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MARX AGAINST MARX: AN OUTLINE OF MATURE HISTORICAL MATERIALISM*

Abstract. In the 1850s, Karl Marx's thought underwent a genuine revolution. After relocating to England, he confronted classical political economy anew, finding it unable to account for value growth and capitalist accumulation. Beginning with the methodological turn in the *Grundrisse* and its explicitly anti-positivist stance, Marx shifted explanation from market appearances to the sphere of production, where surplus value becomes fundamental. This reorientation culminated in a decisive break with his early technological determinism: Marx accords primacy to the relations of production over productive forces in explaining the origins of capitalism, the dynamics of accumulation and the specifically capitalist drive toward productivity growth.

Keywords: historical materialism, surplus value, class struggle, primitive accumulation, subsumption of labor, anti-positivism.

1. Introduction

Karl Marx (1818–1883) attained genuine originality only after casting off the naïve assumptions of the nineteenth-century ideology of progress—an outlook forged amid unprecedented capitalist expansion and premised on the claim that, in the last instance, everything depends on the development of the productive forces, technology, and science.¹

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* This article is the result of research project no. 2017/25/N/HS1/00631 funded by the National Science Centre. The article would never have been written without the long conversations with Zbigniew Marcin Kowalewski, who was reflecting on the issues discussed here before I was even born.

¹ See L. Althusser, *On the Reproduction of Capitalism*, p. 209.

As I argue in another paper,¹ Marx's early historical materialism of the 1840s rested on two premises I call the *Development Thesis* and the *Primacy Thesis*. The first holds that, for unspecified *objective* reasons, the productive forces advance continuously throughout human history; the second maintains that a society's relations of production are determined by the level of development of those productive forces.² On such premises, the young Marx's account of historical change reduces to a form of technological determinism—an obstacle to grounding his emerging conviction that class struggle is the motor of history.

This article argues that overcoming this obstacle required a profound transformation in Marx's theoretical outlook. That transformation began in the 1850s, shortly after he left continental Europe for England, then widely regarded as the most *modern* country in the world. There, his remaining commitments to technological determinism were ultimately severed, and class struggle finally came to occupy the centre of his theoretical framework. Without this shift, Marx's life's work—*Das Kapital: Kritik der politischen Ökonomie* (vol. 1: 1867)—would scarcely have taken the form we know today.

2. Against positivism

In 1857 a severe economic downturn—often described as the first global recession—struck. Ironically, the crisis Marx had long anticipated and believed would precipitate revolution deepened his family's chronic financial difficulties; the newspaper for which he wrote halved his pay. Even so, the new situation filled him with renewed hope. As Jenny von Westphalen (1814–1881) later recalled, *the onset of an economic crisis dispelled the long period of gloom and depression in which Karl had been mired since the death of their son*.³

The crisis spurred Marx to intensify his economic studies and to push them toward a provisional conclusion before the expected deluge.⁴ It appears to have prompted both his immediate decision to draft the *Grundrisse*—voluminous manuscripts of extraordinary importance, published only long after his death—and the frantic pace at which he worked. As Roman Rosdolsky recalled, *[t]he entire work, almost 50 proof-sheets, was completed in nine months, between July 1857 and March 1858*.⁵ In the end, these notebooks amounted to a preliminary exploration of virtually all the constitutive elements of Marx's mature economic theory.⁶

In August 1857, Marx set out to draft the *Introduction* to the entire project. Above all, it registers the extraordinary methodological effort behind his inquiry. The third section, *The Method of Political Economy*, opens with a cri-

¹ See M. Siermiński, *Young Karl Marx in the Age of Progress ...*

² See G. A. Cohen, *Karl Marx's Theory of History*, p. 134.

³ See J. Sperber, *Karl Marx*, p. 226 & p. 242.

⁴ See D. McLellan, *Karl Marx*, p. 267.

⁵ R. Rosdolsky, *The Making of Marx's „Capital“*, p. 7.

⁶ See D. McLellan, *Karl Marx*, p. 271.

tique of contemporary economists who treat *population* as the most elementary—indeed, self-explanatory—concept and take it as their point of departure. If by the 1840s Marx had already broken politically with bourgeois economics, the *Introduction* shows that by 1857 his theoretical-methodological emancipation had been achieved as well. What, then, counted for him as the *correct scientific method*? He explained:

*If one were to start with population, it would be [initially] a chaotic conception of the whole, and through closer definition one would arrive analytically at increasingly simple concepts; from the imagined concrete, one would move to more and more tenuous abstractions until one arrived at the simplest determinations. From there it would be necessary to make a return journey until one finally arrived once more at population, which this time would be not chaotic conception of a whole, but a rich totality of many determinations and relations.*¹

In *Grundrisse*, Marx's insistence on deploying the *power of abstraction* to study capitalism in its *chemically pure* form, as Henryk Grossman put it, emerges with particular clarity.² Roman Rosdolsky observed that throughout the manuscript Marx conducts his inquiry from the *surface appearances* to the *inner essence* or *essential structure* of the economic process.³ His later economic studies are likewise *filled with the exposure of secrets and mysteries, showing how things looked different when viewed in the light of the inner logic of the capitalist system than when they were empirically perceived in the system's operation.*⁴

The *Introduction* to the *Grundrisse* appears to mark the completion of a methodological turn that would shape nearly everything Marx wrote thereafter, including *Capital*. Its new credo—that true knowledge arises from grasping what is hidden behind immediately given phenomena rather than from mere empirical observation—is emphatically anti-positivist. When the *Grundrisse* was written, positivism was very much in the ascendant. Marx knew the work of its leading representatives and was unimpressed: he condemned Auguste Comte's (1798–1857) philosophy as *positivist shit* and dismissed Herbert Spencer's (1820–1903) writings as *economic trivia [...] spiced with pseudo-philosophical or pseudo-scientific slang.*⁵ Of course, Marx criticised Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel's (1770–1831) idealism, yet he learned much from this perhaps most anti-positivist philosopher in history. He understood that the *truth was not empirically evident, but emerged in a process involving historical*

¹ K. Marx, *Introduction*, p. 37.

² See H. Grossman, *The Change in the Original Plan ...*, p. 150.

³ See R. Rosdolsky, *The Making of Marx's „Capital“*, p. 52.

⁴ J. Sperber, *Karl Marx*, p. 307.

