

## 2 Communism

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### 2.1 Critical Theories of the Early Socialists

In the wake of the French Revolution, numerous theories began to circulate in Europe that sought both to respond to demands for social justice unanswered by the French Revolution and to correct the dramatic economic imbalances brought about by the spread of the Industrial Revolution. The democratic gains following the capture of the Bastille delivered a decisive blow to the aristocracy, but they left almost unchanged the inequality of wealth between the popular and the dominant classes. The decline of the monarchy and the establishment of the republic were not sufficient to reduce poverty in France.

This was the context in which the ‘critical-utopian’ theories of socialism,<sup>1</sup> as Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels (1820–1895) defined them in the *Manifesto of the Communist Party* (1848), rose to prominence. They considered them ‘utopian’<sup>2</sup> for two reasons: first, their exponents, in different ways, opposed the existing social order and furnished theories containing what they believed to be ‘the most valuable elements for the enlightenment of the working class’;<sup>3</sup> and, second, they claimed that an alternative form of social organization could be achieved simply through the theoretical identification of new ideas and principles, rather than through the concrete struggle of the working class. According to Marx and Engels, their socialist predecessors had believed that

<sup>1</sup> K. Marx and F. Engels, *Manifesto of the Communist Party*, MECW, vol. 6, p. 514.

<sup>2</sup> This term had been used by others before Marx and Engels. See, for example, J.-A. Blanqui, *History of Political Economy in Europe* (New York: G. P. Putnam and Sons, 1885), pp. 520–33. M. L. Reybaud, *Études sur les Réformateurs contemporains ou socialistes modernes: Saint-Simon, Charles Fourier, Robert Owen* (Paris: Guillaumin, 1840), pp. 322–41, was the first to group these three authors under the category of modern socialism. Reybaud’s text circulated widely and helped to spread the idea that they were ‘the entire sum of the eccentric thinkers whose birth our age has witnessed’, p. vi.

<sup>3</sup> Marx and Engels, *Manifesto of the Communist Party*, p. 515.

historical action [had] to yield to their personal inventive action, historically created conditions of emancipation to fantastic ones, and the gradual spontaneous class organization of the proletariat to an organization of society specially contrived by these inventors. Future history resolve[d] itself, in their eyes, into the propaganda and the practical carrying out of their social plans.<sup>4</sup>

In the most widely read political text in human history, Marx and Engels also took issue with many other forms of socialism both past and present, grouping them under the headings of ‘feudal’, ‘petty-bourgeois’, ‘bourgeois’, or – in disparagement of its ‘philosophical phraseology’ – ‘German’ socialism.<sup>5</sup> In general, these theories could be related to one another either in terms of an aspiration to ‘restore the old means of production and exchange, and with them the old property relations and the old society’ or in terms of an attempt to ‘cramp the modern means of production and exchange within the framework of the old property relations’ from which they had broken. For this reason, Marx saw in these conceptions a form of socialism that was both ‘reactionary and utopian’.<sup>6</sup>

The term ‘utopian’, as opposed to ‘scientific’ socialism, has often been used in a misleading and intentionally disparaging way. In fact, the ‘utopian socialists’ contested the social organization of the age in which they lived, contributing through their writings and actions to the critique of existing economic relations.<sup>7</sup> Marx had considerable respect for his precursors:<sup>8</sup> he stressed the huge gap separating Saint-Simon (1760–1825) from his cruder interpreters;<sup>9</sup> and, while he regarded some of Charles Fourier’s (1771–1858) ideas as extravagant ‘humorous sketches’,<sup>10</sup> he saw ‘great merit’ in the realization that the transformative aim for labour was to overcome not only the existing mode of distribution, but also the ‘mode of production’.<sup>11</sup> In Owen’s theories, he saw many elements that were

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.    <sup>5</sup> Ibid, pp. 507–13.    <sup>6</sup> Ibid, p. 510.

<sup>7</sup> V. Geoghegan, *Utopianism and Marxism* (Berne: Peter Lang, 2008), pp. 23–38, where it is shown that the ‘utopian socialists saw themselves as social scientists’, p. 23. The Marxist-Leninist orthodoxy, for its part, employed the epithet ‘utopian’ in a purely derogatory sense. Cf. the interesting criticism, partly directed at Marx himself, in G. Claeys, ‘Early Socialism in Intellectual History’, *History of European Ideas* 40 (7): (2014), which finds in the definitions of ‘science’ and ‘scientific socialism’ an example of ‘epistemological authoritarianism’, p. 896.

<sup>8</sup> See E. Hobsbawm, ‘Marx, Engels and Pre-Marxian Socialism’, in: E. Hobsbawm (ed.), *The History of Marxism. Volume One: Marxism in Marx’s Day* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1982), pp. 1–28.

<sup>9</sup> K. Marx and F. Engels, *The German Ideology*, MECW, vol. 5, pp. 493–510. Engels, who held Saint-Simon in high regard, in *Socialism: Utopian and Scientific* went so far as to assert that ‘almost all the ideas of later Socialists that are not strictly economic are found in him in embryo’, MECW, vol. 25, p. 292.

<sup>10</sup> K. Marx, *Capital*, volume I (London: Penguin, 1976), p. 403.

<sup>11</sup> K. Marx, ‘Outlines of the Critique of Political Economy [*Grundrisse*]. Second Instalment’, MECW, vol. 29, p. 97.

worthy of interest and anticipated the future. In *Value, Price and Profit* (1865), he noted that, already at the beginning of the nineteenth century, in *Observations on the Effect of the Manufacturing System* (1815), Owen had ‘proclaimed a general limitation of the working day as the first preparatory step to the emancipation of the working class’.<sup>12</sup> He had also argued, like no one else, in favour of cooperative production.

Nevertheless, while recognizing the positive influence of Saint-Simon, Fourier, and Owen on the nascent workers’ movement, Marx’s overall assessment of their ideas was negative. He thought that they hoped to solve the social problems of the age with unrealizable fantasies, and he criticized them heavily for spending much of their time on the irrelevant theoretical exercise of building ‘castles in the air’.<sup>13</sup>

Marx did not take exception only to proposals that he considered wrong or impractical. Above all, he opposed the idea that social change could come about through *a priori* meta-historical models inspired by dogmatic precepts. The moralism of the early socialists also came in for criticism.<sup>14</sup> In his ‘Conspectus on Bakunin’s *Statism and Anarchy*’ (1874–1875), he reproached ‘utopian socialism’ with seeking ‘to foist new illusions onto the people instead of confining its scientific investigations to the social movement created by the people itself’.<sup>15</sup> In his view, the conditions for revolution could not be imported from outside.

## 2.2 Equality, Theoretical Systems, and Future Society: Errors of the Precursors

After 1789, many theorists contended with one another in outlining a new and more just social order, over and above the fundamental political changes that had come with the end of the *Ancien Regime*. One of the commonest positions assumed that all the ills of society would cease as soon as a system of government based on absolute equality among all its components had been established.

This idea of a primordial, and in many respects dictatorial, communism was the guiding principle of the Conspiracy of Equals that developed in 1796 to subvert the ruling French Directorate. In the *Manifesto of the Equals* (1795), Sylvain Maréchal (1750–1803) argued that ‘since all have the same faculties and the same wants’, there should be ‘the same education [and] the same nourishment’ for all. ‘Why’, he asked, ‘should not the like portion and the same quality of food suffice for each according

<sup>12</sup> K. Marx, *Value, Price and Profit*, MECW, vol. 20, p. 110.

<sup>13</sup> Marx and Engels, *Manifesto of the Communist Party*, p. 516.

<sup>14</sup> See D. Webb, *Marx, Marxism and Utopia* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2000), p. 30.

