Sociological Marxism

Michael Burawoy
Department of Sociology
University of California - Berkeley

Erik Olin Wright
Department of Sociology
University of Wisconsin- Madison

March 2000

Draft 3.0

Discussions of Marxism as a social theory typically adopt one of four basic stances:

1 *Propagating Marxism*. Marxism is a comprehensive worldview for understanding the social world. It provides the theoretical weapons needed to attack the mystifications of capitalism and the vision needed to mobilize the masses for struggle. The central task for Marxist intellectuals is to articulate the revolutionary core of Marxism in such a way that its influence increases, particularly within oppressed classes. Often this has taken the form of dogmatic enunciations of Marxism as a doctrine, but making Marxism an effective ideology need not imply rigid, dogmatic beliefs. The central issue is that Marxism must be made accessible and internalized as a subjectively salient belief system.

2 *Burying Marxism.* Marxism is a doctrine with virtually no ideas of relevance for serious social inquiry. The historical durability of Marxism is entirely due to its role as a mobilizing ideology linked to political parties, social movements, and states, not the scientific credibility of its arguments. The demise of Marxist-inspired political regimes may at last signal the long overdue death of this antiquated and often pernicious doctrine. It is time to bury the corpse.

3 *Using Marxism.* Marxism is a source of interesting and suggestive ideas, many of which remain useful for contemporary social scientific analysis. Some Marxist ideas may have been deeply flawed from the beginning and others may have lost relevance for understanding contemporary societies, but still the Marxist tradition contains many useful insights and arguments, and these should be preserved as an enduring legacy. Much of what goes under the

rubric of "Marxist Sociology" has this character – selectively using particular concepts and themes in the Marxist tradition to understand specific empirical problems. But one does not have to be a "Marxist" to use Marxism in this way.

4 *Building Marxism.* Marxism is an analytically powerful tradition of social theory of vital importance for scientifically understanding the dilemmas and possibilities of social change and social reproduction in contemporary society. Particularly if one wants to change the world in egalitarian and emancipatory ways, Marxism is indispensable. This does not mean, however, that every element within Marxism as it currently exists is sustainable. If Marxism aspires to be a social scientific theory it must be continually subjected to challenge and transformation. Building Marxism also means reconstructing Marxism. Marxism is not a doctrine, a definitively established body of truths. But neither is Marxism simply a catalogue of interesting insights. If the goal is to enhance our ability to understand the world in order to change it, building Marxism is a pivotal task.

The first two of these stances both treat Marxism as an ideology: a system of beliefs to which people adhere and which provides interpretations of the world and motivations for action. Neither takes seriously the aspiration of Marxism to be a social science – the first stance because it views Marxism as incontestably true, the second because it views Marxism as unequivocally false.

Sociology, at least as it is currently practiced in the United States, has mainly engaged

Marxism in the third of these modes. There are, of course, instances of calls to bury Marxism by sociologists, and certainly there were periods in American sociology in which Marxist ideas were almost completely marginalized.[1] And, in some times and places, building Marxism has been an important intellectual current within Sociology. But mostly, American sociology has simply accepted Marxism as one of the sources of the "sociological imagination." Courses in sociological theory typically include respectful discussions of Marx, Weber and Durkheim as "founding fathers" of central currents in the history of sociology. Durkheim is identified with norms and problems of social integration; Weber with rationalization and the cultural sociology of meaningful action; and Marx with class and conflict. Studies of politics and the state routinely borrow from the Marxist tradition a concern with business influence, economic constraints on state action, and the class bases of political parties and political mobilization. Discussions of the world economy typically talk about the globalization of capital, the power of large multinational corporation and the ways international markets impinge on local conditions, longstanding Marxist themes going back to Marx. Discussions of work frequently talk about the labor process, the problem of extracting effort from workers and the impact of technology on skills. Discussions of social change talk about contradictions. And, perhaps above all, discussions of social conflict are influenced by the core Marxist idea that conflicts are generated by structurally based social cleavages, not simply subjective identities. Often the Marxist pedigree of these themes and ideas gets completely lost. Instead of using Marxism as Marxism, these ideas are simply absorbed into the diffuse mainstream of sociology. But using Marxism can also be a self-conscious practice of deploying these ideas in ways which affirm the continuing relevance of the Marxist tradition for

sociological scholarship.

