EDITORIAL PERSPECTIVES

IN THIS ISSUE

Part of the Marxist enterprise will always be the continuing study of Marx. Questions such as “Why Did Marx’s *Capital* Remain Unfinished?”, as posed by Ludo Cuyvers, are not merely of historical interest; they help us to grasp the implications of the fact that the book was not finished by Marx. This is to say: by examining those questions, incompletenesses, contradictions, etc., we are acquiring Marx’s bequest to us, and finding the ways to carry his work forward. After carefully collecting all of the possible types of answers to his question, Cuyvers finally notes that it may not be possible to choose among

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**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.
them. Personal circumstances are part of it, as are Marx’s incomplete efforts to grapple with some key theoretical problems. But to the extent that Marx’s preoccupation, after 1867, with literatures in biology, ethnography, languages, mathematics, and much else distracted him from completing his own opus magnum, this is only an indication of the vastness and interconnectedness of the project, whose unfinished state is not a failing but rather an essential feature of the reality to which it is addressed.

When authors Maxi Nieto and Juan Pablo Mateo submitted their polemic against Austrian (“free market”) views of socialism (“Dynamic Efficiency in a Planned Economy”), we naturally asked them if we could hold it for our Special Issue on “(En)Visioning Socialism” (see the Call for Papers, below). They of course opted not to wait that long. Their critique of Hayek, von Mises, et al. introduces a useful insight: to the extent that “free market” thinking faults socialist planning for not achieving precisely the “business function” that defines the “free market,” the argument is circular. Beyond that, however, Nieto and Mateo provide useful outlines of institutional pathways that transcend market forms and show how social ownership can incorporate forms of decentralized planning and participation. Their work thus fits in nicely with the continuing “envisioning socialism” project, of which our special issues are merely moments.

Philosopher Charles Mills, over a period of many years, has elaborated a theory of Black radicalism, drawing on Marx but also using a race-based approach, as opposed to historical materialism which starts from class and social structures based on class. Now Gregory Slack, in his study “From Class to Race and Back Again: A Critique of Charles Mills’ Black Radical Liberalism,” takes up this matter in detail. Slack’s treatment of Mills’ argument is forceful, but recuperative, an excellent example of dialectical criticism. Mills, in fact, in rejecting Marx, turns toward liberalism as a general framework. Slack asks: “It might be true, as Mills contends, that Marxism . . . needs to be supplemented by ideas from the liberal tradition . . . but surely not at the price of abandoning the revolutionary critique of capitalism?”

Todd Gordon and Jeffery R. Webber (“Complex Stratification in the World System: Capitalist Totality and Geopolitical Fragmentation”) begin with a thorough and useful survey of recent Marxist writing on the geopolitics of the capitalist system in recent decades. They examine the “empire” approach of Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, the “transnational capitalist class” position best exemplified by William I. Robinson, the state-centric theory of Leo Panitch and Sam Gindin, and the “dual logics” position of Giovanni Arrighi and Alex Callinicos. Arguing that none of these views is entirely adequate, Gordon and Webber propose a notion of a “complexly stratified world system,” which captures the entirety of the system of contemporary imperialism, and examine its implications for analysis and policy.
We are pleased to present a Communication from Beijing scholar Nana Liu, “The New Left in China and Its Implications: A Reflection.” Liu describes an entire literature, and political development, with expressions both within and outside of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), that can be described as a “New Left,” and indeed is so conceived by some of its leading participants. The key point is that these thinkers reject both capitulation to capitalist trends in income distribution and property rights, and what might be thought of as “traditional” positions, supporting high degrees of centralism and CCP political control. While extolling this general perspective, Liu is also sensitive to the faults and limitations of the New Left, and asks whether there is any hope that these may be overcome in the near future.

Finally, we offer left historian Paul Buhle’s extended review of a recent book by Anthony Carew, *American Labour’s Cold War Abroad*. Both author and reviewer provide detailed surveys of the extent to which the official trade union leadership in the United States, during the Cold War, played a key role in promoting the objectives of U. S. imperialism around the world. Far from merely taking a conservative position in labor negotiations, and purging the domestic unions of Communists and other left forces, the AFL-CIO officialdom played an active role in destroying left movements in Europe, Asia, Latin America and Africa, in many countries where the working class was much stronger than in the USA and where, therefore, representatives of U. S. “labor” were needed to operate in theaters in which the CIA and its offshoots could not act directly.

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**CALL FOR PAPERS**

**SPECIAL ISSUE**

(En)Visioning Socialism IV: Raising the Future in Our Imagination Before Raising It in Reality

“... the difference between the worst of architects and the best of bees is this, that the architect raises his structure in his imagination before he raises it in reality.”

