

Title: **Contemporary Capitalism, Uneven Development, and the Arc of Anti-Capitalism.**

Robert Latham – rlatham1@yorku.ca

Abstract:

Uneven and combined development remains crucial for understanding the continued widening and deepening of capitalism. However, the nature of the heterogeneous and uneven development of contemporary capitalism, especially since the 1970s, makes problematic the characterization of capitalist totality, as a coherent stage and as a singular, albeit uneven, combination. This complicates the successful pursuit of anti-capitalism, which now requires varied but interrelated responses at all scales and involving a range of approaches, from local community activism and non-capitalist alternatives to mass Leninist-inspired parties and an international socialist movement. Thus, a far more uneven anti-capitalism is appropriate; and a single, overarching anti-capitalist process such as Permanent Revolution may not be the only or way forward. This is not an argument for a post-Marxist horizontal heterogeneity; but rather an exploration of the reasons and possibilities for a dialectical anti-capitalism, where beneficial encounters occur across the arc of anti-capitalism, within which proletariat mobilization remains a central component. Such confluence offers one starting point for contending with the perennial duality of reform and revolution, manifest today in the either/or of an anti-capitalism of total revolution and an agonistic, fractional post-Marxist politics working to reduce oppression and hardship within capitalism.

Keywords: contemporary capitalism, anti-capitalism, uneven and combined development, Marxism, Trotsky, financialization, permanent revolution, totality.

I understand Left Augmentation to be, in part, a provocation to foster reflection on the boundaries of various Left positions, the nature of, and reasons for enlargement across and beyond them. It risks being about everything that has unfolded politically and ideologically, Left of Centre (i.e., Progressive Liberalism). The Left has many positions as does the most eminent component within it, Marxism. It can sometimes be difficult to distinguish additions and developments that augment existing trajectories of analysis and theory from marked departures that establish new trajectories. Autonomism clearly fits the latter but one might argue both ways about Rosa Luxemburg's wide-ranging contributions.

While disputes about trajectories and boundaries can be fruitful and augmentative - as Alvin Gouldner (1979) showed in his study of various conflicts in positions, such as the one between Marxism and Bakuninism, where the mutual influence has been typically overlooked - Left diversity is not just a function of various ideological and theoretical positions. It also reflects different practices, aims, and forms of organizing, including Leninist-inspired parties, Anarchist insurgencies, and local community efforts. This article engages the former in order to address the latter. I argue that in the context of contemporary capitalism a wide and augmenting range of different types of challenges to capitalism – beyond developments associated with intersectionality - can be seen as forming an arc of anti-capitalism that includes and contributes to Marxist anti-capitalism.

Since arguments involving augmentation typically rest on claims about how capitalism can be understood or has changed, I begin there. I consider the range of forces and factors we might take account of in an evaluation of the nature of contemporary capitalism. A key factor is the continued expansion of capitalism emphasized by Marx; its widening and deepening, which I

argue has important implications not only for exploitation but also for a variety of co-existing political and economic forms. I turn to uneven and combined development (UCD), arguing that the continued widening and deepening of capitalism – which nonetheless remains vulnerable to termination - make problematic the characterization of our capitalist totality, with its variety of forms, as a coherent stage and a singular, if uneven, combination. Thus, a far more dialectical and uneven anti-capitalism is appropriate; and a single, overarching anti-capitalist process such as Permanent Revolution may not be the only or way forward. This is not an argument for a post-Marxist horizontal heterogeneity; but rather an exploration of the reasons for and possibilities for an uneven anti-capitalism, within which proletariat mobilization remains a central component.

Denominating Contemporary Capitalism

A by now familiar question is whether there something about contemporary capitalism that makes it more difficult compared to previous periods to characterize in a total way, as a given system and structure? We can point to a particular phase, sub-phase, or configuration that might be different than previous ones; identify a trend, cluster of developments, or pattern; late, neoliberal, global, or financializing capitalism, neo- or post-Fordism. But how can we be confident that a development is predominant within our capitalist totality?

Claims about the nature of contemporary capitalism also entail explicit or implicit assumptions about transformation. Are we dealing with transformations in capitalism as a totality or only changes in the political and economic formations within an existing capitalist totality? Do we need to rely on a comprehensive framework like Mandel's or Arrighi's (1994) to avoid under- or over-estimating the significance of a development or formation or to know how even to

determine significance? It is hardly surprising Ernest Mandel felt compelled to publish *Long Waves of Capitalist Development* (1980) after *Late Capitalism* (1979).

