

# NEW PROPOSALS

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This journal represents an attempt to explore issues, ideas, and problems that lie at the intersection between the academic disciplines of social science and the body of thought and political practice that has constituted Marxism over the last 150 years. New Proposals is a journal of Marxism and Interdisciplinary Inquiry that is dedicated to the radical transformation of the contemporary world order. We see our role as providing a platform for research, commentary, and debate of the highest scholarly quality that contributes to the struggle to create a more just and humane world, in which the systematic and continuous exploitation, oppression, and fratricidal struggles that characterize the contemporary sociopolitical order no longer exist.

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# New Proposals

Journal of Marxism and Interdisciplinary Inquiry

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## *Introduction*

Charles R. Menzies

*New Proposals Editorial Collective*

# Responsible Anthropology in the Pandemic

Anthropologists have a mixed legacy of complicity with colonial powers and support for pro-local progressivism. Both strains of anthropology share a desire to travel among “othered” peoples. As a guild, anthropologists are aware of this intersectional conflict in disciplinary identity and desire. Neo-Trotskyist anthropologist Kathleen Gough called for anthropologists to subsume themselves in the anti-colonial and anti-capitalist struggles and, in so doing, transform anthropology. For a brief moment in the discipline’s history Gough’s call resonated within the discipline as part of a global social movement for justice and the overthrow of propertied elites who commanded the heights of national states. But as movement after movement was defeated, anthropologists turned away from material struggles for change to explore nuance in experimental representations of their research in print and visual media instead. It was a crisis in the global order of rule that created the opportunity for a progressive social moment in the 1960s and 1970s.

In the context of the global COVID-19 pandemic a similar moment of crisis of authority and the normal is occurring. We see the effects of decades of privatization, underfunding, and tax cutting in the tidal wave of death sweeping through long term care facilities for our elders. Facilities left to profi-

teers employing low paid marginalized workers have been the center of the worst effects of the pandemic. The need to throttle the wider economy arises from the same ideas of lean management and finding ‘efficiencies’ in our healthcare system. Here we see our hospitals lack the adequate resilience to respond to a serious crisis without shutting down all other services, pushing people out of care, and then closing the rest of society.

It didn’t have to be this way and it doesn’t need to be this way in the future. It will be up to historians to dissect how we got here, but we can all focus on how we should move forward today. There is much to learn from the earlier generation of progressives like Gough. They argued for a locally relevant anthropological practice that was tied to an emancipatory social justice practice. It was also an anthropology that was interested as much in making changes in the home nation and communities, as it was oriented to changes elsewhere. In fact, the most committed of the earlier generation of progressives were far less interested in making professional milestones than in facilitating progressive change at home and globally.

So where does this take us? How can we practice anthropology responsibly in the pandemic? We can start with doing anthropology where we are. It has been the luxury of global travel that propelled the dif-

fusion of the virus globally into a pandemic. Combine global travel with key cultural events – lunar New Year in Asia and Spring Break in North America – and we have a recipe for disaster. Anthropologists, despite their claims otherwise, perform very much like cruise ship voyagers travelling to hot spots of interest and feel totally empowered to do so. So, step one, stop travelling for research.

Step two – study local. Work where we are, in our own neighbourhoods, networks, and communities of account. Especially in the pandemic this reduces adverse impacts of crossing social boundaries. This also addresses issues of power imbalances that social scientists have identified with middle class researchers heading off to study groups of historically marginalized peoples.

Step three – act locally for social justice. The impacts of the current pandemic are magnified by longstanding historic injustices. Long-term care for the elderly has been driven primarily by a privatized for profit sector that pays poorer wages to people with inadequate job security, the result in the pandemic has been needless early death of our elders. Our hospitals have been managed to run lean at near 100 percent capacity with over-paid specialists at one end and poorly-paid core staff at the other, with the net effect that our hospitals don't have the resilience or capacity to respond without shutting down society and discharging thousands of people who needed care.

A responsible anthropology in the pandemic would thus be local and engaged in fundamental political, social, and economic changes.

## A Snapshot of Precarious Academic Work in Canada

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**Abstract:** In much of the developed world, tendencies associated with neoliberalism, the “corporatization” of the university, and cuts to government funding have led to a growing reliance on contingent or “non-regular” faculty. The vast majority of these academic workers are in the Social Sciences and Humanities. Precariously employed, these non-regular faculty constitute a reserve of low-paid and marginalized academic workers, and an increase in the number of doctorates granted each year in Canada guarantees a continuous supply of highly exploitable workers. While many books, articles, and blog posts discuss this phenomenon in the United States, less information is available for Canada. Using data collected by the Canadian Union of Public Employees and other published literature, this paper will measure the extent of the reliance on precariously employed contract faculty across Canada and offer suggestions for further research on the plight of these workers in Canada.

**Keywords:** Academic Labour, Precarious Work, Corporatization, Neoliberal University, Non-regular Faculty

### Introduction

In much of the developed world, tendencies associated with neoliberalism, the “corporatization” of the university, and cuts to government funding have led to a growing reliance on contingent or “non-regular” faculty. Precariously employed, these non-regular faculty constitute a reserve of low-paid and marginalized academic workers, and an increase in the number of doctorates granted each year in Canada guarantees a continuous supply of highly exploitable workers. While many books, articles, and blog posts discuss this phenomenon in the United States, less information is available for Canada. This paper will measure the extent of the reliance on precariously employed contract faculty across Canada, where it is “estimated that more than half of all undergraduates are taught by contract faculty” (Basen2014). Research by the Canadian Union of Public Employees (CUPE) supports this figure. It shows that

for the past decade, 54 percent of faculty appointments in Canadian universities are short term contract appointments, rather than permanent. Part-time, casual, or temporary terms of work are

also growing in support work as well. In some cases, universities and colleges are using attrition to get around collective agreement language preventing layoffs in order to replace permanent positions with casual and temporary positions. [CUPE 2018]

For the most part, contingent faculty, as a collectivity, are confined to teaching and often precluded from even applying for many of the larger, more prestigious research grants. Universities pay significantly lower salaries, provide fewer benefits, reduce reported employment time frames, and, as a result, reduce pensionable earnings. In short, contract academic faculty cost significantly less than their tenured counterparts, are often hired only to teach, and teaching is always considered less important than research. Contingent faculty are usually required to re-apply for their jobs every four months and spend a great deal of time in a demoralizing exercise. For these reasons, sessional faculty tend to have less robust publication records, and full-time faculty consider this a valid justification for denying full-time positions. When full-time, tenure track positions do become available, they rarely go to

members of this group. While there may be several reasons given to rationalize this on an individual basis, the fact of the matter is that the real underlying cause is a cultural misrecognition or stigma that is associated with sessional or non-regular teaching (Langan and Morton 2009).

The research report here aims to provide a concise quantitative analysis using the best available data that will contribute to our understanding of the extent of precarious academic labour in Canadian universities. I will draw some tentative conclusions about the spread or decline of these employment practices in the educational sector. The paper will include a brief examination of the use of non-standard employment in Canada for all industries and end with suggestions for future research.

### Literature Review

The trend toward precarious employment, accompanied by an overall decline in the percentage of tenured faculty, is not unique to Canada (Altbach 2002; Baldwin and Chronister, 2001; Busso and Rivetti 2014; Childress 2019; Pratt 1997). Across the developed world, the reliance on lower-paid contract academic staff is growing, and the Social Sciences and Humanities seem to be particularly vulnerable to this shift (Busso and Rivetti 2014; Diciancomo 1997; Donoghue 2008; Walters, 2002). As Frank Donoghue writes: “The dismantling of the American professoriate is part and parcel of the casualization of labour in general, a phenomenon that began in earnest in the 1980s and has accelerated since then (2008, xiv).” Donoghue observes that the corporatization of the university resembles the Scientific Management of Frederick W. Taylor, “the architect of modern capitalist labour-management” who “figures as centrally in present-day universities as it did in the factories of the teens and 1920s (2008, xv).” He argues that the liberal arts model of higher education with a focus on humanities education as a path to ethical and moral citizenship is “crumbling as college credentials become more expensive and more explicitly tied to job preparation (2008, xvii).

The trend is exacerbated by the use of temporary foreign workers to fill contract faculty positions. As a 2018 response paper prepared by the Canadian Association of University Teachers (CAUT) observes

that between 2015 and 2018, “the average number of university professors and lecturers who held work permits under the International Mobility Program (IMP) in Canada in a given year was 5,412.” They further report that “the average number of university professors and lecturers who held work permits under the Temporary Foreign Worker Program (TFWP) in Canada in a given year was 295.” The numbers were lower among college and vocational instructors. Among this group, those 258 held IMP work permits, and an average of 93 held TFWP work permits.

The Temporary Foreign Workers Program (TFWP) is intended to fill temporary labour shortages across a wide range of skilled professions (Preibisch, 2010). However, David Robinson, the executive director of CAUT argued that universities were abusing the program. To quote Robinson, “Universities are using the program to side-step proper procedures for recruiting” (Usher 2015). A later statement issued by CAUT expresses similar concerns about the use of these programs and the impact on Canadian academic workers:

By the mid-1980s, at the largest institutions in the country the proportion of university professors who held a Canadian PhD reached a peak. That share, however, began to decline by the late 1990s, and has fallen further following a significant weakening of the rules in 2003. The growing underemployment and unemployment in the academic sector suggests that the use of both the Temporary Foreign Worker Program (TFWP) and the International Mobility Program (IMP), and short-term contract work more generally, must be more judiciously considered by all stakeholders. The Canadian Association of University Teachers (CAUT), an organization representing more than 70,000 academic staff at over 120 postsecondary institutions across the country, wishes to highlight in this publication the context of growing underemployment and unemployment at Canadian research institutions. [CAUT, August 2018]

In addition to faculty positions, universities are using the IMP and TFWP to employ post-doctoral and research award recipients. As the report states, “In the past three years, the average number of researchers who held work permits under the IMP in Canada in a given year was 523, and the average number of



researchers who held work permits under the TFWP in Canada in a given year was 32” (CAUT 2018). CAUT recommended that

since the number of university professors and lecturers, college and vocational instructors, and researchers who hold work permits under the IMP are much greater than those who hold work permits under the TFWP, we recommend that the IMP require a Labour Market Impact Assessment (LMIA). This way, the IRCC can best assess the impact of these programs on the academic sector. [CAUT 2018]

The difference is significant. Under the Temporary Foreign Worker Program, employers must obtain a Labour Market Impact Assessment (LMIA) and work permits may be issued or denied depending on labour market conditions in specific cases. By contrast, the International Mobility Program (IMP), has no such restrictions, meaning that employers in Canada may hire foreign workers on a temporary work permit without needing to obtain a Labour Market Impact Assessment (LMIA).

Indeed, Employment and Social Development Canada publishes specific details about the number of academic appointments that have passed the LMIA. The information is published quarterly as the *Temporary Foreign Worker Program (TFWP): Positive Labour Market Impact Assessment (LMIA) Employers List* (Government of Canada nd.). The data indicates how many people are hired through this program each quarter, and by which universities and colleges. What it does not tell us is whether these positions are tenure-track or temporary. More research is needed to determine whether this is a way to recruit the best scholars or whether there are also instances of exploitation and non-regular academic positions.

It seems clear from this brief discussion that the extent of this form of labour relations in the teaching roles in postsecondary institutions deserves attention. The remainder of this paper employs descriptive statistics to provide a “snapshot” of the extent of precarity in higher education in Canada.

## Data and Methods

Due to the nature of contract employment, numbers are hard to pin down. How many academic

workers are in contract positions in any given year will shift according to the semester and hiring practices of individual departments. Moreover, as Jamie Brownlee (2015, 55) has observed:

The tenuous employment status of sessionals – in that they are not defined as “real” faculty in the institutional hierarchy – generally means that less care is taken in institutional record-keeping and information management, which has a range of implications for data collection.

“Invisible academic” is a term that has been used to describe this phenomenon (Vose 2015). Another difficulty with data collection is that many precariously employed academics need to teach at more than one university to cobble together a living wage, also known as “road scholars” (Kramer, Gloeckner, and Jacoby 2014, Mystyk, 2001). The difficulty is compounded by an apparent unwillingness on the part of many universities to make this information public (Brownlee 2015, 52-55).

Furthermore, when we can find reliable information, what do these numbers really tell us? Some of the sample will be graduate students who are not yet eligible to apply for tenure-track positions; some will be professionals with other sources of income who teach “on the side.” And others will be long-term members of the “irregular” employment category. This short chapter will bring together information to help to quantify the job category and make some general observations about the university sector. Finally, we will compare the data for postsecondary academic workers with the data for workers in Canada more generally.

The sources of data for this article are the CUPE Database on Academic Employment in Canada, updated May 2019, and Jamie Brownlee (2015). Of these, the database compiled by CUPE is the most comprehensive.

## Statistical Data and Analysis

The Canadian Union of Public Employees (CUPE) is the second largest union in Canada, and a significant number of sessional lecturers are members of CUPE locals, including myself. CUPE funded and executed a nationwide research project. Every postsecondary institution and research facility was served with a Freedom

of Information and Protection of Privacy Act (FIPPA) request. The requests asked for the employment status for every department, broken down by Tenure/Tenure Track, Fulltime Contract, and Part-time contract. I contacted the CUPE National research office and requested a copy of the database. The database (over 550,000 cases) was recorded in Excel.

To analyze the data, I converted the categorical variables to facilitate descriptive statistical analysis using SPSS. Where the values appeared as words (string variables), I converted them to numerical code. The conversion was necessary to ensure a higher degree of accuracy. Blanks, or missing values, were retained as I believe them to be valid variables. The blanks indicate one of two things: the institution in question does not have a tenure system, or the institution was unable or unwilling to accommodate the FIPPA request.

In most cases, it was the former. Research Institutes and Community Colleges, for example, do not have a tenure system but do hire both full-time and part-time faculty, so this information is essential to my goal of providing as complete a picture as possible. To manage the extent of the database, I made some decisions about which years and regions to select.

For this study, data for the years 2011-2017 were analyzed nationally and for the province of Ontario. Jamie Brownlee's data focuses only on Ontario and covers the years 2001 – 2010. For comparison with employment beyond the academic sector, I relied on the National Graduate Survey (NGS) for the years 2011 and 2018. The purpose of this article is to answer, using the best available data, the following questions:

How many positions are tenured or tenure track?

How many are contract, whether full-time or part-time?

What is the connection between discipline or faculty and employment potential?

And, finally,

How do these numbers compare with Canadian employment statistics outside of academia?

The base population for each data set is somewhat varied. As mentioned, Brownlee's data only considers postsecondary institutions in Ontario. The CUPE

National database is the most extensive survey available that focuses on the employment status of academic workers in (almost) all of the postsecondary institutions in Canada. The study focuses on job security, and the results are limited rather than comprehensive as the focus was on job security and a simple differentiation based on employment status. Information by faculty is illustrative, but there is no information on the highest degree, gender, ethnicity, or other variables that might have an impact on a person's likelihood of securing a tenure-track position.

### What is the extent of precarious academic employment in Canada?

Data supports the contention that there was a growing reliance on contract faculty in universities in Ontario between 2000 and 2010. This data focused mainly on the Social Sciences and Humanities departments (Brownlee 2015, 55). Figure 1 (page 11) summarizes Brownlee's (2015, 58) findings.

The bars on the left indicate the number of people employed in Tenure Stream positions in Ontario for the years 2001, 2004, 2007, and 2010 while the bars on the right show the number of contract positions held for the same years. The data indicate a clear pattern for the institutions that provided the data requested by Brownlee. It is interesting to note that most universities were not willing to give this information until presented with an official request under the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act (FIPPA). While there is growth for both tenure-stream and contract employment, the ratio between the two types of employment status shifts significantly during this period. Looking at another data set, also for Ontario, the growth in non-tenure stream employment in Ontario has continued to increase (see Figure 2 below). The left-most bar indicates missing data, which we can infer is primarily non-regular employment status. The growth of full-time contracts is higher than the growth of tenured or tenure-track employment, and the increase in part-time contract work continues to outstrip both.

Table 1 (page 12) summarizes the data for academic employment broken down in terms of temporary or tenured/tenure stream faculty for Ontario from Fall 2006 to Spring, 2017. It shows that, when we consider

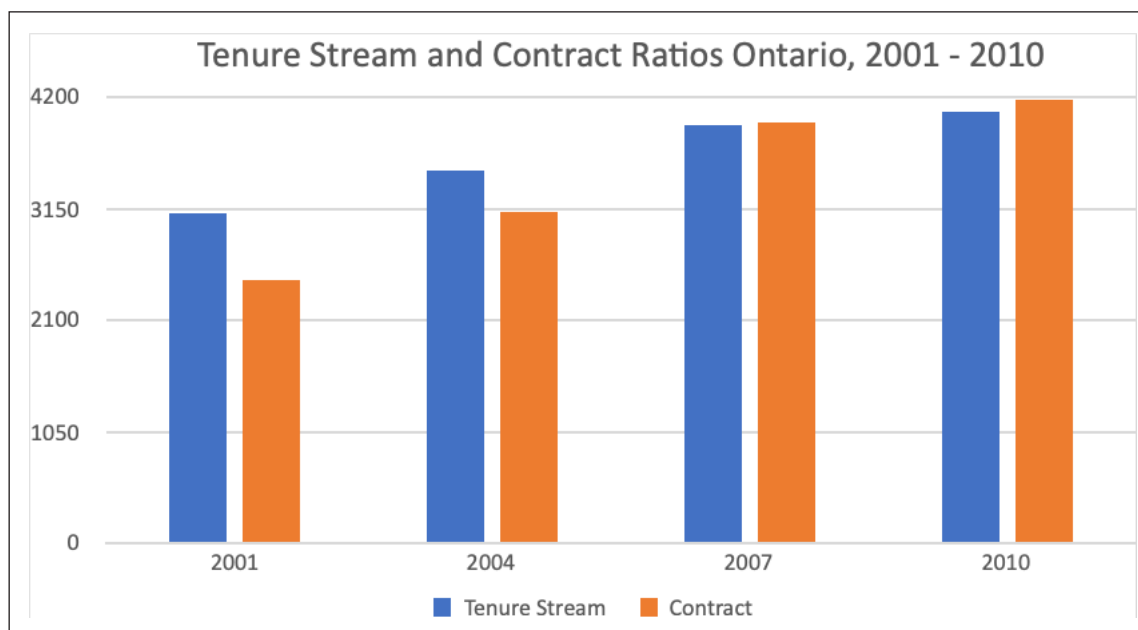


Figure 1. Source: Adapted from Brownlee 2015, 58

permanent, tenured, or tenure-stream appointments compared to contract positions, whether full-time or part-time, a slightly different picture emerges. We can see that the reliance on non-tenured faculty continues to increase, rather dramatically, in the province of Ontario. Data for this analysis comes from a country-wide research project conducted by the Canadian Union of Public Employees (CUPE). This database, updated May 19, 2019, reflects data obtained through Freedom of Information requests to all publicly funded universities in Canada. For comparison with Brownlee's data, I used SPSS to select only data for the province of Ontario.

The CUPE research team requested information on full-time tenured and tenure track faculty, full-time contract faculty, and part-time contract faculty. The researchers note that:

Not all universities have a tenure system. We included permanent or regular faculty who have the same status as tenured faculty at other schools in the category of tenured and tenure track faculty. Additionally, a small number of universities with tenure also have non-tenured faculty with permanent contracts. Since our primary interest for this project was in the question of job security, we included these faculty with the tenured and tenure-track faculty in our database. [CUPE 2019]

A further consideration, and as already noted in the introduction, is that “Contract faculty are known by many different terms: sessional, adjunct, contingent, instructor, lecturer, or limited-term appointment. In this database, all non-permanent faculty, regardless of title, are included in the category of contract faculty.” The numbers indicate a dramatic increase in the numbers of contract appointments as compared with Tenured and Tenure-Track appointments in the Province of Ontario, with 4819 Tenured or Tenure-Track compared to 9780 on some form of “Contract” appointment between 2011 and 2018. In Ontario, again, contract work, including both full-time and part-time positions, outstrips tenured or tenure-stream positions, as the following bar chart for Ontario illustrates (Figure 2, page 13).

Finally, I would like to include a bar chart that depicts postsecondary academic employment for all of Canada for the 2016-2017 academic year (see Figure 3, page 13). The data for British Columbia, Manitoba, Nova Scotia, Ontario, and Quebec show four bars rather than three. The leftmost bar represents “missing” data, which either represents contract workers or comes from institutions that do not have tenure or tenure-stream positions. These institutions include research institutes, polytechnics, and universities that have not

Table 1: Contract (full-time and part-time) and Tenured or Tenure Stream Employment in Postsecondary Institutions in Ontario, 2006 -2017

|           |      | Employment Status |             |            | Total |
|-----------|------|-------------------|-------------|------------|-------|
|           |      | FT Contract       | PT Contract | Tenured/TT |       |
| 2006 - 07 | 72   | 255               | 268         | 255        | 850   |
| 2007 - 08 | 72   | 299               | 318         | 306        | 995   |
| 2008 - 09 | 72   | 343               | 372         | 314        | 1101  |
| 2009 - 10 | 76   | 336               | 355         | 313        | 1080  |
| 2010 - 11 | 76   | 371               | 387         | 351        | 1185  |
| 2011 - 12 | 290  | 376               | 389         | 353        | 1408  |
| 2012 - 13 | 280  | 431               | 456         | 401        | 1568  |
| 2013 - 14 | 277  | 437               | 465         | 410        | 1589  |
| 2014 - 15 | 275  | 434               | 469         | 410        | 1588  |
| 2015 - 16 | 276  | 432               | 468         | 411        | 1587  |
| 2016 - 17 | 273  | 449               | 492         | 434        | 1648  |
| Total     | 2039 | 4163              | 4439        | 3958       | 14599 |

Source: CUPE 2019

yet complied with the FIPPA requests. Overall, the data shows that the reliance on Part-time contract academic workers is highest in Ontario and British Columbia and all provinces evidence some degree of reliance on non-regular faculty for the delivery of their curriculum.

Most of the universities reported the main or primary department for each sessional or regular faculty member who may be cross-appointed. The numbers, therefore, do not indicate the total number of sessional lecturers teaching at any given institution as some may teach for more than one department at the same university or college. An additional complication lies

in the fact that some sessional lecturers teach at more than one institution, and duplication may occur in that context. That said, the numbers do reveal trends and tendencies that are significant and important, as is made clear when we break the data down by faculty.