⁵ J. Sperber, *Karl Marx*, p. 302.

development and conceptual reformulation,¹ and he never abandoned that approach. The positivist conception of knowledge must have struck him as woefully uncritical.² In the years to come, Marx would insist that Hegel was not a *dead dog*, and he would acknowledge that the Hegelian dialectical method—somehow *turned right side up to discover its rational kernel hidden within the mystical shell*³—was crucial to his critique of political economy.⁴

Here, it is not worth entering the exceedingly complex dispute over how, exactly, Marx employed Hegel's dialectic.⁵ It will suffice to note that the dispute is, in a sense, irresolvable. Marx never offered a sustained assessment—let alone a fully philosophical critique—of Hegel's method; in fact, he wrote very little on the subject. A few months after drafting the quoted *Introduction*, he assured Friedrich Engels (1820–1895) that—*if ever the time comes*—he would write *2 or 3 sheets making accessible to the common reader the rational aspect of the method which Hegel not only discovered but also mystified*.⁶ That time never came. To the end of his life, Marx produced no explicit doctrine of dialectics. Hence the paradox: we possess the mature *fruit* of his method—namely, *Capital*—but not any more *systematic exposition of the method itself*.⁷ Or, in the words of one of the leading revolutionaries of the 20th c.: *Marx did not leave behind him a Logic (with a capital letter); he did leave the logic of Capital*.⁸ Let us therefore focus on the latter.

3. The secret of profit making

Throughout *Capital*, Marx argues that the thought of the *vulgar economists* operates only at the level of immediately given *appearances* and is incapable of penetrating the *reality* those appearances conceal.⁹ In his view, bourgeois economics is guilty, first, of fetishising the *commodity structure* and, second, of treating that very structure as the sole basis for a general explanation of the specifically capitalist economy—its origins and its functioning. Put differently, it reduces capitalism as a system to a sphere of fetishised *economic phenomena*, understood *in accordance of its field of vision in terms of the market and commodity exchange*.¹⁰

The mature Marx underscores a paradox: for the *vulgar economy* the *essence* of capitalist accumulation—namely the multiplication of value, consti-

¹ J. Sperber, *Karl Marx*, p. 299.

² See J. Sperber, *Karl Marx*, p. 292 & p. 312.

³ K. Marx, *Capital. A Critique of Political Economy. Vol. I*, p. 19.

⁴ See J. Sperber, *Karl Marx*, p. 297.

⁵ See e.g. L. Althusser, *For Marx*, pp. 89–94 & P. Likitkijsonboon, *The Hegelian Dialectic ...*

⁶ [K. Marx], *Marx to Engels*, p. 249.

⁷ J. Van Heijenoort [Alex Barbon], *On Marx's Method in „Capital”*, p. 7.

⁸ V. I. Lenin, *Plan of Hegel's Dialectics (Logic)*, p. 317.

⁹ See K. Bharadwaj, *Vulgar Economy*, p. 373.

¹⁰ M. J. Siemek, *Historical Materialism as the Philosophy of Marxism (I)*, p. 71.

tutive of capitalism as such—must remain *incomprehensible, if not outright theoretically impossible*.¹ Explaining this phenomenon in the categories of that *economy*, i.e. solely in terms of commodity exchange on the market, is out of the question. For—as both bourgeois economists and Marx assume—market exchange is by its nature equivalent, which excludes any increase in value.² As Marx writes: *all commodities [...] are bought and sold at their full value*.³ This is the *economic law of value*.⁴

Accordingly, instead of restricting himself to the mechanisms of market exchange, as in the *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*, in *Capital*—and already in the *Grundrisse*—Marx started from a consideration of production,⁵ and of production conceived primarily as a social rather than merely material activity.⁶ In both works, the realm of exchange appears as a secondary manifestation of the sphere of production. It is there that Marx seeks the essence and the source of capitalist accumulation.⁷ Consistently, *Book I of Capital* is entitled *The Process of Production of Capital*.⁸ There, he writes of leaving the *noisy sphere* of commodity exchange, the sphere of simple circulation *where everything takes place on the surface and in view of all man* and where *Freedom, Equality, Property and [Jeremy] Bentham rule alone*, and insists on penetrating the *hidden abode of production*.⁹ There, as he announces, *one shall see, not only how capital produces, but how capital is produced [...] [One] shall at last force the secret of profit making*.¹⁰

4. Marx's greatest discovery

Among the many categories that unfold throughout *Capital*, one is pivotal: the general form of *surplus value* introduced in the first volume. Rosdolsky called it the *central category* of Marx's mature system;¹¹ Vladimir Lenin described it as its *corner-stone*.¹² Within this system, the concept of surplus value constitutes a decisive link between the theory of commodity form and commodity-monetary economy in general, to the radically new look at the essence and total structure of the modern capitalist society, as Marek J. Siemek

¹ M. J. Siemek, *Historical Materialism as the Philosophy of Marxism (I)*, p. 71.

² See M. J. Siemek, *Historical Materialism as the Philosophy of Marxism (I)*, pp. 71–72.

³ K. Marx, *Capital. A Critique of Political Economy. Vol. 1*, p. 319.

⁴ F. Engels, *Preface to the First German Edition ...*, p. 22.

⁵ D. McLellan, *Karl Marx*, p. 271.

⁶ See S. H. Rigby, *Marxism and History*, p. 148.

⁷ See M. J. Siemek, *Historical Materialism as the Philosophy of Marxism (I)*, p. 72.

⁸ See K. Marx, *Capital. A Critique of Political Economy. Vol. 1*, p. V.

⁹ K. Marx, *Capital. A Critique of Political Economy. Vol. 1*, p. 186.

¹⁰ K. Marx, *Capital. A Critique of Political Economy. Vol. 1*, p. 186.

¹¹ See R. Rosdolsky, *The Making of Marx's „Capital“*.

