



Marxism in the Times of Total Crisis of Capitalism

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AS STATED BY MANY CRITICAL SCHOLARS and commentators, the Covid 19 pandemic, which still continues to haunt the world, has made capitalism’s political and economic crisis more apparent than ever. An abrupt suspension of the “normal” functioning of the global market mechanisms and the inability of the states and capitalists to develop coherent responses to the situation have unraveled once more the fragility of financial capitalism. The now-conspicuous and immediate repercussions of ecological crisis, which manifest themselves with soaring temperatures, unprecedentedly enormous wildfires, floods and droughts, are observed worldwide. This situation has also demonstrated how capitalism lacks any effective instruments to at least mitigate the imminent catastrophes stemming from its inherent propensity to commodify all of life to the detriment of life itself. Under these circumstances, contemporary capitalism is characterized no longer by economic growth, further globalization, or an ideological triumph but by rampant ontological insecurity, a gloomy sense of apocalypse, and bleak future scenarios. In search of the foundational reasons for this “total crisis,” even the mainstream intellectuals tend to emphasize the intrinsically destructive forces of capitalist production and the devastating consequences it has had on human to human, and, in general, human to nature relations.

As the “totality” of life itself, not only the human life but also the life of the earth in general, is at stake today, there emerged, even among the mainstream thinkers, a tendency to discuss the viability of some total solutions for a potential total catastrophe. The urge of the World Economic Forum, the leading capitalist platform of the world, for a total revision,

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epitomized by the phrase “Great Reset” is a quintessential and telling example of this tendency. Any Marxist would concede that a quest for developing “total” solutions to the total crisis of capitalism from within capitalism itself is not only unavailing but also manipulative. It is impossible to design any solution for such a massive and all-encompassing crisis by remaining within capitalism’s material and ideational confines. Even though there is a widespread acknowledgement of a crisis, answers are usually not sought in Marxist directions. Should not now be the time of recognition of those features in Marxist thought which give possible directions out of the impasse?

The totality of the contemporary crisis of capitalism invites us to rethink the fundamental premises of Marxism in its totality, as the method of understanding and transcending capitalism and reflecting on the historical, present, and possible future forms of human-human and human-nature relations. In an age characterized by the urgent need for a “new beginning,” the quest for revisiting, rethinking, and clarifying Marxism’s foundational premises in different fields of science is crucial. In this vein, in the second issue of *Marxism & Sciences*, we included scholarly articles, essays, interviews and artistic works that discuss and consider the fundamental premises of Marxism as a scientific method, as an epistemology, as a philosophy and as a revolutionary vision and strategy, and assess the extent of actuality and viability of these premises in the wake of “total” crisis of humanity. Apart from original research and scholarly articles, the interviews we conducted with seven leading Marxist intellectuals to compile their reflections on the total crisis of capitalism from the lenses of Marxism added so much to the breadth and depth of this issue. We are thankful for their invaluable contribution to this issue and their general support and encouragement to our journal in its “infancy.”

Inspired by the quest of our journal to highlight Marxism’s holistic and relational understanding of things in general, this introduction will not contend itself with summarizing each contribution’s main premises separately and individually. Instead, it will juxtapose and relate our authors’ reflections on the place of Marxism amid contemporary “total” crisis of capitalism, and thereby present a holistic portrayal of the issue in its entirety. In fact, what allows and encourages such a difficult attempt to combine each contribution is that they revolve around some common global socio-political problems and theoretical questions that Marxism has to deal with, and that their assertions are mostly complementary, otherwise productively clashing with one another.

The Foundations of Marxism and Today's "Crisis"

One of the essential concerns that we pursue in this issue is to identify the very core premises of Marxism regarding human-human and human-nature relations that would serve as a point of entry to discuss the contemporary crisis of capitalism and humanity in its totality. The other thorny problem that the authors of this issue elaborate on is how a Marxist, could lucidly delineate the recent impasse/crisis of capitalism by relying on the core premises of Marxism. If capitalism is going through a crisis today, how is this crisis different from its predecessors and what does this mean for a socialist strategy?

