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Marxist Thought: Still *Primus Inter Pares* For Understanding And Opposing The  
Capitalist System

This contribution to *Neo-liberalism, Education and the Politics of Inequality* is part of my long-term attempt to examine Marx's humanist commitment, and with it a belief in human volition – or agency (Brosio 1985, passim). Collective agency is necessary for attempts to rescue society and its schools from the latest, namely neo-liberal, capitalist attack on working people and the possibilities for our achieving deep and inclusive democracy. This work consists of yet another series of arguments that Marx's ideas and actions (he was involved politically his whole adult life), as well as the Marxists and others who have understood his work well, provide not only some of the best ways to understand our conditions, but also to organize in ways to make possible a resolution of the historical human crisis. I have written elsewhere:

Marx laid out a series of questions, based upon certain assumptions, which were labored over for the rest of his life. The *Grundrisse* of 1859 and *Das Kapital* 1867 cannot be understood separately from the work done before. In the early work, accomplished through the revolutions of 1848-49, Marx made it clear that he believed in the individual (and collective) actors' ability to be a historically effective agent; in fact, it is the very nature of men and women to be makers of history (1985, pp. 82-3).

John Sanbonmatsu's *The Postmodern Prince* (2004) provides powerful theoretical, historical, and pragmatic support for my claim that Marxist thought is still *primus inter pares* for analyzing and combating today's neo-liberal capitalism. Considering what the neo-liberal phase of capitalism fundamentally consists of – the ultra but historical penetration of market ideas and realities into civil society in increasingly up-close and personal ways - the most effective societal and educational inquiries must

be radical. By this I mean getting to the roots and complexities of what is being examined. I contend further that were one to understand how Marx and the best Marxists conducted/conduct their inquiries it would be warranted to assert that they deserve careful attention - if not replication. Not only have Marxist inquiries sought to analyse and describe the nature of the whole historical society, their authors offered suggestions for what should be done! Many of these accomplishments are classics, although not in the sense that conservatives and reactionaries claim classic stature. Marx's inquiry method is open-ended and provides us with the opportunity to revise, reconstruct and improve upon it. Not only the opportunity but the demand by Marx himself to go beyond what he had accomplished. Marx was enough of a secularist to realize that future generations should not attempt to consider his work as sacrosanct in any way.

I, along with Sanbonmatsu, am interested in what still remains of the former powerful socialist, communist, and other "red" ideas, movements, and organizations.<sup>1</sup> Are the many opponents of these leftist forces correct when they triumphantly boast that capitalism and some forms of "democracy" are the only possibilities for good government and a productive economy? Are the neo-liberals advertising agents to be trusted when they insist that we reject the so-called democratic state's responsibility for the common welfare, and instead turn to market outcomes for everyone? Similarly, are the intellectual scaffoldings for the great "red" threats to capitalism and its various forms of class-states also relics of the past and safely deposited in the dustbin of history? It is evident to some that many intellectuals, working people, members of minority groups and others who see themselves as oppressed have formulated specific critiques and demonstrations against the so-called Washington consensus that has dominated the neo-

liberal attempt to take advantage of the Soviet Union's implosion. It is not clear, how or if, these resisters have considered precedents from red ideas and accomplishments.<sup>2</sup> The most recent "gales of creative destruction" began before 1989; in fact, the capitalist accumulation crisis was a main – if not the main – cause for the "gales" in their neo-liberal garb. This being said, it is obvious that the realizations of and actions against the Washington consensus have not been as coordinated as they might be. Consequentially, these actions have failed to stop or even slow down the overall attempt by capital's many agents to turn every place in the world – and now parts of "outer space" – as well as every person into the market's grasp so that we all become dependent on market outcomes alone.

*Principe/Principessa: Gramsci and Marx*

What can be retrieved from the "red" past (which posed the greatest threat to the capitalist system) that can assist us in our efforts to theorize, hypothesize, and act collectively in order to possibly overcome actually existing capitalism – in its resurgent imperialist khakis?<sup>3</sup> As was stated above, learning about the past and its liberatory phases does not mean that we should hold sacred what was done and who did it. The errors of the past are many, but perhaps when we consider the conditions faced by our forbears we will not be so quick to condemn. Sanbonmatsu asks if we can invent a new "form"<sup>4</sup> with which to help unify the many actions against the US led attempt to impose capitalism and various forms of empire on the whole world. Furthermore, he and I ask if a united left can arise around the Marxist belief that the whole can be identified, understood, and changed. His use of the modifier "postmodern" for the noun "prince" was alarming to me at first glance; however, upon further inspection I learnt that

Sanbonmatsu's prince is compatible with mine. He seeks to convince his readers that the work of Gramsci, specifically in the latter's development of the prince concept, is as necessary as it was in Machiavelli and Gramsci's lifetimes. The latter realized the necessity for a "party" that could lead in the redevelopment of Italian civil society, through struggle against developing capitalist hegemony that was assisted and enforced by the class-state.

Machiavelli's project centred upon a strong ruler who would inspire Italians to unite against foreign enemies. Gramsci's Italy was already somewhat unified as a result of the nineteenth-century Risorgimento. However, Gramsci, among many others, were not satisfied with the results of reunification. For those readers who may be wary about the resuscitation of a central organization/party as a motor for overcoming the capitalist system, be assured that both Sanbonmatsu and I are aware of the dangers and excesses connected to the wrong kind of centralization and what some call elitism or avant-gardism.

Sanbonmatsu (2004, p. 187) offers Octavio Ocampo's painting of Cesar Chavez as a symbol that suggests unity and plurality in leadership.

Looking closely at ... [the] painting, one sees ... that Chavez's visage is ... an illusion: his face, shoulders, and chest are composed entirely of hundreds of farm workers ... all marching together. His hair is made of plowed fields, his lips of doves, the highlights on his face, protest banners. The farm workers' movement is depicted diachronically: marchers stream into the present from the past.... Skulls lining the left side of the painting are really figures of women and children burying the dead – victims of poverty and pesticide poisoning.... Ocampo sought to capture the complex morphology of mass counter-power. Chavez the individual, like Machiavelli's *Prince*, is thus portrayed as a transitional figure, one whose form briefly serves as a vehicle through which a collective will manifests itself. Rather than being a hindrance to unity, diversity turns out to be the precondition.

It is important as well as fair to admit that so many leftist movements have been contested by the Western capitalist powers. Moreover, internal reactionaries were and are supported by these armed powers. This may not excuse what some find dangerous in centralized lefts; however, it helps to explain actions that have been taken by the revolutionaries in the face of overwhelming force that threatened to obliterate the movement and kill those who supported it. Important changes need to be made with regard to centralization (when necessary) but this does not mean that parties such as Gramsci's *Partito comunista italiano (PCI)* have little or nothing to offer us. Marx and the best Marxist thinkers had to be their own revisionists while writing and acting. They unsparingly and even "ruthlessly" scrutinized their work as they went along. We must join in the kind of critique that our forbears began.<sup>5</sup>

There is evidence that Marx, Engels, and many of their comrades were more democratic than most people think. Let us begin with Michael Löwy (2005, p. 21):

Contrary to the ideologists of the "Savior" or the supporters of conspiratorial societies, for whom the separation between "the general interest" and masses is institutionalized, because people are [allegedly] necessarily particularist, corrupt, or ignorant, Marx refuses to dig a ditch between the communists and the proletariat, because their separation is provisional, because the proletariat tends towards the totality [and organizational form], towards communism ...[and] revolution. The bourgeois doctrinaire alienates the "totality" in an individual or an institution because he regards civil society as essentially particularistic. The conspirator sees in a secret sect the only bearer of the "totality" because the working-class mass seems to him to be doomed by obscurantism so long as the capitalist regime survives. Marx sees his role and that of the communists as an instrument of self-liberation of the masses, because he is witnessing the birth of an independent labor movement, and he believes this to be capable of attaining consciousness of its historic task.