#### **Is there any difference in terms of discipline or faculty?**

To address this question, I relied on the CUPE National database referred to above. In the methodology section of the database, the authors explain that this data was collected using the following parameters:

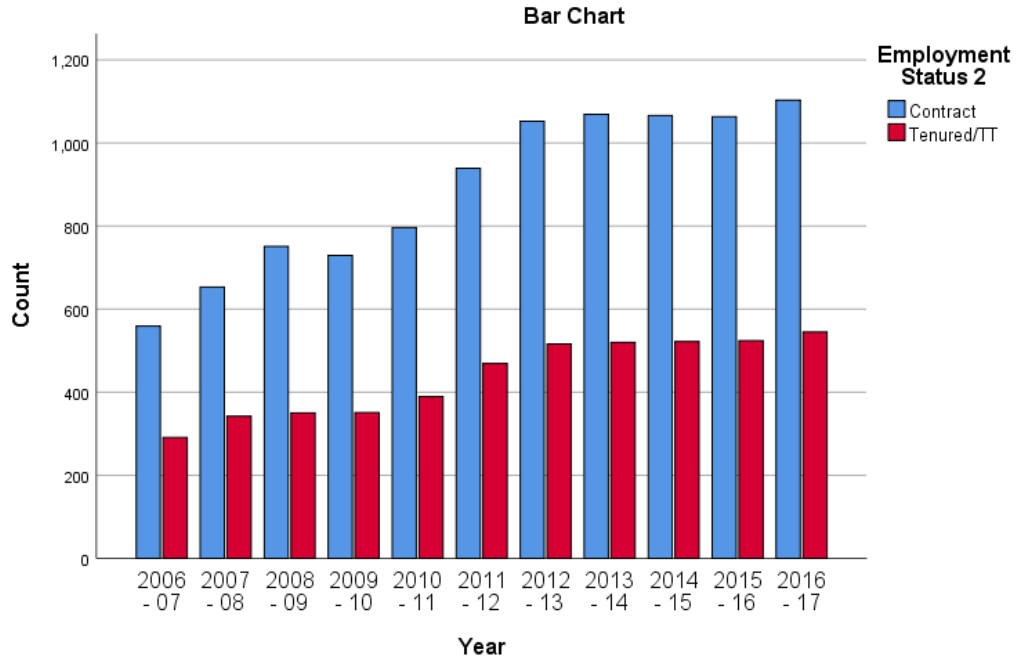


Figure 2: Bar Chart, Employment Status Ontario 2006-2017,

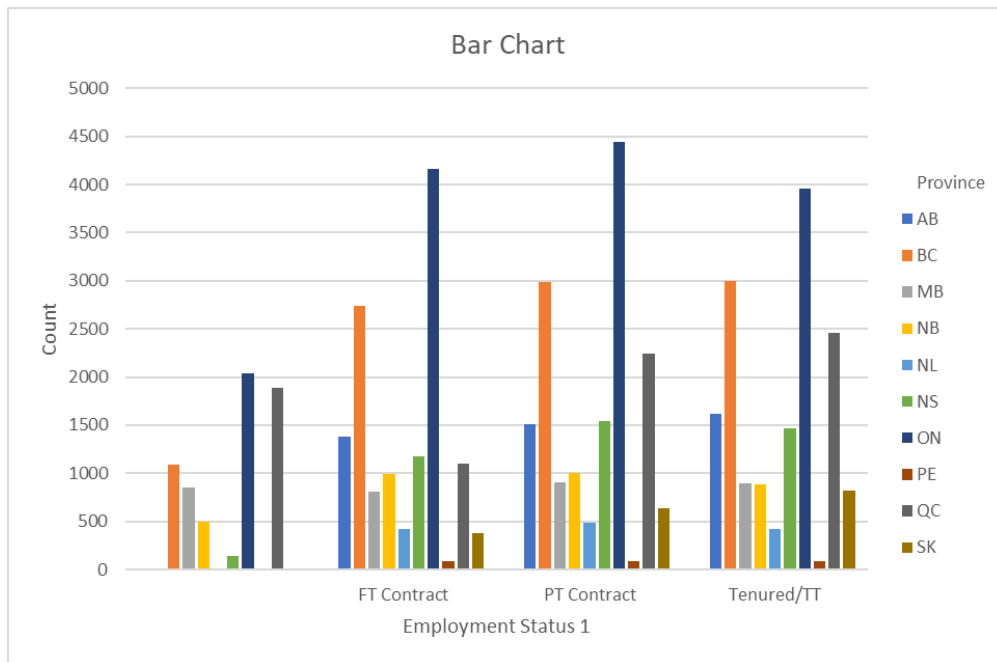


Figure 3 Full-time contract, part-time contract, and tenured or tenure-track employment in Canada 2016-2017

Source: CUPE National Database 2019.

**Table 2 Faculty Type, Employment Status Crosstabulation By Faculty**

| Faculty Type          |      | Employment Status 1 |             |            | Total |
|-----------------------|------|---------------------|-------------|------------|-------|
|                       |      | FT Contract         | PT Contract | Tenured/TT |       |
|                       | 124  | 72                  | 83          | 84         | 363   |
| Agriculture           | 22   | 220                 | 281         | 314        | 837   |
| Architecture          | 88   | 166                 | 210         | 205        | 669   |
| Business              | 379  | 898                 | 1143        | 1048       | 3468  |
| Continuing Education  | 160  | 195                 | 278         | 120        | 753   |
| Education             | 296  | 603                 | 756         | 572        | 2227  |
| Engineering           | 270  | 641                 | 913         | 885        | 2709  |
| Health Sciences       | 942  | 2695                | 2621        | 3286       | 9544  |
| Humanities            | 1633 | 2647                | 3311        | 3019       | 10610 |
| Law                   | 90   | 166                 | 138         | 168        | 562   |
| Library Science       | 44   | 12                  | 44          | 44         | 144   |
| Multiple              | 363  | 729                 | 942         | 844        | 2878  |
| Other                 | 149  | 108                 | 192         | 137        | 586   |
| Science               | 785  | 1862                | 2276        | 2296       | 7219  |
| Social Sciences       | 1027 | 1938                | 2360        | 2242       | 7567  |
| Trades and Technology | 98   | 216                 | 218         | 215        | 747   |
| Veterinary Medicine   | 33   | 79                  | 74          | 123        | 309   |
| Total                 | 6503 | 13247               | 15840       | 15602      | 51192 |

To look at trends by discipline, we assigned each faculty and department a type. For instance, in the case of faculties, the types include Agriculture, Architecture, Business, Continuing Education, Education, Engineering, Health Sciences, Humanities, Law, Library Science, Multiple, Other, Science, Social Sciences, Trades, and Veterinary Medicine. In cases where we had information on both faculty and department, we assigned the faculty type based on the department, rather than on the name of the faculty. This eliminates the difficulty of knowing where to assign faculties which combine multiple types, such as Faculties of Arts and Science. [CUPE 2019]

Table 2 (page 14) shows that Social Sciences and Humanities Departments rely most heavily on the exploitation of non-tenured and part-time faculty. Blank columns represent information reported in a way that was not consistent with the request or not shared at all. In either scenario, the absence of data is significant and indicates either a situation where there are no full-time positions or where a department of university president refused to comply with the request for information.

The faculty types and rates of employment according to the CUPE data are illustrated in Table 2.

## Discussion

A recent Statistics Canada Report (May 2019) indicates that the number of Canadian workers employed in temporary positions has risen an average of 1.5 percent between 1998 and 2018, with Ontario showing the highest increase at 3.1 percent. The three sectors with the highest levels of this type of non-standard employment are Agriculture, Information Culture and Recreation, and Educational Services. Temporary and contract workers in Educational Services are disproportionately women (68%), while men dominate in Agriculture and Information, Culture, and Recreation. Nationally, more than 1 in 8 people worked a temporary job, women were more likely to hold more than one job, and the majority of temporary workers held contract positions (StatsCan May 2019). The use of the TFWP and other govern-

ment-sanctioned programs that enable employers, in this case, universities, to employ non-Canadian faculty on short-term contracts is another contributing factor, as is shown in the CAUT (2018) response paper.

Kalleberg and Vallas (2018, 1) define precarious work as “work that is uncertain, unstable, and insecure and in which employees bear the risks of work (as opposed to businesses or the government) and receive limited social benefits and statutory protection.” For over a decade, sociological theorists have placed the concept of precarity at the center of their analyses of contemporary society (Kalleberg and Vallas 2018). Beck (1992; 2000) believes that rampant economic growth has led to the emergence of what he calls the “risk society,” while Zygmunt Bauman (2000) laments the erosion of the solid, stable institutional structures that undergirded industrial capitalism. This erosion is resulting in a new era of “liquid modernity” which is marked by the condition of “precariousness, instability, vulnerability is the most widespread (as well as the most painfully felt) feature of contemporary life conditions” (Bauman 2000, 160–161; cf Kalleberg and Vallas 2018).

Pierre Bourdieu sees the spread of labour market uncertainty as shifting the ground on which workers stand, weakening their possibility of engaging in collective action:

Casualization profoundly affects the person who suffers it: by making the whole future uncertain, it prevents all rational anticipation and, in particular, the basic belief and hope in the future that one needs in order to rebel, especially collectively, against present conditions, even the most intolerable. [Bourdieu 1998, 82, cited in Kalleberg and Vallas 2018].

“Some theorists have developed this last point, viewing precarious work as constituting a new type of regime that implicitly exercises social and political control over a widening swath of the labour force” (Kalleberg and Vallas 2018: 4). The same has been said, in various ways, by a growing number of authors who focus on the casualization of academic labour (Brownlee 2015; Childress 2019).

## Conclusions and Further Research Questions

The research presented here suggests that it is not correct to say that there are no jobs in academia. Indeed, there are plenty of jobs for “Sessional,” non-regular,” “adjunct,” or “Other” faculty. This small majority constitutes a reserve of low-paid and marginalized academic workers who occupy more than half of all teaching positions in postsecondary institutions in Canada, particularly in Ontario and British Columbia. What does this mean for the job prospects of current and future graduate students? A recent study by Brittany Etmanski, David Walters, and David Zarifa suggests that very few of these young scholars are likely to obtain full-time work within three years of graduation (Etmanski et al, 2017).

Furthermore, full-time work is not the same as tenured or tenure-track as full-time contracts often expire with no guarantee of renewal after the limited-term stated in the agreement. Additional data needs to be collected around issues relating to intersectionality. Future research needs to further explore the impact of variables such as class, race, and gender. Regarding socioeconomic status, for example, an article by Langan and Morton (2009) draws on the concept of cultural capital to argue that their working-class upbringing led them to misunderstand the path to a tenure-track job (Morton is now tenured at the University of Guelph). They provide a good discussion/overview of the corporatization of the university and the associated devaluation of teaching in Canadian universities. What is the gender breakdown? Existing information indi-

cates that a disproportionate number of precariously employed people are women; more research needs to be done (Burns 2019; Statistics Canada 2019). The question needs to address the highest level of education or degree obtained, the nature of the employment contract, and the discipline in order to find out whether or not the gender disparity found outside of academia is also present in academic employment. The same holds for all axes of intersectionality. While it is my impression that a significant proportion of non-tenured faculty in Canada belongs to either a union or faculty association, this needs to be confirmed. The working conditions, job security, and likelihood of benefits and pension are deeply connected to such membership. Finally, why does the myth that “there are no jobs” in academia persist? The reality is that there is no shortage of jobs, but there is a shortage of secure, tenure-track, research-intensive positions. What are the implications of the decline in research-intensive careers and the devaluation of the role of teaching in higher education in Canada? And finally, how will the recent Covid-19 pandemic affect the employment status for precariously employed academics in Canada?

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## Value Proposition: Canadian Freelance Writers at the Intersection of Exploitation and Alienation

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**Abstract:** Over several years now, scholars have redressed a deficit in critical communication research in Canada as it relates to questions involving cultural labourers. One such example of this type of inquiry pertains to the deteriorating working conditions of freelance writers. Their overall penury has revived interest in Marxian categories of analysis, especially around his concept of exploitation. Yet in 25 interviews I conducted with freelance writers, what was demonstrable was the need to extend this notion of a “missing Marx” by incorporating other concepts from his *oeuvre*, in particular, alienation. Historically, a dichotomous rendering has prevailed as to whether exploitation or alienation provides a better explanatory framework for understanding the work-life histories of labour. Ultimately, I argue rather than privileging one over the other, the two phenomena operate relationally – mediated by the category of value. Value generation remains rooted in longstanding techniques constitutive of the journalistic labour process. To that end, this analysis pays particular attention to technologies of the intellect contributing to the exploitation and alienation freelance writers undergo.

**Keywords:** labour process, freelance writers, Karl Marx, exploitation, alienation, value

### Introduction: The Spectre of Exploitation

Recent decades have seen income inequality come to the fore of public opinion and public policy discussions (Lewchuk, Procyk, and Shields 2017). The labour organizer and scholar, Jane McAlevey (2020), has written that “inequality is the root cause of today’s problems” (3). Such anxieties have found expression in various social movements from municipal living-wage campaigns in the mid-1990s to the current “Fight for 15” minimum-wage struggles (Luce 2017). Causal to this phenomenon of inequality are labour markets re-regulated towards more precarious arrangements for workers in an asymmetrical labour-capital power dynamic. In studies of Canada’s most populous region, the Poverty and Employment Precarity in Southern Ontario (PEPSO) working group has found that 50 percent of adult workers in the Greater Toronto and Hamilton Area are employed precariously (Lewchuk, Procyk, and Shields 2017).

This expansion in precarious work has come to affect workers in sectors previously thought to be immune from such tendencies, and to exacerbate such conditions in sectors where insecure work has a historical presence. Authors of the PEPSO report note many formerly employed as full-time workers in the arts and media now work as freelancers (Lewchuk, Procyk, and Shields 2017). According to Nicole S. Cohen (2011), journalism, in particular, “a once secure, well-remunerated form of labour, thanks largely to a long history of unionization ... has become an increasingly insecure form of work” (119). Although the use of freelance workers in news media is centuries old, a confluence of economic re-structurings and technological changes are assumed to have accelerated this tendency especially since “the Great Recession” (Cohen 2016).

This set of developments has resulted in a small but still expanding body of literature investigating

the working conditions of freelance writers<sup>1</sup> in the Canadian news media context (Cohen 2011, 2012, 2015a, 2015b, 2016, 2017; D'Amours and Legault 2013; Gollmitzer 2014, 2018, 2019; McKercher 2014; Salamon 2016, 2018, 2019). Much of this research has concerned itself with the declining material conditions of freelance writers in a period of intensifying precarity and growing inequality. An outcome of this is that several of these investigations have adopted a decidedly Marxian tenor: “Marx’s concept of exploitation is key to the analysis of cultural work yet is most often absent” (Cohen 2016, 38). Relatedly, researchers investigating cultural workers have interrogated why this labouring class tolerates such low levels of remuneration. Responses here range from the perceived autonomy and flexibility associated with freelancing, to creative labour obscuring exploitative employment relations, to inferences suggestive of the thorough interpellation of freelance workers into neoliberalism’s hegemonic order (McRobbie 2015).

In Marxian circles, an “immiseration theory” associates deepening exploitation with worsening deprivation, and consequently, with the formation of class consciousness and collective worker response (Colletti 1972). Despite historical evidence to the contrary (Feldman 2000), Marxian-informed investigations of Canadian freelance writers have been consonant with some variant of the immiseration hypothesis (Cohen 2016; McKercher 2014; Salamon 2016). However, Margaret Zamudio (2004) argues exploitation alone cannot explain worker opposition to capitalist work relations. Accounts that overdetermine the causal ability of exploitation to engender resistance at the point of production fail to consider the powerful animating force that is alienation (Harvey 2014). Whether the lived reality of exploitation or alienation would best serve to catalyze workers is another longstanding tension in Marxian scholarship (Sharma 1979). Even in the current historical juncture with levels of income and wealth inequality unseen for at least a century,

1 The nomenclature of freelance writer rather than the more historically used freelance journalist follows from the convention established by Cohen (2011, 2012, 2016 and 2017). This more accurately depicts the empirical reality that journalistic work conceived of as writing/recording/filming stories for newspapers, magazines, radio, television or online news platforms is not remuneratively lucrative enough for most freelancers. This leaves workers in this field seeking additional employment as instructors, editors, researchers, etc.

David Harvey (2018a) avers “universal alienation” may resonate still more acutely amongst populations for the purposes of politicizing them.

In interviews I conducted with 25 freelance writers from across Canada, evident was the presence of alienation in shaping their work-life histories. This study, then, could be read as an intervention counterbalancing exclusive attention upon issues of inequality and exploitation over several years now. But rather than continuing to propagate the privileging of one of these two concepts over the other, I attempt to dehierarchize exploitation and alienation – viewing them relationally instead. In order to do this, I adopt a narrow focus that concerns itself with the ways in which capital logics make the journalistic labour process a site where freelance writers produce value. A critique involving the category of value wishes to eclipse the exploitation-alienation binary because neither is sufficient in capturing the freelance-writer experience. Before undertaking this multi-level analysis, it will first be necessary to present findings from interviews I undertook with the freelance writers in this survey. And in order to contextualize these findings, I first provide an overview of the research investigating freelance labour in the current historical moment.

### **Freelancing Writing: Subjectivities of Study and Producer Choice**

In Canada, freelancers comprised five percent of the journalistic labour force in 1996. Two decades later, that figured had increased to 17 percent (Wilkinson 2019). This structural transformation has its parallels in the U.K. and across Europe as well (Norback and Styhre 2018). Despite the seeming insecurity, interviews with freelance writers indicate high levels of job satisfaction. Female freelance journalists in the U.S. claim they are “happier working for themselves” (Massey and Elmore 2011, 672). Maria Edstrom and Martina Ladendorf (2012) find freedom and flexibility are qualities freelance writers in Sweden most appreciate about their work lives. In Norway, informants’ discretion over the workday, as well as with their work assignments, are the most prized features of being freelance journalists. Freelance journalists in Australia exhibit a more complicated relationship with the prevailing discourses and performances around free-

dom, autonomy, and flexibility. In one instance, an interviewee observes the freedom freelance journalists enjoy is the freedom to work seven days a week (Das 2007). In a binational comparison involving freelance writers from Canada and Germany, Mirjam Gollmitzer (2014, 2015) finds workers in both countries enjoy the autonomy they possess over their immediate labour process along with the agency they have in structuring their workday.

In contrast to these subjectivist accounts of autonomy, within flexible regimes of accumulation, and marked by precariousness, Quebec-based researchers, Martine D'Amours and Marie-Josée Legault (2013), claim risk is a more appropriate heuristic for examining the labour conditions of freelance periodical writers. This follows from Ulrich Beck's (1992) concept of a "risk society" in which the traditional communal organization of everyday life in feudal society gives way to a project of individualization in modernity (Beck 2001). For the authors, the detraditionalization that occurs in the transition from feudalism to modernity evolves further in late modernity to encapsulate destandardization. This refers to the "creation of a risk-fraught system of flexible, pluralized underemployment, in which both risk and responsibility are being shifted to workers" (D'Amours and Legault 2013, 89). They conclude by pointing to a troubling lack of collective action demonstrated by freelance magazine writers given the level of risks they endure (D'Amours and Legault 2013, 89). Here, Beck's (1992, 2001) individualization thesis is inadequate as it is too consonant with the broader aims of the neoliberal project (McGuigan 2009). Subsequently, this has helped spur a turn towards the theoretical oeuvre of Karl Marx to attempt to interpret the activity of this class of workers.

To this end, Errol Salamon (2016) has chronicled the types of oppositional strategies freelance writers in Canada have adopted to combat corporate news media incursions upon their intellectual property right. Most prominent among the tactics deployed to date are class-action lawsuits and boycotts. Freelancers have used these gambits against publishers because of the latter's use of copyrighted material without compensation. Overall, it is possible to detect in Salamon's (2016; 2018) work an indebtedness to Marx's dialogical logic in which all social phenomena are pregnant with their

contrary. This refers to his ability to demonstrate how the same digital technologies that have contributed to the declining living standards of freelance writers, by enabling media convergence and fostering media concentration, have contributed, positively, to undermining the interests of news media corporations by helping to facilitate resistive actions against rights-grabbing contracts (Salamon (2016; 2018).

What co-exists with these episodes of resistance is the material and cognitive dissonance Salamon (2019) detects in interviews he conducts with freelance writers. Those participating in Salamon's (2019) investigation demonstrate a "freelance class ideology" (118). An outgrowth of their location in the division of global media labour, these workers experience precarious employment conditions that do, simultaneously, afford relatively greater amounts of flexibility, autonomy, and control over the immediate labour process. But the insecure conditions under which they labour leave them in a bifurcated position of employing their subjectivity in individualized and entrepreneurialized ways, while also having, in other instances, a need and desire to act collectively.

In her study of Canadian and German freelancers, Gollmitzer (2018) detects what she terms an "entrepreneurial self" and an "ethical self" that is "present in everyday work experiences" of those she interviews (179). This identifies a professional subjectivity that oscillates between a praxis of entrepreneurialism and ethicalism. The considerations of this ethical self are to a public service conception of journalism, and more specifically, to a duty to participate in the guardianship of democracy. The entrepreneurial self can be understood "as a form of subjectivity that aligns with market needs" (Vallas and Christin 2018, 5). In an examination of Norwegian freelance writers, Birgit Roe Mathisen (2017) categorizes her informants as being either entrepreneurs or idealists. The former group emphasizes the purported freedom that derives from entrepreneurship. By contrast, the idealists are characterized by their commitment to undertaking substantive journalistic projects even if this means living in penury.

Ultimately, Gollmitzer (2018) wishes to develop a more "nuanced account" as a means to contrast Marxian-influenced investigations, which have, accord-

ing to her, tended to represent freelance writers as agents of one-sided class domination in the material and ideological project of neoliberalism. She cites the work of Cohen (2011, 2012, 2016, 2017) as exemplifying this type of scholarship. In the latter's focus upon the structural position of freelance writers as precarious labourers in a global supply chain of media workers, it is possible to conclude these workers occupy "false consciousness," and that they have "internalized the interests of the ruling class erroneously as their own" (Gollmitzer 2018, 196). As a means to expand boundaries of understanding outside of this predominant reading, Gollmitzer (2018) posits that an identity of professionalism, at the individual level, can help inoculate freelance writers from the imbricated articulations of neoliberalism.

