

## 20TH CENTURY MARXISM: AN EVALUATION

HERITAGE, TASKS, PERSPECTIVES OF A MARXIST RENAISSANCE<sup>1</sup>

## 1. REASONS TO ASK

In one of his *danses macabres* the great Marxist poet Volker Braun writes about Art:

„It dares to think, the great *In Vain* [...]/  
In the underground, where all things live.“

The *great In Vain* -- is this the name of the play that has been performed in the 20th century and in which the hopes of the Left were at stake? Revolution, building of socialism, international solidarity with the liberation movements - what remains? Dictators, cleptocracies, mafiose powers amidst the immization of whole populations, multiplication of wars, massive death ...

In history the younger are the elder. They inherit what has become of the great intentions of their predecessors. Looking back on the 20th century can nurture Marxist melancholy. Marxist theory is cheerful science, *gaia scienza*, when it analyzes the capitalist world in its contradictions and when it tears up the ideologies. Whenever it turns its attention on itself in its own history, it seems to earn the same name which has been given to capitalist economics - that of a *dismal science*. Therefore it was not without reluctance when I accepted the thankless task of critically assessing the inheritance which the 20th century offers to Marxists.

---

<sup>1</sup> Lecture, given at the Brecht-Forum, New York, April 11, 2001. Published in German as the first of *Dreizehn Versuche marxistisches Denken zu erneuern*, gefolgt von *Sondierungen zu Marx / Lenin / Luxemburg*, Hamburg: Argument 2005.

The discrepancies couldn't be greater. To counter the Blackbook of communism with the reminder that the real history of communism is ambivalent, would be an understatement. This history comprises the harshest contradictions. Who can even *count* the names of those to whom we owe the most outstanding emancipative works of art -- the Eisenstein and Chaplin, Majakowski and Neruda, Hikmet and Brecht, Eisler and Picasso and ... Again these owe their best to the revolutionary movement, to which they gave much more in return than this movement was able to use. A fate which Marxist theory shares, beginning with Marx, as Rosa Luxemburg analyzed it in *Progress and Stagnation in Marxism*. -- Or let us recall the political thinkers and teachers of the Left. Among them are the best which the 20th century has seen, -- think only of George Lukács in Hungary, Henri Lefèvre, Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Jean-Paul Sartre and Louis Althusser in France, Raymond Williams or the Marxist historians from Christopher Hill to Eric Hobsbawm in England; from Germany we meet Ernst Bloch and Walter Benjamin, Herbert Marcuse who became an American, not to forget the esoterically hidden Marxist thought of the cautious Adorno, or Habermas' Post-Marxism seeping away in praise of Western modernity. -- Finally we remember the rare cases of genuinely thinking politicians as Otto Bauer, Antonio Gramsci, José Carlos Mariátegui, Salvador Allende, Nelson Mandela ...

The memory of the vast majority is, however, occupied by despotic figures from the cabinet of horror like Pol Pot, or the grey, cruel, paranoid master of the apparatus, Stalin, absurd absolutists like Ceaucescu, paternalistic God-kings like Kim il Sung; and, yes, that narrow-minded German emperor of the poor, Honnecker, with his Wizzard of Oz, the ever-snooping Mielke. And don't forget the bunch of sectarians and sect-leaders, who will sink back into namelessness -- what cruelty and despotism would have come over us if they had been given the possibility.

Even if, at the end, it is reminiscent of a satiric play, the history of the worker's movement, of the Left, of socialists and Marxists of the 20th century offers the material of which tragedies are made. Indeed poetry and drama have found a language for this, while theory has not. When in Poland Jan Kott read Shakespeare in the light of the Stalinist experience, this expressed the fact that the epoch of Stalinism could be read in the light of Shakespeare,