Building Marxism is the most ambitious stance towards the Marxist tradition, going beyond simply deploying Marxist categories explicitly or implicitly to tackle a range of sociological problems. Here the goal is to contribute to the development of Marxism as a coherent theoretical structure by understanding its shortcomings and reconstructing its arguments. In practice, this engagement with Marxism involves strong normative commitments, not simply beliefs in the scientific virtues of Marxist ideas. Without a serious normative commitment to the radical critique of capitalist institutions and to the political vision of an egalitarian, emancipatory alternative to capitalism there would be little incentive to struggle with the demanding intellectual task of building and reconstructing Marxism as a coherent theoretical structure.[2] Building Marxism as an intellectual project is thus deeply connected with the political project of challenging capitalism as a social order.

In this paper we will primarily elaborate the basic contours of this fourth stance towards Marxism. We begin in the next section by outlining the central components of the traditional Marxist theory of capitalism, the point of departure for building what we will call sociological Marxism.

1. Setting the stage: the central components of Marxist theory

While there is little consensus, either among Marxists themselves or among nonMarxist commentators on Marxism, over what constitutes the essential elements of Marxism, most commentators would agree that whatever else it is, the centerpiece of Marxism is a theory of

capitalism as a particular kind of class society.[3] This is the aspect of Marxist theory that is most intimately linked to the Marxist political project of radically challenging capitalism. It is on this aspect of Marxism that we will focus.

The central arguments of the theory of capitalism within the Marxist tradition fall under three theoretical clusters: 1. A theory of the *trajectory and destiny of capitalism*; 2. A theory of the *contradictory reproduction of capitalism*; 3. A *normative theory of socialism and communism* as the alternative to capitalism. While each of these theoretical clusters is interconnected with the others, they nevertheless have considerable autonomy, and at different times in the history of Marxism, one or another of these has been given greater prominence.

In Marx's own work, the most elaborated and systematic theoretical arguments were in the first of these three clusters. The central achievement of Marx's work in political economy was an account of the "laws of motion" of capitalism and how these propelled capitalist development along a trajectory towards a particular kind of destination. Marx devoted very little energy to elaborating a real theory of the destination itself – socialism -- either in terms of the normative principles which socialism should embody or the problem of what institutional designs would render socialism feasible and sustainable. Instead, the normative dimension of Marx's writing primarily took the form of the critique of capitalism as a social order characterized by alienation, exploitation, fetishism, mystification, degradation, immiseration, the anarchy of the market and so on. The transcendence of capitalism by socialism and, eventually, communism, was then posited as the simple negation of these features, an implicit unelaborated theoretical utopia which eliminated all the moral deficits of capitalism: a society without alienation, without exploitation,

without fetishism, etc. While there are brief places in Marx's work in which a more positive discussion of socialism is engaged – some passages in the *Critique of the Gotha Program* broach issues of normative principles, and the writings on the Paris commune are evocative of some possible design principles for socialist institutions – nowhere are these issues given sustained, theoretical consideration.

Marx gave more attention to the problem of the contradictory social reproduction of capitalism as it moved along its historical trajectory of development. There are important, suggestive discussions of the role of the state and ideology in reproducing class relations, most notably perhaps in the bold programmatic statement about base and superstructure in *The Preface to a Contribution to a Critique of Political Economy*[4], and a few places where the contradictory quality of this reproduction is touched on.[5] More significantly, Marx elaborates significant elements of a theory of social reproduction within capitalist production itself in his analyses of the labor process and commodity fetishism.[6] Still, taken as a whole, the theory of the contradictory reproduction of capitalist relations remains extremely underdeveloped within Marx's own work: there is no real theory of the state, only fragments of a theory of ideology, and only the beginnings of a theory of the reproduction of class relations within production itself.

