autonomy of the labour movement. Fordism was a corporatist model that subordinated the trade unions to state administration and business associations. This subordination was structural-political in nature. The underlying operation of domesticating the trade unions was a necessary precondition before the neoliberal trap was sprung on labour. Integration of the AFL-CIO was also necessary to purge the labour movement of the socialist and communist organizers, and these were often the most committed and effective people in organized labour. Over time the unions became increasingly more reliant on their pact with the state, rather than mobilizing their

membership. Now the most common way unions protect their members is by means of litigation. When the law becomes the primary means of protecting the worker in the shop, mobilization and strike become a less significant weapon of class struggle.

Under Fordism the trade unions developed large bureaucracies in order to administer industrial-labour regulations. This permanent strata of union staffers created a divide within organized unions that largely rendered the majority of workers passive in their own institutions. The union bureaucracy also became increasingly unresponsive to the demand of memberships as they fell into contradiction with the state program.

Yellow unions, defined as a company union, are strictly illegal in Canada and the United States. But the vast majority of unions collaborate with the state. This means that although the trade unions are not under the direct command of particular capitals (firms), they are under the command of capital-in-general via state policies. In this broader sense, the unions under the command of capital-in-general have become yellow, opposed to revolutionary red unions. When push comes to shove, the unions of the AFL-CIO and the CFL will always follow state mandates over the desire of its members.

In summary, Fordism was not the high-tide of labour, rather it was the beginning of the rip current that would drag the whole movement into the domination of the state's police apparatus. It was the necessary precondition for the neoliberalizing of the economy: which meant the liberation of capital and the suppression of labour. Fordism is a dead-end.

Working-class versus Proletariat

If we wish to return to mass politics we must move beyond the industrial worker. The 19th century industrial worker played such an outsized role in Marx's analysis of capital because capitalism was still relatively young. But even then, Marx understood that capital contained a general trend to augment the total organic composition of capital. It does so by reducing the variable capital of the mass of wage labours with the increase of the constant capital of machinery and superior logistics,

De-industrialization did not reduce manufacturing. In absolute terms the U.S. produces more than ever, and in Canada we have not experienced much change. However in terms of labour: the industrial worker has become an endangered species. In our previous essay titled *The Meaning of Imperialism*, we have commented on the nature of the mature markets in the nations of the imperial core and the production of a superfluous population. The shrinkage of work in the manufacturing sector has been replaced with work in the massive service sector.

Marx's magnum opus, *Capital: a Critique of Political Economy*, is often understood as the pivot from the earlier political-philosophical writings, to the mature economic writings. Within the pages of the three volumes of Capital, the proletariat is rarely mentioned. Here Marx identifies the two classes as the working-class, and capitalist, or capital. But this did not mark the vanishing of the proletariat in Marx's thinking. When the class struggle resumed in the form of the Paris Commune, the proletariat returned to the forefront.

The worker can be understood simply as someone who works for a wage in order to purchase their means of subsistence. But the modern proletariat is a significantly more philosophical object. The proletariat is a worker on the most basic level of analysis, but in relation to society the proletariat is the part of no part. They at once are the means of the productive foundations of the entirety of the social order, but at the same time they have no buy-in. The social destitution of the proletariat compels this class to overturn the existing state of things.

Marx states in his critique of Hegel's doctrine of the state.

"In the formulation of a class with radical chains, a class of civil society which is not a class of civil society, an estate which is the dissolution of all estates, a sphere which has a universal character by its universal suffering and claims no particular right because no particular wrong, but wrong generally, is perpetuated against it. [The proletariat] cannot emancipate itself without emancipating itself from all other spheres of society and thereby emancipating all other spheres of society, which, in a word, is the complete loss of man and hence can win itself only through the complete re-winning of man. This dissolution of society as a particular estate is the proletariat."

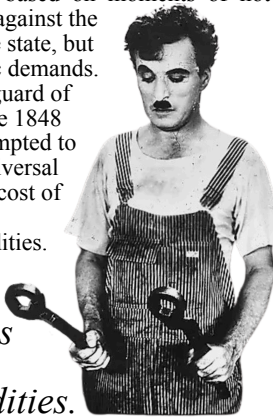
Marx's theory of the proletariat was based on moments of hot political struggle. The proletariat stood against the power of private property and the police state, but they did not formulate narrow economic demands. The proletariat quickly became the vanguard of bourgeois society. In the aftermath of the 1848 revolutions, only the working class attempted to uphold democracy, freedom, and the universal values of bourgeois society, even at the cost of their lives. This heroic character is not developed from manufacturing commodities.

