
EDITORIAL PERSPECTIVES

IN THIS ISSUE

We begin this time with a paper by William I. Robinson, a leading proponent of the view that present-day world capitalism is characterized by an increasingly *transnational* capitalist class, and by the origins of a *transnational* world state. His study of “Global Capitalist Crisis and Twenty-First Century Fascism” focuses on the implications of this general position for our understanding of the rise of new forms of fascism, and of the differences between the current neo-fascisms in Europe and the USA and their 20th-century counterparts. Robinson deploys his transnational perspective to conclude that “the current nationalist discourse among far-right groups is entirely political–ideological,

SCIENCE & SOCIETY

Science & Society is a peer-reviewed interdisciplinary journal of Marxist scholarship. It publishes original studies in political economy and the economic analysis of contemporary societies; social and political theory; philosophy and methodology of the natural and social sciences; history, labor, ethnic and women’s studies; aesthetics, literature and the arts. We especially welcome theoretical and applied research that both breaks new ground in a specific discipline, and is intelligible and useful to non-specialists.

S&S does not adhere to any particular school of contemporary Marxist discussion, and does not attempt to define precise boundaries for Marxism. It does encourage respectful attention to the entire Marxist tradition, as well as to cutting-edge tools and concepts from the present-day social science literatures.

Editorial correspondence: see “Instructions to Contributors,” inside back cover.

insofar as the programmatic content of far-right forces such as Trumpism and others seeking to win the state is decidedly not national but global.” The meat of the argument is in the details, of course, but readers will want to explore further the implications of this application of political economy to a crucial issue of our time.

In an impressive reach in a *transdisciplinary* direction, economist Julio Huato (“The Statistical Physics of a Private Ownership Society”) applies some advanced ideas from Statistical Mechanics, as well as some standard statistical concepts, developed in an intuitive, self-contained form for the non-specialist but serious reader (a core part of the S&S constituency), to make a simple but powerful point. To wit: if the distribution of wealth among the individuals making up a society *were* (note the contrary-to-fact subjunctive mood here) governed by random, unbiased forces, rising productivity would push in the direction of greater equality, and greater symmetry (less “skewness”). This, to be sure, like certain famous propositions in Marxist political economy, is a tendency, not an always-evident “law.” It implies, however, a strong version of the central Marxist claim concerning increasing contradiction between growing forces of production and existing relations of production, including relations of distribution. But to really see his point, you will have to work through the numerical examples. . .

S&S has been classically concerned with dialectics, and with the controversy surrounding Frederick Engels’ *Dialectics of Nature*, over many years. Now author Kaan Kangel returns to the topic with an erudite examination of the history of publication of Engels’ famous manuscript, the forms taken by the early–20th-century debate, and some more recent interventions related to issues stemming from modern science. Kangel takes an admirably balanced view of the controversy — neither supporting the old almost religious “defense” of “orthodoxy” as in some of the Soviet writers, nor siding with the anti-Engels crowd and their effort to confine dialectics entirely to matters of society and human consciousness. His study, while rich in historical detail, is also analytical; it probes the conceptual puzzles and contributes to the effort to bring precision and clarity to their discussion.

Finally, we present Zeyad El Nabolsy’s analysis of Aristotle’s famous defense of slavery as a natural phenomenon, in the *Politics* and elsewhere. Aristotle-on-slavery is of course well-covered ground, but here El Nabolsy specifically re-visits that ground on the basis of Marx’s concept of ideology, using for this purpose this definition: “A claim (or account) is to be regarded as ideological if and only if it is so evidently false that the only way in which we can explain why it is held is to appeal to its function in upholding the interests of the dominant group or class in the society in question.” This is in opposition to “internalist” positions within the history-of-philosophy community that deny the relevance of social context to evaluation or comprehension of philosophical ideas.

A SMALL STEP IN THE INTERNATIONAL DIRECTION

Science & Society has always been internationalist. That is elementary Marxism. And with the increasingly global reach of capital, we know we can't revisit and reaffirm that commitment too often.

It is harder, however, to become truly *international* (let alone *transnational*) in the way we actually operate. We have increasing numbers of readers and contributors in Russia, China, south and east Asia and Latin America (even a few in Africa), but we have a long way to go to become a truly inter- and trans-national project.