as another tragedy. The meaning of the tragic, however, shifted towards absurdity. For Kott, history is in Shakespeare's mirror but a mechanism of violence, the rest is illusion. On the stage of the Kings' dramas - with the exception of Henry IV -- Kott saw in reality one single *dramatis persona*, this is the „Great Mechanism“, history itself. For him, history appeared as the destruction of our belief that anything new would ever occur, let alone a change for the better which could be brought forward by collective action. Therefore every play ends with the beginning of the next. This interpretation obviously comes from a world and time, which experienced the enemy in the form of Nazism and, on one's own side, of Stalinism. Kott's Shakespeare is a Shakespeare of socialist dis-illusion. In a presentation of Hamlet after the 20th party congress, after the uncovering of the „great treason“ and the „great betrayal“ at the top of the communist leadership, every scene of this play appeared to Kott as „poisoned with politics“. Politics seemed to be nothing but the poison of the deadly power of domination. Something like capacity to act from below or, as Rosa Luxemburg called it, „self-centrism of the masses“, had become unthinkable.

In a different way such a vision has become predominant in East Germany after the fall of State socialism. This offers, by the way, a key to the late works of Heiner Müller. For us, this means that we have to get to the bottom of the discourse of the poisoned history if we want to neutralize the counterpoison of dis-illusionment. And we must attempt this, if we want to move on. Because counterpoison is just another poison.

In retrospective, we have to *think* - in the emphatical sense of theoretical thought - the mutations of Marxism, its bifurcations, while obeying the categorical imperative of exposing Marxist thought to self-application. - A two-fold non-equation has to be kept in mind as a general premise: *First*, Marxism is *not*, as Lenin maintained, „the system of the views and the doctrines of Marx“. Instead, it is that which, after Marx's death, was created by the intellectuals of the workers' movement and its socialist parties on the basis of the relatively few texts of Marx which were available to them, or, reducing this basis still more, of what they regarded useful under given historical conditions. *Secondly*, Marxist thought, which we try to practice here, is in itself *not yet* Marxism in its historically full meaning, as long as it remains isolated from workers' movements and socialist politics.

## 2. THE INHERITANCE

The political curriculum of Marxism in the 20th century began, after the sheet lightning of the Russian revolution in 1905, more or less un-separated, un-split, at least until the threshold of the First World War, when the socialist international in Stuttgart repeated its vow of peace. As everyone knows, this vow was almost immediately betrayed by the majority of the socialdemocratic workers' parties, headed by the German SP, in the chauvinist frenzy of 1914. The international split apart.

Out of the hell of this war the revolution rose against the Zarist regime in Russia, followed by the second, the Soviet revolution, with its echos, the short-lived revolutions in Germany and Austria-Hungary, which at least put an end to the regime of the emperors, introduced parliamentary democracy and the right for women to vote.

This was one of those rare great moments in history, in which promises of liberation awoken the sleeping capabilities of millions around the globe with enormous expectations. *Ubi Lenin, ibi Jerusalem*, „where Lenin is, is the New Jerusalem“, Ernst Bloch wrote in 1917. The doomsday of all class domination seemed near. But the bloody struggles with the counterrevolutions and foreign invasions of the first years burned their imprint into the heart of the revolution. And it turned out that to do away with exploiters didn't solve what the generation of Rosa Luxemburg used to call "the knife and fork question". From the war-time communism, which oriented itself along the lines of Lenin's *The State and the Revolution*, there is a continuity which leads - through all ruptures and turning points - to the 'rescuer' of the revolution by counterrevolution, Stalin, and to the GuLag. The Prince is petrified, Ernst Bloch was to say, saying it gently in the image of a fairy tale.

Before the International was torn apart between Kautsky's „No socialism without democracy“ and Lenin's „No democracy without socialism“, Rosa Luxemburg desperately tried to keep both formulas together: „No socialism without democracy - no democracy without socialism“. Rosa failed. She failed in her own ranks when, against her arguments, the upheaval was decided. As a prisoner her head was bashed from behind by the canaille

