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CHAPTER 22

Sociological Marxism

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Discussions of Marxism as a social theory typically adopt one of four basic stances:

1. *Propagating Marxism.* Marxism is a comprehensive worldview for understanding the social world. It provides the theoretical weapons needed to attack the mystifications of capitalism and the vision needed to mobilize the masses for struggle. The central task for Marxist intellectuals is to articulate the revolutionary core of Marxism in such a way that its influence increases, particularly within oppressed classes. Often this has taken the form of dogmatic enunciations of Marxism as a doctrine, but making Marxism an effective ideology need not imply rigid, dogmatic beliefs. The central issue is that Marxism must be made accessible and internalized as a subjectively salient belief system.

2. *Burying Marxism.* Marxism is a doctrine with virtually no ideas of relevance for serious social inquiry. The historical durability of Marxism is entirely due to its role as a mobilizing ideology linked to political parties, social movements, and states, not the scientific credibility of its arguments. The demise of Marxist-inspired political regimes may at last signal the long overdue death of this antiquated and often pernicious doctrine. It is time to bury the corpse.

3. *Using Marxism.* Marxism is a source of interesting and suggestive ideas, many of which remain useful for contemporary social scientific analysis. Some Marxist ideas may have been deeply flawed from the beginning and others may have lost relevance for understanding contemporary societies, but still the Marxist tradition contains many useful insights and arguments, and these should be preserved as an enduring legacy. Much of what goes under the rubric of "Marxist Sociology" has this character—selectively using particular concepts and themes in the Marxist tradition to understand specific empirical problems. But one does not have to be a "Marxist" to use Marxism in this way.

4. *Building Marxism.* Marxism is an analytically powerful tradition of social theory of vital importance for scientifically understanding the dilemmas and possibilities of social change and social reproduction in contemporary society. Particularly if one wants to change the world in egalitarian and emancipatory ways, Marxism is indispensable. This does not mean, however, that every element within Marxism as it currently exists is sustainable. If

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Marxism aspires to be a social scientific theory, it must be continually subjected to challenge and transformation. Building Marxism thus also means reconstructing Marxism. Marxism is not a doctrine, a definitively established body of truths. But neither is Marxism simply a disjointed catalogue of interesting insights. If the goal is to enhance our ability to understand the world in order to change it, building Marxism is a pivotal task.[1]

The first two of these stances both treat Marxism primarily as an ideology: a system of beliefs to which people adhere and which provides interpretations of the world and motivations for action. Both are in tension with the aspiration of Marxism to be a social science: the first stance because it is concerned with Marxism's power to persuade rather than its validity per se and the second because it views Marxism as either unequivocally false or morally and politically pernicious.

Sociology, at least as it is currently practiced in the United States, has mainly engaged Marxism in the third of these modes. There are, of course, instances of calls to bury Marxism by sociologists, and certainly there were periods in American sociology in which Marxist ideas were almost completely marginalized.[2] In some times and places, building Marxism has been an important intellectual current within sociology. But mostly, American sociology has simply accepted Marxism as one of the sources of the "sociological imagination." Courses in sociological theory typically include respectful discussions of Marx, Weber, and Durkheim as "founding fathers" of central currents in the history of sociology. Durkheim is identified with norms and problems of social integration, Weber with rationalization and the cultural sociology of meaningful action, and Marx with class and conflict. Studies of politics and the state routinely borrow from the Marxist tradition a concern with business influence, economic constraints on state action, and the class bases of political parties and political mobilization. Discussions of the world economy typically talk about the globalization of capital, the power of large multinational corporation, and the ways international markets impinge on local conditions, long-standing Marxist themes going back to Marx. Discussions of work frequently talk about the labor process, the problem of extracting effort from workers, and the impact of technology on skills. Discussions of social change talk about contradictions. Perhaps above all, discussions of social conflict are influenced by the core Marxist idea that conflicts are generated by structurally based social cleavages, not simply subjective identities. Often the Marxist pedigree of these themes and ideas gets completely lost. Instead of using Marxism as Marxism, these ideas are simply absorbed into the diffuse mainstream of sociology. But using

[1]The term "Marxism" is in some ways a liability of the project of "building" for it suggests that the theoretical structure in question is primarily defined by the writings of its foundational theorists. Marxism often degenerates into Marxology. This is the equivalent of calling evolutionary biology "Darwinism," a term used primarily by Creationists in an effort to suggest that evolutionary theory is an ideology rather than a scientific theory. Engels proposed the term "scientific socialism" for the theoretical tradition launched by Marx, and Marx himself once declared "je ne suis pas un Marxist." Nevertheless, since the tradition that we are discussing is called "Marxism," we will continue to use this label here.

[2]Until the era of the Cold War, American sociology largely ignored Marx and Marxism. This was as true of the Chicago School, which saw Marxism as propaganda unrelated to social science, as it was of structural functionalism, which saw Marx as a utilitarian whose ideas had little relevance beyond the 19th century. The Cold War brought forth Marxism as calumniated other. Political sociology, in particular, defined itself in opposition to Marxism, understood as communist ideology. Ironically, this attempt to bury Marxism gave it space and recognition—a recognition that was taken up in the 1960s by those who saw the reigning paradigms as out of touch with reality. This rejuvenated Marxism turned Marx's early writings against the American order but also against communist totalitarianism. Today there are renewed attempts to bury Marxism by those who argue that class is no longer relevant for the analysis of contemporary societies. In this chapter we set ourselves against this perspective, arguing the opposite, namely that class continues to be at the core of the dynamics and reproduction of capitalism.

Marxism also can be a self-conscious practice of deploying these ideas in ways that affirm the continuing relevance of the Marxist tradition for sociological scholarship.

Building Marxism is the most ambitious stance toward the Marxist tradition, going beyond simply deploying Marxist categories explicitly or implicitly to tackle a range of sociological problems. Here the goal is to contribute to the development of Marxism as a coherent theoretical structure by understanding its shortcomings and reconstructing its arguments. In practice, this engagement with Marxism involves strong normative commitments, not simply beliefs in the scientific virtues of Marxist ideas. Without a serious normative commitment to the radical critique of capitalist institutions and to the political vision of an egalitarian, emancipatory alternative to capitalism there would be little incentive to struggle with the demanding intellectual task of building and reconstructing Marxism as a coherent theoretical structure.[3] Building Marxism as an intellectual project thus is deeply connected with the political project of challenging capitalism as a social order.[4]

In this chapter we primarily will elaborate the basic contours of this fourth stance toward Marxism. We begin in the next section by outlining the central components of the traditional Marxist theory of capitalism, the point of departure for building what we will call sociological Marxism.

SETTING THE STAGE: THE CENTRAL COMPONENTS OF MARXIST THEORY

While there is little consensus, either among Marxists themselves or among non-Marxist commentators on Marxism, over what constitutes the essential elements of Marxism, most commentators would agree that whatever else it is, the centerpiece of Marxism is a theory of capitalism as a particular kind of class society.[5] This is the aspect of Marxist theory that is most intimately linked to the Marxist political project of radically challenging capitalism. It is on this aspect of Marxism that we will focus.

The central arguments of the theory of capitalism within the Marxist tradition fall under three theoretical clusters: (1) A theory of the trajectory and destiny of capitalism, (2) a theory of the contradictory reproduction of capitalism, and (3) a emancipatory theory of socialism and communism as the alternative to capitalism. While each of these theoretical clusters is interconnected with the others, they nevertheless have considerable autonomy, and at different times in the history of Marxism one or another of these has been given greater prominence.

In Marx's own work, the most elaborated and systematic theoretical arguments were in

[3]One can, of course, endorse the Marxist political and normative project of the egalitarian critique of capitalism and still reject the theoretical project of building Marxism on the ground that the flaws within the Marxist tradition make this task hopeless.

[4]Building Marxism does not imply a commitment to the view that Marxism should aspire to be a grand theory of everything, or even that it alone can provide a complete theoretical foundation for emancipatory social change. The broad project of developing theoretical resources for emancipatory social change also requires building feminism and building critical cultural theory among other things. Building Marxism and building feminism are complementary, not inherently competing, tasks.

[5]Because there are many Marxisms, it often makes sense to speak of "the Marxist tradition" rather than "Marxism" as such. Alvin Gouldner (1980, 1985), for example, argues that while there are two Marxisms (critical and scientific), they form a "speech community," a terrain of debate, a culture of critical discourse, rather than a unified theory. Perry Anderson (1976) also argues that there are two Marxisms—classical and Western—but that the latter is a diversion from the true path of the former, reflecting the defeat of revolutionary movements. But he too constitutes an internal dialogue which gives an internal coherence to Marxism as a whole.

the first of these three clusters. The central achievement of Marx's work in political economy was an account of the "laws of motion" of capitalism and how these propelled capitalist development along a trajectory toward a particular kind of destination. Marx devoted very little energy to elaborating a real theory of the destination itself—socialism—either in terms of the normative principles that socialism should embody or the problem of what institutional designs would render socialism feasible and sustainable. Instead, the normative dimension of Marx's writing primarily took the form of the critique of capitalism as a social order characterized by alienation, exploitation, fetishism, mystification, degradation, immiseration, the anarchy of the market, and so on. The transcendence of capitalism by socialism and eventually communism was then posited as the simple negation of these features, an implicit unelaborated theoretical utopia that eliminated all the moral deficits of capitalism: a society without alienation, without exploitation, without fetishism, and so on. While there are brief places in Marx's work in which a more positive discussion of socialism is engaged—some passages in the *Critique of the Gotha Program* broach issues of normative principles and the writings on the Paris commune are evocative of some possible design principles for socialist institutions—nowhere are these issues given sustained, theoretical consideration.

