

Marx's vision of communism and 20th century distortions

This is the 150th anniversary of the publication of the first volume of Marx's *Capital* and the 100th anniversary of the October Revolution in Russia which was carried out by people who proclaimed themselves to be Marxists. An appropriate moment then to respond to Ismail's and Emar's request that I discuss Marx vision of a future society and problems with the way that was interpreted in the last century.

Marx was famously averse to setting out detailed prescriptions of the future society that he fought for politically. He and Engels distinguished themselves from the utopian socialists such as Owen, Fourier and Saint-Simon who drew up detailed plans for how society could be reorganised. In Marx's view, the most perfect plan for the future would not get humanity one jot closer to achieving it unless the advocates of a cooperative, egalitarian, democratic future identified a material basis in the existing society that made it possible to envisage that such a future was viable and achievable.

It is because Marx takes a rigorous, scientific approach to the question of replacing (or superseding) capitalism that I think it is useful for those of us who are politically engaged to try and understand what Marx was saying. Not because he was some kind of prophet or we treat his work as religious texts but because they can help us to think for ourselves - even if that involves reaching conclusions that are different from those of Marx. I think it is instructive to identify where Marx's ideas have been represented and what the consequences of that are.

The so-called *Critique of the Gotha Programme*¹, written in 1875 as a circular letter to his supporters in Germany, criticising the compromises they have made in reaching a deal with the supporters of Ferdinand Lassalle is one document in which Marx did go into some detail, albeit in a concentrated form, about the future communist society. We have to bear in mind that he is polemicizing against Lassallean formulations that he regards as ambiguous and open to reactionary interpretation. In the main section I am focussing on, Marx is taking to task the following clause in the new unity programme:

"The emancipation of labour demands the promotion of the instruments of labour to the common property of society and the cooperative regulation of the total labour, with a fair distribution of the proceeds of labour".

So for instance, he talks about the balance required between allocating resources for the needs of society as a whole, on the one hand, and individual consumers on the other:

"From [the total social product] must ... be deducted: First, cover for replacement of the means of production used up. Second, additional portion for expansion of production. Third, reserve or insurance funds to provide against accidents, dislocations caused by natural calamities, etc

"There remains the other part of the total product, intended to serve as means of consumption.

"Before this is divided among the individuals, there has to be deducted again, from it: First, the general costs of administration not belonging to production. This part will, from the outset, be very considerably restricted in comparison with present-day society, and it diminishes in proportion as the new society develops. Second, that which is intended for the common satisfaction of needs, such as schools, health services, etc. From the outset, this part grows considerably in comparison with present-day society, and it grows in proportion as the new society develops. Third, funds for those unable to work, etc., in short, for what is included under so-called official poor relief today.

"Only now do we come to the "distribution" which the program, under Lassallean influence, alone has in view in its narrow fashion -- namely, to that part of the means of consumption which is divided among the individual producers of the co-operative society."

He goes on to discuss the basis on which individual consumers might receive their allocation of the society's resources. It is in this latter context that he talks about two phases of communist society: a first phase in which how much you receive as an individual consumer is based on the amount of work you do; and a higher phase in which the distributive principle applies of "From each according to their ability, to each according to their needs":

"... this equal right is still constantly stigmatized by a bourgeois limitation. The right of the producers is proportional to the labour they supply; the equality consists in the fact that measurement is made with an equal standard, labour.
...

"Thus, with an equal performance of labour, and hence an equal in the social consumption fund, one will in fact receive more than another, one will be richer than another, and so on. To avoid all these defects, right, instead of being equal, would have to be unequal.

"But these defects are inevitable in the first phase of communist society as it is when it has just emerged after prolonged birth pangs from capitalist society. Right can never be higher than the economic structure of society and its cultural development conditioned thereby.