of commissioned officers who later threw the unconscious Rosa Luxemburg into the Landwehr-canal -- to drown the "red rat", as they would say. Innumerable are those who during the next years followed her into all kinds of violent deaths. The victims came, in millions, from all currents of the workers' movement and from all the other social emancipation movements of that 20th century with its unfettered energies of annihilation. Rosa Luxemburg's death, however, was like what Kant called a historical landmark, a symbol, under which the further development seemed to receive an irresistible force. Under the burning emblem of Rosa's death the split in the workers' movement led to the extreme opposite of what she had tried to accomplish: At first in Russia, which within living memory had always been governed despotically, the historical divorce of communism and democracy occurred -- then almost all over the world, through the „Bolshevization“ of Communist Parties. This separation between communism and democracy has to be *thought* in the strongest meaning of that word: theoretically and emotionally -- in its causes and consequences, its articulations and evidences. Luxemburg's intensive and solidary-critical considerations on the Russian revolution in 1917 demand a prominent place within the political-theoretical heritage of the 20th century. They may be read in the context of her critical review of Lenin's *One Step Forward, Two Steps back* from 1904. At the very beginning of the 20th century, on the level of a theoretical debate, the two formations stand for the first time against each other: Luxemburg's concept of democratic socialism and Lenin's concept of centralized State socialism. In retrospective Luxemburg's critique reads like a prophecy which has come true.

In a country, one might object, whose population consisted, in its vast majority, of peasants who were kept in a dull subalternity, despotism could only be negated despotically. But in the country of the German Social-democratic Party, which at that time was the pride of the international workers' movement? Ten years later, Antonio Gramsci would, in his *Prison Notebooks*, put the difference of the revolutions in the East and those in the West into the famous formula: „In the East, the State was everything, civil society [...] gelatinous; in the West a right proportion existed between the State and civil society, and when the State gave way one at once became aware of a robust structure of the civil society.“ (*Prison Notebooks*, NB 7, §16) To criticize Trotsky's absolutization of the frontal armed

revolutionary assault, Gramsci differentiated between war of manoeuvre and war of position. He analyzed the revolutionary war of movement as an expression of „the general-economic-cultural-social conditions of a country in which the cadres of the national life are embryo-like and listless, unable to become 'trenches or fortresses',, (ibid.). If there is, however, like in the Western countries, a developed bourgeois civil society with corresponding cadres, then a multilevel form of struggle is needed, with a different time-regime, which Gramsci called „war of position“ (ibid.). Trotsky, the founder and leader of the Red Army against the Russian counter-revolutionaries and the intervention armies of the developed capitalist countries, was an ingenious military communist, as one might say - praising him and doubting in him in the same time. He was right, as Gramsci points out, „in the most general practical foresight; as if one would predict that a four year old girl will become mother, and, when she becomes it as a twenty year old, would say, 'I saw that coming', without admitting, however, that, when she was four, one had wanted to violate the girl, given the certainty, that she would one day become mother.“ (Ibid.) Gramsci's drastic allegory connotes the war-communist overdetermination of manhood and thus of the gender relations.

It is a bitter paradox that, of all things, Rosa Luxemburg's death served to justify the option of the short, direct route with its primacy of violence, the militarization of the revolution and the violation of civil society. When Peter Weiss, in the reflections on his *Aesthetics of Resistance*, drew „the line Luxemburg-Gramsci“, he linked the two names whose carriers occupy a key position, when the question arises: Upon which heritage of the 20th century should a new generation of Marxists enter. Both of them are martyrs in a double sense: Brought to death by the parties of the rich in their war against the poor, their deaths were appropriated by those in their own parties who repressed their political and theoretical methods and values.

The communism of war with its primacy of violence and the orientation towards the frontal attack became prisoner of a passive dialectics, a cruel example of the principle of struggle *and* unity of the opposites. In politics, however, the 'opposite' is no simple given, but a political action, strategy, outcome of an active opposing of oneself. The verdict of the

prisoner Jesus against the attempt by his disciple Peter to liberate him through violence: „Who takes the sword, will fall by the sword“, seems to know about this dialectic which is one of the reasons, why our history in the 20th century presents a face of Medusa, whose frontal sight makes us freeze: The direct confrontation, apparently class against class, lead into a kind of opposition, from which there was no get-away: Despising democracy, cult of the leaders, terror, *statolatria*, State absolutism and domination over the civil society, the State aesthetic ornament of the mass, the witch-hunt for 'enemies of the people'. Theories of totalitarianism and the demagogic formula „red = brown“ had their seducing evidence. To be sure, the equation „red = brown“ is absurd if one considers the social foundations and the political goals. Stalinism, which ruled despotically in the name of the working class, aimed at the forced industrialization of its own country, while particularly German Nazism aimed at the annihilation of the workers' movement and liberal democracy, of the Jews, of handicapped, gay and other suspicious groups like the so-called Gypsies, and last but not least at the conquering and looting other countries. To identify the two formations therefore is perfidious.