Yet even as Gollmitzer (2018) attempts to enfold other analytical frameworks into the study of freelance writers' experiences, she endorses Cohen's (2012, 2016) assessment of the manner by which news media corporations exploit freelance writers. This exploitation, which I will examine at length, necessitates a group response in the form of unions and other workers' organizations in Cohen's estimation (2011, 2016). Before freelance writers can achieve their redistributive aims, labour organizations will need to devise means to negate the "individualism and structural competition that characterizes freelance media work" (Cohen 2016, 231). In part, this is because neoliberal ideology has "interpellated" freelance writers "into entrepreneurial discourses" (Cohen 2016, 124). This is also an outcome of the material organization of their labour market: "entrepreneurial behaviour is not just a condition of neoliberal ideology, but also an imperative because of how work is organized" (Cohen 2015a, 525).

Catherine McKercher's (2014) observance into the lives of freelance writers begins with an appraisal not of exploitation, but of alienation. She notes how it lacks salience presently because of perceptions of Marx as a chronicler of nineteenth-century capitalism. Creative labour discourses have contributed to the diminution of alienation's relevance as well. Best known among these is Richard Florida's (2002) "creative class" thesis. For Florida (2002), knowledge and creativity come to serve as primary inputs in a growing number of labour processes. These processes nullify alienation because

they engage the mental, the affective and the communicative in comparison to the bodily requirements of industrialized manufacturing. He even goes so far as to argue "that creative work cannot be taylorized like rote work in the old factory or office" (Florida 2002, 133). Among Marxian scholars, alienation has lost valence because of purported essentialisms contained within the "species being" formulation within a broader context repudiating humanistic values (Chari 2015).

To conclude, McKercher (2014) concurs the social relations undergirding precarious cultural labour are obscured, to some extent, because these labourers "have a different degree of autonomy, or subjectivity than factory workers" (220). Yet in their relationship to employers, freelance writers are like the pieceworkers of industrial capitalism. Piecework is a keyword in understanding the feminization and devaluation of freelance labour (McKercher 2014, 220). It is a key analytic of understanding for Cohen (2016) as well: "Because freelancers are not engaged in an employment relationship and are not paid a salary, it appears that they sell only a finished piece of work" (47). As freelance writers are outside the standard employment relationship, publishers come to exploit them through the expropriation of intellectual property rights, as well as by not paying them for the full amount of time that is needed to complete a piece (Cohen 2016, 47).

### **Workers' Inquiry in a New Millennium**

The importance of workers' subjective experience in forging an oppositional consciousness has not been a historically prominent feature of Marxian inquiry. Harvey (2006) explains this as attributable to Marx's inclination "to deny the authenticity of experience ... in pushing so strongly the revelatory power of theory" (114). Yet just prior to his passing in 1883, Marx (1997) constructed a survey consisting of 100 questions he entitled, "A Workers' Inquiry." In the preamble to the survey, Marx (1997) provides a rationale for authoring it, consisting of three related suppositions. The second of these axioms states members of the working class are best positioned to articulate the degradations they experience daily under command of capitalist social relations, and that there will be no external saviour for the working class. Jamie Woodcock (2014) has interpreted this second postulate to mean investigators

attempting to further this tradition should not treat their participants as “passive subjects to be researched” (497). Workers are not only the most advantageously positioned to describe the conditions that affect their lives, they are the only social group poised to transform their circumstances (Woodcock 2014, 497).

Even as Marx’s (1997) only foray into this type of social scientific survey did not elicit a single response from workers, the crises that have beset capitalism in the new millennium have reinvigorated interest in workers’ inquiries (Haider and Mohandesi 2013; Woodcock 2017). This follows from a period of renewal in workers’ inquiries, which occurred in the mid-twentieth century, in factories in Italy, France and the U.S. (Haider and Mohandesi 2013). Those earlier efforts saw different assemblages of Marxist sociologists, activists, and rank-and-file workers begin to conceive of a way to establish “the joint production of social knowledge from below” (Wright 2002, 22). What has come to distinguish workers’ inquiries since that time is the notion of “co-research” (Woodcock 2017, 28). This refers to the active participation of investigators alongside workers in an explicitly political project (Brook and Darlington 2013).

This project did not adhere closely to the central tenets of “co-research.” It is therefore better to conceive of it, within the genealogy of workers’ inquiries, as “a from above” project with the aim of producing knowledge and theoretical insights through access to a particular class of workers (Woodcock 2014). This level of inquiry should precede “a from below production” that has the formation of political organization as an intended outcome (Kolinko 2002). The project does, however, remain faithful to an ethos of providing informants with an opportunity for a subjective accounting of their experience as freelance writers. This measure is in keeping with the historical spirit of workers’ inquiries, dating back to Marx’s (1997) preamble.

The interview schedule I employed consisted of three sections, counting 60 questions. The design of the interview schedule was of a semi-structured variety. This modality operates at a meso-level between open-ended interview schedules and the type of yes-no questionnaire Marx (1997) constructed. This mid-point interview tool better aligns with a phenomenological interest in how humans consciously perceive

the object world (Ritzer 1988). In its sociological application, phenomenology prioritizes the intentionality of human agents within social contexts, and how they make sense of commonplace experiences (Ritzer 1988). Again, this is consonant with the second directive Marx (1997) delineates in the preamble to his questionnaire, i.e., workers’ understanding and articulation of their own work-life histories.

The sample size of 25 interviewees exceeded the minimum recommended number of 15 as suggested by Steinar Kvale (1996) in his book on interviewing as a research method. Others such as Greg Scott and Roberta Garner (2013) have recommended interviewing until a saturation point is reached. This is the stage in the interview process when responses converge upon the same themes without any significant novelty. Based on the interview schedule prepared, the saturation point was reached prior to the 25<sup>th</sup> interview. The length of the interviews ranged from 45 minutes to over 120 minutes. I conducted one formal, in-depth interview session with each respondent with subsequent follow-ups limited to instances where it was necessary.

Demographically, 19 of the 25 participants were female. The remaining six identified as male. Though I did not formally record their ages, the chronological span of the informants seemed to stretch from mid-20s-to-mid-60s. With regards to the sample’s racial/ethnic composition, only one participant identified as a visible minority. Other demographic data came from a survey of the respondents. The response rate for the surveys was 52 percent. From this, I calculated respondents earned an average income between \$37,000 and \$49,000 during the previous year. The range of weekly hours worked spanned from 37-to-46 hours. All those who returned surveys had some level of post-secondary schooling. Nine of the 13 respondents possessed a university degree. Of those nine, three had an advanced-level degree. I have anonymized interviewees by assigning pseudonyms, but I have included information that provides the contours of a life history without jeopardizing their identity.

### **Labour’s Love, Lost**

I began the interviews by asking participants about their work histories prior to becoming freelance writers. The intent of this question in designing the interview

schedule was to prime the pump of conversation, and to try and elicit a partial life history with respect to their employment record. Yet this initial questions proved to be one of the most revealing contained within the interview schedule. Immediately, it was possible to observe the strong conditioning influence work histories have upon present outlooks involving their choice of occupation as freelance writers. For instance, Helen Vitalis spent her teenage summers picking produce as a farm worker in British Columbia. What arose from these experiences was a realization that she was unsuited to do “rote work or anything that was unvaried. I was just more bored with it than anything.” In other cases, informants undertook a mid-career change into freelance writing due to their discontentedness. According to Rhonda Schmidt, her clerical career in the insurance industry would end with a pension, but no accomplishments other than having a pile of business letters neatly ordered on the corner of her desk. The disenchantment felt by Sarah Simpson was, perhaps, even more acute. She described the end of her tenure in corporate marketing in the following manner: “Yeah, I didn’t like going to work, so it was ... Maybe there will be a snowstorm ... or maybe I’ll be sick and won’t have to go.”

A global survey of workers finds what Schmidt and Simpson describe to be commonplace for a plurality of people on a daily basis (Crabtree 2013). The persistence of these levels of estrangement since the advent of industrial capitalism means alienation is “the critique that refuses to disappear” (Kalekin-Fishman and Langman 2015). As Harvey (2006) outlines, for Marx, “the impoverishment of the labourer under capitalism had as much, if not more to do, with the degradation forced upon the worker in the labour process, than with the low wages and high rates of exploitation” (108). The concerns of a scientific Marx do not so much eclipse his humanistic investigations. But in exploitation there is a political concept more broadly comprehensible to working peoples than that of alienation (Sharma 1979). Yet the issues confronting labourers are never just wage stagnation, but also that so much of current economic activity is meaningless for those engaged in it (Harvey 2018b). Such a context makes comprehensible the desire for less alienating work when wage labour is an unavoidable circumstance among those interviewed.

Further to this, for a plurality of participants interviewed, the most significant and attractive element of becoming a journalist and freelance writer was the act of writing. In the words of Diana Mill, “I have always been a writer. I’ve always written in a journal and written poetry even before I was in journalism school ... I couldn’t just quit writing and never write again.” Over multiple generations of survey data, journalists have demonstrated a tendency to view themselves as writers (McIntyre 2012). This does not serve to obscure or deny the extant exploitation present. In the words of one participant, what all freelance writers wanted was “(word) rate change and more control over our (property) rights.” It does, however, illuminate the parallel track of alienation that accompanies exploitation.

### **What a Way to Make a Living: Not Working 9-to-5**

In one of the earliest in-depth studies of British journalists and their relationship to their occupation, Jeremy Tunstall (1971) divines the creative impulse as the second-most cited reason for pursuing journalism as a career. Those he spoke with noted a collective wish to avoid the perceived routine of the standard 9 a.m. to 5 p.m., white-collar job, as the primary reason for wanting to be journalists (Tunstall 1971). In my interview schedule, two questions about participants’ relationship to the 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. workday elicited the most visceral set of responses. For those interviewed, the standard work day connoted a lack of control over the allocation of their time. Consequently, this equated to a lack of flexibility to attend to appointments, pick-up children from school, etc. This was especially important to the female participants who comprised a majority of the sample in this study. Additionally, operating in accordance with the 9-to-5 paradigm signified employment within a large, bureaucratically structured work environment. This was anathema to those I interviewed, and this reaction proved consistent across demographic lines within the survey sample.

Jordan Kovich, a Montreal-based freelancer, gave, perhaps, the clearest articulation of his antipathy to working in an office environment from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. This stemmed from his childhood experience of watching his father: “It terrified me ... 9-to-5 very quickly became 9-to-7, 9-to-9, and even later ... during peri-

ods when he had to work that much it wore down on him ... and I never wanted to have to go through that ... It just never seemed worth it to me ... I get to talk to people and chat to people and go out and see some incredible things, talk to incredible people.” When I asked him what he found so dystopian about his father’s work-life trajectory, he responded by saying: “The routine. The idea of going and doing the same thing at the same time at the same desk for 40 years ... At least I get to be creative. Get to put my words down on paper ... Whereas I don’t think you really get to do that when you are working with Excel all day.”

Others still had found themselves working within public-sector bureaucracies for a time. One such respondent was Catherine Moores. Upon completing her master’s degree, she found a position within the Ontario civil service. It was there that she began freelance writing for magazines because she was so “bored” with the work on offer. She described it, thusly: “It’s nice money and you meet some fun people. But it’s a bit demoralizing, and I’d be sitting there reading magazines.” The reader of periodicals turned magazine writer remembered asking herself, “What am I doing here?” Her response to this question was to leave the civil service as quickly as possible, embarking upon a multi-decade career as a freelance writer and editor.

### **Alienation from Without**

As a legal term, alienation traces its history to the Roman Empire. There, it made reference to the transfer of property from one party to another (Kalekin-Fishman and Langman 2015). Therefore, to alienate is to relinquish a claim to something (Sharma 1979). Others have ascribed a different set of meanings to the concept. Theologians, for instance, have used it to infer separation from god, philosophers to indicate separation from truth, from self, from power, and anthropologists to describe various social configurations in which human capacities for attainment of a fulfilling life go unrealized, or are under developed at both the individual and group level. Subsequently, commentators have attributed alienation, variously, to a transhistorical human condition, to modernity, and more specifically, to capitalist social relations (Kalekin-Fishman and Langman 2015).

Marx’s (1988) analysis draws upon all the aforementioned traditions. As such, he designates four dimensions of alienation workers undergo within systemic relations of capitalist production. In the first instance, private property rights enable the owning class to appropriate the goods workers create. Secondly, the same property rights that facilitate the private appropriation of collectively-produced commodities also facilitate control over how commodities are produced in and through the labour process. In these first two dimensions of alienation, capital objectively displaces labour from both the product and process of fabrication. The next dimension of alienation is the denial of the development of “species-being” in humans’ metabolic relationship with nature, i.e., how humans must work to transform nature to meet needs, and in turn, how this transforms human nature. This is an ideal-type construction positing what human potentially could be outside of, and beyond, capitalism. Lastly, the relinquishments that occur along the first three levels of analysis lead to the estrangement of humans from one another (Marx 1988).

Marx (1988) penned these theoretical precepts nearly two centuries ago, yet they continue to have empirical correlates into the present. For example, the premise and promise of a creative class has some parallels with Marx’s (1988) concept of “species-being.” Yet the former is characterized by precarity, inequality, and competitive individualism rather than new forms of cooperation, “where subjectivity, the group itself in its affective and collaborative pulse, is the primary thing we produce together” in “art after capitalism” (Holmes 2013, 166). Max Haiven (2014) observes a contradiction in creative class discourses in that they situate themselves in an extreme form of possessive individualism. This acts to reproduce the hierarchies, inequalities, and divisions of capitalist social relations: “Be as creative as you like ... just colour inside the lines of the individualist” (211). It is precisely the objective structure of these freelancers’ labour market that fosters this competitive individualism (Cohen 2016). A consequence of this was participants’ observation that attempting to organize collectively in opposition to work conditions in the industry was akin to trying to “herd cats.” This serves to demonstrate the degree of estrangement freelance writers experience among themselves.



Even to the degree anti-Marxian scholars (Blauner 1964; Crawford 2009; Murphy 1993) have identified a lack of worker concern with owning the means of production, this fails to consider how this ownership structure shapes the organization of workplaces and its work processes – the latter being crucially important to freelance writers in this investigation. For Marx (1977), three qualities define the labour process in its trans-historical expression. The first of these is the ability of humans to engage in “purposeful activity”; the second is a requirement people have an object to work upon for the purposes of transforming it into something meeting a need; the final trait is the employ of tools/technologies to mediate the relationship between the subject (human activity) and the object (nature) of transformation. In less anthropological, more contemporary terms, the labour process refers to the terrain of control between labour and capital vis-à-vis technologies utilized in the workplace, the overall configuration of work processes, the organization of relations between workers and management and between workers themselves (Yates 2018). It is a struggle over the objective conditions of worker alienation for the purposes of capitalist exploitation (Spencer 2000).

Fordist automation and Taylorist planning and surveillance, which define the industrial, and even non-industrial, division of labour, and accompanying labour processes of the twentieth century, continues to haunt these freelance writers into the new millennium. Whether informants had experienced these conditions directly, such as those who undertook a mid-life career change, or whether merely observed in the figure of a parent, the perceived disciplining effects were uniform to a remarkable degree. The antidote to such empty work experiences has been the pursuit of a more fulfilling occupation via freelance writing as numerous informants made clear. Respondents ostensibly register a relative amount of autonomy historically granted to journalists and freelance writers. This applies to the control they exercise over the immediate production process as well as operating beyond bureaucratic structures as suggested by their independent contractor status (Cohen 2016). Also implicit in this is a recognition of freelance writing as a sphere enabling, unevenly, the at least partial expression of creative impulses (Haiven 2014). Consequently, the

efforts of these freelance writers to try and minimize their alienation may have served to make exploitation more tolerable. Neoliberalism here operationalizes alienation as a highly individualized response to the worst depredations of the Fordist-Taylorist world of work. In sum, the dominant labour processes of the twentieth century are labour processes of domination for the freelance writers in this study.

### **Alienation from Within**

Thus far, this analysis has focused on alienation from without the journalistic labour process. Such an approach, however, overlooks the alienation constitutive of journalists’ work processes. Informants’ subjective accounts make clear their ability to identify the former, but the latter was more difficult to detect. This may derive from what Bill Ryan (1992) names the “art-capital” contradiction. This is in reference to the “irrational” manner in which cultural labourers, such as freelance writers, produce commodities (104). This conflicts with the logic of calculation and instrumentality informing most capitalist accumulation strategies. Because of this, the labour processes of cultural workers cannot be subjected to the logics of scientific management (Ryan 1992, 104). This analysis informs Cohen’s (2016) position that freelance writers “retain control over their immediate labour process, which fuels feelings of autonomy and job satisfaction” (46). And even as she chronicles rationalization and de-skilling in the journalistic labour process of freelance writers, she concludes, “Control over production can be surrendered if it is not an impediment to exploitation” (Cohen 2016, 47). This affordance means that it is exploitation, not alienation, that this group of workers experiences most acutely (Cohen 2012, 2016)

For more than a century now, the activities of newsgathering and news writing have comprised the main elements of journalists’ work process (Ornebring 2010). The first of these two acts involves conceiving of story ideas, conducting research and interviews, and collecting images and audio. Once the journalist has gathered these materials, they would then undertake to write a story or script, depending on whether they are working at a print, broadcast, or online news source (Cotter 2010). Respectively, newsgathering and news

writing are the conception and execution<sup>2</sup> of the journalistic labour process (Braverman 1998).

Certain norms circumscribing conception have served to reify the subjective interests and orientations of freelance writers. Specifically, I refer here to news values and the objectivity doctrine. These are instantiations of intellectual Taylorism in which the judgment of reporters and freelance writers becomes an object of capital's control costumed under an ethical veil. In the words of Georg Lukacs (1971), reification is "at its most grotesque in journalism ... (where) subjectivity itself, knowledge, temperament, and powers of expression are reduced to an abstract mechanism, functioning autonomously and divorced both from the personality of their 'owner' and from the material and concrete nature of the subject matter in hand" (100).

Contestation over freelance writers' subjective orientations in the newsgathering process are captured by criteria external to them, guided by the hegemonic consensus of the objectivity credo and its accompanying news values. These reifications are the autonomous mechanisms Lukacs (1971) obliquely identifies. And as naturalized precedents, these categories are "a social process that goes on behind the back of producers ... (and) therefore appear(s) to the producers to have been handed down by tradition" (Marx 1977, 135). The objectivity doctrine and concomitant news values present themselves as a series of cultural and ethical values but they are equally determinative as economic categories, shaping the commodity character of the stories freelancers pursue. In one manifestation of this, those whom I spoke with recalled spending several hours a day searching through listservs, e-mails, and social media feeds in search of story ideas they thought might be of interest to editors. The fetishisms of freelancing, however, resulted in participants insisting they could pursue any story of interest even as they would bemoan the lack of opportunity to write the articles of greatest import to them.

The generational transmission of newsgathering practices, concepts and values has its parallel in news writing as well. Once again, beneath the appearance of labour process autonomy resides the essence of

sedimented alienation preserved in historical precedent. Despite the long-ago obsolescence of the telegraph from the journalistic toolbox, the inverted pyramid news story it helped engender remains the foundational news writing technique (Canavilhas 2006). Yet prior to the advent of the inverted pyramid in the middle of the nineteenth century, with its top-heavy style of attempting to answer the who, what, where, when, why of a story in its lead paragraph, newspaper writing was considered a literary genre. It displayed "an elegance and classical scholarship rarely displayed today" (Kesterson 1967, 18). According to Michael Schudson (1978), the inverted pyramid is at odds with the "desire to write a good story, not a safe story, or an objective story, but one finally crafted and forceful in its emotional impact" (187). Evidence for such observations was plentiful amongst the informants in this investigation. Norma Lynn Smith mused about the possibility of doing a master's degree in a narrative non-fiction writing program. She had extensive experience in composing feature articles for newspapers. However, even in this slightly less structured format, Smith felt limited in her ability to use the breadth and depth of the English language in order to create more vivid and dynamic accounts of those she was profiling.

The naturalization of certain norms and forms, as comprising the routine elements of the concrete labour practices of newsgathering and news writing, makes it more difficult to detect the imperatives of abstract labour in the articles freelance writers conceive of, research, and write. This set of historical processes confront freelance writers as the ambient background in which they enact their everyday work practices. Although obscured in the journalistic labour process, alienation is no less present: "Abstract labour beings to quantify and shape concrete labour in its image; the abstract domination of value begins to be materialized in the labour process itself ... the goal of production in capitalism exerts a form of necessity on the producers ... the goal has escaped human control" (Marx 1977, 182).

Claims of "relative autonomy" within the journalistic labour process of freelance writers arise from a perspective of there being no external authority directly governing worker conduct (Cohen 2012, 142). But as the above demonstrates, alienation is immanent to the newsgathering and news writing practices of freelance

<sup>2</sup> Despite one seeming to follow the other in discrete fashion, these two categories operate more dialectically than they do linearly. In writing one may realize the need for more or different sources of information in an iterative spiral.

writers. Marx (1977) may have noted, specifically, how the “secret of profit making” is revealed in “the hidden abode of production,” but it is in the labour process that alienation is detectable as well for Canadian freelance writers even as they simultaneously find satisfaction, pleasure and autonomy in and through their work. In a period of intensifying exploitation, labour process analysis need not absent alienation as a category of understanding to maintain relevance even with the need to transcend a dichotomous reading of these phenomena. But prior to engaging with the latter aim, it is requisite to situate, first, the sites and means by which exploitation occurs.

### **Exploitation in the Age of Digital Copyright**

Historically understood, exploitation is a social relation. A key element of this relationship is the ability of a ruling faction to establish the rate at which they will appropriate the surplus, above subsistence, the subordinate group is able to produce (Mandel 1970). Under capitalism, detection of this phenomenon is more elusive for owners and workers alike (Elson 2015). The source of this deceptiveness, for Marx, can be located in the differential measure in output between labour power and labour. Necessary labour is the part of the day dedicated to reproducing this capacity to work, i.e., the portion the capitalist compensates (Mandel 1970). This amount is less than the total number of hours capital hires labour on a daily basis. Surplus labour is the differential in hours between the minimum amount of work required to reproduce labour power, and the actual amount of labour workers perform. This uncompensated labour is the source of surplus value for capitalists (Elson 2015). The labour process remains a privileged site of analysis since it is where this exploitation occurs (Thompson 1989).