Löwy's chapter three is called: "The Theory of the Party (1846-1848)." It is instructive to learn what he has to say about Marxism and democrats. He informs us they were

struggling with how to help German communism to advance beyond its lack of form. They asked how this could be achieved. Of course these communist pioneers' goal was to eventually internationalize the movement and party. Marx explained how the process should occur: from the base to the summit and from the periphery to the center. Engels wrote, "democracy nowadays is communism." According to Löwy (2005, p 133):

Engels describes the changing of the rules [of the League of the Just to the Communist League] as the transition from an organization "hankering after conspiracy, which requires dictatorship" to one that is "thoroughly democratic, with elective and removable authorities."

There is no space here to discuss the famous "dictatorship of the proletariat" in the *Communist Manifesto* (1848), except to say its authors and supporters were convinced that before authentic/bona fide democracy could be established, capitalism as a system, its rulers and main beneficiaries would have to be overcome. Those who continue to rule the politics of the so-called capitalist democracies would or should understand what the Marxist communists meant. Their treatment of everyone and every organization that opposed and opposes the capitalist dispensation over which they sit and benefit from is a necessary – if not sufficient – point to make herein!

The Marxist traditions of inquiry and potential action stress the need to discover contradictions and crises within the systems being interrogated. Many democratic leftists think that the present neo-liberal phase is characterized by these conditions resulting in significant opportunities to act. There is no consensus about this moment of real opportunity because, in part, there is no united democratic left. It may be that there has never been a perfect union of agreement in the past; however, with Sanbonmatsu I believe that there must be a Marxist democratic "form" that can act with an open hand, so

that the fingers can feel out what is happening, and then become a strong hand grasp, or closed fist when needed. According to Sanbonmatsu, the scattered forces that act against what ails us most at this time do not add up to a centralized entity whose members can take advantage of the weakest places in the capitalist system and its outed imperial reality. It is clear that the anti-capitalist/imperial struggles have not even been very effective at maintaining the social democracies that were the targets of the “gales of creative destruction” starting in the 1970s. There are important exceptions, but nothing like a direct and powerful threat to the capitalist system that has been so strengthened during the last forty years. The revanchist right(s) appear to have benefited most from crises that its agents have been most responsible for creating in the first place. An important school example is the neo-liberal attempt to discredit K-12 public schools in the US because of their alleged failures. The “gales” have destroyed many “family wage” jobs and ruined inner cities, inhabited mainly by people of color, where all too many of these “failed” schools exist.

The neo-liberal agents have tried also to shore up patriarchy, racial hierarchies, and of course greater class stratification, as part of a “seamless world order” impervious to dissent and revolutionary action. The disconnect between the great historical threats facing the world’s working people, and the mostly ad hoc responses (patching things up but not removing what caused the need to oppose in the first place), may be getting worse as the leaders of the US and its “coalition of the willing” appear to be contemplating even more reckless policies and actions. I first wrote this in July 2006, a time when the Israelis were conducting a war against its enemies in Lebanon and the Palestinians. The Bush Administration’s announced policy was to let the Israeli armed forces pound their

foes until they give into superior force and accept the status quo that favors America's ally. The Arab fighters are labeled terrorists: therefore there is allegedly little need to look carefully at the issues.

The powers that be, those who constructed and defend the undemocratic system that prevails over most of the world in its current neo-liberal dispensation, have an important advantage. This totalistic hegemony is total in the sense that it speaks to so much of what all of us encounter in our daily lives. The rightist alliance's logic and force is at work in shopping malls, schools, places of worship, the armed forces, the songs we hear, the words we read, the pictures we see, the spectator sports-world, the hunting and fishing community (in the US at least), what passes for certain kind kinds of humor and jokes, and throughout all the rest, the very texture, of the society and culture. It is a hyper-materialistic society and this phenomenon is wrapped in the husk of culture that is dominated by those who are most responsible for these dialectically related constructions.

This is not to say that resistances are absent; however, few if any strike at the heart of the system. I think that Michael Hardt, and Antonio Negri (*Empire*, 2000) would consider my use of the word "heart" naive, because they see empire as everywhere with no central command post. At most they see "empire" being comprised of the strongest capitalist nations, led by the most powerful one, the US, and the various global organizations set up by the great powers. Hardt argues that the US, although most powerful, cannot be imperialist in the older sense of the term. However, the US and UK do not need an official governor, national flags, and other old colonial paraphernalia within colonized countries that depend on the global economy in order to survive. Even more striking is the Bush debacle in Iraq. Old style colonial armed forces are at work in



that ruined country. The occupiers may not be able to return home until Iraq becomes neo-liberalized. This means that the people will be occupied by low wage work, consumerism, and banal circus-like entertainment; although there may not be enough bread!

In order to counter the advantages cited above the opposition must have what Sanbonmatsu calls “perceptible form”. He claims that movements per se are not adequate to the task of seriously challenging the global capitalist system. Moreover, without a body in the temporal world, movements are ghost-like.<sup>6</sup> Marx and Gramsci’s favored example of “perceptible form” was a communist party. This is not to suggest that the name communist would be accepted presently because of many reasons. To make this term more concrete, it means that people must have a tangible place to go – to hang out, make good talk, tend to what concerns them – and this is what the parties on the red left provided. It is not surprising that the Fascist squads first attacked the union headquarters, houses of labor, socialist and then communist party offices and meeting places. Obviously the squads did not stop at destroying the buildings alone. Furthermore, the parties of the red left had seats in the Italian parliament. Gramsci was arrested while he was a member of this body!

#### Babel, Language, and Unity

Sanbonmatsu makes a convincing case that socialism, of various kinds, provided the shape and form for much of the world’s left. The Marxist communists grew out of earlier socialist traditions and organizations. In Central and South America opponents of neo-liberalism and empire have succeeded in some countries to establish various kinds of form. The Bolivarian Revolution in Venezuela and earlier movements such as the Castro

revolution in Cuba, and the Sandinistas in Nicaragua are examples. The systematic attempts by the Monroe Doctrine assisted US governments to smash these organizations demonstrates the dangers confronting people who and countries that seek to make their own histories in their own ways.

The socialists provided versions of utopianism - imaginaries that taped into religious visions of recuperation. Sanbonmatsu informs us that this recuperative effort was dependent on some earlier forms of unity; however, not guided by deities of any kind. The attempt to construct an archetypical tower ends, as we know, in failure.

Sanbonmatsu (2004, p. 12) explains:

the moral of the Babel story is that unity cannot be won on this earth through human effort, that we must not imagine that we can invent whatever we can conceive in our minds. If we dream that we are capable of creation, our hubris will destroy us. Better, in short, to think locally (or tribally), not globally.

Socialism and communism are both about, to some extent, building a tower without god, namely to construct a just society on earth. It is important to understand the various reds' ties to the Enlightenment and the French Revolution, including the one of 1848.

Sanbonmatsu (2004, p. 12) adds:

In the dreams of modern reason, from the Encyclopedists and Jacobins in the eighteenth century to the socialists and anarchists of the nineteenth and twentieth, the Tower of Babel would be rebuilt, the whole restored. From the bricks and mortar of what is, human beings would construct a unified structure [form] capable of bridging the vast difference to what ought to be.

