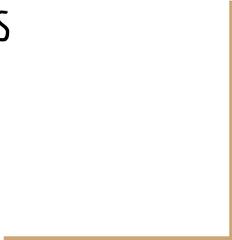




# Marx & Primitive Accumulation

Week Two Lectures



# Labour Power and the Circulation Process

Before we get into Marxist Historiography (as well as who Marx even was), we are going to spend some time understanding his theories, particularly labour power, and the role it plays in the Capital circulation. We will also touch on Primitive [Ursprüngliche] Accumulation, Marx's understanding of the birth of labour power, and subsequently, capitalism.

# Labour Power and the Circulation Process

C ---- M ---- C

vs.

M ---- C ---- M + ΔM

Or

M --- C (LP + MP) ---- P --- C --- M + ΔM

"In order to extract value out of the consumption of a commodity, our friend the money owner must be lucky enough to find within the sphere of circulation, on the market, a commodity whose use-value possesses the peculiar property of being a source of value, whose actual consumption is therefore itself an objectification of labour, hence a creation of value. The possessor of money does find such a special commodity on the market: the capacity for labour, in other words, labour power. We mean by ***labour-power***, or ***labour capacity***, the aggregate of those mental and physical capabilities existing in the physical Form, the living personality, of a human being, capabilities which he sets in motion whenever he produces a use-value of any kind" (Marx 1867: 270).

# Marx's "Mode of Production"

What is a "Mode of Production"?

"Perhaps the simplest answer is that it is a model of certain basic regularities that hold across and therefore define historical epochs. At the heart of those regularities is the interrelationship between technology in some broad sense and social stratification" (Donham 2001: 9924).

Marx generally believed that the first (called Productive Forces) determined the second (relations of production). He was a bit more nuanced than most think, though.

**Productive forces** are things which can be used in "productive interaction with nature". This includes raw materials, tools, technology, skills, knowledge, cooperation. While they are "material" in that they are used to produce, many (such as knowledge) are not strictly materialist.

**Relations of Production** are the "*de facto* power relationships that both underlie and are the result of the division of the fruits of a society's total labour."

# What has this got to do with History?

So-called "Vulgar Marxism" or "Technological determinist Marxism" believed absolutely that Productive forces **determined** the Relations of Production.

While this may be true sometimes, it isn't always, as similar productive technologies can exist empirically in vastly different relations of production.

Furthermore (Marx 1857: 493-4) this likely wasn't what Marx actually believed. He more likely believed that productive forces limited the various relations of production possible, generally to one.

While "mode of production analyses" are not historical analyses and are always incomplete, according to Donham, they "furnish the necessary scaffolding without which all local historical explanation would be impossible" (9927).

The interaction between Productive Forces and Relations of production reveals certain tensions and inequalities in society. It also reveals different ways in which exploitation can take shape. Furthermore, it shows that capitalism is a specific epoch, with a specific base and superstructure, neither of which is necessarily of greater importance than the other.

Remember complex analogy of legs & table top.

# But why is Labour Power a Commodity?

"That the owner of money encounters labour-power as a *commodity* on the market is not a matter of course. Two conditions have to be satisfied for this to be the case. First, there must be people who act as *free proprietors* of their own labour-power, who are therefore in a position to sell their labour-power. A slave or a serf is therefore not in such a position, since the sellers of labour-power must be *legally free people*. But if these people have the means of production at their disposal and can produce and sell their own commodities or can subsist from the products of their own labour, then they will probably not sell their labour power. They are only *driven* to sell their labour-power – and this is the second condition – if they do not own any means of production, if they are therefore not only legally free but also free of substantive *property*. Then they actually treat their labour-power as a commodity. The existence of workers who are 'free' in this double sense is an indispensable social precondition of capitalist production." (Heinrich, 2012: 91).

# How did workers become "Free in a Double Sense"?

"The capital-relation presupposes a complete separation between the workers and the ownership of the conditions for the realization of their labour. As soon as capitalist production stands on its own feet, it not only maintains this separation, but reproduces it on a continually extending scale. The process, therefore, which creates the capital-relation can be nothing other than the process which divorces the worker from the ownership of the conditions of his own labour; it is a process which operates two transformations, *whereby the social means of subsistence and production are turned into capital, and the immediate producers are turned into wage labourers*. So-called primitive accumulation, therefore, is nothing else than the **historical process of divorcing the producer from the means of production**. It appears as primitive, because it forms the prehistory of capital, and of the mode of production corresponding to capital." (Marx, 874-5).

# Marx's Main Case Study: British Enclosure

- Prior to the existence of a British proletariat, most Britons would be classified as peasants under semi-feudal relationships, farming their own allotments and paying occasional tribute to their feudal lord.
- While peasants were normally quite poor, they had a degree of individual and group freedoms, guaranteed in law. They could graze their animals, hunt, and gather wood in communal areas and forests, for example.
- In order to create a mass of people who only have their labour power to sell, the oligarchy sought to privatize these communal lands, eventually called "Enclosure", which was guaranteed through Parliamentary Act
- Most of these individuals were cleared from estates, putting their very lives into danger.

# Marx's Main Case Study: British Enclosure

- After the estates were cleared of former peasants, who found it difficult to maintain their society's "productive forces", many of them turned to crime and vagrancy. After all, they needed to feed themselves.
- Legislation was passed to criminalize this behaviour, and many who were convicted under these laws were to suffer physical violence and forced labour.
- This, according to Marx, is the eventual birth of the Proletariat (those who have nothing to sell but their labour power) in Britain, as well as the birth of Capitalism at large.
- Primitive accumulation takes many forms, depending on the location and the context, nor is it a finite process; it is ongoing even today.

# What does this tell us about "Marxian Historiography"?

- Marx's book, *Capital Volume One*, which we read a segment of for this week, presents two very different types of analyses.
  - First, He presents a structural (often termed Epochal) analysis, exploring the economic logic and structures underpinning our (capitalist) society. [remember Productive Forces]
  - Second, He presents a historical analysis of how these structures came into being and what sustains them. This is a very contingent analysis, which contains much more agency than was present in his structural chapters. [Remember Relations of Production]
- Marxian historiography is often a balanced negotiation of these two kinds of analyses. Marxian historiography doesn't just examine class conflict and labour, but it examines it in a very specific way.
  - Marx's "history" of Primitive Accumulation (and his history of the Working Day) are arguably the first examples of Marxian Historiography.