This is an assessment Cohen (2012, 2016, 2017) shares as it pertains to freelance writers. In spite of the “relative autonomy” freelance writers ostensibly enjoy, she wishes to re-centre labour process analysis in order to examine, “valorization and exploitation, the motor of capitalist accumulation and production, which is fundamentally structured around the extraction and appropriation of surplus value” (Cohen 2016, 46). This extraction takes place within two arenas in her estimation (Cohen 2016, 46). The first of these

to be examined is the domain of intellectual property regimes. Exploitation can now be located at the level of contested property rights between labour and capital: “Copyright’s primary function is to guarantee its owner exclusive right to exploit the work and to extract surplus value from workers” (Cohen 2012, 150). Elsewhere, she describes this phenomenon as follows: “By owning the rights to writers’ works, publishers can continue to extract surplus value from workers’ labour power long after they pay for an article” (Cohen 2016, 51).

Canadian legal precedent has assured independent contractors, such as freelance writers, ownership over the works they produce. The property rights associated with their works have enabled freelance writers to resell their articles in other markets in an acknowledgement of their precarity. But media concentration and technological convergence have made it possible to alter what was an already iniquitous power relation between publishers/editors and freelance writers (Cohen 2012, 2016). Horizontal and vertical integration, when combined with copyright-stripping contracts, has meant news media operations can monetize a freelance authored article across multiple platforms whilst having paid for it only once. Control over freelance writers’ legally enshrined copyright protections by some of Canada’s most powerful media corporations confirm there is nothing primitive about strategies seeking to accumulate capital through processes of dispossession and the subsequent collection of rents.

As Marx conceptualizes, capital is value in motion with value being a quantitative measure of socially necessary labour time (Harvey 2018b). This objective measure of value is the quality making commodities fungible (Mandel 1970). The labour theory of value therefore refers to the historically average quantity of labour needed to produce commodities for exchange on the market as measured by the amount of time needed for their creation. The overall circulation of capital passes through four distinct but interrelated stages. The first is the production process where workers’ labour power combines with other inputs of production, such as raw materials and technologies, in the creation of commodities and concomitant surplus value. These commodities then move to market as organized by merchant capitalists. It is there that the surplus value

generated in production is realized as money in consumer exchange (Harvey 2018b). Subsequently, money realized at the point of exchange is distributed as wages, taxes, profit for producers and merchant profit (Harvey 2018b). The final two distributive categories of money are finance capital and rent.

As monopoly-finance capital comes to characterize the broader political economy, rent-seeking as a facet of this configuration occupies a more prominent role in the accumulation of capital (Mazzucato 2018). Rent-seeking is profitability that stems from non-competitive pricing, the exclusion of competitors, the employ of monopoly power to disadvantage labour, and engagement with other activities not considered to be directly productive of value (Mazzucato 2018). As rent-seeking occurs in the distributive realm, not that of production, it is a form of surplus profits (Zeller 2008). Outside of the abode of production, it may come to appear that capital is not characterized by value in motion but rather by money in motion (Harvey 2018b). Money appears to beget money within the growing tendency of finance-dominated, accumulation regimes (Zeller 2008).

A decade-long, class-action lawsuit, filed by the freelance writer Heather Robertson against *The Globe and Mail* newspaper, is illustrative of the manner in which intellectual property monopolies generate super profits. In 1995, Robertson's publisher entered into agreement with the newspaper in which a submitted piece by the author would appear one time in exchange for a fee. The agreement made no mention of reproduction in any electronic databases (D'Agostino 2015). Yet subsequently, the article appeared in multiple electronic repositories owned and operated by *The Globe and Mail's* parent company (D'Agostino 2015). In order for individuals or institutional actors such as libraries to access these digital archives, license fees must be paid to the proprietor (Zeller 2008). Exclusive ownership over this trove of freelancer articles yields the additional accumulation of monies as created by the artificial scarcity of monopoly property title (Zeller 2008). This results in a phenomenon in monopoly-finance capital that Harvey (2018b) refers to as "prices without values." This means access to (intellectual) goods display a price but they do not express value. The expropriation of freelance writer copyright is exploitative as news media

corporations alienate ownership over the product, but it does not occur at the point of production. The labour process is therefore not the loci of analysis here. Intellectual property rights are not a means to extract additional surplus value from freelance writers after a single payment as Cohen (2016) suggests. Rather, this is a form of market exchange that takes place in the distributional sphere between consumers wanting access to such goods, and those that exercise the power of monopoly rents over that access.

### What a Piece of Work: Value Generation Inside and Outside the Standard Employment Relationship

The industrialization of the journalistic labour process over the course of the twentieth century has served to rationalize and standardize conception and execution, newsgathering and news writing. In opting to pursue careers as freelance writers, these workers have attempted to regain greater control over their work methods<sup>3</sup> even as these efforts expose them to new modalities of exploitation according to Cohen (2016). Their positionality outside the standard employment relationship veils the exploitative character of the employee-employer relationship: "(The) arbitrary per-word form of payment ... obscures a large portion of the labour time that goes into the writing of those words" (Cohen 2012, 148-149). Here, she references the uncompensated time freelance writers expend in conceiving story ideas, sending story proposals to editors, conducting research, attending events, doing interviews, and writing and revising articles. The components Cohen (2012) identifies above comprise the near totality of the journalistic labour process from conception to execution.

As a means of overall assessment, Cohen (2012, 2016, 2017) points to freelance writers' categorization as piecework labourers as the second specific way by which they experience exploitation. In piecework, "it appears that they sell simply a finished piece of work ... not the labour time required to produce that piece"

3 Interviews with participants in my investigation indicate feelings of constraint in working with prevailing formats even in magazine writing or long-form narratives. This may be attributable to the periodical industry adopting its own equivalent of the inverted-pyramid form in the "nut graph," "hourglass," and the "champagne-glass" method (McKercher and Cummings 1998).

(Cohen 2012, 147). Historically, though, there is little to distinguish how newsgathering and news writing differs for staff reporters in comparison to freelance writers at newspapers, magazines or digital outlets. Since the tasks freelance writers engage in are the same, largely, as those of staff reporters, then one may conclude the researching, interviewing and editing paid staffers conduct also goes uncompensated in some proportion beyond necessary labour. Piecework may help to account for freelance writers' toleration for precarity, for as Marx (1977) outlines, it gives workers a "wider scope ... to individuality, tends to develop ... worker's sense of liberty, independence and self-control" (697). But he ultimately concludes that "the piece wage is therefore only a modified form of the time wage" (Marx 1977, 694).

The literal measure here, then, is whether freelance writers are productive workers in that they generate surplus value. This designation of productive labourer Marx (1977) explores in his elucidation of John Milton's *Paradise Lost* poem. In this brief discussion, he first describes Milton as a "silkworm" when he wrote the poem because it was not created in a relation of production. Later, he says Milton becomes a merchant when he sold the piece to a publisher for a fixed fee. In exchanges of this kind, the piece once more has a price but no value. It contributes to an increase in the circulation of money, but not to growth in the production of surplus value (Harvey 2018b). It is only when a writer "turns out work for his (*sic*) publisher in a factory style (that s/he) is a productive worker" (Marx 1977, 1044).

As outlined earlier, the objectivity doctrine, news values, and writing formats such as the inverted pyramid are constitutive to the labour process of freelance writers. While journalistic work processes may appear to be shaped by the logics of craft modes of production, in essence, they are long industrialized. Consequently, freelance writers' positionality outside the standard employment position cannot immunize them from the effects of the Taylorist techniques they deploy regularly.

Cohen (2016) does give attention to what she refers to as "conceptual technologies," such as the inverted pyramid, but in the main does not link them systematically to the role they play in generating and circulating value. She writes, "conceptual technologies" have "changed the form of reporters' writing and chal-

lenged their autonomy ... (but) freelancers have tried to restore these ties (to art forms) by regaining their status as independent workers and remaining outside of the employment relationship" (76). Paradoxically, then, being outside the standard employment relationship is to offer protections to freelance writers against the alienating effects of these mental techniques. Yet freelance writers' status as independent contractors is one of two ways in which they experience the exploitation of unpaid surplus labour. Such seeming incongruities reach a measure of resolution when viewed through an analysis of the labour process as the source of value generation. It is then that the phenomena of alienation and exploitation become cognate irrespective of freelancers' relationship to their employment contract.

### Conclusion: A Full-Value Accounting

The capitalist crises of the new millennium have resulted in a revival of interest in Marx's concepts of analysis. Such efforts have included several book-length treatments examining and critiquing the category of value (Holloway 2010; Henderson 2013; Massumi 2018). Yet labour process scholars have sidelined, mostly, Marx's labour theory of value in the decades following the publication of Harry Braverman's *Labour and Monopoly Capital: The Degradation of Work in the Twentieth Century* in 1974 (Spencer 2000). Contradictorily, one of the many critiques levelled in opposition to Braverman's analysis of the labour process is his disregard for Marx's labour theory of value (Jaros 2005). His apparent neglect of the labour theory of value is reflected in the title of his *magnum opus*, as it ostensibly links deskilling solely with the monopoly conditions of capital. Others, still, have accused him of the opposite tack. That is, he did not examine with sufficient rigour the mechanisms of profit making under monopoly conditions, i.e., monopoly pricing, mergers and acquisitions, and the collection of rent that becomes more pronounced in non-competitive markets (Littler and Salaman 1982). But in the following, Braverman (1998) presents managerial control of the labour process as existing expressly for the purpose of attempting to extract more surplus value from workers. Attendant to this is the alienation encapsulated in the tendency towards deskilling. Upon the craft chassis of formal subsumption and absolute surplus value extrac-

tion sits the industrial motor of real subsumption and relative surplus value:

In order to ensure management control and to cheapen the worker, conception and execution must be rendered separate spheres of work, and ... the study of work processes must be reserved to management and kept from the workers, to whom its results are communicated only in the form of simplified job tasks governed by simplified instructions, while it is thenceforth their duty to follow unthinkingly and without comprehension. [Braverman, 1998, 81]

An understanding of capital as value in motion is unable to abandon the labour process and the labour theory of value for these categories of analysis connect valorization in production, to realization in exchange, to the remainder of the circuit of capital in its distributional components (Spencer 2000). As Moishe Postone (1993) notes, “the form of social domination (that) characterizes capitalism ... is grounded in the value form of wealth itself,” which is generated in and through the labour process (30). Additionally, Postone (1993) describes how in order to receive “full value” for the time spent labouring, workers are compelled to conform to temporal norms, in the production of these commodity pieces, that are alien and foreign and confront them as such. The working to the temporal requirements external to the control of freelance writers, as determined by socially necessary labour time, is the source of the structurally deeper forms of alienation and exploitation they experience. This is the “abstract mechanism” Lukacs (1971) identifies as the source of journalists’ reification.

Impoverishment, in this guise, is not merely the exploitation that occurs at the point of production, but also the degradation workers experience in the labour process (Harvey 2018b). It is the latter that accounts for the lines of flight desired by the respondents in this study as they expressed a need to move from work that was more alienating to work organized and experienced, in freelance writing, that was even slightly less alienating. But rather than perpetuate debates in which one of these two concepts is assigned greater analytical power, or as having more political resonance, I have attempted here to bring exploitation and alienation into conversation with one another through an articulation of the labour theory of value, and how it is realized in the journalistic labour process of freelance writers. For exploitation and alienation operate relationally as mediated by the category of value, and value generation remains rooted in historical techniques constitutive of freelance writers’ labour as consistent with their designation as productive workers. To the degree freelance writers do not produce “in accordance with the laws of beauty,” it is because they continue to produce in accordance with the laws of value (Marx 1988, 77). Neither labour process reforms in the journalistic field touting multi-skilling, nor redistributive measures re-allocating a larger portion of the value freelance writers generate addresses the above. It is only a workers’ movement that can negate the motion of value. And it is only in this manner freelance writers can realize the occupational fulfillment they have sought over the course of their work-life histories.

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# Rereading The 18th Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte: The Phenomenon of Bonapartism as a Capitalist State Without Popular Representation

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**ABSTRACT:** This article examines the character of so-called Bonapartism through the development of the class struggle in the period between 1848 and 1851. The perspective adopted is that in contrast to what is stated in the classics (Marx, Engels, Lenin, Gramsci) of Marxism, Bonapartism is neither a form of politics imposed from the exterior against all social classes, nor is it a manifestation of the state's autonomy vis à vis the bourgeoisie (Poulantzas). On the contrary, it is a characteristic form of the bourgeois state, which does not have parliamentary institutions among its constituent elements. On the basis of this argumentation, one can understand the current tendency of limited representative relations, which benefits state-controlled mechanisms that are independent of popular control

**KEYWORDS:** state, Marx, capitalism, Bonapartism, class struggle, bourgeoisie

## Introduction

The purpose of this article is to approach analysis of the nature of the State in capitalism through an examination of the class struggle in France in the period between 1848 and 1851, that is to say of the phenomenon that has come to be called Bonapartism. To aid with understanding of the historical context of the events, Marx's classic analyzes will be utilized, as will texts by present-day researchers.

What we will attempt to show is that developments in this period are epitomized by the fact that the French social formation was passing through the stage of consolidating capitalist relations of production, a process generating some superstructural turbulence up to the time that all factions of the French bourgeoisie could feel that they had some presence in it. This is in contrast to what happened in the last years prior to the 1848 uprising. At that time, bank capital in collaboration with a section of the parliamentary elite spearheaded the state securities, affecting significantly other bourgeois factions such as the industrial and commercial

capital. The reaction of these bourgeois factions in alliance with the proletariat and the peasantry is what led to the 1848 revolution. The division of the bourgeoisie into distinct segments with particular interests played an important role in the developments of the period.

The composition of the Bonapartist state did not amount to some special type of State reflecting a balance between two opposing social coalitions, as the Marxist classics claim. It was a cruder political variant of bourgeois domination largely divested of the trappings of representation of the dominated classes and their interests. The phenomenon of Bonapartism shows that a bourgeois state, if it is to be such, should reflect the interests of all factions of the bourgeoisie, without it being necessary for representative institutions to be in operation. In other words, Bonaparte's victory constitutes not a victory over all social classes, but rather the ascendancy of an authoritarian model of the bourgeois state over relations of representation. It is a development which cannot in any way be regarded

as being against what Marx called the “great mass” of the bourgeoisie. This observation helps us to see that the “caesarist” traits of Bonapartism are also linked to the present-day trajectory of the authoritarian State where the relations of representation (the power of the parliament) are restricted, to the advantage of centres impervious to popular control.

From this viewpoint it becomes understandable how this supposed class equilibrium, overseen by an individual whom Marx regarded as a buffoon, lasted for two decades, given that it represented a form of class domination rather than the manifestation of individual initiative in favourable social conditions. It is also not hard to interpret why sections of the lumpenproletariat actively supported Bonaparte, inspired by his struggle with some of the political representatives of the bourgeoisie, albeit not with its hard core, the overwhelming majority of its economic agents. Last but not least, the transformations to be described provide an interpretation more comprehensive than a mere mention of the bourgeoisie’s tendency to weaken the institutions of political representation, concerning the French proletariat’s inability to form a politically and organizationally unified collective to challenge, with a plan and a program, the designs of Bonaparte and the bourgeoisie.

This approach helps to understand the relatively recent developments in the State where representation relations (the power of the Parliament) decline for the benefit of unelected government (technocratic staff, government advisers, public administration experts) and supranational institutions (credit rating agencies, the European Central Bank for euro countries, the World Bank etc.).

### General Context of the Era

In this section we present the outline of the basic economic and social parameters characterizing French society on the eve of the 1848 uprising and continuing to sustain it as it unfolds.

Before we embark on this, however, there is a question that needs to be answered, concerning the nature of the French social formation at that time. Is it a capitalist social formation or something else, given the majority status of the rural strata and the strong state bureaucracy? If the “something else” applies then the whole discussion about a capitalist state that

called upon Bonaparte to co-operate and/or confront the bourgeoisie has no meaning. Questioning of the capitalist character of the French state is a view associated with Comninel and corroborated precisely by the majority status of the rural strata that would ultimately support Bonaparte (see below) but also by the special role played by the state bureaucracy in his rise to power (Comninel 1997, 203).

Mooers cites some data which, without his personally being led to such a conclusion, could justify the position that the French state was not at that time a capitalist state: three-quarters of the active population were farmers; there were just over a million of workers employed in establishments employing an average of ten workers. At the same time factors of rural economy such as demographic crises and famine had a significant effect on overall economic development (Mooers 1991, 83). But numerous figures highlight the consolidation of capitalism within the French social formation: France in 1850 on a number of indicators (production capacity of steam engines, coal consumption, crude iron production, raw cotton consumption) may have lagged behind Britain but it was clearly ahead

of Germany and Belgium. In the period between 1851 and 1853 it came fourth after Switzerland, Holland and England in per capita global trade, and third (with around 11 percent of the total) after the USA and Britain in annual national income per employee.<sup>1</sup> At that time England, France, Germany and the U.S. accounted for two-thirds of global industrial production, with the figure for France being 16 percent (Beaud 1981, 126). Between 1815 and 1850 industrial production increased by 2.8 percent, and the corresponding rural production by 1.9 percent,<sup>2</sup> so that in 1850, 29 percent of the GNP was generated in this way. In the same year the relevant figures for the UK were 35%, for Germany 21%, for Italy 19% and for Russia 10% (Trebilcock 1996, 51). Finally, very large production units had begun to be established. In 1834 the company Doltfus-Mieg et Cie employed 4,200 workers and Schneider at Le Creusot increased the workforce at its factory from 230 in 1812 to 3,250 in 1850 (Beaud 1981, 134).

<sup>1</sup> For the relevant data see Clough- Rapp 1980 Vol II : 418; 431, 435, and Beaud 1981, 125.

<sup>2</sup> Data compiled by Levy-Leboyer 1968, 796.

But the empirical/quantitative factor is the least important because in every social formation there are typically various coexisting, or to be more precise, interlocking modes of production, one of which predominates over the others.<sup>3</sup> This mode of production succeeds in constructing an edifice of maintenance-disintegration vis à vis the others, commencing at the economic level and subsequently expanding into the superstructure. In the France of 1850 the capitalist mode of production structured the economic process in accordance with its own priorities: an expansion of wage labour, the sale abroad of capitalist commodities, the gradual transformation of agricultural products from barter items into commercial goods, increasing involvement of the banking sector in the circuit of production, distribution and sale of goods, ever greater deployment of technological innovation in the production process.

Having clarified this issue, let's proceed to an outline of the economic and social conditions of the period. One key element is that in the reign of Louis Philippe a political and economic power complex had emerged comprised of bankers and their collaborators in parliament and the palace. The latter transferred to the former state secrets, knowledge of which led to sudden fluctuations in government securities, resulting in massive profits for the protagonists and major disasters for small capital holders. Great profits were generated at the same time from railway construction, government spending and state loans, and were channelled to the aristocracy of money and its political partners. Nevertheless "Trade, industry, agriculture, shipping, the interests of the industrial bourgeoisie, were bound to be continually endangered and prejudiced under this system" (Marx 2010, 15-16).

At the level of the working class, the situation was very bad, given that the law of Le Chapelier, contained in the Criminal Code of 1811, prohibited strikes and workers' unions (Beaud 1981, 135- 136). Temporary wage cuts in periods of industrial crisis were a frequent phenomenon, and working days could be as long as fourteen and fifteen hours. Children and women often worked as much as men, for very low wages (Tuma 1978, Vol II, 655).

This was the general framework of domination for this power bloc. Beyond that there are the specific factors that sparked the uprising of 1848: events such as the potato blight, the poor harvests of 1845 and 1846, the price rises of 1847, all exacerbating popular discontent. To these should be added the crisis in Britain. These factors taken together had the effect of inhibiting the extroversion of big French investors. Seeing the British crisis spreading into Central Europe, they preferred to invest in France, thereby causing suffering to many shopkeepers and small entrepreneurs.

All socially combustible material had accumulated in preparation for the outbreak of the 1848 uprising.

### The February Republic

The prohibition of a programmed demonstration on February 22 led to militant demonstrations and the setting up of barricades, with the majority of the National Guard refusing to intervene.

Louis Philippe dismissed the Prime Minister Guizot but the crisis sharpened when, on the evening of 23rd February, the guards of the Foreign Ministry shot and killed 16 demonstrators who were celebrating in the streets. After that the monarchical regime of Louis Philippe collapsed. A provisional government was formed which only under pressure from the workers' representatives proclaimed the Second French Republic. Universal suffrage was introduced for all men who had reached the age of 21, lived in the same house for the previous six months and had not forfeited their civil rights. The right to stand for public office, under the same provisos, was granted to males who had turned 25 years of age. This led to an increase in the number of voters, from 250,000 to nine million! Another pro-labour reform was the right of workers, with the help of the State, to establish production co-operatives (national workshops) that would distribute the profits of their labour. Also established, following agreement with the provisional government, was a committee of representatives of the trade unions. The national workshops aimed at absorbing the unemployed and those who worked in them were employed in public works. A little later the 10-hour working day was introduced in Paris, and 11-hour in the rest of France. Slavery was abolished in the overseas territories, complete freedom of the press was instituted and freedom of assembly

3 For a more detailed examination of the inter-articulation of modes of production see Poulantzas 1979, 22.

secured. The institution of “*marchandage*” (a form of contract labour) was abolished, as was imprisonment for debt. The assets of two railway companies were seized.

These are examples of the “left-wing” practices of the provisional government. Nevertheless, just because it was a government of very different, and conflicting, social interests, measures had to be taken that could serve as credentials with the world of capital, and particularly the banking elite, so that the government could be seen as working for the overall benefit of shareholders: Seeking to display its credentials to the economic elite and its world, the provisional government paid the interest on the securities to the state’s creditors before the expiry of the deadline for payment, thus encouraging a positive attitude to the government on the part of a critical mass of capitalists (Marx 2010, 21). Of course someone had to pay the bills for this pleasant surprise conferred upon State creditors. Thus the government would proceed to seizure of deposits exceeding 100 francs, converting them into unpaid state debt. This was an act that would enrage the petty bourgeois strata who now saw democracy working to the detriment of their interests. (Marx, 2010, 21).

At the same time, to enable state revenue to be increased from another source, the government decided to impose a further tax of 45 centimes in the franc in addition to the four direct taxes already paid by farmers, thus enraging them.

On the basis of this plethora of opposed and conflicting interests Marx concluded, correctly in my opinion, that the February republic was a bourgeois republic and could not be anything else, but under the pressure of action by the proletariat was obliged to proceed to a series of popular concessions. The proletariat for its part was not able to proceed beyond the constant demand that the promises made by the government must be kept, but even this limited political horizon made possible significant pressure to be exercised on the government, which did what it could not to carry out these promises. (Marx 2010, 25).

Thus in order to shield the new regime against any challenge from the proletarian side, the government hired 24,000 young soldiers who formed the mobile guard and came from the lumpenproletariat. They were a body of full-time employees, so that apart from

operating as policemen they also operated as a brake on unemployment (Agulhon 1983, 41).