<sup>15</sup> K. Marx, ‘Conspectus on Bakunin’s *Statism and Anarchy*’, MECW, vol. 24, p. 520.

to their wants?’<sup>16</sup> The leading figure in the conspiracy of 1796, François-Noël Babeuf (1760–1797), held that application of ‘the great principle of equality’ would greatly extend the ‘circle of humanity’ so that ‘frontiers, customs barriers and evil governments’ would ‘gradually disappear’.<sup>17</sup>

The vision of a society based on strict economic equality re-emerged in French communist writing in the period after the revolution of July 1830. In *Travels in Icaria* (1840), a political manifesto written in the form of a novel, Étienne Cabet (1788–1856) depicted a model community in which there would no longer be ‘property, money, or buying and selling’, and human beings would be ‘equal in everything’.<sup>18</sup> In this ‘second promised land’,<sup>19</sup> the law would regulate almost every aspect of life: ‘every house [would have] four floors’<sup>20</sup> and ‘everyone [would be] dressed in the same way’.<sup>21</sup>

Relations of strict equality are also prefigured in the work of Théodore Dézamy (1808–1850). In the *Community Code* (1842), he spoke of a world ‘divided into communes, as equal, regular and united as possible’, in which there would be ‘a single kitchen’ and ‘one common dormitory’ for all children. The whole citizenry would live as ‘a family in one single household’.<sup>22</sup>

Similar views to those circulating in France also took root in Germany. In *Humanity as It Is and as It Should Be* (1838), Wilhelm Weitling (1808–1871) foresaw that the elimination of private property would automatically put an end to egoism, which he simplistically regarded as the main cause of all social problems. In his eyes, ‘the community of goods’ would be ‘the means to the redemption of humanity, transforming the earth into paradise’ and immediately bringing about ‘enormous abundance’.<sup>23</sup>

All the thinkers who projected such visions fell into the same dual error: they took it for granted that the adoption of a new social model based on strict equality could be the solution for all the problems of society; and they convinced themselves, in defiance of all economic laws, that all that was necessary to achieve it was the imposition of certain measures from on high, whose effects would not later be altered by the course of the economy.

<sup>16</sup> S. Maréchal, ‘Manifesto of the Equals or Equalitarians’, in: P. Buonarroti (ed.), *Buonarroti’s History of Babeuf’s Conspiracy for Equality* (London: H. Hetherington, 1836), p. 316.

<sup>17</sup> F.-N. Babeuf, ‘Gracchus Babeuf à Charles Germain’, in: C. Mazauric (ed.), *Babeuf Textes Choisis* (Paris: Éditions Sociales, 1965), p. 192.

<sup>18</sup> É. Cabet, *Travels in Icaria* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 2003), p. 81.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 4. <sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 54. <sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 49.

<sup>22</sup> T. Dézamy, ‘Laws of the Community’, in: P. E. Cocoran (ed.), *Before Marx: Socialism and Communism in France, 1830–48* (London: The MacMillan Press Ltd, 1983), pp. 188–96.

<sup>23</sup> W. Weitling, *Die Menschheit, wie sie ist und wie sie sein sollte* (Bern: Jenni, 1845), p. 50.

Alongside this naïve egalitarian ideology, based on an assurance that all social disparities among human beings could be eliminated with ease, was another conviction equally widespread among the early socialists: many believed that it was sufficient to theoretically devise a better system of social organization in order to change the world. Numerous reform projects were therefore elaborated in minute detail, setting out their authors' theses for the restructuring of society. The priority, in their eyes, was to find the correct formulation, which, once discovered, citizens would then willingly accept as a matter of common sense and gradually implement in reality.

Saint-Simon was one of those who clung to this conviction. In 1819, he wrote in the periodical *The Organizer* [*L'Organisateur*]: 'The old system will cease to operate when ideas about how to replace existing institutions with others . . . have been sufficiently clarified, pooled and harmonized, and when they have been approved by public opinion.'<sup>24</sup> However, Saint-Simon's views about the society of the future are surprising, and disarming, in their vagueness. In the unfinished *New Christianity* (1824), he stated that the 'political disease of the age' – which caused 'suffering to all workers useful to society' and allowed 'sovereigns to absorb a large part of the wages of the poor' – depended on the 'feeling of egoism'. Since this had become 'dominant in all classes and all individuals',<sup>25</sup> he looked ahead to the birth of a new social organization based on a single guiding principle: 'all men must behave with one another as brothers'.<sup>26</sup>

Fourier declared that human existence was grounded upon universal laws, which, once activated, would guarantee joy and delight all over the earth. In his *Theory of the Four Movements* (1808), he set out what he unhesitatingly called the most 'important discovery [among] all the scientific work done since the human race began'.<sup>27</sup> Fourier opposed advocates of the 'commercial system' and maintained that society would be free only when all its components had returned to expressing their passions.<sup>28</sup> The main error of the political regime of his age was the repression of human nature.<sup>29</sup>

<sup>24</sup> C. H. Saint-Simon, 'L'Organisateur: prospectus de l'auteur', in: C. H. de Saint-Simon, *Œuvres complètes*, vol. III (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 2012), p. 2115.

<sup>25</sup> C. H. Saint-Simon, 'Le nouveau christianisme', in: C. H. de Saint-Simon, *Œuvres complètes*, vol. IV (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 2012), p. 3222.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 3216.

<sup>27</sup> C. Fourier, *The Theory of the Four Movements* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), p. 4.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 13–14.

<sup>29</sup> This is the exact opposite of the theory developed by Sigmund Freud, who, in 'Civilization and Its Discontents', in: S. Freud (ed.), *Complete Psychological Works*, vol. 21 (London: Hogarth Press, 1964), pp. 59–148, argued that a non-repressive

Alongside radical egalitarianism and a quest for the best possible social model, a final element common to many early socialists was their dedication to promoting the birth of small alternative communities. For those who organized them, the liberation of these communes from the economic inequalities existing at the time would provide a decisive impetus for the spread of socialist principles and make it easier to argue in their favour.

In *The New Industrial and Societal World* (1829), Fourier envisaged a novel community structure in which villages would be 'replaced with industrial phalanxes of roughly 1800 persons each'.<sup>30</sup> Individuals would live in phalansteries, that is, in large buildings with communal areas where they could enjoy all the services they needed. According to the method invented by Fourier, human beings would 'flutter from pleasure to pleasure and avoid excesses'; they would have brief spells of employment, 'two hours at the most', so that each would be able to exercise 'seven to eight attractive kinds of work in the course of the day'.<sup>31</sup>

The search for better ways of organizing society also spurred on Owen, who, over the course of his life, founded important experiments in workers' cooperation. First at New Lanark, Scotland from 1800 to 1825, then at New Harmony in the United States from 1826 to 1828, he tried to demonstrate in actual practice how to realize a more just social order. In *The Book of the New Moral World* (1836–1844), however, Owen proposed the division of society into eight classes, the last of which 'will consist of those from forty to sixty years complete', who would have the 'final decision'. What he envisaged, rather naïvely, was that in this gerontocratic system everyone would be able and willing to assume their due role in the governance of society 'without contest, his fair, full share of the government of society'.<sup>32</sup>

In 1849, Cabet, too, founded a colony in the United States, at Nauvoo, Illinois, but his authoritarianism gave rise to numerous internal conflicts. In the laws of the 'Icarian Constitution', he proposed as a condition for the birth of community that, 'in order to increase all the prospects of success', he should be appointed 'sole and absolute Director for a period of ten years, with the power to run it on the basis of his doctrine and ideas'.<sup>33</sup>

organization of society would involve a dangerous regression from the level of civilization attained within human relations.

<sup>30</sup> C. Fourier, *Le nouveau monde industriel et sociétaire*, in C. Fourier, *Œuvres complètes*, vol. VI (Paris: Éditions Anthropos, 1845), p. 15.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 67–69.

<sup>32</sup> R. Owen, *The Book of the New Moral World* (New York: G. Vale, 1845), p. 185.

<sup>33</sup> É. Cabet, *Colonie icarienne aux États-Unis d'Amérique: sa constitution, ses lois, sa situation matérielle et morale après le premier semestre 1855* (New York: Burt Franklin, 1971), p. 43.