"In a higher phase of communist society, after the **enslaving subordination of the individual to the division of labour, and therewith also the antithesis between mental and physical labour, has vanished; after labour has become not only a means of life but life's prime want; after the productive forces have also increased with the all-around development of the individual, and all the springs of co-operative wealth flow more abundantly** -- only then can the narrow horizon of bourgeois right be crossed in its entirety and society inscribe on its banners: From each according to his ability, to each according to his needs!"

Marx also talks about the "revolutionary dictatorship of the proletariat" as the basis of the state in the "political transition period" "between capitalist and communist society" - a critical instance of Marx's use of this much-abused term.

Now, I first became interested in how Marx's discussion in the *Critique* was interpreted in the context of a debate we were having in my former organisation, the CPGB who publish the *Weekly Worker*, about a redrafting of the organisation's programme. This evening, rather than discussing the specific programmatic differences I had six or seven years ago, I want to explore the broader issues that were at stake. These flow in particular from Lenin's decision in *The State and Revolution*, written a hundred years ago between the February and October revolutions, to emphasise the phases of communist society that Marx outlines, as far as I know, only in the *Critique* and nowhere else and apply different labels to them – *socialism* to the first phase and *communism* only to the higher phase – almost as if they were two distinct types of society, which is how it was often been interpreted in the course of the twentieth century.

But before I do that though I want to look at what Marx says about communism in *Capital*, the work, the 150th anniversary of which we are celebrating this. The first volume of *Capital* was published in 1867 and reworked by Marx in several German and one French editions. The second and third volumes were published posthumously by Engels².

I think *Capital* is a good prism through which to view Marx's discussion in the *Critique* year - for as we shall see, the *Critique* says nothing about the future communist society that is not explored in the pages of *Capital* - particularly those factors that Marx identifies as blocks to moving to a higher phase of communist society:

- "the enslaving subordination of the individual to the division of labour";
- the requirement for labour to become one of "life's prime want[s]";
- and the development of the productive forces to allow "all the springs of co-operative wealth flow more abundantly".

Capital is Marx's single most important scholarly and scientific work. It is certainly the work to which he devoted the bulk of his intellectual life. *Capital* is an attempt to discover and describe the main laws of motion of the capitalist mode of production. It is not an attempt to describe an actual capitalist society. A mode of production is an abstraction, what we would today call a scientific model that attempts to describe the most important features and dynamics of a particular form of society - and the features and dynamics of different social formations of its type. And it is an attempt to describe the features and dynamics of that form of society as a historically (and, as Marx emphasises in the case of the capitalist mode of the production in the 19th century, a geographically) limited phenomenon. Like everything in our universe, a mode of production has a beginning and an end. Its laws of motion not only describe its behaviour but should say something about how it comes into being, evolves and ends.

***Capital*: role of capitalism in creating the basis of a new society**

So *Capital* contains a lot of historical material about the birth of capitalism and Marx constantly refers to the modes of production that preceded it and

continue to overlap with it and to interpenetrate it. It is not a surprise then that a fairly constant object of the discussion in *Capital*, often implicit, but not infrequently, explicit is the mode of production that Marx thought capitalism was bringing into being. That, after all, was the point of Marx's approach to communism or the communist mode of production: it could only come into being on the basis of the capitalist "laws of motion", ie, the creation of a class of propertyless producers, the proletariat; the socialisation of labour and cooperation within the workforce which brings workers together and unleashes the potential for ever increasing productivity; and the concentration and centralisation of ownership and production.