So it is with some pride that we announce a first step — one that readers may have noticed in *S&S* for January. Beginning there and going forward, we will be publishing translations of the article Abstracts that appear in each issue. In April 2019, which you are holding in your hands, you will find these translations on pp. 282–286. We begin with Spanish and Chinese, but may add other languages as this becomes possible. The translators — to whom we are deeply indebted — are our own Prof. Julio Huato (for Spanish), and Dr. Nana Liu (for Chinese).

Helping break down language barriers is one small thing we can do to build worldwide working-class unity, and also to enrich our own understanding and practice with the reservoirs of experience and scholarship that exist around the globe. Our hope is eventually to move beyond targeted translations to electronic publication, using the increasingly powerful translation software that is available. In the meantime, we hope readers whose first language is Spanish or Chinese, or who have some knowledge of those languages, will be able to use the translated Abstracts as aids to reading the English versions.

HELPING OUT THE COPY-EDITOR

At *S&S*, the copy-editor (singular) is — the Editor. So this is an entirely self-interested segment!

Contributors to our journal could not be expected to master completely our style and formatting requirements, especially since we have never published an *S&S Manual of Style*. But I have found that authors, many of whom know much more about word-processing procedures than I do, nevertheless

have special difficulty with one element in the formatting of References lists: that is the “hang indent” feature used for each separate item.

“Hang indent” means that the first line of each item begins flush left (flush with the left margin), but each subsequent line is indented, using the usual (default) paragraph indent. The problem is that you can’t know where those indents are to be applied, since they depend on line length, font size, and so on. So our contributors struggle with all sorts of things — setting special tabs, margin adjustments, using the tab key to indent subsequent lines manually — and all this creates mounds of work for yours truly. Fortunately, I work in WordPerfect — pardon the commercial — and the “reveal codes” feature makes it possible to delete tons of extraneous code, some of it created by authors, but much of it built in by the techies who manage the design of the commonly used word processors. (Techies do like to leave their mark on things.) But then, of course, I have to start from scratch and do all of the hang indents myself.

So. How *do* you implement the “hang indent” feature when you create your References list? I googled this for MS Word, and got the following: “It’s easier done than said. •Place your cursor at the beginning of your citation, and highlight it. •Right click your mouse. •Select Paragraph from the resulting pop up menu. •Under Indentation, use the Special pull-down menu to select hanging. •Use the By menu to select 0.5”.”

Hey, I doubt if the Corel Corp. would welcome an endorsement from S&S, but here is all you need to do in WordPerfect: Place the cursor at the beginning of the entry, and hit Ctrl-F7! That’s it.

Either way, you’ll save the copy-editor (me) some time — time that, I like to believe, can be spent adding my own few little drops to the ever-widening stream of Marxist *praxis* (theoretical practice).

MARXISM IN OUR TIME

Notes from the Editor

THE ELECTORAL ARENA AND EVOLVING CLASS STRUCTURE IN CAPITALIST SOCIETIES

In the United States, we are in between the midterm elections of 2018 and the crucial presidential election year of 2020 (but when are election years *not* “crucial”?). In Europe, as you read this, elections to the

European Parliament are imminent, and our colleagues/comrades in the Democracy in Europe 2025 movement (DiEM25) are deeply into the struggle to build real alternatives on that continent. And so it goes. Electoral cycles provide a certain rhythm to the underlying social conflict, but they also tend to replace that conflict in the popular imagination — the “parliamentary cretinism” noted by Marx and widely discussed in the early 20th century.

