The Concept of Class

Thesis: Communists have repeatedly either ignored or attempted to circumvent the issue of struggles of a non-exclusively proletarian nature. These approaches in their various forms are insufficient. The question can only be answered once it extends beyond one of class composition into the content of the critique itself.

Following the decline of the USSR and the rise of the neoliberal "end of history", the historical left began to find itself in an identity crisis of sorts. This is the type of crisis Derrida finds himself contending with when writing *Specters of Marx*:

> *Today, almost a century and a half later, there are many who, throughout the world, seem just as worried by the specter of communism, just as convinced that what one is dealing with there is only a specter without body, without present reality,without actuality or effectivity, but this time it is supposed to be a past specter. It was only a specter, an illusion, a phantasm, or a ghost: that is what one hears everywhere today. (Derrida 1984, 47-48)*

As for what "defines the left", I've written on that before (although it hasn't aged well); the focus of this piece is to provide a response to the questions raised by one of Marxism's alleged "gravediggers", the New Left.

> *On the other hand, there has emerged a growing body of leftist intellectual work which is highly critical of Marxism and often explicitly anti-Marxist., Two characteristics of these new critiques of Marxism are particularly important.*
>
> *First, they are critiques on the Left, not from the antisocialist Right. The criticisms are not from apostate Marxists who have become defenders of capitalism; they are from anti-capitalist intellectuals with commitments to progressive social change. In some cases, in fact, these theorists' vision of the alternative to capitalism is not radically different from the image of socialism and communism contained in Marxist theory; what is different is the view of the theory of society needed to help create such a society.*
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> *Second, the critiques are not simply critiques of the insufficiencies or gaps in Marxist theory; they are critiques of Marxism. In one way or another all of these theorists argue that Marxist theory is a hindrance, that its theoretical assumptions necessarily create blind spots, that its foundations are fundamentally flawed and thus it cannot be reconstructed — it must be abandoned. (Wright 1983, 452)*

One of the major points of contention for these social movements was the question of whether Marxism fundamentally has a "tendency toward class or economic reductionism in Marxist typologies of historical forms of society" (Wright 1983).

Is a primarily material conception of society able to testify to the experiences and promise liberation for groups of a racial, sexual, or gender-based identity? Is it even the duty of socialists to pursue such ends?

This essay will deal with evaluating common responses to this question, and providing an answer that does not jeopardize the content of a revolutionary critique.

1. Class Romanticism

To a lot of the early socialists, the obvious answer seemed to be to focus on uniting proletarians across the world under a common class identity. This seemed like the simplest solution, after all two central tenets of Marxism were the uniquely revolutionary potential of the proletariat and the notion that productive relations governed the rest of society.

Those are all well and good from the outset, but we should be careful about how far and why we draw said conclusions. Often times, these conclusions are drawn out of political expedience at the cost of both our understanding of and the development of class-struggle itself.

1.1. Forming a "Proletarian Identity"

Marx's famous call was for workers of the world to unite. What made such a task seem feasible was a connection drawn between the development of productive forces under capitalism and the homogenizing of proletarians. Peasant revolts never broke out into revolution due to their interests residing with religious, ethnic, and other identities.

> *Large-scale industry concentrates in one place a crowd of people unknown to one another. Competition divides their interests. But the maintenance of wages, this common interest which they have against their boss, unites them in a common thought of resistance – combination. Thus combination always has a double aim, that of stopping competition among the workers, so that they can carry on general competition with the capitalist...*
>
> *Economic conditions had first transformed the mass of the people of the country into workers. The combination of capital has created for this mass a common situation, common interests. This mass is thus already a class as against capital, but not yet for itself. In the struggle, of which we have noted only a few phases, this mass becomes united, and constitutes itself as a class for itself. The interests it defends become class interests. But the struggle of class against class is a political struggle. (Marx and Engels 1900, 195)*

In practice, such a phenomenon was not nearly as cut-and-dry as Marxists presumed:

> *In reality, the homogenisation that seemed to be taking place in the factory was always partial. Workers became interchangeable parts in a giant machine; however, that machine turned out to be vastly complex. That in itself opened up many opportunities for pitting different groups*

> *against each other. In US auto plants, black workers were concentrated in the foundry, the dirtiest work. Southern Italians equally found themselves segregated from Northerners in the plants of Turin and Milan. Such segregation may appear inefficient, for employers, since it restricts the pool of potential workers for any given post. But as long as the relevant populations are large enough, employers are able to segment the labour market and drive down wages. If differential sets of interests among workers could be created by the internal divisions within the plant (as in Toyota-isation), so much the better. Capitalists were content for the labouring population to remain diverse and incommensurable in all sorts of ways, especially when it undermined workers' organising efforts. (Endnotes Collective 2015, 129)*

Faced with this reality, socialist parties had no choice but to artificially construct a class identity, centered around the ideal image of what a proletarian "should look like":

> *How all this might be fashioned into a single working-class identity was the operative question for socialists. The rise of the urban working-class neighborhood was crucial to this project. Initially, lower-class loyalties were held within superordinate structures of deference and paternalism, often ordered by religion, and increasingly dominated by liberals. Across Europe, government policies and party actions regulated popular culture by interacting with the social histories of urbanization in ever more ramified ways. From the 1890s, states intervened with gathering intensity in the everyday lives of working people, assisted by new knowledges and professions and targeting social stability and the national health via powerful ideas of family. In the process, powerfully gendered images of the ideal working father and the responsible mother permeated the politics of class. Then socialist parties, too, began organizing working people into collective political agency beyond the neighborhood and workplace, with an impact on government, locally and municipally, in regions, and eventually the nation. All these processes helped shape class identities institutionally. (Eley 2002, 58)*

While this picture may prove useful for propaganda, it ultimately is no substitute for a *real* class consciousness. Revolution can only be accomplished by the "self-conscious, independent movement of the immense majority", not just by pandering to a specific subset of artisans.

> *Given that the expected homogeneity of the semi-skilled workforce failed to fully realise itself, it became part of the task of the workers' movement to realise that homogeneity by other means. As we saw above, organisation requires an affirmable identity, an image of working class respectability and dignity. When workers failed to fit this mold, the champions of the workers' movement became champions of self-transformation. The workers' movement was a sect — with DIY, straight-edge sensibilities, a particular style of dress, etc. Yet the predicates of the dignified worker (male, disciplined, atheist, expressing a thirst for scientific knowledge and political education, etc.) were often drawn by analogy to the values of bourgeois society. "The party activists wanted to live worthy, upstanding, moral, moderate, and disciplined lives: on the one hand, to show the workers who were not yet organised a good example; on the other hand, to show bourgeois society that one was up to all tasks, that one deserved*

> *good standing and respect." In other words, party activists were quite often killjoys.*

The proletarian has been reduced from a class with an actual role in production to a primarily cultural and moral identity. This ideal worker would eventually find himself championed by electoral and populist movements more willing to indulge this fantasy.

> *Sections of workers—organized, skilled or semi-skilled, male—won unprecedented security, with not only full employment and rising real wages but a new shop floor self-respect…*
>
> *Postwar industrial relations required a corporatist triangulation: labor won tangible economic benefits and political influence; capital won the space for a new accumulation strategy based on Fordism, meaning workplace deals combining high wages, productivity, and a modernized labor process, linked to consumer-driven growth; and the state won a new role overseeing this large-scale societal compromise. This corporatism was held together partly by national systems of consultation between government, employers, and unions and partly by Keynesianism's ending of mass unemployment. It produced a system of "reformer managed capitalism." This held a central place for organized labor, while bypassing socialism as such. (Eley 2002, 316)*

Why is this an issue with regards to the workers' movement? Because class identification goes hand-in-hand with class consciousness. When socialists promote a "class" that the majority of proletarians are unable to identify with, they find themselves unable to reach the immense majority.

