EDITORIAL PERSPECTIVES

IN THIS ISSUE

David M. Kutzik and Douglas V. Porpora (“Critical Realism and the Varieties of Materialism”) re-visit old philosophical issues, but they do so in the context of recent rigorous work on the ontological foundations of science — the Critical Realism of Roy Bhaskar, the “new materialisms” of Diana Cooke and Samantha Frost, and the Biosemiotic Realism of Jesper Hoffmeyer and others. S&S readers may find the cross-interrogation between these new developments and older Marxist debates particularly illuminating. Kutzik and Porpora seek to “reclaim the themes of pre–poststructuralist materialisms, i.e.,

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.
materialisms that give the theoretical basis for effective critique and analysis of the actual material conditions driving the rising tide of political struggles in the real world outside of the academy.” This is, then, high theory in the service of transformations in a wider social and natural reality.

S&S has been at the forefront of serious Marxist and Marxist–feminist interrogation of the position of women, in capitalist society and more generally. Now Elena Louisa Lange, of the University of Zurich, offers a critique of various well-known writers in this field (“Gendercraft: Marxism–Feminism, Reproduction, and the Blind Spot of Money”), asking us to begin from carefully developed starting points in Marxist political economy. Only this, she argues, will enable Marxist–feminist theory to progress beyond dual-systems approaches and their remnants; to link struggles against oppression of women to the core realities of the capitalist wage relation, and connect them firmly to anti-capitalist resistance in general.

Arpad Kovacs’ “Cosmography as Cultural Capital: Power Struggle in the Visigothic Kingdom” is an erudite bringing-together of topics from the 6th–7th century CE: cosmography (the early science of planetary movements), religious ideology, class, and class division in the post–Roman Empire social formation in Spain. The “cultural capital” concept from the work of Pierre Bourdieu is used to disentangle the conflict between old and new (Visigothic) elites, and the ways in which this played out in the cosmographic speculations of bishop Isidore of Seville. Dialectical categories help reveal ways in which cultural capital, including visions of planetary cycles, promoted the status of the ruling Hispano-Roman aristocracy.

Much has been written recently about the rise of China as a world power, and about conflict between China and the United States on the world stage. David Chen’s study, “Rethinking Globalization and the Transnational Capitalist Class,” places this discussion on firm theoretical terrain. Chen examines critically the transnational capitalist class (TCC) view of William I. Robinson, Leslie Sklair and others, and finds that the Sino–U. S. conflict is better understood within the framework of the view of global capitalism advanced by William Carroll, based on corporate network research. The TCC in this view appears rather fragile, and gives way to one in which interlocks among firms are more regional and national in nature than truly global. This, in turn, greatly affects the way in which the Sino–U. S. conflict appears, and is likely to play out.

This issue contains two Communications. First, we are pleased to present Paul Blackledge’s “Response to Nimtz: Strategy, Tactics and Real Movements from Below.” This is a reply to the Communication from August Nimtz (S&S, July 2020), in which Nimtz addresses two “Editorial Perspectives” pieces by David Laibman (April, 2019; July, 2019) on Marxism and electoral politics, as well as Blackledge’s article-length critique of Nimtz’s Lenin’s Electoral Strategy (July, 2019). Laibman’s rejoinder to Nimtz also appeared in S&S, July 2020.
We leave it to the reader to disentangle all of the threads of this discussion, and also invite further contributions to an old but obviously still vital and evolving debate. Second, Alexis Ioannides and Stavros Mavroudeas write on “Work Intensity and Value Formation: Comments on Hernández and Deytha.” A. Sebastián Hernández and Alan Deytha published their proposal for a neat formalization and clarification (April, 2020) of Ioannides and Mavroudeas’ work on this topic, in S&S, January 2010. The gist of the matter is that Marxists (including Marx) had failed to explore fully the role of work intensity (as opposed to simple hours of work performed) in value formation, and this dimension must be added to the core principles of value theory. In this case (and unusually, in our experience) the two sets of authors are in substantial agreement, a sign that collaborative research leading to unified understandings rather than fragmentation and “speciation” is indeed possible!