The experiments of the early socialists – whether the lovingly devised phalansteries, the sporadic cooperatives, or the eccentric communist colonies – proved so inadequate that their implementation on a wider scale could not be seriously contemplated. They involved a derisory number of workers and often very limited participation of the collective in policy decisions. Moreover, many of the revolutionaries (non-English ones, in particular) who devoted their efforts to building such communities did not understand the fundamental changes in production that were taking place in their age. Many of the early socialists failed to see the connection between the development of capitalism and the potential for social progress for the working class. Such progress depended on the workers' capacity to appropriate the wealth they generated in the new mode of production.<sup>34</sup>

### 2.3 Where and Why Marx Wrote about Communism

Marx set himself a completely different task from that of previous socialists; his absolute priority was to 'reveal the economic law of motion of modern society'.<sup>35</sup> His aim was to develop a comprehensive critique of the capitalist mode of production, which would serve the proletariat, the principal revolutionary subject, in the overthrow of the existing social-economic system.

Moreover, having no wish to inculcate a new religion, Marx refrained from promoting an idea which he considered theoretically pointless and politically counterproductive: a universal model of communist society. For this reason, in the 'Postface to the Second Edition' (1873) of *Capital*, volume I (1867), he made it clear that he had no interest in 'writing recipes for the cook-shops of the future'.<sup>36</sup> He also outlined what he meant by this well-known assertion in the 'Notes on Wagner's *Treatise*

<sup>34</sup> According to R. Rosdolsky in *The Making of Marx's 'Capital'* (London: Pluto Press, 1977), the Romantic socialists, unlike Marx, 'were totally incapable of grasping the "course of modern history", i.e., the necessity and historical progressiveness of the bourgeois social order which they criticized, and confin[ed] themselves to moralistic rejection of it instead', p. 422.

<sup>35</sup> K. Marx, *Capital*, volume I (London: Penguin, 1976), p. 92.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 99. Marx made this point in reply to a review of his work in *Positive Philosophy (La Philosophie Positive)*, in which the Comtean sociologist Eugène de Roberty (1843–1915) had criticized him for not having indicated the 'necessary conditions for a healthy production and just distribution of wealth', see K. Marx, *Das Kapital. Kritik der politischen Ökonomie. Erster Band, Hamburg 1872*, MEGA<sup>2</sup>, vol. II/6, pp. 1622–3. A partial translation of de Roberty's review is contained in S. Moore, *Marx on the Choice between Socialism and Communism* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1980), pp. 84–7, although Moore wrongly claimed that the purpose of *Capital* was 'to find in the present the basis for predicting the future', p. 86.

on *Political Economy*' (1879–80), where, in response to criticism from the German economist Adolph Wagner (1835–1917), he categorically stated that he had 'never established a "socialist system"'.<sup>37</sup>

Marx made similar declarations in his political writings. In *The Civil War in France* (1871), he wrote of the Paris Commune, the first seizure of power by the subaltern classes: 'The working class did not expect miracles from the Commune. They have no ready-made utopias to introduce by a decree of the people.' Rather, the emancipation of the proletariat had 'to pass through long struggles, through a series of historic processes, transforming circumstances and men'. The point was not to 'realize ideals', but 'to set free elements of the new society with which old collapsing bourgeois society itself is pregnant'.<sup>38</sup>

Finally, Marx said much the same in his correspondence with leaders of the European workers' movement. In 1881, for instance, when Ferdinand Domela Nieuwenhuis (1846–1919), the leading representative of the Social Democratic League in the Netherlands, asked him what measures a revolutionary government would have to take after assuming power in order to establish a socialist society, Marx replied that he had always regarded such questions as 'fallacious', arguing instead that 'what is to be done . . . at any particular moment depends, of course, wholly and entirely on the actual historical circumstances in which action is to be taken'. He contended that it was impossible 'to solve an equation that does not comprise within its terms the elements of its solution'; 'a doctrinaire and of necessity fantastic anticipation of a future revolution's programme of action only serves to distract from the present struggle'.<sup>39</sup>

Nevertheless, contrary to what many commentators have wrongly claimed, Marx did develop, in both published and unpublished form, a number of discussions about communist society which appear in three kinds of text. First, there are those in which Marx criticized ideas that he regarded as theoretically mistaken and liable to mislead socialists of his time. Some parts of the *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844* and *The German Ideology*; the chapter on 'Socialist and Communist Literature' in the *Manifesto of the Communist Party*; the criticisms of Pierre-Joseph Proudhon in the *Grundrisse*, the *Urtext*, and the *Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*; the texts of the early

<sup>37</sup> K. Marx, 'Marx's Notes (1879–80) on Wagner', in T. Carver (ed.), *Texts on Method* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1975), pp. 182–3.

<sup>38</sup> K. Marx, *The Civil War in France*, MECW, vol. 22, p. 335.

<sup>39</sup> K. Marx to F. Domela Nieuwenhuis, 22 February 1881, MECW, vol. 46, p. 66. The vast correspondence with Engels is the best evidence of his consistency in this regard. In the course of forty years of collaboration, the two friends exchanged views on every imaginable topic, but Marx did not spend the least time discussing how the society of the future should be organized.

1870s directed against anarchism; and the theses critical of Ferdinand Lassalle (1825–1864) in the *Critique of the Gotha Programme* (1875) belong to this category. To these should be added the critical remarks on Proudhon, Lassalle, and the anarchist component of the International Working Men's Association scattered throughout Marx's vast correspondence.

The second kind of text is the militant writings and political propaganda written for working-class organizations. In these, Marx tried to provide more concrete indications about the society for which they were fighting and the instruments necessary to construct it. This group comprises the *Manifesto of the Communist Party*, the resolutions, reports, and addresses for the International Working Men's Association – including *Value, Price and Profit* and *The Civil War in France* – and various journalistic articles, public lectures, speeches, letters to militants, and other short documents such as the *Programme of the French Workers' Party*.

The third and final group of texts, which are centred around capitalism, contain Marx's lengthiest and most detailed discussions of the features of communist society. Important chapters of *Capital* and the numerous preparatory manuscripts, particularly the highly valuable *Grundrisse*, contain some of his most salient ideas on socialism. It was precisely his critical observations on aspects of the existing mode of production that prompted reflections on communist society, and it is no accident that in some cases successive pages of his work alternate between these two themes.<sup>40</sup>

A close study of Marx's discussions of communism allow us to distinguish his own conception from that of twentieth-century regimes, who, while claiming to act in his name, perpetrated a series of crimes and atrocities. In this way, it is possible to relocate the Marxian political project within the horizon that corresponds to it: the struggle for the emancipation of what Saint-Simon called 'the poorest and most numerous class'.<sup>41</sup>

<sup>40</sup> Rosdolsky argued in *The Making of Marx's 'Capital'* that, while it is true that Marx rejected the idea of the 'construction of completed socialist systems', this does not mean that Marx and Engels developed 'no conception of the socialist economic and social order (a view often attributed to them by opportunists), or that they simply left the entire matter to [their] grandchildren . . . On the contrary, such conceptions played a part in Marx's theoretical system . . . We therefore constantly encounter discussions and remarks in *Capital*, and the works preparatory to it, which are concerned with the problems of a socialist society', pp. 413–14.

<sup>41</sup> C. H. Saint-Simon and B.-P. Enfantin, 'Religion Saint-Simonienne: Procès', in: C. de Saint Simon and B.-P. Enfantin, *Oeuvres de Saint-Simon & D'Enfantin*, vol. XLVII (Paris: Leroux, 1878), p. 378. In other parts of their work, the two French proto-socialists use the expression 'the poorest and most laborious class'. See, for example, idem, 'Notre politique est religieuse', *ibid.*, vol. XLV, p. 28.

Marx's notes on communism should not be thought of as a model to be adhered to dogmatically,<sup>42</sup> still less as solutions to be indiscriminately applied in diverse times and places. Yet these sketches constitute a priceless theoretical treasure, still useful today for the critique of capitalism.