> *In this double sense—in social structure and social understandings, as the social aggregation of wage-earning positions in industrial economies and as an organized political identity—the working class declined. This was a complex story. Perceptions of decline reflected the demise of one kind of working-class aggregate—the skilled or semiskilled male proletarians of the "old" industries and the electrochemical complex of the "second industrial revolution." By stricter definitions of wage-labor, after all, working-class positions still increased. The declining peasantry, shopkeepers, tradesmen, and other self-employed more than replenished the wage-dependent labor force, likewise women's entry into employment. Assumptions about working-class identity lagged behind actual changes in work and the continuing creation of new types of worker, as growth of the service sector and public employment made clear. (Eley 2002, 397)*

1.2. Blurred Lines

Some might handwave this as a white lie in order to attract people to the cause —something that can attract the "common man", but then be explained in more detail later — but often it ends up spiraling out of control. Propaganda of any form has lasting psychological effects that are severely underestimated. We cannot expect a man to suspend his capacity to think critically and then wean him off of convenient falsehoods.

> *The individual has no chance to exercise his judgment either on principal questions or on their implication; this leads to the atrophy of a faculty not comfortably exercised under any conditions. What the individual loses is never easy to revive. Once personal judgment and critical faculties have disappeared or have been atrophied, they will not simply reappear when propaganda has been suppressed.*
>
> *What the individual loses is never easy to revive. Once personal judgment and critical faculties have disappeared or have been atrophied, they will not simply reappear when propaganda has been suppressed. In fact, we are dealing here with one of propaganda's most durable effects: years of intellectual and spiritual education would be needed to restore such faculties. The propagandee, if deprived of one propaganda, will immediately adopt another; this will spare him the agony of finding himself vis-à-vis some event without a ready-made opinion, and obliged to judge it for himself. (Ellul 1965, 170)*

The more you appeal to the irrational side of a man, the more prone he will be to irrational messaging in the future, or to put it in simpler terms: what you say now will come back to haunt you later down the road.

This is *especially* the case when talking about questions of class composition, because whatever message you put forth regarding class ends up shaping the body of the resulting movement. Nowhere is this more clear than with the syndicalists. Early syndicalists were some of the strongest proponents of class-romanticism. However, their neutered class-theory would end up paving the way for a movement more willing to submerge itself in the fantasy: Italian Fascism.

> *The war, he felt, had restored Italy's self-confidence by proving the country capable of serious things; now, at last, after centuries of indiscipline and disorganization, she would be able to get down to work, creating "the new miracle, that Italy of the labor aristocracy that can be the model of every other people that intends to endure" The new Italy would have an important new role in the world, not as a military-imperial power, but as the bearer of new productivist values: "The world needs the Italian; Italian is synonymous with worker; he is an organism of extraordinary energy, is resistant, adaptable, sober, thrifty; he is the poet of toil, the hero of excavations, the vanguard of the harvesters of the land, the essential raw material for the effort of continuing human progress." Orano clearly wanted to believe that the war itself had been the Italian revolution, but all his exaggeration and forced optimism indicate his sense that it would not be so easy to reap the harvest of the Italian war experience.*
>
> *And despite Orano's inspiring images, of course, the end of the war soon led to the "biennio rosso" and the threat of socialist revolution. In response, the syndicalists finally began cutting themselves off from the old orthodoxy for good, condemning the working class, declaring the class struggle to be counterproductive, and calling for collaboration between the workers and productive sectors of the bourgeoisie. (Roberts 1979, 154-155)*

Class struggle is not merely an issue of getting enough people to identify with socialism. Making your message more palatable for the sake of "the front" may work for electoral movements, but as Marxists such a choice only serves to foster false consciousness. How can one expect a proletarian to be aware of his situation while he is constantly misled on what a proletarian even is?

2. Populism

> *The global financial crisis that began in 2008 and the ongoing crisis of the euro are both products of the model of lightly regulated financial capitalism that emerged over the past three decades. Yet despite widespread anger at Wall Street bailouts, there has been no great upsurge of left-wing American populism in response. It is conceivable that the Occupy Wall Street movement will gain traction, but the most dynamic recent populist movement to date has been the right-wing Tea Party, whose main target is the regulatory state that seeks to protect ordinary people from financial speculators. Something similar is true in Europe as well, where the left is anemic and right-wing populist parties are on the move. (Fukuyama 2012)*

This quote is part of a piece by Francis Fukuyama, in which he identifies that "in the aftermath of the [Great Recession]... populism has taken primarily a right-wing form, not a left-wing one". He attempts to provide an explanation of why this is, but he (unsurprisingly) misses the mark in the process. The purpose of this section will be to provide an alternative answer to this problem, tying it back to our central theme of class-composition.

2.1. OWS and Populism

As the left rallied behind the call of "the personal is the political", the question of class only became all more daunting. By the 2010s, one possible solution was starting to gain traction: if one class theory ends up excluding others, then why not make everybody the revolutionary class?

This theme was at the center of Occupy Wall Street, quite possibly the most prominent example of a left-wing movement in the 21st century. Signs, posters, chants, all repeating the same slogan: "we are the 99 percent".

For the uninitiated, the term "99 percent" refers to a statistic of income inequality in the US (one percent of the country controls approximately two-fifths of the nation's wealth). From this one statistic springs out a rudimentary class-narrative littered throughout Occupy rhetoric:

> *The top 1 percent have the best houses, the best educations, the best doctors, and the best lifestyles, but there is one thing that money doesn't seem to have bought: an understanding that their fate is bound up with how the other 99 percent live. Throughout history, this is something that the top 1 percent eventually do learn. Too late. (Stiglitz 2011)*

If this passage screams "populism" to you, you're absolutely justified in your suspicions. Yes, there is an economic element to the whole dichotomy, but it still is predominantly populist. Of course, defining populism is tricky, but there are common patterns we can observe:

> *The people are defined in opposition to outsiders, who allegedly do not belong to the moral and hard-working true people. While many studies of populism define the essential social conflict as between the people and the elite, this report uses the more general term "outsiders", because populists as often stoke divisions between marginalised communities as between marginalised communities and elite.*
>
> *From there, populists attribute a singular common good to the people: a policy goal that cannot be debated based on evidence but that derives from the common sense of the people. This general will of the people, populists argue, is not represented by the cartel of self-serving establishment elites who guard status quo politics. (Kyle and Gultchin 2018, 12)*

The very same report denotes a subtype of populism that should prove more relevant to early Occupy:

> *Socio-economic populism does not constitute a specific package of economic policies, but rather paints the central 'us vs. them' conflict as between economic classes. Among socio-economic populists, there is a reverence for the common worker. The pure people belong to a specific social class, which is not necessarily constrained by national borders. For example, socio-economic populists may see working classes in neighbouring countries as natural allies.*
>
> *The corrupt elites can include big businesses, capital owners, state elites, and foreign forces and international institutions that prop up an international capitalist system. (Kyle and Gultchin 2018, 23-24)*

For some, socio-economic populism may sound all well and good, since it still deals in vaguely economic terms. However, that alone is not enough; the foundations still remain far too equivocal to constitute a proper class theory.