I have written elsewhere:

Carl Becker, in his classic work, *The Heavenly City of the Eighteenth-Century Philosophers* [1932], writes of the link between the *philosophes* and Marx, between the French and Russian Revolutions. "Supplied with the dialectic of Hegel and the evolutionary theories of Darwin, Marx formulated in *Das Kapital*, the creed of the communist faith which was to

replace, for the discontented, the democratic faith of the eighteenth century. The new faith ... does not look back to a golden age ... or Garden of Eden.... It does not look forward to the regeneration of humanity by the pleasant specific of enlightenment [alone].... It sees in the past a ruthless and impersonal conflict of material forces; a conflict functioning through the economic class interests of men [sic], which, as it created the landowning aristocratic régime of the Middle Ages and then destroyed it in the interest of the bourgeois-capitalist régime of the nineteenth century, will in turn destroy the bourgeois-capitalist régime in the interest of the proletariat” (Brosio 1994a, pp. 111-112).

The “will in turn” does not mean inevitability. Marx thought that history is open, made by people in conflict and perhaps some day in harmony

Marx sought to develop a form of common language for politics so that the scattered and disunited working-class people could understand their plight and make common cause in solidarity to overcome their oppressors. This emphasis did not include belief in divine intervention, at Babel or elsewhere. He understood the damage that capitalism had done to workers **and the environment** in which they, and many others, inhabited. Despite keeping focused on the destruction that capitalism caused, he saw its demonic power as a giant broom that swept away many forms of imposed differences that were regressive. Feudalism is a good example. Marx held that the drive toward an admitted dangerous leveling and homogenizing of certain processes and institutions also had a positive side to it. Bluntly said: it laid the groundwork, in his view, for a more common universal playing field – a site that could then be taken over by the proletarian revolution.

According to Meghnad Desai (2002, p. 7) central to Marx’s theory is that

any particular mode of production disappeared only after its full potential had been exhausted.... With mature capitalism came a mature, organized [not inevitably] working class capable of autonomous collective action. The full chain of links was never specified, but it would be [done by] ... workers.

Desai (2002, p. 10) continues, Marx

did not see capitalism as eternal, but nor did he see it as incapable of change.... The limits to capitalism have to be sought in the weakness of ... [its] strongest points.... It will be in the daily practice of the people working the machinery of capitalism that its limits will be felt, and it will be overcome by them.

Marshal Berman (1999, p. 264) concurs.

Marx sees the modern working class as an immense worldwide community waiting to happen. Such large possibilities give the story of organizing a permanent gravity and grandeur. The process of creating unions is not just an item in interest-group politics, but a vital part of ... “the education of the human race.” And it is not just educational but existential: the process of people, individually and collectively, discovering who they are [I would say: “we”]. As they learn who they are, they will come to see that they need one another to be themselves. They will see, because workers are smart, bourgeois society has forced them to be in order to survive its constant upheavals. Marx knows they will get it by and by.

Berman points out that during the 1990s Marx was considered dead, by some, and that big ideas were no longer necessary. However, in the early twenty-first century, these postmodernist, neo-liberal, and neo-conservative boasts and claims look rather dated! We “find ourselves in a dynamic global society ever more unified [in some ways] by downsizing, deskilling, and dread – just like the old man said” (Berman 1998, p. 16). It is unfortunate, but not surprising, that official schooling in almost every country does not expose students to what Marx and the Marxists actually said – and then tried to accomplish.

#### Differences Can Be Worked Out

Sanbonmatsu does not agree with poststructuralists, postmodernists, and others who support Foucault and Nietzsche’s insistence on difference being the sine qua non of our condition. He, like Marx, seeks to construct consensus among people who arguably

have much in common, in spite of obvious and important differences. Marx belongs to a tradition whose members see differences among us and other phenomena as mostly “appearances”, rather than “essences”. I am not using these two words in a Platonic sense, wherein they are generally viewed as starkly dichotomous, or in other ways that conflict with Marx’s well-known critique of so many philosophers who came before him. His dialectical materialist inquiries speak to the nuances and relationships within the human-natural world. On a more mundane level, Marx understood that differences could be worked out. He rejected the idea that differences trumped what we all have –or develop - in common. In the market-saturated societies we now live in its agents’ attempt to trap us into the acceptance of a narcissism featuring very small differences. I, perhaps surprisingly, turn to Isaiah Berlin (2004, p. 26) for further support.

What ... do I mean by saying that men [sic] do have a common nature ... I think that common ground between human beings must exist if there is to be any meaning in the concept of human being at all. I think ... there are certain basic needs, for example – food, shelter, security, and if we accept Herder, for belonging to a group of one’s own.... These are only the most basic properties; one might ... add the need for a certain minimum of liberty, for the opportunity to pursue happiness or the realization of one’s potentialities for self-expression, for creation ... for love.... [Also] for some means of conceiving and describing themselves, perhaps in highly symbolic and mythological forms [as well as] their own relationship to the environment natural and human.... Unless there is that communication between human beings ... within a society, let alone understanding what others have wished to communicate in other ages and cultures, [humanism] would become impossible. I believe in the permanent possibility of change, modification, [and] variety ... but there must be enough in common between individuals and groups who are going through various modifications for communication to be possible.

I am among those who see Marx as a humanist. This does not conflict with his scientific inquiries. Non-positivist science and humanism are compatible in many ways.<sup>7</sup>

Liberalism does not own humanism. The word itself, like history, suggests problems in terms of nomenclature; namely inserting “man” and “his”. In addition to this gender insensitivity there are also social class, race, ethnic, sexual orientation, and other examples of non-inclusion. Marx admired liberal “culture” and “civilization” because it replaced the older feudal, aristocratic, church, and royal order. The early benefits enjoyed by the bourgeoisie did enhance many liberties for various persons and groups. However, Marx understood that the terrible shortcoming of this improvement was its non-inclusion of the working class. He realized that the surging bourgeois-liberal order was based much more on capitalism than Enlightenment. It became clear that the main benefits accrued to those who owned the means of production.

One of the putative great strengths of liberalism/humanism is its vaunted support of pluralism. Marx and Marxists have been criticised for not accepting this important feature of a good and just society. John Gray (2006, p. 20) has written, in reference to Isaiah Berlin’s “achievement” concerning what the latter was against.

[Specifically], all genuine values must be combinable in a harmonious whole. In this view conflicts of values are symptoms of error that in principle can always be resolved: if human values come into conflict that is only because our understanding of them is imperfect, or some contending values are spurious; where such conflicts appear there is a single right answer that – if only they can find it – all reasonable people are bound to accept. In opposition to this view Berlin maintained that conflicts of values are real and inescapable, with some having no satisfactory solutions.... Conflicts of value go with being human.

I contend that Marx’s use of the dialectical method of inquiry provides ways to resolve certain crises, thorny problems, and disagreements. He paints a societal picture in the *Manuscripts* of 1844 that signify “true” and “ultimate” freedom.

Sympathetic critics have called it a society of artists who work harmoniously [Berlin may argue against this]. Men [sic] would find freedom and happiness in work, in the same way that Marx believed artists worked. There would be no rules imposed from outside the work process, according to Marx's artistic vision. Eugene Kamenka thinks Marx's position is that "art ... knows no authorities and no discipline except ... [that of] art itself.... [This], every artist accepts freely and consciously; it is in this ... alone that makes him [her] an artist"(Brosio 1985, p. 78).

Marx remained loyal to his early and continuing humanist vision and hopes.

### What Has Really Gone Awry

We are constantly reminded that many leftist, and specifically red, achievements have gone awry. However, this did not occur in a vacuum, as Gramsci's imprisonment and bad treatment exemplify. Rosa Luxemburg was imprisoned during World War I in Germany and murdered in that country in 1919. She, whose work

speaks to the need for a deeper form of democracy, a socialist democracy grounded in a humanist outlook, free of both authoritarianism and the claim that any attempt to go beyond the narrow horizons of capitalist democracy will necessarily end in authoritarianism (Hudis and Anderson 2004, 30).

It must be realized that the red lefts have been savagely defeated in many places since the red flag was raised against capitalism. It is important to consider what might have happened if these revolutionary beginnings would have been able to be developed further without the police, military, and other interventions that forced the revolutionaries to be consumed by the need to defend the revolution and themselves. Reagan's military support of the "Contras" in Nicaragua against the people's revolution is yet another example of what those who struggle against capital and empire have endured.