The popular conception of this terrain sees various contending forces — in the USA there are the left; progressive democrats; mainstream Democrats; mainstream Republicans; and the neofascist “white nationalist” alt-Right symbolized by Donald Trump — all jockeying for influence within various alliances and coalitions. Does unity against the Trump White House require joining together everything to the “left” of that monstrosity, including “principled” conservatives (as represented by the famous anonymous op-ed in *The New York Times*)? Or a coalition including, and led by, the Blue Dog Democrats, or (in New York State) the Independent Democratic Conference? Or, perhaps, centered on the progressive democrats (small “d”) of Bernie Sanders’ “Our Revolution”? The dominant Dems (Clinton, Obama, Biden, *et al.*) complain that the insurgent Dems to their left actually help the Republican side. Marxists, in contradistinction to the *policy socialism* of the Sanders–Warren–Perez left wing in the Democratic Party, advocate *systemic* or *revolutionary socialism* — a distinction that does not require further elaboration here. Some people on the left, however, see *all* efforts at coalition with more moderate forces as self-defeating. These efforts, they insist, inevitably lead to co-optation: movements to transform society in the interests of the working class are submerged within a reformist swamp that leads nowhere. Marxism — the central concern of this journal — should be able to provide a foundation for these seemingly endless debates on the broad left, a framework to transcend the apparently arbitrary and non-convergent swirl of positions governed by the mood and circumstances of the moment. This framework should hold, even if it does not produce simple or formulaic answers to the question of how to act within the political terrain of advanced capitalist societies.

Marx addressed the general issue of the political–electoral stance of the left in March 1850, in his “Address of Central Authority to the [Communist] League,” with these famous and oft-quoted words:

. . . the proletariat must take care . . . that workers’ candidates are nominated everywhere in opposition to bourgeois–democratic candidates. . . . Even where there is no prospect of achieving their election the workers must put up their own candidates to preserve their independence, to gauge their own strength and to bring their revolutionary position and party standpoint to public attention. They must not be led astray

by the empty phrases of the democrats, who will maintain that the workers' candidates will split the democratic party and offer the forces of reaction the chance of victory.¹

This is a clear pronouncement *both* in favor of electoral participation, *and* against what many nowadays might call “lesser-evilism”: support for (small-d) democrats and reformers, in order to exclude or minimize the power of reactionary forces.

As always, however, both materialist foundations and the dialectic dictate that texts be read in historical context. The “Address” was Marx’s recommendation to the League *in 1850*, when Europe was in a period of retrenchment following the popular uprisings of two years earlier. It refers to the state of development of, and the nature of the social classes and political process within, the capitalist social formations of that time. Here — this is the argument of this essay, within the much wider set of issues touched upon in it — is one of the links to *political economy*, an absolutely necessary element in the uniquely Marxist contribution to the theory of politics.

A clue is provided in another passage from Marx’s 1850 Address:

... the workers, and above all the League, must work for the creation of an independent organization of the workers’ party, *both secret and open*, and alongside the official democrats, and the League must aim to make every one of its communes a center and nucleus of workers’ associations in which the position and interests of the proletariat can be discussed free from bourgeois influence. (Emphasis added.)

Marx is here intervening in an ongoing debate between proponents of open, public activity and those who insisted on secret, or underground, organization. Characteristically, he insists on combining the two forms, rather than counterposing them and opting for one over the other. There is also the reference to the League’s “communes,” as “center and nucleus of workers’ associations,” suggesting rich and deeply social structures for independent workers’ action (education, social support and protection, and the like).

Two things leap out: first, the fact that the post-monarchic, post-absolutist capitalist democracies within which the communists at that time were working were extremely fragile. The “reactionary party” was still powerful, by no means removed from the political stage. The bourgeoisie was still battling for supremacy, and its hegemony over the structures of civil society and their ideological counterparts was still weak, even non-existent; democrats, not to speak of working-class revolutionaries, continued to operate in a climate of police

1 Taken from <https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1847/communist-league/1850-ad1.htm>. The same passage was quoted, in a different context, in “Political Economy and Electoral Politics: Some Exploratory Questions” (Editorial Perspectives), S&S, January 2014.

repression that required secret organization. In other words: the conditions for open political action, for the “democratic breakthrough,”² were still to be won.

But more to the present point: the political stage was dominated by “parties” that more-or-less reflected the actually existing disposition of class forces. These forces, moreover, at what from the standpoint of the present was a relatively early stage of capitalist evolution, were numerous. There was a range of “interests”: first, the monarchist and aristocratic forces, and certain strata that clung to them, constituting the reactionary element; then, peasants (smallholders), merchants (the liberal bourgeoisie), Christian Democrats (a stratum representing the church), petty-bourgeois democrats, and, of course, the working class (which was either a significant minority or a tiny minority of the population). In sum, the range of forces represented in the new national assemblies, or parliaments, more-or-less corresponded to the existing range of class positions in the early capitalist societies of the period, and this range had not yet been subjected to the simplification and clarification brought about by capitalist accumulation — the polarization tendency to which Marx and Engels drew attention in the *Communist Manifesto*. This was the situation within which Marx urged the workers to run for office, to “gauge their own strength,” to “preserve their independence,” etc.