20th Century Western Marxism, confronting the enduring failure of revolutionary movements in the West, became much more focused on the problem of the social reproduction of capitalism. Gramsci is the most significant early contributor to these discussions, particularly in his writings on hegemony and the problem of the material basis for consent.[7] The theme of social reproduction was further developed, in especially functionalist ways, by Frankfurt School

critical theorists in the middle third of the century.[8] But it was really only in the Marxist revival of the1960s and 1970s that the problem of the contradictory reproduction of capitalism became the widespread subject of theoretical and empirical debate among Marxists. The problem of the normative theory of socialism also grew in importance, first in the context of the fierce political debates among Marxists over the character of the Soviet Union and later in the less impassioned attempts at diagnosing the causes of stagnation and eventual collapse of the attempts at building state socialism. Still, as in Marx's own work, much of the normative dimension of Western Marxism – particularly in the work of the Frankfurt school – took the form of the negative critique of capitalism rather than the positive elaboration of an emancipatory alternative. In the context of the collapse of Communist regimes and the apparent triumph of capitalism, the development of a serious positive normative theory of socialism has become even more pressing.

In what follows we will first lay out the central theses in the traditional Marxist theory of the destiny of capitalism and examine why we feel these theses are unsatisfactory. We then turn to the theory of the contradictory reproduction of capitalism which we will argue constitutes the foundation of sociological Marxism. Finally we will discuss the problem of developing a normative theory of Marxism's emancipatory project.

2. The classical Marxist theory of the trajectory and destiny of capitalism

The traditional Marxist theory of the trajectory and destiny of capitalism was grounded in three fundamental theses:

Thesis 1 The long-term nonsustainability of capitalism thesis. In the long-run capitalism is

an unsustainable social order. Capitalism does not have an indefinite future; it's internal dynamics ("laws of motion") will eventually destroy the conditions of its own reproducibility. This means that capitalism is not merely characterized by episodes of crisis and decay, but that these episodes have an inherent tendency to intensify over time in ways which make the survival of capitalism increasingly problematic.

Thesis 2 *The intensification of anticapitalist class struggle thesis*. As the sustainability of capitalism declines (thesis 1), the class forces arrayed against capitalism increase in numbers and capacity to challenge capitalism.[9] Eventually the social forces arrayed against capitalism will be sufficiently strong and capitalism itself sufficiently weak that capitalism can be overthrown.[10] Two additional claims are often attached to this thesis: 1) that the destruction of capitalism must be *ruptural* rather than *incremental* (i.e. that the destruction takes place in a temporally-condensed historical episode), and 2) that the rupture requires *violent overthrow* of the state rather than *democratic capture*. Neither of these claims, however, are inherent in the intensification of anticapitalist class struggle thesis itself and should be regarded as historically contextual propositions rather than fundamental theses of Marxism.

Thesis 3 *The natural transition to socialism thesis*: Given the ultimate nonsustainability of capitalism (thesis 1), and the interests and capacities of the social actors arrayed against capitalism, in the aftermath of the destruction of capitalism through

> intensified class struggle (thesis 2), socialism is its most likely successor (or in an even stronger version of the thesis: its inevitable successor). Partially this is because capitalism itself creates some of the institutional groundwork for socialism – concentration of ownership through trusts, massive increases in productivity liberating people from the necessity of long hours of work, increasing interdependence among workers, the removal of the capitalist as an active entrepreneur in production through the joint-stock company, etc. But mainly socialism emerges in the aftermath of capitalism's demise because the working class would gain tremendously from socialism and it has the power to create it. There are occasional places where classical Marxism entertained some other fate for capitalism than socialism – as in Luxemburg's famous formula of "socialism or barbarism" – but nowhere is a nonsocialist postcapitalist future given any theoretical precision.

These theses were meant to embody real predictions based on an understanding of the causal mechanisms at work in the social world, not simply expressions of wishful thinking or philosophical speculation. The predictions are derived from an account of two causal processes which are seen as imparting the fundamental logic to the dynamics of capitalist economic systems: *exploitation of workers* by capitalists, and *competition among capitalists* in various kinds of markets. These two processes generate the causal streams which provide the fundamental explanations for the theses about the destiny of capitalism.