2.2. Class-Narratives

In Marxism, classes are distinguished according to their specific role in the process of production:

> *(i) The class of big capitalists, who, in all civilized countries, are already in almost exclusive possession of all the means of subsistence and of the instruments (machines, factories) and materials necessary for the production of the means of subsistence. This is the bourgeois class, or the bourgeoisie.*
>
> *(ii) The class of the wholly propertyless, who are obliged to sell their labor to the bourgeoisie in order to get, in exchange, the means of subsistence for their support. This is called the class of proletarians, or the proletariat. (Engels 1847)*

This proves important for two reasons:

1. There are clear lines being drawn; both the proletarian and the bourgeois can be objectively identified according to their productive relations. These aren't just adjectives, but actual historical categories.
2. The proletariat is presented not just in its negative characteristics (its oppression), but as the producer of value. It is this positive characteristic that is able to give weight to Marx's claim that "the proletariat alone is [the] really revolutionary class".

Contrast this with the class-narrative of socio-economic populism:

1. The "people" and the "elite" are incredibly equivocal categories. We can attribute a character to these classes, but not any concrete characteristics. Even if we spoke of them in terms of say, income or wealth, that'd only serve to raise more questions. Where is the cutoff that decides if a person is elite or common? What really unites *the 99 percent*? Why do some of the so-called *elite* sympathize with Occupy?
2. The categories serve a primarily moral function, decrying the actions of the "elite". But it ultimately fails to go further than that. For people like Stiglitz saying that the one percent will learn their lesson once its too late; this may be a nice thought, but it's ultimately hollow. What would the 99 percent do once its "too late"? Are they willing? Are they capable?

What Marxist class theory takes into account which populists neglect is that the revolutionary subject must have *both* composition and content. As Dauvé puts it:

> *Until the two or three last decades of the twentieth century, most radical critique considered the working class as the social pivot and revolutionary lever (metaphors highly revealing of a mechanical age mindset). Nowadays, in contrast with the apparent simplicity of yesteryears, capitalism and contemporary struggles are said to be devoid of centrality. When most radicals speak of labour, they tend to overstretch the notion, with no significant difference between a housewife, a student and an assembly-line worker. The definition has moved from entirely positive to entirely negative: the prole is no longer the pan-creator of wealth, he or she is a less-person: jobless, landless, powerless, propertyless, moneyless, homeless, and undocumented. As result, what is meant by class is a boundless shapeless whole, disjointed not only from the work place (which would stick to the Marxian definition: proles are at work and/or jobless), but from the world of work altogether. (Dauvé 2015, 140)*

A movement that fails to advance beyond protesting, that fails to take seriously the questions of what leverage is available, the fundamental interests of those in question, and its goals is doomed from the outset.

And that second part ties back into the earlier question of what really unites the 99 percent? And no, I don't mean a character sketch of the "common man". What is a meaningful characteristic shared by the members of this group? Populism proved great for spreading awareness and promoting the slogans of

the campaign: after all, the 99 percent appeals to *everyone*. But broad appeal comes at a cost: the content is diluted.

2.3. Democracy and Demands

And it's specifically for this reason that we saw Occupy devolve in the way it did. Once people were on board with the idea of fighting back against the one-percent, what was to happen next? What issues should be prioritized? What about conflicting interests among the 99 percent? Is it even possible to represent everyone? Sure, you can say it can be accomplished with consensus democracy, but how does consensus democracy reconcile these divergences better than our current system?

Talking in practical terms, we've seen experimentation with the speaking stack (a consensus-based approach to group discussion) to address concerns raised by minority groups, but even that has run into conflict:

> *Another check on structurelessness comes in the form of the "progressive stack," in which the "stack-keeper," who is in charge of taking questions and concerns from the audiences at general assemblies, is given the ability to privilege voices from "traditionally marginalized groups."*
>
> *…Innovations like progressive stack can at times act as a Band-Aid solution covering over pervasive power dynamics that are hard to pinpoint and resolve, she adds. Without serious and sustained work towards women's equality within the movement, she says, "progressive stack is [just] a way for us to feel slightly better." (Seltzer 2011)*

Confronted with this crisis of identity, the movement which has nothing but an ideal of democracy to its name, does what all democratic movements eventually do: begin negotiations on a list of demands. Demands (and public policy by extent) are essential to democracy:

> *Democracy and public policy are intertwined because the organization of authority in a nation affects the design and implementation of government activity. Fundamental to democracy is the notion that citizens possess the ability and means to shape decisions made by public officials…*
>
> *Democracy's desirability derives from its institutional design which allows the majority of citizens to influence public policy in ways relevant to their interests and needs. (Krane and Marshall 2007)*

It should be noted that the move to list demands was not met with unanimous approval; there was some controversy surrounding it, yet I bring it up because these demands still remain Occupy's legacy regardless.

> *"Everyone is entitled to make their own blog or website to post their opinions about how OWS should operate or what they think the OWS demands should be, this 99% group is no different," Stepanian said in an email. "However, all of OWS's official statements are agreed upon by way of consensus-based general assemblies. This matter was not submitted or agreed upon by the NYC general assembly, and therefore by-passed the process all OWS plans have been made through."…*

> *"Demands have come up before,"* wrote Ryan Hoffman in another email to HuffPost. *"They were shot down vociferously under the argument that demands are for terrorists and that is not who we are. From that debate however, another proposal was passed: that we table all talk of demands until future notice! Therefore, any talk about demands, posts of demands, etc. are null and void. We already tabled those discussions using consensus." (Kingkade 2011)*

This quote, in addition to introducing the "demand debate", does give us insight into how Occupy deliberates and also why these demands ended up taking center-stage.

- The question of Occupy's organization seemed not to have been properly settled. On one hand, there *technically is* a General Assembly, yet the GA's "authority" seems to be little more than nominal. Groups independent are able to speak on behalf of OWS and receive such recognition by the public no matter how much the GA protests.
- The consensus-model of the GA brings deliberation to a snail's crawl, showing it to be impotent and bureaucratic in response to a rapidly-unfolding situation. If the GA struggles to discuss an issue (much less offer a solution), their input will remain less significant than that from those who have taken demonstrable action.

> Though "On Conflict and Consensus" assured organizers that "Formal Consensus is not inherently time-consuming," experience suggested otherwise. The process favored those with the most time, as meetings tended to drag out for hours; in theory, consensus might include everyone in all deliberations, but in practice, the process greatly favored those who could devote limitless time to the movement — and made full participation difficult for those with ordinary life commitments outside of their activism. Movement after movement found, moreover, that the process tended to give great attention and weight to the concerns of a few dissenters. In the purest form of consensus, a block by one or two individuals could bring the whole group to a screeching halt. (Kauffman 2015)

Since the GA proved itself incapable for the task, countless other groups stepped up to the plate and put forth their demands.

- One of the most well-known of these is the 99 Percent Declaration: a list of twenty demands, some of which include congressional term limits, an overturning of Citizens United, and various reforms to the tax code.
- The Demands Working Group backed a "New Deal-style work program funded largely by ending America's wars and taxing the rich". (Harkinson 2011)
- The Liberty Square Blueprint was a bit more extreme, calling to end all wars, open-source government technology, and abolish the Federal Reserve.

What's shared in common by all of these declarations (even the rather unreasonable Liberty Square Blueprint) is that they all take upon a distinctly reformist character. Despite the fanfare in its rhetoric and the wishes of the more anarchist members, there is nothing revolutionary about what Occupy

left behind.