Even with a comprehensive framework in hand the challenge of contending with the range of relevant factors and facets remains. Marx was clear in writings such as *The German Ideology* or *The Grundrisse* that there are various layers of complex totality in play in any understanding of a given historical stage. Hilferding, as well as Gramsci and Lenin, also emphasized the multiple layers in any understanding of a phase or stage, including economic, ideological, political, and social (McDonough 2007). This range has only broadened over the last century with the development of capitalism and the analysis of it. Included are transformations in: the institutional organization of capitalism; modes, relations, and forces (particularly technology) of production and the status and logics of competition, concentration, economic/financial power; classes and class struggle; imperialism and global capitalist system; the State and forms of state capitalism, public/private power, nationalism, borders, raciality, and citizenship; forms of culture and popular resistances; nature, (earth, flora, fauna and human bodies). One can also argue that a new facet has become consequential within capitalism as, for example, Autonomists have regarding immaterial labour. Lastly, central to any view of stages and transformations is the knotty topic of crisis, whether it is seen as endemic (Marx 1976, 763), pervasive (Anderson 1964) or endless (Foster and McChesney 2012).

There is one potential phase or (ultimate crisis) transition that overshadows these considerations: the end of capitalism, which is different than just collapse, where there is some possibility of its resurrection in another form or new phase or stage.¹ Regulationists typically (somewhat reminiscent of Eduard Bernstein) imply that capitalism can organize its institutional life in ways to ward off its demise. Some observers argue that this is defeatism, underestimating

and perhaps undermining agency (Dyer-Witheford 1999, 112-15). I think both perspectives underemphasize dialectics. Capitalism's end is always present even when it is successfully reproducing on stable terms (say in the 1950s). Forces for the existability of capitalism can be countered not only by organization around unjust and exploitative conditions but also by capitalist actions that take for granted and threaten that existence (e.g., the financial bubbles leading into 2008). The problem is the dialectic cuts both ways: a trajectory of termination and collapse – or a substantial challenge from the Left - can be opposed and negated by actions of rescue and reorganization. Nonetheless, as I will discuss below, there is no reason to assume some (bad) infinite to and fro, between one side and the other.

Finally, the significance of a phase, tendency, or transformation can vary based on what is at stake in its scope, depth, and impact. Scope bears on how much of capitalism and existence is influenced or drawn up into a development (from mode of production to ideological formation). It can entail the control of space (e.g., Luxemburg, Braudel, Harvey) and time (Hudis 2012). Depth bears on how deep into these realms it goes; how much changes and how much is subsumed. Impact refers to the degree to which system, domains, and planetary life overall is altered.

These are conventional dimensions. I would add one that is less so and central to the question of system characterization: coherence. Coherence means developments or formations are predominant and constitute the basis for denominating a particular phase or stage (sub- or otherwise) the way that Lenin was able to point to the monopoly-imperialist stage.²

Predominance could mean we are dealing with a highest, advanced layer in the context of a range of other forms, the way Marx (1973, 107-10) identified full-factory production as predominant and on top of a hierarchy of modes of production; or that we are dealing with a

multitudinous form that suffuses throughout the entire system with wide scope, depth, and impact, as in Harvey's (1989) flexible accumulation. Either way, coherence implies that contemporary capitalism can effectively be characterized as one type of system or another.

A Totalizing Capitalism?

A contradiction the Left faces around coherence is that if the nature of the capitalist system is discernible it can work in capitalism's as well as anti-capitalism's favour. When capitalism does not know how to go on, where conditions are such that existing structures and knowledge do not lend themselves readily to (re)organization it opens the way to what Lenin (1917) called "exceptional historical conjunctures," typically associated not just with acute crisis (e.g., great depressions) but with war (international and national) and revolution. These conjunctures have historically been transitory "moments." The question is, if contemporary capitalism is no longer discernible, overall, as a coherent totality (even as a highly flexible, variable one) does it make capitalism more vulnerable.