Exploitation of workers and competition among capitalists are the fundamental causes of

the most salient properties of capitalist development: the steady increase in its productive capacity, the expansion of its global scope, the increasing concentration and centralization of capitalist production. This development dynamic, however, contains internal contradictions, contradictions which mean that capitalism has inherent tendencies to generate periodic, intensifying economic crises. Traditional Marxist crisis theory is complex, and there are many different kinds of causal processes in play in explaining the disruptions of capitalist accumulation. The two most important of these for the eventual fate of capitalism in classical Marxism are the long term tendency for the aggregate rate of profit to fall and, particularly as argued by Engels, the tendency for capital accumulation to lead to evermore serious crises of overproduction.[11]

The argument that capitalist crisis tendencies have an inherent longterm tendency to intensify means that as capitalism becomes more and more developed, more and more global, it ultimately becomes harder and harder to maintain the aggregate rate of profit or to find new markets – the necessary condition for continued capital accumulation and innovation -- and this, in turn, means that capitalism becomes less and less sustainable, eventually reaching limits for its own material reproduction. To use another classical Marxist formulation: the relations of production become fetters on the development of the forces of production.[12] The first causal stream generated by the two interconnected generative processes of capitalism, then, leads to the strong prediction of the thesis 1: in the long-run capitalism will become an unreproducible economic system. It cannot last forever.

The longterm fragility and problematic reproducibility of capitalism, however, does not in and of itself say much about what kind of social order would emerge in its place. Here the

important issue is the effects of capitalism on class structure and class formation: capitalism not only develops the productive forces and expands into a world-wide system of capitalist markets and competition, it also creates social agents – the working class – with a specific set of interests opposed to capitalism and a set of capacities that enable them to challenge capitalism. Workers have interests opposed to capitalism for a variety of reasons. Most fundamentally, they are exploited in capitalism. But capitalism also renders the lives of workers insecure, subject to unemployment, work degradation, and other hazards. Workers' material interests would thus be advanced if the social relations of production could be transformed from relations based on private ownership of the means of production – capitalism – to relations based on democratic, egalitarian control over the organization of production, or what came to be called "socialism."[13]

Having a class with anti-capitalist interests, however, is still not enough for the natural transition to socialism thesis. That class must also have a capacity to challenge capitalism. Capitalism as an economic system may be increasingly crisis-ridden and irrational, but capitalist societies also contain an elaborate array of institutions to defend and reproduce capitalist class relations (see the discussion of social reproduction below). These institutions develop in tandem with capitalism in response to class struggles and other threats to capitalist reproduction. While classical Marxism did not systematically theorize these flanking institutions, nevertheless Marx recognized that the transformation of capitalism depends upon the increasing capacity of opponents of capitalism to mobilize effective challenges against capitalism.

In classical Marxist theory, the dynamics of capitalist development were thought to enhance working class capacity for such challenge for a variety of reasons: the working class

becomes more numerous; it becomes concentrated in ever-larger units of production; communications and interdependencies among workers improve; internal differentiation among workers declines under the pressures of deskilling and other homogenizing forces; the organizational competence increases. Many of these developments in capitalism not only increase the capacity of workers to struggle, but also create some of the economic conditions for socialism itself: the concentration of capitalist ownership and the emergence of the joint-stock corporation make the person of the capitalist increasingly superfluous; the greater interdependency among workers make production evermore social in character. As Marxists were fond of saying, the conditions for socialism are created "in the womb of capitalism." Eventually the working class becomes a revolutionary class both in the sense of having revolutionary socialist objectives and of having the capacity to make a revolution against capitalism (thesis 2) and to create the institutions of socialism (thesis 3).

Taking these arguments together generates the fundamental predictions of classical Marxism about the destiny of capitalism: capitalism has an inherent tendency to create the conditions both for its own destruction and for the triumph of socialism as an alternative. As the economic reproduction of capitalism becomes more and more problematic and precarious, agents with an interest in transforming capitalism increasingly have the capacity to effectively struggle against capitalism. In such a context there was little need to speculate on the institutional design of this alternative. Given the interests and capacities of the relevant social actors, socialism would be invented through a process of pragmatic, creative, collective experimentalism when it became an "historical necessity."

This is an elegant social theory, enormously attractive to people committed to the moral and political agenda of an egalitarian, democratic, socialist future. Since struggles for social change are always arduous affairs, particularly if one aspires to fundamental transformations of social structures, having the confidence that the "forces of history" are on one's side and that eventually the system against which one is fighting will be unsustainable, provides enormous encouragement.[14] The *belief* in the truth of this classical theory, arguably, is one the things which helped sustain communist struggles in the face of such overwhelming obstacles.