Marx gave more attention to the problem of the contradictory social reproduction of capitalism as it moved along its historical trajectory of development. There are important, suggestive discussions of the role of the state and ideology in reproducing class relations, most notably perhaps in the bold programmatic statement about base and superstructure in *The Preface to a Contribution to a Critique of Political Economy*,[6] and a few places where the contradictory quality of this reproduction is touched on.[7] More significantly, Marx elaborates significant elements of a theory of social reproduction within capitalist production itself in his analyses of the labor process and commodity fetishism.[8] Still, taken as a whole, the theory of the contradictory reproduction of capitalist relations remains extremely underdeveloped within Marx's own work: there is no real theory of the state, only fragments of a theory of ideology, and only the beginnings of a theory of the reproduction of class relations within production itself.

Twentieth-century Western Marxism, confronting the enduring failure of revolutionary movements in the West, became much more focused on the problem of the social reproduction of capitalism. Gramsci is the most significant early contributor to these discussions, particularly in his writings on hegemony and the problem of the material basis for consent.[9] The theme of social reproduction was further developed, in especially functionalist ways, by

[6]G. A. Cohen (1978, 1988) presents the most analytically rigorous exploration of the implications of Marx's brief statement in the preface for a general theory of the reproduction of capitalism.

[7]In *The German Ideology*, Marx and Engels (1970) refer to the ruling ideas in every epoch being the ideas of the ruling class. In *The Communist Manifesto* they refer to the executive of the modern state as the committee for managing the common affairs of the whole bourgeoisie. These are the more functionalist understandings of state and ideology, whereas in *The Eighteenth Brumaire* (Marx, 1963) and *The Class Struggles in France* (Marx, 1964) Marx is at pains to show the ways in which the expansion of democracy challenges capitalism, how universal suffrage unchains class struggle.

[8]See, *Capital*, Volume I (Marx, 1967a), especially parts I and VII.

[9]There is an enormous literature inspired by Antonio Gramsci's (1971) prison writings, not only by his signature concept of hegemony, but also by his understanding of state and civil society, his theory of ideology and intellectuals, of common sense and good sense, his reconceptualization of class struggle as war of position and war of movement, his development of the now influential notion of passive revolution, his treatment of political parties and trade unions, as well as his comparative sociology of Fascism, Fordism and Soviet communism. He provides the foundations, if in a relatively fragmentary form, of a sociological Marxism.

Frankfurt School critical theorists in the middle third of the century.[10] But it really was only in the Marxist revival of the 1960s and 1970s that the problem of the contradictory reproduction of capitalism became the widespread subject of theoretical and empirical debate among Marxists. The problem of the normative theory of socialism also grew in importance, first in the context of the fierce political debates among Marxists over the character of the Soviet Union and later in the less impassioned attempts at diagnosing the causes of stagnation and eventual collapse of the attempts at building state socialism. Still, as in Marx's own work, much of the normative dimension of Western Marxism, particularly in the work of the Frankfurt school, took the form of the negative critique of capitalism rather than the positive elaboration of an emancipatory alternative. In the context of the collapse of Communist regimes and the apparent triumph of capitalism, the development of a serious positive normative theory of socialism has become even more pressing.

In what follows we will first lay out the central theses in the traditional Marxist theory of the destiny of capitalism and examine why we feel these theses are unsatisfactory. We then turn to the theory of the contradictory reproduction of capitalism which we will argue constitutes the foundation of sociological Marxism. Finally we will discuss the problem of developing a theory of Marxism's emancipatory project.

THE CLASSICAL MARXIST THEORY OF THE TRAJECTORY AND DESTINY OF CAPITALISM

The traditional Marxist theory of the trajectory and destiny of capitalism was grounded in three fundamental theses:

1. *The long-term nonsustainability of capitalism thesis.* In the long-run capitalism is an unsustainable social order. Capitalism does not have an indefinite future; its internal dynamics ("laws of motion") will eventually destroy the conditions of its own reproducibility. This means that capitalism is not merely characterized by episodes of crisis and decay, but that these episodes have an inherent tendency to intensify over time in ways which make the survival of capitalism increasingly problematic.

2. *The intensification of anticapitalist class struggle thesis.* As the sustainability of capitalism declines (thesis 1), the class forces arrayed against capitalism increase in numbers and capacity to challenge capitalism.[11] Eventually the social forces arrayed against capitalism will be sufficiently strong and capitalism itself sufficiently weak that capitalism can be over-

[10]While not as sociologically rich as Gramsci, classics such as Georg Lukacs's (1971) *History and Class Consciousness*, Horkheimer and Adorno's (1972), *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, and Marcuse's *One Dimensional Man* (1964) and *Eros and Civilization* (1955) all pointed to the ubiquity of capitalist domination. They stressed the way the mass media, consumer culture lured the popular classes into acceptance of capitalism, generating psychological processes that obliterated all forms of resistance. Their prognoses were either profoundly pessimistic or sort out imaginary utopias.

[11]The locus classicus of the argument for the intensification of class struggle is *The Communist Manifesto* where Marx and Engels (1998) show how capitalism sows the seeds of its own destruction by creating its own grave digger—the proletariat whose struggles develop from scattered attacks on capital, to the development of trade unions and from there the constitution of national political parties to represent the working class against the state. In "Socialism: Utopian and Scientific," Engels (1978) writes of the coincidence of deepening economic crises and the intensification of class struggle until finally the "proletariat seizes state power."

thrown.[12] Two additional claims are often attached to this thesis: (1) that the destruction of capitalism must be ruptural rather than incremental (i.e., that the destruction takes place in a temporally condensed historical episode), and (2) that the rupture requires violent overthrow of the state rather than democratic capture. Neither of these claims, however, are inherent in the intensification of anticapitalist class struggle thesis itself and should be regarded as historically contextual propositions rather than fundamental theses of Marxism.

3. *The natural transition to socialism thesis.* Given the ultimate nonsustainability of capitalism (thesis 1), and the interests and capacities of the social actors arrayed against capitalism, in the aftermath of the destruction of capitalism through intensified class struggle (thesis 2), socialism is its most likely successor (or in an even stronger version of the thesis: its inevitable successor). Partially this is because capitalism itself creates some of the institutional groundwork for socialism: concentration of ownership through trusts, massive increases in productivity liberating people from the necessity of long hours of work, increasing interdependence among workers, the removal of the capitalist as an active entrepreneur in production through the joint-stock company, and so on. But mainly socialism emerges in the aftermath of capitalism's demise because the working class would gain tremendously from socialism and it has the power to create it. There are occasional places where classical Marxism entertained some other fate for capitalism than socialism, as in Luxembourg's famous formula of "socialism or barbarism," but nowhere is a nonsocialist postcapitalist future given any theoretical precision.

These theses were meant to embody real predictions based on an understanding of the causal mechanisms at work in the social world, not simply expressions of wishful thinking or philosophical speculation. The predictions are derived from an account of two causal processes that are seen as imparting the fundamental logic to the dynamics of capitalist economic systems: exploitation of workers by capitalists, and competition among capitalists in various kinds of markets. These two processes generate the causal streams that provide the fundamental explanations for the theses about the destiny of capitalism.

Exploitation of workers and competition among capitalists are the fundamental causes of the most salient properties of capitalist development: the steady increase in its productive capacity, the expansion of its global scope, the increasing concentration and centralization of capitalist production. This development dynamic, however, contains internal contradictions, contradictions that mean that capitalism has inherent tendencies to generate periodic, intensifying economic crises. Traditional Marxist crisis theory is complex and there are many different kinds of causal processes in play in explaining the disruptions of capitalist accumulation. The two most important of these for the eventual fate of capitalism in classical Marxism are the long term tendency for the aggregate rate of profit to fall and, particularly as argued by Engels, the tendency for capital accumulation to lead to ever more serious crises of overproduction.[13]

[12]The intensification of class struggle thesis does not imply that revolution is only possible at the point when capitalism becomes completely moribund and unsustainable. Since the relevant anticapitalist forces come to know that capitalism is moving toward unsustainability, they have the possibility of organizing to overthrow before it reaches the point of complete internal collapse. Unustainability is still important in this revolutionary transformation for two reasons: first, the apparatuses that defend capitalism are weakened by the intensifying crises of capitalism even before complete unsustainability has been reached, and second, the knowledge of the eventual demise of capitalism plays a significant role in mobilizing people against capitalism.

[13]In Volume III of *Capital* (Part III) Marx (1976) argues that competition drives capitalists to innovate, especially through the introduction of new technology, which simultaneously brings down the rate of profit and generates crises of overproduction. In "Socialism: Utopian and Scientific" Engels (1978) argues that the pursuit of profit through innovation leads to ever-deepening crises of overproduction, which leads to the concentration of capital, and eventually the state itself becomes a capitalist—capitalism is brought to a head and once brought to a head it topples over.

The argument that capitalist crisis tendencies have an inherent long-term tendency to intensify means that as capitalism becomes more and more developed, more and more global, it ultimately becomes harder and harder to maintain the aggregate rate of profit or to find new markets—the necessary condition for continued capital accumulation and innovation—and this, in turn, means that capitalism becomes less and less sustainable, eventually reaching limits for its own material reproduction. To use another classical Marxist formulation: the relations of production become fetters on the development of the forces of production.[14] The first causal stream generated by the two interconnected generative processes of capitalism, then, leads to the strong prediction of thesis 1: in the long-run capitalism will become an unreproducible economic system. It cannot last forever.