— Marx, *Capital*, I, ch. vii

*Science & Society* has produced, so far, three Special Issues on envisioning, or building, or designing socialism — at exact ten-year intervals: Spring, 1992; Spring, 2002; and April, 2012. For the most part, the contributors to all three issues, while differing among themselves on many points, share one thing
in common: The radical — socialist/communist — alternative to capitalism must be envisioned. Moreover, this can be done with due regard for the scientific moment in Marxism and the need to avoid utopian speculation and idealist constructivism. The long rise to power of the working class — the experience of collective struggle, and the vast practice of labor, which is the embodiment of purposeful creation — combines with the vast experiences of the 20th century (both positive and negative) to suggest that the core elements of the socialist system can be outlined; socialist values must therefore be embodied in real projections, and not merely imagined, or desired.

Now we announce Special Issue No. 4, to appear — you guessed it! — in April, 2022.

Socialism has been presented in numerous places as a set of democratic, egalitarian and humanist values. The increasing presence of these values in political discourse, as in the current surge of interest in democratic socialism in the United States, is noted, and welcome. Nevertheless, in the Marxist tradition we must go farther: we must actually describe how socialism as a system can work. The Thatcherite buzzphrase “There Is No Alternative” must be countered directly. We must answer the question, when it is put to us by skeptics: concretely, what would you socialists do differently? If you actually replace the capitalist class (after taming that class, to whatever degree possible), what would you put in its place? (Just saying “the working class in power” doesn’t cut it!) How might production, management, incentives and income be organized? How would decisions be made, in both the short term and for the future? How could actual systems and structures be developed that address the conflicts and constraints, the ecological challenge, the population challenge, the need to transcend racist, misogynist and nationalist divisions? And how might any of this turn out to be decidedly different from what capitalism achieves currently, given the greatest popular pressure we can bring to bear to counteract its worst impacts? Despite what defenders of capitalism (and some “market socialists”) may believe, our premise is that we are not bound to a rigid either/or choice: between naive, speculative “castles in the air,” utopian blueprints, “recipes for the cookshops of the future” (Marx), on one hand; and simply “muddling through” with eclectic and partial fixes to the existing order, on the other.

The three preceding Special Issues brought together some of the most important models of a post-capitalist, and for the most part post-market, system. All of these involve participatory planning, and outline ways to combine a vibrant democracy of an educated and critical citizenry with the considerable complexities of modern production and social life. The need is nothing less than to put teeth into the evocative but vague slogans of classical Marxism: the “commonwealth of toil,” the “community of the associated producers,” the “free development of each as the condition for the free development of
all.” The apostles of the capitalist present fear nothing more than the threat of this vision becoming operational, an effective guide to action!

Much has changed in the ten years since the last Special Issue. A whole new political generation is making itself felt. To preserve the continuity of our project, we expect that some of the older contributors will update and renew their visions, and set a framework. At the same time, we urge new contributors to come forward and offer different perspectives, on planning, micro-level control and interaction, modern IT-based systems for both coordination and autonomy, new ways to think about labor and creativity, the use of high-tech to promote both sustainability and human fulfillment, and much else that we no doubt have not yet been able to imagine. A hundred flowers can, and will, bloom. Our one unifying request is that prospective participants in this project embrace our call to go beyond the general affirmation of socialist values to address the matter of actual/structural/institutional properties — even if only as broad models and not arbitrary elaboration of details.

Work can be submitted in the usual S&S formats: articles, up to 10,000 words; communications and review articles, 3–4,000 words.

The rough time frame (deadlines) are as follows:

- Proposals: July 15, 2020
- Papers, first drafts: January 15, 2021
- Papers, final drafts: July 15, 2021

All communications should go to both of the Guest Co-Editors of the issue:
- Al Campbell (al@economics.utah.edu)
- David Laibman (dlaibman@scienceandsociety.com)

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MARXISM IN OUR TIME

*Notes from the Editor*

**ELEPHANTS IN ROOMS: STRATEGIC INVISIBILITIES IN TWO PRESENT-DAY CONJUNCTURES**

When there is a huge element — a presence — in a given reality, which observers either don’t or can’t acknowledge and which plays a major role in setting the context for evaluation of details, we call it “the elephant in the room.” Its elephantine nature is in fact a core aspect of objective social (and natural) reality. Captured in Marxist epistemological thought with a deep connection to Hegel, these are essential properties of things that do
not reveal themselves immediately to the senses, or to practice, but must be unearthed via processing of appearances. The elephant is often the deep structure, which is missed not only because of the inherent opacity of its relation to its outward manifestations, but also, in the social context, because its invisibility is functional for ruling classes and their hegemonic needs. Marxist theoretical practice is therefore largely about bringing the elephant to the surface, or, in other words, revealing the systemic nature of a problem, whose specifics are being tackled by the progressive political community with which we are allied.

