

**The historical reason of existence of the
capitalist mode of production and
the determination of the working class
as a revolutionary subject**

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Buenos Aires, 2002

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como CRITICA PRACTICA**

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Nowadays, the mere reference to necessity, to a historical reason, means scandal and abomination among many of those that present themselves as critics of capitalism. “Teleology”, falls excommunication on any scientific recognition that society advances in a determined direction. And the action that affirms itself in its freedom by ruling itself through the scientific awareness of its own determination is accused of being a “totalitarian” attack against freedom. Under the advocacy of pluralism and diversity, all revolutionary potentiality is brought down to an abstract “desire”, “free will”, “moral power”, to affirm an identity that starts by dogmatically denying any class identity that arises from social relations of production. The dogma thus advances to the point of proclaiming that the capitalist mode of production is to abolish the working class, and not the other way round. Of course, the open apologists of capitalism cannot but enjoy this emptiness of historical necessity. What else could they ask for, when even the very scientific method that is uncritically accepted in a universal way as the natural form of science, logical representation, consecrates the impossibility of acting bearing the certainty about one’s own determinations.

To this modern advance of the idealistic inversion we are going to oppose here the development of the consciousness about the materiality of human natural history, i.e. about the development of human productive subjectivity.¹

*The commodity, or the productive powers of social labour performed as individual private labour*²

The human being distinguishes itself as a genus in opposition to animal species. It does so for its potentiality to act upon its environment. It is able to transform the latter into a means for itself through labour; that is to say, through the expenditure of human labour-power ruled in a conscious and voluntary way that is applied on an external object to transform it into a use value for human life. Since they are specific parts of human labour, consciousness and will can advance in their own development as far as the material productive forces of human labour reach in theirs.

The material productive forces of labour are borne by individual labour. Nevertheless, the development of their potentiality is an attribute only inhering in the collective unity of individual labours. In other words, the realisation of the human generic-being³ itself is an attribute only inhering in social labour. The organic unity of individual labours, i.e., the way

¹ We start this development armed with the original knowledge presented by Marx in *Capital*, that is to say, by performing a process of recognition. As long as we advance in this process of recognition we limit our exposition to the presentation of the axis of the path that takes towards the concrete forms we specifically aim at cognizing here. Therefore, it does not make sense to refer each step of our advance to a singular point in Marx's original exposition, but to the units of his exposition that point to the axis of ours.

² Marx, Karl 1965, part I.

³ The English “human species-being”, commonly used in this sense, conceals the generic difference from animal species that humanity engenders for itself by developing its capacity to transform its environment into a means for itself through labor. On the contrary, this difference remains immediately visible in the expression “human generic-being”, as it currently happens in Spanish, and as it corresponds to the German difference between *Gattung* (genus, from which *Gattungswesen*: generic-being) and *Art* (species), that is essential to dialectics.

in which society organises the production of its life, takes the concrete shape of the social relations of production. As such, these social relations lack any way of advancing in their development beyond that which the very materiality of the productive forces of society demands from them at each stage of its own development. The natural history of the human generic-being is but the history of the development of the material productive forces of labour, and of the social concrete forms through which that development rules itself.

The first noticeable thing concerning social labour in the capitalist mode of production is the form of private labour in which it is performed. Here, no producer is subjected to direct relations of personal dependence that can impose on him/her the concrete mode in which his/her labour-power has to be applied. And, if there is something that characterises an independent subject that performs his/her labour in a private way, that is the immediate autonomy of his/her consciousness and will. Still, as much as the consciousness and will of the independent producer are not subordinated to any other individual's consciousness and will in the process of privately ruling his/her individual labour, they are deprived from intervening in the correspondingly independent organisation of everybody else's labour. As free individuals, the independent producers of commodities exercise by means of their own consciousness and will the complete control over their individual labours, but lack any control over the social character of these labours. The development of the material productive forces of social labour thus expands its power through the development of the isolated individual productive forces. But, at the same time, it loses all power coming from the application of consciousness and will to the organisation of labour as a direct social process. This contradiction is the starting point of the specific historical reason of existence of the capitalist mode of production.

Commodity producers are deprived from any capacity to socially organise their labours in a direct way by applying their individual consciousness and will as an immediate social power. This organisation necessarily solves itself in an indirect way. In the capitalist mode of production, society allocates its total labour-power under the different useful concrete forms of labour necessary for social life, through the exchange of commodities. That is to say, through the value-form taken by the product of social labour privately performed. The abstract socially necessary labour - a simple productive expenditure of human body whichever the concrete form in which it is realised and, as such, a natural condition for human life regardless the social modality that rules it - acquires a historically specific social form for being privately realised by the independent producers. Once materialised in its product, the commodities, it appears represented as their value. That is to say, it appears represented as the ability of commodities to socially relate among themselves in exchange, thus placing their own producers in social relation.

Only just in exchange itself, i.e. in the market, it becomes evident whether a certain private labour has formed part of social labour at the moment it was performed. Therefore, the producer must not only produce a socially useful object, a social use value. He/she must produce, at the same time, his/her general social relation, i.e. he/she must produce value. Then, the development of the productive forces of social labour under its capitalist modality starts from the plentitude of the productive powers of free isolated individual labour. In other words, it starts from the full expression of the productive forces that social labour can achieve from being executed under the form of an absolutely private labour.

Since they need to produce value, the free individual consciousness and will of the producer that privately and independently organises his/her labour is subjected to a historically specific determination. They must submit themselves to the necessity imposed on them by the value-form of their own material product. The producer is free from any personal servitude because he/she is the servant of the social character of his/her product. While the producer's will completely dominates the private and independent exercise of his/her

individual labour, it is in turn completely subordinated to the social powers of the material product of that labour. From the point of view of the participation of the private and independent producer in social labour, his/her consciousness and will only count inasmuch as he/she personifies the powers of his/her commodity. The productive power of their social labour confronts the producers themselves as an alienated power, as a power incarnated in their commodities.

*Capital, or the productive powers of the doubly free labourer*⁴

The production of value starting from substantive value itself, i.e. the production of surplus-value, is the ultimate form of value-production. As capital, substantive value opens the circuit of a social production that has the production of more substantive value as its immediate object. Therefore, in the allocation of social labour under its different concrete forms, the realisation of the purely quantitative difference between the amount of capital that opens and closes the circuit is the only qualitative determination that prevails.

In the capitalist mode of production, capital is the concrete subject of the process of social life. The productive powers of social labour only exist as capital's powers. Social production is ruled by a general social relation produced in the very process of material production, which imposes the constant expansion of this material production without any immediate necessity other than that of producing more of itself as a materialised general social relation. Upon which it constantly renews the necessity of its production on an expanded scale.

The realisation of social labour in a private and independent way entails a violent doubling with respect to the immediate appearance it presented when we considered commodities as the simple product of labour, and not as the product of labour alienated in capital. On the one hand, direct labour is left to the doubly free labourer. This labourer is a free individual since he/she retains the autonomy of his/her will as the owner of the only commodity that he/she owns for selling, his/her own labour-power. Still, at the same time, he/she is a free individual since he/she is separated from the means needed to put that labour-power into action by him/herself. This twofold freedom retains for the labourer's will and consciousness the necessity of being applied to the self-control over his/her individual labour, as a condition for his/her labour-power to retain its mercantile aptitude. On the other hand, the capitalist incarnates the powers inherent in the commodity determined as capital, that is to say, the powers of social labour. Hence, the exercise by the doubly free labourer of his/her consciousness and will to rule his/her own individual labour entails being consciously and voluntarily subordinated to the authority of the capitalist inside the labour process.

The allocation of society's total labour power under its concrete useful forms through the commodity-form taken by the product of social labour presupposes the absence of any direct relation that subordinates the will of an individual to another individual's will. Yet, now we see that the purest exchange of commodities that characterises in a specific way the capitalist mode of production, the buying and selling of labour-power, engenders by itself a direct relation of subordination of the labourer's will to the capitalist's will. It is about a direct relation that reaches the universality of the indirectly established link between the capitalists and the labourers through the buying and selling of labour-power. Nevertheless, it is not about a relation that links them in a general way. It only prevails within each labour process realised in an independent and private way, and through the working-day for which the labour-power has been sold.

⁴ Marx, Karl 1965, parts II-III.

Hence, a mutilation in the capacity to control one's own individual labour mediates between the simple direct producer that rules by him/herself his/her individual labour in a private independent manner and the doubly free labourer. Therefore, a mutilation in the development of the productive powers of individual labour mediates between them. However, the development of the capacity to consciously control the individual process of labour as a collective power mediates too. It is about a collective power that emerges from the association of the labourer with the non-labourer that exploits him/her in a direct relation that, in turn, is ruled in a general way by the indirect relation established through the buying and selling of labour-power.