Finally, Alan Wald’s review article on Milton A. Cohen’s *The Pull of Politics* examines the book author’s treatment of his three subjects, Communist Party–affiliated writers John Steinbeck, Richard Wright and Ernest Hemingway. All of them rank among the leading novelists of the U. S. 20th century, and were deeply involved in CPUSA and left politics during the 1930s and 40s. They left the CP eventually (although following rather different paths). Wald, with his customary incisive insight and grasp of historical detail, cuts through the standard anti-Communist formulas: the three novelists, “for highly diverse reasons, maintained for years after 1939 some significant degree of loyalty to what they had known and lived through on the left. Whatever the idiosyncrasies of their politics — and Cohen correctly notes many — they experienced an elective affinity with the overall Communist project of fighting for a better world.”

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**CALL FOR PAPERS**

**THE 100TH ANNIVERSARY OF GEORG LUKÁCS’**

**HISTORY AND CLASS CONSCIOUSNESS**

Georg Lukács ranked among the most eminent, influential, and prolific philosophers of the 20th century. He advanced Marxist thought in works such as *History and Class Consciousness*, *The Young Hegel* and the *Ontology of Social Being*. His many books, written in German and Hungarian, have been translated into dozens of languages. The impact of his ideas continues to be felt on every continent.

*History and Class Consciousness*, perhaps his most famous book, was originally published in a very small print run in Vienna in 1923. It was almost immediately attacked and rejected both by social democrats and by leading
figures in the Communist International, while being largely ignored by the right. Despite this, the book proved very influential throughout the 20th century, among both Marxists and non-Marxists. In addition to its massively influential and seminal concept of reification, *History and Class Consciousness* (HCC) advanced one of the most profound theoretical discussions of class consciousness and the dialectics of revolutionary transformation in the Marxist tradition.

In order to mark the 100th anniversary of the publication of HCC, *Science & Society* will publish a Symposium on the book in 2023. We invite full-length articles, which may be a maximum of 8,000 words in length. We also encourage shorter contributions, up to 2,000 words in length. Aspects explored may include the contribution to Marxist theory of HCC, its place in Lukács’ work as a whole, and its contemporary relevance: in what ways does HCC still speak to the needs and aspirations of progressive and revolutionary movements and theoreticians in the 21st century? Does it still offer viable pathways for thinking through the dialectics of revolution or has it become an object of merely historical interest? What lessons can we draw today from the book?

Contributors from every school of Marxist thought are invited to submit abstracts of possible contributions to the editor of the Symposium, Paul Leduc Browne (paul.leducbrowne@uqo.ca).

The timelines of the Symposium are as follows:
- Abstracts of possible contributions must be received by the Symposium’s editor by February 28, 2021
- First drafts of contributions must be received by September 30, 2021
- Final drafts of contributions must be received by June 30, 2022
- The Symposium will be published in *Science & Society* in 2023

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**MARXISM IN OUR TIME**

*Notes from the Editor*

**THE MARKET, THE STATE, RACIST POLICE REPRESSION: A DIALECTICAL ESCAPE FROM RIGID BINARIES**

Tucked away in a remarkable collection of short stories by Graham Greene (*21 Stories*, Vintage, 1954) is a gem called “Proof Positive.”¹ A speaker at a

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¹ Spoiler alert! Skip this paragraph, and the next, if you wish to experience the story *de novo*. “Proof Positive” is only four pages long.
meeting of the London Psychical Society, a Mr. Weaver, is proclaiming, with increasing fury and incoherence, that the spirit lives on eternally after the death of the body. “I’ll give you,” he said, speaking with increasing difficulty, “proof pos . . .” He finally swoons, and falls backward, unconscious. A doctor is summoned. The doctor examines him, and whispers: “The man must have been dead a week!” The story concludes:

What the Colonel [chairing the meeting] thought of most was Weaver’s claim — “proof positive” — proof, he had probably meant, that the spirit outlived the body, that it tasted eternity. But all he had certainly revealed was how, without the body’s aid, the spirit in seven days decayed into whispered nonsense.

The shock value here is to disrupt the speaker’s — and, let it be said, the reader’s — binary presumption: that there are only two possible truth values. Either the spirit lives on eternally, or it does not survive the death of the body at all. The latter is indeed the choice that is consistent with philosophical materialism (if, indeed, the concept of “spirit” can be admitted in the first place). The only point here is that the author has expanded our sensibilities by asking us to at least imagine the tongue-in-cheek possibility of a third alternative, one that breaks the simple either–or binary.