## 2.4 The Limits of the Initial Formulations

Contrary to the claims made by a certain type of Marxist-Leninist propaganda, Marx's theories were the result not of some innate wisdom, but of a long process of conceptual and political refinement. Intense study of economics and many other disciplines, together with observation of actual historical events, particularly the Paris Commune, was extremely important for the development of his thoughts on communist society.

Some of Marx's early writings – many of which he never completed or published – are often surprisingly regarded as syntheses of his most significant ideas,<sup>43</sup> but, in fact, they display all the limits of his initial conception of post-capitalist society.

<sup>42</sup> An example of this genre is the anthology K. Marx, F. Engels, and V. Lenin, *On Communist Society* (Moscow: Progress, 1974), which presents the texts of the three authors as if they constituted a homogenous opus of the Holy Trinity of communism. As in many other collections of this type, Marx's presence is altogether marginal: even if his name appears on the cover, as the supreme guarantor of the faith of 'scientific socialism', the actual extracts from his writings (19 pages out of 157) are considerably shorter than those of Engels and Lenin (1870–1924). All we find here of Marx the theorist of communist society comes from the *Manifesto of the Communist Party* and the *Critique of the Gotha Programme*, plus a mere half-page from *The Holy Family* and a few lines on the dictatorship of the proletariat from the letter of 5 March 1852 to Joseph Weydemeyer (1818–1866). The picture is the same in the diffuse anthology edited by the Finnish communist O. W. Kuusinen, *Fundamentals of Marxism-Leninism: Manual*, second rev. (Moscow: Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1963). In part 5, on 'Socialism and Communism', Marx is quoted only eleven times, compared with twelve references to the work of Nikita Khrushchev (1894–1971) and the documents of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union and fifty quotations from the works of Lenin.

<sup>43</sup> See R. Aron, *Marxismes imaginaires. D'une sainte famille à l'autre* (Paris: Gallimard, 1970) which pokes fun at the 'Parisian para-Marxists', p. 210, who 'subordinated *Capital* to the early writings, especially the economic-philosophical manuscripts of 1844, the obscurity, incompleteness and contradictions of which fascinated the reader', p. 177. In his view, these authors failed to understand that 'if Marx had not had the ambition and hope to ground the advent of communism with scientific rigour, he would not have needed to work for thirty years on *Capital* (without managing to complete it). A few pages and a few weeks would have sufficed', p. 210. See also, M. Musto, 'The Myth of the "Young Marx" in the Interpretations of the *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*', *Critique*, 43 (2) (2015), pp. 233–60. For a description of the fragmentary character of the *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844* and the incompleteness of the theses contained in them, see M. Musto, *Another Marx: Early Manuscripts to the International* (London: Bloomsbury, 2018), pp. 42–45.

In the *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*, Marx wrote of these matters in highly abstract terms, since he had not yet been able to expand his economic studies and had had little political experience at the time. At some points, he described ‘communism’ as the ‘negation of the negation’, as a ‘moment of the Hegelian dialectic’: ‘the positive expression of the annulled private property’.<sup>44</sup> At others, however, inspired by Ludwig Feuerbach (1804–1872), he wrote that:

communism, as fully developed naturalism, equals humanism, and as fully developed humanism equals naturalism; it is the genuine resolution of the conflict between man and nature and between man and man – the true resolution of the strife between existence and essence, between objectification and self-confirmation, between freedom and necessity, between the individual and the species.<sup>45</sup>

Various passages in the *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844* were influenced by the theological matrix of Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel’s (1770–1831) philosophy of history: for example, the argument that ‘the entire movement of history [had been] communism’s actual act of genesis’; or that communism was ‘the riddle of history solved’, which ‘knew itself to be this solution’.<sup>46</sup>

Similarly, *The German Ideology*, which Marx wrote with Engels and was intended to include texts by other authors,<sup>47</sup> contains a famous quotation that has sown great confusion among exegetes of Marx’s work. On one unfinished page, we read that, whereas in capitalist society, with its division of labour, every human being ‘has a particular, exclusive sphere of activity’, in communist society:

society regulates the general production and thus makes it possible for me to do one thing today and another tomorrow, to hunt in the morning, fish in the afternoon, rear cattle in the evening, *criticize after dinner*, just as I have a mind, without ever becoming hunter, fisherman, shepherd or *critic*.<sup>48</sup>

<sup>44</sup> K. Marx, *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*, MECW, vol. 3, p. 294. D. Bensaid, ‘Politiques de Marx’, in: K. Marx and F. Engels (eds), *Inventer l’inconnu, textes et correspondances autour de la Commune* (Paris: La Fabrique, 2008) affirmed that in its initial phase ‘Marx’s communism is philosophical’, p. 42.

<sup>45</sup> Marx, *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*, p. 296. <sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 297.

<sup>47</sup> On the complex character of these manuscripts and details of their composition and paternity, see the recent edition K. Marx and F. Engels, *Manuskripte und Drucke zur Deutschen Ideologie (1845–1847)*, MEGA<sup>2</sup>, vol. I/5. Some seventeen manuscripts are printed there in their fragmentary form as abandoned by the authors, without the semblance of a completed book. For a critical review, prior to publication of MEGA<sup>2</sup>, vol. I/5, of this much-awaited edition – and in favour of the greatest fidelity to the originals – see T. Carver and D. Blank, *A Political History of the Editions of Marx and Engels’s ‘German Ideology Manuscripts’* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), p. 142.

<sup>48</sup> Marx and Engels, *The German Ideology*, p. 47. The words written by Marx are indicated in italic.

Many authors, both Marxist and anti-Marxist, have ingenuously believed that this was the main feature of communist society for Marx – a view they could hold because of their relative unfamiliarity with *Capital* and various important political texts. Despite the plethora of analysis and discussion regarding the manuscript of 1845–46, they did not realize that this passage was a reformulation of an old – and rather well-known – idea of Charles Fourier's,<sup>49</sup> which was taken up by Engels but rejected by Marx.<sup>50</sup>

Despite these evident limitations, *The German Ideology* represented indubitable progress over the *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*. Whereas the latter was informed by the idealism of the Hegelian Left – the group of which he had been part until 1842 – and lacked any concrete political discussion, the former now maintained that 'it is possible to achieve real liberation only in the real world and by real means'. Communism, therefore, should not be regarded as 'a state of affairs to be established, an ideal to which reality will have to adjust itself, [but as] the real movement which abolishes the present state of things'.<sup>51</sup>

In *The German Ideology*, Marx also drew a first sketch of the economy of future society. Whereas previous revolutions had produced only 'a new distribution of labour to other persons',<sup>52</sup>

Communism differs from all previous movements in that it overturns the basis of all earlier relations of production and intercourse, and for the first time consciously treats all naturally evolved premises as the creations of hitherto existing men, strips them of their natural character and subjugates them to the power of

<sup>49</sup> See Fourier, *Le nouveau monde industriel et sociétaire*.

<sup>50</sup> The only words that belong to Marx – 'criticize after dinner', 'critical critics', and 'or critic' – actually express his disagreement with the romantic, utopian-inclined views of Engels. We owe the rediscovery and accessible presentation of this important detail to the rigorous philological labours of Wataru Hiromatsu (1933–1994), the editor of the two-volume work with German and Japanese *apparatus criticus*: W. Hiromatsu (ed.), *Die deutsche Ideologie* (Tokyo: Kawade Shobo-Shinsha, 1974). Two decades later, T. Carver wrote that this study made it possible to know 'which words were written in Engels' hand, which in Marx's, which insertion can be assigned to each author, and which deletions', *The Postmodern Marx* (Pennsylvania: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1998) p. 104. Cf. the more recent Carver and Blank, *A Political History of the Editions of Marx and Engels's 'German Ideology Manuscripts'*, pp. 139–40. Marx was referring sarcastically to the positions of other Young Hegelians he had derided and sharply combatted in a book published a few months earlier, *The Holy Family, or Critique of Critical Criticism: Against Bruno Bauer and Company*. According to Carver, *The Postmodern Marx*, 'the famous passage on communist society from *The German Ideology* cannot now be read as one continuous train of thought agreed jointly between two authors'. In the few words he contributed, Marx was 'sharply rebuking Engels for straying, perhaps momentarily, from the serious work of undercutting the phantasies of Utopian socialists', *ibid.*, p. 106. Still, Marx's marginal insertions were integrated seamlessly into Engels's initial text by early twentieth-century editors, thereby becoming the canonical description of how human beings would live in communist society 'according to Marx'.