Capital 3

p.368 "Hence the concern of the English economists over the decline of the rate of profit. The fact that the bare possibility of this happening should worry Ricardo, shows his profound understanding of the conditions of capitalist production. It is that which is held against him, it is his unconcern about "human beings," and his having an eye solely for the development of the productive forces, whatever the cost in human beings and capital-values — it is precisely that which is the important thing about him. Development of the productive forces of social labour is the historical task and justification of capital. **This is just the way in which it unconsciously creates the material requirements of a higher mode of production.**"

pp.567-72 re the formation of stock companies: "The capital, which in itself rests on a social mode of production and presupposes a social concentration of means of production and labour-power, is here directly endowed with the form of social capital (capital of directly associated individuals) as distinct from private capital, and its undertakings assume the form of social undertakings as distinct from private undertakings. **It is the abolition of capital as private property within the framework of capitalist production itself.**"

re the separation of management from ownership: "**This is the abolition of the capitalist mode of production within the capitalist mode of production itself, and hence a self-dissolving contradiction, which prima facie represents a mere phase of transition to a new form of production.** ... It is private production without the control of private property. ...

And the final rousing peroration in the penultimate chapter of the first volume of *Capital*:

Capital 1

p.929 "The centralisation of the means of production and the socialisation of labour reach a point at which they become incompatible with their capitalist integument. This integument is burst asunder. **The knell of capitalist private property sounds. The expropriators are expropriated...** This is the negation of the negation [the first negation being the deprivation of the producers of their means of production by capital]. It does not re-establish private property, but it does indeed establish individual property on the basis of the achievement of the capitalist era: namely **co-operation and**

the possession in common of the land and the means of production produced by labour itself."

Capital: end of exploitation and shortening of the working day

Marx saw his greatest theoretical achievement in the field of political economy as being to locate the source of the surplus grabbed by the different faction of the capitalist class in the exploitation of the working class. The degree of exploitation can be expressed in terms of either value as surplus-value or time as surplus labour-time.

Exploitation would end in a communist society, but, as Marx was to explain in the *Critique*, not all of the surplus-value or surplus labour-time would be restored to the individual worker, but it would be up to society how the time and products it produced were distributed.

Capital 1

p.667 "Only the abolition of the capitalist form of production would permit the reduction of the working day to the necessary labour-time. But even in that case the latter would expand to take up more of the day, and for two reasons: first, because the worker's conditions of life would improve, and his aspirations become greater, and second, because a part of what is now surplus labour would then count as necessary labour, namely the labour which is necessary for the formation of a social fund for reserve and accumulation."

p.667 "The intensity and productivity of labour being given, the part of the social working day necessarily taken up with material production is shorter and, as a consequence, the time at society's disposal for the free intellectual and social activity of the individual is greater, in proportion as work is more and more evenly divided among all the able-bodied members of society... In capitalist society, free time is produced for one class by the conversion of the whole lifetime of the masses into labour-time."

Capital: nature of work/division of labour

It is not only exploitation that would end in a communist society but the nature of work and, specifically, the disfiguring division of labour which condemned workers a deadly boring routine throughout their working lives.

Capital 1

p.458 "a worker who performs the same simple operation for the whole of his life converts his body into the automatic, one-sided implement of that operation... The collective worker, who constitutes the living mechanism of manufacture, is made up solely of such one-sidedly specialised workers."

p.464 "The collective worker, formed from the combination of the many specialised workers... [manufacture] only accomplished the social

organisation of the labour process by riveting each worker to a single fraction of work."

p.477 "The same bourgeois consciousness which celebrates the division of labour in the workshop, the lifelong annexation of the worker to a partial operation, and his complete subjection to capital, as an organisation of labour that increases its productive power, denounces with equal vigour every conscious attempt to control and regulate the process of production socially, as an inroad upon such sacred things as the rights of property, freedom and the self-determining 'genius' of the individual capitalist. It is very characteristic that the enthusiastic apologists of the factory system have nothing more damning to urge against a general organisation of labour in society than that it would turn the whole of society into a factory."

In *Capital* Marx associates the division of labour specifically with the period he calls manufacture - from the 16th to late 18th century, the capitalist economy as described by Adam Smith. Counter-intuitively from our perspective of Fordist methods of organising work on the basis of machine production, Marx sees the introduction of machinery from the end of the 18th century as creating the possibility of dispensing with the division of labour and allowing the worker to shift easily from one role to another. This is somewhat at odds with the bucolic image of work Marx summons up in *The German Ideology*: hunting in the morning, fishing in the afternoon, rearing cattle in the evening, and writing a criticism after dinner.