¹² V. I. Lenin, *The Three Sources ...*, p. 26.

observed.¹ On 24 August 1867, just as the first volume of *Capital* was about to be published, Marx confided to Engels in a letter that he considered the theory of surplus value—together with the underlying discovery of the *two-fold character of labour according to whether it is expressed in use-value or exchange-value* (of which more in a moment)—to be the *best point* of his book.² Many years later, in the preface to the second volume, Engels stated that this theory would *revolutionise all [previous] political economy* and offer the *key to an understanding of all capitalist production*.³

The notion of surplus value had already appeared in the repertoire of several classics of liberal economics; most notably, it was employed by David Ricardo (1772–1823). Marx initially held this great scholar in high esteem—at one point describing him as *the most distinguished economist of our century*.⁴ As his thought matured, however, he came to the view that Ricardo had failed to grasp the problem of surplus value adequately and was therefore mired in persistent theoretical contradictions. As Engels later recalled, this issue proved to be the *rock on which Ricardo's school ultimately shipwrecked* (around 1830).⁵

In *Capital* Marx wrote: *Ricardo never concerns himself about the origin of surplus value. He treats it as a thing inherent in the capitalist mode of production, which mode, in his eyes, is the natural form of social production*.⁶ His continuators, whom Marx regarded as mere *vulgarisers*, offered nothing more than *wretched evasions*. In fact, as Marx wryly observes, *these bourgeois economists instinctively saw, and rightly so, that it is very dangerous to stir too deeply the burning question of the origin of surplus value*.⁷

For Marx, as for Ricardo, labour was the measure of value. However, Marx rejected the claim that labour itself has a value. As Engels' figurative explanation puts it: [*Labour as*] *an activity which creates values can no more have any special value than gravity can have any special weight, heat any special temperature, electricity any special strength of current*.⁸ Hence it is not labour that the wage worker sells to the capitalist, but labour power. As Marx wrote in *Capital*, this is the very *capacity to labour—the aggregate of those mental and physical capabilities existing in a human being, which he exercises whenever he produces a use value of any description*.⁹ The value of labour power, like that of any other commodity, is determined by *the labour time necessary for the*

¹ See M. J. Siemek, *Historical Materialism as the Philosophy of Marxism (I)*, p. 71.

² [K. Marx], *Marx to Engels. 24 August 1867*, p. 407.

³ See F. Engels, *Preface to the First German Edition ...*, p. 20. See also F. Engels, *Karl Marx's Funeral*, p. 468.

⁴ J. Sperber, *Karl Marx*, p. 307, p. 151 & p. 338.

⁵ See F. Engels, *Preface to the First German Edition ...*, p. 22.

⁶ K. Marx, *Capital. A Critique of Political Economy. Vol. 1*, p. 516.

⁷ K. Marx, *Capital. A Critique of Political Economy. Vol. 1*, p. 517.

⁸ F. Engels, *Preface to the First German Edition ...*, p. 22.

⁹ K. Marx, *Capital. A Critique of Political Economy. Vol. 1*, p. 177.

*production, and consequently also the reproduction, of this special article.*¹ Accordingly, when the capitalist buys labour power, he pays for it in the form of wages that, in the final account, correspond only to the value of the *average quantity of the means of subsistence necessary for [the maintenance of] the labourer.*² On this understanding, labour power—*justly* bought and sold in the market on the basis of its value—*does not at all contradict the economic law of value*³.

For the mature Marx, it is precisely the *extension of the commodity form to the heart of the production process through the commodification of labour power* that determines the *truly unique character of capitalist production*, George C. Comninel noted.⁴ Lacking the means of production, the worker is compelled to labour for those who possess them and thus to work beyond the time necessary to maintain his life—that is, to perform surplus labour for the capitalist. In other words, the use-value of labour power, which is actually *consumed* by the capitalist in the production process, exceeds the exchange value for which it was *fairly* purchased. The difference between these two values is precisely the surplus value appropriated by the capitalist. It follows that the capitalist, in buying labour power, *buys a unique “commodity” which has a wondrous ability of creating value always larger than its own value.*⁵ This is how Marx accounted for the increase in value—a phenomenon that remained a riddle for bourgeois political economy.

In 1943, when the study of Marx’s work was still in its infancy, Jean van Heijenoort—Leon Trotsky’s personal secretary in the 1930s—noted that the discovery of the *general form of surplus value* had a *direct political consequence*. He argued: *If from now on social product falls into two fundamental parts, surplus value and wages, then society must fall into two great classes, those that live on surplus value and those that live on wages.* All other social oppositions pale *before the fundamental antagonism of the capitalists and the proletariat.*⁶ Many years later Siemek articulated this consequence with greater precision. At the point where Marx defined surplus value *as the unpaid for part of worker’s labour, which is appropriated by the capitalist*, he revealed the *social essence of the whole “economic” reality of capitalism*. In other words, he identified capitalist profit *as the exploitation of the class of people who only work, by the class of the proprietors of the means of production.*⁷

This is a crucial moment. The capitalist class struggle—i.e. the exploitation of wage labour and the workers’ inseparable resistance—came to occupy the very centre of Marx’s theoretical project. Marx understood that bourgeois polit-

¹ K. Marx, *Capital. A Critique of Political Economy. Vol. 1*, p. 180.

² K. Marx, *Capital. A Critique of Political Economy. Vol. 1*, p. 181.

³ F. Engels, *Preface to the First German Edition ...*, p. 22.

⁴ See G. C. Comninel, *Revolution in History*, p. 87.

⁵ M. J. Siemek, *Historical Materialism as the Philosophy of Marxism (I)*, pp. 72–73.

⁶ J. Van Heijenoort [Alex Barbon], *On Marx’s Method in „Capital”*, p. 11.

⁷ M. J. Siemek, *Historical Materialism as the Philosophy of Marxism (I)*, p. 73.

ical economy, which failed to distinguish between the value of labour power and the value of labour itself, did not simply commit mistakes, but *only performed strictly and excessively adequately its proper ideological function*, that is: *obscuring and mystifying* the fundamental—indeed, one might say structural—social antagonism of capitalism.¹ As Rosa Luxemburg observed, the Marxian theory of capitalism is, in a sense, *a child of bourgeois economy, yet the one that was given its life at the cost of its mother's*.²

In 1864—when work on *Capital* was in full swing—Marx wrote that the *emancipation of the working class must be conquered by the working class themselves*.³ Shortly thereafter, as Jonathan Sperber noted, the agitation of the newly formed Reform League for universal manhood suffrage in Great Britain, together with the broader *general turmoil and upheaval* in the country's political life, proved enormously encouraging to Marx, who at times discerned the emergence of a revolutionary situation. He now clearly saw that capitalist exploitation generated working-class resistance—visible in campaigns for a legally guaranteed shorter working day and in trade-union demands for reduced hours.⁴

Sperber argues that Marx's theory of surplus value made his commitment to the International Working Men's Association (1864–1876)—and to the trade unionism it championed—intelligible. The unions' campaign for shorter working hours stood at the centre of the class struggle, since it enabled to reduce the capitalists' surplus value and thus their profits. Reformist though it was, this strategy struck at the root of capitalist profit and pointed toward the eventual supersession of the capitalist system.⁵ Put simply, by the publication of the first volume of *Capital*, Marx could side with the proletariat not only politically and morally, as he had in the 1840s, but on the secure footing of his own theory.