The long-term fragility and problematic reproducibility of capitalism, however, does not in and of itself say much about what kind of social order would emerge in its place. Here the important issue is the effects of capitalism on class structure and class formation: capitalism not only develops the productive forces and expands into a worldwide system of capitalist markets and competition, it also creates social agents—the working class—with a specific set of interests opposed to capitalism and a set of capacities that enable them to challenge capitalism. Workers have interests opposed to capitalism for a variety of reasons. Most fundamentally, they are exploited in capitalism. But capitalism also renders the lives of workers insecure, subject to unemployment, work degradation, and other hazards. Workers' material interests thus would be advanced if the social relations of production could be transformed from relations based on private ownership of the means of production—capitalism—to relations based on democratic, egalitarian control over the organization of production, or what came to be called "socialism."[15]

Having a class with anticapitalist interests, however, still is not enough for the natural transition to socialism thesis. That class must also have a capacity to challenge capitalism. Capitalism as an economic system may be increasingly crisis-ridden and irrational, but capitalist societies also contain an elaborate array of institutions to defend and reproduce capitalist class relations (see the discussion of social reproduction below). These institutions develop in tandem with capitalism in response to class struggles and other threats to capitalist reproduc-

[14]This formulation is part of the larger, more abstract theory of historical trajectory in historical materialism. In historical materialism the bold thesis is advanced that it is a property of every class-based system of production relations that (1) within each type of class relations there is a limit to the possible development of the forces of production, (2) that the forces of production will eventually develop to reach those limits, (3) when those limits are reached—when the relations fetter the further development of the forces—the relations will become increasingly unstable, and (4) eventually this instability will lead to a transformation of the relations of production, enabling the forces of production to develop further. It is this "dialectic" between forces and relations of production that provides the basic dynamics for the theory of historical trajectory and gives it a specific kind of directionality. For a systematic exploration of the logic of this theoretical structure, see Cohen (1978).

[15]Like many Marxist terms, the term "socialism" has many competing meanings. Often socialism is identified with a specific institutional design, such as centralized state ownership of the means of production and central planning. State ownership, however, is not an inherent feature of the concept understood as the "socializing" private ownership. The pivot is rendering social relations of production egalitarian and democratic. Many possible institutional forms could accomplish this. Capitalism as well comes in many different institutional forms: family firms, joint ventures, large multidivision corporations, worker codetermination firms, state-regulated firms, and so forth. Socialism—understood as an egalitarian, democratic control over production—can also be envisioned in many institutional varieties: centralized state ownership, centralized ownership with decentralized control, market socialism, and workers co-ops.

tion. While classical Marxism did not systematically theorize these flanking institutions, nevertheless Marx recognized that the transformation of capitalism depends on the increasing capacity of opponents of capitalism to mobilize effective challenges against capitalism.

In classical Marxist theory, the dynamics of capitalist development were thought to enhance working-class capacity for such challenge for a variety of reasons: the working class becomes more numerous; it becomes concentrated in ever-larger units of production; communications and interdependencies among workers improve; internal differentiation among workers declines under the pressures of deskilling and other homogenizing forces; the organizational competence increases. Many of these developments in capitalism not only increase the capacity of workers to struggle, but also create some of the economic conditions for socialism itself: the concentration of capitalist ownership and the emergence of the joint-stock corporation make the person of the capitalist increasingly superfluous; the greater interdependency among workers make production evermore social in character. As Marxists were fond of saying, the conditions for socialism are created "in the womb of capitalism." Eventually the working class becomes a revolutionary class both in the sense of having revolutionary socialist objectives and of having the capacity to make a revolution against capitalism (thesis 2) and to create the institutions of socialism (thesis 3).

Taking these arguments together generates the fundamental predictions of classical Marxism about the destiny of capitalism: capitalism has an inherent tendency to create the conditions both for its own destruction and for the triumph of socialism as an alternative. As the economic reproduction of capitalism becomes more and more problematic and precarious, agents with an interest in transforming capitalism increasingly have the capacity to effectively struggle against capitalism. In such a context there was little need to speculate on the institutional design of this alternative. Given the interests and capacities of the relevant social actors, socialism would be invented through a process of pragmatic, creative, collective experimentalism when it became an "historical necessity."

This is an elegant social theory, enormously attractive to people committed to the moral and political agenda of an egalitarian, democratic, socialist future. Since struggles for social change are always arduous affairs, particularly if one aspires to fundamental transformations of social structures, having the confidence that the "forces of history" are on one's side and that eventually the system against which one is fighting will be unsustainable, provides enormous encouragement.[16] The belief in the truth of this classical theory arguably is one of the things that helped sustain communist struggles in the face of such overwhelming obstacles.

Unfortunately, there is little evidence for the scientific validity of the theory of the destiny of capitalism as formulated. While Marx's theory of capitalist dynamics and development contains many penetrating insights about the inner workings of capitalism in the period of unregulated early industrial capitalism with its sharp polarizations and chaotic crisis tendencies, the actual trajectory of capitalism in the 20th century does not support the pivotal claims of the theory.

First, the nonsustainability of capitalism thesis: While capitalism does contain inherent crisis tendencies, there is no empirical evidence that these crises have any long-term tendency for intensification. Furthermore, there are serious flaws in the principle theoretical arguments advanced by Marx that capitalism has inherent limits to its own sustainability. In particular,

[16]It might seem that the determinism of this prediction of the demise of capitalism would lead people to ask, "Why should I engage in struggle since capitalism is doomed by the laws of history whether or not I do so?" In fact, since one of the main impediments to people's participation in struggle is the fear that sacrifices will be pointless, having confidence in the ultimate victory of one's cause can help motivate people for action, making that victory more likely.

the most systematic argument for his predictions, the theory of the tendency of the falling rate of profit, is unsatisfactory. Marx believed on the basis of the labor theory of value that aggregate profits are generated exclusively by the labor of workers currently using the means of production (what he called "living labor"). Since capital intensity (or what Marx called "the organic composition of capital") tends to increase with the development of capitalism, and thus the costs of capital relative to labor increases over time, the profit-generating capacity of capitalism declines as a proportion of total costs and thus the rate of profit will tend to decline. This theoretical argument has been shown repeatedly to be unsatisfactory, both because of flaws in the labor theory of value on which it is based and because of specific flaws in its argument about the impact of capital intensity on the rate of profit. The other main idea within classical Marxism for a tendency for crises to intensify in capitalism—the problem of overproduction—also does not yield any inherent intensification of crisis once it is recognized that the state and other innovative institutions are capable of generating increased demand to absorb excess production. The first fundamental thesis of the classical Marxist theory of the trajectory of capitalism—the thesis that there is an inherent tendency for capitalism to eventually become unreproducible—therefore cannot be sustained.[17]

Second, the intensification of anticapitalist class struggles thesis and the natural socialist transition thesis: The theory of class formation and class struggle that underpins the arguments that socialism is the future of capitalism is also problematic. There is little evidence to support the classical Marxist view of an overriding tendency for structurally determined classes to become organized as collective actors around class interests, and for the articulated class interests of workers so organized to become increasingly anticapitalist. Instead of becoming simplified and more polarized, class structures in capitalist societies are becoming more complex and differentiated. Even within the working class, instead of material conditions of life becoming more precarious and more homogeneous, heterogeneity has increased on many dimensions in many parts of the world. Furthermore, even apart from the failures in its predictions about how the trajectory of capitalist development would affect the class structure, as we shall see below, classical Marxism did not anticipate that the various institutions of social reproduction that develop within capitalism would be so robust, flexible, and effective.[18] As a result, there appears to be much more contingency and indeterminacy in the relationship between class structure, class formation and class struggle, even in the long run, then was countenanced in the classical theory.

If capitalism has no inherent tendency to become progressively weakened and eventually unsustainable and if the class forces arrayed against capitalism have no inherent tendency to become collectively stronger and more able to challenge capitalism, then there are no solid grounds for predicting, even in the long run, that socialism is the probable future of capitalism. This does not, of course, imply the converse—that socialism is not a possible future for capi-

[17]This does not, of course, imply that evidence exists for the converse counterthesis that capitalism is indefinitely reproducible. It also does no imply that there are no other possible arguments for the long-term nonsustainability of capitalism. Arguments of environmental limits to the sustainability of capitalism may well have persuasive force, and these environmental limits may be reached by virtue of the internal dynamics of capitalism: because of the tendency of capitalist firms to ignore negative externalities and for capitalist markets to encourage very short time horizons capitalism may destroy its ecological conditions of existence. All that is being claimed here is that there are no convincing theoretical arguments of the distinctively Marxist variety of the nonsustainability thesis.

[18]The theory of the "superstructure" was quite underdeveloped in classical Marxism, which generally regarded superstructures as rigid, largely repressive apparatuses, incapable of flexible adaptation and transformation in response to changing demands of social reproduction. The very use of an architectural metaphor to capture the mechanisms of social reproduction suggest this rigidity. The centerpiece of sociological Marxism is understanding how such institutions function, adapt, and change.

talism, or even that it is an improbable future—but simply that the traditional theory provides no firm basis for any predictions about the likelihood of this outcome.

If one rejects the historical destiny theses of the traditional theory, one might well ask: What's left of Marxism? Perhaps all that is left are some scattered, if still valuable, insights of a Marxist legacy, as suggested by the "Using Marxism" stance. We will argue to the contrary that there remains a conceptual core to Marxism that can provide the foundation on which Marxism can be (re)built. There are two basic directions this reconstruction can take. First, one can try to reconstruct the theory of the dynamics of capitalist development, freeing it from its traditional commitment to uncovering an immanent trajectory toward an ultimate destination. Recent work by Giovanni Arrighi (1994) would be an example of this kind of reconstruction. Alternatively, one can turn to the second cluster of traditional Marxist theses, the theory of the contradictory reproduction of capitalist class relations, and try to build a sociological Marxism on this basis. This is the strategy we will adopt here. This involves identifying salient causal processes within capitalist society that have broad ramifications for the nature of institutions in such societies and the prospects for emancipatory social change, but it will not identify an inherent dynamic process that propels such societies toward a specific emancipatory destination. The problem of challenging capitalism will remain a central anchor to this proposed sociological Marxism, but socialism will no longer be viewed as an historical necessity but as the potential outcome of strategy, constraint and contingency.[19] Let us now turn to the core concepts that constitute the foundation of this reconstructed sociological Marxism.