But all this was still not enough. Just as in February a combative proletariat was required for democracy and its social concessions to be established, so now another fight was needed for the purpose of getting rid of them (Marx 2010, 25).

This direction would soon get under way when on April 15 the provisional government accused the representatives of the workers (Raspail, Blanc, Blanqui) of preparing to overthrow the government, seeking on the one hand to have the army withdrawn from the provinces and on the other to have a climate of fear generated in the other social strata. The second, and more substantial, blow was to come at the elections on April 23 when bourgeois democrats emerged as the victors, receiving the votes of the great majority of farmers, who were the numerically largest social stratum, comprising 64.5 percent of the economically active population, and considering themselves wronged because of the 45 percent tax increase that had been imposed on them (Tombs 1996, 380). The socialists, by contrast, exercised limited influence and elected only a small number of representatives in Paris, notably in areas where they were supported by moderates (Mastrogiannopoulos 2013, 279). In comparative terms the moderate republicans who agreed with the political line of the provisional government were in the majority, with approximately 500 representatives. There were about 250 royalists and 150 representatives who were positively disposed towards the socialist project. Thus, the winner of the election was the liberal bourgeoisie, as the majority voted for the provisional government’s program for liberal democracy without social revolution (Agulhon 1983, 45- 46).

### **May 4, 1848 to May 28, 1849**

The second period was that of the consolidation of bourgeois democracy. In that connection the National Assembly that was convened on May 4, 1848 intended to proceed with the repeal of previous pro-labour measures. This elicited a reaction from the workers, who demanded that a tax of one billion francs be imposed on the rich, that sections of the regular army be moved out of Paris, and that the French army not participate in the European bombardment of Poland (Tombs 1996, 382).

On May 15, in support of the demand for implementation of the demands of the proletarian layers, a raid on the National Assembly was launched, with subsequent arrest of the key representatives such as Raspail and Blanqui. Then, above and beyond the prohibition of popular assemblies, the institution of the national workshops was targeted through replacement of the daily wage by piece work, restrictions on the entry of workers into them, expulsion of unmarried workers and their drafting into the army. In essence it was the period of struggle of all other classes against the proletariat. The bourgeois monarchy of Louis Philippe was succeeded by bourgeois democracy, that is to say the political ascendancy of the entirety of the bourgeoisie. Of course, to achieve victory over the proletariat a social alliance had been created against it that encompassed the entire bourgeoisie, “the aristocracy of finance, the industrial bourgeoisie; the middle class; the small traders’ class; the army; the slums, organized as *Guarde Mobile*; the intellectual celebrities, the parsons’ class, and the rural population.” (Marx 2003, 19).

Faced with this alliance, the proletariat responded with the June Days Uprising, an extremely violent labour insurrection triggering bloody repression, with 3,000 workers killed by the troops of General Cavaignac in Paris and 10,000 in France as a whole. Thousands were injured and over 25,000 imprisoned or exiled. After the defeat of the workers’ insurrection the national workshops were abolished and those working in them had to enlist in the army or farm a plot of land in the provinces (Richards 2005, 162). The plan for purchase of the railways was withdrawn.

This defeat was to lead the proletariat “to the background on the revolutionary stage. It always seeks to crowd forward, so soon as the movement seems to acquire new impetus, but with ever weaker effort and ever smaller results.” (Marx 2003, 19). This occurred because of the enormity of the June defeat, because then all the classes and parties joined forces against the proletariat, the embodiment of the party of anarchy. The point is that this will not be confined to the proletariat. On the contrary, the pretext of order against anarchy will be used whenever a particular class feels that its own particular interests are threatened and reacts against this (Marx 2003, 21). Marx makes this observation in the light of the view that the state

apparatus under the leadership of Bonaparte possessed an ultimate autonomy. For our part, we agree with this Marxian observation but within the context of the overall functioning of the capitalist state as a key vehicle of political representation for the interests of the bourgeoisie. This means that the concept of the struggle for order against anarchy is not nebulous.

Its content is the contraposition of bourgeois order against anyone who threatens the interests of the *grande bourgeoisie*. The amalgamation of the interests of the bourgeoisie achieved through the February revolution is a decisive step towards the maturation of this class, which subsequently focuses on the removal of all obstacles that stand in the way of its uncontrolled sovereignty. The parliament and its functioning are one of them.

From June onwards the history of the Constituent Assembly was “the history of the sovereignty and dissolution of the democratic grouping of the bourgeoisie” (Marx 2003, 22). Through its mouthpiece, the Parisian *National* newspaper, it called for parliamentary democracy (which is why the delegates did not withdraw the decree on direct suffrage), defended economic protectionism, opposed the aristocracy of finance and despised socialism and communism. Politically, the convening of the National Assembly led to the exclusion of the socialist elements from the Executive Committee. The June Days uprising provided a pretext for expulsion of the Executive Committee and the democratic republicans who expressed the interests of the petty bourgeoisie. At the institutional level there began a process of cancellation of many popular legislative gains that had been enacted in the previous period: abolition of the law that limited the working day to ten hours, a return to imprisonment for debt, limitations on freedom of association, reintroduction of the security deposit for newspapers, rejection of the plan for taxation of capital in the form of a mortgage which had been prepared by the previous assembly.

Meanwhile the rupture proceeded in the alliance between bourgeois democrats and the petty bourgeoisie. The latter were in a dire economic position. In Paris more than 21 million francs in promissory notes were still awaiting payment, and in the provinces another 11 million francs. More than 7,000 commercial business owners had not paid their rent since February. A

request was then examined that creditors should accept a proportion of the sums owed and agree to postponement of payment for shopkeepers whose businesses had started recovering by February 24. But the fear that acceptance of this request would pave the way for new demands, and thus for political strengthening of the petty-bourgeoisie, led to its rejection by the National Assembly on January 22, 1848.

The above-mentioned developments might be seen as a victory for the bourgeois democrats but they created problems for the bourgeois layers because they ruined trade at a time when state expenses were increasing due to the cost of the June insurrection and state revenues were decreasing due to a contraction in production, dwindling consumption and falling imports. The only solution was to resort to renewed borrowing.

This makes it understandable how the exclusive sovereignty of the bourgeois democrats should have lasted only from June 24 to December 10, 1848. The vitiation of their power had already commenced from the moment of the establishment of the Presidential office, which came to share overall political responsibilities with the Legislative Assembly. On the one hand were the 750 representatives of the people who comprised the legislature, with upgraded powers such as the power to declare war or conclude commercial agreements. On the other was the President, who headed the executive, nominated and recalled ministers, appointed civil servants and had control of the army (Marx 2003, 26).

Although the motion proposing election of the President by the people passed easily, with 648 votes in favour and 158 against, the National Assembly, probably fearing excessive concentration of power in the hands of the President, ensured that he could not be re-elected, along with a range of prohibitive measures against the prospect of a coup being initiated by the President (Agulhon 1983, 68-69).

We see that this whole development, with conflicts within the parliament, dual power at the level of political decision-making, etc., unfolds within a context characterized by continuous contraction of institutional remnants of the means for registering popular claims within the state. This does not happen automatically, but gradually and by refraction, due to the particular importance of the introduction of

universal suffrage, making possible the emergence of individual social interests.

Recognition and management of those individual social interests is a cost to the bourgeoisie, whose desire would be to avoid payment for them, and which accordingly never ceases to struggle against it.

The adoption of the Constitution, which was finally approved by a vote of 793 votes to 30, created a peculiar equilibrium, the maintenance of which was undertaken by the President of the Republic himself, who within a few weeks would be Bonaparte. Marx comments on this development as entailing a fundamental contradiction. Political power is conceded through giving the right to vote to classes beyond the bourgeoisie, but they are required not to move on to social emancipation. By contrast the social power of the bourgeoisie is underwritten but this takes place on specific terms which it is expected not to overreach. (Marx 2010, 35) Marx thus recognizes a social equilibrium between opposing social forces, but we observe that it will very soon be modified precisely because under capitalism it is not the government but the state as a whole that exercises political power, with particular emphasis on its repressive mechanisms.

The Constituent Assembly, for its part, perceiving the growing discontent of the farmers, reduced indirect taxes on salt and alcohol and announced that it would not dissolve until it had passed ten organic laws, which would harmonize certain institutions with the new Constitution. In this way it sought not only to broaden its legitimacy but also to delay the holding of parliamentary elections, fearing the growing influence of monarchists. (Agulhon 1983, 74-75).

In any case on December 10th presidential elections were held where the bourgeois democratic choice Cavaignac received only 1,400,000 votes, as against the 5,400,000 that went to Louis Bonaparte, 370,000 to the left republican Ledru-Rollin, 37,000 to the socialist Raspail and 18,000 to Lamartine.

This victory of Louis Bonaparte and his appointment as President of the Republic were a reaction of the countryside against the city. It nevertheless also enjoyed support from the army, the petty bourgeoisie and the big bourgeoisie, who saw Bonaparte as a bridge to monarchy, and from proletarians as well, who rejoiced in the defeat of Cavaignac, the military

figure who had organized the suppression of the June Days uprising and won the adulation of the bourgeois democrats.<sup>4</sup> Other factors behind the emergence of Bonaparte included the prestige of his name among the broad peasant masses. In terms of mechanisms an important role was played by the church and the dignitaries whose influence won voters over to Bonaparte, whereas Cavaignac had the support only of the state's administrative machinery. (Agulhon 2006, 129). Not being a class, given that they maintained no political links and projected no common interest, the peasantry cannot represent themselves, so that someone else must come to represent them. The support for Bonaparte thus had basically conservative characteristics.

The period from December 20, 1848, when Bonaparte assumed office, until the dissolution of the Constituent Assembly in May 1849, was one of the decline and fall of the bourgeois democrats. They were sidelined by the numerical mass of the bourgeoisie, who saw themselves represented by the party of order, in which were included representatives of the House of Bourbon and the House of Orleans.

At the same time there was an intensification of the struggle between the executive and the right-wing minority wing of the legislature and the corresponding centre-left majority over further legislative reforms that would end in the loss of the parliamentary majority and proclamation of elections on May 13, 1849.

The predominant feature of these elections, where 750 representatives were elected for a term of office of three years, was intense polarization, clearly discernible between the three competing factions. The Reds or "The Mountain" had around 200 deputies, the republicans approximately 100 and the monarchist Party of Order about 450. This in itself shows a clear shift in the correlation of forces from the centre to the right and/or from the progressive democratic bourgeoisie to the conservative monarchist bourgeoisie. The Left appeared to have gained in strength but this was merely a matter of appearances given that after continued political defeats its discourse had patently become more moderate, particularly after the violent departure from the scene of the more radical representatives.

4 For Cowling-Martin the social alliance that elevated Bonaparte to the presidency was comprised of the peasantry, the petty bourgeoisie, the proletariat and the grande bourgeoisie, who voted for the restoration of the monarchy (Cowling-Martin 2002, 3).

### **From May 28, 1849 to December 2, 1851**

On May 28, 1849, the Legislative Assembly was convened and on December 2, 1851, violently dissolved. Following Marx's relevant outline, we can distinguish the following periods:

From May 29 to June 13, 1849, dominated by the struggle between the democracy and the bourgeoisie and ending with the defeat of the petty-bourgeois or democratic party.

From June 13, 1849 to May 31, 1850, dominated by the parliamentary dictatorship of the bourgeoisie, that is to say the coalition of Orleanists and Legitimists also known as the Party of Order, a dictatorship supplemented by the abolition of universal suffrage.

May 31, 1850 to December 2, 1851, a period of struggle between the parliamentary representation of the bourgeoisie, as expressed by the remaining party of the order and Bonaparte, the victory of the latter, followed by the collapse of constitutional/ parliamentary sovereignty.

As Marx observes, at this stage continuing to represent the bourgeoisie, the Party of Order stood against the accumulated dissatisfaction of the other classes without being able to contain this dissatisfaction through enlisting it into its own conflicts with the monarchy. The power of the

dominated classes was based on the right to vote so this is what the bourgeoisie were constrained to oppose. Correspondingly the petty-bourgeois who had seen their material interests being placed in jeopardy were drawn towards the workers (Marx 2003, 41-42). To this we add the thesis that all this conflict amplified the dislike of the great mass of the bourgeoisie for representative institutions, and the more so when they became aware of the emerging alliance between the petty bourgeoisie and the proletariat.

A key element in the alliance between the petty bourgeoisie and the proletariat were the by-elections of 10th March 1849 in Paris conducted to find new occupants for the seats left vacant as a result of political persecution of their predecessors. The upshot was that in Paris the three vacated seats were all won by the Social Democrat candidates, receiving 127,000 votes overall, and of the total of 21 seats the Social Democrats won 11. This was interpreted as consolidation of the



influence of the Left, despite the persecution that had preceded it in the most recent period (Agulhon 1983, 125) Unnerved, Bonaparte forged an alliance with the Party of Order and on May 31 a new electoral law was passed under the terms of which three million casual workers were no longer able to vote because three years' residence in the same area was now demanded, the lower age limit rose from 21 to 25 and voting was prohibited to the indigent. Freedom of the press was also being curbed through a range of other legislative innovations, and freedom of association abolished. At the same time the state acquired the right to ban unions and associations. This is a key point since the curtailment in relations of representation is largely achieved through the temporary alliance between Bonaparte and the Party of Order. The relationship between the two reflects primarily the autonomy of the political element over the economic, in the sense that the political is the Party of Order and the economic the great mass of the bourgeoisie that feels itself represented by Bonaparte.

It is the conditions of transition to a capitalist state embracing the whole of the bourgeoisie that creates space for the autonomy of the political element.

On 13th June the Party of Order succeeded in subordinating the Constitution to *majority decisions* of the National Assembly, as the legitimate protests of Left parliamentarians and thousands of citizens against the anti-Constitutional campaign in Rome were met with brutal repression.<sup>5</sup> From the moment that a given number of parliamentarians began to comply with the orders of the public prosecutors they were consenting to the abolition of parliamentary immunity itself. The powers of the President of the Republic were thereby upgraded and those of each separate parliamentary deputy correspondingly downgraded.

The role of the farmers proved to be particularly decisive because they were to ally themselves with Bonaparte against the Party of Order from the moment that parameters such as the low grain prices, the price

fluctuations for cotton, the poor harvest for raw silk and the increases in taxation left them with the feeling that they had been defrauded by the Party of Order. When these reactions were made manifest a wave of persecution of teachers (seen as being ringleaders of the farmers) was unleashed, obliging them to submit to the tutelage of the church. Community leaders were hounded and a network of spies was established in every region.

The autumn of 1850 was entertained by the spectacle of the rivalry between the Presidency and the parliamentary deputy and military commander Changarnier, culminating on January 3 with the dismissal of Changarnier. On January 18 a motion of no confidence in the government was tabled and passed with 415 votes in favour and 286 against, following an initiative by the Party of Order, which was protesting in this way against the dismissal of Changarnier that had been ordered by this particular government. This meant that the parliament was now losing its control over the supreme command of the armed forces.

But this gave Bonaparte the opportunity to appoint a new transitional government, none of whose members were in the parliament. At the same time, a considerable section of the Party of Order voted against the party line, engendering a volatility of alliances between the various parliamentary factions and also enhancing the power of the parliamentarians supporting the Presidency. The government continued in office until April.

The political crisis propelled the Party of Order into an alliance with the democrats and the petty bourgeoisie. Ostensibly this signified an open breach between the Executive and Legislature. But in reality it meant that the transformations in the state had progressed so far that the – very desirable, for the bourgeoisie – possibility of abolishing the representative institutions had become visible.

According to Marx:

The one, the small republican faction of the bourgeoisie that alone could proclaim the republic, wrest it from the revolutionary proletariat by street fighting and a reign of terror, and draft its ideal basic features in the constitution; and the other, the whole royalist mass of the bourgeoisie that alone could rule in this constituted bourgeois republic, strip the constitution of its ideological trimmings, and realize by its legisla-

5 From the beginning of life of the new National Assembly, the Mountain was opposed to France's participation in the Rome campaign, which was, however, supported by Bonaparte and the majority of the National Assembly. The victorious outcome for the French troops gave a further boost to the morale of the bourgeoisie's political representatives, whereas the June 13 protests by 30,000 representatives of the Mountain were met with repression by the forces of Changarnier, incidents in Lyon being much more violent, with 150 dead and 1,500 arrested.

tion and administration the indispensable conditions for the subjugation of the proletariat. [Marx 2010, 39]

This position is correct, the only caveat being that the democratic sector of the bourgeoisie was a remnant from the previous period, whereas the so-called monarchic bourgeoisie comprised the majority of the bourgeois class that were determinedly resisting against to the relations of representation

In any case, the result was that Bonaparte managed on April 11, 1851 to bring back the government of January 18, something that can be seen not only as a victory for Bonaparte over the Party of Order but also a victory of the hardy mechanism of the bourgeois state over relations of representation<sup>6</sup> in conjunction with participation of aristocracy of finance in the government through Fould.<sup>7</sup> The period between April 11 and October 9, 1851 is therefore regarded as catalytic for the breach between the mass constituency for bourgeois order and the parliamentary representation.

Marx attributes the above-mentioned behaviour to the pressures being exerted on active agents of capitalist activity on account of a minor economic crisis: falling exports and continued industrial stagnation. This brought economic protagonists into conflict with their political representatives. For our part, we think that it is something deeper transcending the framework of temporary economic recession, related to the very functioning of the capitalist state which is not to be equated with the existence of representative institutions.

As for the military aspect, the Bonaparte government ordered the dissolution of the Mobile Guard from the moment that the demands of its democratic component began to intensify, but also from the moment that the government felt itself in a position to do this. Half the soldiers in the Mobile Guard were dismissed and the other half were integrated into the army on clearly lower pay. In this way yet another danger was neutralized.

6 "In November, 1849, Bonaparte had satisfied himself with an UNPARLIAMENTARY, in January, 1851, with an OUTSIDE PARLIAMENTARY, on April 11, he felt strong enough to form an ANTI-PARLIAMENTARY Ministry, that harmoniously combined within itself the votes of lack of confidence of both assemblies – the constitutive and the legislative, the republican and the royalist" (Marx 2003, 79- 80).

7 "Fould not only represented Bonaparte's interests at the Bourse, he represented also the interests of the Bourse with Bonaparte" (Marx 2003, 87- 88).

On the institutional plane, the President wanted a revision of the Constitution to enable him to stand again for a new term in office. But to achieve this he needed the support of three quarters of the Parliament, which was not feasible: in late July 1851 the weakened Party of Order, together with pro-Bonaparte parliamentary deputies attempting to placate the President and forestall the likelihood of a coup, voted in favour of the revision: 448 voting for and 278 against (mainly those belonging to the republican Left).

But this development was not enough to check the trend towards the abolition of democracy. The final act of the drama came between October 9 and December 2, when an open rift emerged between the parliament and the executive, with Bonaparte declaring, contrary to the National Assembly, that there should be a reinstatement of universal suffrage. The conflict ended with the dissolution of the Parliament by Bonaparte and the declaration of martial law. The anti-Bonapartist reaction was suppressed in the following days, with 500 hundred dead and 150,000 arrested, of whom 10,000 were sent into exile. Bonaparte's actions were ratified by the referendum December 21 and 22, 1851, where 7,400,000 of the ten million registered voters gave their consent, with only 600,000 voting against.<sup>8</sup>

Marx's final conclusion is that Bonapartism should be interpreted, up to moment that "when the bourgeoisie had already lost, and the working class had not yet acquired, the faculty of ruling the nation" (Marx 2000, 34) and elsewhere:

In contrast with the Legislative, the Executive power expresses the heteronomy of the nation in contrast with its autonomy. Accordingly, France seems to have escaped the despotism of a class only in order to fall under the despotism of an individual, under the authority, at that, of an individual without authority. The struggle seems to settle down to the point where all classes drop down on their knees, equally impotent and equally dumb. [Marx 2003, 103]

8 For Cowling-Martin, the social alliance on which Bonaparte depended to consolidate his one-man rule was comprised of finance capital, the landowning aristocracy who were loyal to the Bourbons, the industrial faction of the bourgeoisie, the lumpenproletariat, the army and state officials (Cowling-Martin 2002, 4).

Engels, too, is particularly clear when in a letter to Marx there is also the remark that:

It is becoming increasingly clear to me that the bourgeoisie does not possess the qualities required to rule directly itself, and that therefore, unless there is an oligarchy as here in England capable of taking over, for good pay, the management of state and society in the interest of the bourgeoisie, a Bonapartist semi-dictatorship is the normal form; it promotes the great material interests of the bourgeoisie even against the bourgeoisie, but allows it no share in the government itself. Conversely, this dictatorship itself is in turn compelled unwillingly to adopt these material interests of the bourgeoisie. [Marx and Engels 2010, 266]

Lenin in his *State and Revolution* accepts Engels' thesis, outlined in his *Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State* (Engels 1988, 231) that

exceptional periods, however, occur when the warring classes are so equal in forces that the state power, as apparent mediator, acquires for the moment a certain independence in relation to both. This applies to the absolute monarchy of the 17th and 18th centuries which balanced the nobility and the bourgeoisie against one another, and to the Bonapartism of the first and particularly of the second French empire, which played off the proletariat against the bourgeoisie and the bourgeoisie against the proletariat. [Lenin 1977, 16]

Gramsci, for his part, approaches Bonapartism as a specific form of Caesarism integrated into the framework of the capitalist state. Caesarism for Gramsci is not just a momentary balance between capitalist forces but a devastating equilibrium that produces policy and cannot, at its extreme, end in any way other than mutual ruin (Gramsci 1999, 463).

### Poulantzas' Position

Poulantzas, by contrast with the classic view, would argue that "to explain the relative autonomy of the Bonapartist state (considered as the 'religion of the bourgeoisie') as a constituent characteristic of the state, by reference to a situation of equilibrium between the social forces in struggle, *is totally insufficient*" (Poulantzas 1987, 260). For Poulantzas the working

class in Louis Bonaparte's France could in no way be regarded as an alternative pole to the bourgeoisie, given that it had been crushed politically. What existed on the eve of the coup was the conflict between the bourgeoisie on one hand and the petty bourgeoisie and farmers on the other, without there being any equilibrium (Poulantzas 1987, 260). As for the autonomy of the bureaucracy, this is indeed a reality within the parameters of service to the political power of the ruling classes and representation of their class interests (Poulantzas 1987, 354).