5. Toward a new *Primacy Thesis*

In *Capital*, Marx explicitly reproduces the well-known passage from the *Manifesto of the Communist Party* (1848) on the continual revolutionising of the instruments of production in the bourgeois epoch. More broadly, many sections of *Capital* read as though lifted directly from the *Manifesto*. For example:

Modern industry never looks upon and treats the existing form of a process [of production] as final. The technical basis of that industry is therefore revolutionary, while all earlier modes of production were essentially conservative. By means of machinery, chemical processes and other methods, it is continually causing

¹ See M. J. Siemek, *Historical Materialism as the Philosophy of Marxism (I)*, p. 73.

² M. J. Siemek, *Historical Materialism as the Philosophy of Marxism (I)*, p. 74. See also E. M. Wood, *Democracy Against Capitalism*, p. 3.

³ K. Marx, *Provisional Rules of the Association*, p. 14.

⁴ See J. Sperber, *Karl Marx*, p. 271 & p. 324.

⁵ See J. Sperber, *Karl Marx*, p. 324.

*changes not only in the technical basis of production, but also in the functions of the labourer, and in the social combinations of the labour process.*¹

In the *Manifesto*, or in any other text from the 1840s, Marx does not in fact explain this capitalist drive to progress. In *Capital* he clearly does. For mature Marx this drive does not arise from some imaginary universal laws that seem to guarantee the forward march of history, nor does it derive directly from competition among capitalists. Its primary source can be found only in the distinctive logic of capitalist exploitation—a logic that must be investigated and laid bare.

Alain Testart draws attention to the order of Marx's deduction in *Capital*: Marx takes up the question of the development of the modern productive forces and the rise of industry only after defining the two forms of capitalist exploitation—the *production of absolute surplus-value and the production of relative surplus-value*. This sequence, Testart argues, demonstrates the logical primacy of the relations of production: it is the mechanism of the latter form—relative surplus value—which allows us to understand the development of the productive forces specific to capitalism.²

In a nutshell: for Marx, absolute surplus value arises from the extension of surplus labour by merely lengthening the working day and does not require *an alteration in [...] tools or in [...] mode of working*. For its creation it suffices for capital to take over the labour process in the form under which it has been historically handed down and simply to extend the duration of that process. Relative surplus value is likewise produced by extending surplus labour, but not by stretching the working day; rather, by the *curtailment of the necessary labour time*. Capital achieves this only by *increas[ing] the productiveness of labour*, whereby *the value of labour power [...] [is] made to sink* and thus *the portion of the working day necessary for the reproduction of that value [...] [is] shortened*.³ Marx writes:

The prolongation of the working day beyond the point at which the labourer would have produced just an equivalent for the value of his labour power, and the appropriation of that surplus labour by capital, this is production of absolute surplus value. It forms the general groundwork of the capitalist system, and the starting-point for the production of relative surplus value. The latter presupposes that the working day is already divided into two parts, necessary labour, and surplus labour. In order to prolong the surplus labour, the necessary labour is shortened by methods whereby the equivalent for the wages is produced in less time. The production of absolute surplus value turns exclu-

¹ J. Sperber, *Karl Marx*, p. 324.

² A. Testart, *Le communisme primitif*, p. 25.

³ K. Marx, *Capital. A Critique of Political Economy. Vol. 1*, pp. 319–320.

*sively upon the length of the working day; the production of relative surplus value, revolutionises out and out the technical processes of labour, and the composition of society.*¹

Briefly: *Relative surplus value is [...] directly proportional to [...] productivity [of labour]. It rises with [its] rising and falls with [its] falling.* From this follows the *immanent [...] inclination and constant tendency*² of capital to heighten its productive powers.

In *Capital*, Marx cites an excerpt from John Stuart Mill's (1806–1873) *Principles of Political Economy* (1848): *It is questionable if all the technical inventions yet made have lightened the day's toil of any human being.* In a footnote, Marx remarks—ironically—that Mill ought to have specified he was not referring to capitalists, since their class plainly benefits from the development of machinery. Indeed, the very framing of Mill's question likely struck Marx as absurd. About the lightening of the day's toil he writes:

*[it] is by no means the aim of capitalistic application of machinery. Like every other increase in the productivity of labour, machinery is intended to cheapen commodities, and, by shortening that portion of the working day, in which the labourer works for himself, to lengthen the other portion that he gives, without an equivalent, to the capitalist. In short, it is a means for producing surplus value.*³

In another passage of the work, Marx emphasises that although labour is indeed *economised* by increasing productivity, the aim of capitalist production is not to shorten the working day. Its sole aim is to shorten the *labour time necessary for the production of a definite quantity of commodities*. Marx ironises that, in the treatise of bourgeois economists, *we may read upon one page, that the labourer owes a debt of gratitude to capital for developing his productivity, because the necessary labour time is thereby shortened, and on the next page, that he must prove his gratitude by working in future for 15 hours instead of 10.*⁴ He then immediately explains: *The object of all development of the productivity of labour, within the limits of capitalist production, is to shorten that part of the working day, during which the workman must labour for his own benefit, and by that very shortening, to lengthen the other part of the day, during which he is at liberty to work gratis for the capitalist.*⁵

In the first volume of *Capital*—and in the subsequent volumes—Marx repeatedly *made it very clear that the capitalist impulse to improve the productiv-*

¹ K. Marx, *Capital. A Critique of Political Economy. Vol. 1*, pp. 510–511.

² K. Marx, *Capital. A Critique of Political Economy. Vol. 1*, p. 324. See also K. Marx, *Outlines of the Critique of Political Economy ...*, p. 83.

³ K. Marx, *Capital. A Critique of Political Economy. Vol. 1*, p. 374.

⁴ K. Marx, *Capital. A Critique of Political Economy. Vol. 1*, p. 325.

⁵ K. Marx, *Capital. A Critique of Political Economy. Vol. 1*, p. 326.

ity of labour is quite distinct from, and often in opposition to, any general human inclination to curtail labour.¹ What ultimately motivates this impulse, he argues, is the drive to increase the portion of unpaid labour.