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The vulgar reading of Capital grounds the importance of the industrial worker on their ability to reproduce society independently of capital. This critique is even leveled at service workers which are said to be the formation of a degeneration of the worker under late-stage capital.

This perspective is full of logical and empirical holes. Under capital, labour is socially dominated, an expression of this is the social division of labour. Independently, industrial labour can not reproduce society whether it is capitalist or socialist because it has been deprived of the intellectual skills to organize large industries. In the third volume of Capital, Marx spends time speaking of management of industrial labour as necessary work, but qualifying that this is only socially necessary because of the unfreedom of wage labour. We hope our readers hesitate to include most managerial workers in the ranks of the revolutionary proletariat.

The separation of intellectual and manual labour is not a hard and fast distinction but it is a real character of large-scale industry, within and between firms. Even when workers have highly developed intellectual skills in relation to the production process, these skills remain fragmentary without the coordination of capital and the private policing of management. This is why Marx understands management as the intrusion of politics in production.



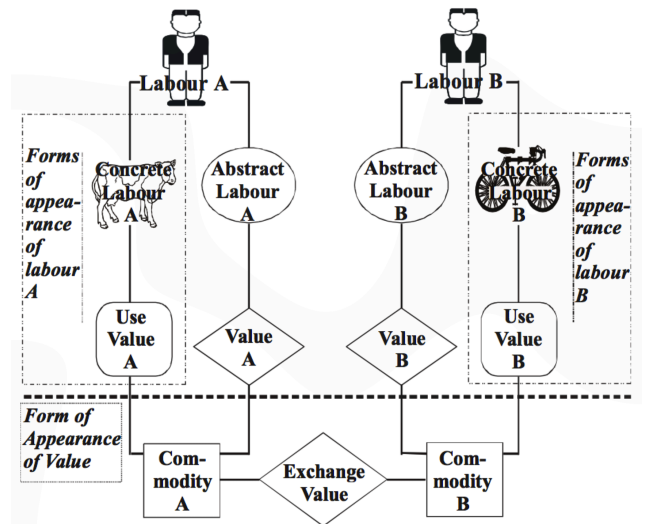
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The reason some claim that the service worker is less important than the industrial worker is found in Marx. In Capital Volume 1, in chapter 15 on *Machinery and Large-Scale Industry* Marx notes: “The extraordinary productiveness of modern industry, accompanied as it is by both a more extensive and a more intense exploitation of labour-power in all other spheres of production, allows of the unproductive employment of a larger and larger part of the working-class, and the consequent reproduction, on a constantly extending scale, of the ancient domestic slaves under the name of a servant class, including men-servants, women-servants, lackeys, etc....”

But before we leap to dismiss the service worker as unproductive labour, we should reflect on the distinction between the service worker of the 19th century and the service worker of the 21th century. The explosive growth of the number of domestic servants was a result of the overaccumulation of capital. In the phases of capital accumulation, surplus-value is expended in two distinct modes. The capitalist must reinvest part of that money to replace and expand production, and the remainder can be spent as revenue for the capitalist. Revenue is used as consumption which can not be valorized as profit, like a big yacht. Domestic workers are paid out of revenue, they raise the standard of the living of the wealthy as a luxury service, but they don't add value.

Clearly the modern service worker is nowhere close to this dynamic. A barista generates surplus value. Aside from offering a service, they also create commodities which may have low labour inputs at the point of purchase. Regardless, Starbucks still makes surplus value from the operation of their caf  s. The wages of the barista are paid from the fund of productive reinvestment, not revenue.

The fetishism of the industrial worker is also the failure to understand Marx's critique of political economy. Namely the distinction between concrete and abstract labour. Concrete labour generates use-values; goods and services. But capital only values what is abstract, it only values what is realized in the process of exchange. Commodities have dual natures; they contain use-value and exchange value as antinomies. The only thing that is common to the mass of diverse commodities is the abstract labour time contained in them. Labour-time is not more valuable because it is from sectors of manufacturing or construction, and it is not less valuable when it is some from extractive industries, service work and education. Value is entirely indifferent to the use-values that bear them.