And yet, the struggling opposites also formed a unity. The imperialist energy, which opposed the great capitalist powers in World War One, gave birth to its opposite in the gestalt of the Russian revolution. The Second World War was already overdetermined by this antagonism. It resulted in the bipolar world of the systemic East-West-competition, the order of deployment of the Cold War. In its shadow the identity of a Third world formed itself, across the greatest differences, in the Non-alignment movement. The system-antagonism overpolitized every colonial oppression of the traditional kind, as already Franz Fanon has remarked in *Les damnés de la terre*. Among the attainments of the 20th century therefore the emancipation from colonialism occupies an important place. The decolonization was fought for in fierce wars, whose last great example made the protesting youth of the capitalist countries move onto the Left: the Vietnam war.

This was, in very rough lines, the political world structure of the Fordist epoch. In the Eastern state-dominated societies which were basically stamped by Stalinism, creative Marxist thinking -- if its carriers were not physically eliminated - moved into the

underground or dissidence, if not into the West (as, for instance, Ernst Bloch or Wladimir Brus, and many others). Outside of the Soviet power sphere the heterogeneous thought of Marxist intellectuals was stamped by its opposition to the Eastern official Marxism as Western Marxism. This title always had a wrong sound, because it subsumed Japanese, Mexican, even Indian Marxisms undifferentiatedly to those of the high capitalist western centers. In the meantime, this corporate identity has vanished, together with its opposite, which had unified it from the outside.

### 3. TASKS

For us, who enter upon this difficult inheritance despite its burdens, it is indispensable to take up some of the unfinished tasks of the last century. Unfinished are for instance the analyses and debates on the theoretical and practical questions that were raised in the short period of the last Soviet reform-project, the Perestrojka. The limits of what Henri Lefebvre has called „the Statist mode of production“ had been analyzed from within, based on more than enough experience. Tentatively non-statist, socially autonomous elements of a possible democratic socialism were tested. The miserable failure of the Perestrojka has buried the evaluation of its diagnoses and approaches. It threatens to eclipse the world historic failure of the State socialist formation which was created under Stalin, a failure to which Perestrojka sought an answer - five minutes after twelve. The failure of the command-administrative regime calls for a Marxist analysis. I can only hint at a few main features here. Obviously the problem is rooted in the very center of the Marxist cause, which concerns the position of working individuals within the relations of production. In Marx's terms: the State-socialist way to run the Fordist Mode of production formed a structure of alienation, depriving the workers of their societal competences. This had a basic passivating effect. The complementary opposite to this weakness is the strength of Neoliberalism, which mobilizes the subjects -- albeit basically against each other, transforming their competences into those of competition. The neoliberal hegemony, which by now has conquered the social democrats, can only be broken if this strength, the subjective-initiative



moment can be won back for the left perspective on relations of production, which Marx used to articulate as that of the "free association of producers".