The capitalist exercises the productive consciousness and will of the labourers whose labour-power buys, under a necessarily antagonistic concrete form. Still, it is not simply about the general antagonistic character implied by any relation of direct subordination of the labourer's will to the will of the non-labourer that exploits him/her, whichever its specific social form. The antagonistic character of the direct relation established between the labourer and he/she who represents capital is determined in a historically specific way as a concrete form of realising the value of the commodity labour-power. Therefore, it is determined as a concrete form of organising social labour by means of its realisation in a private and independent way.

The antagonism between the seller and the buyer of labour-power does not concern them in an individual way. The equality of juridical rights as owners of commodities, with which they individually face each other in circulation, can only be solved by force. And the competition among the labourers to individually sell their labour-power under the penalty of not being able to reproduce each one's natural life necessarily inclines the scale to the side of the capitalist. Consequently, in what purely concerns individual circulation, labour-power is condemned to be sold below its value. This possibility certainly fascinates each individual capital. Still, from the point of view of their totality, that is to say, of society's total capital, such a practice depletes the capacity to accumulate. It does so by progressively exhausting the labour-power at social capital's disposition.

Hence, the reproduction of social capital necessarily realises itself by making the indirect relation that the individual labourers establish among them as sellers of the same commodity, the competition among them, take concrete shape in its opposite. That is to say, this competition takes shape in a direct relation of co-operation, labourer's mutual solidarity, in the process of circulation of their commodity labour-power. The selling of labour-power at its value transcends the powers of the individual labourer. Moreover, it also transcends those of the collective of labourers delimited by the private character of each individual capital. And it even transcends those of the addition of these collectives in each special branch of social production. The same happens concerning the representation of these capitals by their capitalists. Therefore, the buying and selling of labour-power for its value necessarily takes concrete shape by determining labourers and capitalists, not simply as antagonists that confront each other in an indirect and individual manner through the buying and selling of labour-power, but as classes that confront each other in a direct manner. In other words, the buying and selling in question realises itself by necessarily taking the form of class struggle.

The commodity-form taken by the general social relation in the capitalist mode of production carries in itself the dissolution of all direct relation of personal dependence, replacing them with indirect relations of general interdependence with respect to things. Still, we now see that the realisation of the accumulation of social capital engenders by itself a direct social relation among the individuals that confront each other from the same pole of the alienation of their human powers as capital's powers, namely, the working class and the capitalist class. And that very same general autonomous regulation can only realise its own powers by taking concrete shape through a direct general social relation that subsumes those

relations that determine each class, namely, class struggle. It is no longer about a direct relation confined to the private and independent character with which each portion of social labour is performed. It is about this character necessarily engendering a direct relation that has a universal scope.

Therefore, class struggle is essentially the conscious and voluntary collective action of a universal scope that realises the organisation of social labour in a direct way, as a specific concrete form in which its general unconscious organisation through the accumulation of capital realises itself. The capitalist mode of production thus shows to carry within itself a first historical potentiality that specifically inheres in it, namely: the generation of a social relation of a universal scope according to which the organisation of social labour is ruled by the conscious and voluntary action of the individuals. Yet, it determines this direct relation as a necessary concrete form of the indirect relation through the valorisation of value. On doing so, the capitalist mode of production shows at the same time that it carries within itself a specific limitation to the development of that direct relation.

*Relative surplus-value, or the constant revolution in the productive subjectivity of the doubly free labourer*⁵

The working class cannot cease to confront day after day the capitalist class for the realisation of the value of its labour-power. This confrontation is the only way it has to reproduce its labour-power and, with it, its natural life. Still, no matter how many victories it is able to accumulate in this confrontation, it does not revolutionise through them the material basis for the development of the potencies of social labour. Of course, neither does the capitalist class, however much it strives to represent these potencies by exploiting labour-power to its annihilation. The capitalist class only accomplishes this task inasmuch as it will acts as the personification of the production of relative surplus-value. On pursuing the production of relative surplus-value, the capitalist mode of production carries within itself the necessity to constantly revolutionise the technical conditions of social production, without having any limit other than the formally unlimited valorisation of value. With the production of relative surplus-value, living labour does not only become formally dominated by its own product, at whose service it has to put its consciousness and will by personifying the social powers materialised in it. Here, the labourers are really subsumed in their own product, inasmuch as the latter acts as the concrete social subject that imposes the constant revolution in the material conditions of their labour.

Nevertheless, the historical role played by the capitalist mode of production in the development of society's material productive forces is not limited to an abstract constant revolution in the technical basis of production. The key lies in the concrete form taken by this constant revolution. For, in the same way that the labourer and the capitalist have no will nor social existence other than as incarnations of the potencies of capital, the constant technical revolution through which these potencies realise themselves revolutionises their determination as alienated social subjects. Therefore, it revolutionises their consciousness and will.

Simple co-operation, where each labourer performs an integral labour process bearing no difference with respect to those of his/her mates, is the first specific modality taken by the development of the productivity of labour as a concrete form of producing relative surplus-value. The individual labourer we started from does not experiment any transformation in his/her own labour process. Yet, at the same time, he/she emerges from this first stage

⁵ Marx, Karl 1965, parts IV-VII.

transformed into a particular member of the collective of labourers exploited by a capitalist. The capacity of the capitalist to control the execution itself of the labour performed by each individual labourer is restricted to the exteriority of this execution. Regarding this labour itself, no subjectivity rules other than that of the doubly free labourer. Still, the capitalist personifies now the powers of social labour inasmuch as these powers impose themselves, not just on a mere individual labour process, but on a collective of individual labours. Therefore, as they impose themselves on a social labour in itself.

The manufacturing division of labour transcends the powers of simple co-operation to revolutionise the productivity of labour as a concrete form of producing relative surplus-value. It does so by transforming the labourer into a collective subject that integrates the partial task performed by each individual labourer, regarding the labour process itself. Thus, the individual labourer loses all capacity to control in an integral way the labour process in which he/she takes part. He/she retains, however, the complete subjective control over the portion of that process that materially passes through his/her hands. But this capacity he/she retains transforms itself into a renewed basis for the mutilation of the potential universality of his/her labour-power. It is at the cost of such a mutilation that the doubly free labourer sees the powers of his/her individual labour turned into powers of a directly collective labour. In turn, the capacity of the capitalist to consciously control social labour penetrates now into the labour process itself. The latter requires now the proportional allocation and co-ordination of the different partial tasks that compose it.

The machinery system, inherent in large-scale industry, overcomes any constraint that the intervention of the labourer's subjectivity in the realisation of his/her labour process could impose on the extraction of surplus-value. The individual labourer that remains active tends to recover his/her potential universality only because capital has erased his/her subjectivity from the production process. Still, far from recovering his/her capacity to control the entirety of the production process in which he/she takes part, this capacity confronts the labourer as an attribute objectified in the machinery. The alienation of the powers of human labour as capital's powers has thus reached its most developed expression concerning productive labour.

The collective labourer of large-scale industry starts by having its organicity given in its condition as an appendage of the machinery system. In turn, once turned into the materialised subject of the production process, the machinery system has its own organicity determined by the objectified capacity to organise this process in an integral way. And this objectified capacity can only be the product of a knowledge that reaches the integrity of the natural processes upon which the machinery is going to operate, in a correspondingly objective way. Therefore, science is the necessary concrete form of producing the capacity to organise the labour process of the collective labourer of large-scale industry. The production of that capacity, its exercise in the practical organisation of the production process in a restricted sense, and this process itself, are the three necessary stages in the execution of the unity that constitutes the production process inherent in large-scale industry.

When the doubly free labourer consumes his/her means of subsistence, he/she does nothing else but to reproduce him/herself as such. Hence his/her consciousness and will have as their only material determination the necessity to convert him/her, day after day, into a forced seller of his/her labour-power which, in turn, he/she has to productively apply then in a conscious and voluntary way in the service of capital. The condition of being a private and independent individual, that the doubly free labourer retains for him/herself, is the necessary concrete form in which his/her determination as a forced labourer whose product faces him/her as an alien dominating power, realises itself. The individual freedom, which at the same time lacks the power to control the social character of the labour that it rules, is the necessary concrete form in which this labour organises itself as an attribute of its own

product, when the latter acts as the materialised general social relation that has constituted itself in the concrete subject of social life. Therefore, this individual freedom is the ideological necessary form through which forced labour inherent in the capitalist mode of production is organised. In this mode of production, the labourer is a free individual only because he/she is born to his/her natural life already determined as an individual whose own social powers are alien to him/her. The more the labourer sees him/herself as an abstractly free individual, that is to say, as an individual whose social powers rise from his/her sole condition as a free subject, the more he/she becomes condemned to incarnate the powers of capital that need to take concrete shape in the negation of the conscious organisation of social life. In turn, the capitalist only asserts him/herself as a free individual by personifying the necessity of his/her capital to accumulate.