Unfortunately, there is little evidence for the scientific validity of the theory of the destiny of capitalism as formulated. While Marx's theory of capitalist dynamics and development contain many penetrating insights about the inner workings of capitalism in the period of unregulated early industrial capitalism with its sharp polarizations and chaotic crisis tendencies, the actual trajectory of capitalism in the 20th century does not support the pivotal claims of the theory.

First, *the nonsustainability of capitalism thesis*: While capitalism does contain inherent crisis tendencies, there is no empirical evidence that these crises have any long-term tendency for intensification. Furthermore, there are serious flaws in the principle theoretical arguments advanced by Marx that capitalism has inherent limits to its own sustainability. In particular, the most systematic argument for his predictions, the theory of the tendency of the falling rate of profit, is unsatisfactory. Marx believed on the basis of the labor theory of value that aggregate profits are generated exclusively by the labor of workers currently using the means of production (what he called "living labor"). Since capital intensity (or what Marx called "the organic

composition of capital") tends to increase with the development of capitalism, and thus the costs of capital relative to labor increases over time, the profit-generating capacity of capitalism declines as a proportion of total costs and thus the rate of profit will tend to decline. This theoretical argument has been shown repeatedly to be unsatisfactory, both because of flaws in the labor theory of value on which it is based and because of specific flaws in its argument about the impact of capital intensity on the rate of profit. The other main idea within classical Marxism for a tendency for crises to intensify in capitalism – the problem of overproduction – also does not yield any inherent intensification of crisis once it is recognized that the state and other innovative institutions are capable of generating increased demand to absorb excess production. The first fundamental thesis of the classical Marxist theory of the trajectory of capitalism – the thesis that there is an *inherent* tendency for capitalism to eventually become unreproducible – cannot, therefore, be sustained.[15]

Second, *the intensification of anticaptialist class struggles thesis* and *the natural socialist transition thesis*: The theory of class formation and class struggle that underpins the arguments that socialism is the future of capitalism is also problematic. There is little evidence to support the classical Marxist view of an overriding tendency for structurally-determined classes to become organized as collective actors around class interests, and for the articulated class interests of workers so organized to become increasingly anticapitalist. Instead of becoming simplified and more polarized, class structures in capitalist societies are becoming more complex and differentiated. Even within the working class, instead of material conditions of life becoming more precarious and more homogeneous, heterogeneity has increased on many dimensions in

many parts of the world. Furthermore, even apart from the failures in its predictions about how the trajectory of capitalist development would affect the class structure, as we shall see in section 4, classical Marxism did not anticipate that the various institutions of social reproduction that develop within capitalism would be so robust, flexible and effective.[16] As a result, there appears to be much more contingency and indeterminacy in the relationship between class structure, class formation and class struggle, even in the long run, then was countenanced in the classical theory.

If capitalism has no inherent tendency to become progressively weakened and eventually unsustainable, and if the class forces arrayed against capitalism have no inherent tendency to become collectively stronger and more able to challenge capitalism, then there are no solid grounds for predicting, even in the long run, that socialism is the probable future of capitalism. This does not, of course, imply the converse – that socialism is not a *possible* future for capitalism, or even that it is an improbable future – but simply that the traditional theory provides no firm basis for any predictions about the likelihood of this outcome.

If one rejects the historical destiny theses of the traditional theory, one might well ask: what's left of Marxism? Perhaps all that is left are some scattered, if still valuable, insights of a Marxist legacy, as suggested by the "Using Marxism" stance. We will argue to the contrary that there remains a conceptual core to Marxism which can provide the foundation upon which Marxism can be (re)built. The resulting Marxism, however, will be a sociological Marxism, rooted in the theory of the contradictory reproduction of capitalist class relations, rather than a Marxist theory of historical trajectory. It will identify salient causal processes within capitalist society which have broad ramifications for the nature of institutions in such societies and the prospects

for emancipatory social change, but it will not identify an inherent dynamic process which propels such societies towards a specific destination. The problem of challenging capitalism will remain a central anchor to this proposed sociological Marxism, but socialism will no longer be viewed as an historical *necessity* but as the potential outcome of strategy, constraint and contingency. Let us now turn to the core concepts that constitute the foundation of this reconstructed sociological Marxism.