To start to address this question - recognizing that increased vulnerability means thinking here in theoretically speculative rather than prospective terms - it is helpful to indicate the starting point for analysis. Limiting discernibility, I suggest, is a function of the range of factors and facets discussed above, reflecting the expansion and development of capitalism, tied to rising unevenness - and therefore complexity and variability in time and space – dialectics, and even exploitation operating in this extensive context. That is, if capitalism has expanded so greatly into most every crevice of human and natural existence (as anticipated by Marx and many others since), then it means unevenness, dialectics, and exploitation is applicable across and within a far wider, deeper and potentially less coherent range of existence than ever before.

Whereas dialectic and unevenness (discussed below) are obvious elements - in that variety and multiple negations (and negations of negations) can proliferate dynamically across an expanding capitalism – exploitation is not. But it also proliferates with expansion. Putting arguments over the relationship between surplus value and immaterial labor aside (Camfield 2007) a key contribution of the Autonomists was to point to the exploitation throughout society and the “social factory” (households, consumption, etc.). With the primary form of exploitation involving labour power, Marx had considered other forms of exploitation (e.g., rent, food) calling it “secondary exploitation, which proceeds alongside the original exploitation that takes place directly within the production process itself” (1981, 745). After 150 years the extent, depth, and nature of secondary exploitation has changed, for example, around financialized, indebted lives (Lapavistas 2014, 136ff). Perhaps what we can label as tertiary and quaternary layers of exploitation includes not only nature and the deeper realms of human experience – now via social media and new forms of surveillance – but also ‘life itself’ via biotechnologies (Cooper 2011).

Inter-capitalist relations (not just between states) can also entail expanding forms of exploitation. Marx mentions the capitalist farmer being exploited by land owners or by urban manufacturers and where: “...the town everywhere and without exception exploited the countryside economically through its monopoly prices, its taxation system, its guilds, its direct commercial trickery and its usury” (1981, 937). This inter-capitalist exploitation keeps mushrooming via new capacities to manipulate or “game” markets, sectors, and state institutions, especially via sophisticated computerized algorithms and neo-colonial, predatory practices (Lewis 2015; and Perkins 2016)

The oft-noted 1970s-80s transition is especially relevant to discernibility and coherence. After the tumultuous 1930s and 1940s (war, depression, fascism) in dialectical fashion a new, relatively stable, postwar order was established and with it a period of capitalism anchored in international agreements (e.g., Bretton Woods), state regulation, labour bargains, U.S. hegemonic agency, and logics of productionism. Dialectically, stability fostered aggressiveness, manifest in war, imperialism, and neo-colonialism (e.g., Vietnam) that in turn were accompanied by related international financial imbalances (e.g, Eurodollars), stifling consumption cultures, violent inequalities and racisms; which then helped fuel popular political agency among youth, racial minorities, and colonized (neo and otherwise) dominated peoples. But popular agency was not the only negating agency opened up. Capital was able - famously and in its ever adaptable and flexible ways (Arrighi 1994, 3-7) – to exploit the crises and destabilizations to organize, once again, an expanded horizon of practice around finance (exploiting post-Bretton Woods exchange opportunities and logics of debt); variations on organizing production and distribution (e.g., off-shoring), recasting of globalism, further neo-colonial penetration in the global South, to name but a few examples.

An increasing range of relations were open to what I term fabrication to convey the combination of manipulation, invention, and construction. Building on Marx's (1981) fictitious capital (what could be more fabricative than fiction?) we can see fiction as describing the analogous status, fabrication the action. Fabrication impacts finance and credit as well as workforce governance, extraction, access to national spaces, uses of state power to, for example, set large contracts or beneficial regulations. Aspects and elements of such exploitation had existed across the past two centuries but the range and depth was now different. This way of looking at these changes is different than Robert Brenner's (2006), where focus is on overall

economic downturn and the increasing competition especially between the U.S., Europe, and Asia.

Although I am emphasizing instability, complexity, non-discernibility, it does not mean capitalism is “disorganized” (Lash and Urry 1987). This is not about the post-structuralization of capitalism, even if postmodern tendencies are symptomatic (Jameson 1991). Nor is it about the inability to know capitalism – or “economies” and “markets” - as Hayek and then Foucault claimed. The point is rather that the complex variability of capitalism is increasing as it develops through time in a fashion more dynamic, dialectical, and expansively exploitative than in the past. This, not disorganization, makes coherence and discernibility problematic. That is, it is increasingly less possible to determine and identify a settled form of capitalism – or predominant strain with it, as discussed below - with the proliferation of – *knowable* - sites, spaces, domains of potential dialectical negation coming from capitalism, including a negation also internal to it, anti-capitalism.