2.4. Occupy's Limited Legacy

With the hindsight of all these years behind us, it is rather easy to reflect upon Occupy's legacy. The general consensus seems to be that while the protests may have gone on to promote certain policy platforms, it's impact was far from revolutionary:

> *Occupy Wall Street takes some of the credit for introducing income inequality into the broader political discourse, for inspiring the fight for a $15 minimum wage and, most recently, for creating a receptive audience for the Democratic presidential campaign of Vermont Sen. Bernie Sanders.*
>
> *"Everyone knows we were right," said Caleb Maupin, who was working in the insurance industry when he first joined the movement five years ago. "We had a major campaign for president with Bernie Sanders. The campaign was like a giant Occupy Wall Street rally, talking about the 99 percent and the one percent because millions of people know we were right." (Hajela and Balsamo 2016)*

This was always a concern amongst the protestors (especially the anarchist ones), so it's fair to say that this result was far from unanticipated.

> *The protesters are just reminding those in power to look down. This is the easy part. The protesters should beware not only of enemies, but also of false friends who pretend to support them but are already working hard to dilute the protest. In the same way we get coffee without caffeine, beer without alcohol, ice-cream without fat, those in power will try to make the protests into a harmless moralistic gesture...*
>
> *What one should resist at this stage is precisely such a quick translation of the energy of the protest into a set of concrete pragmatic demands. Yes, the protests did create a vacuum – a vacuum in the field of hegemonic ideology, and time is needed to fill this vacuum in a proper way, as it is a pregnant vacuum, an opening for the truly new. (Zizek 2011)*

What Zizek, along with many other protestors neglected is the form this "dilution" takes:

- Recuperation need not come from the "elite" or "false friends", it can arise as a consequence of how we communicate and propagate ideas using modern mediums. Zizek gives an example of Bill Clinton "suggest[ing] the protesters get behind President Obama's jobs plan", but what the existence of such a statement demonstrates is not a danger to be heeded, but rather instead, evidence of a compatibility between the rhetoric of Occupy and the goals of Bill Clinton. Occupy makes its motto "let the 99 percent be heard", Bill Clinton believes he can accommodate this with a jobs plan. The issue isn't with Bill Clinton, the issue is with Occupy's messaging.
- Zizek is correct to oppose demands. But just because a revolutionary movement is absent of demands doesn't mean it shouldn't be absent of content. He seems to identify this when he speaks of a vacuum,

but he underestimated how quickly that vacuum can be filled with other things. In the case of Occupy, the vacuum would end up being filled with a overreliance slogans and imagery, both of which are ripe for recuperation.

However, it is one thing to make an observation, and another to transform said observations into useful information. So, returning to this question of *why* Occupy left behind what it did, let us reiterate our earlier findings.

- Confronted with the failure of historically labor-centric movements, Occupy centers itself around a populist class-narrative, pitting the 99 percent against the 1 percent. This allows Occupy to be more inclusive of non-labor struggles, as they can be easily slotted into this 'great majority".
- Occupy's class-narrative has the numbers on its side, but ultimately lacks substance. Because the movement is primarily populist, the only common theme that could be pursued is "true democracy". As a result, the movement's main focus shifted towards promoting consensus-democracy, giving rise to the General Assembly.
- The General Assembly found itself burdened by the inefficiency of its process, and struggled anything, much less an actionable programme.
- The lack of demands from both the anarchist occupiers and the General Assembly led other groups to make demands on behalf of the movement. While this was neither agreed upon or official, it was de-facto recognized due to the lack of action on part of either of the opposing parties.

Tying this together, we begin to get a picture of how class-content can determine the nature of a movement. Occupy's populist nature could only lead to a democratic focus which in turn could only be resolved by democratic means, i.e., reform. The question of class had not been solved, but instead, merely ignored:

> This points more to a **crisis within class relations** than to a **crisis of class relations**—a crisis that might initiate the destruction of class structure. Present unrest acts as if it could absorb class without doing away with what maintains it: the capital-labour opposition. Togetherness is a necessary dimension of revolution, providing it breaks with class division, not when it fuses class groups into an aggregate mass. On Tahrir, Puerta del Sol, Taksim … the fact that those without any means of livelihood have to sell their labour power to those who organise work and profit from it, in simpler words the basic fact of exploitation, was interpreted in terms of poor v. rich, powerless v. powerful, bottom v. top. Therefore the solution could only be a fair resharing of wealth and power.
>
> We are not suggesting everything will be fine the day the Cairote jobless refuse to demonstrate alongside doctors because proletarians don't associate with middle class. The question is what they do and cannot do together. The shift from factory to street occupation, from private to public places, is immensely positive if occupiers transform what they take over: one has to get hold of something before transforming it. But takeover is not ipso facto changeover. The reclaiming of public space signifies a will to reappropriate our lives, an intuition that production and work should not

> *be central in our lives: that could be a starting point for a critique of the economy and work, if production and work were confronted and not bypassed. Otherwise, just as the occupied factory occupies its occupiers and keeps them within the confines of labour issues, those who occupy the square immerse themselves in the occupation tasks. Solidarity is an indispensable dimension of revolutionary breakthrough, a part, not the whole, and when the part replaces the whole, community becomes an end in itself. A Madrid participant was saying in May 2012: "People are fighting to take decisions themselves." What self is meant and, what's more, which decisions? (Dauve 2015, 98)*

Class without content is little more than an amorphous grouping, impotent and atomized. It's easy, it's attractive, but it's ultimately toothless.

2A. Rebuttal to Fukuyama

Returning back to Fukuyama, let us see what he concluded regarding Occupy Wall Street:

> *In the United States, for example, although the Tea Party is anti-elitist in its rhetoric, its members vote for conservative politicians who serve the interests of precisely those financiers and corporate elites they claim to despise. There are many explanations for this phenomenon. They include a deeply embedded belief in equality of opportunity rather than equality of outcome and the fact that cultural issues, such as abortion and gun rights, crosscut economic ones.*
>
> *But the deeper reason a broad-based populist left has failed to materialize is an intellectual one. It has been several decades since anyone on the left has been able to articulate, first, a coherent analysis of what happens to the structure of advanced societies as they undergo economic change and, second, a realistic agenda that has any hope of protecting a middle-class society.*
>
> *The main trends in left-wing thought in the last two generations have been, frankly, disastrous as either conceptual frameworks or tools for mobilization. Marxism died many years ago, and the few old believers still around are ready for nursing homes. The academic left replaced it with postmodernism, multiculturalism, feminism, critical theory, and a host of other fragmented intellectual trends that are more cultural than economic in focus. Postmodernism begins with a denial of the possibility of any master narrative of history or society, undercutting its own authority as a voice for the majority of citizens who feel betrayed by their elites. Multiculturalism validates the victimhood of virtually every out-group. It is impossible to generate a mass progressive movement on the basis of such a motley coalition: most of the working- and lower-middle-class citizens victimized by the system are culturally conservative and would be embarrassed to be seen in the presence of allies like this. (Fukuyama 2012)*

Fukuyama is correct in two areas: there is an absence of a coherent conceptual framework and an increasing inability to link struggles/experiences. However, he quickly loses sight of the issue:

- This first part should come as no surprise, considering [the book](#) he's notorious for, but Fukuyama contributes to the issue at hand by prematurely burying Marx. Marxism isn't perfect, there's a lot of things that Orthodox Marxists were mistaken on, but it *was* a coherent framework. It *did* provide tools for mobilization. Recent developments and the publication of Marx's newly-discovered writings show, if anything, what we need is a return to Marx.
- He irons over the differences between revolutionary and reactionary movements, which leads him to come to the wrong conclusion on why the Tea Party *succeeded*. First, it should be noted that "most Tea Party supporters are among the middle class", not the working class as Fukuyama implies (Boushey 2010). Secondly, the fact is that the ends of reactionary movements are just more suited to populism: the creation of a unified identity, manipulation, a focus on "other-ing" weaker groups, us-versus-them narratives. Combine all of these combined with the middle-class' influence on social institutions and its clear what make right-wing soft-coups so effective.