It is the need to control and discipline the worker that imposes the need on capital to continue with division of labour. One thinks by analogy of Marx's description of how the slaveholders of the southern United States could only use the crudest implements and the toughest animals - mules instead of horses - because the slaves couldn't be trusted not to damage the tools and animals. Likewise, because workers in a capitalist society do not work for themselves, they cannot be trusted to work productively without the close control that the division of labour provides.

p.547 "Thus although, from a technical point of view, the old system of division of labour is thrown overboard by machinery, it hangs on in the factory as a tradition handed down from manufacture, and is then systematically reproduced and fixed in a more hideous form by capital as a means of exploiting labour-power."

pp.617-18 "At the same time, [modern industry] thereby also revolutionises the division of labour within society, and incessantly throws masses of capital and of workers from one branch to another. Thus large-scale industry, by its very nature, necessitates variation of labour, fluidity of functions, and mobility of the worker in all directions. But on the other hand, in its capitalist form it reproduces the old division of labour with its ossified peculiarities... This possibility of varying labour must become a general law of social production, and the existing relations must be adapted to permit its realisation in practice. That monstrosity, the disposable working population held in reserve, in misery, for the changing requirements of capitalist exploitation, must be replaced by the individual man who is absolutely available for the different kinds of labour required of him; the partially developed individual, who is merely the bearer of one specialised social function must be replaced by the

totally developed individual, for whom the different social functions are different modes of activity he takes up in turn."

***Capital*: end of commodity production and money/labour tokens**

It is important to emphasise that, although Marx discusses labour tokens in *Capital*, he is nowhere says this is how distribution has to be organised. He is careful never to be prescriptive since it will be up to the people who make the revolution and build the new society to decide how it is organised. And he is also abundantly clear that even if labour tokens are used they are not money.

Capital 1

p.188 Footnote 1: "On this point I will only say further that Owen's 'labour-money', for instance, is no more 'money' than a theatre ticket is. Owen presupposes directly socialised labour, a form of production diametrically opposed to the production of commodities. The certificate of about is merely evidence of the part taken by the individual in common labour... but Owen never made the mistake of presupposing the production of commodities..."

Capital 2

p.434 "With collective production, money capital is completely dispensed with... There is no reason why the producers should not receive paper tokens permitting them to withdraw an amount corresponding to their labour time from the social consumption stocks. But these tokens are not money; they do not circulate."

***Capital*: the society of "associated producers"**

Nowhere in *Capital* does Marx talk about two distinct phases of forms of communist society. As we have seen, any phase of communist society, as conceptualised by Marx, has left behind commodity production, money and the law of value - even if the distribution of consumer goods is rationed by labour tokens. And capitalism provides the means to overcome the division of labour and release the productive potential of human cooperation. However, Marx does see the future mode of production (as do all modes of production) as inevitably evolving.

Capital 1

After a discussion of the classical political economists favourite economic model, Robinson Crusoe, in the section of the first chapter on the fetishism of the commodity:

pp.171-2 "Let us finally imagine, for a change, an association of free men, working with the means of production held in common, and expending their many different forms of labour-power in full self-awareness as one single social labour force... The total product of our imagined association is a social product. One part of this product serves as fresh means of production and remains social. But another part is consumed by the members of the

association as means of subsistence. This part must therefore be divided up among them. The way this division is made will vary with the particular kind of social organisation of production and the corresponding level of social development attained by the producers. We shall assume, but only for the sake of a parallel with the production of commodities, that the share of each individual producer in the means of subsistence is determined by his labour-time. Labour-time would in that case play a double part... The social relations of the individual producers, both towards their labour and the products of their labour, are here transparent in their simplicity, in production as well as in distribution."

