

TOWARDS A NEW COMMUNISM

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Abstract

In this short essay, I aim to reconceptualize communism by reinterpreting the framework of capitalism. Building upon this foundation, I delve into various Marxist concepts, including the commodity, the global capitalist system, the bourgeois state and its ideology, the notion of the class struggle, the broader universal struggle, the production of essential needs, the negation of both the proletariat and the bourgeoisie, the role of the communist party, the idea of withering away of the state, the significance of crisis, and the core principles that define communist politics. While brief in length, I hope that its brevity will allow it to have a profound impact, leading us to recognize that the pursuit of communism must commence without delay.

Introduction

There has been a notable resurgence of interest in Marx¹ and Leftist theory on a global scale since the 2008 economic crisis, the growing popularity of the communist

¹ Marcello Musto, preface to *The Marx Revival*, ed. Marcello Musto (Cambridge: University Printing House, 2020), xvii.

philosopher Slavoj Zizek,² and the proliferation of Leftist media through various social media platforms during the peak of the pandemic.³ One significant event that led to the revival of Leftist theory, at least in North America, is the emergence of the Left presidential candidate Bernie Sanders⁴ and the exponential expansion of membership experience by the Democratic Socialists of America.⁵ Bernie Sanders and other Left-wing politicians' campaigns popularized socialist politics, bringing it into the mainstream of political thought and action.⁶

However, a critical aspect of this theory revolves around the Left's inability to become a real alternative to capitalism.⁷ What I mean by real is for the Left to impact the everyday lives of the proletariat substantially, both the employed and the unemployed, and to effect transformative changes that benefit the overwhelming majority of society. To truly present itself as an alternative to capitalism, communism must mobilize a politics of 'puncture'-- creating ruptures within the capitalist structure. It is essential for communism to concretely demonstrate its irreconcilable divergence from capitalism.

² Chris Fleming, "Why did Slavoj Zizek Become So Popular?" The Review, The Chronicle of Higher Education, March 27, 2023, https://www.chronicle.com/article/why-did-slavoj-zizek-become-so-popular?bc_nonce=6ykd5dd5yflw8u1nefrj1g&cid=reg_wall_signup.

³ David Bush, "Social Media and the Left," Analysis, Spring, August 18, 2020, <https://springmag.ca/social-media-and-the-left>.

⁴ Isaac Chotiner, "How Socialist is Bernie Sanders?," Q. & A., The New Yorker, March 2, 2020, <https://www.newyorker.com/news/q-and-a/how-socialist-is-bernie-sanders>.

⁵ Joseph M. Schwartz, "A History of Democratic Socialists of America 1971-2017: Bringing Socialism from the Margins to the Mainstream," July 2017, <https://www.dsasa.org/about-us/history/>.

⁶ Pankaj Mishra, "The Rise of the Left was the Real Story of 2022," Business, The Washington Post, December 29, 2022, https://www.washingtonpost.com/business/the-rise-of-the-left-was-the-real-story-of-2022/2022/12/28/b2c75266-86f2-11ed-b5ac-411280b122ef_story.html.

⁷ Ashley Frawley, "The Future and How to Get There: A Leftist Critique of the Modern Left," accessed April 18, 2023, <https://www.cultureontheoffensive.com/leftist-critique-of-the-left/>.

Nevertheless, when we approach communism as an analytical framework, we confront the question of how it conceptualizes capitalism. Marx, without a doubt, identified bourgeois private property as the fundamental issue.⁸ His proposed remedy involved the proletarian state acquiring and transforming this private property into public property.⁹ However, historical evidence shows that this solution did not dismantle capitalism; instead, it reinvented it in a different manner.¹⁰ This distinct form is known as state capitalism or what the Left refers to as socialism. A compelling example of this can be observed in China, where a blend of state and private ownership of capital coexists alongside an authoritarian bureaucracy that is entirely controlled by the Communist Party.¹¹

However, state intervention and ownership are still vital to the solution. No institution other than the state has the authority to promulgate its interests as the interests of the entire populace. It is imperative for communism to embrace transparency regarding its objectives and intentions, as it aims to acquire political power and present its assertions as those representing the collective whole. It is a must to provide a clear explanation of its anti-capitalist stance. To achieve this, it becomes essential to reconceptualize the very essence of capitalism. In a word, there is a need to reinterpret capitalism.