Marx was the first to provide a systematic explanation of the uniquely capitalist phenomenon of *constant self-expansion*. More than that, he was the first to recognise that this issue required explanation at all, rather than being taken for granted. By insisting on the specificity of capitalism—its historical origins and eventual end, and its distinctive systemic logic—he fostered a genuinely historical sensibility absent from classical political economy and conventional notions of progress.²

6. The rise of capitalism

It still remained to explain how the capitalist mode of production—along with its specific desire for *progress*—came into being. In the 1840s, Marx addressed this question—most notably with Engels in *The German Ideology*—but his analyses at the time leaned heavily on technological determinism and on certain classical ideas from Adam Smith (1723–1790), and thus could not offer a full explanation.³ The mature Marx was far better prepared for the challenge. And in *Capital* he did, indeed, provide some—shall we say—preliminary answers to the question of the transition from feudalism to capitalism. Of particular importance is the final section of the first volume, entitled *The so-called Primitive Accumulation*, in which he outlines the general course of the process.

Stephen H. Rigby observed that *in his [...] analysis of the rise of capitalism [that we find there] Marx makes [already] no use of his own [earlier] [...] claims that feudalism's fetters were burst asunder by the growth of productive forces. Still less does he make use of the idea that the rise of capitalist relations of production was the result of the need of the future productive forces.*⁴

Marx's analysis is free from any teleology—in contrast to so many other *explanations* of the time (and of later times, right up to our own) that *capitalism emerged because history requires the development of productive forces and the development of productive forces requires capitalism.*⁵ What Marx meant to say in the aforementioned section of *Capital* was simply that capitalism appeared, quite spontaneously, in the aftermath of a certain transformation of relations of production and classes. It was precisely this that set in motion the specific dynamic of the development of the productive forces that culminated in the Industrial Revolution.

Marx begins his argument as follows: *[The] accumulation of capital presupposes surplus value; surplus value presupposes capitalistic production;*

¹ See E. M. Wood, *Democracy Against Capitalism*, p. 138. See also K. Marx, *Capital. A Critique of Political Economy. Vol. 3*, p. 263.

² See E. M. Wood, *Democracy Against Capitalism*, p. 5 & p. 124.

³ See S. H. Rigby, *Marxism and History*, p. 157.

⁴ See S. H. Rigby, *Marxism and History*, p. 158.

⁵ E. M. Wood, *Democracy Against Capitalism*, p. 136.

*capitalistic production presupposes the pre-existence of considerable masses of capital and of labour power in the hands of producers of commodities. Hence, the whole movement [...] seems to turn in a vicious circle. One can escape it only by supposing a primitive accumulation [...] preceding capitalistic accumulation; an accumulation [being] not the result of the capitalist mode of production, but its starting point. The primitive accumulation that clears the way for the capitalist system, Marx argues, is simply the historical social process of divorcing the producer from the means of production—that is, transforming on the one hand, the social means of subsistence and of production into capital, on the other, the immediate producers into wage labourers.*¹

For Marx, the initial basis of *primitive accumulation* was the expropriation of peasants and the broad transformation of agrarian class relations in England, which gave rise to agrarian capitalism.²

This social transformation, constituting the pre-historic stage of capitalism, was simply the *process of class struggle*, often taking the form of *coercive intervention by the state*.³ As a whole, it was marked by brutal violence. Marx does not deny that *the historical movement which changes the [direct] producers into wage workers* did indeed mean their *emancipation from serfdom and from the fetters of the guilds*. But it was not an *idyllic* process, as the *tender [...] political economy* would suggest. Marx shows that the *emancipation* of the producers was preceded by the *robbery of all their own means of production, and of all the guarantees of existence afforded by the old feudal arrangement*. The history of this *expropriation*—he notes—is written in the *annals of mankind in letters of blood and fire: The expropriation of the immediate producers was accomplished with merciless Vandalism, and under the stimulus of passions the most infamous, the most sordid, the pettiest, the most meanly odious*. Thus, as we read, *capitalism comes dripping from head to foot, from every pore, with blood and dirt*.⁴

Marx distinguishes two *phases* in the development of the modern economy. In the first, capital focuses primarily on increasing absolute surplus value. To achieve this, it is enough to assume control over the pre-capitalist structure of production (*formal subjection*). To obtain the second type—relative surplus value—capital must go further: it must fundamentally transform the labour process, especially the technical means of production, until they are fully imbued with capitalist imperatives (*real subjection*).⁵ In line with this distinction, Marx writes in the third volume of *Capital* that the *capitalist mode of production—along with its methods, means, and conditions—arose and developed itself spontaneously on the foundation afforded by the formal subjection*

¹ K. Marx, *Capital. A Critique of Political Economy. Vol. 1*, pp. 704–706.

² See S. H. Rigby, *Marxism and History*, p. 158.

³ E. M. Wood, *Democracy Against Capitalism*, pp. 20–21.

⁴ K. Marx, *Capital. A Critique of Political Economy. Vol. 1*, pp. 704–707 & pp. 748–749.

⁵ See in particular K. Marx, *Results of the Direct Production Process*, pp. 424–429.

of labour to capital. In the course of this development, the formal subjection is replaced by the real subjection of labour to capital.¹

And here are the crucial conclusions that Ellen Meiksins Wood drew from this:

[...] transformation in the social relations of production that gives rise to the formal subjection of labour to capital—the transformation of producers into wage labourers directly subject to capital without at first transforming the means and methods of production—set in train a process that had as its eventual consequence the revolutionising of productive forces. Capitalist relations carried a compulsion to increase surplus value; and as the production of absolute surplus value gave way to [the production of] relative surplus value, the need to increase labour productivity was met by completely transforming the labour process, the real subjection of labour to capital. The revolutionizing of productive forces was thus only the end of a complex process that began with the establishment of capitalist social relations.²

Actually, these are the conclusions Marx himself draws. For example, in *Theories of Surplus Value* (written in the early 1860s), after recalling that the basis of capitalist production is the separation of the producer from the means of production and his transformation into a wage labourer, he emphasises that it is as a result of these social processes alone that production is accelerated and the productive forces rapidly develop, ultimately taking the form of large, concentrated industry.³

Hence, the relations of production appear *primary* to the productive forces not only in a logical sense. They are *primary* historically as well: capitalist relations of production emerged first, and these relations alone drove the accelerating development of technology and material production.⁴

Robert Brenner and the school of economic history he founded demonstrated how analytically productive this general Marxian approach can be. Since the 1970s, he and his students have shown—ever more concretely—that capitalism did indeed emerge, somewhat accidentally, in early modern England, as the outcome of specific class conflicts that opened particular paths of economic

¹ K. Marx, *Capital. A Critique of Political Economy. Vol. 1*, p. 511.