Occupy had a clear focus against the elites, there was undeniably an economic undertone to it (hence the focus on income and Wall-Street), and the "99 percent" included the middle class. The issue was that they hit a wall precisely because their populist approach had little to offer to those who they wished to mobilize. Taking more pages out of the Tea Party's playbook would only exacerbate the problem, not solve it.

3. Class Vacuum

Of course, all of this begs the question. Why even bother with a class theory? This is a question that has repeatedly been raised, whether consciously or unconsciously, by various movements from individualist anarchists to right-wing nationalists. Often times, however, what we are going to see is that this sort of rejection of a social element in revolutionary change often lends itself to individual terrorism as a means of praxis.

First, let us set the terms, because terrorism in and of itself is a broad phenomenon. We're mostly going to be focusing on terrorism perpetrated by individuals and non-state actors and the ideological factors which motivate them. Terrorism studies is a rabbit-hole unto itself, so there's no point digging into what is irrelevant to the topic of this essay. The following quote should make clear the angle we're approaching this from:

> *By its very essence terrorist work demands such concentrated energy for "the great moment," such an overestimation of the significance of individual heroism, and finally, such a "hermetic" conspiracy, that – if not logically, then psychologically – it totally excludes agitational and organisational work among the masses.*
>
> *...Everything that is outside the framework of terror is only the setting for the struggle; at best, an auxiliary means. In the blinding flash of exploding bombs, the contours of political parties and the dividing lines of the class struggle disappear without a trace.*

> *...The revolvers of individual heroes instead of the people's cudgels and pitchforks; bombs instead of barricades – that is the real formula of terrorism. (Trotsky 1909)*

3.1. Propaganda of the Deed

Historically, a core component of anarchist theory is "propaganda of the deed", best summarized as the idea that an individual's actions can inspire others to take up arms. However, those who postulated about it soon had to come to terms with the reality once people began to follow through on it.

> *A proper understanding of the origins of anarchist terrorism at the end of the nineteenth century must take into account not only a variety of causes, some of them contradictory, but also a baffling gap between rhetoric and reality. Malatesta and Kropotkin had called for propaganda by the deed, meaning actions aimed at insurrection and revolution, but soon got random acts of murder about which they harbored deep misgivings. Loath to abandon the lowly instigators of these deeds, the anarchist leaders apolo-gized for them, and thus enabled, or at least assisted, the popular press and numerous politicians in finding someone to blame, or to scapegoat, for mis-cellaneous anti-social acts...*
>
> *...The assassination of Tsar Alexander, attempts on the German kaiser and Italian king in 1878, the abortive bombing of the Greenwich Observatory (at the instigation of the tsarist police?), scores of mysterious bombings in Barcelona between 1904 and 1909, attacks on British civilians and officials in India, the Italian soldier Masetti's assault on his commanding officer in 1911, and other acts of violence were all co-opted into the terrorist "black wave," not only by the prejudices (and sometimes the instigation) of the media, police, and politicians, but also by the fervent desires of many anarchists, who saw in them dazzling images of proletarian power. (Jensen 2014, 22-23)*

This encouraged a reformulation on part of thinkers such as Kropotkin and Bakunin, who would develop a theory of anarchist praxis drawing heavily from the then-emerging syndicalist movement. This would end up defining a split between anarchists who were willing to embrace a class-theory and anarchists who weren't.

> *Coinciding with the birth of anarcho-syndicalism and revolutionary unionism, three tendencies emerged within anarchist-communism. First, there was the tendency represented by Kropotkin himself and Les Temps Nouveaux (Jean Grave). Second, there were a number of groups which were influenced by Kropotkin but which were less reserved than him towards the trade unions (for example, Khleb i Volia in Russia). Finally, there was the anti-syndicalist anarchist-communists, who in France were grouped around Sebastien Faure's Le Libertaire. From 1905 onwards, the Russian counterparts of these anti-syndicalist anarchist-communists become partisans of economic terrorism and illegal 'expropriations'.*

> *…As an alternative to the strategy of the Russian 'illegalist' anarchist-communists, Kropotkin envisaged the formation of independent anarchist trade unions whose aim would be to counteract the influence of the Social Democrats. He defined his strategy in one sentence in the 1904 introduction to the Italian edition of Paroles d'un Révolté: 'Expropriation as the aim, and the general strike as the means to paralyse the bourgeois world in all countries at the same time.'*

> *At the end of his life Kropotkin seems to have abandoned his previous reservations and to have gone so far as to see in syndicalism the only 'groundwork for the reconstruction of Russian economy'. In May 1920, he declared that: 'the syndicalist movement… will emerge as the great force in the course of the next fifty years, leading to the creation of the communist stateless society'. (Pengam 2002)*

For the purposes of the point I'm driving, I am going to direct my attention towards individualist strains of anarchism, as they offer the most coherent expression of a classless perspective. A separate section can be found below ("Addressing Potential Objections") if social anarchists have any issues with exactly how representative this is of anarchism with respect to the context of this piece.

> *The 1911–1912 rampages of the Bonnot gang, the "Tragic Bandits," were even more spectacular and bloody. Most of the bandits were French, but a few were Belgian. Many of the gang's members, although not Jules Bonnot himself, had originally been associated with L'Anarchie, founded in 1905 as the premier anarchist journal advocating individualist anarchism and "individual restitution," i.e., robbery. In December 1911 the Tragic Bandits began to steal cars, rob banks, and kill people. They were the first individuals to use automobiles for terrorist or criminal purposes. (Jensen 2014, 351)*

3.2. Terrorism and Failure

The aforementioned Anarchist F.A.Q. makes another point regarding terrorism:

> *Terrorism has been used by many other political, social and religious groups and parties. For example, Christians, Marxists, Hindus, Nationalists, Republicans, Muslims, Sikhs, Fascists, Jews and Patriots have all committed acts of terrorism. Few of these movements or ideas have been labelled as "terrorist by nature" or continually associated with violence—which shows anarchism's threat to the status quo. (McKay et al. 2010)*

Which brings me to the other half of the terrorism coin: movements which have decayed beyond the point of being able to view themselves as the lever of history.

And it's here we begin to see the inherently defeatist character of terrorism: it "can maintain itself only by exploiting the weakness and disorganization of the masses, minimizing their conquests, and exaggerating their defeats" (Trotsky 1909). It appeals to those who are politically isolated, those who are

facing the inevitability of their defeat.