Also unfinished is the project which in the 1980s, under the impact of "Euro-communism", had been promoted under the catchword *Plural Marxism*. The demand to recognize pluricentrism in the State socialist world has lost its meaning since the implosion of the Soviet block, and since the forced prerogative of the Marxist-Leninist Vatican in Moscow belongs to the past. In China, the putting on ice of Marxist theory by Deng Xiaoping's reforms has contributed to this new indifference. But the profound core problem is something more radical and general, and it regards all Marxist tendencies. It is related to that of the Perestrojka. It resides in the philosophical grammar of Marxism. - By the Wittgensteinian category "philosophical grammar" I understand the basic set of articulations, by which the way to ask questions and to seek for answers is predetermined. Normally this dimension of thought is not consciously thought itself. It can be described as the underlying pattern of rationality. Reason receives its materiality from the social articulations which are the result and the precondition of innumerable practices. Very schematically, four basic patterns can be distinguished: horizontal cooperation, direct domination, market exchange relations, and the State pattern of subjection. The Marxist philosophical grammar - not that of Marx, however! - traditionally has had a statist bias. This is a result of the predominance of anti-capitalism which tends to throw its subjects, while they attack the market, spontaneously into the State logic. It may sound paradoxical that socialism should be at odds with society, from which its name derives. But exactly this is the case. It is worth noting that, in spite of extreme differences between communist and social-democratic politics, here they have a common denominator. This has been criticized as the dominance of the representative patterns of politics: The Party or State would represent the class/the people and act for them. The masses are not in the active position. They figure like addressees of services. (Don't misunderstand me: This will always be necessary to a certain extent, but for Marxists, the self-activity of the masses must be the decisive criterion.)

In the Fordist era with its welfare State politics in the West and its extensive reproduction politics in the East, when both antagonistic formations promised an always growing level of consumption to the masses to be guaranteed by the States on the basis of standardized mass production, this bias could be ignored without immediate blatant negative consequences.

When, however, the rise of transnational high tech capitalism under neoliberal hegemony initiated the final crisis of Fordism, when the left-Keynesian social-democratic welfare-politics all over the capitalist world collapsed, when this political earthquake in the West was followed by the implosion of the European State socialisms, when finally the membership of trade unions started to erode - it became clear, that a whole set of theories and practices had reached its historical limits.

That State socialism should break down and the whole Left should enter a crisis - let me put it in an oversimplified way: as a consequence of the computer, -- for an observer from some extraterrestrial civilization this would seem incomprehensible. In a certain way, the new productive forces with the computer in the lead seemed predestined for a socialist use. But in the East, the police State structures proved to be incompatible with computer-based technology, which would have made working individuals less controllable and would have put them into a strategically incomparably more powerful position. And in the West it turned out that, even here, the Left lacked the vision and praxis forms that could cope with the new conditions and compete with Neoliberalism, which succeeded in becoming the ideological manager of this development.<sup>2</sup>

These considerations lead to the conclusion that the strengthening of social - and civil societal - competence of Marxist theory and practices deserves a high priority. There are, however, still Marxists who think that civil society is an essentially liberal term. They should take note, and better today than tomorrow, that civil society is the central concern in Gramsci's *Prison Notebooks*. It is maybe not accidental that Gramsci, as one of the first and

---

<sup>2</sup> An interesting exception is the Italian Post-Operaism with its appeal to the new mass intellectuals and its concepts of "self-entrepreneurship" and the like. But the theories of this tendency are haunted by illusionary generalizations, which are sometimes patently nonsensical – as, for example, the claim that we are already living in communism, or that wage labour no longer plays any productive role.

few Marxists to study Fordism, already transcended the limits of Fordist Marxism. The task is, in theory and practice, to develop elements of socialism in civil society. For this, we have to do away with the confusion which surrounds this term for many Marxists.<sup>3</sup> The task is to break up the false equating of civil and bourgeois society. Civil means inclusive-participatory, bourgeois means exclusive-private.

Of special interest is the scientific community of Marxists. All too long we had our philosopher-kings, backed by State- and Party-apparatuses. A generation ago, Alwyn W. Gouldner wrote:

"Extract the influence of both Peking and Moscow from the world community of Marxists today -- 'factor' it out -- and what is left are small groups whose intellectual interest has little corresponding political influence." (1976, XIII)