In his opening article of this issue, entitled "Marxism and New Materialism," Stuart A. Newman argues that what is at the core of Marxism as a philosophy is a specific conception of materialism that recognizes and puts at the center the *specificity* of life and living matter. This is what is denied by those ideologies of "new materialism" that seek to erase any ontological distinction between living and non-living matter and thereby refuse to attribute any central role to human agency to overcome the burning planetary problems today. One can infer from Newman's article that a productive discussion as to what is to be done to resist those destructive dynamics that threaten the entire planet could be possible only if we retain Marxism's quest for understanding the distinctive features of "self-formative dynamics of the species." From this, Newman reaches a precise definition of historical materialism: an inquiry into "the the social formation, a complex historical entity with developmental propensities determined, in the last analysis, by the means of production of basic and socially conditioned needs and the struggle between group—social classes—with different and unequal relationships to these productive forces and resources." It is through historical materialism as such that Marxism could possess the merit of being "simultaneously totalising and empirical" as aptly put by Helena Sheehan in our interview with her in this issue. For Newman, historical materialism could provide us with a much more realistic and well-founded strategy of exit from the current impasse of capitalism than the philosophy of so-called "new materialism" and "posthumanism," which disconnect ongoing disasters of climate, war, and inequalities from perennial socio-political issues like class divisions or socio-economic and ecological problems like capitalist extraction.

Marxism, however, is not concerned only with the domain of *production* when addressing the specific nature of human activity and agency. Human beings also *reproduce* the conditions under which they produce themselves. At this point, Melda Yaman makes a crucial intervention by asserting that an integrated conception of production and reproduction of labour, life and the material world distinguishes Marxism from other strands of thought. According to her, the dialectical unity of production and reproduction in Marx and Engels's thought is still the most productive genus of concepts and ideas to understand the deep and total crisis of humanity that unfolded itself conspicuously during the Covid-19 pandemic. For her, thinking about production and reproduction in a relational and united manner will enable us to diagnose the specificity of today's crisis as the "general crisis of the reproduction of society in all its dimensions".

Engin Delice, in his article with the title "The Objective Validity of Engels' Dialectic Theory as a Method of Reasoning" strives to outline, in reference to Frederick Engels's controversial works, the specific reasoning and method that Marx and Engels employ to investigate what Newman refers to as "specificity of life and living matter." Delice implies that it is the "dialectic" theory and method that is at the core of Marxism and the resolution of the controversy as to whether "it is process of nature's own functioning or the logical order of the concepts" that gives validity to dialectics is essential for rethinking Marxism in the wake of a total crisis of capitalism today.

While Newman, Yaman and Delice try to explore the core of Marxism in its methodology of understanding life and nature, Haldun Güllalp, in his very comprehensive and thought-provoking article "From Black Death to Covid 19: The Rise and Fall of Capitalism" explores the "core" of Marxism in the subject matter or the main question that Marx pursued especially in his later works: what is the historically specific and distinguishing feature of capitalism as a mode of production that differentiates it from pre-capitalist social formations? Here, Güllalp identifies accumulation through continual dispossession of masses as a continual and distinctive feature of capitalism, which is also emphasized in Sahotra Sarkar's interview in this issue. Güllalp's discussion shows that through an analysis of different forms of dispossession in the history of capitalism, we can discern the distinctive characteristics of the contemporary crisis and envision a post-capitalist society. For him, this final phase of capitalism is characterized by the "renewed primitive accumulation" in which capital owners forge an

unrestrained attack on natural resources and prevent people “from accessing basic necessities, including air and water.” He lucidly explains what makes the contemporary crisis of capitalism different from its predecessors: “Up to the present, crisis tendencies were caused by various economic, social and political limits to capital accumulation; today, however, capitalism is pushing against the limits of nature.” In the face of such a total crisis of humanity today, Vesa Oittinen highlights the need to rethink Marxist views on ethics, modernity and anthropology in a general sense, also in view of the legacy of emancipative aspects of the Enlightenment in Marxism. When reading our interview with Andrey Maidansky, one can see how these assertions could be questioned in the name of “scientific Marxism”.