The increase of the productivity of labour in order to produce relative surplus-value gradually transforms the productive labourer into a collective labourer devoid of subjectivity within the labour process in a restricted sense. At the same time, it presupposes the increasing concentration of the capital needed to put into action each collective labourer. Hence, the scale of the fragments of social labour - privately organised and independent from each other - performed by each collective labourer under the control of the individual capital that delimits it, increases. And this increase does not only take place in absolute terms, but with respect to the participation of each individual capital inside the special branch of production it belongs to.

The increase in the rate of surplus-value through the development of machinery is conditioned by the increase of constant capital at the expense of the increase of variable capital. The increase of variable capital at a progressively lower rate with respect to the increase in total capital has an immediate consequence on the productive subjectivity of the working class. It transforms an increasing part of the working class into a surplus population for capital. But capital is the social relation through which the labouring population forcefully organises the general production of its life. Therefore, on transforming that labouring population into a surplus for its necessity, capital deprives it of the social link that bears its capacity to produce its own natural life. Capital, the product of the social labour of the labouring population, deprives the latter of its capacity to participate in the realisation of social labour. In other words, capital, a realisation of the labouring population's human generic-being, deprives the labouring population that it determines as a surplus of its own generic being. It thus sentences it to death. To such a degree capital erects itself as the concrete subject of social life, confronting its very producers as an alienated power.

Thus far, capital's necessity to constantly revolutionise the material conditions of production has not shown to have any historical potency other than that of degrading the productive subjectivity of the working class. It turns this subjectivity into an appendage of the machinery, when it does not raze it in an absolute manner. That constant revolution appears as resulting just in the transformation of the productive powers of individual free labour into the powers of materialised social labour, at the expense of depriving the labourers of any capacity to put social production in action by themselves. The very productive consciousness and will of the collective labourer delimited by each individual capital faces this labourer itself as attributes incarnated in the subjectivity of the capitalist that buys the labour-power of its individual members. Therefore, it could seem that capital has emptied the working class of any historical potency that could transcend the reproduction of relative surplus-value.

Yet, we have still to consider what happens concerning the other two stages that integrate the productive process of large-scale industry. That is to say, what happens concerning the production of the scientific control over the natural forces and over their productive application. The development of these tasks in the scale that corresponds to large-scale industry escapes from the subjective powers of the capitalist. Consequently, social

capital needs to produce a new type of doubly free labourer whose productive subjectivity has the aptitude to perform these tasks that conform the production and exercise of the productive consciousness and will of the collective labourer. This labourer is thus integrated by the labourers that directly participate in the labour process in a restricted sense and the labourers whose labour consists in scientifically organising that process. In the same way that the individual labourer has lost the dominion over the integrity of the labour process he/she takes part in, this dominion shows now that it has given its first step in its development as an attribute of the collective labourer. However, as an alienated attribute, it can only reproduce the fragmentation that reigns within the collective labourer among its different specialised organs. At the same time that capital needs to degrade the productive subjectivity of the first portion of the collective labourer until razing it, capital needs to develop the second portion by enabling it to realise an increasingly complex labour.⁶

In fact, with the development of production on the basis of the machinery system, the labour process itself experiments a transformation in its nature. It does no longer essentially consist in the application of human labour-power on its object to transform it. It is now centred in the application of human labour-power to the scientific control of natural forces and to the objectification of this control as an attribute of machinery, so as to make those natural forces act upon the object to transform it.

The more this transformation in the materiality of labour advances, the more social capital needs to produce a labourer that bears an universal productive subjectivity, able to control and organise the natural forces whichever their concrete form that is put in action in each case. In brief, the more the accumulation of capital develops, the more social capital needs to produce a universal individual labourer, no longer by degrading his/her productive subjectivity, but by multiplying it. Although, of course, capital constantly counteracts this general tendency inherent in it. It does so by turning each advance in the control over natural forces into a new attribute objectified in the machinery, thus simplifying the labour that exercises that control.

The necessity to organise production in a scientific way, with a complexity and scale that surpass any individual subjectivity, reaches the process of circulation too. Then, the collective labourer delimited by each individual capital develops a specialised organ, in charge of that unproductive task. In turn, the fact that the collective labourer handles the integral organisation of its material labour process within each private fragment of social capital does not change in a iota the antagonistic character of the relation established by its members with capital around the realisation of the value of labour-power. Still, the capitalist's subjectivity is surpassed by the scientific character and the scale acquired by the execution of the coercive control over the labourers he/she employs. Capital then invests another specialised organ of the collective labourer with the capacity to exercise that coercive consciousness and will. The collective labourer thus comes to acquire the capacity to coerce itself as capital's personification in order to extract surplus-value from its own body. The free consciousness and will of the individual labourer, that is to say, his/her capacity to organise by him/herself his/her own labour process, which is a condition for his/her coercion by capital, has been also developed as an attribute of the collective labourer. Finally, the subjective capacity of the capitalist is surpassed even concerning the personification of capital as the generic movement of substantive value that engenders more value. That is to say, the subjectivity of the capitalist is surpassed even as the bearer of the consciousness and will of

⁶ In *Capital*, Marx only just indirectly advances on the determinations of this productive subjectivity (eg. Marx 1965, pp. 386-87). Yet, in *Grundrisse* he presents the necessity of its development with the material transformation of the labor process that is generated by the advance of machinery, up to its relation with capital's immanent necessity to annihilate itself through its own development. (Marx 1973, pp. 704-07 and 713-14). We should bear in mind that, in Marx's time, the subjectivity in question was only just starting to develop.

the private form under which social labour is realised in the capitalist mode of production. The collective labourer develops a new part of its body aimed at acting as a specialised organ that personifies capital in its purity as such.

Of course, inasmuch as in this process that expands its subjectivity alienated in capital the collective labourer undertakes the coercion on itself and the representation of capital in its purity as such, the individual labourers in charge of these tasks appear to themselves and to the rest as the very negation of what they are. Namely, members of the class of free individuals that only count with their labour-power as a commodity to sale, that is to say, members of the working class. Still, upon this appearance, it becomes evident that the collective labourer has recovered for itself what the very movement of capital that engenders it has taken away from the doubly free individual labourers that integrate it, starting from their attributes as mutually independent producers able to organise their individual labours in a private way. The collective labourer put into action by each individual capital is, in its unity, a producer that rules its labour in a private way independently from the actions of the rest, and whose consciousness and will are determined as the personification of the social powers of the product of its labour, capital.

Concentration and the state, or the complete development of the productive powers of social labour performed as private labour

The reproduction of relative surplus-value imposes the relative and absolute increase of each of the fragments of society's total labour whose private execution is consciously organised by the same collective labourer that performs it. Under its concrete form of capitalist accumulation, the expansion of the space reached by the consciously organised social labour realises itself through the progressive concentration and centralisation of individual capitals. Of course, as soon as the organisation of social labour transcends the scope of each individual capital, the commodity-form directly steps forward as the bearer of that organisation. The conscious plan that organises the labour of the collective labourer within each individual capital is the necessary concrete form taken by the realisation of the accumulation of capital, that is to say, taken by the realisation the general unconscious organisation of social labour through the valorisation of value. Capital is the materialised social relation that erects itself as the concrete subject of the process of social life. Therefore, the condition of being a subject inheres in social capital itself, as the specific form in which the product of social labour in its unity is represented. This subject takes concrete form in the individual capitals, which are determined as private materialisation's of social labour. The formation of the general rate of profit is the complete manner in which social capital realises its condition as the concrete subject of social production. This formation is the mode of allocating society's total labour-power under its different useful concrete forms through the affirmation of individual capitals as aliquot parts of social capital.⁷

Still, for social capital to allocate total labour-power it does not suffice with the organisation of private labours ruled by the movement of individual capitals in the formation of the general rate of profit. The accumulation of social capital itself reaches the limit of this autonomous regulation as soon as the private exercise of the consciousness and will that personifies the individual capitals undermines the conditions for the general reproduction of the process of accumulation. Then, the allocation of social labour needs to be directly realised by social capital, and not just through the simple exchange of commodities. The direct powers of the accumulation of social capital thus need to be incarnated by a subject that confronts

⁷ Our process of recognition has already advanced through the path opened by Marx, Karl 1967 and Marx, Karl 1966, parts I-II.

individual capitals, not only just as the bearer of a consciousness and will independent from theirs, but with the power to directly impose its consciousness and will upon the latter. This direct political representative of social capital is the state.