Furthermore, these past achievements have been forgotten, and/or abandoned, by those who have much to gain from remembering what was accomplished. These successes can be used critically now as precedents – if not roadmaps. An important way of imagining

politics has been smashed by, its opponents, and forgotten by most people during the early twenty-first century. Carl Boggs (2000) calls this a retreat from politics. However, some theorists and activists are trying to

reinvigorate the public sphere with a vision of participatory democracy and universal human rights, and ... of the need to create a coherent, unified movement to contain and represent the aspirations of all [democratic leftist] movements. Without such a unified approach, Lydia Sargent argued, the separate movements of the left would never “exist as a collective project...” Rather than “growing interactively, each benefiting from the rest,” today’s scattered movements “exist at best side by side, often ... competitively ... Without organization and strategy, there is nothing to work for and no way to evaluate what we’ve done.” ... Yet within academic critical theory, a strong theoretical bias had developed that was ...allergic to any discussion of the need for a new *synthesis* of theory and practice. Postmodernists, in particular, had taken to advocating not unity but rather the deconstruction of the *discourse* of unity, and not solidarity but “difference” (Sanbonmatsu 2004, pp. 13-14).

Sanbonmatsu claims that the “bias” against unity in theory – and one can assume practice – can be importantly attributed to the events that occurred in Paris in 1968, seemingly as a culmination of what the new leftists had done in the US, France, Italy, Germany, and elsewhere. Sanbonmatsu fingers Daniel Cohn-Bendit, Michele Foucault and Gilles Deleuze as primary suspects. Nietzsche may be the arch-suspect!

Sanbonmatsu argues that all too many leftists abandoned the socialist-communist commitment to rebuilding the Babel project as they turned to poststructuralist images of “speaking in tongues.” This phenomenon is connected to the emphasis on “feeling” so common among many new leftists. Sanbonmatsu laments the victory of “expressivism” over the earlier leftist focus on strategy. These developments are causal in reference to the

decline of social movements and a widening gap between theory and practice [resulting in leaving] left critical theory vulnerable to changes in



the political economy of knowledge production in the 1980s and 1990s [via] (the rationalization of the university) (2004, p. 14).

Let us fast forward to May 2006. Ignacio Ramonet (2006, p. 1) writes:

Once again during the recent revolt against the First Employment Contract [a threat to discontinue French workers' protection against being fired], the enthusiasm and dynamism evident on French streets were in marked contrast with the disconcerting silence of French thinkers. The same was true during the November [2005] riots in the *banlieues* [places where unemployed youth whose parents came to France from her former colonies live]. There was a lot of chattering, but few, other than such rare figures as Jean Baudrillard and John Berger, were able to read the events, uncover their deeper significance and suggest what they might portend. With no relevant or encouraging diagnosis forthcoming, society was left in the dark about its symptoms and in danger of succumbing to further crises.

The failure of so many theorists, other intellectuals, and putative intellectuals who write and speak in the “mainstream” media to provide the needed diagnoses of what the effects of today’s global capitalism has been is of great significance. For example, newspaper columnist and author Thomas Friedman of the *New York Times*, is called a liberal; although he is a cheerleader for the war in Iraq. Moreover, his “liberalism” is characterized by the belief that marketization is the sine qua non of democracy. Perhaps more serious is that many who claim to be postmodernist/poststructural “critical” theorists seldom look at and condemn the ravages of contemporary capitalism’s drive to beat down wageworkers. These theorists do not look deeply enough into the structural changes that have occurred, as the agents of capital have sought to solve the accumulation crisis that began in the 1970s. Perhaps these “critical” post commentators do not believe that structure is a real phenomenon – or, at least, cannot be described or found.

Richard Vogel has written an article in the *Monthly Review* that demonstrates how important it is to inquire into the structural changes and how they affect workers – those

who have little or no say about the conditions of their labor. He focuses on neo-liberal capitalism's "relentless search for cheap labor" and how it has materially affected workers in the US and Mexico. He begins by explaining that the de-industrialization of the US and the reliance on cheap goods from East Asia have resulted in making the US west coast cities the largest ports in the nation. The dockworkers in Los Angeles and Long Beach were very busy in part because their comrades in other jobs had become unemployed as factory workers. The stevedores may have thought their jobs could not be off-shored; however, they had not considered an end run by the capitalist planners.

Current transportation trends are proving labor's assumptions dead wrong. Sparked by organized resistance and wildcat actions by workers against falling wages and deteriorating working conditions at America's ports and on the nation's highways, the flow of container traffic is being shifted to a south-north orientation [rather than west-east]. By leveraging both the US and Mexican governments and taking advantage of the terms of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), big capital is developing container terminals in Mexico and using that country as a land bridge and labor pool to deliver shipping containers to destinations in the US at discount prices (Vogel 2006, pp. 16-17).

This "achievement" is called the Lázaro Cárdenas-Kansas City Transportation Corridor. The maritime distance between Shanghai and Los Angeles is 2,000 miles less than from Shanghai to Lázaro Cárdenas. Although, the land distances between Los Angeles to Kansas City and the former to Lázaro Cárdenas are roughly the same. This distance does not prevent the owners to choose an end run rather than come to terms with workers in *Alta* California ports. Furthermore the class states of the US and Mexico aid and abet such anti-organized labor policy. Those who are authentically Critical rather than critical do criticise strategies such as these; whereas the "small-c theorists" usually write that these events are unavoidable as capitalism marches on and the workers must then bend to

the “inevitable.”<sup>8</sup> Vogel ends his article with a reminder that what he has presented is best understood within the context of global capital’s attacks on labor throughout the world. Furthermore, he provides this advice: keep our eyes on the dialectic of, or between, capital’s war from above and labor’s responses.

In contrast to the clear analysis by Vogel and most contributors to *Monthly Review* I present Sanbonmatsu’s dislike (2004, p. 15) of

The “baroque” or superficial formal density of postmodernist texts ... [that] represents the extension of *commodity* logics into the previously protected sphere of critical [I would use an upper case C] thought.

I invite interested persons to read the *Monthly Review* journal and the books they publish because of the very clear concrete language used. This experience can be juxtaposed with all too many *baroque* postmodernist writings. The latter are not adequate for attempting to reach out beyond a very small circle of readers. What can be considered *baroque* is of little or no danger to the actually existing capitalist world order (or disorder).<sup>9</sup>

Vogel’s contribution can educate us about the structural realities that often remain hidden when concentration is limited to the cultural body around the structural skeleton. His work helps to demonstrate that Marxist thought deserves to be considered: still *Primus Inter Pares*. Many readers may counter that capitalism is not identified as the main cause for what liberals, progressives, and other “leftists” are very concerned about in the world today. However, Marxists insist that neo-liberal policies are part of the historical efforts of capitalist thinkers and activists to control our lives as much as possible. Those who do not agree with capitalist causality limit their horizons to resuscitating some kind of New Deal or social democracy.