Now fast-forward 150 or so years. The reactionary classes are gone. The peasants are gone. The petty bourgeoisie — the class of small business owners, artisans, and family farmers — is, if not gone, then greatly reduced in numerical weight within the population.³ The church — in some countries the Catholic Church, in others a range of Christian denominations, with Jewish, Muslim, Sikh and other religions also present — is no longer a separate social stratum, with landholdings, economic power and identity separate from the main social classes. *The working class is the vast majority* — the “99 per cent.” Finally, the bourgeoisie, or, to use the more modern term, the capitalist class, is, in “population” terms, a tiny minority, the “one percent” in the Occupy lexicon. But in fact, it becomes ever more clear that the ruling class should not now even be thought of as a percentage of the population, but rather in more structural terms, as embodied in the ruling institutions, and involving individuals “in so far as they personify” (Marx) the roles, interests and powers of those institutions.

In short, *the polarization of the class structure and universalization of the proletarian condition*, so presciently predicted by Marx and Engels, has transformed

2 As described and documented by August Nimtz, “Marx and Engels — The Unsung Heroes of the Democratic Breakthrough,” *Science & Society*, Summer 1999, 203–231.

3 The class of autonomous professionals, the so-called “new middle class,” is of course still around (lawyers, doctors, middle managers, consultants, etc.), but it is increasingly subject to erosion of its economic independence and transformation into a highly educated “precariat.” This is, of course, a huge topic, and will not be pursued further here.

the political terrain, and changed the terms in which Marxist theory must approach the question of political action in general, and electoral action in particular. In the United States, to take that country as our example for the moment, the major parties — Republicans and Democrats — do not represent different classes. Neither of them could exist for a moment without an overwhelmingly working-class base. And both of them are controlled by the capitalist ruling class at the top, although at the base they function differently with respect to their mass memberships, in line with the differences in political lines that are dominant within them.

This transformation in the nature of the capitalist political economy, from Marx's time to our own, must, I submit, be central to our thinking about the nature of the electoral institutions and of revolutionary participation in those institutions. The single most important feature of this transformation is the evolution of the electoral bodies themselves, from *parliaments* to *legislatures*. "Parliaments," in this sense, are (as the term implies) spaces for talking, carved out of the absolute monarchies of the late middle ages by the emerging forces of modern market-based economic life. The national assemblies which Marx urged workers to join in 1850; the Duma in Russia, 1905–1917; the British Parliaments of the 16th–18th centuries — all of these were *parliaments*, in the terms suggested here. The British Parliament today, the United States Congress, and similar bodies in other advanced capitalist countries — these are *legislatures*. Legislatures are qualitatively more integrated into the social economy, not least as a result of the emergence of (what used to be called) state-monopoly capitalism, or the Keynesian apparatuses of late capitalism. Most crucially, the political process is populated almost entirely by the working class at the base; and by functionaries organically tied to the capitalist ruling class at the top.⁴ Remaining divisions within the working class continue to be important, but they are only weakly correlated with political positions (liberal, conservative, *e.g.*). *The stability of capitalist power thus depends almost entirely on significant ideological control — hegemony — over a mass of voters whose objective interests are revolutionary.*

The full implications of this remain to be explored, and this essay has reached its length limit. But would it be too much to suggest that it now becomes a matter of the working class not merely "gauging its forces" — the phrase suggests that the actual forces are to be deployed elsewhere — but rather of *exercising* its forces, both within the electoral arena and beyond it: beginning to assert its power to shape the path of social change, both incrementally, and with eventual consequences for qualitative and revolutionary transformation?

D. L.

4 Perhaps increasingly by members of the wealthy social classes and financial elites themselves, in what appears to be a noteworthy political process of disintermediation.