SOCIOLOGICAL MARXISM: CONCEPTUAL FOUNDATIONS

Complex scientific theories often can be captured by simple conceptual phrases that define the foundational core of the theory. Thus, for example, the core of the Darwinian theory of biological evolution is encapsulated by the concept "natural selection" and the proposition "biological evolution is broadly explained by natural selection through reproductive fitness." Of course, modern evolutionary biology contains a vast array of additional concepts and complex propositions. No one would reduce the theory to this simple core. Ideas such as genetic drift, for example, do not exactly fit this proposition. Nevertheless, this does constitute a kind of bottom line that unifies the theoretical framework. Or take another example: neoclassical economics. The simple concept at the core of neoclassical economics is the idea of "rational utility maximization under constraints" and the accompanying proposition would be something like "market outcomes are broadly explained by interactions among constrained rational utility maximizers." Again, the actual elaboration of the theory contains much more than this. There is a recognition, for example, that information imperfections can interfere with the rationality assumption in all sorts of ways. Nevertheless, the neoclassical paradigm in economics has at its core these elements.

What, then, is the core of sociological Marxism? We believe that the core concept of sociological Marxism is "class as exploitation" and the accompanying proposition is "the dilemmas and dynamics of the reproduction and transformation of capitalist institutions are broadly explained by class." As in the case of Darwinian biology and neoclassical economics,

[19]Ultimately, of course, these two strands of theoretical development need to be joined, since a fully reconstructed Marxism would systematically link an account of capitalist dynamics to an account of its contradictory reproduction. Here, however, we pursue the more limited aim of giving some precision to the conceptual foundations of sociological Marxism.

this does not imply that the reproduction and transformation of capitalism can be reduced to class. There are many complications and many situations in which other causal processes play an important role. Rather the claim is that class as exploitation identifies the bottom line of sociological Marxism that provides coherence to its explanations.

In the next section we will elaborate the implications of this claim for the theory of the contradictory reproduction of capitalist social relations. In this section we will explicate more systematically the idea of class as exploitation itself. The discussion will involve clarifying six conceptual issues: (1) the concept of social relations of production; (2) the complementary concept of social relations in production; (3) the idea of class as a specific form of relations of production; (4) the problem of the forms of variation of class relations; (5) exploitation and domination as central processes within class relations; and (6) the conceptual shift from an abstract analysis class relations to a concrete analysis of class structure.

Relations of Production

Any system of production requires the deployment of a range of assets or resources or factors of production: tools, machines, land, raw materials, labor power, skills, information, and so forth. This deployment can be described in technical terms as a production function: so many inputs of different kinds are combined in a specific process to produce an output of a specific kind. The deployment also can be described in social relational terms: the individual actors that participate in production have different kinds of rights and powers over the use of the inputs and over the results of their use. Rights and powers over resources, of course, are attributes of social relations, not descriptions of the relationship of people to things as such: to have rights and powers with respect to land defines one's social relationship to other people with respect to the use of the land and the appropriation of the fruits of using the land productively. The sum total of these rights and powers constitute the "social relations of production."

Relations in Production

The social relations of production—the relations within which rights and powers over productive assets are distributed—do not exhaust the social relations that take place within systems of production. There are also social relations of cooperation, coordination, and control among actors within the labor process. Whenever there is a division of labor, different actors need to cooperate with each other and their activities need to be coordinated in order to get things done. The social relations within which such cooperative–coordinating interactions take place can be called social relations in production.[20]

[20]In effect we are replacing the couple "forces of production–relations of production" with the couple "relations in production–relations of production." There are several implications. First, we remove the teleology associated with the expansion of the forces of production that conventionally drive history forward from one mode of production to another. We now open up both the internal dynamics of modes of production and the transition from one mode to another. Second, by underlining the relational moment of the "forces of production" we pose the question not only of innovation of new techniques but of the reproduction of the relations of work, which thereby offers a more nuanced understanding of domination. Third, it compels the recognition of political and ideological apparatuses of production (responsible for guaranteeing the reproduction of the relations in production) and thus brings politics into production—the politics of production (see Burawoy, 1985).

The social relations in production are not autonomous from the relations of production. In particular, the relations of production directly shape one particularly salient aspect of the social relations in production: workplace domination—the relations within which one set of actors controls the activities of another set of actors. When a manager tells a worker what to do this action both involves exercising delegated rights and powers over resources derived from the relations of production (the manger can fire the worker for noncompliance) and providing coordinating information so that cooperation within a division of labor can take place. Domination can be organized in various ways: in strict, authoritarian hierarchies where workers activity is closely monitored and noncompliance swiftly sanctioned; in more relaxed systems of control where considerable individual autonomy is allowed; through the creation of collectively supervised teams with high levels of internal mutual monitoring; in governance structures where workers have a variety of rights as "industrial citizens." In all these cases, the relations in production constitute specific ways in which the social relations of production are translated into concrete power relations within organization of work.

Class Relations as a Form of Relations of Production

When the rights and powers of people over productive resources are unequally distributed—when some people have greater rights/powers with respect to specific kinds of productive resources than do others—these relations can be described as class relations.[21] The classic contrast in capitalist societies is between owners of means of production and owners of labor power, since "owning" is a description of rights and powers with respect to a resource deployed in production.

Let us be quite precise here: The rights and powers in question are not defined with respect to the ownership or control of things in general, but only of resources or assets insofar as they are deployed in production. A capitalist is not someone who owns machines, but someone who owns machines, deploys those machines in a production process, hires owners of labor power to use them, and appropriates the profits from the use of those machines. A collector of machines is not, by virtue of owning those machines, a capitalist. To count as a class relation it therefore is not sufficient that there be unequal rights and powers over the sheer physical use of a resource. There also must be unequal rights and powers over the appropriation of the results of that use. In general this implies appropriating income generated by the deployment of the resource in question.

Variations in Class Relations

Different kinds of class relations are defined by the kinds of rights and powers that are embodied in the relations of production. For example, in some systems of production people are allowed to own the labor power of other people. When the rights accompanying such ownership are absolute, the class relation is called "slavery." When the rights and powers over labor power are jointly owned by the laborer and someone else, the class relation is called "feudalism."[22] In capitalist societies, in contrast, such absolute or shared ownership of other people is prohibited.

[21]"Powers" refer to the effective capacity of people to control the use of means of production, including the capacity to appropriate the results of that use; "rights" refer to the legal enforcement by third parties of those powers.

[22]This may not seem to be the standard definition of feudalism as a class structure. Typically feudalism is defined as a class system within which extraeconomic coercion is used to force serfs to perform labor for lords, either in the form of direct labor dues or in the form of rents. Here I am treating "direct economic coercion" as an expression of a property right of the lord in the labor power of the serf. This is reflected in the fact that the serf is not free to leave the land of the lord. This is equivalent to the claim that the flight of a serf from the land is a form of theft—stealing labor power partially owned by the lord. For a discussion of this conceptualization of feudalism, see Wright (1985, Chapter 3).

Class, Exploitation, and Domination

What makes class analysis distinctively Marxist is the account of specific mechanisms embedded in class relations. Here the pivotal concept is exploitation, although domination plays an important role as well.

Exploitation is a complex and challenging concept. It is meant to designate a particular form of interdependence of the material interests of people, namely a situation which satisfies three criteria:[23]

1. *The inverse interdependent welfare principle.* The material welfare of exploiters causally depends on the material deprivations of the exploited.
2. *The exclusion principle.* This inverse interdependence of welfare of exploiters and exploited depends on the exclusion of the exploited from access to certain productive resources.
3. *The appropriation principle.* Exclusion generates material advantage to exploiters because it enables them to appropriate the labor effort of the exploited.

Exploitation thus is a diagnosis of the process through which the inequalities in incomes are generated by inequalities in rights and powers over productive resources: the inequalities occur, in part at least, through the ways in which exploiters, by virtue of their exclusionary rights and powers over resources, are able to appropriate surplus generated by the effort of the exploited. If the first two of these principles are present but not the third, economic oppression may exist but not exploitation. The crucial difference is that in nonexploitative economic oppression, the privileged social category does not itself need the excluded category. While their welfare does depend on the exclusion, there is no ongoing interdependence of their activities. In the case of exploitation, the exploiters actively need the exploited: exploiters depend on the effort of the exploited for their own welfare.[24]

This deep interdependence makes exploitation a particularly explosive form of social relation for two reasons: First, exploitation constitutes a social relation that simultaneously pits the interests of one group against another and requires their ongoing interactions; and second, it confers on the disadvantaged group a real form of power with which to challenge the interests of exploiters. This is an important point. Exploitation depends on the appropriation of labor effort. Because human beings are conscious agents, not robots, they always retain

[23]For a more extensive discussion of these three principles, see Wright (1997, pp. 9–19).

[24]The fate of indigenous people in North America and South Africa reflects this contrast between nonexploitative economic oppression and exploitation. In both cases indigenous people were excluded from access to the pivotal resource of their economies: land. And in both cases, by virtue of this exclusion the material welfare of European settlers was advanced at the expense of the indigenous people. The crucial difference between the two settings was that in North America, Native Americans were generally not exploited, whereas in Southern Africa indigenous people were. The result was that genocide was an effective, if morally abhorrent, strategy for dealing with Native American resistance: the white settlers did not need the Native Americans and thus they could simply be eliminated. Such a strategy is not possible where indigenous people are exploited. Mona Younis (2000) has used this distinction to explain the different trajectories of the Palestinian Liberation Organization and the African National Congress. Because Palestinians were largely excluded from the Israeli economy, they did not have the leverage power of the large African working class in South Africa.

significant levels of real control over their expenditure of effort. The extraction of effort within exploitative relations thus to a greater or lesser extent always is problematic and precarious, requiring active institutional devices for its reproduction. Such devices can become quite costly to exploiters in the form of the costs of supervision, surveillance, sanctions, and so forth. The ability to impose such costs constitutes a form of power among the exploited.