## The End of Rational Capitalism

John Bellamy Foster, *Monthly Review's* editor, analyses what he calls the end of rational capitalism. He explains how John Maynard Keynes, and to some extent Joseph Schumpeter, developed a defence of capitalism – a system that just had endured some very bad times, for example, World War I, the Great Depression, and World War II. Many Marxists have argued that the capitalism system was very causal for all these events. Because of the Soviet Union's survival and the communist victory in China, capitalism was confronted by powers that refused to enter the capitalist global system. Foster explains that Keynes's response was to lay out a way to make capitalism rational and competitive with the socialist bloc. Keynes was insightful and bold enough to admit that capitalism was not self-regulating. He endorsed state intervention in the capitalist economies. His work helped make possible social democracy and the welfare states within the US-led capitalist bloc. The key to it was political compromise between capital and labor. Schumpeter added that monopolies were dangerous to and for capitalism because the system's real strength was the so-called rational entrepreneur. He viewed capitalism's problems as sociological rather than inherently structural. Daniel Bell's *The Cultural Contradictions of Capitalism* (1976) helps explain the sociological causes to which Schumpeter referred. As I have written elsewhere (1994a, pp. 18-19):

Bell asserts that unrestrained economic impulses were held in check by Puritan restraint, and/or the Protestant ethic. However, capitalism undermined this restraint when the old religious sanctions were “sundered from bourgeois society” and we were left with hedonism. The cultural justification of capitalism has become hedonism ... the pursuit of pleasure as a way of life.

The cultural contradiction could be stated as: capitalism demands that people be “straight” and hard working by day, but “swingers” at night and during consumer-driven

holidays. Moreover, frenzied consumerism occurs almost every day in the US, and in some of the countries that seek to emulate the only “superpower.” The business media bombards consumers as they seek to entice everyone to make shopping and buying the central parts of our lives.

Both Keynes and Schumpeter thought that capitalism had to be protected from its own logic – one that had and would lead again to disaster. The US position of dominance over a world ravaged by war allowed a kind of seeming benevolence toward working people in some of the leading capitalist countries, but it was not all benevolence. The Cold War was not without millions of casualties around the world, a great percentage of them caused by the Western Powers’ wars against rebelling subaltern people. As Foster (2005, p. 5) claims:

Not all economists succumbed to the idea of a new rational capitalism. .... At the height of the golden age of post-Second World War capitalism in 1966, Paul Baran and Paul Sweezy’s *Monopoly Capitalism* was published, which argued that far from being a reflection of a more rational more organized capitalism, the prosperity of ... [that time] was a transitory product of special development factors to be ... [understood] in the larger historical environment.

Foster explains that for Baran and Sweezy the new regime of accumulation did not resemble the myth about rational capitalism. The last chapter of their book is called an “irrational system.” In contrast to Keynes and Schumpeter’s models the realities were militarism and imperialism (albeit some without traditional colonies); furthermore, these phenomena were “built into the very fiber” of how the really existing capitalism operated.<sup>10</sup> In fact, as Foster explains:

The welfare state celebrated by Keynesians and social democrats was undeveloped in the most developed, most stable capitalist state – the US – blocked by vested interests. What were viewed as successes in economic growth and stability were the product of fortuitous historical

circumstances and artificial economic stimulants.... The limited quid pro quo of capitalism – its idealized system of equal exchange – had broken down almost completely under monopolistic pricing and output arrangements.... Wage exploitation ... was becoming more severe. Meanwhile leisure itself became just another form of exploitation – “passively absorbable amusement” – designed to reinforce an economic system that while encompassing a vast production capacity was unable to allow for a meaningful transformation of human existence.... At the center of Baran and Sweezy’s analysis was the view that the monopoly capitalist system, despite all of the massive, irrational means [for example, the constant warfare] being used to shore it up, could not continue crisis free (2005, p. 7).

This situation is in many ways the same during Bush junior’s presidency – if not worse.

The conditions in Western Europe may not be as bad, because of many reasons, although there is no immunity from neo-liberal totalism.

Keynesianism was not played out in rational ways. Even if it had, there were too many people left out of its benefits in order to work. The events of the late 1950s and the next two decades made clear that those at the bottom and even those doing a bit better did not think that they were living in a rational system. The eruptions of democracy caused by many organized workers, people of colour, women, anti-war activists, and others made it difficult for the powers that be to do anything but exercise repression. The absence of profound reform as the New Deal petered out demonstrated that vaunted Keynesianism was unable to resist the capitalist imperatives as soon as its agents realized that their bottom lines needed to be rescued. Foster argues:

What quickly emerged was a supply-side discourse that reflected capitalism’s attempt to purify its accumulation logic, abandoning all previous attempts to rein in and regulate the system.... The principles of a no-holds-barred capitalism took over (2005, p. 8).

The “gloves off” version of capitalism did not work as well as the system had during the so-called Golden Years right after 1945 – a period when it was restrained to

some extent by countervailing forces led by organized labor. The strategy and tactics became more exploitative as the accumulation crisis got worse as politicians like Thatcher and Reagan came into power. This only added to the crisis faced by the irrational system. However, it “succeeded” in enhancing the wealth at the top - in prodigious and even criminal hoggish ways. Foster connects all of these developments to explain how the US and its key allies acted after the fall of the Soviet Union.

If for Schumpeter imperialism was a byproduct of a war machine and monopolization rather than the intrinsic properties of capitalism, reality today suggests this distinction is either irrelevant or false. The most powerful state of the global capitalist system and the one claiming to best represent its logic, the US, has openly adopted a strategy of retaining its political and economic hegemony through military means – and went so far as to announce this to the entire world (2005, p. 9).

#### Miliband’s Divided Societies

I turn next to Ralph Miliband, an excellent Marxist analyst, in order to strengthen my claim that Marxist thought is of great importance – even *primus inter pares* - in these times. Because of Marx’s unique understanding of capitalism it is justifiable to turn to a person who worked within the main lines and foci that Marx began. As we have seen, there are scholars, media persons, and others who declare that Marxist analyses no longer apply. Many of them claim that the capitalist system is not what Marx claimed when he was alive, let alone under the changed “post” conditions. I maintain that although things change, there are historical and institutional consistencies. How post is capitalism in the early twenty-first century? How post are imperialism, racism, misogyny, poverty, religious fundamentalism, war, torture, and governmental oppression? In historical perspective – even of centuries that are called short by some and long by others – things look quite different from what those who have a “presentist” point of view provide.<sup>11</sup> Of

course it is necessary to divide the stream of history into temporal units in order to further understand what has occurred and the reasons why; however, there must be room for many people to help decide what these units are and/or should be.

Miliband's book *Divided Societies* was published in 1989, a very important year marker for historians and many other people, although the author began thinking systematically about these issues in 1982 and reporting his findings via lectures. His purposes for giving the lectures were: 1. to clarify what the "notion" of class conflict meant in the "advanced" capitalism of that time, and 2., seek to convince his readers that class conflict was still

the most important, indeed the absolutely central fact in the life of advanced capitalist societies .... Also ...the work I have done for the book has strongly confirmed my belief that class struggle ... is the key phenomenon for the understanding of the societies [Britain and the US] in question (Miliband 1989, p. v).

It is not surprising that Miliband was under fire from many writers who branded him as passé and worse. This was a time when Reagan and Thatcher had succeeded in using their respective governments to forward capitalism's no holds barred strategies.

Miliband's point of departure is Marx's model of class struggle. He does this unapologetically, although explaining that Marx's model is a point of departure – not a point of arrival. Marxists such as Miliband and myself are aware of the fact that Marx died in 1883 and while he was alive never claimed he had discovered a Rosetta Stone that could serve as tool with which to arrive at certainty. However, Miliband does claim that Marx had the "essence" of the matter correct! Important modifications are always in order when dealing with messy realities. Miliband takes this into consideration as he develops a comparative study of Britain and the US. His justification for studying these



two is that both are highly developed in industrial and technological ways. Both of their economies are predominantly under private ownership and control; moreover, both have had comparable political regimes since World War II, namely “democracies” – although he hastens to add that the more correct term is: “capitalist democracy.” These characteristics are in contrast to communist societies of that time and those in the “third world.” He concludes the preface with:

My ... purpose has not been to add to the empirical material [an enormous amount exists], but rather to “theorize” class struggle in ways which seem ... appropriate to the understanding of social reality, and which are not on the whole to be found in the relevant literature (1989, p. viii).