<sup>51</sup> Marx and Engels, *The German Ideology*, pp. 38, 49.    <sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 52.

the united individuals. Its organization is therefore essentially economic, the material production of the conditions of this unity.<sup>53</sup>

Marx also stated that ‘empirically, communism is only possible as the act of the dominant peoples “all at once” and simultaneously’. In his view, this presupposed both ‘the universal development of productive forces’ and ‘the world intercourse bound up with them’.<sup>54</sup> Furthermore, Marx confronted for the first time a fundamental political theme that he would take up again in the future: the advent of communism as the end of class tyranny. For the revolution would ‘abolish the rule of all classes with the classes themselves, because it is carried through by the class which no longer counts as a class in society, which is not recognized as a class, and is in itself the expression of the dissolution of all classes, nationalities’.<sup>55</sup>

Marx continued, together with Engels, to develop his reflections on post-capitalist society in the *Manifesto of the Communist Party*. In this text, which, in its profound analysis of the changes effected by capitalism, towered above the rough and ready socialist literature of the time, the most interesting points on communism concern property relations. Marx observed that their radical transformation was ‘not at all a distinctive feature of communism’, since other new modes of production in history had also brought that about. For Marx, in opposition to all the propaganda claims that communists would prevent personal appropriation of the fruits of labour, the ‘distinguishing feature of communism’ was ‘not the abolition of property generally, but the abolition of bourgeois property’,<sup>56</sup> of ‘the power to appropriate the products of society . . . to subjugate the labour of others’.<sup>57</sup> In his eyes, the ‘theory of the communists’ could be summed up in one sentence: ‘the abolition of private property’.<sup>58</sup>

In the *Manifesto of the Communist Party*, Marx also proposed a list of ten preliminary benchmarks to be achieved in the most advanced economies following the conquest of power. They included ‘abolition of property in land and application of all rents of land to public purposes’;<sup>59</sup> the centralization of credit in the hands of the state, by means of a national bank . . . ; the centralization of the means of communication and transport in the hands of the state . . . free education for all children in public

<sup>53</sup> Ibid, p. 81.    <sup>54</sup> Ibid, p. 49.    <sup>55</sup> Ibid, p. 52.

<sup>56</sup> Marx and Engels, *Manifesto of the Communist Party*, p. 498.    <sup>57</sup> Ibid, p. 500.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid, p. 498.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid, p. 505. The English translation that Samuel Moore (1838–1911) produced in 1888 in cooperation with Engels, and which is the basis for the MECW edition, renders the German *Staatsausgaben* [state expenditure] as the less statist, more generic ‘spending for public purposes’.

schools', but also 'abolition of all right of inheritance', a Saint-Simonian measure that Marx later firmly rejected.<sup>60</sup>

As in the case of the manuscripts written between 1844 and 1846, it would be a mistake to regard the measures listed in the *Manifesto of the Communist Party* – drafted when Marx was just thirty – as his finished vision of post-capitalist society.<sup>61</sup> The complete maturation of his thought would require many more years of study and political experiences.

## 2.5 Communism as Free Association

In *Capital*, volume I, Marx argued that capitalism was a 'historically determined'<sup>62</sup> social mode of production in which the labour product was transformed into a commodity, with the result that individuals had value only as producers, and human existence was subjugated to the act of the 'production of commodities'.<sup>63</sup> Hence 'the process of production' had 'mastery over man, instead of being controlled by him'.<sup>64</sup> Capital 'care[d] nothing for the length of life of labour power' and attached no importance to improvements in the living conditions of the proletariat. Capital 'attains this objective by shortening the life of labour-power, in the same way as a greedy farmer snatches more produce from the soil by robbing it of its fertility'.<sup>65</sup>

In the *Grundrisse*, Marx recalled that in capitalism, 'since the aim of labour is not a particular product [with a relation] to the particular needs of the individual, but money ... the industriousness of the individual has no limits'.<sup>66</sup> In such a society, 'the whole time of an individual is posited as labour time, and he is consequently degraded to a mere labourer, subsumed under labour'.<sup>67</sup> Bourgeois ideology, however, presents this as if the individual enjoys greater freedom and is protected by impartial legal norms capable of guaranteeing justice and equity. Paradoxically, despite the fact that the economy has developed to such a level that it can allow the whole

<sup>60</sup> In the International Working Men's Association, this provision was supported by M. Bakunin (1814–1876) and opposed by Marx. See 'Part 6: On Inheritance', in: M. Musto (ed.), *Workers Unite! The International 150 Years Later* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2014), pp. 159–68.

<sup>61</sup> Their 'practical application' – as the preface to the German edition of 1872 reminded readers – 'will depend ... everywhere and at all times on the obtaining historical conditions, and, for that reason, no special stress is laid on the revolutionary measures proposed at the end of Section II'. By the early 1870s, the *Manifesto of the Communist Party* had become a 'historical document', which its authors felt they no longer had 'any right to alter', in Marx and Engels, *Manifesto of the Communist Party*, p. 175.

<sup>62</sup> Marx, *Capital*, volume I, p. 169. <sup>63</sup> Ibid, p. 172. <sup>64</sup> Ibid, p. 175. <sup>65</sup> Ibid, p. 376.

<sup>66</sup> K. Marx, 'Outlines of the Critique of Political Economy [*Grundrisse*]. First Instalment', MECW, vol. 28., p. 157.

<sup>67</sup> Marx, 'Outlines of the Critique of Political Economy [*Grundrisse*]. Second Instalment', p. 94.

society to live in better conditions than before, ‘the most developed machinery now compels the labourer to work for a longer time than the savage does, or than the labourer himself did when he was using the simplest, crudest implements’.<sup>68</sup>

By contrast, Marx’s vision of communism was of ‘an association of free individuals [*ein Verein freier Menschen*], 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’.<sup>69</sup> Similar definitions are present in many of Marx’s writings. In the *Grundrisse*, he wrote that post-capitalist society would be based upon ‘collective production [*gemeinschaftliche Produktion*]’.<sup>70</sup>

In the *Economic Manuscripts of 1863–1867*, he spoke of the ‘passage from the capitalist mode of production to the mode of production of associated labour [*Produktionsweise der assoziierten Arbeit*]’.<sup>71</sup> And in the *Critique of the Gotha Programme*, he defined the social organization ‘based on common ownership of the means of production’ as ‘cooperative society [*genossenschaftliche Gesellschaft*]’.<sup>72</sup>

In *Capital*, volume I, Marx explained that the ‘ruling principle’ of this ‘higher form of society’ would be ‘the full and free development of every individual’.<sup>73</sup> In *The Civil War in France*, he expressed his approval of the measures taken by the Communards, which ‘betoken[ed] the tendency of a government of the people by the people’.<sup>74</sup> To be more precise, in his evaluation of the political reforms of the Paris Commune, he asserted that ‘the old centralized Government would in the provinces, too, have to give way to the self-government of the producers’.<sup>75</sup> The expression recurs in the ‘Conspectus of Bakunin’s *Statism and Anarchy*’ (1874–1875), where he maintained that radical social change would ‘start with self-government of the communities’.<sup>76</sup> Marx’s idea of society, therefore, is the antithesis of the totalitarian systems that emerged in his name in the twentieth century. His writings are useful for an understanding not only of how capitalism works, but also of the failure of socialist experiences until today.

In referring to so-called free competition, or the seemingly equal positions of workers and capitalists on the market in bourgeois society, Marx

<sup>68</sup> Ibid. <sup>69</sup> Marx, *Capital*, volume I, p. 171, translation modified.