Metaphysical Subtlety and Theological Nicety

⁸ Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *Manifesto of the Communist Party: A Modern Edition* (London: Verso, 2016), 33.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 47-50.

¹⁰ Immanuel Wallerstein, *Historical Capitalism* (London: Verso, 1983), 87.

¹¹ Slavoj Žižek, *Heaven in Disorder* (New York and London: OR Books, 2021), 212.

The aforementioned phrase encapsulates Marx's portrayal of the commodity form in Volume 1 of *Capital*.¹² I posit that the commodification of all aspects of life distinguishes capitalism from previous systems, forming the very essence of capitalism itself. However, what exactly constitutes a commodity? The subtleties and niceties could not exactly aid us, but they provide valuable clues to comprehend the dominant relationship of exchange value to use value.¹³ Use values are subservient to the interests of exchange value. That is why commodities possess addictive qualities, offering fleeting gratification, fostering an appetite for related commodities, and fundamentally being subjected to the dynamics of buying and selling. Capitalism, this self-perpetuating monstrosity, devours everything in its path. It operates as an all-encompassing system that commodifies every facet of existence.

World Capitalist System

When we assert that the world constitutes a global capitalist system, it is not a mere metaphorical statement; it represents a political and economic totality. The classification of certain regions as “developed” or “backward” becomes irrelevant in this context. Paradoxically, this very unevenness provides the necessary conditions for the existence and evolution of capitalism. A highly developed capitalist nation necessitates the co-existence of numerous less-developed capitalist countries to maintain its relative status as highly developed. Similarly, a presently less-developed capitalist nation can

¹² Karl Marx, *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy*, Vol.1, trans. Ben Fowkes (Middlesex, England: Penguin Books in association with New Left Review: Middlesex, England, 1976), 163.

¹³ Ibid, 125-128.

only aspire to become highly developed by perpetuating the backwardness of other nations and impeding the progress of already-developed countries.¹⁴

The world capitalist system is brimming with commodities. Whether they are created and disseminated, purchased and traded, commodities are the outcomes of this system. Instances of non-commodities are rare exemptions. The capitalist class, predominantly, possesses the majority of the means of production and sustenance. It is the bourgeoisie's role to guarantee the production and distribution of commodities, thereby generating profit and amassing capital.

The proletariat represents the class devoid of property, lacking ownership of any capital. It not only comprises those engaged in the process of capitalist accumulation but also those who do not directly participate in the production of surplus value. This implies that, apart from the bourgeoisie, the owners of capital, the entirety of humanity is essentially part of the proletariat.¹⁵ Consequently, the world is fundamentally divided between these two factions, even though the extent of their inherent animosity towards one another may be doubtful. The global capitalist economy, meanwhile, produces and distributes commodities, establishing the conditions that shape these capitalist subjects: the bourgeoisie and the proletariat.¹⁶

The Dictatorship of the Bourgeoisie

¹⁴ GWF Hegel, Hegel: The Phenomenology of Spirit, trans. with intro. and commentary Michael Inwood (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), ¶ 34, 17.

¹⁵ Ibid, ¶ 96, 44.

¹⁶ Ibid, ¶ 64, 29.

The state does not come pre-assembled as machinery designed exclusively for the bourgeoisie. It is the outcome of the bourgeois revolution, which brought about transformative conditions that shifted the state from its role as a protector of feudal blood privilege to a state dominated by monetary capital.¹⁷ Once the bourgeoisie assumed power, they embarked on brutal colonization of other nations to establish a capitalist system aligned with their specific capitalist interests as well as capitalism as a whole.