In the book’s last chapter Miliband speaks to the future of class struggle in capitalist societies. I suggest that an objective and learned reader might think that what Miliband presents in 1989 is just about “essentially” correct with regard to what we know presently. The author speaks of the dizzying changes that occurred during the 1980s and how they have profoundly changed the terrains upon which class wars occurred. Specifically, the “radical recomposition of the working class;” the weakening of leftist political parties; the emergence of the “new” social movements based mostly on “identities,” in relationship with deep cultural changes; the crisis of socialism itself, let alone communism; and other related phenomena that have already been presented in the work before you.

Miliband agrees with the empirical data, but not with all or even many of the interpretations about their significance, and what could be done. He is adamant in rejecting that the left’s entire history of accomplishment should, or must be rejected, or disowned. Miliband argues that what is really in question, but not often mentioned by supporters of capitalism’s “inevitability” and “end of history” claims, is whether or not

actually existing capitalism will become ultimately different and/or better for more people. Have these admitted changes, during the “gales of creative destruction” really altered the “character” of the system? If so, what will a more relevant socialism look like? How should the left conduct class struggle after the grave defeats suffered?

According to Miliband (1989, p. 204): in spite of a

torrent of propaganda to the contrary, advanced capitalist societies are now and will remain highly structured and hierarchical class societies. The precise composition of the different classes will no doubt undergo further and considerable modifications, but the social structure itself, with the patterns of domination and exploitation ... may be expected to endure.... Consumption patterns are somewhat less class-specific than they were in the past; and the trend may become even more pronounced.... But the substance of life experience for everyone in these societies remains utterly shaped by the fact of class and class inequality.

He should see us now after the market’s serious troubles and six years of the Bush Jr. Administration, servile Congress, rightist Supreme Court and lapdog mainstream media. The Congressional victories by the Democratic Party in November 2006 are important, but it remains to be seen what the “second party of capitalism and empire” will do with the mess we face. The US and all to many of its citizens – and non-citizens – are deeply in debt and the poverty is beginning to show through the facades erected. Of course the brutal facts about poverty in the world’s richest country have been well known by those who respect socio-economic facts. I know less about Britain, although it’s reasonable to assert that most of the wealth accumulation in that country has been enjoyed by a rather small part of the population. Part of this elite group includes some who did come from “humble” beginnings. However,

during this time of rising incomes and better positions for some women, racial minorities, and others, the counter phenomenon is that subaltern people who have not been deemed “qualified” by the power elites have seen their relations with the current capitalist economy result in hard times

for most of them – especially when a government that allegedly “looks more like America” seems to have little will or power to overcome socioeconomic injustices (Brosio 2000a, p. 404).

Miliband foresaw that the distribution of power in the advanced capitalist countries would become worse, more unequal. The reference above, looking more like America, is what the victorious Clintonions said after they won the presidential election in 1992 and put together a cabinet that featured more diversity than Bush Sr.’s. However, Clinton could not stop the growing inequalities during his two terms. It is not clear that this was his goal. It does seem that governments in the US and possibly in other advanced capitalist democracies cannot or will not use their power to arrest the exacerbation of social class stratification. Clinton may have had more compassion for ordinary people than his predecessor and his successor, but his politics could not be seriously called compassionate as he helped the Republicans end “welfare as we know it.” Corporate welfare continued to grow significantly during his presidency. This growth is exponential during Bush Jr.’s time in the White House, with no end in sight. Blair’s record as prime minister is comparable in some ways. Labour’s historical domestic record in Britain has not been supported since he came to power. The country is richer; however, all too many people have not been included – similar to the situation in the US. Blair has announced that he will resign in June 2007.

Miliband (1989, p. 204) warned it should be clear that a concentration of economic power surely results in a parallel centralization in the entangled political realm.

However, strident the rhetoric of democracy and popular sovereignty may be, and despite the “populist” overtones which politics must now incorporate, the trend is toward ever-greater appropriation at the top.

The presidency of Bush Jr. demonstrates savagely what Miliband predicted based on his studies from a Marxist perspective. One could argue that the Blair government is somewhat similar in its appropriation of power. See the decision to go to war against Iraq in 2003 as Bush's junior partner, despite opposition by many Britons.

Miliband was not fooled by title inflation and distortions by capital and its agents. He realized that in the near future (from 1989) most people would still be in the working class – having nothing but their labor to offer the market. In fact, as capitalism became increasingly global the number of people in a proletarian position is greater than ever before. He argued that what will be decisive is how the working class will react to the constant pressure from their capitalist bosses and politicians. His scenario – based on Critical reflective studying – permitted him to extrapolate from the evidence in 1989, and long before, to offer us what follows. He thought that class struggle would continue among private and state workers against their respective supervisors; however, it would be “sporadic, limited, and specific and well contained and routinized within a tight web of legal and political constraints” (1989, p. 204). He predicted that these actions would have less affect than the pressures brought to bear on the powers that be by the new social groups based on identities, peace and environmental activists and others. Organized labor would be seen by many as just another “special interest.” In a word, another era of “business unionism.” So-called socialist politicians and governments in the capitalist democracies would be limited to some versions of ameliorative politics. The very thought of making a fundamental assault on the capitalist system would seem ludicrous, or more likely not even cross their minds.

However, this scenario includes a realization that the demise of socialism would not result in complete pacification of the working class! Conflict would continue here and there; although, these challenging acts would not be a serious threat to the system and its social order. Working people would act to achieve remedies for specific grievances and problems, some of which would be addressed by their bosses and others that would not. Some concessions would serve to satisfy the complainers and keep them from digging deeper in order to understand the systems of oppression and how to combat them more seriously and effectively. With few exceptions most people would accept the "what is" of their lives without asking the dangerous question: What could/should be? This attitude, caused in part by "manufactured consent", would not allow most people to question the reality of private ownership and control! Herbert Marcuse's *One-Dimensional Man* (1964) helps explain this unfortunate phenomenon and is still very relevant.

#### The People/Workers Could "Get It" Eventually

However, Miliband (1989, p. 206) offers a second scenario of the future beyond 1989.

Advanced capitalism will inevitably generate further and more acute class struggle from below ... [some being] over ... aspirations involving the achievement of deep "structural" transformations ... in the direction of socialism. This alternative scenario does not involve a revolutionary upheaval ... leading to a revolutionary government, on the pattern of the Bolshevik revolution of 1917.

Miliband does not say how class war from below will turn out, only that eventually capitalism will create severe contradictions and sufferings that are likely to result in people having to push back as the class war from above is incessantly assailing them – us! From the vantage point of spring 2007 (as I reread my original manuscript) it is not

clear to me which of the scenarios provided by Miliband we are experiencing. Perhaps it is a time of moving from the end of the first scenario to the beginning of the second – more optimistic – one. As we have seen above, Marshal Berman (1999b, p. 264) was convinced that Marx was correct: the people/workers would “get it” eventually. I shall argue below that warranted optimism depends upon what Sanbonmatsu calls the prince, as movement and form.