The two cases-in-point addressed in this essay are: first, discussions currently under way in Russia about the sub-optimal performance of the Russian economy, and the way forward for it; second, the intensifying political debate on the left in the United States, as we move into a presidential election year.

Along with other scholars and observers from a number of countries, I traveled to Moscow to participate in the Moscow Academic Economic Forum (MAEF), held May 15–16 last year. The MAEF, successor to the Moscow Economic Forum and St. Petersburg Economic Congress, was a huge gathering, mainly of Russian social scientists and their colleagues from a number of former Soviet countries. Plenary sessions were held at the Russian Academy of Sciences, in a hall that must have no rival for comfort, simultaneous translation, visual aids, and so on. Plus, of course — a huge elephant.

The central concern of the delegates to this conference (as with its predecessors) was — Russia; specifically, why Russia has not taken its place among leading countries in growth rates, innovation, market leadership, etc. One might say, tongue-in-cheek, that the theme was: Make Russia Great Again (although in a much more subtle and less openly chauvinist manner than appears in present-day U. S. presidential discourse). Speaker after speaker bemoaned the facts: Russia’s growth rates lag behind, “we” don’t invest, “we” don’t support innovation and entrepreneurship, “we” don’t take leading positions in the IT revolution — and this despite the presence of all of the prerequisites: a highly literate and well-educated population, and well-developed electric power, IT and transport infrastructures. Proposals abound: improve industrial organization (there is much talk about “clusters,”¹ or supra-firm structures to achieve economies of scale); develop a vibrant state-financed investment program; remove this or that deficiency in investment and financial policy. Here are some random paper titles: “Inequality and Poverty in Russia: Failures of State Policy”; “Creation of Agglomerations

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¹ Curiously repeating a massive literature from the Soviet 1970s, concerning reforms to create what were then called “Industrial Associations”: bodies intermediate between enterprises and planning agencies, which could presumably improve efficiency and prevent duplication of resources and effort among the enterprises that constituted them. Characteristically, there appear to be no current references to this earlier experience; see below.
as a Factor of Socio-Economic Inclusive Development of Rural Territories”;
“Global Transformations of World Economy: What Should Russia Expect?”
This should give the reader a sense of the proceedings.

There is, clearly, an elephant. To reveal it, all we need to do is state a key historical materialist principle: the principle of continuity. “Men make their own history, but in circumstances . . . [etc.]” It is that simple: to get from A to B, you need to start at A. What is A, in this case? The Soviet Union.

In the two days of the MAEF, I don’t recall hearing a single reference to the USSR, nor have I found one in the documents from the conference available to me.

The point is really quite simple. The economic resurgence that the conference participants so urgently and sincerely desire can only be a democratic resurgence. This therefore can only be achieved by mobilizing Russia’s working population, and that in turn can only be done by calling on the participatory institutions that were the foundation of the Soviet economy: the trade unions, the standing production conferences, enterprise-level, regional and higher planning bodies, the various safety and health inspection commissions, Party committees and Komsomol (Young Communist League) committees (obviously, their counterparts, as redefined for present political circumstances), the intra-enterprise and territorial–political local commissions, the team (or brigade) leaderships. This vast participatory system is in Russia’s muscle memory. Formed during the USSR’s rise to world prominence, it is the latent but inevitable starting-point for any new departure. As it had developed through the mid-1980s in the USSR, it was, of course, mixed in character: possessing many unique and positive features that presage the age-old vision of the “associated producers” in power, and yet beset by the well-known negatives as well: bureaucratism, privilege, corruption, over-organization, duplication of functions, and much else. The point is not to re-open the debate here about the balance among all of these elements; that clearly must be done. The governing issue, however, is more basic. The road, for Russia, to a dynamic economy in the present must invoke the Soviet experience as starting point.

And it is precisely this that cannot be done, without mounting a direct challenge to the proto-capitalist oligarchic class interest that rules in Russia today. The road from the system of planning and management that evolved in the USSR to whatever the future of Russia (and associated countries) may hold cannot be embarked upon without overturning the massive private

2 There is the deeper issue of the relation of the downsides in the economic system to the repressive distortion of Soviet life rooted in the Stalin era, and the ways in which the incomplete coming-to-terms with that history during the later Soviet years has affected the current capacity to address the Soviet point of departure for Russia going forward.
accumulations of power and wealth that replaced it. The elephant in this case, then, turns out to have two trunks! One is the Soviet Union; the other is Vladimir Putin and the forces he represents. Again, neither of these was mentioned anywhere, to my knowledge, in the discourse at the MAEF. Together, in opposite ways, they embody the system that, I argue, simply must be grasped if all of the perceived elements that populated the various papers and lectures at the conference are to become meaningful objects of study, and the policies related to them are to become effective.

In other words: the elephant in the room.