Now binary oppositions are clearly central to dialectical understanding. One need think only of the elemental and ineluctable opposition between exploiting and exploited social classes. But if the dimension of interpenetration and interdefinition is ignored, the full nature of the whole, and of possibilities within it, may be missed.

Two examples.

Philosophies concerning the state have tended to polarize into two camps: a core position within bourgeois political thought that sees the state as eternal and inevitable, rooted in the unavoidable need for social control or in an equally unavoidable social contract; and the anarchist view of the state as inherently evil, the principal or at least co-equal source of domination and oppression. Thus, a binary forms: preserve the state for all time as the embodiment of civilization and reason, or call for its abolition. However, seeing the state as a historical product of class relations leads to a more nuanced view, expressed classically by Engels: With the overthrow of capitalist rule and the subsequent maturation of socialism, “the interference of the state power in social relations becomes superfluous in one sphere after another, and then ceases of itself. The government of persons is replaced by the administration of things and the direction of the processes of production. The state is not ‘abolished,’ it withers away” (Anti-Dühring, part 3, chapter 2). The full meaning of replacement of “government of persons” by “administration of things” must, of course, be determined, but the takeaway is that state functions
gradually lose their oppressive qualities, leaving a substratum that meets general and continuing social needs and is consistent with radically democratic principles. The negative aspects of state power in capitalist, precapitalist, and early-socialist societies, then, are not imposed upon subaltern populations from without; they emerge organically in combination with necessary and (from a general social standpoint) beneficial roles. The gradual evolution of the core socioeconomic relations, including at decisive moments the revolutionary overthrow of exploiting classes, progressively makes possible the separation of those beneficial roles from the antagonistic forms in which they have been embedded. So the withering away of oppressive state power is inseparable from the transformation of state structures by infusing them with increasingly democratic and principled content.

Oppression may be experienced, for long periods, as coming from “some other” place — external, and therefore unknown and unexplained. But its true nature can only be grasped when we realize that it is also internal: it is related to the micro-functioning of human relationships, linked in crucial ways to the social bonds that connect people together in production and consumption, and in the reproduction of society. Thus we come to understand how it works, not just that it exists. The outcome, for the present, is this: If something is important, it can’t be simply abolished, without simultaneously being transformed.

A similar binary style of thinking has tended to dominate discussions of the relation between socialism and the market. In the 1930s, a school of thought arose, most prominently reflected in the work of Oskar Lange and Fred M. Taylor: socialist (meaning: state-owned) firms could imitate the competitive market by setting outputs and choosing techniques to maximize profit. Thus began the school of “market socialism,” today famously embodied in the official ideology of the Communist Party of China. Western market socialist theorists usually concede to a view of “markets” that is a hollowed-out relation among abstract, utility-maximizing individuals. Markets are thus not only not “embedded” in wider social realities; they are ahistorical entities more expressive of general principles of rationality than of systems of social property and production relations. They then become eternal, a realization of sheer human reason and constrained optimization. Well-functioning markets, even in socialist form, become something like a true “end of history.”

On the other side of this binary is, of course, another variant of abolitionism, one with roots in Marxist value theory. With Marx’s discovery...

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2 Is this Foucauldian? I leave it to others to sort out the sources. But I am sure its ultimate roots go back to Marx, and to the basic drive of Marx and Engels to explain. (What did Bakunin say?: “Marx spoils the workers; he makes logic-choppers out of them.”)

3 A term that has returned to widespread use; see below.
of the law of value — the proposition that atomistic, unregulated action on the part of separate economic actors creates a system of regularities in economic relations that asserts itself independently of the wills of the actors, or of their political representatives — the idea is firmly planted in political economy that the observed behavior of “economic” variables such as commodities, money, wages, prices and profits is the outward expression of social relations (capitalist ones, to be sure). So far, so good. The abolitionists, however, take this one step further, and propose to eliminate, purposefully and at one stroke, the entire system of capitalist relations by abolishing the law of value. They are then able to conclude that, since some form of money, wages, prices, money incomes, and the like have continued to exist in every socialist country since 1917, the law of value — and therefore capitalism — have not been abolished in those societies. This is, of course, an extreme form of voluntarism, according to which objective realities that have taken shape over thousands of years of human history can simply be “abolished,” by a sheer act of revolutionary will. (One might just as well “abolish” the law of gravity, or the laws of thermodynamics.)