A capitalist state primarily functions to safeguard and advance capitalist private property, capitalist production, and the distribution of commodities. However, the capitalist state itself partakes in capitalist pursuits across different spheres. In this context, state officials can generate “profit” by virtue of their roles as functionaries. Political corruption and illicit practices are often normalized within the system. These activities serve as tangible manifestations of the extensive commodification process within the capitalist state.

Despite the far-reaching commodification, the fundamental universality of the state remains unaltered. Each bourgeois state proclaims its alignment with the common welfare. It is evident that no government openly admits to serving only the interests of a select few. Moreover, in practice, many state actions do benefit a significant portion of the population in immediate terms, while remaining compatible with the capitalist system. It is precisely within this claim of universality that communist politics must assert its presence and make its mark.

¹⁷ Ibid, ¶ 18, 11.

Missing Ideology

The daily routines of life primarily revolve around consumption, work, job searching, inflation, and being bombarded with news about crime, corruption scandals, austerity measures, and other disheartening aspects of capitalist existence. This relentless cycle tends to desensitize the capitalist subject, particularly the proletariat. The proletariat experiences mixed emotions regarding their subjectivity. On one hand, they may silently accept their role as capitalist subjects, yet simultaneously lament their circumstances, while others go beyond mere complaints. Some seek solace and distraction through binge-watching, social media, and other forms of entertainment, while others dedicate their lives to work. Although these actions initially seem to evade conflict, they gradually evolve into a yearning for a life free from the command of capitalism. The challenge lies in transforming this yearning into a tangible reality, as it remains an elusive dream. The global prevalence of capitalist ideology is paradoxically experienced as an absence. Within capitalism, the commodification of life itself relentlessly intensifies day by day. It is within this continuous intensification of life's commodification that the absence is deeply felt. The absence can be confronted by addressing the institution that upholds and perpetuates this intensified commodification—the state.¹⁸ Currently, there exists no communist politics capable of challenging the hegemony of capitalism within this institution.

In conclusion, the pervasive presence of the commodity form in the economy, encompassing both the proletariat and the bourgeoisie, the prevalence of state corruption, and the overwhelming influence of capitalist ideology in our daily lives all

¹⁸ Ibid, ¶ 19, 11.

exemplify the profound commodification inherent in capitalism. As a result, the process of commodification and the existence of commodities themselves constitute the very essence and nature of capitalism. Based on this reimagining of capitalism, it becomes necessary to reconsider the essence of communism. One way to embark on this journey is by revisiting and reevaluating the concept of class struggle.

Revolutionizing the idea of class struggle

History encompasses more than just a narrative of class struggles.¹⁹ It is equally defined by periods of cooperation and peaceful coexistence among classes. The persistent prevalence of capitalism serves as evidence that history predominantly consists of class cooperation, with only sporadic moments of actual class conflicts. Furthermore, the majority of these instances of class struggle fail to challenge the very structure that upholds their existence, namely capitalism itself. Instead, they primarily strive to enhance their circumstances within the confines of the capitalist system.

Whenever a class successfully brings about a transformation in the existing system, the leading class of that revolt undergoes a fundamental change and ceases to be what it was before. Revolutionary struggles are revolutionary even in their immediacy.²⁰ If they fail to do so, they merely result in reforming or enhancing the current system. The struggle must evolve into a clash between two distinct and opposing systems. This conflict should be waged between communism and capitalism.

¹⁹ Marx and Engels, *The Communist Manifesto*, 3.

²⁰ Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *The Phenomenology of Spirit*, ed. and trans. Terry Pinkard (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), ¶ 21, 14.

Communism is a 'classless' struggle.

Given that no class within capitalism possesses an inherent revolutionary character, it follows that communism does not align with the interests of any class confined within the limits of capitalism. Communism represents a fight for the emancipation of humanity from capitalism and, as such, it is a project that transcends class boundaries and aims for universal liberation.²¹ Communism works to transform individuals, whether they are proletarians or even members of the bourgeoisie, into advocates of communism. However, it is important to bear in mind that the success of the communist emancipatory project hinges on its ability to garner the support of the vast majority of the population, specifically the proletariat.