Its historically specific condition as the general political representative of social capital determines the capitalist state as the direct general agent of the reproduction of the exploitation of the working class. Hence, above all, the direct personification of the state as the representative of social capital belongs by nature to the capitalist class. Conversely, it seems that being the direct personification of social capital is a determination that does not fit the working class in any form. Rather, it seems that the working class could only personify the necessities of social capital by means of its struggle against the state in order to force it to apply the policies that impose on individual capitals the buying and selling of labour-power for its value (a value that obviously includes the progression itself towards the production of an universal labourer).

Nevertheless, in circulation, and therefore to the immediate consciousness of the working class, the accumulation of social capital through the buying and selling of labour-power presents itself under the appearance of being the realisation of freedom, equality, property based on one's own labour and the self-interest of all the participants. The alienation of the labourer's consciousness and will in capital thus takes the shape of its opposite, that is to say, of the free consciousness and will. Based on this appearance, the direct organisation of the accumulation of social capital as a concrete form in which the general indirect organisation of social life by that accumulation realises itself, thus presents itself as a necessity that equally concerns the capitalist class and the working class. Thus, it realises itself by establishing the general political - therefore, direct - relation of citizenship that indistinctly reaches the members of both classes. Then, the direct organisation of the accumulation of social capital takes concrete shape in the political action of the working class, not simply in what this action incarnates the antagonistic character of the capital relation, but insofar it converts itself into an immediate positive expression of the process of accumulation of social capital. Still, since this direct organisative action realises a necessity of social capital, it confronts the same working class that performs it as what it is, namely, as an alienated power that dominates it. That is to say, it confronts the same working class that performs it as a power that belongs to the general political representative of social capital, i.e. to the state.

The development itself of the accumulation of social capital takes the complexity of its organisation beyond the scope of the subjective capacity of the members of the capitalist class to exercise the general political representation of social capital. In the same way as it happens concerning the personification of individual capitals, social capital needs to produce a portion of the working class as individuals that personify its general political representation. It is not any more about a portion of the working class that politically represents social capital in a specific way inasmuch as the latter carries within itself the necessity of reproducing labour-power with the material and moral attributes it requires for its valorisation. It is now about a portion of the working class that politically personifies social capital in its integrity as such. Which means, just to begin with, that this fragment of the working class is in charge of exercising, as a direct social power, the direct coercion on the rest of the working class inherent in the antagonistic relation that capital keeps with the latter. But it also means that another portion of the same fragment of the working class is in charge of developing, as a direct social power, the scientific consciousness inherent in the development of the material productive forces ruled by the production of relative surplus-value. Which means that the same portion is in charge of producing the scientific consciousness of the working class as a direct social power alienated in capital and, therefore, under the concrete form of its opposite,

namely, ideology. The appearance of the independence of the working class with respect to capital thus becomes a product of the science produced by the working class itself.

We have already seen that, with the development of large-scale industry, the direct producer - in its unity as a collective labourer - recovers for itself, and therefore, as an immediate social power within itself, the condition of being a conscious and voluntary personification of the general social character of its labour. However, of course, this character goes on confronting it as an attribute alienated in its material product. It does so since it goes on being, now to the exterior of the unity formed by each collective labourer, a social labour realised under the concrete form of private labour. We see now that, for their direct relation as a class, and therefore, as a conscious and voluntary power that is a directly social one within the class, the doubly free labourers achieve that which was impossible for the direct producers of simple commodities. That is to say, they are able to intervene in a conscious and voluntary way in the allocation of their total labour-power under the concrete useful forms of labour, insofar as this allocation immediately concerns the social unity of the product of their private labours, namely, social capital. Nevertheless, the historical development of the specific attributes of the free producer of simple commodities into the attributes of the doubly free labourer is far from having freed him/her from the alienation of those attributes as social powers that are materialised in the product of his/her labour. The doubly free labourer is not the concrete subject of his/her own social labour. On the contrary, he/she him/herself is the product of the materialised social powers of his/her labour, that is to say, of the capital-form taken by his/her own product.

Within the determinations we have seen thus far, however fierce the class struggle or however democratic the state, the alienation of the powers of human labour as powers of the materialised general social relation has not stepped back in the least. All the powers of the generically human being confront it as powers alienated in capital. The same consciousness and will of the labourers that feed capital with the surplus labour it extracts from them are alienated in it, not just insofar as they must submit themselves to that exploitation, but insofar as they are actively determined as capital's positive personification. It is through this path that the accumulation of social capital takes its necessary concrete form through the direct organisation of social labour by the state. And, in turn, this direct organisation has the political action of the working class as its necessary concrete form of realising itself. The working class can only draw its powers to confront the bourgeoisie in class struggle from being the personification of the powers of social capital, inasmuch as its accumulation collides against the private character of the individual capitals.

Idealistic inversions

At this stage, it could seem that the necessity to overcome the capitalist mode of production is nowhere to be found other than as an ethical, a moral, imperative. It would be about overcoming capitalist "injustice" that arises against a socially natural, if not divine, "right", "justice", "equality".⁸ Or, more pretentiously, it would be about realising the "dialectic of the moral life",⁹ or about the "increase in internal self-determination or morality proper' through education."¹⁰ Still, ethics, morality, right, are not the abstract products of "free human spirit". The producers of commodities bear the practical necessity of seeing themselves as individuals whose actions arise from their immediate mutual independence.

⁸ Bernstein, Eduard 1961, p. 157 (in the Spanish edition). Laclau, Ernesto and Chantal Mouffe 1985, pp. 180-81.

⁹ Habermas, Jürgen 1971, p. 67 (in the Spanish edition).

¹⁰ Mezaros, István 1986, pp. 188-89.

Therefore, they need to appear to their own consciousness as individuals that are essentially free by nature. Their general social interdependency, their own social being, appears to them inverted as an external limit imposed on their abstract natural freedom. Ethics is the pure ideological, theoretical, representation of social being placed by nature as a determination external to the individual. It is historically determined as much as its practical counterparts, both the subjective one - morality - and the socially objectified one - right. All of them are the concrete forms of alienated consciousness. The general indirect organisation of social production by capital necessarily realises itself by taking through them the concrete shape of direct relations among persons, on the basis of mutual individual independence. Therefore, they are social relations that give shape to the alienation of human powers as the attributes of the material product of labour. The overcoming of the capitalist mode of production does not entail a change in the content of these social relations. It entails their annihilation. When they are inverted as the cause of the revolutionary powers of the working class, the latter is presented as if it lacked any power to overcome the capitalist mode of production other than the one it could get from the abstract development of a consciousness that is unable to transcend capitalist alienation itself. The spirit of “equality and solidarity” that embellishes the ethics, morality and right of the “new man” thus hides away the true historical determination. That is to say, it hides away the fact that the superseding of the capitalist mode of production can only result from a change in the materiality itself of the labour process which, in turn, has as its own material condition that of being ruled by a consciousness able to overcome any alienated appearance.

In contrast with the impotency that arises from this apparent criticism, it could seem that the answer lies in the antagonistic character of the relation between exploiters and exploited labourers through which the value of labour power is realised. It could thus seem that this antagonistic character, the struggle in which the working-class constitutes itself as such, is the one that turns by itself this class into a revolutionary subject bearing the power needed to overcome the capitalist mode of production. The historical limit of the latter is seen to arise from the accumulation of experience in that struggle to the point this experience becomes by itself the consciousness about the capacity as a class to organise the generality of social labour in a direct conscious way.¹¹ Still, this conception starts by putting aside the material source of the development of consciousness that specifically corresponds to the working class; i.e. the material development of the productive subjectivity that specifically corresponds to this class. It replaces it with the mere formal specificity of the relation between the exploiting non-labourer and the exploited labourer in capitalism. That is to say, it starts by substituting the formal subsumption of the labourers in capital for their real subsumption, as the determinant of the specific revolutionary powers of the working class. So empty of material determination the historical specificity of capitalism thus becomes, that even the inversion of the determination of the antagonistic relation between the non-labourers and the labourers can be postulated. In this inversion, the different modalities that the separation of society in exploited labourers and non-labourers that exploit another’s labour takes along history are not the necessary concrete forms in which the development of the productive forces of society organises itself insofar as it can only be realised at the expense of the development of the productive forces of individual labour. On the contrary, human history is presented as having the development of the modalities of exploiting another’s labour as its essence. Thus, the historical specificity of capitalism comes down to the latter being the ultimate form of that exploitation, by imposing the insatiable hunger for surplus-value as the object of social production. According to this conception, class struggle is not the social relation of production through which the development of the material productive powers of

¹¹ Lukács, Georg 1971, p. 83 (in the Spanish edition).

social labour takes concrete shape starting from the productive powers of individual isolated labour. On the contrary, as it happens in Holloway's version, this material form of the social process of production appears inverted as if it were a specific concrete form of the development of class struggle.¹² Upon which, the end of class struggle, i.e. the necessity of the annihilation of the capitalist mode of production, appears again emptied of its concrete determination by the transformation of the materiality of the social process of production. Again, the alienated consciousness has ceased to be the historically necessary concrete form through which the natural process of metabolism between society and its environment organises itself. It appears inverted as the subject whose abstractly free development determines the material modality of that process.