Now suppose we draw upon Engels’ non-binary approach to the state, and apply it to the matter of markets and market relations under socialist conditions as well. The market, then, is neither eternal, nor subject to immediate abolition. It is, rather, subject to transformation, as social development makes possible the gradual attenuation of the coercive, alienating, and destabilizing properties that social systems taking the market form have exhibited in earlier periods. The power-magnifying aspects of the market — its mystifying effects whereby relations of power, domination and exploitation among people (really, among social classes) take on the disguise of unalterable and “natural” relations among goods — all of this progressively vanishes, as (what remains of) markets becomes a tool in the hands of democratically organized producers. The market is not abolished; it withers away.

This brings us, finally, to the latest variant of abolitionism: the demand for the abolition, or de-funding, of police departments in the United States, after the brutal murders of George Floyd in Minneapolis, Ahmaud Arbery in Brunswick GA, Rayshard Brooks in Atlanta, Breonna Taylor in Louisville, Eric Garner in Staten Island, Michael Brown, Tamir Rice, Freddie Gray, Philando Castile, and others too numerous to list. The magnificent protest movement that took shape last Spring over the latest round of police killings holds enormous promise for raising the political impact of popular mobilization, the degree of unity among racially and culturally diverse sectors of the working class, and levels of political consciousness. At this writing (June, 2020) the scale of the moral outrage at ongoing
official violence and repression is the most noteworthy property of the popular upsurge, and this is a fact of great political significance. We will undoubtedly return to this. For now, our interest lies in the question: What does the demand for police abolition signify? In the light of the preceding discussion, of binaries and alternatives, what should we be able to say?

The starting point, for a Marxist analysis, is always the functionality of racist structural oppression, and racist ideology, for capitalist class rule. It may or may not be abstractly possible to imagine a capitalist economy in which the working population is homogeneous with respect to the physical and cultural characteristics that historically ground the socially generated division of people into “races.” In the case of the United States (and all or most other capitalist countries), racial division is a structural fact, and one that is embedded in a wider matrix of divisions: by gender, by national origin, language, religion, regional identity, age, sexual orientation, etc. For reasons that are surely not arbitrary or contingent, the racial dimension is central to the mix of divisive structures and strategies, the glue that holds the others together.

Policing, in turn, is about enforcing capitalist control over public space, defending property, and ensuring the continued hegemony of the ruling class — its dominant role in the definition and enforcement of law and order. The police function has been historically distinguished from the military function by its confinement to a well-defined domestic territory, and its application to a working class that identifies with the national–territorial entity within which it lives. Militarization of the police, then, must mean progressive re-definition of the subaltern population as “alien.” The subaltern class becomes akin to an external enemy, an “other.” Ruling-class ideology has always relied on this to make loyalty to the state a major element in the dominant ideology, offsetting and counteracting class consciousness.

In terms of the nesting of functions of the state more generally, and of the market, the police institution can also be seen as a hierarchy of more specific functions. At the top we have protection of capitalist property and power, a broad category covering everything from defense of physical productive plant against attack or occupation, to actions against strikes, surveillance of political opposition movements, containing of demonstrations (“kettling”), and so forth. This gives way to a broader set of functions: protection of property in general, including both small business and personal property. This set includes the normal range of crime-fighting activities and investigations: burglary, robbery, drug-related offenses, economic fraud. Finally, there is the set of police roles captured by the ideological phrase “serve and protect.” These roles — assisting ill or injured persons, giving travel directions, and the proverbial rescuing of kittens from trees, all the way to investigating serious crimes against persons (domestic violence, rape, assault) — are central to both the reality and the popular mythology about policing.
In a fully developed Marxist understanding, this last category, importantly, is also a component of the central function of protecting and enhancing capitalist class power. When police help establish and protect the normality of everyday life, they reproduce confidence, in the minds of the broad population, in the ability of the established authorities — and the powerful social sectors behind them — to manage society in general. They reinforce the role of the ruling class, and the popular image of that role, as the carriers and guarantors of social well-being, just as their funding and direction of educational institutions, museums, scientific institutes and the like establish and re-establish their position as the bearers of the society’s entire cultural history.