Production of Needs

As previously stated, the essence of capitalism lies in the commodity form and its process of commodification. To align with its spirit, communism must manifest itself in material form. Communism represents the transformative process of turning commodities into genuine needs. The concept of a need stands in direct opposition to that of a commodity. A need is sustainable, provides a longer-lasting sense of satisfaction, and aims to eliminate the pursuit of profit. Over time, it ceases to be bought and sold and becomes free. It is important to note that the proletariat exists as a living commodity solely because it is bought and sold. However, to break free from this state of enslavement, the proletariat must transcend its status and no longer be classified as such.

²¹ Hegel, *The Phenomenology*, trans. Inwood, ¶26, 55.

As I reflect on the matter at hand, I am inclined to believe that there currently does not exist a communist process that strives to negate the proletariat and the bourgeoisie while simultaneously progressing toward communism. In the context of a communist revolution within capitalism, both the proletariat and some members of the bourgeoisie continue to embody their fundamental roles within the capitalist framework. However, it is important to acknowledge that they are simultaneously undergoing a transformative process, gradually freeing themselves of their class interests within the confines of capitalism, as the universalist communist process is already underway.

Negation of the Proletariat

The proletariat, in and of itself, does not possess inherent revolutionary qualities. As long as this class continues to exist, capitalism will endure. However, the proletariat has the potential to negate its own existence, both theoretically and organizationally, by embracing the ideology and organization of communism. To truly become a revolutionary force, proletarian individuals must critically examine the conditions that shape their subjectivity and question the underlying structures that define their identity. In essence, they must challenge the authoritative figures that dictate who they are, asking the question: "Why am I what you are saying that I am."²² This process entails a non-acceptance of the proletarian identity and effectively de-proletarianizes oneself. Consequently, the communist process becomes an immediate interest for the proletariat on a deeper level. The communist revolution strives to negate the proletariat by transforming it into a universal class, and by nurturing a collective consciousness of

²² Slavoj Žižek, "The Difference between Hysteria and Perversion," *The Radical Revolution*, May 15, 2021, video, 4:19 to 4:56, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AgW9g8J8-Eg&t=295>.

communism. Within the realm of politics, this process involves a significant reduction in working hours through the utilization of available labor force and advanced technologies. By diminishing the amount of time spent in labor, the proletariat experiences a profound de-commodification. This process of de-commodification and the subsequent negation of the proletariat constitutes a communist-led endeavor that must begin in capitalism.

Negation of the Bourgeoisie

Indeed, the bourgeoisie does not inherently possess revolutionary qualities either. However, unlike the proletariat, it seems that the pursuit of communism, in its struggle against capitalism, runs counter to the immediate interests of the bourgeoisie. Nevertheless, any individual belonging to the bourgeois class has the potential to scrutinize their own subjectivity and pose the same question as the proletariat. In that sense, the struggle for communism can also become their immediate interest, fostering a critical examination of their own position within the capitalist system.

Essentially, communist politics oppose the bourgeois concept of private property, and this conflict unfolds within both the political and economic realms of capitalist society. Once the Communist Party assumes political power at any level, it must make use of all available state structures to initiate the process of de-commodification. By this process, I mean the state's increasing authority to lower the prices of commodities or essential needs through greater involvement in their production. This entails creating conditions that allow the state to take responsibility for producing these commodities, particularly vital means of subsistence, as state-supported enterprises that eventually

become state-owned properties. Thus, the negation of the bourgeoisie necessitates a certain level of antagonism in the political and economic spheres. However, achieving an effective economic struggle against capitalism can only be made possible through communist politics and by earning the right to govern in a communist manner.