Rémy Herrera has written about the “French Revolts” of May and October-November 2005 as well as what occurred in April 2006. Herrera seeks to convince readers that these “moments of French revolt” can be seen as a “single dialectical movement – full of contradictions and hidden potentials (Herrera 2006, p. 13). His interpretation of these “moments” and significance is based on the no vote against the European Union Constitution; the uprising of the *cités* of the suburbs; and the mobilization against the attack on the employment security of the youngest workers first hiring contracts (*contrat première embauche*). All of these represent meaningful social class recognition of what neo-liberalism is doing to the French version of the “welfare” state or system that has been constructed by generations of working people. The French leftist parties and unions are neither as strong nor radical as they once were; therefore, they were not able to help direct the activists who made the “moments” of which Herrera writes. It is because of this reality that I think his article is relevant to what Sanbonmatsu has sought to convey. What follows is an example of how persons can organize – albeit imperfectly around class issues – and how those who are already protected by the remnants of the party and union based welfare state/system must reach out in solidarity to those who are not!<sup>12</sup>

If one views the word proletariat as those who have nothing to offer, and/or to rely on, except their labor – laboring under conditions not of their own choosing within the so-called free labor contract with those who own the means of production - then it is possible to argue that the number of proletarians is greater presently than ever - not just in total numbers, but arguably in terms of percentages. This is due to the greater intensity of capitalist penetration into places and populations during the current neo-liberal phase of capitalist power. Our understanding of the proletariat can be understood more effectively if viewed historically. There has always been a proletariat since capitalism's inception; however, the quasi-total reach of capitalism beyond its area of inception has resulted in complexities and pluralisms beyond the “making of the English working class” and Gramsci's metallurgy workers in northern Italy.

Without getting into who is and who is not a member of the proletariat in an attempted definitive, manner, it is necessary to consider some obvious candidates for inclusion. Herrera explains that there is too little awareness by most people of the resistances against the capitalist system and the class-state among those who do not have steady jobs, or are mostly unemployed (and perhaps unemployable). Referring to many of those who have rebelled during the recent “moments,” Herrera (2006, p. 20) argues that the French left must express

its solidarity with regard to this overexploited sub-proletariat. The disadvantaged youth of the suburbs certainly do not constitute the whole of the left's social base, but without them, the left will never be truly popular – that is, of the people.

Herrera describes the “popular classes” as: “the economically disadvantaged, unemployed, homeless, undocumented, and those without rights” (2006, p. 20). He believes that opportunities exist in France for building class alliances with those who are

most vulnerable and that some people could be convinced that broad inclusive solidarity is the only way that their exploitation and marginalization can be addressed. This pertains also to the conditions in the US, especially in reference to those who entered and continue to enter across the country's southern border. Obviously those who have more protection against the "gales of creative destruction" have historically not been easily talked into allying with those below. Gramsci's project – clearly and incisively presented by Sanbonmatsu – offers useful ideas with regard to how this "coming together" may be achieved.

#### Back To, And Forward, With The Princess/Prince

The modern prince was Gramsci's concrete "myth" or symbol of a new historical form that could catalyze the collective will of the proletariat and their allied classes. He hypothesized that an albeit imperfect, collective could unfold, or develop – although not teleologically, but through human action in "overlapping phases." Gramsci thought it was possible for a class to arrive at a high form of consciousness that allowed what might be called transcendental solidarity. This would allow getting beyond our own comparatively narrow social class interests and see how these justifiable individual and group interests can and should be broadened to include other subordinate classes. More specifically:

For Gramsci, as for Machiavelli, the question of unity, of how to construct a collective will, capable of leading society was paramount. The socialist movement would have to assume form as a "modern" prince if it hoped to win consent of the working class, and its allied classes, in leading them in the construction of a new democratic order [*ordine nuovo*]. "The modern prince" ... Gramsci wrote "cannot be a real person.... It can only be an organism, a complex element of society in which a collective will ... has already been recognized and has to some extent asserted itself in action, begin[ing] to take concrete form" (Sanbonmatsu 2004, p. 17).



I realize that many persons today are uncomfortable with words such as collective. Collective will may be beyond uncomfortable for some. However, I think that this is a dangerous condition for leftists and radicals who authentically wish to bring about profound change. There are many examples of collective wills and actions that have been responsible for some of the greatest forward movements in history. The civil rights movement during the 1960s in the US is a good example. The various leftists are fighting with one hand behind their (our) backs against opponents who have been able to act collectively – based mostly on very simple criteria and objectives. This is not to claim that agreement on every issue is necessary, nor to claim leftists are constituted similarly to their rightist opponents. It is justifiable to recognize difference; however, all too often division makes the left vulnerable to rightist onslaughts – resulting in an order that is based on punishing various “others.” The fear of collectivity and unity is understandable and must be worked out by all of us who are concerned with the dangers involved in too much collectivity and *unum*. A historical example is the various lefts’ divisions over where to place Jean-Jacques Rousseau on the political continuum. I have addressed this problem in a chapter called “Schumpeter’s Apologia Contrasted to Rousseau’s and Marx’s Radical Democracy” (Brosio 1994a, pp. 179-208). Perhaps this will provide a context within which readers can address this issue further?

Sanbonmatsu’s Gramsci advised us to build a political and cultural programme in dialectical conversations with the people (*il pòpolo*). Sanbonmatsu (2004, p. 17) gets to the heart of the issue – at least for the logic of the work before you. The prince or the feminine equal is the new collective subject

which must gather up the myriad dispersed movements of oppositional practice and culture in the *form* of a single movement whose outward

expansion establishes a genuinely democratic and ethical human ... [society]. Only in cohering into a unified identity and worldview can the dispersed remnants of the left place them[our]selves in a position, at least potentially, to respond meaningfully to the legitimation crisis of the state and the colonization of the life world by the commodity.

Sanbonmatsu and I argue that even if some call the present, postmodern, we must rebuff so-called postmodernists who claim that the politics we embrace, and hope to convince the many others of, are passé. If modernism, capitalism, and Marxist thought/action came upon the historical stage at roughly the same time, then there can be no post-Marxism until capitalism is *kaput!*

### Conclusion

I conclude this chapter with a brief summary and postscript. The capitalist system has penetrated beyond the sites of production; therefore it is necessary to organize people everywhere into the realization of this totalism. However, we must understand that some forms of exploitation are more salient than others – or more possible to combat. Moreover, although it may seem frivolous to add, some people are super exploited by not being included in the capitalist system! In other words, those left behind – for now – may not even be able to stay alive because of their separation and alienation from the modern world; therefore being susceptible to genocidal policies. Furthermore, these “superfluous/redundant/useless” people will not have the opportunity to learn how to resist a system that has no use for them. It could be argued that some people in the US ghettos, and other places of confinement, are trapped into this category, as are many so-called “primitive” people who have only their land and other resources to offer. Experiences have taught us that understanding things holistically is difficult, and organizing around Marxist ideas and calls for solidarity have never been easy. There are

so many “identities” thought to be more important and easier to recognize and rally around than class. However, this has resulted in spotty ameliorative progress at best, improvements that were and are mostly at the mercy of what those who direct the capitalist system believe is necessary for their own advantage presently and in the future. There have been unjust systems before capitalism; however, this system, in all its complexities, is the most powerful secular system in the world today; furthermore, those who suffer, directly and indirectly, must understand how it works in order to oppose it. Marx and the Marxists have been our most informative teachers on this subject; therefore, it is within and around the best of this intellectual-activist tradition that promises the best results.

Postscript: As the reader knows, I have not specifically addressed the well-established correspondences between social class membership and school achievement in the so-called advanced societies in this chapter. However, there is much evidence to support my claim that societies which are honoured by being referred to, by some, as democracies, but do not allow politics to really affect the economic systems they feature, can hardly be expected to favor and support democratically empowering schooling-education. I have addressed some of these issues via many other publications during the last thirty years. My *Philosophic Scaffolding for the Construction of Critical Democratic Education* (2000b) is a good example of these publications.

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## Notes

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<sup>1</sup> Michael Löwy (2005, pp. 63-4) has explained that according to Engels: socialists were those, in mid-19th century, who were outside the working class and appealed to the “educated classes” for assistance. In contrast the communists already insisted on a radical reconstruction of society beyond political revolution. Furthermore, and most important, the communists believed that the emancipation of the working class must be accomplished by the workers!

<sup>2</sup> The *Socialist Register* series is a good source to study this question/issue. Two examples are: *Working Classes; Global Realities* 2001, and *A World Of Contradictions* 2002. Leo Panitch and Colin Leys are the editors: London: Merlin.