The problem of envisioning and building a post-capitalist society socialism induces us to revisit the issue of “agency,” the subject of a revolutionary transition and hence the problem of (re)formulating class struggle today. Indeed, what is at the core of Marxism is not only its method, that is historical/dialectical materialism, it is subject matter, that is capitalism, but also its major reference point to understand the dynamics behind historical transformations, like class struggle and private property. As Pepijin Brandon states in our interview with him, Marxism is also a “history writing that foregrounds class and class struggles, starting from a fundamental identification with the oppressed and exploited.” Rethinking class struggle is not only a “theoretical” but also an exigent political question today because, as Marcel Van Linden, states in our interview with him that “one of the great paradoxes of the current era is that world working class continues to grow, while at the same time many labour movements are experiencing a crisis.” At this point Omer Moussaly’s rich elaboration on Domenico Losurdo’s interpretation of Marxism shows that the roots of a non-dogmatic, sophisticated and multi-layered conception of class struggle exist in the fundamental premises of historical materialism. As Marcel Van Linden puts it, such a non-dogmatic view of class struggle could also entail rethinking Marx’s theory of value in today’s rapidly changing dynamics of capitalism. Andrey Maidansky would most probably criticize and refute Losurdo’s position as well as Mousally’s endorsement on the grounds of his conviction that Marx’s earlier political essays are more prophecy than science. He controversially argues that an attempt to understand capitalism as a “natural historical process” should be at the core of a

scientific Marxism today. Again the tension between “ethics” and “science” seems to open up. However, it is exactly this tension that Marxism tries to overcome.

While seeking an answer to the question related to the core premises of Marxism and their relevance to understand the specificity of the crisis of contemporary capitalism in this issue, we see the emphasis oscillates between a Marxism as a philosophy of human being and a Marxism as a scientific exploration of the laws of capitalism. Christoph Henning presents in his interview a subtle formulation that combines both and represents Marx and Engels’ legacy in its entirety: “their approach is not only based on ethics, but also on a sound social scientific analysis that uncovers mechanisms of power, exploitation, ideology, alienation and ecological destruction.”

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Marxism and Sciences is also open to review articles that fall outside the designated main theme for each issue. We have two pieces of this kind in this issue. J.R. Valila revisits the Marxist literature related to “transition to capitalism” debate in relation to the specific features of social formation in Philippines in his article entitled “Revisiting the Semi-feudal Question in the Philippines.” Finally, Salaadin Ahmad discusses “imperialism” in the context of Ukrainian War and eloquently discusses what kind of a position the left should take in “another war that force us to choose between two wrongs within a false duality.”

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As was the case for our first issue, we publish some very intriguing cultural works in this issue as well: a digital photograph manipulation, a poem and two musical compositions. The work of art titled, ‘Marx: A Nineteenth Century Ghost’ by Engin Ümer is a digital manipulation of Marx’s one of famous photographs. Engin Ümer discusses the context of his work in an accompanying short essay. In the Name of the Comradeship of the Cosmos’ (*Kosmosun Kardeşliği Adına*) is the title of a poem written by Turkish communist poet, Nazım Hikmet (1902–1963). Mehmet Şahin and Jonathan M. Ross kindly translated this poem for our journal and, to our knowledge, this is the first ever translation of this fascinating piece of art. ‘Cosmic’ was composed by Ömer Er in 2005. The composer performs the musical piece by synthesizers and electro-violin. *Çapuleyşin Müzik Orkestra*, founded during Gezi Park Uprising in 2013 in Turkey, published

the music with the title of Hikmet's poem 'In the Name of the Comradeship of the Cosmos,' on Youtube.

Boyun Eğmeyenler (The Ones Who Don't Bow Down) is a song by Yiğit Özatalay whom both wrote the lyrics and composed the music during the Gezi Park Uprising. The phrase, 'Don't Bow Down' at the name of the song was one of the famous slogans of the demonstrations and phrases such as "revolution winked at us" and "revolution became possible with them" clearly represents the collective hope unfolded during the uprising.