Does this warrant calling it a sub-phase of late or monopoly-imperial capitalism - moving beyond the evasive label, contemporary capitalism, to something like total capitalism? I would answer provisionally yes, but in the spirit of Mandel, who said of the term late capitalism, “what is really important is not to name, but to explain the historical development that has occurred in our age” (1979, 10-11). Thus, the designation, total capitalism at best can serve as a placeholder, indicating contemporary capitalism is different compared to the past (rather than an assertion of coherence) – with “total” referring – parallel to the designation, “uneven” - to a process (totalization) not an outcome (which dialectics suggests is impossible) and indicating an inclusive indeterminacy. What is different is not just the widening variableness of modes of production or organizations of capitalist power that co-exist, whether it is imperialism,

monopoly, factory production, neoliberalism, or flexible accumulation, but the inappropriateness of even settling – in the current moment - on variability as an overarching descriptor (where one risks even turning this inappropriateness into an overarching logic).

Relevance of Uneven and Combined Development

Uneven and combined development (UCD) offers the most apt window to begin to frame so-called total capitalism especially because it starts from the assumption of complexity, including not only the totality of various types of development, conditions, and forms but their interaction across space and time.³ In that interaction lie possibilities for various amalgams and alliances at varied spatial and temporal scales, conflicts, contradictions and roadblocks, setbacks, leaps, and ruptures, which for Trotsky are on the way to international proletariat struggle and revolution.

The value of UCD for analyzing total capitalism starts with its ontology. Trotsky's notebooks revealed that he viewed UCD as part of a capitalist totality shaped and populated by contradiction, dialectics, negations, negations of negations, all of which composed a "differentiated unity" (1986, 77-97). UCD implies capitalism may not cohere into a single predominant form of production, power, or capitalist organization. Viewed in our contemporary context we have differences not just between advanced and non-advanced modes of production but differences across the advanced forms and modes and even with the specific advanced forms, including what we might identify as Fordist and neo- or post-Fordist forms. Financial capitalism can have varying degrees of impact on national economies, industries, and structures of exchange. All of this is further complicated by the great variety of ideological, political, and institutional forms that reflect materialist modes and relations in uneven and sometimes indirect ways as suggested not just by Marx but Engels (1890).

But UCD suggests that capitalist totality forms a singular combination - the possibility of Permanent Revolution implies a chartable logic of radical transformation based on a discernable singular combination of capitalist development, however uneven. I suggest this is problematic for a contemporary capitalism that has expanded well beyond Trotsky's time. Instead, the various uneven forms can be seen more accurately as concurrent – occurring or existing simultaneously or side by side either synchronically or diachronically. This does not jettison the “combinedness” or to use Althusser's term the “combinatory”⁴ nature of the capitalist totality, but only the sense that it coheres into a singularity. Concurrence does not mean horizontalism, because some forms will, in varying contexts, spaces, timeframes, be very powerful. Or, as Marx argued, there can be predominant forms in one country but not another; or one region and so on. Importantly, concurrence does not assume there is only one concurrent condition or moment of an uneven and differentiated totality. Concurrence takes different forms as capitalism unfolds thru time consistent with the interactivity of UCD.

Modern capitalism, of course, was always complex and differentiated, but now more so, to the point of altering the coherence of contemporary capitalism. Marx, when discussing political states, interestingly observed:

This does not prevent the same economic basis – the same in its major conditions - from displaying endless variations and gradations in its appearance, as the result of innumerable different empirical circumstances, natural conditions, racial relations, historical influences acting from outside, etc, and these can only be understood by analysing these empirically given conditions (1981, 927).

Unsettlement and Governance

The ways that this capitalism has unsettled, for example, the world of work has been documented and analyzed well by a range of thinkers.⁵ A key issue here is unsettlement in capitalist practice as it bears on inter-capitalist and state-capital relations and governance more generally (for which discernibility and coherence are obviously relevant). The transformation of the 1970s onward was not orchestrated from the heights of capitalist power but rather, as described above, emerged with the dialectical breaking of the preceding, more stable system. The door was open in various realms of exploitation for expansive fabrication. The developing capitalist totality - with its multiple trends, contra-pressures, contradictions (including “conservation” and eco-degradation, high and low wages, job gains and losses, casualization of work, soaring debt, and diminishing consumption) - are exploitable especially by monopoly corporations best able to take advantage in domains such as state contracts and privatization (in part associated with neoliberalism); corporate takeovers and consolidations; financial manipulation (including tax inversions and stock buybacks); new forms of corporate propaganda and public opinion manipulation especially via digital technologies and social media (e.g., green and pink washing).