The levels of police functionality are deeply intertwined. For example, when police enforce local edicts and regulations regarding homeless people, they may be helping guide the homeless toward services: shelters, food, health care, job placement. In this way they are helping the indigent, while simultaneously “protecting” the more secure layers of the working class from the insecurities and indignities occasioned by the presence of the homeless in their midst. But when this crosses over into harassing and confining the poor, it intensifies racist division and oppression, something that supports capitalist interests in obvious ways. It also serves as a disciplining force exercised over those more secure layers — the “there but for the grace of God” effect. Capitalist policing “protects” the working-class mainstream, but it is also designed to keep that mainstream fully aware of the social underclass, and to highlight that underclass’ “otherness.”

With this as background, we can now begin to think about the demand emerging from many sectors of the popular uprising against racist police violence: for de-funding, including everything up to outright abolition, of police departments. The first step is to get completely clear about what this might mean. At one extreme, the demand is for dismissing existing police forces entirely, on the grounds that they are too infected by racism and by a fascism-like mentality of violence to be “reformed.” This, then, is not about “abolishing”; it is about replacing existing police entities with new ones, whose training, funding and control are in the hands of the progressive community. These new police forces would then be sites where the long and difficult process of separating capitalist functionality from working-class functionality — redefining the concept of “serve and protect” — can be worked out. This line of thought provides us with a mighty opportunity to think through exactly what this can mean.

5 We note that the term “de-funding” is currently being used to refer to a variety of proposals, including various degrees of reduction of funding, re-direction of resources, and linking of police funding to a range of other reform proposals.
At the other extreme, we have a demand that, whether its proponents realize this or not, calls for a society evolved to a point at which all forms of policing — and incarceration — have become vestigial and unnecessary. But to abolish police and prisons as such, immediately, would be just like (if I may reveal what by now should be the obvious direction of my argument) abolishing: the state; the market; money; natural disasters; even the laws of nature (who says we can’t travel faster than the speed of light?). It is not just that there would then no longer be kind officers who rescue stranded pets from precarious situations, assist people with paperwork after fender-benders, or help elderly people cross the street. From a working-class–partisan standpoint, we may ask: are we ready to dismantle all structures that are capable of arresting, and if necessary incarcerating, genuine criminals, including (let’s say) right-wing provocateurs, and members of counter-revolutionary militias? The abolitionist position does indeed raise an interesting question: might certain transformations that have always been projected into a post-revolutionary future actually be possible in the pre-revolutionary present? Don’t we also need to avoid mechanical presumptions concerning the order in which social changes can or should take place?

There are no simple answers to these questions. It is a matter of when we are ready to take a given step; what preconditions need to be established. Extreme, or “maximalist,” demands will of course arise within popular progressive movements, with millions of young and inexperienced new members. All we might ask is that these demands be taken as the occasion for serious study of possibilities, and the opening up of new avenues for progressive transformation of our capitalist societies — away from racism, away from reactionary police violence, away from authoritarianism and ignorance, and toward the “passionate possibilities” of democracy, science and planning.

Perhaps future historians will be able to exclaim: “Far from being eternal and living on forever, the racist police establishment, like the rest of the capitalist state, decayed under the relentless force of the progressive tide, into whispered nonsense,” just as did Mr. Weaver’s “spirit” in Graham Greene’s story. One expects, of course, that this will take a bit longer than seven days.

D. L.

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6 Lenin once enlisted several counter-revolutionary generals, who were imprisoned at the Peter–Paul Fortress in St. Petersburg, to help the Bolsheviks prepare military defenses for the city. When they were done, the generals ingratiatingly asked if they might now be moved to better living quarters? Lenin’s answer: “My exceeding regrets. . . . Some other time, but not just now. Your quarters, gentlemen, may not be comfortable, but they have the merit of being very safe.” The staff was returned to the fortress of Peter and Paul. (Incident related in Albert Rhys Williams, Lenin: The Man and His Work, New York: Scott and Seltzer, 1919, p. 93ff. https://www.questia.com/read/1306378/lenin-the-man-and-his-work)