This passage in the 3rd volume of *Capital* comes closest to mirroring what the *Critique* has to say about a higher phase of communist society in the form of the "realm of freedom".

Capital 3

pp.958-9 "The actual wealth of society, and the possibility of constantly expanding its reproduction process, therefore, do not depend upon the duration of surplus-labour, but upon its productivity and the more or less copious conditions of production under which it is performed. In fact, **the realm of freedom actually begins only where labour which is determined by necessity and mundane considerations ceases; thus in the very nature of things it lies beyond the sphere of actual material production.** Just as the savage must wrestle with Nature to satisfy his wants, to maintain and reproduce life, so must civilised man, and he must do so in all social formations and under all possible modes of production. With his development this realm of physical necessity expands as a result of his wants; but, at the same time, the forces of production which satisfy these wants also increase. Freedom in this field can only consist in socialised man, the associated producers, rationally regulating their interchange with Nature, bringing it under their common control, instead of being ruled by it as by the blind forces of Nature; and achieving this with the least expenditure of energy and under conditions most favourable to, and worthy of, their human nature. But it nonetheless still remains a realm of necessity. Beyond it begins that development of human energy which is an end in itself, the true realm of freedom, which, however, can blossom forth only with this realm of necessity as its basis. **The shortening of the working-day is its basic prerequisite.**"

Misinterpretation

Let's return to the *Critique of the Gotha Programme*. I have already mentioned that Lenin in *The State and Revolution* distinguishes between socialism and communism. He goes on further to say that the dictatorship of the proletariat will continue under socialism and "For the state to completely wither away, complete communism is necessary":

"The state withers away insofar as there are no longer any capitalists, any classes, and consequently, no class can be suppressed. But the state has not completely withered away, since there remains the safeguarding of 'bourgeois law', which sanctifies actual inequality."

I don't think this conforms to what Marx says in the *Critique*. Look at the text (Marx is responding to Lassallean phraseology about the "free people's state"):

"The question then arises: What transformation will the state undergo in communist society? In other words, what social functions will remain in existence there that are analogous to present state functions? This question can only be answered scientifically, and one does not get a flea-hop nearer to the problem by a thousand-fold combination of the word 'people' with the word 'state'.

"Between capitalist and communist society there lies the period of the revolutionary transformation of the one into the other. Corresponding to this is also a political transition period in which the state can be nothing but the revolutionary dictatorship of the proletariat."

This is one of the handful of occasions when Marx refers to the "dictatorship of the proletariat". HAL Draper performed an excellent service for us by collating all the instances in which either Marx or Engels use this phrase. The reference in the *Critique* is Draper's *locus no 9*. Draper contends that that both Marx and Engels used the term as synonymous with the political rule of the working class - it was a workers' state. It didn't imply anything about the political content of that rule. It didn't imply anything specifically about repression. It was simply a way of describing class rule. They also talked about the dictatorship of the bourgeoisie even when talking about parliamentary democracies. But because Marx and Engels envisaged the dictatorship of the proletariat as the rule of the large majority of society it would in fact be much more democratic than anything even the most liberal of bourgeoisies could accomplish. In the *Communist Manifesto* Marx describes the objective of the working class raising itself to the position of the ruling class as being "to win the battle for democracy".

It also was purely a transitional form, as Marx explains in the *Critique*. In *Anti-Duhring*, Engels explains that by seizing state power and proceeding to take control of the means of production the working class

"puts an end to all class differences and class antagonisms, it puts an end also to the state as the state... When ultimately [the state] becomes really representative of society as a whole, it makes itself superfluous... The government of persons is replaced by the administration of things and the direction of the processes of production. The state is not 'abolished' [Engels is referring here to the anarchist demand], *it withers away*." [London 1934, pp.308-9].