<sup>70</sup> Marx, ‘Outlines of the Critique of Political Economy [*Grundrisse*]. First Instalment’, p. 96.

<sup>71</sup> K. Marx, *Ökonomische Manuskripte 1863–1867*, MEGA<sup>2</sup>, vol. II/4.2, p. 662. Cf. P. Chattopadhyay, *Marx’s Associated Mode of Production* (New York: Palgrave, 2016), esp. pp. 59–65 and 157–61.

<sup>72</sup> K. Marx, *Critique of the Gotha Programme*, MECW, vol. 24, p. 85.

<sup>73</sup> Marx, *Capital*, volume I, p. 739. <sup>74</sup> Marx, *The Civil War in France*, p. 339.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid, p. 332.

<sup>76</sup> Marx, ‘Conspectus of Bakunin’s *Statism and Anarchy*’, vol. 24, p. 519.

stated that the reality was totally different from the human freedom exalted by apologists of capitalism. The system posed a huge obstacle to democracy, and he showed better than anyone else that the workers did not receive an equivalent for what they produced.<sup>77</sup> In the *Grundrisse*, he explained that what was presented as an ‘exchange of equivalents’ was, in fact, appropriation of the workers’ ‘labour time without exchange’; the relationship of exchange ‘completely disappeared’ or it became a ‘mere semblance’.<sup>78</sup> Relations between persons were ‘actuated only by self-interest’. This ‘clash of individuals’ had been passed off as the ‘the absolute form of existence of free individuality in the sphere of production and exchange’. But, for Marx, ‘nothing could be further from the truth’, since ‘in free competition, it is capital that is set free, not the individuals’.<sup>79</sup> In the *Economic Manuscripts of 1863–1867*, he denounced the fact that ‘surplus labour is initially pocketed, in the name of society, by the capitalist’ – the surplus labour that is ‘the basis of society’s free time’ and, by virtue of this, the ‘material basis of its whole development and of civilization in general’.<sup>80</sup> And in *Capital*, volume I, he showed that the wealth of the bourgeoisie was possible only ‘by converting the whole lifetime of the masses into labour time’.<sup>81</sup>

In the *Grundrisse*, Marx observed that in capitalism ‘individuals are subsumed under social production’, which ‘exists outside them as their fate’.<sup>82</sup> This happens only through the attribution of exchange-value conferred on the products, whose buying and selling takes place *post festum*.<sup>83</sup> Furthermore, ‘all social powers of production’ – including scientific discoveries, which appear as ‘alien and external’ to the worker<sup>84</sup> – are posited by capital. The very association of the workers, at the places and in the act of production, is ‘operated by capital’ and is therefore ‘only formal’. Use of the goods created by the workers ‘is not mediated by exchange between mutually independent labours or products of labour’, but rather ‘by the circumstances of social production within which the individual carries on his

<sup>77</sup> On these questions, see E. M. Wood, *Democracy against Capitalism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), esp. pp. 1–48.

<sup>78</sup> Marx, ‘Outlines of the Critique of Political Economy [*Grundrisse*]. First Instalment’, p. 386.

<sup>79</sup> Marx, ‘Outlines of the Critique of Political Economy [*Grundrisse*]. Second Instalment’, p. 38.

<sup>80</sup> K. Marx, *Economic Manuscript of 1861–1863*, MECW, vol. 30, p. 196.

<sup>81</sup> Marx, *Capital*, volume I, p. 667.

<sup>82</sup> Marx, ‘Outlines of the Critique of Political Economy [*Grundrisse*]. First Instalment’, p. 96.

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 108.

<sup>84</sup> Marx, ‘Outlines of the Critique of Political Economy [*Grundrisse*]. Second Instalment’, p. 84.

activity'.<sup>85</sup> Marx explained how productive activity in the factory 'concerns only the product of labour, not labour itself',<sup>86</sup> since it is 'confined to a common place of work under the direction of overseers, regimentation, greater discipline, consistency, and a posited dependence on capital in production itself'.<sup>87</sup>

In communist society, by contrast, production would be 'directly social', 'the offspring of association distributing labour within itself'. It would be managed by individuals as their 'common wealth'.<sup>88</sup> The 'social character of production [*gesellschaftliche Charakter der Produktion*]' would 'from the outset make the product into a communal, general one'; its associative character would be 'presupposed' and 'the labour of the individual . . . from the outset taken as social labour'.<sup>89</sup> As Marx stressed in the *Critique of the Gotha Programme*, in post-capitalist society, 'individual labour no longer exists in an indirect fashion but directly as a component part of the total labour'.<sup>90</sup> In addition, the workers would be able to create the conditions for the eventual disappearance of 'the enslaving subordination of the individual to the division of labour'.<sup>91</sup>

In *Capital*, volume I, Marx emphasized that, in bourgeois society, 'the worker exists for the process of production, and not the process of production for the worker'.<sup>92</sup> Moreover, in parallel to exploitation of the workers, there developed exploitation of the environment. In contrast to interpretations that reduce Marx's conception of communist society to the mere development of productive forces, he displayed great interest in what we would now call the ecological question.<sup>93</sup> He repeatedly denounced the fact that 'all profess in capitalist agriculture is a progress in the art, not only of robbing the worker but of robbing the soil'. This threatens both of 'the original sources of all wealth – the soil and the worker'.<sup>94</sup>

In communism, the conditions would be created for a form of 'planned cooperation' through which the worker 'strips off the fetters of his individuality and develops the capabilities of his species'.<sup>95</sup> In *Capital*, volume II, Marx pointed out that society would then be in a position to 'reckon in advance how much labour, means of production and means of subsistence it can spend, without dislocation', unlike in capitalism 'where any

<sup>85</sup> Marx, 'Outlines of the Critique of Political Economy [*Grundrisse*]. First Instalment', p. 109.

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 505. <sup>87</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 506–07. <sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 95–96. <sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 108.

<sup>90</sup> Marx, *Critique of the Gotha Programme*, p. 85. <sup>91</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 87.

<sup>92</sup> Marx, *Capital*, volume I, p. 621.

<sup>93</sup> An extensive new literature has sprung up in the past twenty years on this aspect of Marx's thought. One of the most recent contributions is K. Saito, *Karl Marx's Ecosocialism: Capital, Nature, and the Unfinished Critique of Political Economy* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 2017), esp. pp. 217–55.

<sup>94</sup> Marx, *Capital*, volume I, p. 638. <sup>95</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 447.

kind of social rationality asserts itself only *post festum*' and 'major disturbances can and must occur constantly'.<sup>96</sup> In some passages of *Capital*, volume III, too, Marx clarified differences between a socialist mode of production and a market-based one, foreseeing the birth of a society 'organized as a conscious association'.<sup>97</sup> 'It is only where production is under the actual, predetermining control of society that the latter establishes a relation between the volume of social labour time applied in producing definite articles, and the volume of the social want to be satisfied by these articles.'<sup>98</sup>

Finally, in his marginal notes on Adolph Wagner's *Treatise on Political Economy*, Marx made it clear that in communist society 'the sphere [volume] of production' will have to be 'rationally regulated'.<sup>99</sup> This will also make it possible to eliminate the waste due to the 'anarchical system of competition', which, through its recurrent structural crises, not only involves the 'most outrageous squandering of labour power and the social means of production',<sup>100</sup> but is incapable of solving the contradictions stemming essentially from the 'capitalist use of machinery'.<sup>101</sup>

## 2.6 Common Ownership and Free Time

Contrary to the view of many of Marx's socialist contemporaries, a redistribution of consumption goods was not sufficient to reverse this state of affairs. A root-and-branch change in the productive assets of society was necessary. Thus, in the *Grundrisse* Marx noted that 'to leave wage labour and at the same time to abolish capital [was] a self-contradictory and self-negating demand'.<sup>102</sup> What was required was 'dissolution of the mode of production and form of society based upon exchange value'.<sup>103</sup> In the address published under the title *Value, Price and Profit*, he called on workers to 'inscribe on their banner' not 'the

<sup>96</sup> K. Marx, *Capital*, volume II (London: Penguin, 1978), p. 390.