Turning to our second case, we have the U. S. election-year debate, centering on the effort to defeat the neo-fascist alt-right and build a progressive path for the country. This means rejecting both Donald Trump’s nationalist, racist, misogynist and anti-science juggernaut, on the one hand; and the Democratic Party leadership’s shamefaced neoliberalism and capitulation to imperialism in foreign policy, on the other. The calls for a Green New Deal (GND), for an economy that “works for” everyone “and not just the billionaire class,” for fully supported higher education, Medicare for All, a national $15/hour minimum wage, etc., pretty much capture what Bernie Sanders means by “democratic socialism.” Is there anything in this program that Marxists would oppose? Suppose we add a bit more related to the workplace: worker representation on corporate boards, for example. While this in total is a program that anyone concerned with the general welfare of the working class will surely support, Marxists have historically held out for more.

But what? The millions of people supporting Sanders’ OurRevolution, and similar activist organizations headed by other candidates, plus the many non-electoral movements, may well ask us (and they should!): “Other than calling for revolution — and whether the road to social change must move beyond the electoral arena, or must involve civil war and organized armed struggle, is surely not entirely up to us — what does your socialism mean, if not the (incomplete) list of goals and policies summarized above? If you insist that our socialism is ‘ameliorative’ (concerned with effects), whereas your Marxist socialism is ‘systemic,’ then we would still like to know what actual difference that makes.”

3 This wealth, of course, was built up over the years of Soviet economic development, and represents a clear case of accumulation by theft, in what David Kotz, with tongue in cheek, called the “necrophagous mode of production” (David Kotz, “Is Russia Becoming Capitalist?”, Science & Society, Summer 2001, p. 173).

4 The Sanders and Warren campaigns have begun to address this area. See, for example, http://nymag.com/intelligencer/2019/05/berniesandersgetspragmaticbygettingmoresocialist.html; https://hbr.org/2018/08/worker-representation-on-boards-wont-work-without-trust
Part of the answer, which will not be explored here, is the existence of an integral, operational vision of socialism as an economic system (“economic,” in a broad sense of that term): what exactly do systemic socialists propose as an alternative to capitalist relations of production and distribution? But for the present I want to argue that a systemic socialist vision also implies an underlying understanding of *capitalism* as a system; moreover, that capitalism in that sense is more than merely the accumulation of undesirable realities that are addressed in the evolving Sanders-Warren-AOC programs.

In a nutshell: When working people are given access to real medical care, education, jobs, wages above poverty, gains against racist and sexist oppression, genuine security in old age, and avenues toward participation in social and economic decision-making, the quality of their lives is improved; but, beyond that, *they are empowered*. Serious change in the direction of a GND, for example, is good for people and the planet, but bad for the balance of class power on which capitalist society rests. It is not just about desirable “reforms,” or “how to pay for them.” It is about changing the balance of class forces, and while capitalist power is in place that change can only result in increased tension and attacks.

Mitch McConnell recently taunted Bernie Sanders: “His program would do to the United States what Maduro’s did for Venezuela.” The attack against the people of Venezuela, of course, has been carried out not by Nicolás Maduro, but by the U. S. government and its international and local allies; McConnell is simply threatening to do to us what he did to Venezuela, should we follow the Venezuelan people’s example and get out of line! The point is that, in the short run, realistically speaking, this threat can most likely be carried out. So we have to be in favor of the *ameliorative* socialist program — the Green New Deal — *knowing* that this massive attack against us will occur. What *systemic* socialism can do, in addition to building the vision of the alternative, is to make clear the interconnectedness of all of the movements, reforms, programs, and so on, and their unavoidable need to ultimately press beyond themselves to a political posing of the deeper questions regarding the nature of capitalist power as such.

The elephant in *this* room, then, is — capitalism! Can *this* system of property/power/production relations tolerate meaningful change in priorities, at the expense of the billionaire class? Or will we be forced, eventually, to press on toward eliminating the billionaire class from our social life altogether? In which case, who and what will replace it? These are the truly revolutionary questions.

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5 Once more (and for the last time!) I refer to the Call for Papers for a special issue on “*(En)* Visioning Socialism,” just above.
Some will say: “Surely, these questions are for later. Shouldn’t we get behind the GND now, and worry about what we need to do next when that time comes?” The Marxist/systemic socialist answer — if we can clinch it — must show that we need the long-term (revolutionary) vision in order to be most effective in taking the steps that are right in front of us.6

That answer, however, needs to be carefully elaborated; it is a work in progress.

D. L.

6 Some of my S&S comrades say that Marx, Engels and Lenin figured all this out a long time ago; we should read them. I certainly agree that we should continue to study the classical revolutionaries! But I also think we need to work it out afresh, drawing on the classics, and all of the subsequent contributions, wherever we can.