It could also seem that the revolutionary powers of the working-class cannot arise from the subsumption of the labourer in capital but, on the contrary, from a source external to it. From this point of view, it seems that if capital were to determine working-class consciousness, if it were the totality in the determination of the working-class, the latter would have no place from where to get the power needed to free itself from it. Thus, it could seem that the capacity of the working-class to overcome the capitalist mode of production could only arise from its "autonomy" with respect to the latter. However, capital is the general social relation of the working class, i.e. the general mode in which the working class - whether it likes it or not - organises the production of its social life. And this, its general social relation, has inverted itself into the objectified concrete subject of social production. So much capital determines the working-class as its attribute that it is able to deprive an increasing part of the latter of its natural life. Hence, to have a revolutionary power alien to the capitalist mode of production that it could impose on it, the working-class should be the bearer of a social relation even more general than that mode of production itself, from which that potency could arise. Or, in other words, capital should not be the general social relation of the working class, but a concrete form of a mode of organising the production of human life more generic than it itself. Since it is more than obvious that such a social relation does not exist, the conceptions about the autonomy of working-class consciousness follows two paths. The first one consists in basing the revolutionary powers of the working-class on a libertarian or egalitarian spirit, a desire to recover the "meaning" of labour, all of them imputed to an abstract human nature. These spirits and desires are consequently presented as bearing the power needed to run over the mode in which humanity actually has been able to organise its material life up to today. Hence, for instance, the "self-valorisation" proposed to the working-class by Negri.¹³ The second path consists in degrading the postulated autonomy of the consciousness of the working-class to a "relative" one. The secret of relative autonomy comes down to affirming that capital accumulation determines working-class consciousness, but that, in turn, working-class consciousness influences capital accumulation, albeit the latter determines the former in the last instance. Thus, the consciousness of the working-class no longer is a necessary concrete form in which the general social relation realises itself. This unity has been ideally replaced by an external back-and-forth motion. So much so, that even the attempt to explain relative autonomy by the movements of a dog chained to a pole fits in it. Through this path, it is finally concluded that everything determines everything and, therefore, that nothing determines nothing. Once every real necessity has been thus erased, it is stated, as Althusser does, that a revolutionary action is that which bears a revolutionary "doctrine", and that the latter is such provided it promotes revolutionary action.¹⁴ Once again, the overcoming of the capitalist mode of production appears as having its necessity reduced to the abstract development of consciousness.

¹² Holloway, John 1991, p. 100.

¹³ Negri, Antonio 1978, p. 182.

¹⁴ Althusser, Louis 1969, pp. 142-81 (in the Spanish edition).

These fantastic conceptions of a free consciousness which is not only able to engender itself but also to engender the material conditions of society's life, are expressions of what Marx named the petit-bourgeois dialectics of "on the one hand" and "on the other hand". On the one hand, humanity - or the working-class, for those who are more specific - is seen as having its social consciousness determined as a necessary concrete form of capital production. Its consciousness is seen as being just the personification of the powers of the product of its own labour. That is to say, it is seen as being an alienated consciousness at whose back the general autonomous organisation of social life operates. On the other hand, humanity - or the working-class - is seen as having its social consciousness determined as the capacity to take in its own hands the general organisation of social life. It is seen as being, on this part, a consciousness immediately freed from any alienation. In the most materialist of the cases, the question about the historical character of the capitalist mode of production thus becomes idealistically inverted into the struggle between the material forces that an abstract alienated consciousness and an abstract free consciousness could respectively put in action.

The assumption that capitalism could be overcome by 'market socialism', so fashionable today, is presented as a draw in this struggle.¹⁵ On the one hand, the individuals would have the complete conscious control over the social character of their labour, thus organising it in a direct way. Therefrom, we would have socialism. On the other hand, they would lack any conscious control over the social character of their labour. The latter's powers would face them as the powers inherent in its product, thus alienating their consciousness. Therefrom, we would have the market. On the one hand, social production would be consciously organised at the service of human life. On the other hand, social production would be based on placing human life at the service of capital, i.e. of a power that is able to deprive human life from its very generic being. In reality, free consciousness and will produce mere use values, but never use values that confront them as the alienated bearers of their social powers, namely, as commodities. Conversely, the production of commodities produces the consciousness and will that are alienated from their own social powers, but never free consciousness and will. Beyond its ideological content as the apologetics of "humanised" capitalism, the actual possibility of market socialism comes down to being the community of the schizophrenically associated individuals.

Market socialism has the virtue of making violently visible the consequences of taking the concrete forms through which the labour of the doubly free labourers appears in the process of buying and selling of labour-power, and abstract them from their determinations. Capital can only appropriate the productive forces of the free individual labour placed under the direct conscious control of the capitalist because it produces the forced labourers that bear those forces under the concrete shape of individuals that bear a free consciousness and will. Thus, in circulation, the forced character of labour given by the necessity to sell one's labour-power just to reproduce it as a sellable object, takes the concrete shape of the freedom to sell the commodity that the labourers own. The obligation of the labourers to render unpaid surplus-labour, takes the concrete shape of an exchange of equivalents where all labour is paid for. The deprivation of the product of their social labour suffered by the labourers, takes the concrete shape of the realisation of the right to property based on one's own labour. And the social process that lacks any immediate object other than the accumulation of capital, takes the concrete shape of a process that simply emerges from everyone pursuing the satisfaction of their personal interest. *The labourers' free consciousness is not the abstract opposite of their alienated consciousness. In other words, in the capitalist mode of production, only because their consciousness and will are alienated in the product of their own social labour, the labourers have a free consciousness and a free will. And it is through their consciousness*

¹⁵ Schweickart, David 1993. Roemer, John 1994.

and will as free individuals that the labourers have their consciousness and will alienated as capital's powers.

The dialectics of “on the one hand and on the other hand” allows market socialism to conciliate what is irreconcilable. Trotsky makes it separate what is inseparable.¹⁶ On the one hand, the development of the material forces of production is abstracted, by stating that it has already achieved the highest point of fruition that can be reached under capitalism. Strictly speaking, this is the same as stating that the development of that forces have come to a stop because it has been exhausted under its capitalist form. Any materialist would say that the stoppage of the material development of productive forces necessarily entails the stoppage of the development of the concrete form in which it socially organises itself, namely, of the social relations of production. And that, therefore, that stoppage entails the stoppage of the development of the concrete form that the relations of production take in human mind, namely, consciousness and will. In a loose sense, the assertion in question implies that any further development of the productive forces within capitalism has turned sterile for the development of the conditions for its supersession. Therefore, it would be about a material development unable to develop the social relations of production, consciousness and will. Hence, provided such an absurd from a materialist standpoint is accepted, the development of consciousness would have come to the same stop as in the former case. Nevertheless, on the other hand, the consciousness and will of the working class are abstracted, by demanding from them the plentitude of their movement. One hand firmly holds still the development of the materiality of the productive forces of society - i.e. the realisation of the human generic-being - brought down to the category of an “objective factor” already satisfied for the overcoming of capitalism. The other hand puts the consciousness of the working class into a vertiginous spin around itself, brought down to the category of a “subjective factor” whose development is still pending in order to achieve that overcoming. Why, if the productive forces have reached the complete development that fits their capitalist form, is it that this form has not been yet overcome? Because the working-class has not sufficiently developed its revolutionary consciousness. Why is it that the working class has not developed its revolutionary consciousness? Because it has been defeated once and again by the capitalist class in political struggle. Why is it that the working-class has suffered these defeats? Because it has been betrayed once and again by its political leaderships. And, why is it that the working-class insists in choosing once and again those treachery leaderships? Because it has not sufficiently developed its revolutionary consciousness. Upon which, the consciousness of the working class has completed a somersault by itself.