The expansion of the modern service sector mirrors the expansion of social needs under capitalism. No other mode of production has produced so many new uses, innovations, and transformations of daily life. Automobiles, toasters, and washing machines were unnecessary before the Fordist era, but after these technologies became totally integrated into social life it became impossible to live without these innovations. Cities now are designed around cars. We need cellular providers in order to be functional members of modern society. Service sector workers are not merely a distended growth of an overaccumulation of capital, services are new expansions of the total outlay of capital

The real problem of the service sector is that it is labour intensive. While the service worker generates value, the sector is trapped in the stage of formal subsumption. Formally subsumed labour does not increase value relatively but it can only expand absolutely. So Starbucks will not be able to increase earnings radically by adding new machinery to the labour process. If they want to expand they must open a new caf  . The low growth of the service sector can be tolerated in conditions where advanced capitalist nations developed mature markets with high rent-seeking and low growth

The reason Marx started with the industrial worker is historically contingent. In the 19th century it appeared that the modern factory was creating a new form of social being amongst the industrial working-class. Due to the limits of telecommunications, transport speeds, and logistics, the industrial factory system developed as the highest concentration of capital within any spatial distribution. Many factories clustered in cities, and when they could not develop in cities, the industry produced factory towns around the point of production. This development produced the collective worker.

The collective worker came about from the crushing together of thousands of bodies in horrendous working conditions in poorly ventilated factories. The inhumanity and visibility of the social conditions created the spontaneous organization of mass workers' resistance within discrete sectors of industry. Between the 19th-early 20th century, industry integrated millions of working people under the rhythmic discipline of machinery and concentrated social organization of large-scale industry.

But it was an assumption that the full subsumption of labour would continue to create such geographical concentration. This trend has become both intensified and subverted by the increasing effectiveness of information technologies and logistics. Now workers from the global south and the imperial core can be interlinked into planetary spanning value-added supply chains.

A single firm can control the production process across multiple factories and offices as if the company's executive officers were in the same building. Of course, they are not actually in the embodied production and administration of goods and services. This limited hyper-specialized knowledge only intensifies the irrationality of the social power of private property over social production.

Capitalism under highly developed finance has also created international corporations as a norm for large scale production. These entities have no clear delineation between finance, merchant, and productive capital, these forms can only be distinguished by balance-sheets, reports, and inferences from government data tracking industry sectors and growth.

The social character of the collective worker has vanished under the new mass society. Due to 20th century advances in information and transportation technology, most people no longer live close to their place of work. Daily commutes mean that the workers do not experience a social life collectively outside of the workplace. People live in suburbs, and high rises. Atomization in society is only overcome by a facsimile of sociability in digital spaces. Social media has produced a hyper-mediated society which seemingly floats above the immediate needs of people.

The Primacy of the Political

We risk framing the current situation as if it were an interminable crisis. We are optimistic. But this optimism is grounded in the proletariat as a political force, not the working-class as an economic force. That being said, there is an imperceptible flow between the evolution of the economic struggle to the political struggle. Rosa Luxemburg studied this social development in her book *The Mass Strike, the Political Party and the Trade Unions*.

Luxemburg defended the mass strike from the economism of Bernstein, a leading political figure in the SPD—the socialist party of Germany at the time. Bernstein and his ilk, claimed that the mass strike can not serve as a means to revolution, because they lack a powerful enough political party, they will lack the monetary means to outlast the capitalist class, and they are not sufficiently organized to carry out such a coherent social political action. For Luxembourg, the Russian Revolution proves that all of these critiques are beside the point.

In her theory the mass strike is not a political action which can be issued from above from the party. Rather it is an objective historical force, which generates a revolutionary form of subjectivity which runs ahead of overdetermined political strategy.

A good trade union will attempt to give workers the best deal they can bargain for, and the strike is a means to an end. But a strike has a secondary benefit that the economicist view can not grasp. The strike—even one that fails its material objective—is always practical education for the worker. Few things reveal more about the unjust nature of class society than a failed strike, and nothing is a more concrete confirmation of the collective power of the working-classes than victory after a strike.