² E. M. Wood, *Democracy Against Capitalism*, p. 136. Compare P. Murray, *The Social and Material Transformation ...*, pp. 302–303.

³ See K. Marx, *Theories of Surplus Value*, p. 446 & p. 449.

⁴ See A. Testart, *Le communisme primitif*, p. 25.

and social development. And the rise of these new relations of production cannot be explained in terms of the needs of society's productive forces.¹

What followed the emergence of these new relations? Under their primacy—and through imperatives of competition, capital accumulation, maximising exchange value via cost reduction, raising labour productivity through specialisation and innovation, and profit maximisation—a fundamentally new economic logic took hold. In this way, *the main economic actors were obliged to follow new “rules for reproduction”, completely different from those of any pre-capitalist society, the consequence of which was to set in train an unprecedented process of self-sustaining economic growth.*²

To sum up: the mature Marx argues explicitly that it is the specific relations of production—the exploitation of wage labour by capital—that alone constitute the essence of capitalism as a system, and that from these relations flows its characteristic drive toward the continual expansion of technology and production. Moreover, Marx maintains the same direction of implication when presenting the historical transition to capitalism. His analysis clearly assumes that capitalist relations of production were introduced prior to—and indeed caused—the new types of technology that increased social productivity and the surplus. In the development of capitalist industry, capital initially adapts to existing forms of the labour process; only later does it develop distinctively capitalist forms of production, with manufacture and large-scale industry. All this demonstrates the primacy of the relations of production over the forces of production—at least as far as capitalism is concerned. The *Primacy Thesis* adhered to by the young Marx is thus reversed. This poses a serious problem—or indeed a death blow—for any Marxist advocate of technological determinism.³

7. Modest theory of history

It is fair to say that the young Marx's thinking about the historical process—like that of many of his contemporaries—stemmed from uncritically taking for granted and universalising capitalism's dynamics, especially its relentless drive to improve productive capacities. Over time, however, Marx's intellectual maturation involved a growing recognition of the specificity and absolute historical uniqueness of the logic of capitalist social relations, and thus of capitalism itself. In other words, he came to see that history presents a wide range of possibilities—from the revolutionizing of the productive forces under capitalism to their tendency to petrify in pre-capitalist societies. From the 1850s on, treating the forces of production as if they were an autonomous principle of historical movement, somehow external to any given system of social relations—as if their development inevitably propelled history forward (the *Development Thesis*)—no longer had anything to do with Marx's thought: [h]e

¹ See S. H. Rigby, *Marxism and History*, pp. 160–170 & R. Brenner, *The Origins of Capitalist Development ...*

² E. M. Wood, *Democracy Against Capitalism*, p. 229.

³ See S. H. Rigby, *Marxism and History*, p. 113, p. 143 & p. 159.

no longer claims that every system of production necessarily contains a compulsion to be succeeded by a more productive one, or that the social forms rise and decline according to whether they promote or obstruct such improvement.¹

One could argue, of course, that *Capital* is essentially devoted to analysing the modern bourgeois mode of production—the capitalism of the 19th c. In his *opus magnum*, Marx did not present a systematic account of the historical process as a whole. Wood suggests that, in general, Marx's discussions of pre-capitalist modes of production—at least as they became more critical from the 1850s onward—were never more than retrospective analyses, part of a strategy to explicate the workings of capitalism and emphasise the historicity of its laws and categories.²

Even so, it's hard to deny that *Capital*—and even more the *Grundrisse*—laid the groundwork for a fundamentally new way of thinking about history. What most sharply distinguishes this outlook from conventional bourgeois ideas of progress is its insistence on the specificity of each mode of production—its internal logic, its own laws of motion, and its characteristic crises. Marx, in short, urged that pre-capitalist societies be studied on their own terms, without smuggling in capitalist categories or ideology.³

Rigby argues that in the *Grundrisse* and *Capital*, Marx shows that every mode of production rests on its distinctive social relations, which shape and determine its production forms. From this it follows that the priority of social relations over productive forces (the *inverted Primacy Thesis*) applies not only to capitalism and its origins but to historical development more broadly. Indeed, this priority recurs wherever Marx points to class relations as the foundation of the ancient and medieval worlds and their respective modes of production. The mature Marx's guiding research maxim—his general rule of thumb, so to speak—can be put this way: for any given mode of production, indeed for any social formation, investigate the specific laws of motion set in motion by the prevailing relations between appropriators and producers.⁴

Consequently, in the first volume of *Capital*, Marx differentiates historical modes of production not by their material productive forces—allegedly determining their relations of production—but by the specific manner in which exploitation occurs. He put it this way: *The essential difference between the various economic forms of society, between, for instance, a society based on slave labour, and one based on wage labour, lies only in the mode in which [the] surplus labour is in each case extracted from the actual producer, the labourer.*⁵ Likewise, in the third volume he argues that what reveals *the innermost secret* of every society is the *specific economic form, in which unpaid*

¹ E. M. Wood, *Democracy Against Capitalism*, pp. 128–129 & p. 133.

² E. M. Wood, *Democracy Against Capitalism*, p. 139.

³ See E. M. Wood, *Democracy Against Capitalism*, p. 121, pp. 139–140 & pp. 151–152.

⁴ See E. M. Wood, *Democracy Against Capitalism*, p. 110 & p. 127.

⁵ K. Marx, *Capital. A Critique of Political Economy. Vol. 1*, pp. 226–227.