In apparent contrast with this abstract exhaustion of capital accumulation as the vehicle of the development of productive forces, it is postulated the unavoidably mechanical exhaustion of its capacity to function at all. For instance, Luxemburg postulates that the surplus-value materialised in the means of consumption to be applied to the expansion of variable capital is impossible to be realised without counting on strata or societies outside the capitalist mode of production itself. But, since the latter cannot avoid absorbing them in a gradual way, it ends up exhausting them as that supposed source of realisation, thus destroying itself.¹⁷ Likewise, Grossmann postulates the final collapse of capitalism based on its mechanical impossibility to reproduce the proportions of social production due to an insufficiency of surplus-value.¹⁸ Given their very definition, these assumed mechanical limits are independent from the realisation by capital of any historical reason of existence concerning the development of the material productive forces of society. Rather, the hypothetical extinction of capital accumulation because its alleged collision against them

¹⁶ Trotsky, Leon 1973, pp. 5, 7-8 and 42-44 (in the Spanish edition).

¹⁷ Luxemburg, Rosa 1968, pp. 332 and 384 (in the Spanish edition).

¹⁸ Grossmann, Henryk 1992, p. 121 (in the Spanish edition).

entails the very negation of that realisation. Hence, those mechanical limits implicitly entail the same interruption of the development of productive forces we have already seen. Only that it is postponed to an inexorable future, instead of being presented as an immediate actuality that obviously disagrees with visible reality.

If the material productive forces of society could mechanically reach the limit that fits their organisation under the capitalist mode of production without having completely developed the revolutionary consciousness of the working class, the material base that determines the latter would come to a stop. Upon which, this consciousness itself would be immobilised at the stage it could have reached thus far. Far from being able to overcome its determination as an alienated consciousness, it would indefinitely remain detained in that condition. This perspective horrifies those who conceive the mechanical limits to accumulation. At first sight, to postulate that the necessity of the overcoming of capitalism emerges from the existence of a limit inherent in the mechanics itself of capital accumulation seems to be the opposite of postulating the autonomy of consciousness as the condition for that overcoming. Still, as soon as the former postulate is announced, this autonomy is the only path open ahead. Since the realisation of the supposed mechanical limit of capitalism is the very negation of its supersession, it necessarily appears as the negation of the human generic-being itself. Therefore, it appears as a “barbarism” abstracted from any mode of production, that not by accident converges with the conceptions that alienated consciousness engenders as mere science-fiction. Hence, the enunciation of the mechanical limit is normally followed by the pretension that the consciousness of the working class puts itself in movement by itself. Even if the mechanical limit were to be reached, this consciousness would thus be able to put in motion again the development of its own material base. That is to say, the enunciation in question is normally followed by the pretension that consciousness is not the expression in ideas of the material conditions of human life, but that the development of ideas engenders these conditions.

Finally, there exists the conception that the powers of the working-class to overcome capitalism arise from the desperate resistance not to perish, exercised by the portions of it that capital brutally determines as a surplus. These portions have been impotent to resist the advance of capital when the latter still required them as an active labour-power. Now that capital has deprived them even from the possibility to participate in social production and consumption and, therefore, from their own human generic-being, the impotency in question is conceived inverted as the possibility to assert a supposed immanent “self-identity”. Then, this identity is declared to have the power to transcend capital as the general social relation. That is to say, it is attributed to this supposedly “freed” consciousness the capacity to put into movement by itself the material productive forces that correspond to a superior form of social organisation.

Beyond pointing out their condition as idealistic inversions, the true reply to these apologetics or pseudo-critical illusions lies in putting into evidence that the historical role of the capitalist mode of production in the development of the material productive forces of society does not limit itself to an abstract constant revolution of the technical base of production. The key lies in the concrete form taken by this constant revolution. It happens that, in the same way that the labourers and the capitalists have no will nor social existence other than as the incarnation of the powers of capital, the constant technical revolution through which these powers are realised revolutionises their determination as alienated social subjects and, therefore, their consciousness and will.

The historical end of capitalism, or the working class as a revolutionary subject

The more the accumulation of capital grows on the basis of the production of relative surplus-value, the more the absolute and relative magnitude of each portion of collective labour that is internally organised in a conscious way grows, albeit it remains a private portion with respect to total labour of society. At the same time, more needs capital to scientifically objectify any subjectivity in the process of production. Likewise, more needs capital to produce a universal labourer able to develop and control whichever machinery system falls to his/her lot. And, the more the consolidated labouring surplus population rises above the level with which capital needs it as the counterbalancing factor of the working class' solidarity in the process of realising the value of labour-power; the more the violence capital resorts to to do away with that surplus population. Upon all of which, the more acute the contradiction between the directly social powers of labour and the private form in which it is performed, and consequently, the more acute the clash of those powers against the private form taken by the appropriation of their product.

In brief, the more the accumulation of capital develops itself, the more the autonomous capitalist regulation needs to realise itself under the form of the direct regulation by the state. And with the development of this necessity, the subjective powers of the capitalist class become increasingly undermined to act as the personification of the consciousness and will of social capital. Hence, the more the capitalist mode of production needs to transform the political representation of social capital into the task of a special collective unproductive labourer, of a specialised collective organ within the social division of labour, formed by doubly free individual labourers.

The powers that the capitalist mode of production gives to each of the social classes it engenders show now that they are really opposed to the appearance they presented in the immediateness of the production of relative surplus-value. In its own development, capitalism deprives the capitalist class of its historical reason of existence. This class loses any aptitude to constitute itself as the consciousness and will that personifies the transformation of the productive powers of individual free labour into the productive powers of direct social labour, under the form of being the potencies borne by the product itself of social labour. Capital thus turns the bourgeoisie into a pure social parasite, in whose subsistence a portion of surplus-value that subtracts from the mass available to increase the scale of accumulation is expended. Therefore, it transforms the bourgeoisie into the personification of the procrastination of the development of the productive forces of society, even within the very limits of the capitalist mode of production. Originally, capital invests the bourgeoisie with the revolutionary power to annihilate the limits imposed on the development of the productive forces by the subordination of the consciousness and will of the individual labourer to the feudal and slavery organisation of social production. In its condition as the concrete subject of social production, capital itself is the one that ends up claiming for a social revolution that frees it from the dead weight entailed by the subsistence of a social class to which it itself leaves no potency other than that of unproductively consuming it. And, as we have just seen, the process in which capital transforms the bourgeoisie into a dead weight for itself is the same process in which capital engenders a social class that bears a consciousness and will able to free it from that dead weight. We are referring to the working class, that capital itself has put in charge of the complete realisation of social production so as to extract from it to the last drop of surplus-value it could render.

Actually, a process of capital accumulation where the complete realisation and control of the labour process is in the hands of the wage labourers, and capital is a collective property of these same labourers under the necessary modality of state capital, is the most developed form of the alienation of human powers as capital's powers. The materialised general social relation, that is to say, the general organisation of social labour borne in the value-form of its material product, puts social production in action without any immediate

objective other than its expanded self-reproduction. The allocation of society's total labour-power remains mediated by the commodity-form taken by labour-power and the means of subsistence needed to reproduce it. However centralised as a social property, capital goes on needing to count on the productive powers of the labourer forced by his/her condition as a doubly free individual. The working class is thus determined as the collective personification of the consciousness and will of the reproduction in question, as well as the collective labour-power from whose blood the same reproduction feeds itself, and as an increasingly surplus labour-power with respect to the reproduction of its own general social relation.

Which transformation in the materiality of the social process of production ruled by the production of relative surplus-value could, then, carry in itself the necessity to overcome the capitalist mode of production, determining the working class as the revolutionary subject in charge of annihilating it in its own development?