This describes quite well the actual Marxist condition. The *factoring out* has led to the disappearance of a world-wide operative structure of Marxist theoretical production and discussion; hundreds of journals, institutes, regular conferences have disappeared. Marxism exists since this rupture mainly in its intellectual components, basically as Academic Marxism. The competitive struggle for jobs tends to overdetermine the common struggle. Nevertheless, it makes no sense to bemoan this condition. Not only is it inevitable. What is more, it is an indispensable source of possible strength. The quest for the non-contradictory harmony of the single truth is an evil in disguise of a good. It inevitably leads to its extreme opposite. Instead, every progress comes through doubt and debate. The important thing is, to make controversy work, and to civilize it. The Marxist-Leninist discourse of the laws of history which were known to the leadership, who only had to apply them, couldn't admit the necessity of debate. It was used as opium for the people, but functioned in fact mostly as opium of the leadership. Not only inevitable but vitally necessary are the controversial debates about how to analyze the real conditions, about the possibilities of intervening, about targets, means, methods, about the direction to follow ... or about the "Subjects" of change. For the Marxist theoretical culture this is the adequate form.

---

<sup>3</sup> Cf. Jan Rehmann, „'Abolition' of Civil Society?. Remarks on a Widespread Misunderstanding in the Interpretation of 'Civil Society',, in: *Socialism and Democracy*, No. 1, New York, 1-18.

The ancient Greeks were the first to conceive of their political existence as agonistic. Later bourgeois ideology dressed capitalist market competition up in the noble costume of antique athletes or Homeric heroes. Marx laughed at such fancy masks. Later however, many Marxists took the mask for the thing; and since they were to eliminate antagonistic contradictions from society and to fight their class antagonist, they reduced legitimate agonism to sport. Marx, in his critiques and polemics, shows the vital necessity of agonism *in actu*. In his theory, however, he finds no concepts for this - his own - praxis form. On the contrary, he gives you more than often the impression that his opponents' views are illegitimate.

The handbook-Marxisms of the subsequent century perpetuate a, so to speak, "roaring silence" about the open and decentralized process character of Marxist theory. The same significant silence is kept about that other fundamental fact, which assumed an enormous importance and occasionally acquired the status of monsters, *the leadership*. In spite of all the talk about the "leading role of the party", there was never a Marxist concept, never a theoretical analysis, if we leave aside Gramsci's *Prison Notebooks*, which again are crucial here as well. The ant-agonism was always on the side of capitalism. In one's own ranks there were deviationists, traitors, foreign agents. Stalin's "Short course", the *Kratki kurs*, would brief the members on the line and the deviations. After destalinization, the structure as such was kept with somewhat different contents and context, including a less violent policing of differences. The categorical blindness for an unavoidable social form of existence created for every demon, which it incessantly expelled, ten others. The subject (in a double sense) of this blindness, the leadership, presided over a steep hierarchy, protected by its shield and sword, the secret police, like a conspiracy over the society.

What a different spirit do we meet in Marx! "If the working class conspires" - he writes in one of the proclamations of the International Workers Association, when its French members were accused by the Bonapartist regime of conspiracy -, then it does so "as publicly as the sun conspires against the darknes". The passage continues: "in the full consciousness that outside the realm of the working people" - in a broad sense -, "there is no legitimate power", since even the ruling classes pretend to rule in their name (cf. MEW

16, 421f). Marxist thought cannot live without a functioning Marxist public space. Part of the poison which the Marxisms of the 20th century have left us, is the destruction of this public sphere which existed among the first generation of Marxists and to a certain extent even in the first ten years of Soviet power.

Once more the question: Have we learned to do without the old unifying powers, without falling apart? In other words, have we developed the competence of plural unity which is more than an indifferent side-by-side existence? Have we left the shadow of the State and come to terms with society? Aren't there still tasks to take up?

#### 4. PERSPECTIVES

If today Marxism seems to be widely restricted to its intellectual, almost exclusively academic form of existence, "intellectual", however, no longer means the same thing it meant at the beginning of the 20th century. Not only if one applies Gramsci's wide, functional concept of the intellectual. And not only, because of the explosive comparative growth of the percentage of students per age-group and of the average amount of life time spent in processes of education. Marx' anticipation in the *Grundrisse*, about sciences becoming the main productive force, has become reality. Elements of intellectuality which once were condensed in the particular figure of the intellectual tend to become generalized and omnipresent, at least in the sphere of all those who are not excluded from the world of necessary social labour and its reserve segments. Intellectuals and the working class are no longer apart in the sense that individuals are *either* intellectuals *or* workers. The "general intellect" about which Marx speaks in the *Grundrisse*, has won tremendously in importance. Will its realization remain imprisoned in the applications which capital and the State find for it? Which forms will be assumed by the contradiction that the "general intellect" functions as the medium of productive social rationality, in which the main productive force forms itself, while irrationality determines the social and world order? To put it in the old Hegelian terms: Will the "general intellect", which exists 'in itself', tend to constitute itself as the social intellect-for-itself?