*surplus labour is pumped out of direct producers.*¹ Moreover, in the same passage Marx also notes that social formations, even when they grow out of the same *economic basis*, can display *infinite variations and gradations in appearances*—depending on *innumerable [...] circumstances* that must be analysed empirically in each concrete case.²

Marx's mature thought clearly allows no pre-ordained and unilinear sequence of modes of production. The origin or end of each mode, as Wood put it, *is something that needs to be explained, not presupposed, and which seeks its explanation not in some transhistorical law of nature but in historically specific social relations, contradictions and struggles [...] Marx's theory of history does not take the form of propositions like "primitive communism is (must be) followed by slavery [...] etc.", but rather something like "the fundamental key to the development of feudalism (say) and the forces at work in the transition to capitalism is to be found in the specific mode of productive activity characteristic of feudalism, the specific form in which surplus labour was pumped out of the direct producers, and the class conflicts surrounding that process of surplus-extraction"*.³

The mature Marx saw human history as marked by an increasing separation of direct producers from the means of their labour, subsistence, and reproduction. He treated this expanding expropriation as a broad tendency—a general drift, especially in the West—rather than a timeless *law*. Even as a trend, the process is shaped by the specific features of each social formation, above all the concrete relationship between appropriators and direct producers. More importantly, it is a process of class struggle whose outcomes are, by definition, not predetermined. Marxist theory can point to class conflict as a principal driver of historical change and provide tools for analysing its effects, but it cannot specify in advance how any particular struggle will turn out.⁴

Let's be clear. *Capital*, despite its general objection to teleology as a form of historical *explanation*, is not entirely free of a certain limited unilinearism. In 1867, in the *Preface to the First German Edition* of the first volume, Marx stated that his *ultimate aim* was to *lay bare the economic law of motion of modern society*. We read that the *natural laws of capitalist production* and the *tendencies* of that production operate *with iron necessity toward inevitable results*—the same way in every country where capitalism has appeared.⁵ Hence: *The country that is more developed industrially only shows, to the less developed, the image of its own future.*⁶ It sounds like a judgment, and Marx did not try to hide it. A few lines later, he underscores once more that no society *can*

¹ K. Marx, *Capital. A Critique of Political Economy. Vol. 3*, p. 777.

² K. Marx, *Capital. A Critique of Political Economy. Vol. 3*, p. 778.

³ E. M. Wood, *Democracy Against Capitalism*, p. 6 & p. 127.

⁴ See E. M. Wood, *Democracy Against Capitalism*, pp. 141–142.

⁵ K. Marx, *Capital. A Critique of Political Economy. Vol. 1*, p. 8.

⁶ K. Marx, *Capital. A Critique of Political Economy. Vol. 1*, p. 9.

*neither clear by bold leaps, nor remove by legal enactments, the obstacles offered by the successive phases of its normal development.*¹

In a 1877 letter to Engels, Marx argued that the historical tendency of capitalist production in Western Europe begets *its own negation with inexorability which governs the metamorphoses of nature*; and that *capitalist property [...] can only be transformed into social property*. Yet in the same letter he forcefully rejected attempts to extract from his work *a general historico-philosophical theory whose supreme virtue [would] consist in being supra-historical*. As Marx complained, everything he had written was too little for one of his critics:

*It is absolutely necessary for him to metamorphose my historical sketch of the genesis of capitalism in Western Europe into a historico-philosophical theory of general development, imposed by fate on all peoples, whatever the historical circumstances in which they are placed, in order to eventually attain this economic formation which, with a tremendous leap of the productive forces of social labour, assures the most integral development of every individual producer. But I beg his pardon. This does me too much honour, and yet puts me to shame at the same time.*²

Engels, too, cautioned against certain forms of historiosophy. In 1890, seven years after Marx's death, he wrote: *the materialist method turns into its opposite if, in an historical study, it is used not as a guide but rather as a ready-made pattern in accordance with which one tailors the historical facts.*³ Not long after, speaking for himself and Marx, he lamented that their *materialistic view of history* had attracted some younger German followers *one can well do without* and for whom *it serves as an excuse for not studying history*. In this context, Engels recalled Marx's quip distancing himself from the first French Marxists: *All I know is that I am not a Marxist*. He then added: *our view of history [...] is first and foremost a guide to study, not a tool for constructing objects after the Hegelian model.*⁴

Marx sometimes referred to capitalism's *historical task*, but—as Wood reads him—this meant only that the effects of capitalist development create the necessary preconditions for socialism: capitalism has built an unprecedented material basis for human emancipation. In other words, Marx tells us what capitalism has done to make a transition possible, not inevitable. If we're doing history rather than teleology, the key category for socialism is possibility, not destiny: concrete social and material conditions can open paths that were previously closed, making socialism a real political project rather than an abstract

¹ K. Marx, *Capital. A Critique of Political Economy. Vol. 1*, p. 10.

² K. Marx, *Letter to Otechestvenniye Zapiski*, p. 200.

³ [F. Engels], *Engels to Paul Ernst. 5 June 1890*, p. 503.

⁴ [F. Engels], *Engels to Conrad Schmidt. 5 August 1890*, pp. 7–8.

ideal. We needn't choose between hard determinism and pure contingency: [t]he real alternative to both is history.¹

The young Marx sometimes implied that socialism's aim was to perfect the development of the productive forces. His mature view—especially his account of Western history as the widening separation of workers from the means of production—points to a different socialist project: the reappropriating of those means by the direct producers.²

Late Marx says little about the exact form of a post-capitalist order. His principle of specificity applies here too: socialism or communism would not be a mere extension or upgrade of capitalism but a distinct system with its own internal logic. After *Capital's* first volume, the scattered remarks where he considers the future are, as Althusser noted, markedly less idealising than his early writings.³

8. What is to be done next?

To speak of Marx's fixed *views* or a single *system* is to ignore decades of intense work, during which he continually revisited and revised his concepts and political stances. Marx was a human thinker—fallible and evolving—rather than an omniscient, unchanging authority,⁴ despite what many Marxist-Leninists might have preferred to believe.

There is no evidence that Marx recognised that the body of work he had been assembling for more than forty years was fundamentally *cracked*. He would likely have been astonished to hear the claim that, over his lifetime, he in fact produced two historical materialisms: one grounded in the *Development* and the original *Primacy Thesis*, amounting to a theory of the progress of the material means of production and technology and its consequences; the other grounded in the *inverted Primacy Thesis*—affirming the primacy of purely social relations of production—constituting a theory, to use Althusser's phrase, of the *conditions, forms and effects of the class struggle*.⁵

After Marx's death, positivist evolutionism and scientism became even more dominant in European intellectual life.⁶ Socialists of the period were, almost by definition, committed to the era's central credo: inexorable *progress*. Their parties—especially in Marxist variants—cast themselves as standard-bearers of history's inevitable advance toward a better future, whose details might be hazy but would surely feature the expanding rule of reason, education, science, and technology. As Hobsbawm noted, many socialists saw themselves as heirs to the Enlightenment, a stance widely shared across bourgeois culture. The fascination with progress—above all technological—also swept through

¹ E. M. Wood, *Democracy Against Capitalism*, p. 137, p. 142 & pp. 144–145.

² See E. M. Wood, *Democracy Against Capitalism*, p. 141.