Poulantzas' view is that the capitalist state:

takes charge, as it were, of the bourgeoisie's political interests and realizes the function of political hegemony which the bourgeoisie is unable to achieve. *But in order to do this, the capitalist state assumes a relative autonomy with regard to the bourgeoisie.* This is why Marx's analyses of Bonapartism as a capitalist type of state are so significant. For this relative autonomy allows the state to intervene not only in order to arrange compromises vis-à-vis the dominated classes, which in the long turn, are useful for the actual economic interests of the dominant classes or fractions, but also (depending on the concrete conjuncture) to intervene against the long term interests of one or other fraction of the dominant class: for such compromises and sacrifices are sometimes necessary for the realization of their political class interests. [Poulantzas 1987, 284- 285]

So essentially, for Poulantzas, Marx in the 18th Brumaire is referring to the capitalist state's structural tendency to acquire relative autonomy so as better to organize the vested interests of the ruling class. What is exceptional are the circumstances under which the autonomy is actuated and not the autonomy itself (Jessop 2002, 179).

### The Political Element and the State as Catalysts for the Understanding of the 18th Brumaire.

What becomes evident from this juxtaposition of the views of the classic authors is that the Bonapartist state embodies a catastrophic contraposition of two social blocs within which Bonaparte finds the opportunity to commandeer them constructing his own independent framework of power.

Marx presents this as the result of continuing conflict between classes and factions of classes, where at the end of each phase the loser would withdraw from the political scene, only to make a renewed comeback, but weaker, whereas the temporary winner would not perceive that the only result of all this was a further strengthening of Bonaparte. Marx abhorred Bonaparte, whom he saw as a figure from the underworld, while at the same time ridiculing them for the humiliations they suffered the social classes who sought to ally themselves with him.

Without resorting to such derogatory characterizations, the other classic authors (Engels, Lenin, Gramsci) concluded that at some point there must be an equilibrium of forces between the two social blocs and that then a personage or a political collectivity will come from outside and impose a kind of suzerainty over the representatives of political authority.

But the question remains: In this case is the state not capitalist and does not every species of Bonaparte embody bourgeois interests? Poulantzas for his part considers what the classics mean is that in times of crisis the state acquires autonomy in order to function in the collective interest of the ruling class. However, as Poulantzas himself has shown, the relative autonomy of the capitalist state is inherent in nature and an *invariable reality*. Having said that, the fact is that in emergency situations, such as for example in the interwar period in a number of European national formations, there was an upsurge of fascism. In these instances the crisis state is neither a referee in a situation of deadlock nor a neutral political entity presiding over two social blocs that are bent on exterminating each other. *It is a specific form of capitalist state* associated with specific developments in the class struggle. It is accordingly not only through Bonapartism that the State intervenes against the transient interests of this or that section of the bourgeoisie and in favour of the long-term bourgeois interest. It is something inherent in the functioning of the bourgeois state.

May we conclude that Bonapartism is a form of emergency rule? To answer this question persuasively one would need to highlight the overall content of the concept and the specific historical conditions prevailing in France in 1851.

The story begins when the proletariat takes the initiative of staging an uprising that results in the emergence of a democratic state, grounded in universal suffrage in which all social classes are represented in the decisive political institutions. The proletariat harboured the illusion that enlargement of the electorate and popular mobilization would be sufficient for moving forward in a transition to socialism. But without social alliances, without political organization, without a political program, none of this was possible when faced with an opponent that was preparing from day one to neutralize the proletariat. The bourgeoisie, by contrast, on the one hand forged social alliances, isolating the proletariat, and on the other constructed a materiality of state (military fortifications, normalization of the functions of parliament so as to preclude any overruling 'from the street', activation of ideological apparatuses for the enforcement of 'order') whose functioning led to the defeat of the proletariat.

Of great interest is the sequel, when the democratic faction of the bourgeoisie came into conflict with the Party of Order which, however, rallied the great mass of the bourgeoisie. What was created in consequence was a political schism within the bourgeoisie, but not a social schism. The bourgeoisie did not judge that it was represented only by the Party of Order. And because the bourgeois democrats, the petty bourgeoisie and even the socialists continued to be a presence in the representative institutions, the Party of Order was obliged to enter into alliance with Bonaparte and the executive. On the other hand, Bonaparte was elected President, supported by a broad alliance of social and political forces opposed to the policies of the moderate bourgeoisie.

What is the meaning of all this, up to this point? Firstly that the proletariat was not ready, for the reasons indicated, to assert its authority and the petty bourgeoisie and the farmers by their nature could not. Moreover the parameter of universal suffrage complicated matters still further because it made it possible for resentment to be transformed into political instability. The issue of maintaining order made a comeback, increasingly, into political discourse, particularly after the June 1849 joint insurrection of proletariat and petty bourgeoisie against the Expedition to Rome, but if one examines what had brought about the absence of order one will

be led back to the February revolution and its aftermath (the June revolution, the parliamentary disputes, the clash between a large proportion of the provisional parliament and the executive).

From this point onwards the Party of Order began to suffer from serious conflict between different social factions and categories with the result that it lost the capacity to unite politically. This relieved Bonaparte from the pressure to accommodate an ally, allowing him greater freedom to display his policy, with which a section of the Party of Order was in any case in agreement. It was a development that was to be cut short by the electoral success of the alliance between the petty-bourgeoisie and the working class, reflected in their mass entry into parliament. Here too – and this demonstrates the central importance of universal suffrage – there would be two consequences: on the one hand the moderation of intra-bourgeois disagreements, thus bringing the grievously divided Party of Order under the hegemony of Bonaparte, and on the other the unease of Bonaparte at the electorate's shift to the left, which would induce him to seek, and secure, an agreement for limitation of the suffrage.

The whole history of collaboration between the Party of Order and Bonaparte is one of intensification of state authoritarianism, which had in fact already begun from the time of the bourgeois democrats: restrictions on press freedom, abolition of universal suffrage, heightened repression, reduction in the role of parliament. But when one reaches this point the question that arises is: what was the point of the Second Republic, given that those who wanted it had sustained serious defeats and those who ran the administration didn't want it.

Does all this signify a process of delinking of the political from the economic? This depends on what we mean. If we mean the relative autonomy of the state from the individual interests of various factions of the bourgeoisie, this is something inherent in the materiality of the bourgeois state. If, however, we are referring to the endeavour of the great mass of the bourgeoisie, to use the exact expression of Marx, to free itself from the restrictions imposed by bourgeois democracy, then we are coming closer to the truth. The February Revolution gave the bourgeoisie in toto access to political power, on the precondition, however, of its

granting numerous concessions to its allies. Gradually with the development of the class struggle (a process in which the manoeuvres of Bonaparte are also to be included) it succeeded in disencumbering itself of its allies, and in consequence was also able to revoke the institutional compromises it had already made, in other words, to be rid of France's Second Republic. It was of little significance to the great mass of the bourgeois class whether this liquidation should be the accomplishment of a political party or an individual personage. Essentially the bourgeoisie had broken its ties with its parliamentary representatives, precisely because it had broken its ties with parliamentarianism as such.

This is a critical point. Contrary to a fairly widespread belief that capitalism and parliamentary democracy go together, in fact the institutions of mass political representation were imposed on the dominant classes through the struggles of the dominated classes. Nowadays the disjuncture between relations of representation and capitalism is becoming ever more obvious: what is involved is an inexorable erosion of the powers of the powers of representative institutions and, in consequence, the shift of power to centres impermeable to popular control (from committees of technocrats in the various ministries to the all-powerful – for the countries in the Eurozone – European Central Bank). In the specific case of the France of the Second Republic it was the need for the transformation of political power into the power of the bourgeoisie as a whole that opened the way for the imposition of mass representative institutions. But as is shown by the historical evolution itself, nothing can be assumed to remain unchanged. When the intensity of popular reactions diminishes, the bourgeoisie prefers to be represented directly by the state mechanisms and not by the representative institutions that are characterized by the materiality of the presence of the dominated classes. To put it somewhat differently, political representation of the bourgeoisie as a whole has already been achieved through the State. The bourgeoisie is politically represented first and foremost through parliamentary institutions only to the extent that this emerges out of pressures from the reactions of subordinate classes.

As for the question of whether Bonapartism is to be categorized as a form of national emergency state, or

in other words a marginal variety of authoritarian state whose further oscillations will result in breakage and transformation into a dictatorship, we have two basic objections to this. The first is historical in character in the sense that in the 19th century the bipolar schema of parliamentary versus anti-parliamentary regime is not present, precisely because parliamentary democracy is not the rule, at least in the contemporary sense, in most national formations. The second is methodological and rejects the bipolar model one extreme of which is the healthy parliamentary democracy and the other the national emergency state. On the contrary we believe that there are no impermeable dividing walls between these different forms of state because in reality they are the results of class struggle, or more properly opposing trends within the tendency of the capitalist system not to have its dynamic restricted by institutions of popular representation.

From this viewpoint, while the position of Thalheimer (Thalheimer 1930), according to which Bonapartism and Fascism comprise twin alternatives to the prospect of proletarian power, has the right orientation to these phenomena in so far as it approaches them in terms of class rather than personal strategies, it is nevertheless limited when it conceptualizes them simply as an “exceptional” state of the socialist revolution and does not perceive them to be an abiding tendency of the bourgeoisie to limit the civil rights not only of the proletariat but of all the subaltern classes. The bourgeoisie does not trade away its political power for the sake of socio-economic power,<sup>9</sup> because its fundamental interest, which is the reproduction of relations of exploitation and domination, is evidently served more effectively by the abolition or restriction of relations of representation.

To conclude, Bonapartism is a form of state which, although the class struggle waged in the context of early forms of capitalist domination played a significant role in its formation, in fact highlights the basic characteristic of the capitalist state: the dictatorship of the bourgeoisie which, in the absence of the deterrent effect of popular mobilizations, tends to eliminate the institutions of popular representation.

## Conclusion

This article has analysed the class struggle in the French social formation between 1848 and 1851 focusing on the role and the content of Bonapartism. In the interpretation of the classics he is seen as an element of external domination over the balance of antagonistic class forces, a view that harbours the danger of approaching the state as neutral in its dynamic owing to the mutual extermination of two opposing social forces, a State which then comes to utilize a personage for *its own* benefit. But neither is the Poulantzas approach convincing when it attempts to propose an “authentically” Marxist variant of the notion of an autonomous relationship between the state and bourgeois interests.

Precisely because by virtue of its very creation the capitalist state has the function of defending the long-term interests of the bourgeoisie, there is no “special moment” when it ceases to operate in such a capacity, either in conditions of parliamentary democracy or in those of a dictatorship. Neither can some external factor enter the equation and in instrumentalist fashion alter its fundamental functioning. Nor, last but not least, is there a “normal” mode of operation of the capitalist state oscillating between a democratic parliamentary regime and the state-of-emergency break-up that will usher in a dictatorial capitalist regime.

The thesis that we have defended is that Bonapartism can be like a snapshot of the way the bourgeois state operates. To be worthy of its name the bourgeois state should work for the benefit of all factions of the bourgeoisie and from that point onward it depends on the evolution of the social balance of forces how democratic/representative it will be. The French example shows that the element of representation is not at all given in the capitalist system. It is established only when there are forces that can impose it. Unlike the representative system, which may or may not exist, the state never ceases to embody the state power of the bourgeoisie.

The above enables us to detect the red thread connecting the Bonapartist state with the transformations of the modern state.

We find that in the last decades there has been continuous deterioration of the representative institutions as a result of a number of processes: the elimination of essential differences between the ruling parties,

<sup>9</sup> As argued by Reid (Reid 2007, 552).

the rapid transference of political decisions from the legislature to the executive, and from there to the administration, and on the other hand transference to the head of the government, that is to say to the Prime Minister and the technocrats advising him and/or in transnational organizations such as the EU and the IMF, limitations on the relative autonomy of the state vis à vis the bourgeoisie, and expansion of the activity of repressive mechanisms.

These are developments that show yet again how relations of parliamentary representation are not a structural element of the capitalist mode of production but rather a result of class struggle. What can be gained from the struggles of the popular strata can also be lost. Exactly as happened in the period between 1848 and 1851.

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## ON FASCISM AND CAPITALISM

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*But whoever is not willing to talk about capitalism should also keep quiet about fascism.*  
Horkheimer, *The Jews and Europe*

### Fascism and Fascisms

One of the fundamental problems with writing about fascism is that before we consider any specific issue it is paramount to agree on its more general definition. However, no such definition exists, or rather there are too many of them, which makes it impossible to discuss them comprehensively in early-stage research and make an informed choice. If every text about fascism were to begin with a reliable consideration of arguments in favour of or against this or that definition, probably none would be written.

However, it is possible to hold that despite not adopting a proper definition, the many published analyses of fascism do have merit. Moreover, it seems dubious whether the strenuous efforts to capture the phenomenon of fascism in some ultimate and unambiguous definition really serve best to enhance our understanding of it. Do all historical forms of fascism display a certain set of core features, related for example to ideology or political organization? It seems that these forms share a family resemblance of sorts, while the ambiguity of the very word “fascism” stems precisely from the fact that it relates to a certain group of characteristics that are unevenly distributed in particular incarnations of fascism. Finally, it is of course a term that has both an analytical and a political dimension.

Our political position is reflected in our decisions to call someone a fascist or not. All of these issues are deeply entangled, forming a knot that cannot be severed with a single theoretical stroke. The concept of capitalism is equally complicated. Although it is perhaps possible to agree on a certain basic understanding of capitalism, for example, by referring to the category of wage labour, such basic definitions are of little use when we try to grasp how the capitalist mode of production has operated and – even more importantly – how it has evolved over the centuries (and how many centuries we are in fact talking about).

Wherever necessary, I refer here to certain more elaborate concepts of capitalism developed by Marx and others, whereas my understanding of fascism is both abstract and particular. It is particular because my analysis focuses on one historical incarnation of fascism, namely German Nazism. It is abstract because the very gesture of considering Nazism as an example of fascism demands that we think about the latter in a way that goes beyond any narrowing approach that would demand we differentiate Italian fascism from German Nazism or Spanish Falange, and so on. The point is to discern elements of family resemblance among many fascisms, past and present, at a more abstract level



and regardless of nomenclature. German Nazism and Mussolini's fascism are instances or variants of fascism understood in the more abstract sense. It needs to be noted that distinguishing the Third Reich, although understandable due to the consequences of its criminal policies, is not that obvious from an analytical perspective. Indeed, I discuss a particular kind of fascism – one that rose to power and took control of a large, modern state. How many fascist or fascistic movements have come close to this? Are they any less fascist because of that? It seems that, particularly today, we observe many dispersed fascisms that penetrate power structures or remain on its margins, but so far have little chance of overtaking them completely. This does not make them any less ominous and efficient. In other words, fascistization can proceed even if no “modern-day Hitler” looms on the horizons. Nazism is a specific case also in the light of the relationship between fascism and capitalism. Nevertheless, its study can be highly instructive. After all, before the Nazis rose to power in Germany they were an insignificant or even grotesque movement bordering on political folklore. Its history can thus provide us with hints on how to study and understand today's lingering fascism.

### **Fascism and Class**

If we agree – taking Marx's theses as our point of departure – to consider capitalism as a system based on the private ownership of the means of production and on wage labour, thus accepting the view that society is basically divided and marked by class conflict, we will have to ask, sooner or later, whose class interest is represented by fascism and what social class do fascists actually originate from. The fact that the answers to the above two questions do not have to be identical, or even that these answers have to differ, seems to be one of the hallmarks of fascism. As its countless researchers have pointed out, the essence of fascism, or at least one of its most prominent features consists precisely in the fact that it conceals and distorts the class conflict itself, causing the masses to act against their own interest, unknowingly serving the few who in fact benefit from the dominant economico-political order. Even in places where fascists do not hold any power, they are capable of efficiently dissuading people from fighting their real adversary, beguiling them with visions of national or

racial homogeneity, antagonizing them against imagined enemies like Jews or migrants. Wherever they win power this becomes even clearer. Fascism is a mode of redirecting class anger or even hatred to various other, substitute objects, thus enabling the predominant class structure and supremacy to thrive.

This intellectual formula rests at the foundation of critical analyses of fascism developed already at the moment of its historical nascence by authors associated with Marxism and the workers' movement. By employing perverse propaganda, which would even intercept and utilise elements of communist discourse as figures of anti-capitalism, fascism set out to seduce the proletarian masses that abandoned the idea of revolution and turned to that of a *Führer*, thus giving up class conflict in favour of a war between races.<sup>1</sup> Naturally, these anti-capitalist figures were employed for purely rhetorical reasons in order to delude people and secure the interest of the ruling class. This line of reasoning echoes in today's discussions of the “excluded” as ones who would be most prone to fall under the spell of fascistic ideologies and join far-right organizations in mass numbers. Regardless of the kind of paternalism that accompanies such “attention” to the fate of the manipulated and the excluded, who are supposedly unable to identify their own economic and political interest, the case of the Third Reich demonstrates that the matter at hand is far more complex.

The policy of Nazi Germany can be certainly understood as one of deterring and charming the proletarian revolution that broke out after the First World War and was later contained by social democrats Ebert and Noske with significant support from the Freikorps, from which many later Nazis originated. August Thalheimer was right to argue in his classic essay on fascism as Bonapartism, alluding to Marx's analyses from *The eighteenth Brumaire*, that the working class “contributes to the emergence of Bonapartism when it has launched a revolutionary assault on bourgeois society, has driven it into a state of fear and horror, but has proved not yet capable of seizing and holding power itself. A serious defeat for the proletariat in a deep social crisis is thus one of the preconditions of Bonapartism” (Thalheimer 1979, 110). More precisely, it is born when the proletariat is weakened to an extent that it

<sup>1</sup> See Sohn-Rethel 1987, 133, 138; Guerin 1979, 105–38

does not put up any radical resistance but simultaneously endangers the class status quo to the extent that it needs to be fully pacified if the phantom of rebellion is to be effectively banished. The question remains, however, how this pacification occurs. Is the working class really mass recruited in the Movement, fooled and converted to its doctrine? Or, in other words, was it really the proletariat that constituted the class base for the Nazi “workers’ party”? The point is not to clear the tarnished name of the proletariat, relieve it of the burden of moral political responsibility for fascism, or prove that the working class is in fact never wrong (and cannot be deceived), but rather to understand the actual class dynamic of fascism.

Indeed, there is another figure of fascism, equally classic and rooted (perhaps even more strongly) in Marxist theory: one describing fascism as a movement and phenomenon of basically petty bourgeois origin. According to this concept, fascist ideas prove seductive not to the masses of those people who are most underprivileged in social and economic terms (the excluded), but to the constantly growing – at least under certain circumstances – group of people who face the danger of being declassed, e.g. the lower strata of the middle class, who are threatened with pauperization or “proletarianization.” It is not so much about those who have been irrevocably declassed – as regarded by Thalheimer, who juxtaposes fascist hit squads with the Band of December 10, that is the militant arm of Louis Bonaparte – but precisely those who are at risk of losing their current status, or – as is often the case today, those who might be experiencing insufficient improvement.<sup>2</sup> This is the account provided by Alfred Sohn-Rethel in his studies on the class structure of German fascism. Strictly speaking, he distinguished two phases: in the first one fascism would recruit followers among the petty bourgeois masses who have been undergoing proletarianization; in the second, it would already create a sort of new intelligentsia, partially basing it on its petty bourgeois base. This new group would consist of people whose real economic fate, not just their fears and hopes, was related to the operation of the fascist machine, primarily in its technical and logistical dimension: “the engineers and technicians of the new order employed in the installation, operation, supervision and servicing

of these large-scale modern plants and their comprehensively rationalised labour-processes” (Sohn-Rethel 1987, 135). They would be preoccupied mainly with “their functional position in the production process” and not with the ends to which that process was oriented, which made them focus solely on one purpose: “that production was maintained and did not stand still” (Sohn-Rethel 1987, 135). The most loyal and fanatical supporters of the new order were recruited among these new personnel: office workers, technicians, middle- and low-level managers, petty bourgeois – people who were indebted to the new order as far as their social survival and advancement were concerned.

However, what about the proletariat, on the one hand, and the high bourgeoisie on the other, the latter supposedly using the former in order to preserve its privileged position? Let us begin with the former. Even if the proletariat was not entirely seduced and manipulated by fascist propaganda, they could not put up the kind of resistance that we would expect given the adversity on both sides of this political conflict. What were the reasons for this? First of all, it needs to be clarified that the workers’ movement did put up resistance, both by committing acts of sabotage in factories and – until a certain moment – by organizing its own hit squads that would clash with fascist ones, especially in the streets and districts of large cities.<sup>3</sup> However, the workers’ resistance was crushed. Many factors contributed to this, including the internal division of the workers’ movement (in Germany it was especially the division into supporters of SPD (Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands) and KPD (Kommunistische Partei Deutschlands); these two parties also had different strategies of combating Nazism) and certainly the famed political naivety that would lead people to believe that the farcical figure of Hitler must soon leave the stage, making it possible to convert his followers to the right cause. Yet, this naivety was not just a leftist fallacy. Similar illusions were harboured by conservatives, who believed for too long that they would be somehow able to bring Hitler under control and use him to achieve their own goals. It seems that something else was of key importance as well, namely the brutal and consistent anti-union policy adopted

2 It is one of the forms of the so-called relative deprivation.

3 See Bologna 2005 (especially the passages on the workers’ skirmishes in Berlin’s districts)

by the Nazis, their violence-based actions meant to destroy the workers' movement, or perhaps overtake it and forcibly make it part of their own organizations, which were supporting workers only by name, in reality remaining entirely subordinated to the party. And although the party never removed the word "socialism" from its name, it was very far from implementing any socialist policies. In fact, not even the Nazi "battle for work" during the relatively short period until December 1933 can be regarded as socialist.<sup>4</sup> Hitler's economic vision was predicated, from the very beginning, on conquest. It was only the acquisition of living space and resources to the east that would boost the prosperity of Germany. Until then it was necessary to make sacrifices, which included the need for workers to renounce any aspirations that would hurt the nation's unity and hinder ultimate victory. One can wonder how the national-socialist heaven would look like had Germany won the war. However, this is alternative history. In real life, the Nazis opposed workers' solidarity on all fronts, hampering any efforts to promote their interests, repressing them, and subjecting them to tyrannical discipline.