Currently this education process is undermined in Canada by the good faith bargaining laws and the process of collaborative bargaining. Such class collaborationism can only be a means of realising some degree of economic gain, but rarely straining against the constitution of class society. In this nation, the Rand formula has also added to the complacency of the current trade unions. Because Article 70.1 automatically adds all workers in a unionized shop to the union, many workers gain the objective advantages of unionization without the subjective benefits of creating organized labour.

Trade unions are good for workers. But not just any trade union is good for working-class politics. As outlined above, the legacy of Fordism has integrated most of the existing trade unions as corporate bodies of state power. Because of the large amount of the regulation and reliance on legal power required to run a legal union, these institutions began to accumulate large strata of bureaucracy. Organized workers in North America are largely alienated from their own organs of social power.

The subjective moment of the economic struggle is cut off from workers when vast parts of the collective bargaining process are automated by union bureaucracy and state regulation. When both Marx and Luxemburg argued for the self-emancipation of the working-class, this did not mean institutions that represented the working-class. This work of liberation required immediacy on the part of the masses if they were to experience the subjective education of the confrontation between labour and capital.

The final ends of the workers' movement must be the realization of the class rule of the proletariat over society. The term dictatorship of the proletariat reasonably creates apprehension. For many, dictatorship is understood as the opposite of democracy, and in the state-socialist projects of the 20th century, regimes that claimed Marxism also exercised power as a dictatorship over the proletariat and peasants. These regimes were perversions of the notion of the dictatorship of the proletariat.

Dictatorship and Democracy

The classical notions of dictatorship of the proletariat emerged from the Roman Republic. When the senate declared a state of emergency they elected a dictator from the citizenship at random. This citizen was given the executive authority of the two consuls and the senate for the preservation of the republic by all means. The American presidency could be understood best as the permanent institution of the dictatorship. And many nations with parliamentary structures—like Canada—have integrated the executive powers into the office of the prime minister.

Dictatorial powers have long been equated with sovereignty in Western jurisprudence. Most famously, Carl Schmitt defined the sovereign as “he who decides on the exception”. The sovereign exception is experienced by us in the declaration of a state of emergency. In Canada, we have the War Measures Act, and the Emergency Acts, these are dictatorial laws. They can abnegate normal laws and civil liberties if it is deemed a state of emergency. The Notwithstanding Clause is written into our constitution, so the federal and provincial governments can override elements of the Charter of rights and freedoms. The dictatorship, whether temporary or institutionalized, is intended to preserve the character of the republic.

We understand dictatorship and emergency powers as the illegal means modern society has upheld the legal order. Walter Benjamin, in his essay *On the Concept of History* stated:

“The tradition of the oppressed teaches us that the ‘emergency situation’ in which we live is the rule. We must arrive at a concept of history which corresponds to this. Then it will become clear that the task before us is the introduction of a real state of emergency...”

Benjamin attempted to warn the socialist of the early 20th century not to become complacent when regarding the tools of the capitalist masters. He understood that under capitalist rule, the state will continually suspend the rule of law when class society is in jeopardy. But the illegal character of bourgeois rule is continuously present in capitalist society in the form of the police. In Benjamin's essay *The Critique of Violence* he takes the police as a paradigmatic form of state violence directed at its own population. The police combined both the mythic law forming violence and the ongoing practical activity of law-preserving violence. Police powers are constituted as such, where its activities can incorporate a wide range of illegality.

This is Walter Benjamin on the police:

“... two forms of violence [law forming and law preserving] are

present in another institution of the modern state: the police. True, this is violence for legal ends (it includes the right of disposition), but with the simultaneous authority to decide these ends itself within wide limits (it includes the right of decree). The ignominy of such an authority-which is felt by few simply because its ordinances suffice only seldom, even for the crudest acts, but are therefore allowed to rampage all the more blindly in the most vulnerable areas and against thinkers, from whom the state is not protected by law lies in the fact that in this authority the separation of lawmaking and law-preserving violence is suspended. If the first is required to prove its worth in victory, the second is subject to the restriction that it may not set itself new ends. Police violence is emancipated from both conditions. It is lawmaking, because its characteristic function is not the promulgation of laws but the assertion of legal claims for any decree, and law-preserving, because it is at the disposal of these ends. The assertion that the ends of police violence are always identical or even connected to those of general law is entirely untrue. Rather, the ‘law’ of the police really marks the point at which the state, whether from impotence or because of the immanent connections within any legal system, can no longer guarantee through the legal system the empirical ends that it desires at any price to attain. Therefore, the police intervene ‘for security reasons’ in countless cases where no clear legal situation exists, when they are not merely, without the slightest relation to legal ends, accompanying the citizen as a brutal encumbrance through a life regulated by ordinances, or simply supervising him. Unlike law, which acknowledges in the ‘decision’ determined by place and time a metaphysical category that gives it a claim to critical evaluation, a consideration of the police institution encounters nothing essential at all. Its power is formless, like its nowhere-tangible, all-pervasive, ghostly presence in the life of civilized states. And though the police may, in particulars, appear the same everywhere, it cannot finally be denied that in absolute monarchy, where they represent the power of a ruler in which legislative and executive supremacy are united, their spirit is less devastating than in democracies, where their existence, elevated by no such relation, bears witness to the greatest conceivable degeneration of violence.”

The machinery of policing only emerged out of the 19th century and continually developed into the specialized forms of civil violence, the regulation of life, the raising of children, public health, and surveillance. Police officers are only the coercive means of this authoritarian system of the maintenance of life and the reproduction of labour at an acceptable rate of exploitation. Everything is the police, and thus marked by illegality.

The character of the dictatorship of capital, is the upholding of class society at all cost. While economic crises have not resulted in the declaration of the state of emergence in de jure, we have witnessed the state intervening in the market to maintain the status quo. The stabilization of the market also benefits the working-class, but working families experience these benefits passively. These benefits only preserve the most vital animal functions and social needs, they do not lift the working-class family into the realm of freedom.

The dictatorship of the proletariat hinges on the development of the subjective powers of the masses. Spontaneity is a power of the mind that can only be developed through the practical activity of class struggle. In reference to socialism as an absolute aim, economic struggles are significant only insofar as they are actions consciously carried out by working people.

The dictatorship of the proletariat, can not be understood as a dictatorship of a political party, as such was the case in the many distorted forms of “actually-existing socialism”. Rather this dictatorship is formed out of society itself, opposed to a state looming above society. Under capitalism, life was sacrificed to mammon, but the working-class must use its emergency powers to subordinate capital to living labour. This dictatorship must take the form that is more democratic than democracy itself.

Dictatorship is constitutive of democracy itself; monarchies do not claim such emergency powers. Democracy as it is presently, is understood as the consent of the governed, not the governed in whole or in part but the governed as the People. The People, or the Nation, are curious categories, because they are not empirical objects. Rather these are speculative categories, the People and Nation are stand-ins for the modern state, where everyone is equal under the law. This also means that democracy is the legitimacy of political intrusion into every part of social life. Under the bourgeois understanding of democracy, political life and political categories are more real than their concrete social basis. This is why all too often political equality—often in the form of constitutional law—is used in upholding the most heinous social injustice.

Democracy is the legitimacy of political intrusion into every part of social life.

Benjamin also identifies democracy with a rise of totalizing police powers and absolute violence. Only under democracy can representatives of the political People, have so much legitimate power over the real social life of humanity. Only modern life can render society as bare life, population, vectors and statistical norms. Even so-called “critical” social theories refer to humanity as mere bodies. The freedom of social life from politics must be the aim of the new dictatorship. Even as this moment of the struggle may take the form of social democracy, which would mean political power as emerging from mass society, not over it.

The proletariat becomes a political force when they develop the self recognition as the part of no part. This subjective character can not blossom under the condition of alienated social forms of administering the economic needs of the working classes. The active struggle against the domination of capital necessitates new forms of social institutions to coordinate working-class activity. When economic gains are seized by working class struggle, the development of subjective and objective powers occur in step with each other. And as a result, spontaneity becomes a historical necessity. When proletariat society can demonstrate an effective development and deployment of emergency powers, it meets the conditions of an absolute sovereign over the bourgeois forms of society.

We have only covered the political question in sketch. In a future publication this summer we will develop the historical understanding of the mass party and its relations to the working-class organs of society.



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