<sup>3</sup> The following books speak to current forms of imperialism. They are arranged alphabetically by author. David Harvey, *The New Imperialism* (2005), Harry Magdoff, *Imperialism Without Colonies* (2003), Michael Parenti, *Against Empire* (1995), Arundhati Roy, *An Ordinary Person’s Guide To Empire* (2004), and Ellen Meiksins Wood, *Empire Of Capital* (2005). Michel Hardt (2006) offers a version of empire that is critical of some leftist theorists, perhaps including – although not by name – some listed in this endnote.

<sup>4</sup> I wish to clarify my use of “form.” First, it means form/organization as opposed to its opposites. Second, form in the context of this chapter is synonymous with an organized political party. Furthermore, one could see form as the seeming opposite of particulars as offered by Plato and Aristotle. Form in philosophical terms means the structure or essence of a thing, rather than its matter. However, form and content may be viewed as dialectically connected rather than starkly dichotomous. This choice allows one to see form as a projection of content/matter. See Fredric Jameson’s *Marxism and Form* (1971). The Italian Communist Party that Gramsci helped form/organize was to be representative of its inner logic: the working class’s need to organize around issues that were experienced and understood better with the help of Marxist theory, and resulting in contestations against those who oppressed them.

<sup>5</sup> Douglas Kellner (1995, p. 26) speaks to what I have written above. “Wither then Marxism? Certainly not the master theory and narrative, as it appeared in its classical forms.... [I]t continues to be an important method of social research and set of theoretical perspectives, concepts, and values that can still be used for critical social theory and radical politics today. We continue to live in a capitalist society, and as long as we do, Marxism will continue to be relevant. A reconstructed [once again] Marxism ... one without guarantees, teleology, and foundations, will be more open, tolerant, skeptical, and modest than previous versions. A Marxism for the twenty-first century could help promote democracy, freedom, justice, and equality ... [as well as] counterattack conservative ideologies that ... promote the interests of the rich and powerful.... Marxism will disappear either when the nightmare of capitalism is finally over or when a democratic and free society emerges that will produce its own philosophy and way of life. If Marxism has inspired such a project, then the doctrine can pass on to a happy

obsolescence and the sufferings and struggles of those in the Marxian tradition can be redeemed [I choose a non-theocratic definition of the word].”

<sup>6</sup> Derrida (1994, pp. 100-2) writes: “The specter [ghost] that Marx was talking about [in the *Manifesto*] ... communism, was there, without being there [yet] .... When, in 1847-48, Marx names the specter of communism, he inscribes it in historical perspective.... [He] announces and calls for a presence to come. He seems to predict and prescribe: What for the moment figures only as a specter in the ideological representation of old Europe must become, in the future, a present reality.... The *Manifesto* calls ... for this presentation of the living reality: we must see to it that in the future this specter – and first of all an association of workers forced to remain secret until about 1848 – becomes a reality ... This real life must show itself and manifest itself ... in the universal dimension of an International. But it must also manifest itself in the form ... of a party.... the motor of the revolution.

<sup>7</sup> I have long argued that in Marx’s philosophical and economic inquiries he sought to ascertain what the objective barriers were with regard to human freedom. “There is only one Marx, and his contributions ... belong to the mainstream of Western thought.... Marx’s philosophy is rooted within the humanist tradition that is anchored in Greek rationalism, Spinoza, the Enlightenment ... German idealism and romanticism, French socialism, and British political economy (Brosio 1985, p. 74). Of course Marx created something new from all these elements. This is why he is a great thinker! Louis Althusser’s *Lenin And Philosophy and Other Essays* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 2001), including a new introduction by Fredric Jameson, may cause readers to conclude that Althusser’s arguments against Marx remaining a “humanist” cast serious doubts concerning my interpretive position.

<sup>8</sup> Perhaps what follows will clarify better my use of C/c. I use the upper case letters to indicate that Critical Theory in its authentic Marxist sense is different in many important ways from the current uses of the words. This is not to claim that some of those I identify in the lower case – critical – and/or critical theory(ies) are without usefulness. In fact, there are some similarities among those I refer to as CT and ct. However, I do maintain that those who are Critical in the tradition of Marx and the Marxists – including the Frankfurt School members – are better equipped than their critical counterparts.

<sup>9</sup> Here is a preview of Sanbonmatsu’s baroque indictment. “Coterminous with these macroeconomic policies, which arose in direct response to profitability crises in capitalism, a “postmodern” culture took shape in which the commodity came to stand in for every possibility of ... lived human experience. Suffice it to say, in such a pervasive context of cultural corruption, it would ... have been remarkable had critical knowledge escaped unscathed.... The general decline and disarray of left social movements in the West after the 1970s led to a decoupling of theory from practice.... As theory became vulnerable to spatio-temporal rhythms and relations of the new regime ... less and less engaged in the problems of human society, it became more heteronomous [differences in quality] in its determinations and correspondingly less *truthful*. In content, theory became idealist; in form ... it became *baroque* (Sanbonmatsu 2004, pp. 71-72).

<sup>10</sup> Harry Magdoff’s *Imperialism Without Colonies* (2003) is instructive with regard to the “without colonies” factor. This concept is explained further by David Harvey (2003, pp. vii-viii) in his reaction to 9/11/01 and the American War on Iraq that began in 2003. “I

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set out ... to identify the underlying forces at work within the chaos of surface appearances.... To this end, I constructed a general framework for thinking that I hoped would be strong enough to survive the contingencies and uncertainties of actual outcomes.... Readers can – by constructing their own versions of how the relation between territorial and capitalist logics of power works; of the particular form of the US imperial tradition; of the ‘inner-outer dialectic’ of US society; of the role of predatory practice; of the distinctions between neo-liberal and neo-conservative politics; and of the strengths, strategies, and tactics of oppositional movements – arrive at their own particular interpretations and draw conclusions that may be quite different from mine. That is as it should be”.

<sup>11</sup> Eric Hobsbawm (1994, p. ix) famously wrote: “I think it is now possible to see the Short Twentieth Century from 1914 to the end of the Soviet era”. According to Giovanni Arrighi (1994, p. 324): “Thus while the party for the Third and Second Worlds were over [in the late 1980s and early ‘90s when the Soviet Union collapsed] the bourgeoisie of the West came to enjoy a *belle époque* in many ways reminiscent of the ‘wonderful moment’ of the European bourgeoisie eighty years earlier. The most striking similarity between the two *belles époques* has been the almost complete lack of realization on the part of their beneficiaries that the sudden and unprecedented prosperity that they had come to enjoy did not rest on the resolution of the crisis of accumulation that had preceded the beautiful times. On the contrary, the newly found prosperity rested on a shift of the crisis from one set of relations to another. It was only a question of time before the crisis would re-emerge in more troublesome forms”. This speaks to Arrighi’s long century.

<sup>12</sup> I offer the following with regard to class and various identities. “The unwillingness on the part of antidemocrats to allow the construction of a politics that intervenes into macroeconomic decision-making so that a society based on democratic citizens’ rights, economic justice, racial and gender fairness could emerge has led to an understandable politics of identity instead of one characterized by the citizen-worker as the key human category [I should have articulated in 1994 that those who have been prevented from becoming or being citizens deserve to be included]. The failure to build a bona fide social democracy that features economic justice has resulted in the continued existence of “playing fields” that are not level, but instead wildly mountainous terrains with happy valleys for those who score well on social class, racial, ethnic, gender and sexual choice/orientation hierarchies.... The antidemocratic drive toward capitalist globalism and totalism has challenged and frightened many people who have experienced the melting of formerly solid institutions, habits, and sign-posts; consequently many of them have looked to religious ... [and other choices/memberships to rally around] (Brosio, 1994b, pp. 1-2). This passage is representative of what comes after in this 48 pp. article.