> *What basically characterizes the members of these strata is their individualism, impatience, scepticism and demoralization. Their actions are more aimed at spectacular suicide than at any particular goal. Having lost their past position in society, having no future, they live in a present of misery and exasperated revolt against this misery; in an immediacy which is felt as an immediacy. Even if through contact with the working class and its historical future they can get inspired by its ideas in a distorted way, this rarely goes beyond the level of fantasy and dreams. Their real view of reality is a purely contingent one. (International Review 1978)*

The hopeless mentality that underlies it often makes it attractive to reactionaries, whose ideology can only lead one to adopt the mentality of the perpetual loser. Littered throughout the manifesto of the El Paso shooter is this sense of complete desperation and self-victimization on part of the author. No person who feels remotely secure in their political position would write something like this:

> *In short, America is rotting from the inside out, and peaceful means to stop this seem to be nearly impossible. The inconvenient truth is that our leaders, both Democrat AND Republican, have been failing us for decades. They are either complacent or involved in one of the biggest betrayals of the American public in our history. The takeover of the United States government by unchecked corporations. I could write a ten page essay on all the damage these corporations have caused, but here is what is important. Due to the death of the baby boomers, the increasingly anti-immigrant rhetoric of the right and the ever increasing Hispanic population, America will soon become a one party-state. The Democrat party will own America and they know it. They have already begun the transition by pandering heavily to the Hispanic voting bloc in the 1st Democratic Debate. They intend to use open borders, free healthcare for illegals, citizenship and more to enact a political coup by importing and then legalizing millions of new voters. With policies like these, the Hispanic support for Democrats will likely become nearly unanimous in the future. The heavy Hispanic population in Texas will make us a Democrat stronghold. Losing Texas and a few other states with heavy Hispanic population to the Democrats is all it would take for them to win nearly every presidential election. (Crusius 2019)*

The Unabomber, a luddite, also finds himself in despair when faced with the seemingly unstoppable march of industrialization.

> *That being accomplished, it does not appear that there would be any further obstacle to the development of technology, and it would presumably advance toward its logical conclusion, which is complete control over everything on Earth, including human beings and all other important organisms. The system may become a unitary, monolithic organization, or it may be more or less fragmented and consist of a number of organizations coexisting in a relationship that includes elements of both cooperation and competition,just as today the government, the corporations and other large organizations both cooperate and compete with one another. Human freedom mostly will have vanished, because individuals and small groups will be impotent vis-à-vis*

large organizations armed with super technology and an arsenal of advanced psychological and biological tools for manipulating human beings, besides instruments of surveillance and physical coercion. Only a small number of people will have any real power, and even these probably will have only very limited freedom, because their behavior too will be regulated; just as today our politicians and corporation executives can retain their positions of power only as long as their behavior remains within certain fairly narrow limits.

Don't imagine that the system will stop developing further techniques for controlling human beings and nature once the crisis of the next few decades is over and increasing control is no longer necessary for the system's survival. On the contrary, once the hard times are over the system will increase its control over people and nature more rapidly, because it will no longer be hampered by difficulties of the kind that it is currently experiencing. Survival is not the principal motive for extending control. As we explained in paragraphs 87-90, technicians and scientists carry on their work largely as a surrogate activity; that is, they satisfy their need for power by solving technical problems. They will continue to do this with unabated enthusiasm, and among the most interesting and challenging problems for them to solve will be those of understanding the human body and mind and intervening in their development. For the "good of humanity," of course. (Kaczynski 1995, 39-40)

The previous examples were us demonstrating the hopelessness of known terrorists, but what about the terrorism of a known failure? Working backwards, we end up at the same result. Take a look at Peru's Shining Path, one of many international Maoist movements formed in response to China's liberalization.

Viewed from one historical angle – the emergence of neo-liberalism under Reagan, and China's own shunning of the Cultural Revolution in the early 1980s – Shining Path's project was bizarrely out of its time. It was also ill-suited to Peru. Few of the preconditions for Mao's own revolution in the 'semi-colonial, semi-feudal' China of the 1940s seemed to be present: Peru in 1980 was a democracy; it was largely urban and literate; and there was no colonial invader to fight, no militant social rebellion to capitalise upon, no massive inequality of land ownership. (Lovell 2019, 308)

The aim – to provoke the state into indiscriminate retaliation and for the people in turn to rebel against government brutality – was crude but, as it turned out, cruelly effective. The more excessive the state response, the more discredited Peru's democracy, and the more disillusioned the populace, would become. Guzmán was prepared to sustain horrendous losses. He told his cadres frankly that they would have to 'cross the river of blood': that 'many party militants would die…and they would die in the worst possible ways. Their families would be destroyed…there was very little in Peru's history that prepared it to confront the level of violence that would eventually be unleashed. Dozens, hundreds of thousands of dead.' The revolution envisioned by Shining Path resembled ever more closely a compact of death. Shining Path melded Mao's optimistic 'a single spark can light a prairie fire' with a much darker, quasi-religious concept of purification in rivers of blood. It fostered a spirit of reckless confrontation. (Lovell 2019, 327-328)

The reversal of their outlook would not bring victory for the guerillas; "with the capture of [their leader], Shining Path collapsed like a paper tiger" (p. 342). What it did bring instead was numerous atrocities inflicted upon the very peasantry Maoism was intended to champion.

> *Children were forced to become guerrillas: 'against their will, whether they wanted to or not, they showed them arms, knives, spears; if you don't accept it, you'll die'. They understood little of Mao: a few pre-breakfast readings from philosophy essays, nothing more. The party at first tried to ban fiestas, but then realised that the booze made villagers indiscreet in identifying informers: 'drink made them reveal what they had told the military. Right there we would take them away, and kill them later that night. No one witnessed this, only the dark canyons.' Girls aged twelve or thirteen were turned, effectively, into comfort-women or child-bearing slaves – they were conscripted to bases, from where they returned pregnant. Shining Path 'have deceived us', cried anguished mothers. In some base areas, voluntary recruits coexisted with conscripts whose families had been annihilated in senderista attacks. Deserters and dissenters suffered cruel public execution; in a massacre of Amazonian tribal captives in November 1989, one of the prisoners was crucified. (Lovell 2019, 332-333)*

Even beyond Peru, a common pattern emerges among the Maoist movements surveyed in Lovell's book. In the cases of India (p. 349) and Nepal (p. 393-394), and others, we also see movements which when faced with the threat of irrelevancy resort to terroristic means.

3.3. The Atomization of the Terrorist

Unlike the other approaches that have been covered, you're going to see very few people consciously advocate for individual terrorism as a means of praxis. Because of this, it's going to be necessary to first draw a connection between terrorism and a "class vacuum".

> *In our eyes, individual terror is inadmissible precisely because it belittles the role of the masses in their own consciousness, reconciles them to their powerlessness, and turns their eyes and hopes towards a great avenger and liberator who some day will come and accomplish his mission. The anarchist prophets of the 'propaganda of the deed' can argue all they want about the elevating and stimulating influence of terrorist acts on the masses. Theoretical considerations and political experience prove otherwise. The more 'effective' the terrorist acts, the greater their impact, the more they reduce the interest of the masses in self-organisation and self-education. But the smoke from the confusion clears away, the panic disappears, the successor of the murdered minister makes his appearance, life again settles into the old rut, the wheel of capitalist exploitation turns as before; only the police repression grows more savage and brazen. And as a result, in place of the kindled hopes and artificially aroused excitement comes disillusionment and apathy. (Trotsky 1909)*

3.1A: Addressing Potential Objections

The Anarchist F.A.Q. (reflecting the views of a lot of modern social anarchists) considers the "propaganda-by-the-deed phase of anarchism [to be] a failure" and attempts to quash the notion of "anarchist terrorism". Peppered throughout the section, however, we're given a whole array of mealy-mouthed defenses regarding the link between anarchism and terrorism.