The development of the productive forces of immediately social free labour as an attribute of its negation, ie. of private labour, is the contradiction that synthesises the historical powers and the limit of the capitalist mode of production. The specific potency of the capitalist mode of production to develop the productive forces of society has no secret other than the progressive transformation of the attributes of individual private labour into attributes of labour performed as a collective power - and therefore, a directly social labour - albeit within a specific limit. Even this labour determined by its materiality as directly social goes on having the specific social form of being private labour. Still, at the same time, the development of the productivity of this social labour that is privately put in action increasingly has as a material condition the development of the conscious organisation of labour as a direct social power. And this direct organisation can only take concrete form in the direct general social relation inherent in the capitalist mode of production, in other words, in class struggle. More specifically, inasmuch as it is about a directly conscious organisation that imposes itself upon the limited character of the immediate powers of individual capitals, it necessarily realises itself under the concrete form of the advance of the working class in that struggle.¹⁹

The development of the general direct organisation of social production by means of the conscious action of the working class starts by having its scope limited by its very condition of being the concrete form in which its opposite realises itself. This same limited scope limits, in turn, the consciousness with which the working class rules its action. Hence, it cannot overcome its own appearance as an abstractly free consciousness. Still, the more the development of the productivity of labour privately put in action has the direct conscious organisation of social labour as its material condition, the deeper consciousness must penetrate in the determinations of social labour to be able to rule it. And the determinations of social labour in the capitalist mode of production are but the determinations of the alienated consciousness of the working class. Upon which, the more capital develops its necessity to directly organise social labour, the more it turns this necessity into one that can only be satisfied by the advance of the consciousness of the working class into its own determinations.

Social capital thus imposes, as its own, the necessity that the scientific cognition developed by the working class advances by going beyond any appearance that could hinder the conscious organisation of the transformation of nature into a means for social labour. Still, this advance is in itself the negation of the reproduction of capital. It happens that this reproduction has as its condition the production of a consciousness and will that confront their own human powers as alien powers, as powers that belong to capital. Not in vain, in the capitalist mode of production, the forced character of labour has the apparently free

¹⁹ Marx, Karl 1965, part VIII.

consciousness and will of the labourer as a necessary concrete form of realising itself. Capital can only be the product of an alienated consciousness and will.

Thus we find capital demanding, as a necessity that emerges from its mere immediate reproduction, to be personified by a consciousness and will that has freed itself of any alienation and, therefore, that has freed itself of any determination as a personification of capital. Let us carefully notice that it is not about the development of the productive forces being stopped because it can no longer realise itself under its concrete capitalist form, and that has to be started again later by a consciousness freed from its alienation. It is about a development of the productive forces that capital starts to satisfy its more specific necessity, but that can only satisfy that necessity by taking a material form whose organisation has a specific condition. That of being realised by a consciousness that is aware of its own necessity beyond any appearance. Therefore, this development of the material productive forces starts as the realisation of an uncontrollable necessity of capital and ends up as the realisation of the latter's supersession, as its material form necessarily entails the transformation of the alienated consciousness in a consciousness freed of any alienation.

The capitalist mode of production thus exhausts its historical reason of existence, namely, the development of the material productive forces of society by transforming the productive powers of free individual labour into powers of directly social labour consciously organised by the same collective labourer that performs it, under the form of the alienation of the powers of the latter as social powers of its material product. From being a form of developing society's productive forces, bearing a historical potentiality that allowed it even to overcome the specific barriers that it itself opposed to that development by alienating the productive subjectivity of the worker, the capitalist mode of production becomes an absolute limitation to the same development. Still, at the same time, capital shows that it cannot avoid giving the step forward whose closure does not fit in it any more. It happens that, in the capitalist mode of production, the necessity that generically inheres in the natural process of human life is directly borne by the specific necessity inherent in the expanded reproduction of the former as a determined mode of production. It happens that capitalism is but a historically specific mode in which the natural process of human metabolism with its environment organises itself. And animal species develop the potentiality of their processes of metabolism, expanding their capacity to appropriate their environment, by transforming their own bodies to adapt them to it. But the human generic-being lies in the capacity to appropriate the environment by acting on it to transform it into a means for itself through social labour. Therefore, the process of human life has as its essential natural necessity the expansion of its power to appropriate its environment through the development of the material productive forces of society.

The realisation of the above-mentioned step forward in the development of the productive forces thus necessarily takes a concrete material form that specifically inheres in it. Namely, it takes the form of a social revolution in which the material subject of that development, that is to say, the working class, does not limit itself any more to annihilate the bourgeoisie, turning capital into an immediate social property, but annihilates capitalism itself. And, with it, it annihilates the general political representative of social capital, the state. Upon which the working class reaches its own end, giving way to a new mode of the general organisation of social labour. This new general social relation has no concrete form other than that of being borne in a human consciousness and will through which the individual labourer recognises him/herself in an immediate way as the organ of social labour he/she is. That is to say, he/she recognises him/herself as the individual bearer of the social powers of his/her labour. Therefore, it is about the general conscious organisation of the process of production of social life.

From then on, there is no place left for a development of the powers of social labour that could not be immediately a development of the powers of individual labour; and, conversely, each development of the powers of individual labour immediately is a development of the powers of social labour. For the first time since the separation between the labourer and the non-labourer, the realisation of the capacity to act in a conscious and voluntary way on nature to transform it into a means for human life has ceased to be, at the same time, a concrete form of the negation of that capacity. On overcoming the capitalist mode of production, the complete realisation of the human generic-being begins and, therefore, so does true human history. The labourer becomes for the first time a really, not just formally, free individual and, more specifically, a freely associated individual. That is to say, he/she determines him/herself as the concrete subject of the human process of social metabolism that is organised by the cognition, exercised as an attribute that inheres in the very individuality of each member of society, of his/her own determination as such concrete subject.

The production of the scientific consciousness of the working class concerning its own historical potentiality is not an abstract scientific matter. It is a necessary specific moment of the political action of the working class in class struggle. While it remains the prisoner of the same method that operates as the scientific consciousness of the production of relative surplus-value in the materiality of the production process - namely, of logical representation - the scientific consciousness of the working class remains impotent to discover that, in the capitalist mode of production, freedom is the concrete form of alienation. It thus mutilates itself in its own historical powers, on seeing itself as an abstractly free consciousness. Still, as the accumulation of capital itself needs to develop the direct conscious control over the social character of labour, the conscious action of the working class needs to advance towards the overcoming of that appearance. It needs to leave behind the externality of logical *representation* to rule itself by the *reproduction* of the concrete in thought, that is to say, by means of dialectical cognition.²⁰ Marx's *Capital* is in itself the development - realised for the first time and put in a form that enables its social reproduction - of the alienated consciousness of the working class that produces itself as an alienated consciousness that is aware of its own alienation and of the historical powers it gets from it. In *Capital*, this consciousness unfolds itself to the point where it reaches its general determinations concerning the revolutionary action of the working class in which the historical powers in question realise themselves thus producing the material conditions for the conscious - therefore, free - organisation of social life.

²⁰ Iñigo Carrera, Juan 1993.

Appendix I: Working-class consciousness and the development of productive subjectivity

The divergent paths followed by the labourer's productive subjectivity, one towards its degradation and the other towards its development, directly reflect the historically-specific determination of the division between manual and intellectual labour when the social powers of labour are developed as the alienated powers of capital in large-scale industry. In facing the issue from the standpoint of productive subjectivity, this division is focused as it directly concerns the labourers' activity as the subjects of the labour process alienly ruled as a valorisation process. Contrary to this standpoint, Sohn-Rethel abstracts intellectual labour in capitalism by relating it to 'appropriation' in opposition to 'production'.²¹ He further abstracts intellectual labour by presenting it as a directly socialised process in opposition to independently and privately performed individual manual labours. Thus, he ends up abstracting the direct subjects of the labour process that produces science from their general social relation. Intellectual labourers are scarcely present in Sohn-Rethel's exposition. When they appear, they are referred to by the immediate material peculiarity of their labours - ie. as scientists, technicians, managers - and the only reference to their specific social being - ie. to their class relation - is that capital must keep them separated from the manual labourers.

The work of the labourers whose productive subjectivity develops with the production of relative surplus-labour through the machinery system materially consists in the exertion of a scientific consciousness. This same materiality, in addition to the modalities and volume of the individual consumption needed for the reproduction of the labour-power able to develop that scientific consciousness alienated as a power of capital, reinforces in a particular way the appearance with which the buying and selling of labour-power realises itself in circulation. That is to say, these labourers appear as the quintessence of the abstractly free individuals and not as what they are, namely, forced labourers for social capital. Thus, despite the fact that they possess no commodity for sale other than their labour-power, the appearance arises that they do not belong to the working-class. This appearance is further reinforced as soon as these labourers are openly in charge of the general personification of capital and, as such, of exerting direct coercion on the rest of the labourers. Thus, they immediately appear to their own and the other's consciousness as if they belonged to a class different from the working and the capitalist ones and, even, to the latter.