For the time being it has the existence form of many loosely linked bridgeheads, as f.i. the annual Socialist Scholars' Conference in New York, the *Marx International* conferences in Paris, or the international InkriT-conferences in Berlin, and quite a few others. Since they are all based on cooperation, a reflection of the intellectual individuality form seems appropriate: Under certain conditions the intellectual loner was a necessary retreat form for autonomous Marxist thought. And we have to honour and gratefully respect those individuals who as Marxist "outlaws" dared to resist and follow their conscience. A quarter of a century ago Alwyn W. Gouldner described his own form of existence within the American Left as that of a "Marxist outlaw", and he explained: "Paradoxically, a Marxist outlaw is a man of the law." He wanted to say: Whenever one of us tries to discover and articulate "the grammar to which Marxism submits", we risk to be outlawed in our own political culture. Most of the Leftists of today will agree that the old game of group-inclusion/exclusion is an obtuse relic of the past, when a number of "exclusively true churches" fought for the souls of the Left. The form of the heretic loner was not a virtue in itself, but rather a temporary expedient that turns into a vice in an epoch where peer-to-peer-networking is needed as one of the basic competences of Marxist intellectuals. Gouldner's outlaw-form, however, has to be shared by all of us in its paradox meaning: The *refoundation* of the Marxist philosophical grammar belongs on our agenda, therefore we have to see where our blind spot is, to see, so to speak, our way to see.

Generally spoken, the patterns of thought that may have worked under Fordism don't correspond any longer to the reality. In this epoch, capitalism for the first time dominates globally and, at least on a systemic level, with no alternative. It has become dominant in the form of transnational high tech capitalism. This formation is in its phase of cannibalistic expansion. At the beginning of the 20th century Rosa Luxemburg observed how capitalism then was expanding into the pre-capitalist world. In our days, the more modern capital expands into the less modern - or, as in the case of Napster, into what has already been transcending capitalist borders -, devouring it under the ideological heaven of postmodernity. A new primary - not primitive - accumulation is occurring, conquering the new valorization spheres that have been opened up by high technology.

Social Democracy has jumped on the train of Neoliberalism towards a redistribution of the world. This is what its capitalist modernization politics is about.

Under a thundering heaven of speculative euphoria and piecemeal crash in the New Market, in a horizon of fictitious capital and new proletariat, in a shrill ambiguity of Brave new world of high tech capitalism and world-wide-shit-that-hits-the-fan the abstract necessity of a Marxist renaissance could become a concrete possibility. Albeit not in the old form. Therefore preparatory works are on the agenda. They aim in seemingly opposite directions: towards a future that is objectively already present, and towards a past that is still subjectively present, a paralyzing co-presence, which means no - or not enough - real presence. We have at the same time to examine the inheritance historico-critically, and to elaborate analytical instruments to cope with the changing reality. Both - the desedimentation of Marxist thought, and the analysis of high tech capitalism and its new and old economies, its remodeling of the State and of international politics, its patterns of entertainment and its individuality forms, etc. etc. This can only be the work of many Marxist intellectuals from all over the world. In such an atmosphere of departure towards reinventing Marxism the dismal science of Marxist self-analysis could finally become a cheerful science.

To be sure: A mere will is not yet a real way. Rosa Luxemburg observed, that in the field of Leftist strategy and tactics often "the unconscious ranges before the conscious", that the tactics "in its main features never is 'invented'", but that it is "the result of a progressing series of great creative acts of the experimenting and often elementary class struggle" (W 1/2, 432). This observation is *mutatis mutandis* also valid for us. Nothing is more important than the taking into account of real movement. To simply accommodate to the momentary conditions "conceals [...] the further horizons" and promotes the "inclination towards perpetuating". While criticizing the perpetuation of the momentary, Rosa Luxemburg also rejects what she calls "the presentiment and preconstruction of a ready recipe for future tactics". She recommends a "historical appreciation of the forms of struggle which dominate in a given situation", together with a "feeling for the relativity of the given stage of the struggle" (433).