Domination is a simpler idea. It identifies one dimension of the interdependence of the activities within production itself—what we have called the relations in production—rather than simply the interdependence of material interests generated by those activities. Here the issue is that by virtue of the relations into which people enter as a result of their rights and powers they have over productive resources some people are in a position to control the activities of others, to direct them, to boss them, to monitor their activities, and to hire and fire them. Since the powers embodied in domination are directly derived from the social relations of production, domination also can be understood as an aspect of class relations. Class relations therefore imply not simply that some people have the fruits of their laboring effort appropriated by others, but that significant portions of their lives are controlled by others, directed by people outside of their own control. In traditional Marxist terms this latter condition is called alienation.[25]

From Abstract Class Relations to Concrete Class Structures

The concept of class relations so far discussed is defined at a very high level of abstraction. The relations are perfectly polarized between exploiters and exploited, dominators and dominated. Actual class structures within which people live and work are much more complex than this in all sorts of ways:

- Varieties of different forms of exploitation coexist: actual class structures can combine aspects of capitalist relations, feudal relations, and even various forms of postcapitalist relations of production.
- Exploitation and domination do not perfectly correspond to each other: managers, for example, may dominate workers and yet themselves be exploited by capitalists.
- The rights and powers associated with the relations of production are not perfectly polarized: all sorts of state regulations may deprive capitalists of having unfettered rights and powers over the use of their means of production; institutional arrangements like works committees or worker co-determination may give workers certain kinds of rights and powers over the organization of production.
- Individuals can have multiple, possible inconsistent, relations to the system of production: ordinary workers in capitalist production can also own stocks, either in their own firms (e.g., employee stock ownership programs) or more broadly; families may contain people occupying different locations within the relations of production, thus indirectly linking each person to the class structure in multiple ways.

[25]The idea of alienation is also often used to describe a situation in which one's life is controlled by impersonal forces, such as "the market," rather than simply by the agency of other people. In this broader sense, one can say that while they are not exploited, capitalists, not just workers, are alienated in capitalism: their lives, like those of workers, may be controlled by "alien" forces: the market, competitive pressures, inflation, and so forth. The idea of alienation also is not exclusively linked to class relations: one can have one's life controlled by forces outside of one's control not simply because of how one is situated within the relations of production, but also because of one's relationship to the state, because of gender relations, and so forth.

While we will not discuss the various strategies for conceptualizing these complications here, one of the important issues in sociological Marxism is elaborating a repertoire of class structure concepts at different levels of abstraction in order to coherently understand this complexity.[26]

SOCIOLOGICAL MARXISM: THE THEORY OF THE CONTRADICTORY REPRODUCTION OF CLASS RELATIONS

Let us recall what we have said so far. We began by claiming that it is worthwhile to build Marxism, rather than simply use it (let alone bury it), because of its importance for understanding the obstacles and possibilities for egalitarian, emancipatory social change. This normative, political agenda provides the central motivation for worrying about these issues. We then reviewed classical Marxist theory, focusing on the part of the theory of history that tries to explain the trajectory of capitalism toward its ultimate demise and transcendence by socialism. We argued that while this theory provides a compelling vision, it is unsatisfactory as an explanatory theory. Marxism, however, also contains a theory of the contradictory reproduction of class relations. At the core of this theory is the concept of class as exploitation. We now want to show how this concept is deployed within the Marxist theory of social reproduction and how this can form the foundation for developing sociological Marxism.

The Marxist theory of the contradictory reproduction of capitalist class relations is based on three fundamental theses:

1. *The social reproduction of class relations thesis.* By virtue of their exploitative character, class structures are inherently unstable forms of social relations and require active institutional arrangements for their reproduction. Where class relations exist, therefore, it is predicted that various forms of political and ideological institutions will develop to defend and reproduce them. In classical Marxism these were typically referred to as political and ideological superstructures which reproduced the economic base.[27]

2. *The contradictions of capitalism thesis.* The institutional solutions to the problems of social reproduction of capitalist class relations at any point in time have a systematic tendency to erode and become less functional over time. This is so for two principle reasons: First, the dynamics of capitalist development generate changes in technology, the labor process, class structure, markets, and other aspects of capitalist relations, and these changes continually pose new problems of social reproduction. In general, earlier institutional solutions will cease to be optimal under such changed conditions. Second, class actors adapt their strategies in order to take advantages of weaknesses in existing institutional arrangements. Over time, these adaptive strategies tend to erode the ability of institutions of social reproduction to effectively regulate and contain class struggles.

3. *Institutional crisis and renovation thesis.* Because of the continual need for institu-

[26]For a discussion of the issues involved in coherently incorporating complexity into a concept of class structure, see Wright (1997), and Wright et al. (1989).

[27]The standard argument was that superstructures, particularly the state and ideology, existed to protect the economic base from challenge. Typically this argument took the form of a strong functional explanation in which the form of the superstructure was explained by functional requirement of reproducing the base. We are avoiding the use of the term "superstructure" here because of the tendency for this term to suggest too high a level of integration and coherence among those institutions involved in social reproduction, as well as an image of functional efficiency, which we believe is unjustified. For an important discussion of the explanatory logic of the concept of superstructure, see Cohen (1978, 1988, pp. 155–179).

tions of social reproduction (thesis 1) and the tendency for the reproductive capacity of given institutional arrangements to erode over time (thesis 2), institutions of social reproduction in capitalist societies will tend to be periodically renovated. The typical circumstance for such renovation will be institutional crisis, a situation in which organized social actors, particularly class actors, come to experience the institutional supports as unsatisfactory, often because they cease to be able to contain class conflicts within tolerable limits. These institutional renovations can be piecemeal or may involve dramatic institutional reconfigurations. There is no implication here either that the new institutional solutions will be optimal or that capitalism will collapse in the face of suboptimal arrangements. What is claimed is that capitalist development will be marked by a sequence of institutional renovation episodes in response to the contradictions in the reproduction of capitalist relations.

These three theses provide the core framework that anchors the agenda of sociological Marxism. As with the theory of capitalism's destiny, they are not meant to be simply an interpretative discourse but to identify real mechanisms that exist in real institutions.

The Social Reproduction of Class Relations Thesis

In a fundamental sense, the issue of social reproduction applies to all types of social relations. No type of social relation, whether friendship relations, authority relations within organizations, gender relations, or class relations, simply continues to exist in a given form by sheer inertia; there always is some kind of practice involved in maintaining the social relation in question. But equally, those practices are themselves structured by social relations; they are not simply the unconstrained acts of voluntaristically acting persons. This is a fundamental metatheoretical idea that sociological Marxism shares with many other currents of sociological theory: social relations are reproduced (and transformed) by social practices that are themselves structured by social relations. Here we will focus on the issues of reproducing class relations; in the next section we will examine their transformation.

While social reproduction is an issue for all social relations, different sorts of social relations pose different kinds of problems for social reproduction. Class relations, by virtue of their exploitative character, are an example of a kind of social relation for which social reproduction is a particularly complex and problematic business, requiring the deployment of considerable resources, social energy, and institutional devices. This is so for two reasons: First, exploitative class are relations in which real harms are imposed on some people for the benefit of others. Social relations within which antagonistic interests are generated will have an inherent tendency to generate conflicts in which those who are harmed will try to change the relation in question.[28] The fact that there will be a tendency for active efforts at changing such relations to occur imposes greater burdens on the practices of reproducing those relations; social reproduction does not simply need to counter tendencies for relations to decay or drift over time, but active forms of challenge and resistance. Second, exploitation confers important

[28]There are some difficult (and murky) metatheoretical issues invoked by the claim that exploitation generates "antagonistic interests," and such interests in turn have a tendency to create conflict. The implication of the statement is that the hypothesized antagonism of interests is objectively given irrespective of the subjective understandings of the actors. Many people reject the idea that interests can be in any meaningful sense "objective." The relations themselves may be objectively describable, bt the interests of actors only exist as subjective meanings. In any case, the claim here is not that antagonistic interests automatically generate conflict but simply that there is a tendency for antagonistic interests to generate conflict. It is not clear that this is substantively different from saying that there is a tendency for exploitative relations to generate subjectively antagonistic interests, which in turn have a tendency to generate conflicts.

forms of power on the exploited. Since exploitation rests on the extraction of labor effort and since people always retain some measure of control over their own effort, they always confront their exploiters with at least some capacities to resist exploitation.[29] Thus, not only do we have a social relation that breeds antagonisms of interests, but the disadvantaged within these relations have inherent sources of power to resist their exploitation.

Given these features of exploitative class relations, the first fundamental sociological thesis of Marxism predicts that where capitalist class relations are stable, an array of complex institutional devices will exist to reproduce those relations. The conditional form of this prediction is important. The claim is not that capitalist class relations always will be stable, but simply that such stability, where it occurs, requires active institutional supports. Thus, there is a kind of quasifunctionalist reasoning at work here, since class systems are seen as posing significant problems of their own reproduction, problems that will tend to provoke the construction of solutions. However, there is no homeostatic assumption that effective functional solutions are always forthcoming. Indeed, one of the central concerns of a sociological Marxist exploration of the problem of social reproduction is precisely studying the ways in which social reproduction is itself challenged, undermined, contradictory.

These institutional mechanisms of social reproduction of class relations exist both in the microsettings of class relations and the macroinstitutional supports of capitalism. At the microlevel the pivotal problem is understanding the ways in which consent and coercion are articulated within everyday practices, particularly in the labor process. At the macrolevel, the central problem is the way various apparatuses—the state, the media, education—contribute to the stabilization of class structures.

Much of the theoretical and empirical work in neo-Marxism from the 1960s to the 1980s explored this issue of social reproduction. To give just a few examples: Bowles and Gintis' (1976) analysis of education analyzed the functional correspondence between schooling practices and class destinations of children. They argued that schools attended predominantly by working-class children engaged in pedagogical practices revolving around discipline and obedience, thus facilitating the future roles of these children as exploited labor within production, whereas schools for more middle-class or elite children inculcated autonomy and creativity, thus enabling them to better fulfill the roles of domination and direction of production. Schooling helps solve a problem of reproducing class relations: to enable children from different class origins to function effectively in their class destinations. Paul Willis (1977) also explores the ways in which schools constitute a context for reproducing class relations, but in his case the analysis centers on the ways in which forms of resistance contribute to the reproduction of places in the class structure. Burawoy (1979) in his work on "manufacturing consent" among factory workers argues that the organization of work together with the political regime of production generate consent to managerial domination while obscuring capitalist exploitation. Przeworski and Sprague (1986) study the way electoral rules of capitalist democracies channels working-class politics, which might potentially threaten capitalist interests, into practices that are consistent with the reproduction of capitalism, creating the conditions for a hegemonic form of rule. In each case there is a problem for the reproduction of class relations posed by the potential for resistance to capitalist exploitation and domination. The institutional solutions do not eliminate this potential altogether, but when successful they do contain that resistance within acceptable limits.