And yet there are authors who regard the historical Third Reich as a paradise of this sort, or at least as an actual welfare state. As Götz Aly remarks in one of his well-known works, "Nazi leaders were constantly handing out benefits to ordinary Germans, keeping them remarkably well fed and well supplied" (Aly 2005, 314). Regardless whether these calculations are precise (this matter was, to a large extent, at the heart of the debate between Aly and Tooze, namely what portion of expenses arising from military campaigns was covered by the German society, and what portion was paid for using spoils of war or means acquired thanks to the exploitation of conquered areas), referring to the Nazi state as a welfare state *avant la lettre* or – even more so – as a socialist state is a misuse of the term in the most fundamental way. There is a great difference between a state geared towards the well-being of its citizens and one that distributes benefits in exchange for political support, serving leftovers to the people in order to realise its criminal goals. There is also another great difference between receiving arbitrary help from the government and enjoying social and work rights

that one had fought for, as was the goal in socialism and the reality of post-war welfare state created as a compromise between capital and work. In the Third Reich, workers' organizations fighting to improve their members' well-being were first brutally destroyed and only then compensated with any "provisions." Finally, we should keep in mind that the distribution of benefits had a compensatory character, while the core of Nazi policy towards workers involved freezing wages, removing the right to strike, and striving to impose absolute work discipline that did not differ much from forced labour.<sup>5</sup>

In one of his books, Enzo Traverso presents a convincing analogy between the death camps' mode of operation and the Taylorist model of organizing work in capitalist factories.<sup>6</sup> Like many before and after him, he noticed the irremovable tension existing between the imperative to kill and the imperative to produce, between extermination and work.<sup>7</sup> Despite the accuracy of this analogy at the structural level, one should not forget that in the Third Reich both would take place, namely both production and extermination. Although they would often come into conflict, they basically ran parallel to each other. This is why one should keep in mind that factories operated in the Third Reich next to camps and alongside them. Did they differ from production plants operating in other, non-fascist capitalist states? Traverso indicates another intriguing contradiction that marks Nazi ideas of work and workers. As a regime of soulless, mechanical, mass, standardised work, Taylorism could not be, at least officially, the main doctrine of Nazi managers. It would only be applicable in the exploitation of enslaved workforce in labour camps: prisoners of war and forced labourers. Although a vision of such factories functioning in the conquered eastern territories and using an army of "subhumans" as a source of energy would not raise anyone's concern, the matter would be regarded differently in the case of racially pure German workers. They would have an entirely different work ethos, one derived from Ernst Jünger rather than Charles Taylor. This is why the fact that – before the ultimate victory – the German *Arbeiter* would work under conditions not

<sup>5</sup> See Neumann 2009, 337–48, 400–58

<sup>6</sup> See Traverso 2003, 37–41

<sup>7</sup> See Traverso 2003, 34

<sup>4</sup> See Tooze 2008, 44, 61

much different from forced labour had to be compensated with various actions, not only propagandist ones.

From a proletarian perspective, however, this difference could not have been great, just like the difference between national “socialism” and what they knew from past experience. If socialism were to entail the socialization of the means of production and the abolishing of wage labour, the Third Reich was far from it and certainly did not aspire to this. Nor would Nazi plans include ending the alienation of work. In fact, Nazi Germany can appear to be a socialist state only to someone who does not assume a worker’s perspective but that of a capitalist, or more precisely that of a proponent of a certain vision of capitalism, which – as I hope to demonstrate – did not match the reality of capitalism already in the 1930s. This vision had its supporters then and has them today, but at least since a certain moment it comprises only the ideology of capitalism, and an outdated one at that. In this conception, capitalist society is organised primarily around the principle of free competition among enterprising individuals, with minimal contribution from the state and with few factors limiting the free exchange of goods and services. It seems justified to ask whether capitalism ever functioned in this way or, to put it differently, whether we are not dealing here only with its ideology, that is a distorted representation meant to legitimise it. One could easily argue that this was the ideology of nineteenth-century capitalism and although it mystified reality already in that period, it was at least an ideology of that society – an ideology that society needed in order to reproduce itself. This is exactly what changed with the rise of fascism. I shall return to this later.

Let us now turn to the capitalists who lived and operated their big businesses in the Third Reich. From their perspective, the new regime did not appear to be socialist insofar as it allowed them to retain a significant portion of their former privileges. This does not mean that business was carried on as usual. There were important, often radical changes. However, they would be connected with the transformations of the capitalist model itself, forcing businessmen to adapt to it. And adapt they did because their practical and flexible approach made them less attached to free competition than those who specialised in capitalist ideology. This

is especially true because the Nazis left most businesses in private hands, at least as far as their sole ownership was concerned. As Daniel Guerin puts it, “No sooner is fascism installed in power than it hastens to give evidence of its good will. It restores to private capitalism a number of monopolies held or controlled by the state. ... As soon as the National Socialists came in, they announced that there will be an end to all the attempts of recent years at nationalization. State enterprises will again be transformed into private enterprises” (Guerin 1979, 361). It does not mean that relations between the authorities and business were unproblematic from the very start, or that – as engaged Marxists would often claim – fascism was simply at the service of great business. One great favour that the German industrialists certainly appreciated was the Nazi pacification of trade unions, workers’ organizations, and the more broadly understood left. Without these obstacles in the way, their businesses could flourish much more freely. This favour, however, came at a certain price. Firstly, as Adam Tooze observes (in his account of the meeting held on 20 February 1933 between representatives of the highest authorities and the industrialists’ cream of the crop, evidently testifying to “the willingness of German big business to assist Hitler in establishing his dictatorial regime”; Tooze 2008, 101), German entrepreneurs may have agreed with the anti-union policy of the new regime, but would not readily support the idea of a national economic autocracy. Even more, this idea was fundamentally at odds, if not with their worldview (which would be often tainted by nationalism), then (more importantly) with their usual practice of doing business in a world characterised by the international flow of goods and capital. It is possible to say that they naturally welcomed a certain kind of cosmopolitanism involving the ease of movement in the international sphere as well as in the complex system of political and economic dependencies at a global scale. Meanwhile, Hitler’s plan assumed the destruction of this order through war and conquest. The second difficulty consisted in the fact that – especially when the economy was readjusted to support war – this plan demanded that production be subordinated to the government agenda, depriving entrepreneurs of the ability to make decisions in many areas crucial to the functioning of their own companies. Thus, although they were not

expropriated – which could smack of “socialism,” even if expropriation as nationalization has little to do with the socialization of the means of production discussed by Marx and his continuators – they faced the situation in which they remained the (co)owners, but had to accept that people appointed by the party would from now on participate in managing their companies alongside the aforementioned new intelligentsia, new types of managers, and so on.

Fascism in Germany would be thus akin to the Bonapartism described by Marx in *The eighteenth Brumaire* had the great German bourgeoisie retained its economic position and thwarted all attempts at revolution or expropriation for the price of transferring political power into the alien hands of Hitler and his petty bourgeois supporters. According to a widely shared view on the specificity of the “German way,” however, this state’s bourgeoisie never had power and was politically “impaired,” at least in comparison with France or the British Empire. Perhaps it would be then better to say that it saved its shares and the title to exploitation by supporting the petty bourgeois ambitions of those challenging the old elites represented by the Junkers and the aristocracy. If the bourgeoisie had to renounce something in exchange, it would not be its political influence (of which it had relatively little) but rather its influence on the very process of production. To a certain extent, it waived that which – in accordance with the ideology of free competition – constitutes the core of the bourgeois-capitalist ethos: its function as entrepreneurs. Decisions related to what particular firms are to produce and in what quantity were to be now made elsewhere. Renouncing this power alongside participation in the international system of interdependencies and flows, and embracing an alien vision of economic self-sufficiency were of course bought by the Nazis. Apart from the gift of shattering the left, there was also the guarantee of government commissions related primarily to militarization, and of course the chance to partake in the profits. In this way, capitalists transformed from entrepreneurs into quasi-rentiers. The question that needs to be asked at this point regards the broader logic that stood behind this shift. It is the logic of twentieth-century transformations of capitalism, not just some more or less random deal struck between a group of German industrialists and the new authorities.

### **The Old New Spirit of Capitalism**

If some people really wish to regard the economy in Nazi Germany as socialist in a deeper sense, or at least as a kind of economy that – mainly thanks to planning and state interventionism – breaks away from the basic principles of capitalism, then this may arise from the fact that they are attached to a specific, narrow understanding of capitalism. However, this problem cannot be grasped by applying the already discussed formula of an “ideological” dispute, that is by indicating that the understanding of capitalism as a system of free competition is simply an ideological distortion of reality (especially of today’s reality, and perhaps even in the entire history of this mode of production). If this indeed is an ideological distortion, we should still demonstrate what kinds of real processes are being obfuscated, and consider their significance in the context of questions about fascism and its connections with capitalism.

In their famous study, Luc Boltanski and Eve Chiapello analyse the three phases of capitalism’s development and the three corresponding forms of its “spirit,” or – to somewhat simplify this – the three strategies of legitimizing it at these respective stages.<sup>8</sup> They were primarily concerned with the “new spirit of capitalism” or the phase that was still strong in the late 1990s and in a sense still continues today though it is now certainly nothing new. Although Boltanski and Chiapello avoid using this term, neoliberalism – the form in question – is still the dominant economic order, even if the discourse legitimizing it appears to be losing credibility. In the present context, however, something else merits our attention, namely the somewhat transitory phase preceding neoliberalism. Boltanski and Chiapello claim that it began in the 1930s and ended in the mid-1970s, in accordance with the widely embraced view about the neoliberal steamroller passing through the world already in the period directly following the oil crisis in 1973. What are the characteristics of capitalism in its second, transitory phase? In the preceding period, which peaked in the second half of the nineteenth century during the classic era of the middle class, one symbolic figure prevailed in theory and to some extent in practice, namely that of an entrepreneur-conqueror or industrial knight who calculates possible profits and

<sup>8</sup> See Boltanski and Chiapello 2005.

real risks, firmly standing at the company's helm. Such companies would usually have a family character, with the entrepreneur being the family's head and the father who wields paternal power over his subordinates. This system was legitimised by concepts of fair exchange and free competition, as well as by belief in progress and technology. Whatever the famed, invisible hand of the market failed to turn into universal benefit for all could and had to be rectified through acts of charity, by means of which the entrepreneur would show a different, merciful face of paternal authority. All of this slowly began to fade into history – or, as it were, into the realm of outdated images that are not even suitable for sustaining the illusion among the ruled – along with the birth of the society marked by mass production and consumption. Individuals, including entrepreneurs, were being supplanted by gigantic production companies, while the family character of relations inside a company – by an ever-growing bureaucratic apparatus. As for the actual control over the production process, it was a capitalism of directors and supervisory boards rather than owners. Moreover, the employees' expectations were evolving too. In more general terms, what changed was the strategy of legitimizing the system in the face of the inequalities it produced. Redistribution through charity was obviously insufficient.<sup>9</sup> Large-scale social programmes were developed and implemented by the state, though in cooperation and agreement with capital, which abandoned the vision of state as merely a “night-watchman,” opening the path towards ever more intense interpenetration of the spheres in which business and government are active.

The account of this transformation can bring to mind the post-war history of Europe, including the birth of the so-called welfare state, or possibly the American New Deal. Such associations are correct, though this does not change that fact that the Third Reich was also part of this historical tendency. We are touching upon a delicate issue here. Columnists and historians like Götz Aly were too keen to use the analogy between Nazi economy and the welfare state in order to discredit the latter. However, as is demonstrated above, the vision of the Third Reich as a paradise for (German) workers as beneficiaries of an overdeveloped social policy does not really reflect the historical reality.

9 See Boltanski, Chiapello 2005 17–18.

Benefits for workers are only a part, or a certain aspect of the transformations of the spirit of capitalism. One could say that the democratic welfare state is a version of the new type of society that emerged in the 1930s, a version whose birth was preceded – some would say necessarily – not only by the tragic outbreak of another world war, but also by the rise of a different society: one that was undemocratic and regarded the question of well-being as secondary or postponed this issue for a later period after achieving the ultimate victory. In the Nazi version of the new spirit of capitalism the state would intervene in the economy to such an extent that people started to speak of the birth of state capitalism;<sup>10</sup> however, the goal of this was not to ensure that wealth is redistributed, and to guard the compromise struck between capital and work, but to erect a terribly efficient capitalist war machine: a totalitarian monopoly capitalism as Franz Neumann has termed it.

Reflecting on the operation of the Third Reich's economy and on the connections between Nazi economy and state/party constitutes a theoretical exercise that allows us to rethink the very concept of capitalism. What are the essential characteristics of this concept, and which features are only relevant in individual phases of the development of the capitalist mode of production? If capitalism is not necessarily tied to free competition or the principle of *laissez-faire*, what is it that actually defines it? A classic Marxist answer would be: capitalism is defined by the private ownership of the means of production. Still, the function of ownership can change significantly. The owner can be the entrepreneur, but can also renounce this role, more or less willingly, in order to obtain a “rent” on the basis of formal ownership, and not much more. In the Third Reich, no mass-scale nationalization of companies took place. It is possible to ask, however, whether in this case we could speak of a certain type of capitalism, a type that in fact deserves to be called “state capitalism” because the state would emerge in it as the new and only capitalist.<sup>11</sup> The second component of a classic definition of capitalism is wage labour, which is opposed to forced labour determined by the feudal relation of personal dependence. Nonetheless, as Karl Marx

10 See Pollock 1990. Pollock distinguished two forms of state capitalism: democratic and totalitarian.

11 This was the meaning behind the use of the term ‘state capitalism’ in relation to the USSR, a tendency common among the unorthodox left.

pointed out, the freedom assumed in work contracts was from the very beginning only figurative, in fact consisting in freedom from the “burden” of any ownership except for one’s ability to work, which workers sell as commodity. In this sense, from the perspective of capitalist wage labour it is not crucial for labourers to be “free,” but to be expropriated. Anyway, workers’ freedom was severely limited in the Third Reich at least due to “work books” and top-down directives shifting masses of workers from one branch of the economy to another depending on where the workforce was necessary. The means of production can be owned by private capitalists or the state, but under no circumstances by workers themselves. The same goes for any real control over the process of production as well as its management, both in shorter and longer perspective. Capitalism is a system opposed not only by the historical form of feudalism, but also by a possible system of worker self-government and self-organization, in which the workers would be granted not only property rights but also a subjectivity, thus ceasing to be merely an object for discipline and management.

If we shift our perspective from that of owners or entrepreneurs to that of the expropriated and alienated “free” wage labourers, who were never even considered to have their own point of view, it ceases to be strange or paradoxical to call Nazi Germany a capitalist state or a totalitarian monopoly capitalism as Neumann put it. This may seem paradoxical or contradictory only if we associate capitalism with democracy, by definition opposing it to any totalitarianism, and with free competition, which out of principle excludes the possibility of creating monopolies. However, neither of the two associations are strictly necessary. What is more, they are contravened, if not by capitalist theory, then certainly by capitalist practice. The Third Reich is only one example of an order in which capitalism does not go hand in hand with democracy. A modern-day example of this is offered by China. Probably those who strongly believe in an organic connection between capitalism, democracy, and liberalism (or liberal democracy) will not be convinced by any arguments or examples. They may not consider Nazi Germany and especially Xi Jinping’s China to be really capitalist states. However, let us stick to the kind of capitalism that actually exists, not to the “real” one that exists

only in certain people’s imagination. The former does not always promote democracy, nor does it really have to fight monopolist practices as long as they do not interfere with its mode of operation in a given historical context. Laws forbidding the creation of cartels and monopolies aptly express the spirit of early capitalism, in which individual owners-entrepreneurs would compete with one another on (theoretically) equal ground.<sup>12</sup> However, in the phase that coincided with the birth of fascism, and especially with the rise of Nazism in Germany – the phase of gigantic companies and a greatly increased economic role of the state – monopolies could have appeared to entirely conform to principles of capitalism; what is more, monopoly could be regarded as the fullest realization of these principles. Max Horkheimer already suggested this. In his understanding, economic liberalism is a system that adheres to social Darwinism, which sentences the weaker to be devoured by the stronger. This is what real capitalist competition consists of, not one that is ideal and imaginary. The stronger, of course, do not have to be individuals. Only the strong survive, so if it turns out that cartels and monopolists have the upper hand, everyone should recognise their right to triumph. It is only a matter of consistency – everything is already contained in the very principle of competition as the right of the stronger.<sup>13</sup>

Doubts about the claim regarding the capitalist character of economy in the Third Reich can be also raised by endorsing certain findings of Pollock and Neumann as well as a general, Marxist understanding of capitalism. Is capitalism not primarily a mode of producing goods, a form of commodity economy in which work itself becomes a commodity after being transformed into labour power? Is it not true that the main principle organizing the capitalist system is the imperative to profit? However, by placing the Third Reich – as “state capitalism” or “totalitarian monopoly capitalism” – within the historical dynamic of capitalism, both Pollock and Neumann (as well as Horkheimer) seem to acknowledge that Nazism involved the primacy of politics, or rather power, over

12 In today’s European law there are naturally still legal provisions limiting monopolies and forbidding creation of cartels, but is the sense of “competition” that these laws protect the same thing it was in the nineteenth century?

13 See Horkheimer 1989, 91.

the economy. Though the principle of purely economic profit was not abolished, it was incorporated in a broader logic of domination. This is not limited to the sense that – in line with Hitler’s doctrine – the conquest of Slavic territories to the east was to guarantee German well-being, but primarily involved subordinating the economy not merely to the state but to the Nazi party, which made any title to profits and managing production depend on the position one occupies in the hierarchy of power. What is basically characteristic of the Third Reich regime is not the total dominance of the state, but rather its interception and subordination, including the economy, by the party and the *Führer*. Following this path, it is possible to argue that this power, which took over the economy, may not have expropriated capitalist owners, but set before itself goals that were fundamentally extra- or in some way even anti-economic. Is there anything more opposed to the logic of production, or even exploitation, than death and extermination? Was the Shoah not the essence of Nazism? It consumed unbelievable amounts of resources and energy, “producing” only masses of useless dead bodies. A detailed account of this goes a long way beyond the scope of this text, where emphasis is placed on a more narrowly understood economic aspect of fascism. Perhaps Deleuze and Guattari were right when they noted that capitalism is simultaneously a machine of production and anti-production, propelled by a certain kind of death drive. Still, this anti-productive aspect was identified by Deleuze and Guattari in every historically formed social machine. They seem to have regarded this aspect as the link between capitalism and Nazism – something they called the “war machine,” which captures a state and leads it to suicide.<sup>14</sup> Perhaps no economic order can be reduced to production in the common sense of the word, that is the production of goods. Perhaps each of them is, at least to some shared extent, an economy of anti-production, destruction, and death. If this is true, capitalism can be no exception. We might find it easier to believe this if we realise that the fetishization

of economic growth causes capitalism to be potentially the last form of human economy, one that might annihilate life on earth.

### **Fascism and the Present Time**

Presenting fascism, particularly German Nazism, as a phenomenon inscribed in the historical logic of the capitalist mode of production is not aimed to demote the latter. There are sufficient other reasons for a radical criticism of capitalism. Nor am I advancing the thesis that fascism is the ultimate form of capitalism or that there is a necessary relation between them, if such necessity were meant to denote some essential, metaphysical affinity. Neither fascism nor capitalism have essences in the stronger sense; thus, they are not co-essential. Still, it is a fact that they had a historical connection, which may be as contingent as anything else in history, but is not any less real because of that. At a certain time, the fascist state constituted a form compatible with capitalist economy. It was not the only form of this kind, and their compatibility does not indicate some metaphysical affinity or identity. And yet, the very fact that this connection existed should provide food for thought today when we are witnessing the rise of the far right, which has already penetrated mainstream politics, while capitalism is undergoing another deep crisis. Fascism may not be our destiny but it nevertheless seems to be a spectre haunting modern capitalism throughout its history and thus looming on our horizon as a certain possibility. The lesson we can draw from history involves identifying this possibility (precisely as a possibility), which is inscribed in the historical dynamic of capitalism (though not in the indomitable laws of its historical development).

Leaving aside the otherwise important question about which of these movements deserve to be called fascist (or possibly, as Enzo Traverso argues, post-fascist<sup>15</sup>), a more general yet no less urgent issue needs to be considered, namely today’s conditions of the possibility of fascism. New fascisms do not have to be similar to any of the old ones as far as forms of expression are concerned (imitating historical forms is rather the domain of neo-fascists). However, its possibility

<sup>14</sup> The question of capitalist anti-production and its relation to the death drive is addressed in: Deleuze and Guattari 1983, 234–35, 346. Further, the question of the Nazi state as a form that is not so much totalitarian as “suicidal,” alongside the concept of fascism as a ‘war machine’ that overtakes the state is discussed in Deleuze and Guattari 1987, 230–31.

<sup>15</sup> See the chapter “Definitions” in Traverso 2019. One could argue whether the prefix “post” is really necessary here, especially because Traverso rightly calls fascism a ‘transhistorical’ phenomenon.



is related, just like in the past, to certain structural conditions, many of which are discussed above and connected with the dynamic of capitalism. Firstly, it is important to closely trace any signs of radicalization and populist mobilization among the lower middle classes. Just like a century ago, this group is the main source of new followers joining the far right. Just like then, this mobilization occurs under the banners of a revolutionary, anti-systemic and sometimes even anti-capitalist rhetoric, although it does not really endanger capitalist relations, venting all social frustration on aliens, who are today typically migrants from Arab countries. The danger of a social, anti-capitalist revolution of the exploited and the excluded may have loomed for a while over Wall Street itself in the form of the Occupy movement, but it receded due to radically disadvantageous configuration of power, pacification of movements striving for change, as well as political and organizational impotence on the left. At the same time, its memory is so fresh that there does emerge a need for some counterbalance in the form of fascist or fascistic movements.

We have been dealing with something of this sort for a long time now, both in Europe and the USA. This seems to characterise the class dynamic of fascism. On a structural level, the matter appears more complex though. There are many indicators that the 2008 economic crisis was merely a prelude to a deeper recession that possibly awaits us in the near future. Bearing in mind the role that the economic crisis of the late 1920s played in the birth of fascism, we ought to prepare ourselves for the worst. “Crisis” also has a different sense than the purely economic one, indicating a turning point, a time of transition, though not in the classical sense, derived from Greek philosophy and medicine, of progressing from sickness to health (or death), but in the sense of one historical form or formation replacing another. If we were correct to characterise Nazism as a phenomenon accompanying the transition from the stage in which capitalism involved free competition among relatively small companies to the stage in which gigantic mass production plants were creating cartels and monopolies, while the functions of owner and entrepreneur were split and taken by other subjects, the question today is whether contemporary capitalism is in a transitory stage too, mutating into something

else, and if so, what this transformation involves and what risks it entails as far as the possibility of fascism is concerned. Are we still defined by the birth of neoliberalism and the dismantling of the welfare state, which led to the peculiar figure of an entrepreneur of the self, a self-employed worker desperately trying to manage his or her so-called capital, a figure that is so much different from the nineteenth-century knight of the industry? Or maybe neoliberalism was only an introduction, a way to prepare the ground for another kind of capitalism, not just the network or cognitive one (the former already identified by Boltanski and Chiapello, while the latter diagnosed by post-operaismo authors), but primarily one based on the biotechnological revolution whose meaning and consequences still elude us and cannot be predicted?