It is a moot point as to whether the Paris Commune qualified in its short existence as a workers' state. I am inclined to think that this is how Marx thought about it. And Engels in a letter a decade or two later explicitly describes it as "the dictatorship of the proletariat". In *The Civil War in France* (1871), Marx says of the Commune:

"It was essentially a working class government, the product of the struggle of the producing against the appropriating class, the political form at last discovered under which to work out the economical emancipation of labour."

Engels writing to Bebel about the Gotha Programme at the same time Marx was drafting his *Critique* says:

"All the palaver about the state ought to be dropped, especially after the Commune, which had ceased to be a state in the true sense of the term ... since the state is merely a transitional institution of which use is made in the struggle, in the revolution, to keep down one's enemies by force, it is utter nonsense to speak of a free people's state."

And what of the "first phase of communist society" that Lenin calls *socialism*? According to Marx, it may be a new society that

"has not developed on its own foundation, but, on the contrary, just as it emerges from capitalist society; which is thus in every respect, economically, morally, and intellectually, still stamped with the birthmarks of the old society from whose womb it emerges",

However, it is still a "communist society". Marx defines it as a

"co-operative society based on common ownership of the means of production" within which "the producers do not exchange their products; just as little does the labour employed on the products appear here as the value of these products, as a material quality possessed by them, since now, in contrast to capitalist society, individual labour no longer exists in an indirect fashion but directly as a component part of total labour".

In other words, there is no commodity fetishism in this society. So, Marx is not talking here about a transitional society in which elements of the old and the emerging modes of production are mixed together. It is an economy that has gone beyond commodity production and beyond the law of value. Everyone who can works. There are no class distinctions. Therefore there is no working class and no basis for an instrument of class rule. The "revolutionary dictatorship of the proletariat" in the *Critique* lasts during the transition from capitalism to communism - nothing about it persevering within the early period of communist society.

And I should add that neither is there any basis for a communist party defined as a party of the working class once that class no longer exists.

Bukharin and Preobrazhensky take up this question in what I regard as a highly unsatisfactory manner - and one of the most egregious examples of misinterpreting Marx - in the *ABC of Communism* (1919) written to explain the new Bolshevik programme in the midst of the civil war. This was very influential within the communist movement before both authors fell out of political favour (both to be murdered in the Stalin's great purge).

They do not talk about *socialism* and *communism* but, in sections that Bukharin wrote, discuss the different principles of distribution (pp.72-3) that Marx set out in the *Critique* and say of the dying out of the state (pp.74-5):

"Manifestly this will only happen in the fully developed and strongly established communist system, after the complete and definitive victory of the proletariat; nor will it follow immediately upon that victory. For a long time yet, the working class will have to fight against all its enemies, and in especial against the relics of the past, such as **sloth, slackness, criminality, pride**. All these will have to be **stamped out**. Two or three generations of persons will have to grow up under the new conditions before the need will pass for laws and punishments and for the use of repressive measures by the workers state. Not until then will all the vestiges of the capitalist past disappear. Though in the intervening period the existence of the workers' state is indispensable, subsequently, in the fully developed communist system, when the vestiges of capitalism are extinct, the proletarian state authority will also pass away. The proletariat itself will become mingled with all the other strata of the population, for everyone will by degrees come to participate in the common labour. Within a few decades there will be quite a new world, with new people and new customs."³

I see this interpretation of the objective of communists as problematic for a number of reasons. I am not saying that there is a straight line between this formulation and the kind of society that Stalin created - a monstrously repressive state seeking to control all aspects of the economy and society with a harsh discipline at work and certainly no attempt to break with the division of labour inherited from capitalism, ie, nothing in the way of human emancipation. A society Stalin then claimed was the socialist mode of production. In fact, at the 19th congress of the CPSU in 1939 he not only claimed that they had built socialism in the Soviet Union but engaged in the theoretical debate about the role of state and said it was a mistake to believe that the state would in any way begin to wither away under socialism. Rather, material conditions in Russia after the revolution and civil war, the isolation of the new revolutionary state played the decisive role in this degeneration.