Exploitation is one thing, the ability to govern capitalism, ultimately to prevent its termination, another. Marx of course saw ebbs and flows in these capabilities in his own time.⁶ The monopoly-imperialism complex described by Lenin onward signaled a shift toward the establishment of new methods and forms of governance at the international not just the domestic scale. That concepts like global governance arose with the demise of Bretton Woods and the rise of neoliberalism is no coincidence, as it was a form that did its best to contain and limit political claims and focus on techniques of system management, opening space and options at various geoscales and in various political and economic institutional contexts (states, trade agreements,

markets etc.) for corporate power and access, privatization, anti-unionism, and the emptying of social welfare (Latham 1999) - options and spaces obviously required for fabrication.

More generally, it is not in the interest of capital to develop any total framing but rather rely on partial concepts and theories – first observed by Marx regarding capitalism’s many separations - such as those associated with neoliberalism (e.g., Hayek and James Buchanan) or with what we come to know as Keynesianism; both of which are consistent with the global governance frame. Dialectically across the century, it has been Marxism and labour unrest that has helped make capitalism self-reflexive to any degree as evidenced, for example, in the reactivity of the Mont Pelerin Society or the policies of “enlightened” capitalism (be it Bismarck or Ford). Hayek’s unknowable market-world is not a condition for but rather a symptom of an evasion of knowledge taking form in practice, for example, in the rejection of links between extraction and biosphere damage or in dismissal of, for example, most any macro-economic theory that does not conform to new classicism.

As capitalism expands what is generated is not system-level knowledge but new partial, specialized – and highly problematic (MacKenzie 2008) - expertise on topics from algorithms, credit instruments, and big data, to automation and new types of temporary labour management - matching the proliferating contradictions (e.g., autonomous vehicles versus the entire automotive complex) and financial fabrication via, for example, tactics for repositioning financial obligations (from Quantitative Easing in the US to Expanded Asset Purchase Programmes in Europe).

Increasingly the phrase “unchartered territory” is being articulated to describe the current fabricative, non-cohering context by capitalist functionaries such as Holger Schmieding, chief economist at Berenberg Bank in London (Christie and Ruhe 2013). But the label “unchartered”

risks confusion and even playing into Hayekian or Foucauldian claims about the severe limits to system-level knowledge. Fabrication, like non-coherence, is anchored in the vast array of existing conditions (e.g., prices, contracts, conventions, materialities) and is not *de novo*. Its force, like all creation, is anchored in what is already known; and much is known. For example, tactics such as massive debt and stock market purchases by central banks, sustained near-zero interest rates, and derivative contracting suggests fabrication and negation are increasingly contained within the trajectory and path-dependence of already established forms (taking shape for instance in new asset purchase programs). This tendency is further exacerbated by recent trends in sociodigitization (Latham and Sassen 2005): the drawing up and schematization of facets of social, economic, and political life in digital form, including logics of social organization, interaction, (social and institutional), circulation, exchange, and space. The uneven expansion of capitalism simultaneous with increasingly limited, auto-referential, and closed reflexivity poses a question: if capitalist knowledge is narrowing and anchored in a non-cohering totality does this set increasing limits to fabrication's effectiveness, opening the way for not knowing how to go on to ensure the existence of capitalism?

Some have argued the various machinations and coping policies I am associating with fabrication, especially seen since 2008, are symptoms of crisis and a potential sign of a pending terminal condition (Balakrishnan 2009). But complicated arrangements (from debt schemes to derivatives) are easily seen as keeping an increasingly complex, overstretched system going that would otherwise face further and deeper financial crisis; and the more fragile the system becomes, the more aggressive the action to sustain it (as we might see, coming out of a new crisis, some sort of post-Keynesian “reset”).

Trotsky reflected on these logics, building on Marx's ideas about dialectics and how capitalism produces its own conditions of limit and conflict such as class conflict, proletariat revolution, as well as the possibilities of going on:

Everything flows, but not outside [its] banks. The world is not “fluid,” there are changes in it, the crystallization of durable (congealed) elements, although indeed not “eternal” ones. Then life creates its own banks for itself in order later to wish them away (1986, 84).