What Luxemburg calls "*contraction* of the movement", today assumes forms like networking, linking, or associating. In such forms the international solidarity with the Zapatistas constituted itself. And through similar forms the movement for a "global human world order" (Castro) made its world historic appearance in Seattle, in the very lion's den, in the United States of America. "Here, too", we might say with Rosa Luxemburg, "the logic of the objective historical process precedes the subjective logic of its carriers." This sounds more kautskyan-objectivistic than it is. What she means is that it corresponds to the "subjective logic" of a social movement that it makes its inventions or even re-invents itself within the struggles -- and that it is the "objective logic" of the given conditions which is experienced in its resisting materiality through those inventions. Today, the objective conditions are those of the globally linked *brave new world* of transnational high tech capitalism. On the ground of these conditions, as analysis, critique, alternative practices and resistance will the renaissance of Marxism occur, if at all, and will Marxism be re-invented by a plural movement of movements. What we can do - and therefore must do - is this: promote a collective take-off in understanding the actual metamorphosis of capitalist societies.

Marx' third thesis on Feuerbach points out - against vulgar materialism and the elitist conception of educating the people - that those who want to change the world have to change themselves too. The German term is "Selbstveränderung", 'changing oneself' - the English translations eliminate this most important rule in favour of the neutralizing formula "changing human activity".<sup>4</sup> In our particular historical situation, which is marked by the conjuncture of post-communism and the rise of the high tech capitalist mode of production, a collective 'changing ourselves' must be put on the agenda.

I am aware that my message might sound a bit intellectualistic. Hasn't every participation in real struggles of solidarity a greater dignity? In a certain way, yes. The articulating

---

<sup>4</sup> Here we touch one of the reasons why at least for leading academic Marxists it is a *must* that they be able to read Marx in the original. -- Insofar as globalization means Americanization -- and it does so to a certain extent -- the American Left is in a particularly important position. However, global relations need global resistance. For this, we need an increased global awareness of the real state of affairs. We mostly speak our kind of English all over the world to communicate. But the organic intellectuals of the American left will hopefully not content themselves with this linguistic advantage. The experiences and ideas have to circulate globally, if the globality of capital is to be met.



intellectuals of such movements will know that this is precious and yet not enough. Isn't there a specific additional task of Marxists within the social and solidarity movements? In the *Manifesto* Marx says that this specificity consists in analyzing the relations of property in relation to every conflict. I will certainly not propose a reductionist reading of this passage. To grasp these relations in a way, which is significant for our time - in which a Jeremy Rifkin can proclaim the end of *property* in the name of *access* -, we have to analyze the profound changes in the capitalist mode of production.

My argument was that to win a future, we must come to terms with our past. Looking back is not without danger. The retrospective meets the burned earth of the former enthusiasm. It threatens to turn us into a pillar of salt, as Lot's wife. But it would be easier to get rid of our shadow than of our past. The memory of whole peoples preserves, like that of an elephant, the offences that were committed in the name of Marxism. We cannot excuse ourselves with the crimes committed by imperialism. It is impossible for us to wash our hands in innocence - even for those among us who suffered from Marxism-Leninism. However, our crisis, after the catastrophe of Early socialism, contains chances and challenges. Often, it is the dose which makes the difference between poison and medicine. Even our inheritance of defeats and deviations is ambivalent. Nothing is more precious than understood errors; nothing more deadly than blind compulsory repetition. We are "at last compelled", to say it in the words of the *Manifesto*, to face, like dis-illusioned individuals, our "real conditions of life" and our "mutual relations" with "sober senses". If we don't close our eyes and do learn our lessons, I am quite confident that there will be a renaissance of Marxism. Capitalism will provide every reason for it.