[29]It is important to note that one need not accept the normative implications of the concept of "exploitation" to recognize the salience of the problem of the "extraction of labor effort" and the ways in which this generates conflicts and capacities of resistance. This is one of the central themes in discussions of principal/agent problems in transaction costs approaches to organizations. For a discussion of class and exploitation specifically in terms of principal/agent issues, see Bowles and Gintis (1990).

The Contradictions of Capitalism Thesis

If sociological Marxism was simply a theory of the social reproduction of class relations, it could easily devolve into a variety of functionalism. Indeed, Marxist analyses often are accused (sometimes correctly) of this: treating all social institutions as functional, perhaps even optimal, for the stability of capitalism and the securing of the interests of the capitalist class. Much of the debate over the influential work of Louis Althusser (1971) on ideology and of Nicos Poulantzas (1973) on the capitalist state, for example, centered on the extent to which their arguments had an overly functionalist cast.[30]

The contradictions of capitalism thesis avoids this kind of functionalism. It argues that the social reproduction of class relations is inherently unstable and problematic, both because of the ways in which the institutions of reproduction themselves become objects of challenge and because of the ways in which capitalist development continually disrupts would-be functional solutions.

The tendency for institutions of social reproduction to erode over time also has been the subject of considerable research and theorizing. O'Connor's (1973) work on the fiscal crisis of the state argues that patterns of state spending that arise in an effort to neutralize certain crisis tendencies in capitalism and to contain class conflict are internally contradictory so that eventually they provoke a fiscal crisis that requires some sort of institutional transformation. Abraham's (1981) work on Weimar Germany argues that the adaptive strategies of different class actors taking advantages of the institutional opportunities in the Weimar Republic eventually made the creation of a stable hegemonic block capable of reproducing German capitalism impossible under the existing constitutional framework. Schwartzman's (1989) study of the First Portuguese Republic shows the disarticulating effects of the global economy, making impossible the consolidation of a united dominant class that eventually succumbs to dictatorship. Claus Offe's (1984) analysis of the "crisis of crisis management" explores how the forms of rationality developed within state institutions to handle social tensions around redistribution become dysfunctional when the state needs to intervene more deeply into production in order to stabilize the conditions for capitalist reproduction. Writers in the French Regulation School (Aglietta, 1979; Lipietz, 1987; Boyer, 1990) and the American Social Structures of Accumulation School (Gordon, Edwards & Reich, 1982; Bowles, Gordon & Weisskopf, 1990) have argued that in the immediate post-World War II period an institutional configuration called "Fordism" was consolidated that combined a specific form of state activity with a pattern of capitalist production and class compromise. This institutional arrangement facilitated a stable, sustained reproduction of conditions favorable for capitalist accumulation. The capitalist development spurred by this configuration, however, ultimately empowered workers in ways that undermined the capacity of the institutions to maintain these reproductive conditions, eventually leading to a "crisis of Fordism."

The Institutional Crisis and Renovation Thesis

The final core thesis of sociological Marxism is that the erosion of the effectiveness of institutions of social reproduction will tend to provoke episodes of institutional renovation, typically in response to situations of felt crisis. The prediction is that these institutional renovations will tend to secure the basic interests of the capitalist class, but there is no prediction that the resolution will always be optimal for capitalists and certainly not that capitalists will never be forced to make significant compromises in order to consolidate new institutions.

[30]For detailed discussions of the problem of functional explanations within Marxism, see Cohen (1978) and Elster (1985).

Some of the most interesting research in sociological Marxism centers on the problem of the process through which new institutional solutions to the problem of the social reproduction of class relations are generated. David James (1988) examines how in the aftermath of the Civil War and the destruction of slavery, the Southern planter class faced a serious problem in the reproduction of its class power. He shows how the creation of the radicalized state in the American South in the post-Reconstruction era made possible the reproduction of particularly repressive forms of labor effort extraction in sharecropping. He then demonstrates how the eventual elimination of sharecropping by the middle of the 20th century set the stage for a successful challenge to the racial state. Edwards (1979) shows how new institutional arrangements for the control of labor are created in response to the pressures generated by new technologies and changes in the labor process. Much of the research of social democracy and neocorporatism can be viewed as an analysis of how new forms of "class compromise" are institutionalized to resolve problems of class conflict and social reproduction in the face of economic crisis (Przeworski, 1985; Pontusson, 1992; Heller, 1999).

Taken together with the contradictions of capitalism thesis, the institutional crisis and renovation thesis does argue that capitalist societies are characterized by an inherent dynamic of change. In this way it is like the theory of capitalism's trajectory and destiny. But unlike the ambitious theory of history in classical Marxism, there is no claim here that the "punctuated equilibria" of institutional change is moving toward some predictable destination. What is predicted is a pattern of episodic reorganizations of capitalism and its support institutions in the face of the erosion of processes of social reproduction, but not that cumulatively these episodes have a tendency to increase the probability of socialism.[31]

TOWARD AN EMANCIPATORY THEORY OF SOCIALISM

If the theory of capitalism's destiny developed by Marx were valid, then there would be less need for an elaborate theory of socialism. If we had good reason to believe (1) that capitalism will eventually become unsustainable, (2) that as capitalism becomes less unsustainable, the institutional supports that reproduce capitalism will tend to become more fragile, (3) that as sustainability declines, the class forces opposed to capitalism will become stronger and stronger, and (4) that the class location of people within the anticapitalist forces meant that they would overwhelmingly benefit from an egalitarian and democratic reorganization of production, then it might be reasonable to suppose that through some sort of pragmatic, creative trial-and-error process some kind of viable socialism could be constructed. Where there is a will there is a way; necessity is the parent of invention. So, if the claims of the

[31]In a sense sociological Marxism is more, rather than less, like a form of "evolutionary" theory than is historical materialism (the theory of history in classical Marxism). In the theory of biological evolution there is no inherent tendency for biological history to move toward some destiny. *Homo sapiens* are not the inherent destiny of single-celled creatures 3 billion years ago. Rather, the actual trajectory of the development of species is a function of various kinds of dynamic processes combined with contingent events. Historical materialism, in predicting a general tendency for the trajectory of history to follow a particular course, thus is more like a theory of the development of an organism from embryo to adulthood than it is like evolutionary theory. For a discussion of the relationship between the logic of social change in historical materialism and evolutionary theory, see Wright, Sober, and Levine (1992).

classical Marxist theory of capitalism's destiny were true, perhaps there would be less need for a positive theory of socialism, a theory that clarified its normative foundations and institutional principles. Once we drop the optimistic predictions of historical materialism, however, there is no longer a theoretical grounding for bracketing these issues.

One option, of course, would be to continue the tradition of the Frankfurt School and other important currents of Western Marxism in which the emancipatory dimension of Marxism is developed primarily as the critique of capitalism. Socialism, then, is the idealized negation of the oppressions of capitalism.

While this may provide us with a valuable moral anchor, it will not do as a normative model of alternatives to existing institutions. We have witnessed several historical experiments of trying to build socialism in the aftermath of anticapitalist revolutions that relied heavily on moral visions combined with "where there is a will there is a way" and "necessity is the parent of invention." The problem, of course, is that what was invented with this will was not an egalitarian, democratic organization of production. If we have learned anything from the history of revolutionary struggles against capitalism it is that anticapitalism is an insufficient basis on which to construct a socialist alternative. In addition to a sociological Marxism that explores the contradictory reproduction of class relations in capitalism we therefore need a theory that illuminates the nature of the emancipatory project itself and its institutional dilemmas. The development of this emancipatory theory is one of the essential tasks for Marxism in the 21st century.

As we see it, the development of a theory of socialism would have two principle concerns. First, emancipatory Marxism must thoroughly understand the dilemmas and dynamics of the historical attempts at creating socialist relations. This concerns, above all, understanding the development and unraveling of authoritarian state socialisms since, for better or worse, these constitute the main empirical cases for attempts at putting Marxist-inspired socialist ideas into practice. Partially the purpose of such investigations is to avoid repeating the same mistakes in the future, but more fundamentally the purpose is to enrich our general understanding of the institutional requirements for feasible emancipatory alternatives.

Second, emancipatory Marxism must take more seriously the problem of theoretically elaborating institutional designs embodying emancipatory principles. This does not imply the fantasy of developing fine-grained social blueprints that could be taken off the shelf and instituted through some massive project of social engineering. Marx rightly thought that such blueprints for socialism were implausible. But it does mean elaborating much more systematically the principles that would animate the pragmatic development of real institutions. This involves both thinking through the abstract design principles for realizing particular emancipatory ideals and studying empirical cases where some of these design principles may have been put into practice. We refer to this effort as "envisioning real utopias."

Understanding State Socialism

For those who desire to bury Marxism, state socialism, especially its Soviet variety, becomes its dirge. For them, Soviet communism demonstrates the bankruptcy and totalitarian danger of Marxism. There is nothing to be learned or recovered. For those who wish to propagate Marxism, given the widespread disrepute into which it has fallen, state socialism is something to be avoided. Or at least the propaganda must be that state socialism has nothing to do with Marxist socialism. Even those who use Marxism have no use for state socialism except as a negative case, perhaps an expression of degenerate Marxism. They too want to

dissociate themselves from the deceased body. Only those who seek to build Marxism, and not all of them, are likely to do a serious postmortem and extract the lessons to be learned, the positive and the negative, in the one enduring example of socialism.