This inverted consciousness even reaches the theoretical conceptions critical to capitalism. Braverman defines the working-class by the degradation of productive subjectivity.²² Accordingly, the wage-labourers bearing an expanded one only enter the working-class inasmuch as they lose it. Carchedi includes in the working-class the labourers bearing the expanded productive subjectivity needed to co-ordinate collective labour, provided this task excludes surveillance.²³ Still, in any labour-process socially ruled by the antagonistic relation established through the buying and selling of labour-power, co-ordination is inseparable from explicitly or implicitly coercing others to render surplus-value. This unity underlies the capitalist labour-processes in large-scale industry from the very beginning of what form of consciousness is defined as a scientific one. According to both Braverman's and Carchedi's conceptions, the constant revolution of the material conditions of production - hence of consciousness - that determines the historical role of capitalism, never becomes the direct product of the alienated labour of the working-class. It is conceived, from the beginning to the end of capitalism, as the product of the capitalist class and a so-called

²¹ Sohn-Rethel, Alfred 1978.

²² Braverman, Harry 1974.

²³ Carchedi, Guglielmo 1977.

middle-class. The working-class is thus abstractly deprived from its direct material determination as the progressive historical subject within the capitalist mode of production itself. In turn, Touraine abstracts the concrete forms of capital concentration, to invert capital accumulation into a 'programmed society'.²⁴ Then, the contradictions that the capitalist fragmentation of productive subjectivity engenders within the working-class are inverted into the laws that rule the development of society. Upon which, the working-class is dissolved into mutually opposing strata whose historical potentiality comes down to the appearances presented by their alienated consciousness.

Ranging from its simple determination as the immediate consciousness of its same bearers, to its determination as a critical theoretical conception, the inversion in question is the product of a scientific consciousness. This fact immediately makes evident that the very scientific method that produces this scientific consciousness must engender by itself, ie. by its own form, the ideological inversion. It thus becomes evident that the method that in the capitalist mode of production appears as the natural form of scientific knowledge, is in itself a historically specific concrete form of the alienation of human productive powers as capital's powers. In turn, this evidence reveals that the material development of the productive subjectivity of the labourer beyond the point it fits in the capitalist mode of production necessarily carries in itself the revolution of the scientific method itself. By virtue of its content, this revolutionary development of the materiality of productive subjectivity can only be realised under the concrete form of the political action of the working-class that consists in the transformation of its own alienated consciousness into an alienated consciousness able to give account of its own alienation.

²⁴ Touraine, Alain 1969.

Appendix II: The deprivation of the historical specificity of the capitalist mode of production by critical political economy

There is a strong tendency among Marxist political economists to take out of sight the fact that the historically specific attribute of the social labour that produces commodities is the private and independent form in which it is performed. The fact that the capitalist mode of production has its own historical specificity determined as the necessary concrete mode in which this contradiction between the social nature of labour and its private and independent form develops itself is thus taken out of sight. This concealment follows two general paths.

The first one starts by considering the movement of social capital, in the way it is represented by the schemes of reproduction, as if its unity could be realised in an immediate way.²⁵ Hence, this unity appears to come down to a matter of mere material proportionality unmediated by the private form under which social labour is performed. The appearance thus arises that all labour applied to the production of the commodities that enter the material unity is an immediately social one. Then, this conception considers that the determination of the value of commodities presupposes the existence of a given technical matrix of social production.²⁶ Now, the a priori existence of this matrix presupposes in turn the allocation of society's total labour power into its different concrete useful forms in a direct way before the productive circuit begins. The products of social labour thus allocated have no necessity whatsoever, nor way, of taking the form of commodities; nor the social labour that produces them, of being represented as their value. The problem that the commodity-form is meant to solve, ie. the question of how to allocate society's total labour under its useful concrete forms when no direct social relation of general interdependence exists among the producers - hence, when social labour is performed in a private and independent way - is already given as solved beforehand. No wonder, then, that the supporters of this inverted construction arrive at two conclusions. The first one is that value is not a social relation but a 'redundant category'²⁷ one could do away with to understand the specificity of capitalist production were not for its usefulness to illustrate the 'concept of exploitation'.²⁸ The second one is that value can directly express itself in quantities of its substance, ie. in quantities of labour, and not only as exchange value.²⁹ This directly erases the specificity of commodity-producing labour. Now, for value to be directly expressed as quantities of its substance, the labour privately materialised in commodities would have to immediately manifest itself as social labour at the very moment it was being performed. Then, it would suffice with considering an isolated commodity for it to express the magnitude of its own value. Nevertheless, again, were that the case, the social labour materialised in the commodity would no longer need to, nor could, be socially represented as the aptitude of the commodity for exchange.

In the real world of the commodity-producing society, the material production realised in a private and independent way produces at the same time the general social relation. The material unity of social production only imposes itself ex-post, when the socially necessary simple expenditure of human labour-power is represented as the social aptitude of its material products to relate among themselves in exchange, that is to say, as the value of commodities. And, for the same reason, the value of a commodity can only express itself as exchange-value, ie. in the relation of exchange with another one, but never as quantities of its substance, ie. as

²⁵ Sraffa, Piero 1960, p. 17 (in the Spanish edition).

²⁶ Morishima, Michio 1973, pp. 14-15.

²⁷ Steedman, Ian 1977, p. 202.

²⁸ Dobb, Maurice 1945, p. 29 (in the Spanish edition). Sweezy, Paul 1942, pp. 143-45 (in the Spanish edition).

²⁹ Sweezy, Paul 1942, p. 136 (in the Spanish edition).

quantities of abstract labour. In the exchange relation, a quantity of the latter one's body or use value relatively expresses the magnitude of the former one's value, on acting as its equivalent.

The second path is based on the substitution of the abstract character for the private character, as the historically specific attribute of the social labour that produces commodities and, therefore, value. Abstract labour is the simple expenditure of human labour-power under whatever concrete form. Hence, abstract labour has as its only quality the materiality of the productive expenditure of human body, ie. of human muscles, brains, etc.. Obviously, this quality naturally inheres in human labour whatever the social form in which it is organised. In order to present it inverted as a specific attribute of commodity production, this strand of political economy resorts to different procedures. The crudest one consists in starting by presenting the true nature of abstract labour to assert right after that this nature only corresponds to the labour that produces commodities.³⁰ A second procedure consists in turning upside down the determination of the exchangeability of commodities by the representation of the materiality of abstract labour as the social specific attribute of its product for having been privately and independently performed, by conceiving the very appearances of the process of exchange as the determinants of abstract labour. That is to say, commodities are presented as if they entered the process of exchange being just use values, and, there, their contact with money turned them into the bearers of abstract labour.³¹ A third procedure consists in imposing over the true natural quality of abstract labour another one that makes it appear as being a historically specific attribute of commodity production. For instance, abstract labour becomes conceived as the simple expenditure of human labour-power whichever the concrete form it is performed, provided it is done with indifference to the 'lived experience' of the labourer him/herself.³² Upon which, the abstract labour that produces commodities appears transformed into a particular specific form of abstract labour. As such particular specific form, it is counterpoised to the simple expenditure of human labour-power whichever the concrete form it is performed, but that is performed by a labourer that is not indifferent to its content and end. Abstract labour in itself is thus conceived as if it were determined as such for bearing a specific difference with respect to its own genus and, therefore, as if it were itself a concrete form of human labour. In another version abstract labour itself is conceived as the mediator in the social relation among the producers.³³ Still, it is not labour itself that mediates in the social relation among the private and independent producers. The product of labour, the commodity, is the mediator. It is not abstract labour in act but materialised abstract labour, ie. an abstract labour that only exists materialised in its product by then. In the inversion in question there is a simple expenditure of human labour-power, an abstract labour, that intervenes as a mediator in the social relation and other one that does not. Again, the abstract labour that produces value is conceived as a specific form of its own genus and, therefore, as a concrete labour.

Both the displacement of the private-form of the labour that produces commodities by the appearance of being a directly social labour, and the displacement of the private-form by the condition of being an abstract one as the determinant of the historical specificity of the labour that produces commodities, take to the same place. They devoid the capitalist mode of production of its historical specificity. That is to say, they devoid it of its determination as the necessary form of the development of the productive powers of individual free labour into the productive powers of the immediately social labour consciously organised by the same collective labourer, accomplished through the development of the contradiction inherent in

³⁰ Dutt, C. P. and Andrew Rothstein (eds) 1957, pp. 57-58 (in the Spanish edition).

³¹ Rubin, Isaak 1973, pp. 179, 182 and 196 (in the Spanish edition).

³² De Angelis, Massimo 1995, p. 110.

³³ Postone, Moishe 1993, p. 150.

the private organisation of social labour. Therefore, they devoid the working-class of its own historic specific powers. Upon which they deprive the revolutionary character inherent in these powers of its material base, thus degrading its necessity to some of the idealist inversions already seen.

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