How might we reconsider this in relation to the increasingly dense and extensive but also closed capitalist system considered here? Does the failure of capitalism as a sustainable system become more likely because of the narrowing capacity of its knowhow and practice - paradoxically, as a result of its success thriving in an indiscernible and incoherent context? While it might be able to absorb (neo-Bernstein-like) crisis, permanent or otherwise, is this capitalism as it progresses increasing less able to risk undergoing a truly systemic one?

It is helpful to not lose sight of UCD and capitalist totality. While in the US-Europe-Asia-centred financial realm the double movement of fabrication and closure unfolds, there is a wider-world of industrial production and technological innovation of regional, national, and local capitals, and small enterprise across the globe (Dicken 2015). Situated in this wider, uneven context Trotsky's banks and limits are part of a differentiated and contradictory set of tendencies, with, for example, global liberalization continuing to develop alongside forms of neo-protectionism. In this wider context a deep, destabilizing crisis in the global North may manifest in the global South differently. We still need a great deal more study to discern how exploitation, dialectic, fabrication, and knowledge processes are changing across these spaces

and domains and with what potential impact on the prospects for an existential crisis of capitalism (Amin 2013).

Anti-Capitalism

These questions indicate how complicated any analysis of termination is and anti-capitalism further complicates matters. For Marx the assertion that capitalism can come to an end through some internally generated process of negation is quixotic. Anti-capitalist movements are essential because such momentous change requires, as Marx emphasized, a collective negating force and a non-capitalist frame to subsume a struggling capitalism.

UCD, as mentioned above, is especially relevant in the current context regarding anti-capitalist formations, with its associated Permanent Revolution (PR) pointing to potential trans-local, -national, and -temporal working class (and other oppressed group) alliances and revolutionary processes. PR holds out the prospect that with socialism established on an international basis it could overcome the persistent capitalist dialectic (otherwise socialist revolution itself remains forever vulnerable to negation). Along the way, of course, struggle and negation would continue as the politics of organizing and achieving socialism unfolded.

Note the logic here: UCD is a multiplicity – not just regarding capitalism but also anti-capitalism. Such anti-capitalist multiplicity is to funnel through time and space into a singularity, as the process of PR builds and ultimately engulfs capitalism and its socio-political forms. But what if we forego the assumption of a pathway to singularity - emphasizing the ways that anti-capitalism remains subject to dialectic and its own internal, uneven and combined development? If we acknowledge that the singularity process can be disrupted, fragmented, destabilized, countered, and contested (even via conflict within the Left) – all of which is

consistent with dialectical negation – then we entertain the prospect of a much more multitudinous approach to anti-capitalism, where movements and organization will be open to revision and re-formation through time (Latham 2016); which remains consistent with a part of Trotsky's thinking about changes in socialist strategies stemming from specific socio-political conditions and interactions across time and space.

Relevant here is Marx's famous reluctance to lay out a vision of the future which would have required adopting a programmatic stance toward socialism and his diversion away from the logics of stagism - as seen in his endorsement of Russian rural communes late in his career. PR jettisoned stagism altogether. Dialectical and uneven anti-capitalism, I contend, offers another step away from stagism, one that is prompted by the dynamics of total capitalism depicted above. This concurrent context does not appear to yield, at this time, possibilities for channeling into the sort of singular anti-capitalism trajectory integral to PR. Whereas Trotsky could declare that "all social relations undergo transformation... [s]ociety keeps on changing its skin... [e]ach stage of transformation stems directly from the preceding" (2010, 143), I would simply add that such transformations not only unfold now through time, diachronically, but also synchronically, within a given space and moment that we can take to be our contemporary capitalist totality. These contemporaneous or concurrent dynamics signal that anti-capitalism will have to rely on a diverse range of organizational forms and practices and, perhaps as never before, on the inventive agency of the exploited who must deal with the complexity of forces and conditions. Their efforts may depend on ideas about how to resist that exceed the knowledge banks of both capitalists and anti-capitalists.