At this stage, it seems to be of little probability that (post)fascist movements could establish, entirely on their own, some new order even in a single state, not to speak of a global scale. Nonetheless, history has been notably accelerating in recent years, regardless of any claims that it has come to an end. There is in fact no guarantee that the new oligarchic, biotechnological capitalism, in which – due to broad implementation of artificial intelligence – great masses of people will become literally redundant (even as cheap workforce), will be able to sustain itself without introducing a regime that would be fascist in character and based on some principle of eliminating or at least segregating and separating the degraded, superfluous biological mass from the new, technologically enhanced race of masters. This, however, is just a possibility whose horror can be measured only against a different kind of possibility, one whose realization has to be fought for. “Fascism,” Max Horkheimer wrote, “is retrograde not in comparison to the bankrupt principle of *laissez-faire*, but in terms of what could be attained.”<sup>16</sup>

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16 Horkheimer 1989, 81.

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## CAPITALISM AND UTOPIA IN THE SOCIAL THEORY OF ANDRÉ GORZ

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Some recurring themes in contemporary social theory are the themes of modernity, rationality, and capitalism. Among several other themes, these refer to the central problems of contemporary society. André Gorz is among those thinkers who, while trying to understand the transformations of capitalism, is included in a type of thinking, recurrent in contemporary social theory, marked by an inheritance normative of modernity, which we can also designate as the quest for human emancipation.

Gorz's interpretation of Marx's thought is included in this attempt at a theory with normative content, but does not exclude the presence of other influences, as distinct as Weber, Sartre, and Merleau-Ponty. The work category, which has reached in contemporary sociology the status of an effectively central problem for both contemporary theory and political practice, is present in the various moments of Gorz's thought-making, and here we will emphasize some works that go from *Adeus ao Proletariado* (1987) to *O Imaterial* (2003 b).

In Gorz's later books it is possible to grasp elaborate thinking about the present stage of capitalism as well as a social theory aimed at understanding the transformations of Western society. But unlike other theorists of contemporary society, such as Habermas, Bourdieu, Giddens, Beck, and many others, Gorz's thinking has manifested, over the past twenty-five years, the insistence on the need for a more accurate understanding of the role of human labour in the constitution of advanced capitalism. Gorz's contributions to the sociology of work has a wide range of analysis that allows us to understand him as one of the main theorists of contemporary society and capitalism.

Unlike many authors who remain attached only to Marx's thought to understand capitalism, Gorz also uses Weber, as Habermas did, to show that both human work as a sociological category and the mechanisms of the historical development of capitalism, have to be marked out by those two exponents of classical social theory, thus moving away from a certain

dogmatism still reigning among those who claim to be orthodox Marxists. The influence of Weber on Gorzian construction is manifested at different times, but it is quite clear when we bring to the centre of the debate the concepts of modernity and rationality as fundamental to understanding contemporary society.

Faced with those who defend the centrality of work in the constitution of capitalism, Gorz presents a position that moves from an anthropological approach of human work to situate it as a historical and analytical problematic, implying this position both in a confluence and in a criticism of one's own thinking. It is in this way that work, as a specific manifestation of human action, must first be understood within the historical frameworks of development of modern industrial society, which in its turn can only have its full sociological elucidation when undissociated from the understanding of the role of rationality and rationalization in its constitution. In other words, to understand the work is to enter the debate about modernity itself and the role of rationality in its formation.

Although we know that since the *A Ética Protestante* (Weber 1982) and *Economía y Sociedad* (Weber 1969) the understanding of rational action has moved to the center of any elaborate interpretation of capitalism, this reception of Weber, especially among those who study sociology of the work, continues to support certain theoretical difficulties that begin in the first quarter of the century. These have been sharpened in the last three decades. Such difficulties relate, on the one hand, to how to understand social classes in an advanced capitalism, and on the other, due to a rationality that has overshadowed the subject, how to think of any utopia in the face of an omnipresent capitalist domination.

In thinking about human emancipation, Gorz is confronted with a difficulty that has arisen in critical social theory for more than fifty years, especially the Marxist tradition, which is the need to understand the historical destiny of the modern industrial proletariat, especially in the last three decades.

At the epicentre of the emancipatory project and Marx's social theory, the proletariat loses in this historical period not only its status as a collective subject necessarily destined to revolutionize the relations of production, in what refers primarily to the transformative consciousness of the working class, it is difficult to

identify the proletariat itself as a structurally identifiable class in capitalist economic relations. Thinking about the proletariat under the new conditions of capitalism implies understanding the transformations that exist in the world of work and the new forms of domination that accompany such transformations. The accelerated advance of the productive forces and the emergence of post-industrial capitalism are the well-known manifestations of such changes, but their consequences and the possibility of thinking about a new utopia, consists in the first place, in the way in which Gorz interprets the modern society and capitalism.

Like Habermas (1987), capitalism is understood not only as the commodity-producing system whose purpose is the private appropriation of wealth, but as the kind of rationality that accompanies it, rendered irrational, concerning the role of development of modernity. Marx conceived of human labour as the ontological core through which we learn not only the realm of necessity and the processes of domination, but also as the starting point for thinking about emancipation and human freedom. Gorz, like Hannah Arendt (Gorz 2004), shows us that all economic work is characterized by a specific form of rationality, always geared towards the market or the exchange value. This means that all economic work is intended for heteronomy. In this case, the well-known theory of instrumental rationality resurfaces in Gorz's thinking as a comprehensive nucleus of human action within the framework of the civilizational process itself. It is no longer enough to think of human emancipation only as the abolition of private ownership of the means of production and the construction of a socialist society guided by the collective appropriation of such means; the emancipation passes through the abolition of the own work like the articulating nucleus of the human sociability.

The phenomenon of alienation is no longer understood only as the inherent contradiction of the process of wage labour, but heteronomy refers to the type of rationalization that accompanies work with economic purpose, whether salaried or not. As we shall see in the current stage of western societies, there is an intense modification of labour relations in the very constitution of capitalism. For Gorz there is a complete antinomy between work and autonomy, and the latter can only be found in activities that take

place outside this rationality. As we shall see next, this rationalization in 21st century capitalism points to the prominence of immaterial labour, which concomitantly manifests a new stage of capitalism and an exacerbation of that rationality, or irrationality, which accompanies modernity.

The book *Adeus ao Proletariado* (Gorz 1987), after twenty-five years of its publication, has to be seen not only as a provocative thesis to those who believed, and of many who still believe, in a working class that is capable of constituting itself as a collective subject that appropriates power. Over the last twenty years Gorz's thought has matured to understand the current stage of modernity and the reasons for the crisis and overcoming of capitalism. The crisis of modernity, in this sense, is not only a crisis of reason, but of the historical options that present themselves in the face of forms of domination that go beyond wage labour, the fetishism of the commodity and of the social classes themselves.

Going along a theoretical path of his own, Gorz approaches the central theses that characterized the critical theory of the *Frankfurt School*, that is, the articulation between rationality, modernity, and domination, as the guiding axes of contemporary capitalism. But different from those, Gorz insists on the urgent need to understand the role of labour in the mutation of capitalism, and especially in the need to start from this understanding, to elaborate a utopia different from that which has always encouraged the Marxist tradition, and at the same time does not refer us to different forms of pessimism, quite in vogue in contemporary social theory, especially from post-structuralist and postmodernist perspectives.

When the main leaders of the Russian Revolution came to power, they kept the same parameters of social division of labour and ideologization of productivity at work as a condition for the construction of a new society in the structure of socialist industrial production, somehow they were reaffirming ideology of labour as domination of nature by man, where the suppression of capitalist economic relations would be a firm step towards the constitution of a society without the force of alienated labour. However, the Gorzian thesis of economic rationalization shows us that it is labour itself, capitalist or socialist, when sustained by an economic purpose that engenders heteronomy and limitation of

the freedom of individuals. A liberated society necessarily passes through the abolition of labour itself, or more feasibly, through its gradual reduction, until human beings can produce their lives through a different rationality.

By the late 1970s, Gorz had clearly detected the unsustainability of a syndicalism and a "left" political practice in which the socialist utopia remained virtually unchanged in relation to the ideals forged at the end of the 20th century. The theoretical core of such criticism reaffirmed a problematic already in vogue since Adorno and Horkheimer (1985); that capitalist domination no longer has its exclusive foundation in class domination, but capitalist domination can only be understood, especially in advanced capitalism, as something that refers to the specific movements of economic rationality.

For Marx, capitalist domination is fundamentally class domination. The proletarian is the waged worker who produces the capitalist wealth and finds himself left out of the result of his work as well as the way in which he is constituted. This class domination, and concomitant alienation of the proletariat, is understandable within the framework of a theory of value. What constitutes value in turn is the human labour time employed in the production of commodities. It is known, then, that it is the working time that measures the value of the commodity, constituted of the abstract work, and that it provides the formation of surplus value. For Marx, in short, it is the time of human labour employed in the production of commodities, the founding nucleus of capitalist wealth itself.

Time for Marx thus appears not only as an abstraction that operates at the level of a Philosophy of History and through which it is possible to speculate on the course of humanity, or as in Hegel's case, of the Spirit, but time is a category of political economy, something whose objectivity manifests itself through the human *praxis* that forms a materialistically interpreted history, an objectivity that is expressed by human action, which is inseparable from the very concept of value. Time is thus a category of social theory and the understanding core of capitalist society.

Gorz (1985, 2003b) will seek in the *Grundrisse* of Marx elements of a critique of capitalism that in many

ways anticipates the current tendencies of capitalism, while at the same time modifying classical reflection on temporality, as in the case of the emergence of a production of value that no longer values labour, but value-knowledge. For the moment, it is only necessary to look at the fact that both in the sphere of industrial society and in what is now called postindustrial, the question of time and temporality plays a fundamental role in Gorz's social theory, and remains something possible of a deeper treatment by sociological theory.

It is not only a critique of the Philosophy of Marxian History, which resorts to human work to found, by the notion of proletariat, the figure of a human redemption associated with non-alienated work, but there are also other aspects through which temporality is central to Gorz's investigations.

On the one hand, on the level of political economy itself, the way in which time is the condition for the creation of value and wealth, but on the other hand, time also refers to an effort to understand human actions in a spectrum of experiences which are also constitutive of capitalism. Human actions that take place outside of experience and working time, situated in what Gorz and Habermas call the world of life, will be the condition of possibility to think of human emancipation. It is in this way that thinking about the category of "time" is shown as theoretically relevant to understand what Gorz understands by autonomy, and in what way we can still constitute a utopia.

In elaborating a theory based on a dual view of society, Gorz states that working time, such as the time workers spend in the factory, is the measure not only of value creation, as is clear in Marxian thought, but it also propitiates the heteronomy of individuals, especially workers. From *Adeus ao Proletariado*, Gorz goes on to argue that emancipation is no longer a liberation at work but a liberation from work. The rupture of that process which Marx and Gorz himself saw as alienation can no longer be achieved by starting from working time, but rather from the time of non-work, as well as that work which can no longer be measured temporarily (Gorz 2003b, 25).

This also indicates that autonomy must be sought in a cultural sphere where ethical values and standards that set limits and hamper the power of economic rationality are erected; the heteronomy that characterizes it

cannot be completely eliminated, but diminished, in that it reduces working time, without evidently reducing income.

Gorz understands that a new utopia must be elaborated based on two fundamental axes: the reduction of working time and the possibility of a universal minimum income. The quest for such a utopia no longer passes for the supposed proletariat as the subject of transformation history, as Gorz believed in an earlier stage of his thinking. But there are other convictions in his thinking that have not changed much over the past thirty years, and such are concerned with the influence of phenomenology on his conception of society. We defend here the idea that the question of temporality manifests itself through a phenomenological bias that marks the whole theoretical production of Gorz.

Time is treated not only as the measurable economic category of value production, as it is apprehensible in the critique of Marxian political economy, but is also dimensioned as a philosophical category, as a parameter through which human existence and freedom are thought. Time at work is for Gorz who imprisons and produces heteronomy, and free time that opens many possibilities of a life endowed with meaning.

The time of not working is filled by activities such as leisure, sports, family experiences, cooperative actions, etc., or even by work activities that do not have the purpose of creating value. Just as Marx had alluded to the possibilities that open up in a society that would break with the capitalist division of labour (Marx 1986), Gorz maintains that a future society capable of autonomy must provide individuals with an expanded possibility of experiencing of non-work.

Although not made explicit by Gorz, his conception of autonomy also refers to the concept of experience, but the latter is thought of as a category that alternates between philosophical discourse, or existential phenomenology, and sociological discourse. It is about thinking what is happening in the world of life. Unlike Habermas who thinks the world of life as the place where individuals, in the dimensions of society, culture and personality, intersubjectively share patterns of values that make mutual understanding possible, for Gorz the world of life expresses certain lived experiences that are not always apprehensible by sociological categories.

The world of life is not, therefore, that sphere of action in which spontaneous interactions are based on the solidity of normative standards bequeathed by modernity, but it is the time and space of life in which social integration, as opposed to functional integration, is mediated by the conflict between individual behaviours and institutionalized norms. The influences of Husserl, Merleau-Ponty and Sartre are manifested in Gorz. The notion of autonomy of the individual assumes a character not only of Kantian or Marxian character, to recall two milestones of enlightenment also present in Gorz, but emphatically a perspective of phenomenology. That is, the freedom of individuals does not depend solely on principles of universal rationality, or a change in the mode of production, but that individual and everyday experience must also be open to experiences of nonconformity not subsumed by institutionalized rationality patterns (Gorz 2003a, 171).

It is through experiences not only collective but also singular and existential that individuals experience expressions of nonconformity in the face of the omnipresent power of economic rationality. The more extensive, therefore, the time of non-work, the greater the possibilities of becoming autonomous subjects, as occurs in the conception of Habermas, but with different characteristics, because for Gorz the world of life makes possible the formation of an ethics and a culture not determined by functional integration processes.

The difference between the *Lebenswelt* of Gorz and Habermas is largely a questioning of the very scope of sociology as a science, in its capacity to grasp the fullness of the social phenomena that take place in this sphere. The apprehension of such experiences for a social theory, in a certain sense, incurs a revitalization of the philosophy of existentialism when the problematic in question ultimately deals with the problem of human freedom.

As in Adorno's social theory, where singular experiences manifest almost unconscious examples of resistance to the administered world, the Gorzian utopia presupposes individual experiences as the index of a possible autonomy. It happens that in both cases mediated by quite different theoretical foundations, in which the epistemological bases that inform the thought of Gorz are much closer to the phenomenology than of the dialectical tradition, but where also, by

means of a Habermasian look, for example, this type of conception is not only a sociological deficit, but also a normative one, when we think of the possibilities of political unfolding of such actions.

However, unlike thinkers such as Adorno and Horkheimer, this Gorzian valuation of individual experiences does not invalidate the elaboration of a political project that proposes structural reforms for society, claims that can and should also be sustained by collective actions and demands. On the contrary, Gorz's whole social theory is based on the proposition of political alternatives aiming at the constitution of a new utopia, in which this reduction of working time and the existence of a basic universal income are indispensable questions as to the possibility of a society autonomous, and that in a way, could be already in gestation in the society of immaterial labour.

Is there room for some sort of utopia in the phase of cognitive capitalism and immaterial labour? Probably, responding to the problem of utopia has become even more difficult in the face of the current mutations of capitalism, and it is precisely from such mutations that Gorz engages in his latest book, *O Imaterial*. If *Adeus ao Proletariado* represented a modification in the author's positions, *O Imaterial* may represent a new kind of change.

Gorz's social theory has been shown at different moments as an effort to understand the transformations that are taking place in capitalism in recent decades. Such transformations in their most recent form have received from Gorz, as well as authors such as Antonio Negri, Michael Hardt and Maurizio Lazaratto the designation of cognitive capitalism, or more precisely, a capitalism founded on immaterial labour.

For Gorz, immaterial labour is increasingly replacing the material production of goods and commodities, causing the whole scope of the critique of Marxian political economy, the value theory, to be questioned at its fundamental core, precisely the time of labour as the basis of value. The changes analyzed by Gorz significantly alter not only the use of Marxian categories, but according to our understanding also the thought of Gorz himself.

The immaterial work represents the set of activities of both industry and services that are guided by activities of cooperation, communication and use of

the intellect that has in knowledge its fundamental basis. Thus, in Gorz's view, in a phase of capitalism in which knowledge is the central element of production "in the knowledge economy, all work, whether in industrial production or in the service sector contains a component of knowledge whose importance is growing" (Gorz 2003b, 9). Within the framework of a phase of economic development that other authors also call post-industrial society (Bell 1999), cognitive capitalism imposes modifications first on the work category itself: "Under these conditions, work, which since Adam Smith is taken as the substance of the value common to all commodities ceases to be measurable in units of time" (Bell 1999, 9).

The phase of capitalism that corresponds to immaterial labour stems from an exacerbation of economic rationality, especially regarding technological advancement, which leads to the limiting situation of challenging the very concept of "human." In a capitalism no longer focused on industrial production and the appropriation of working time, the processes of computerization and technological development go hand in hand with a dematerialization of society:

Capitalism dematerialized to a large extent the main productive forces: labor (and we are only at the beginning of this process) and fixed capital. The most important form of fixed capital is henceforth the stagnant and instantly available knowledge of information technologies, and the most important form of workforce is the intellect. [Gorz 2004, 13]

Knowledge and *savoir* become, for Gorz, the central nucleus in the production of capitalist wealth, where immaterial capital is rapidly replacing material fixed capital. A fundamental change concerns the very statute of capitalist domination at this stage, since it ceases to be centred on the modern figure of wage labour giving rise to a prominence of human capital. Here, we no longer deal with the worker who sells his work force and is alienated in this process, but with the worker who must acquire a set of knowledge and competences that refer to the daily life itself; that is, the qualifications that relate not only to working time but *savoirs* that goes on to include non-work time, free time.

Instead of the proletariat, the end of the labour society brings to the surface the figure of the entrepre-

neur of himself, of the individual who can only occupy a place in the market insofar as he deals with competences that lead to the plane of his own individuality characteristic of a company, configuring what Gorz calls "I Business Corporation". The self-entrepreneur is the manifestation of human capital, which refers to the different human capacities and largely informal forms of *savoir* that individuals develop daily in processes of social interaction. But such *savoir* becomes appropriated by cognitive capitalism. It is in this sense that diversified preparatory courses, readable information in diverse readings, learning of other languages, domains of Internet use, rules of etiquette, knowledge of music, films and sports, knowledge of clothing patterns, diverse forms of leisure – and the list is almost endless – of individual activities developed outside working time that represent forms of personal and human learning that eventually become sources of productivity and value production appropriated by capital.

The use of intelligence, exponent for excellence of the immateriality of work, becomes the key element both for procedures proper to industrial production but also for other equally wealth-producing activities such as services, but also a whole multiplicity of activities shrouded in capitalist production that depends, as at no other time in the history of capitalism, on relative processes to consumption activities on the one hand, and the other on experiences that refer directly to everyday life, but represent a new manifestation of capital, intangible capital.

According to Gorz, the formation of the consumer through activities such as marketing and publicity, currently represent a more than considerable part of capitalist investments, insofar as the production of wealth depends directly on a subjectivity that no longer refers only to an alienation apprehensible in time and space of work, but a subjectivity that encompasses all daily life and life becoming the producer of wealth par excellence. It is no longer a result of the world of work, but rather the work that depends on a subjectivity forged in the world of life.

To deal with a theory appropriate to this phase of capitalism, Gorz uses Marx's *Grundrisse* to formulate his conceptual bases (Gorz 2003b, 15). The Marxian notion of *general intellect* already points to a possible exhaustion of value production through working time



and the amount of labour supplied (Marx 1989, 592), insofar as the advance of the productive forces, notably science and in the view of Marx himself, to occupy a central position in the productive process. Marx, therefore, foresaw a process of development of capitalism in which knowledge/*savoir* came to occupy the role of main productive force.

With the realization of a capitalism of the immaterial some questions hitherto crucial in Gorz's thought reach another level of problematization; until the book *Metamorfoses do Trabalho* (Gorz 2003a) working time was treated as the central element both for the production of value and for the production of heteronomy. In industrial capitalism, economic rationality must be limited to the detriment of an emancipatory policy that proposes the reduction of working time as a fundamental step for revolutionary reforms. In the economy of the immaterial, knowledge becomes the main productive force and manifests itself as something that cannot be measured; more than that, it is apprehensible in the dimension of everyday life, in the daily hours of non-work, in free time, becoming this time a producer of value-knowledge.

But if the free time, the cultural and daily experiences that make up the world of life are producers of a certain type of value, it also imposes economic rationality. We can remember, in a sense, what Habermas was talking about a colonization of the world of life (Habermas 1987). I understand that we still have a problematic point in Gorz's social theory with his last positions. That is, what experiences will guide the utopia of an autonomous society, since those experiences that until then could be treated as a source of autonomy have become value producers in the sense of economic rationality?

The fact is that, for Gorz, cognitive capitalism represents at the same time the crisis of capitalism. In his understanding, *savoir* cannot be apprehended as a commodity like any other, because by its specific characteristics it resists being treated as private property. Knowledge/*savoir* can be transmissible indefinitely and by its nature must be treated as a collective good because of collective work. *Cognitive* capitalism tries to take private ownership of this knowledge, which has become cultural or human capital, but at the same time it is possible to perceive movements, such

as free *software*, which point precisely to the difficulties of a capitalism that has knowledge as its principal value.

It is possible to conclude, then, that the reinvention of utopia for Gorz involves the proposition of measures relating to working time and universal basic income, but on the other hand, we are faced with two difficulties: the first concerns the fact that with the end of the proletariat another social stratum emerged in its place when we consider a capitalism that remains in its structure characterized by those who produce and those who appropriate wealth, but such a stratum is not visible as a proposer of the new utopia. The second inseparable question is that knowledge as the main producer of wealth has a communist potential, because it resists being privately appropriated, but at the same time it points to a subjectivity that, from the point of view of autonomous reflection, seems to be converging as never before in the history of capitalism to an absorption by the standards of economic rationality.

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