<sup>97</sup> K. Marx, *Capital*, volume III (London: Penguin, 1981), p. 799.

<sup>98</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 186. See B. Ollman (ed.), *Market Socialism: The Debate among Socialists* (London: Routledge, 1998).

<sup>99</sup> Marx, 'Marx's Notes on Wagner', p. 188. <sup>100</sup> Marx, *Capital*, volume I, p. 667.

<sup>101</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 562.

<sup>102</sup> Marx, 'Outlines of the Critique of Political Economy [*Grundrisse*]. First Instalment', p. 235.

<sup>103</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 195. According to P. Mattick, *Marx and Keynes* (Boston: Extending Horizons Books, 1969) p. 363: 'For Marx, the law of value "regulates" market capitalism but no other form of social production.' Therefore, he held that 'socialism was, first of all, the end of value production and thus also the end of the capitalist relations of production', p. 362.

conservative motto: “A fair day’s wage for a fair day’s work!” [but] the revolutionary watchword: “Abolition of the wages system!”<sup>104</sup>

Furthermore, the *Critique of the Gotha Programme* made the point that, in the capitalist mode of production, ‘the material conditions of production are in the hands of non-workers in the form of capital and land ownership, while the masses are only owners of the personal condition of production, of labour power’.<sup>105</sup> Therefore, it was essential to overturn the property relations at the base of the bourgeois mode of production. In the *Grundrisse*, Marx recalled that ‘the laws of private property – liberty, equality, property – property in one’s own labour and the ability to freely dispose of it – are inverted into the propertylessness of the worker and the alienation of his labour, his relation to it as alien property and vice versa’.<sup>106</sup> And, in 1869, in a report of the General Council of the International Working Men’s Association, he asserted that ‘private property in the means of production’ served to give the bourgeois class ‘the power to live without labour upon other people’s labour’.<sup>107</sup> He repeated this point in another short political text, the ‘Preamble to the Programme of the French Workers’ Party’, adding that ‘the producers cannot be free unless they are in possession of the means of production’ and that the goal of the proletarian struggle must be ‘the return of all the means of production to collective ownership’.<sup>108</sup>

In *Capital*, volume III, Marx observed that, when the workers had established a communist mode of production, ‘private property of the earth by single individuals [would] appear just as absurd as private property of one human being by another’. He directed his most radical critique against the destructive possession inherent in capitalism, insisting that ‘even an entire society, a nation, or even all simultaneously existing societies taken together, are not the owners of the earth’. For Marx, human beings were ‘only its possessors, its usufructuaries, and they have to bequeath it [the planet] in an improved state to succeeding generations, like good heads of the household [*boni patres familias*]’.<sup>109</sup>

A different kind of ownership of the means of production would also radically change the lifetime of society. In *Capital*, volume I, Marx unfolded with complete clarity the reasons why in capitalism ‘the

<sup>104</sup> Marx, *Value, Price and Profit*, p. 149.

<sup>105</sup> Marx, *Critique of the Gotha Programme*, p. 88.

<sup>106</sup> Marx, ‘Outlines of the Critique of Political Economy [*Grundrisse*]. Second Instalment’, p. 88.

<sup>107</sup> K. Marx, ‘Report of the General Council on the Right of Inheritance’, MECW, vol. 21, p. 65.

<sup>108</sup> K. Marx, ‘Preamble to the Programme of the French Workers’ Party’, MECW, vol. 24, p. 340.

<sup>109</sup> Marx, *Capital*, volume III, p. 911.

shortening of the working day is . . . by no means what is aimed at, in capitalist production, when labour is economized by increasing its productivity'.<sup>110</sup> The time that the progress of science and technology makes available for individuals is in reality immediately converted into surplus-value. The only aim of the dominant class is the 'shortening of the labour-time necessary for the production of a definite quantity of commodities'. Its only purpose in developing the productive forces is the 'shortening of that part of the working day in which the worker must work for himself, and the lengthening . . . the other part . . . in which he is free to work for nothing for the capitalist'.<sup>111</sup> This system differs from slavery or the *corvées* due to the feudal lord, since 'surplus labour and necessary labour are mingled together'<sup>112</sup> and make the reality of exploitation harder to perceive.

In the *Grundrisse*, Marx showed that 'free time for the few' is possible only because of this surplus labour time of the many.<sup>113</sup> The bourgeoisie secures growth of its material and cultural capabilities only thanks to the limitation of those of the proletariat. The same happens in the most advanced capitalist countries, to the detriment of those on the periphery of the system. In the *Manuscripts of 1861–1863*, Marx emphasized that the 'free development' of the dominant class is 'based on the restriction of development among the working class'; 'the surplus labour of the workers' is the 'natural basis of the social development of the other section'. The surplus labour time of the workers is not only the pillar supporting the 'material conditions of life' for the bourgeoisie; it also creates the conditions for its 'free time, the sphere of [its] development'. Marx could not have put it better: 'the free time of one section corresponds to the time in thrall to labour of the other section'.<sup>114</sup>

Communist society, by contrast, would be characterized by a general reduction in labour time. In the 'Instructions for the Delegates of the Provisional General Council', composed in August 1866, Marx wrote in forthright terms: 'A preliminary condition, without which all further attempts at improvement and emancipation must prove abortive, is the limitation of the working day.' It was needed not only 'to restore the health and physical energies of the working class', but also 'to secure them the possibility of intellectual development, sociable intercourse, social and political action'.<sup>115</sup> Similarly, in *Capital*, volume I, while noting

<sup>110</sup> Marx, *Capital*, volume I, p. 437.   <sup>111</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 438.   <sup>112</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 346.

<sup>113</sup> Marx, 'Outlines of the Critique of Political Economy [*Grundrisse*]. Second Instalment', p. 93.

<sup>114</sup> Marx, *Economic Manuscript of 1861–1863*, pp. 192, 191.

<sup>115</sup> K. Marx, 'Instructions for the Delegates of the Provisional General Council. The Different Questions', MECW, vol. 20, p. 187.

that workers' 'time for education, for intellectual development, for the fulfilling of social functions, for social intercourse, for the free play of the vital forces of his body and his mind' counted as pure 'foolishness' in the eyes of the capitalist class,<sup>116</sup> Marx implied that these would be the basic elements of the new society. As he put it in the *Grundrisse*, a reduction in the hours devoted to labour – and not only labour to create surplus-value for the capitalist class – would favour 'the artistic, scientific, etc., development of individuals, made possible by the time thus set free and the means produced for all of them'.<sup>117</sup>

On the basis of these convictions, Marx identified the 'economy of time [and] the planned distribution of labour time over the various branches of production' as 'the first economic law [of] communal production'.<sup>118</sup> In *Theories of Surplus Value* (1862–1863), he made it even clearer that 'real wealth' was nothing other than 'disposable time'. In communist society, workers' self-management would ensure that 'a greater quantity of time' was 'not absorbed in direct productive labour but . . . available for enjoyment, for leisure, thus giving scope for free activity and development'.<sup>119</sup> In this text, so too in the *Grundrisse*, Marx quoted a short anonymous pamphlet entitled *The Source and Remedy of the National Difficulties, Deduced from Principles of Political Economy, in a Letter to Lord John Russell* (1821), whose definition of well-being he fully shared: that is, 'A nation is truly rich if the working day is six hours rather than twelve. Wealth is not command over surplus labour time [real wealth] but *disposable time*, in addition to that employed in immediate production, for every individual and for the whole society.'<sup>120</sup> Elsewhere in the *Grundrisse*, he asks rhetorically: 'What is wealth if not the universality of the individual's needs, capacities, enjoyments, productive forces? . . . What is it if not the absolute unfolding of man's creative abilities?'<sup>121</sup> It is evident, then, that the socialist model in Marx's mind did not involve a state of generalized poverty, but rather the attainment of greater collective wealth.