I am not making a claim that large-scale, class-wide mobilization and revolution - relying especially on a Leninist-inspired party seeking to capture state power - is no longer relevant. But

rather to reinforce that it is no longer to the advantage of even militant anti-capitalism to view the classic Leninist-inspired party as the only meaningful and viable form. Much obviously depends on what I mean by anti-capitalism. The two main ways to understand this term is either as a rubric for positions and movements that seek to: contest and change what capitalism does (corporate and state practices and policies); or negate capitalism. The focus here is on the latter. But as intimated above, not all forms of a negation are totalistic as sought by revolution socialism. Negation can be partial and limited in: scope, say along geo-spatial lines (e.g., the Commune's subsection of Paris); or depth (e.g., relatively limited radical worker cooperatives).

What about scale-up? PR offers ideas about how to scale-up across various sites, times, and movements. One scaling tactic is the united front. But united fronts, permanently revolutionary or otherwise, do not just come about on their own. Seeking unity across the arc of anti-capitalism makes sense, but on what terms? In the absence of an "exceptional historical conjuncture" one can think the arc of anti-capitalism through Trotsky and Marx's "differentiated unity" and explore, critically, the variety of anti-capitalisms, the arguments for them, and the visions of where they are expected go, leading away from capitalism and toward alternative logics of social organization. This also implies that Marxism ought to return to the critical engagement with non-Marxist thought that Marx himself was committed to as seen in his close study of bourgeois economists like Ricardo. Where would we be if Marx only engaged Fourier, Owen, and Saint-Simon?

Rather than see this engagement as a diversion from the true path of socialist revolution, we can see it as a potential opening towards a politics of anti-capitalism, where non-socialist orientations are not dismissed but pressed - beyond limited united front tactics - into a struggle

over the question of how far – and where - to go in negating capitalism; and to foster a widening and deepening scope of negation (from housing, food, health care, education, to nature and the material alteration of our world). This politics can extend to protest and reform movements that are Left-oriented but not anti-capitalist. Campaigns to raise the minimum wage and taxes on the wealthy, expand welfare transfers, build public housing, or increase community-based renewable energy, can be viewed as potential trajectories of anti-capitalism. How do we move from fights for minimum wage increases to the abolition of all wage labour exploitation – re-examining the history of such efforts in 1970s Italy? What is needed is a commitment from anti-capitalists to debate and struggle not over the limited nature of reform per se but over the substantial and difficult questions that are located in that in-between space of transition from reform to anti-capitalism.

These sorts of debates need not become a version of post-Marxism associated with movements of movements or contingent political subjectivities. To prevent this, the starting point of discussion should be the deepening of analysis of issues such as labour power and migration, moving in the direction of anti-capitalist logics (e.g., the true emancipation of the working class and the destruction of monopoly and imperialist power), rather than just finding common ground for protest, contestation, and electability. But instead of presupposing a certain socialist vision, anti-capitalists might treat non-capitalist modes of social organization as a site of debate and contestation. Marx engaged in that struggle (e.g., with Lassalle and Bakunin) which formed a part of the dialectical unfolding of capitalism and its negation. Marxists and those committed to Leninist style parties should be at the centre of this augmentation debate not to its side.

Conclusion

A passage attributable directly to Marx (1976, 49) states: “Communism for us is not a state of affairs which is to be established, an ideal to which reality [will] have to adjust itself. We call communism the real movement which abolishes the present state of things. The conditions of this movement result from the now existing premise.” If our premise is the capitalism described above, then Marx’s formulation, although not intended so, aptly captures the spirit of a dynamic arc of anti-capitalism. Although not all efforts across that arc might seek the supersession of capitalism *in toto*, they, in their partiality, when taken together and in conjunction with newly engaging revolutionary socialist mass parties, hold out the prospect - even unwittingly - of a nonsingular confluence of negations. Such confluence offers one starting point for contending with the perennial duality of reform and revolution, manifest today in the either/or of an anti-capitalism of total revolution and an agonistic, fractional post-Marxist politics working to reduce oppression and hardship within capitalism.

1 Wallerstein (1998) has argued anew about endism.

2 Mandel (1979, 10) claimed, for example, “late capitalism” was not a new stage but just a development of monopoly-imperialism.

3 A review of UCD is not possible here. An excellent place to start exploring it is Rosenberg (2013).

4 Althusser’s (2016) notion of combinatory and “structure in dominance” lies between what I am arguing for in concurrence and the more well-established approaches advocating a single cohering form at the apex of capitalist totality.

5 See, for example, Munck (2013)

6 An ebb is analyzed, for example, around Bonapartism (Marx 1977).

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