> We can get a feel of the hypocrisy surrounding condemnation of anarchist violence by non-anarchists by considering their response to state violence. For example, many capitalist papers and individuals in the 1920s and 1930s celebrated Fascism as well as Mussolini and Hitler. Anarchists, in contrast, fought Fascism to the death and tried to assassinate both Mussolini and Hitler. Obviously supporting murderous dictatorships is not "violence" and "terrorism" but resisting such regimes is! Similarly, non-anarchists can support repressive and authoritarian states, war and the suppression of strikes and unrest by violence ("restoring law and order") and not be considered "violent." Anarchists, in contrast, are condemned as "violent" and "terrorist" because a few of them tried to revenge such acts of oppression and state/capitalist violence! Similarly, it seems the height of hypocrisy for someone to denounce the anarchist "violence" which produces a few broken windows in, say, Seattle while supporting the actual violence of the police in imposing the state's rule or, even worse, supporting the American invasion of Iraq in 2003. If anyone should be considered violent it is the supporter of state and its actions yet people do not see the obvious and "deplore the type of violence that the state deplores, and applaud the violence that the state practices." (McKay et al. 2017)

Is anarchism "terrorist by nature"? No, there are anarchist currents (especially anarcho-pacifism) which are fundamentally incompatible with such methods. However, the attitude social anarchists have shown towards terrorism is fundamentally incoherent. On one hand, you have people like Murray Bookchin condemning these terrorists on account of acting of their own individual accord, rather than listening to the "anarchist groups".

> It must be noted that the majority of anarchists did not support this tactic. Of those who committed "propaganda by the deed" (sometimes called "attentats"), as Murray Bookchin points out, only a "few . . . were members of Anarchist groups. The majority . . . were soloists." [The Spanish Anarchists, p. 102] Needless to say, the state and media painted all anarchists with the same brush. They still do, usually inaccurately (such as blaming Bakunin for such acts even though he had been dead years before the tactic was even discussed in anarchist circles or by labelling non-anarchist groups anarchists!). (McKay et al. 2017)

On the other hand, you have acts of terror being committed by these same "anarchist groups", quite a few of which *do* follow social anarchism.

> The Spanish anarchists whom [Bookchin] esteems above all others (1977, 1994) had perhaps the longest terrorist tradition of all. The index reference to "Terrorism, anarchist" in his history of Spanish anarchism covers dozens of pages (1977: 342). There were sporadic bombings in the 1880s which became chronic, at least in the anarchist stronghold of Barcelona, in the 1890s (Bookchin 1977: ch. 6). 1918–1923, period of violent class struggle in Spain, was the time of the pistoleros — gunmen —

> *a term which applies to both employer-hired goons and anarcho-leftist militants. Among hundreds of others, "a premier, two former civil governors, an Arch-bishop, nearly 300 employers, factory directors, foremen, and police, and many workers and their leaders in the sindicato libre [a company union], fell before the bullets and bombs of Anarchist action groups" (Black 1992)*

So, what exactly are we supposed to make of all this?

> *It is true that anarchist violence has often backfired and never won any lasting victory. But this is but to say that anarchism is a failure to date. Anarchist propaganda is a failure. Anarchist organizing is a failure (vide the IWW). Anarchist schooling is a failure. If anything, anarchists have accomplished more by violence than in any other way, in the Ukraine and in Spain, for instance. The fact is anarchists have not accomplished anything by any means to compare with their leftist and fascist and liberal rivals. Their propaganda, for instance, has not come close to the efficiency of propaganda by Nazis, televangelists, and Fabian Socialists. Their institution-building (touted by the Australian consortium) amounts to nothing but anarchists bagging granola in food coops or supplying warm bodies for demonstrations claimed by Stalinists or Green yuppies or whomever. Anything they can do, others do better. Could it be that anarchism itself scares most people away, stirs up their fear of freedom such that they seize upon media spoon-fed slanders like 'terrorism' as excuses for looking the other way? (Black 1992)*

Social anarchism remains stuck at an impasse attempting to balance the class-narrative of its "social" half and the assumption of absolute individual agency afforded by the final condition of anarchy. Class-theories and anarchism mix like oil and water: Faced with this reality, "libertarian municipalists" and anarcho-syndicalists were forced to abandon the anarchist project in favor of simple left-wing libertarianism. Direct democracy, localism, and decentralization: equivocate all you want on the definition of "hierarchy", but none of these constitute anarchy.

> *By some quirk of fate, Bookchin's minimal, believe-it-or-else anarchist creed just happens to be his creed. It also happens to be deliriously incoherent. A "confederation of decentralized municipalities" contradicts "direct democracy," as a confederation is at best a representative, not a direct, democracy. It also contradicts "an unwavering opposition to statism" because a city-state or a federal state is still a state.*
>
> *…While the word "anarchism" appears on almost every page of the Dean's diatribe, the word "anarchy" rarely if ever does. The ideology, the ism, is what preoccupies him, not the social condition, the way of life, it's presumably supposed to guide us toward. It may not be an inadvertent choice of words that what Bookchin lays down, as one of his Four Commandments of orthodox anarchism, is "an unwavering opposition to statism" (60: emphasis added), not an unwavering opposition to the state. As a democrat, the Dean is at best capable of only a wavering opposition to the state, whereas an abstract rejection of an abstraction, "statism," is easy enough to issue. And I'm sure it's no accident that his shot at the mainstream marketing of Bookchinism (Bookchin 1987a) nowhere*

> *identifies the Dean as an anarchist or his teachings as any kind of anarchism. (Black 1997)*

4. Striking A Balance

So far, we have criticized numerous approaches which have sought to replace the Orthodox Marxist class-theory. However, the question posed at the beginning of this piece still remains. How should communists respond to non-class struggles? We've already answered how they shouldn't, so now the time has come for a proposed alternative to the above approaches.

4.1. Class From Another Angle

But before we get to that, I think it's first important to establish exactly why communists should even care about the issue. There's a tendency among Marxists to adopt an outlook of vulgar-materialism, partially due to the aesthetic factor I discussed in Section 1, but also due to misconceptions peddled by countless secondary sources. "Materialism" is constantly used as a crutch to justify lazy analyses of social phenomena. To quote Engels:

> *And if [a] man has not yet discovered that while the material mode of existence is the primary agent this does not preclude the ideological spheres from reacting upon it in their turn, though with a secondary effect, he cannot possibly have understood the subject he is writing about. The materialist conception of history has a lot of them nowadays, to whom it serves as an excuse for not studying history…*
>
> *In general, the word "materialistic" serves many of the younger writers in Germany as a mere phrase with which anything and everything is labeled without further study, that is, they stick on this label and then consider the question disposed of. But our conception of history is above all a guide to study, not a lever for construction after the manner of the Hegelian. All history must be studied afresh, the conditions of existence of the different formations of society must be examined individually before the attempt is made to deduce them from the political, civil law, aesthetic, philosophic, religious, etc., views corresponding to them. (Engels 1890)*

What we have seen throughout history is that these "id-pol" movements and struggles have given way to critiques which shine further light on the nature of capitalism and how these secondary effects can influence how it manifests itself. For example, the insights of the black liberation movement gave way to not just one of the few truly revolutionary socialist organizations in United States history (the Black Panthers), but also an understanding into how racial division can countervail the assumed tendency of workers to homogenize with the development of industrialization (as mentioned in Section 1.1.)

Or even take the case of the women's liberation movement, which has continually found itself confronting the question of social reproduction through the concept of the commons and the distinction between directly and indirectly market-mediated labor.