<sup>116</sup> Marx, *Capital*, volume I, p. 375.

<sup>117</sup> Marx, 'Outlines of the Critique of Political Economy [*Grundrisse*]. Second Instalment', p. 91.

<sup>118</sup> Marx, 'Outlines of the Critique of Political Economy [*Grundrisse*]. First Instalment', p. 109.

<sup>119</sup> Marx, *Economic Manuscript of 1861–1863*, p. 390.

<sup>120</sup> Marx, 'Outlines of the Critique of Political Economy [*Grundrisse*]. Second Instalment', p. 92.

<sup>121</sup> Marx, 'Outlines of the Critique of Political Economy [*Grundrisse*]. First Instalment', p. 411.

## 2.7 Role of the State, Individual Rights, and Freedoms

In communist society, along with transformative changes in the economy, the role of the state and the function of politics would also have to be redefined. In *The Civil War in France*, Marx was at pains to explain that, after the conquest of power, the working class would have to fight to ‘uproot the economical foundations upon which rests the existence of classes, and therefore of class rule’. Once ‘labour was emancipated, every man would become a working man, and productive labour [would] cease to be a class attribute’.<sup>122</sup> The well-known statement that ‘the working class cannot simply lay hold of the ready-made state machinery and wield it for its own purposes’ was meant to signify, as Marx and Engels clarified in the booklet *Fictitious Splits in the International*, that ‘the functions of government [should] become simple administrative functions’.<sup>123</sup> And in a concise formulation in his ‘Conspectus on Bakunin’s *Statism and Anarchy*’, Marx insisted that ‘the distribution of general functions [should] become a routine matter which entails no domination’.<sup>124</sup> This would, as far as possible, avoid the danger that the exercise of political duties generated new dynamics of domination and subjugation.

Marx believed that, with the development of modern society, ‘state power [had] assumed more and more the character of the national power of capital over labour, of a public force organized for social enslavement, of an engine of class despotism’.<sup>125</sup> In communism, by contrast, the workers would have to prevent the state from becoming an obstacle to full emancipation. It would be necessary to ‘amputate . . . the merely repressive organs of the old governmental power, [to wrest] its legitimate functions from an authority usurping pre-eminence over society itself, and restore [them] to the responsible agents of society’.<sup>126</sup> In the *Critique of the Gotha Programme*, Marx observed that ‘freedom consists in converting the state from an organ superimposed upon society into one completely subordinate to it’, and shrewdly added that ‘forms of state are more free or less free to the extent that they restrict the “freedom of the state”’.<sup>127</sup>

In the same text, Marx underlined the demand that, in communist society, public policies should prioritize the ‘collective satisfaction of needs’. Spending on schools, healthcare, and other common goods would ‘grow considerably in comparison with present-day society and

<sup>122</sup> Marx, *The Civil War in France*, pp. 334–5.

<sup>123</sup> K. Marx and F. Engels, ‘Fictitious Splits in the International’, MECW, vol. 23, p. 121.

<sup>124</sup> Marx, ‘Conspectus on Bakunin’s Book *Statehood and Anarchy*’, p. 519.

<sup>125</sup> Marx, *The Civil War in France*, p. 329. <sup>126</sup> Ibid, pp. 332–3.

<sup>127</sup> Marx, *Critique of the Gotha Programme*, p. 94.

grow in proportion as the new society develop[ed]'.<sup>128</sup> Education would assume front-rank importance and – as he had pointed out in *The Civil War in France*, referring to the model adopted by the Communards in 1871 – ‘all the educational institutions [would be] opened to the people gratuitously and . . . cleared of all interference of Church and State’. Only in this way would culture be ‘made accessible to all’ and ‘science itself freed from the fetters which class prejudice and governmental force had imposed upon it’.<sup>129</sup>

Unlike liberal society, where ‘equal right’ leaves existing inequalities intact, in communist society ‘right would have to be unequal rather than equal’. A change in this direction would recognize, and protect, individuals on the basis of their specific needs and the greater or lesser hardship of their conditions, since ‘they would not be different individuals if they were not unequal’. Furthermore, it would be possible to determine each person’s fair share of services and the available wealth. The society that aimed to follow the principle ‘From each according to their abilities, to each according to their needs’<sup>130</sup> had before it this intricate road fraught with difficulties. However, the final outcome was not guaranteed by some ‘magnificent progressive destiny’ (in the words of Giacomo Leopardi [1798–1837]), nor was it irreversible.

Marx attached a fundamental value to individual freedom, and his communism was radically different from the levelling of classes envisaged by his various predecessors or pursued by many of his epigones. In the *Urtext*, however, he pointed to the ‘folly of those socialists (especially French socialists)’ who, considering ‘socialism to be the realization of [bourgeois] ideas . . . purport[ed] to demonstrate that exchange and exchange value, etc., were originally . . . a system of the freedom and equality of all, but [later] perverted by money [and] capital’.<sup>131</sup> In the *Grundrisse*, he labelled it an ‘absurdity’ to regard ‘free competition as the ultimate development of human freedom’; it was tantamount to a belief that ‘the rule of the bourgeoisie is the terminal point of world history’, which he mockingly described as ‘an agreeable thought for the parvenus of the day before yesterday’.<sup>132</sup>

In the same way, Marx contested the liberal ideology according to which ‘the negation of free competition [was] equivalent to the negation of individual freedom and of social production based upon individual

<sup>128</sup> Ibid, p. 85.   <sup>129</sup> Marx, *The Civil War in France*, p. 332.

<sup>130</sup> Marx, *Critique of the Gotha Programme*, p. 87.

<sup>131</sup> Marx, ‘Outlines of the Critique of Political Economy [*Grundrisse*]. First Instalment’, p. 180.

<sup>132</sup> Marx, ‘Outlines of the Critique of Political Economy [*Grundrisse*]. Second Instalment’, p. 40.

freedom'. In bourgeois society, the only possible 'free development' was 'on the limited basis of the domination of capital'. But that 'type of individual freedom' was, at the same time, 'the most sweeping abolition of all individual freedom and the complete subjugation of individuality to social conditions which assume the form of objective powers, indeed of overpowering objects . . . independent of the individuals relating to one another'.<sup>133</sup>

The alternative to capitalist alienation was achievable only if the subaltern classes became aware of their condition as new slaves and embarked on a struggle to radically transform the world in which they were exploited. Their mobilization and active participation in this process could not stop, however, on the day after the conquest of power. It would have to continue, in order to avert any drift towards the kind of state socialism that Marx always opposed with the utmost tenacity and conviction.

In 1868, in a significant letter to the president of the General Association of German Workers, Marx explained that, in Germany, 'where the worker is regulated bureaucratically from childhood onwards, where he believes in authority, in those set over him, the main thing is to teach him to walk by himself'.<sup>134</sup> He never changed this conviction throughout his life and it is not by chance that the first point of his draft of the Statutes of the International Working Men's Association states: 'The emancipation of the working classes must be conquered by the working classes themselves.' And they add immediately afterwards that the struggle for working-class emancipation 'means not a struggle for class privileges and monopolies, but for equal rights and duties'.<sup>135</sup>

Many of the political parties and regimes that developed in Marx's name used the concept of the 'dictatorship of the proletariat'<sup>136</sup> in an instrumental manner, distorting his thought and moving away from the direction he had indicated. But this does not mean we are doomed to repeat the error.

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<sup>133</sup> Ibid. <sup>134</sup> 'K. Marx to J. B. von Schweitzer, 13 October 1868', MECW, vol. 43, p. 134.

<sup>135</sup> K. Marx, 'Provisional Rules of the Association', MECW, vol. 20, p. 14.

<sup>136</sup> H. Draper has shown that Marx used the term only seven times, mostly in a radically different sense from the one falsely attributed to him by many of his interpreters or by those who have claimed to be continuing the tradition of his thought. See *Karl Marx's Theory of Revolution. Volume 3: The Dictatorship of the Proletariat* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1986), pp. 385–6.

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