But I do say that what Bukharin wrote in developing what Lenin wrote on the state and the first phase of communist society - let alone what Stalin claimed - is not consistent with what Marx says in the *Critique of the Gotha Programme* and that in theoretical terms it created a space where the concept of a non-emancipatory society as the immediate post-capitalist alternative could grow and eventually become a reality.

To conclude, I don't think we should conceive of the future society as consisting of two distinct phases. It is clear from the passages from *Capital* that Marx was thinking in terms of a mode of production that would evolve and change in the same way as any other mode of production or social formation.

I think there are dangers if we do conceptualise a distinction between socialism and communism. Throughout the twentieth century socialists often thought in terms of a socialist society as being defined by state ownership of the means of production full stop with democracy and workers' control as a

nice-to-have. "Full communism" was a long way away - definitely beyond our lifetimes - and therefore didn't really concern us other than as an inspiring vision to stop us asking too many questions about the present-day realities.

For instance, John Ross of *Socialist Action* wrote an article⁴ just two weeks ago that uses the categories in the *Critique of the Gotha Programme* to define contemporary China as socialist in the sense of being in the first phase of communist society. Utter nonsense!

I think that the exercise of political power and control is critical in defining a socialist or communist society. It won't do to talk about the economic base being more important than the political superstructure in any mode of production and state ownership of the means of production therefore constituting socialism. The separation of base and superstructure quite possibly only applies to the capitalist mode of production. It is definitely an inadequate theoretical framework to consider a future emancipatory society. In *Capital* Marx talks about types of non-free communal property in the past. The society of the future in the passage I quoted is "an association of *free* men". Whether or not the people of that society are *free* can only be determined politically.

And since a workers' revolution and a transition to a communist society is a conscious political act - in contrast to transitions between modes of production in the past - the conceptual framework that informs that political act matters and plays a material role in how events turn out.

It's generally a mistake to be overly prescriptive about how the economy or distribution will be organised. That needs to be decided at the time. For that matter, I don't think there will ever come a time that rationing of some of the social product is not required. I am not convinced that the absence of rationing is what Marx meant by "to each according to their need". As we have seen, it is certainly not what he meant by the abolition of money - labour tokens - a form of rationing - are not money.

But neither am I saying there will be a neat cut-off between the capitalist and communist modes of production. Features of both will overlap and interpenetrate. I particularly think the question of the peasantry (in those country where independent farmers operate) and the petty-bourgeoisie will be with us for a long time and should not be dealt with by repression as Stalin did in launching a civil war against Russia's peasants in 1929. The transition between capitalism and communism - the period when an increasingly residual workers' state exists - will be relatively long and will have its difficulties. Among those difficulties will be superseding a commodity producing economy and the market - even after the capitalists have been expropriated. The key task will be to develop democratic forms that operate on a sufficiently local scale to be genuinely participatory but allow society to consciously plan what it produces. I don't think an all-powerful central planning agency fits the bill.

Above all, our programme for the future has to address the billions of people alive today - with all their "sloth, slackness, criminality, pride". If we have to wait for those human attributes to be to be "stamped out", we will be waiting a long time for human emancipation.

Nick Rogers, September 2017

¹ *Critique of the Gotha Programme*: <https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1875/gotha/>

² Pages numbers and the text for quotes from volumes 1 and 2 of *Capital* are from the Penguin editions. Quotes from volume 3 are sourced from the online version [\[https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1894-c3/index.htm\]](https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1894-c3/index.htm) while the page numbers indicate position of the passage in the Penguin edition. All use of bold text as emphasis is by me.

³ The *ABC of Communism*, London, 1922

⁴ <http://www.socialistaction.net/Theory/China/Why-China-is-a-socialist-country-China-s-theory-is-in-line-with-Marx-but-not-Stalin.html>