> *We struggle to break capital's plan for women, which is an essential moment of that planned division of labour and social power within the working class, through which capital has been able to maintain its power. Wages for housework, then, is a revolutionary demand not because by itself it destroys capital, but because it attacks capital and forces it to restructure social relations in terms more favourable to us and consequently more favourable to the unity of the class. In fact, to demand wages for housework does not mean to say that if we are paid we will continue to do it. It means precisely the' opposite. To say that we want money for housework is the first step towards refusing to do it, because the demand for a wage makes our work visible, which is the most indispensable condition to begin to struggle against it, both in its immediate aspect as housework and its more insidious character as femininity. (Federici 1975, 5)*

In the case of both of these examples, however, it required said movements to begin with a purely identity-based analysis, and only after theoretical maturity was it ready to be incorporated into a broader critique of capital. It's naive to expect every movement to begin dealing in these abstract terms, because politics starts from the concrete, our everyday experiences. However, as we become more conscious of our situation, building upon the knowledge of our predecessors, we can begin to articulate these observations as a critical theory.

Communists should not be antagonistic towards these movements, but rather instead give them room to develop in parallel. And as it develops into a coherent theory and history of struggle, the intersection of the causes will allow us to view class from another angle.

4.2. The Politics of Everyday Life

Why would we want to view class from another angle? Because it ties into the concept of "the politics of everyday life". While capitalism retains certain core characteristics such as generalized commodity production and wage-labor, it's far from a static system. How capital is manifested, how it subsumes labor, and how people are stratified under it are questions which can only be answered relative to the time-period in question. As seen in the wake of 1968, these transformations can occur faster than theory can formalize. A revolutionary moment can be completely missed because communists remain wedded to yesterday's analysis. This isn't to completely disown the need for formal theory, but understand that unless we can pair it with a more responsive base of understanding, we're doomed to forever play catch-up.

> *Man makes his own history, but he does not make it out of the whole cloth; he does not make it out of conditions chosen by himself, but out of such as he finds close at hand. The tradition of all past generations weighs like an alp upon the brain of the living. At the very time when men appear engaged in revolutionizing things and themselves, in bringing about what never was before, at such very epochs of revolutionary crises do they anxiously conjure up into their service the spirits of the past, assume their names, their battle cries, their costumes to enact anew historic scene in such time-honored disguise and with such borrowed language.*

> *Thus does the beginner, who has acquired a new language, keep on translating it back into hi sown mother tongue; only then has he grasped the spirit of the new language and is able freely to express himself therewith when he moves in it without recollections of old, and has forgotten in its use his own hereditary tongue. (Marx 1852, 12)*

This is where the temporal advantage of the everyday comes into play, it allows us to understand and respond to revolutionary moments *as they occur*. It refuses to allow us to fall back onto a purely historical identification, but rather instead forces us to take seriously our responsibility as present beings to define the content of the struggle.

> *The line of objective time knows nothing and wishes to know nothing of the present as immediate subjective presence. And, in its turn, subjective life concentrated in the space of a point – my joy, my pleasure, my daydreams – isn't interested in time that flows away, in linear time, the time of things. On the contrary, it wants to learn everything about its present – for, after all, it is only a present. (Vaneigem 1967, 105)*

There's another side to the coin however, and that's the everyday as relevant to the individual, bringing us back to the original topic. One of the most persistent anchors within communist circles has been the cult of the proletarian, and its this tendency which would go on to inspire all the various mistakes I've gone over in the previous sections.

Parties constantly invoke the wellbeing of the "working-man" to justify their actions. Populists, desperate to be validated, define class-boundaries as broadly as possible to fit themselves into the narrative. Councilists continue to paralyze themselves out of fear that they're somehow interfering with the proletarian destiny.

This remains as true now as it was back in 1968, when Camatte wrote the following:

> *The classist analysis which we adopted originally could never do more than interpret real events. The same shortcoming affected the participants of May '68 and made it possible for them to perceive themselves according to the old schemas. It is becoming increasingly obvious that these active participants were men and women who were personally and very intimately involved in the life and functioning of capital, and more especially were having to justify and maintain its representation, who then went into revolt against it. But their revolt is completely recuperable as long as it moves on the worn out road of class struggle which aspires to awaken the proletariat and make it accomplish its mission...*
>
> *The mythology of the proletariat accounts for how the "populism" of May '68, as we called it, became "proletarianism". People started to say: "We must go to the proletariat, revive its fighting spirit, summon up its capacities for self-sacrifice and then it can kick out the evil bosses and follow the other 'proletarians' down the road to revolution."*

> *May '68 ushered in a period of great scorn and confusion. People were scornful of themselves because they weren't "proletarian", and they scorned each other for the same reason, whereas they were all confused about the proletariat, the class that had always been considered potentially revolutionary. There is no other way to explain the impasse encountered by the movement which formed itself in opposition to the established society. (Camatte 1973)*

Camatte's position is rather extreme, but perhaps rhetorically necessary as a wake-up call.

I still hold to the assertion that as the producers of value, the proletariat is in a unique position to give force to a critique of capitalism. However, this does not mean that they are the only ones capable of taking action, that action cannot precede their movement, or that somehow it is impossible for them to organize with non-proletarians.

There's an oft-quoted passage from Marx's letters regarding how non-proletarian elements are to be tolerated, one which seems to preclude the stance I have taken:

> *"Second, when such people from other classes join the proletarian movement, the first demand upon them must be that they do not bring with them any remnants of bourgeois, petty-bourgeois, etc., prejudices, but that they irreversibly assimilate the proletarian viewpoint. But those gentlemen, as has been shown, adhere overwhelmingly to petty-bourgeois conceptions. In so petty-bourgeois a country as Germany, such conceptions certainly have their justification, but only outside the Social-Democratic Labor party. If the gentlemen want to build a social-democratic petty-bourgeois party, they have a full right to do so; one could then negotiate with them, conclude agreements, etc., according to circumstances. But in a labor party, they are a falsifying element. If there are grounds which necessitates tolerating them, it is a duty only to tolerate them, to allow them no influence in party leadership, and to keep in mind that a break with them is only a matter of time." (Marx 1879)*

However, it should be noted that this is within a purely programmatic context, both the proletarian and petty bourgeois elements of the time working within an explicit political party. The backdrop here is the war between the reformist and utopian currents of the SPD versus the revolutionary ones. The former often denied the existence of class conflict, believing that socialism was a matter which could be negotiated. The direction with which the SPD approaches its task would have implications for all of its members.

Within the passage, I'd like to highlight this sentence here:

> *If the gentlemen want to build a social-democratic petty-bourgeois party, they have a full right to do so; one could then negotiate with them, conclude agreements, etc., according to circumstances.*

Within the context of spontaneous organization, the proletariat is free to associate, dissociate, adopt, and reject elements according to the situation.

In these cases, the movement is not gradually subverted away from the proletarian perspective, it either interests the proletariat or it does not. Irrespective of that, we continue to struggle according to our personal conflicts with capital and the perspective and tools offered to us by our socially-determined role. Once we put aside the act of white-knighting the little guy and actually become honest with our relationship to capital, does the movement actually begin to mean anything to non-ideologues.

The ones who were successful in piquing the interest of the proletariat in 1968 weren't the electoralist PCF or the invariant ICC, it was the artists and students whose agitation was based on how they found capitalism boring. It sounds rather petty in discourse dominated by proletarian virtue-signaling, but it was the self-awareness which ended up being the most in touch with the situation.

Leaving the question of praxis so incredibly relative and open-ended would've been impossible previously, but it's the reality we find ourselves now in a society increasingly characterized by unity-in-separation. Collective struggles, whether proletarian or not, have the potential to develop a public space in which our day-to-day experiences serve as a common ground in an atomized world. The question of class was not what needed fixing, but rather instead the question of how we relate to it.

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