What has the history of state socialism to contribute to building an emancipatory theory of socialism? Ironically, perhaps, modifications of the three theses of classical Marxism concerning the destiny of capitalism may help us understand the trajectory of state socialism: the nonsustainability of state socialism; the intensification of antisocialist challenges, and the transition to an alternative society, in this case some form of capitalism.

State socialism involved the central redistribution of surplus, appropriated by a class of "planners" from a class of "direct producers." Its appropriation was palpable and therefore had to be legitimized in the name of the superior knowledge of the planner about the needs of the people (Konrád & Szelényi, 1979). This worked fairly effectively when the central task of state planning was mobilizing resources for basic industrialization against the backdrop of an underdeveloped agrarian economy; it encountered increasing contradictions when the central task became enhancing productivity within the industrial economy.

Central appropriation and planning led to a shortage economy in which the bottleneck was from the side of supply (Kornai, 1980, 1992). If all that was required of the economic system was simple reproduction—the allocation of given inputs to produce a given array of outputs—then central planning was quite feasible and the supply-side bottlenecks could be overcome by various institutional innovations. In and of itself, this failure in state socialism was no more pathological than the chronic problem of market failure in capitalism with its excess production, the bottleneck of demand. Just as capitalism could counter the problem of demand failures in the market through various forms of state-generated demand, state socialism could counter the supply failures of state planning through various forms of quasimarket mechanisms.[32]

Where state socialism had deeper problems, problems that it was unable to overcome, was in its dynamic properties, particularly the inability to innovate on a systematic basis. Bureaucratic competition for resources, unlike market competition, did not have the effect of generating sustained innovation. Relative to the capitalist world beyond, state socialist relations of production impeded the development of its forces of production. The result over time was deepening stagnation and increasingly problematic sustainability of state socialism.

There also seems to have been a tendency for state socialism to inspire challenges to its continuity. Because legitimacy was so central to its stability, state socialism was vulnerable to an imminent critique in which the ruling ideology that permeated the day to day practices was turned against the ruling class, the party state, for failing to realize its proclaimed ideals (Burawoy and Lukács, 1992). In other words, because under the banner of Marxism these were proclaimed to be workers' states, it was not surprising that workers would take up struggle against them in the face of their failure to live up to their ideals (Berlin, 1953; Poland and Hungary, 1956; Czechoslovakia, 1968; Poland, 1980–1981; Russian miners, 1989, 1991). In the end, the failure of state socialism was so dramatic that the ruling class lost confidence in all possible reforms, so that the only alternative was capitalism. With the discrediting of all forms of socialism and the demise of state socialism, a transition to some kind of capitalism became the "natural" solution.

Capitalism, of course, also had its crises, sometimes very deep crises, but this did not lead

[32]There is an extensive literature on the way marketlike practices—the so-called "second" or "black" economy—emerge to solve supply-side problems in state socialism. See, for example, Berliner (1957) and Lewin (1985) for the Soviet Union and Stark (1986) and Szelényi (1988) for Hungary. One of the best overall assessments of the Soviet type economy is Nove (1983).

to its collapse, because, we argue, following Gramsci, it developed an expanded state and a vibrant civil society. Robust institutions of social reproduction were elaborated that could flexibly absorb challenges and respond through a process of iterated institutional renovation. While there were clearly embryonic beginnings of and aspirations for such an institutional complex in state socialism—think of *perestroika* that aspired to a vibrant civil society, solidarity, which sought to create participatory institutions, and Hungary, which created a significant second economy—institutions of social reproduction never developed into fully fledged superstructures. These experiments never came to fruition, they never stabilized, but they held within them the seeds of a democratic socialism. In other words, centrally directed state socialism spawned a range of alternative socialisms of a democratic character that at different times captured the imagination of subordinated classes.

Perhaps if state socialism had occurred in a more benign global environment, it might have avoided the extreme forms of authoritarianism that characterized these regimes, and thus have allowed for a more vibrant and open associational life in civil society. This in turn might have created the conditions, which in the face of the failures of central planning might have generated more coherent counterhegemonic visions of socialism. Just as the internal contradictions of early capitalism led to an organized capitalism with its flanking institutions, under more propitious circumstances, state socialism might have given way to democratic socialism rather than capitalism.

The posing of a qualitative alternative to state socialism—capitalism—occurred in the context of a pervasive belief that state socialism had exhausted any capacity for renewal or development. Virtually no one believes in capitalism's immanent demise. It therefore seems unlikely that visions of radical egalitarian alternatives to capitalism will be spontaneously generated by struggles within capitalism. When capitalism runs into difficulties, the spontaneous impulse is to try to perfect it rather than dismantle it. If Marxism is to render alternatives to capitalism credible therefore it is necessary for alternatives to be given coherent and compelling theoretical force. Part of building Marxism in these conditions involves formulating "real utopias," utopias that are rooted in real practices, and embody feasible institutional designs that point beyond capitalism.

Envisioning Real Utopias

Marxists traditionally have been skeptical at best, and often sharply hostile to anything that smacked to utopian thinking. Marx criticized "utopian socialists" who thought they could build emancipatory enclaves within capitalism rather than struggle for the revolutionary transformation of capitalism itself. Yet, as we have argued, building Marxism needs to go beyond a vision of the critical negation of capitalism toward the exploration of alternative models. Such models should be "utopian" insofar as they try to embody in a serious way the central values of traditional emancipatory projects of social change—radical equality, deep democracy, caring community, individual self-realization, and freedom. But they also should be "real," insofar as what is envisioned are not fantasies or purely moral constructions, but feasible institutional designs capable of contributing to real human progress.

To flesh out this idea, let us consider in some detail one such real utopian idea: unconditional universal basic income grants. The idea of universal basic income has a long pedigree, but recently has been revived (Van der Veen & Van Parijs, 1986; Purdy, 1994; Van Parijs, 1992; Cohen & Rogers, 2000). The proposal has come under a variety of names: universal basic income, demogrant, citizen dividend. While the details may vary, the basic idea is quite

simple: Every citizen receives a monthly living stipend sufficient to live at a culturally defined respectable standard of living, say 125% of the "poverty line." The grant is unconditional on the performance of any labor or other form of contribution and it is universal—everyone receives the grant as a matter of citizenship right. Grants go to individuals, not families. Parents are the custodians of minority children's grants.

With universal basic income in place, most other redistributive transfers are eliminated—general welfare, family allowances, unemployment insurance, tax-based old age pensions—since the basic income grant is sufficient to provide everyone a decent subsistence. This means that in welfare systems that already provide generous antipoverty income support through a patchwork of specialized programs, the net increase in costs represented by universal unconditional basic income would not be extraordinary, particularly since administrative overhead costs would be so reduced (since universal basic income systems do not require significant information gathering and close monitoring of the behavior of recipients). Special needs subsidies of various sorts would continue, for example, for people with disabilities, but they are likely to be smaller than under current arrangements. Minimum wage rules would be relaxed or eliminated: there would be little need to legally prohibit below-subsistence wages if all earnings, in effect, generated discretionary income.

Universal basic income has a number of very attractive features from the point of view of radical egalitarianism. First, it significantly reduces one of the central coercive aspects of capitalism. When Marxists analyze the process of "proletarianization of labor," they emphasize the "double separation" of "free wage labor": workers are separated from the means of production, and by virtue of this are separated from the means of subsistence. The conjoining of these two separations is what forces workers to sell their labor power on a labor market in order to obtain subsistence. In this sense, proletarianized labor is fundamentally unfree. Unconditional, universal basic income breaks this identity of separations: workers remain separated from the means of production (these are still owned by capitalists), but they are no longer separated from the means of subsistence (this is provided through the redistributive basic income grant). The decision to work for a wage therefore becomes much more voluntary. Capitalism between consenting adults is much less objectionable than capitalism between employers and workers with little choice but to work for wages. By increasing the capacity of workers to refuse employment, basic income generates a much more egalitarian distribution of real freedom than ordinary capitalism.

Second, universal basic income is likely to generate greater egalitarianism within labor markets. If workers are more able to refuse employment, wages for crummy work are likely to increase relative to wages for highly enjoyable work. The wage structure in labor markets therefore will begin to more systematically reflect the relative disutility of different kinds of labor rather than simply the relative scarcity of different kinds of labor power. This in turn will generate an incentive structure for employers to seek technical innovations that eliminate unpleasant work. Technical change therefore would not simply have a labor-saving bias, but a labor-humanizing bias.

Third, universal basic income directly and massively eliminates poverty without creating the pathologies of means-tested antipoverty transfers. There is no stigmatization, since everyone gets the grant. There is no well-defined boundary between net beneficiaries and net contributors, since many people and families will freely move back and forth across this boundary over time. Thus, it is less likely that stable majority coalitions against redistribution will form once basic income has been in place for some length of time. There also are no "poverty traps" caused by threshold effects for eligibility for transfers. Everyone gets the transfers unconditionally. If you work and earn wages, the additional income is of course

taxed, but the tax rate is progressive, and thus there is no disincentive for a person to enter the labor market if they want discretionary income.

Fourth, unconditional universal basic income is one way of valorizing a range of decommodified caregiving activities that are badly provided by markets, particularly caregiving labor within families, but also caregiving labor within broader communities. While universal income by itself would not transform the gendered character of such labor, it would counteract some of the inegalitarian consequences of the fact that such unpaid labor is characteristically performed by women. In effect, universal basic income could be considered an indirect mechanism for accomplishing the objective of the "wages for housework" proposals by some feminists: recognizing that caregiving work is socially valuable and productive and deserving of financial support. The effects of basic income on democracy and community are less clear, but to the extent that basic income facilitates the expansion of unpaid, voluntary activity of all sorts, this would have the potential of enhancing democratic participation and solidarity-enhancing activities within communities.

There are, of course, significant questions about the practical feasibility of universal basic income grants. Two issues are typically raised by skeptics: the problem of labor supply and the problem of capital flight.