³ See L. Althusser, *Philosophy of the Encounter*, p. 37.

⁴ See T. Shanin, *Late Marx ...*, p. 4.

⁵ L. Althusser, *Philosophy of the Encounter*, p. 14.

⁶ See M. J. Siemek, *Historical Materialism as the Philosophy of Marxism (I)*, p. 62.

other radical currents: Spanish anarchists, for example, imagined their utopia in terms of electrification and automated conveniences.¹

Many Marxists failed to notice—or grasp—the major theoretical shift in their intellectual founder’s work. For them, Marx’s early historical materialism, along with *Development* and the first *Primacy Thesis*, became a kind of gospel.² As Siemek observed, some even mined the young Marx for an easy warrant to revive a naturalistic–materialist metaphysics in its most traditional form—not merely pre-Marxist but, in a sense, pre-Kantian.³ This became the dominant tendency of Marxism around the turn of the 19th to the 20th c. Though exceptions existed, most followers—both in theory and in politics—firmly assigned primacy to the productive forces rather than to the relations of production.⁴

In the years immediately after Marx’s death, Engels—who outlived him by twelve years—naturally became the chief interpreter and conduit of *Marxism*. The late-nineteenth and early-twentieth-century spread of Marxist ideas occurred largely through Engels’s writings. Like Marx, he also wrote about Hegelian dialectics, but he did so in a thoroughly positivist vein: for him, dialectics was nothing more than an expression of natural science.⁵

In *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State* (1884), Engels often presented what amounts to an evolutionary handbook capped with a dialectical *happy ending*: history advances through stages with clockwork regularity, as if the laws governing nature applied straightforwardly to society. He also articulated broad, programmatic claims that echoed the young Marx’s primacy of the productive forces in social development⁶—positions he pressed forcefully in correspondence, including a firm directive to Karl Kautsky in the summer of 1884: *Rotation of crops, artificial fertilisers, the steam engine, the power loom, cannot be separated from capitalist production any more than the tools of the savage and the barbarian from his production. The tools of the savage condition his society just as much as do more modern ones capitalist society.*⁷

After Engels’s death, it was Kautsky who took up the mantle, emerging as the *Pope of Marxism* at the close of the 19th c. He became the most renowned—and arguably most influential—theorist and publicist of the Social Democratic Party of Germany (SPD), then the world’s largest and most active socialist party, and of the Second International (1889–1916) as a whole. Kautsky—who treated *Capital* largely as a historical work⁸—made no secret that his under-

¹ See E. Hobsbawm, *The Age of Empire 1875–1914*, p. 107 & p. 138.

² See L. Althusser, *On the Reproduction of Capitalism*, p. 209 & p. 214.

³ See M. J. Siemek, *Historical Materialism as the Philosophy of Marxism (I)*, pp. 62–63.

⁴ See L. Althusser, *On the Reproduction of Capitalism*, p. 214.

⁵ See J. Sperber, *Karl Marx*, pp. 312–314.

⁶ See S. H. Rigby, *Marxism and History*, p. 34.

⁷ [F. Engels], *Engels to Karl Kautsky. 26 June 1884*, p. 156.

⁸ See H. Grossman, *The Change in the Original Plan ...*, p. 141 & J. Van Heijenoort [Alex Barbon], *On Marx’s Method in „Capital”*, p. 16.

standing of Marx's major texts *ran through Engels's interpretation of them*.¹ In 1892 he published the celebrated *Erfurt Programme*, a commentary on the platform adopted at the SPD's 1891 Erfurt congress, which quickly became a touchstone for Marxists worldwide.²

At the core of Kautsky's *orthodox Marxism* stood the absolute primacy of *economic development*. He held that, in the advanced capitalist countries, the spectacular, accelerating growth of the productive forces since the Industrial Revolution would eventually collide irreconcilably with private ownership of the means of production. At that point, a *social revolution*—the transition to socialism—would occur. In this vision, the first step toward the future society was the democratization of property rights, removing the barrier to the further expansion of the productive forces forged under capitalism.³ In substance, the *Erfurt Programme* thus largely restated the conclusions of the young Marx.⁴

Paradoxically, in the final years of the nineteenth century, *orthodox Marxism*—formulated in Germany, already one of the world's leading industrial powers—found its most receptive audience in the relatively backward Russian Empire. Under tsarist rule, socialist parties were created from scratch in the 1890s and early 1900s, just as Kautsky's Marxism was ascendant and effectively hegemonic.⁵ For most theorists of the Russian Social Democratic Labour Party—split into Menshevik and Bolshevik wings after its Second Congress (1903)—Kautsky was the supreme authority. Up to the First World War, Lenin regarded him as the foremost heir to Marx and Engels.⁶ As Lars T. Lih puts it, no one in Russia read Kautsky's voluminous works more closely, extensively, or admiringly than Lenin.⁷

The peculiarities of Russian Marxism arose from the fact that, from the very outset, it had to confront the agonising awareness of the backwardness of the essentially agrarian East of Europe vis-à-vis its *modern*, industrial West. Over time, three distinct *Marxist* modernisation projects for Russian Empire emerged. The first pursued *bourgeois modernisation*; the second, *proletarian modernisation*; neither was ultimately realised. Russia entered *modernity* only in the 1930s through a third project: *bureaucratic (Stalinist) modernisation*. The first two projects were revolutionary in intent, whereas the third was counter-revolutionary to the core. Despite their stark differences, the first and third shared a strong economic determinism and a sequential, evolutionist view of history.

The advocates of the second project—the Bolsheviks in the immediate aftermath of 1917—did break politically with Kautsky and Second-Internation-

¹ J. Sperber, *Karl Marx*, p. 415.

² See J. Molyneux, *What is the Real Marxist Tradition?*, p. 35.

³ See K. Kautsky, *The Class Struggle*.

⁴ See K. Marx, *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*, p. 262.

⁵ See E. Blanc, *Revolutionary Social Democracy*, pp. 36–40.

⁶ See L. Trotsky, „*Karl Kautsky*”, p. 98.

⁷ See L. T. Lih, *Lenin Rediscovered*, p. 25.

tional orthodoxy. Still, without at least partially questioning the primacy of the productive forces and a simple evolutionism, they could hardly have led a revolutionary government in a backward country. However even afterward, their thinking and practice remained deeply shaped by the Marxism from which they sprang—anchored in *Development* and the original *Primacy Thesis*. This constellation of Russian problems, sketched only in outline here, warrants a fuller, more detailed analysis.

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