The Communist Party

To initiate the communist process, the immediate objective should be the transformation of the capitalist state into a communist one. Therefore, communism must actively engage in political struggle. This necessitates the establishment of a reinvigorated communist party. Rather than positioning itself as an omniscient vanguard, the party must humbly endeavor to enlist the entire proletariat to join the communists. Simultaneously, it should advocate for communist positions on various issues. This entails proposing communist legislation, initiatives, and policies. The party should also organize mass mobilizations, seek electoral victories in all feasible positions, and undertake activities that foster favorable conditions for attaining political power and the authority to govern at any level.

Certainly, just like in any organization, leadership is crucial. Therefore, within this reinvigorated communist party, there is a pressing need for a greater number of leaders who could take on diverse responsibilities and fulfill their functions effectively. This expansion of leadership is essential to successfully mobilize and convert the majority of the population into proponents of communism.

The Idea of a Communist State

The concept of a communist state, contrary to prevalent belief, is not an oxymoron. I reject the notion of the Marxist idea of the state withering away ²³ or being abolished. Instead, I propose the idea of a state that continuously evolves to enhance its efficiency and provide comprehensive services to the population. Moreover, the communist state must redirect violence away from its constituents and direct it toward its own officials. It should turn this violence inwards,²⁴ acknowledging that the capitalist state is inherently plagued by corruption, self-interest, and graft. The communist officials within the existing state must employ innovative approaches to minimize, subvert, and dismantle these corrupt elements, thereby eliminating them through the process of de-commodification.

Once the majority of state officials embrace communism, it is declared as the state's official system. The Communist state strives to create conditions for its own "abolition" and improvement by actively promoting internationalism and global cooperation, seeking to unite various struggles against capitalism. The communist state holds high regard for the international association of states fighting against capitalism and must never diminish itself by prioritizing the narrow interests of individual nation-states within capitalism.

Communist Politics

Communism needs to redefine its political strategy to establish the necessary conditions for the creation of a communist state. Communism must articulate its objectives clearly and precisely. Communists must put forth specific political principles

²³ V.I. Lenin, *State, and Revolution*, annotated and intro Todd Chretien (Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2014), 12.

²⁴ This is an idea I heard from communist philosopher Slavoj Zizek in his lectures on YouTube.

while remaining open to alternative approaches that align with the communist cause. The formation and active involvement of the communist party will undoubtedly have a significant impact on the political landscape of the population.

Once the party succeeds in securing electoral victories and assuming governance, it must strive to make the influence of communist governance deeply felt in the daily lives of its constituents. It is through the tangible experience of communist rule, where party members not only excel as administrators but also act as liberators from capitalist oppression, that we can genuinely challenge and overturn the prevailing dominance of capitalist ideology in favor of communism. The materiality of the communist rule should serve as a radical force for change, enabling the transition from capitalist hegemony to communist leadership.

Communist Politics is not Crisis-Driven

Communist politics cannot afford to wait for a crisis in capitalism before taking action. Moreover, considering the current state of affairs, capitalism is already entrenched in a perpetual crisis, evident in the plight of the world's unemployed, refugees, the homeless, and the majority of the employed proletariat. Every day is a struggle for survival. Instead of waiting for capitalism's crisis to worsen, communists must work towards alleviating the people's conditions by implementing communist politics within the existing capitalist system.

This effort to alleviate the people's conditions should not be seen as an attempt to improve capitalism itself, but rather as a means of establishing communism as an emancipatory project. Effective communism weakens capitalism by establishing a

strong presence within the proletariat through party organization, successfully placing communist candidates through democratic processes, improving the people's conditions through communist governance, and engaging in various other communist activities. By taking these actions, communism begins to assert itself and undermines the dominance of capitalism.

Hence, to establish conditions conducive to communism, it is crucial to adopt comprehensive and unambiguous communist politics. These politics encompass the transformation of commodities into essential needs, the expanding role of the state in ensuring the provision of all necessary goods and services to its populace, the reduction of working hours by harnessing the full potential of human resources and available technology, and the continual enhancement of the state's efficiency to serve the well-being of the people. By embracing these principles, we lay the groundwork for a society that paves the way for the realization of communism.

In a word, communist politics is the process of de-commodification of everything.

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