A universal basic income is only feasible if a sufficient number of people continue to work for wages with sufficient effort to generate the production and taxes needed to fund the universal grant. If too many people are happy to live just on the grant (either because they long to be couch potatoes and/or simply because they have such strong preferences for nonincome-generating activities over discretionary income) or if the marginal tax rates were so high as seriously dampen incentives to work, then the whole system would collapse. Let us define a "sustainable basic income grant" as a level of the grant that if it were instituted would stabley generate a sufficient labor supply to provide the necessary taxes for the grant. The highest level of such grants therefore could be called the "maximally sustainable basic income grant." The empirical question, then, is whether this maximally sustainable level is high enough to provide for the virtuous effects listed above. If the maximally sustainable grant was 25% of the poverty line, for example, then it would hardly have the effect of rendering paid labor a noncoercive, voluntary act and probably not dramatically reduce poverty. If, on the other hand, the maximally sustainable grant was 150% of the poverty level, then a universal basic income would significantly advance the egalitarian normative agenda. Whether or not this would in fact happen is, of course, a difficult-to-study empirical question and depends on the distribution of work preferences and productivity in an economy.

Apart from the labor supply problem, universal basic income also is vulnerable to the problem of capital flight. If a high universal basic income grant significantly increases the bargaining power labor, if capital bears a significant part of the tax burden for funding the grant, and if tight labor markets dramatically drive up wages and thus costs of production without commensurate rises in productivity, then it could well be the case that a universal basic income would precipitate significant disinvestment and capital flight. It is for this reason that Marxists have traditionally argued that a real and sustainable deproletarianization labor power is impossible within capitalism. In effect, the necessary condition for sustainable high-level universal basic income may be significant politically imposed constraints over capital, especially over the flow of investments. Some form of socialism then may be a requirement for a normatively attractive form of basic income. But it also may be the case that in rich, highly productive capitalism, a reasonably high basic income could be compatible with capitalist reproduction. Particularly in generous welfare states, the increased taxes for funding a basic income might not be excessive and the technological and infrastructural reasons why capital

invests in developed capitalist economies may mean that massive capital flight is unlikely. Maybe.

Universal basic income is not the full realization of the emancipatory vision of Marxism. It does not create democratic control over society's productive capacity; it does not produce radical egalitarianism; it does not eliminate domination in production; it does not eliminate capitalist exploitation, although it may render it less morally objectionable. Nevertheless, it is a feasible institutional design with many normatively attractive features that advance some of the core goals of the socialist project.

Universal basic income is only one example of a model envisioning real utopias. Other examples would include John Roemer's (1994, 1996) proposal for an institutionally feasible form of market socialism; various innovative ideas about ways of deepening democratic governance through a new articulation of the state and secondary associations (Cohen & Rogers, 1995) or through the elaboration of new forms of empowered deliberative participation of citizens in political decision making (Fung, 2001; Fung & Wright, 2001); and proposals to create egalitarian market institutions through sustained redistribution of assets (Bowles & Gintis, 1998).

All these proposals in various ways challenge the prevailing idea that there is no alternative to capitalism. If people generally believed that capitalism was inevitably doomed within their lifetimes, then this itself would undercut the notion that there was no alternative. But if this belief is dropped, then articulating alternatives is a necessary condition for putting alternatives on the historical agenda.

Envisioning real utopias, however, is meant to be more than just an ideological strategy for challenging fatalism. Because of the contradictory quality of social reproduction in capitalism, under certain political conditions, aspects of these institutional designs can potentially become part of pragmatic projects of social reform even within capitalist society. There are many possible capitalisms with many different institutional arrangements for social reproduction. One crucial issue for emancipatory Marxism is the extent to which it is possible to introduce and sustain significant aspects of emancipatory institutional arrangements in some varieties of capitalism. Although the arguments of sociological Marxism suggest that the constraints of social reproduction of class relations necessarily make any emancipatory project within capitalism difficult, this does not imply that elements of emancipatory alternatives cannot be prefigured within the contradictory reality of capitalism.[33] Envisioning real utopias thus is ultimately part of an active agenda of social change within capitalism rather than simply a vision of a destiny beyond capitalism.

In other words, a sociological Marxism is a Marxism without guarantees (Hall, 1983). It substitutes the working out of real utopias for the "end-of-capitalism" certainties of classical Marxism. At the center of sociological Marxism's agenda is the articulation and dissemination of alternatives, alternatives that already exist in embryonic form within capitalism. Sociological Marxism does not depend on inevitable laws of motion that will automatically bring forth a socialist world but instead must actively propagate real utopias that will capture a popular

[33]The idea that emancipatory principles can be prefigured within institutions in capitalism runs counter to the more functionalist versions of sociological Marxism. In the more functionalist versions, all significant, sustainable institutional innovations in capitalist society are viewed as in some sense contributing to stabilizing and securing class relations. While some institutional changes in the state, for example, may make life easier for ordinary people, these are at best palliatives that make capitalism more acceptable, and thus more stable. Reforms have the appearance of being more radical, of posing significant alternatives to capitalism, are either illusions or are quickly undermined and neutralized. If this strongly functionalist view of institutional possibilities is accepted, there is little room for emancipatory ideals to be embodied even prefiguratively in the institutions of capitalist society.

imagination. In this case building Marxism as a coherent scientific research program has to be combined with propagating Marxism, challenging capitalism's capacity to absorb or ridicule alternatives to itself, and providing the grounds for a prefigurative politics. Thus, a sociological Marxism has to be not only science but also ideology—ideology in Gramsci's sense that embeds real utopia in a concrete fantasy that will move people to collective action.[34]

CONCLUSION

We have argued in this chapter that the main theoretical ideas of Marxism can be grouped into three broad clusters: a theory of dynamics and destiny of capitalism—historical materialism; a theory of the contradictory reproduction of capitalism—sociological Marxism; and a theory of emancipatory alternatives.

Classical Marxism developed during the early phases of industrial capitalism. It brilliantly captured the historical dynamics of that period—the extraordinary power of capitalism to transform the world, to destroy preexisting class relations and forms of society, but also its inherent tendency to crisis and self-destruction. This dynamic self-destructive logic of capitalism was given theoretical coherence by historical materialism.

Sociological Marxism was present in embryonic form within classical Marxism, but only later did it become an elaborate, developed theoretical framework for understanding the new array of institutions built up around capitalism, counteracting its tendency toward self-destruction. Historical materialism and sociological Marxism complemented each other—one explaining the trajectory and ultimate destiny of capitalism and the other the impediments toward movement along that trajectory. Together they provided a grounding for Marxist-inspired political parties who saw their mission to be overcoming these impediments, particularly those embodied in the state, and thus hastening the arrival at the destiny.

So long as historical materialism was accepted, there was little need for sociological Marxism to embrace an emancipatory theory that went much beyond the critique of capitalism. If we abandon the pivotal theses of historical materialism—the nonsustainability of capitalism thesis and the intensification of class struggle thesis—then developing an emancipatory theory becomes critical for building Marxism. Sociological Marxism demands that we now pay close attention to developing alternatives to capitalism, since the end of capitalism no longer is given as an inherent tendency and the attempts at socialism have not been successful. The emancipatory theory of a reconstructed Marxism must examine state socialism for the lessons as to what should be avoided and imagination of what might have been. But even more important are developing real utopias based on real institutions of capitalism and exploring the idea that those flanking institutions themselves potentially contain seeds of alternative societies.

Sociological Marxism without emancipatory Marxism degenerates into cynical, pessimistic critiques of capitalism, ultimately encouraging passivity in the face of capitalism's enormous capacity for reproduction. Emancipatory Marxism without sociological Marxism falls into an unanchored utopianism that is ungrounded in the real contradictions of capitalism and is unable to capture the imagination of people. Only by building Marxism with a combination of the two can the apparent naturalness and inevitability of capitalism be prevented from turning all alternatives into far-fetched impossibilities.

[34]Gramsci (1971, pp. 125–126) spoke of the power of political ideology "expressed neither in the form of a cold utopia nor as learned theorizing, but rather by a creation of concrete fantasy which acts on a dispersed and shattered people to arouse and organize its collective will."

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CHAPTER 23

Weberian Theory Today

The Public Face

ALAN SICA

A protracted debate has occurred within the social sciences during the last 25 years, particularly in scholarly circles whose primary goal is the elaboration of social theory. The question at stake, "Who among the 'holy trinity' of classical theorists will most forcefully propel social analysis into the 21st century?" seems finally to be settled, at least for the foreseeable future. Marx has been consigned by most laypersons and many scholars, perhaps only temporarily, to the same "dustbin of history" he eloquently invoked when criticizing his theoretical forbears or contemporary enemies. The Marxist star was most firmly hitched, properly or not, to the political fortunes of the Soviet Union and its Eastern Bloc satellites. As they failed to construct a workable communist social order and were dragged unwillingly into the capitalist world system, the relevance of Marxist social analysis seemed, especially to the theoretically uninformed, to have disappeared as quickly as did statues of Stalin and Lenin from the streets of Moscow. Marx's uniquely astute analysis of how capitalist accumulation occurs on the corporate or global level will likely regain its pertinence during the next major economic downturn. For the inevitable price of uncontrolled global capitalism, environmentally and otherwise, will require a "rethinking" once the current so-called "boom" has exhausted itself, especially in the West, where such "booms" are politically defined for mass consumption. But for now, without a major national government using his name for the purposes of political legitimation, the kind of intellectual supremacy Marx's ideas enjoyed between the mid-1960s and late 1970s, especially in those countries where social sciences flourish, is difficult to foresee.

The case of Durkheim, of course, is entirely different, since his ideas were never overtly attached to government policies beyond the reach of French pedagogical practices. Yet it is probably fair to say that Durkheim's most general ideas have so thoroughly saturated analysis common to the social sciences that it is difficult to speak in any tongue but his, especially regarding the related phenomena of deviance, the division of labor, and religious practices. Oddly, though, even given the ubiquity of "the Durkheimian perspective" or "a Durkheimian conceptualization," his works themselves, when reread carefully, seem increas-

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