3. Sociological Marxism: conceptual foundations

Complex scientific theories can often be captured by simple conceptual phrases which define the foundational core of the theory. Thus, for example, the core of the Darwinian theory of biological evolution is encapsulated by the concept "natural selection" and the proposition "biological evolution is broadly explained by natural selection through reproductive fitness." Of course, modern evolutionary biology contains a vast array of additional concepts and complex propositions. No one would reduce the theory to this simple core. Ideas such as genetic drift, for example, do not exactly fit this proposition. Nevertheless, this does constitute a kind of bottom-line that unifies the theoretical framework. Or take another example, neoclassical economics. The simple concept at the core of neoclassical economics is the idea of "rational utility maximization under constraints" and the accompanying proposition would be something like "market outcomes are broadly explained by interactions among constrained rational utility maximizers". Again, the actual elaboration of the theory contains much more than this. There is a recognition, for example, that information imperfections can interfere with the rationality assumption in all

sorts of ways. Nevertheless, the neoclassical paradigm in economics has at its core these elements.

What, then, is the core of sociological Marxism? We believe that the core concept of sociological Marxism is "class as exploitation" and the accompanying proposition is "the dilemmas and dynamics of the reproduction and transformation of capitalist institutions are broadly explained by class." As in the case of Darwinian biology and neoclassical economics, this does not imply that the reproduction and transformation of capitalism can be reduced to class. There are many complications and many situations in which other causal processes play an important role. Rather the claim is that class as exploitation identifies the Marxist bottom line that provides coherence to its explanations.

In the next section we will elaborate the implications of this claim for the theory of the contradictory reproduction of capitalist social relations. In this section we will explicate more systematically the idea of class as exploitation itself. The discussion will involve clarifying six conceptual issues: 1. the concept of social relations *of* production; 2. the complementaryconcept of social relations *in* production; 3. the idea of class as a specific form of relations of production; 4. the problem of the forms of variation of class relations; 5. Exploitation and domination as central processes within class relations; 6. the conceptual shift from an abstract analysis class *relations* to a concrete analysis of class *structure*.

Relations of production

Any system of production requires the deployment of a range of assets or resources or factors of

production: tools, machines, land, raw materials, labor power, skills, information, and so forth. This deployment can be described in technical terms as a production function -- so many inputs of different kinds are combined in a specific process to produce an output of a specific kind. The deployment can also be described in social relational terms: the individual actors that participate in production have different kinds of rights and powers over the use of the inputs and over the results of their use. Rights and powers over resources, of course, are attributes of social relations, not descriptions of the relationship of people to things as such: to have rights and powers with respect to land defines one's social relationship to other people with respect to the use of the land and the appropriation of the fruits of using the land productively. The sum total of these rights and powers constitute the "social relations of production".

Relations in Production

The social relations of production – the relations within which rights and powers over productive assets are distributed – do not exhaust the social relations that take place within systems of production. There are also social relations of cooperation, coordination and control among actors within the labor process. Whenever there is a division of labor, different actors need to cooperate with each other and their activities need to be coordinated in order to get things done. The social relations within which such cooperative/coordinating interactions take place can be called social relations *in* production.

The social relations in production are not autonomous from the relations of production. In particular, the relations of production directly shape one particularly salient aspect of the social

relations in production: workplace *domination* – the relations within which one set of actors controls the activities of another set of actors. When a manager tells a worker what to do this action both involves exercising delegated rights and powers over resources derived from the relations of production (the manger can fire the worker for noncompliance) and providing coordinating information so that cooperation within a division of labor can take place. Domination can be organized in various ways: in strict, authoritarian hierarchies where workers activity is closely monitored and noncompliance swiftly sanctioned; in more relaxed systems of control where considerable individual autonomy is allowed; through the creation of collectively supervised teams with high levels of internal mutual monitoring; in governance structures where workers have a variety of rights as "industrial citizens". In all these cases, the relations in production constitute specific ways in which the social relations of production are translated into concrete power relations within organization of work.

Class relations as a form of relations of production

When the rights and powers of people over productive resources are unequally distributed – when some people have greater rights/powers with respect to specific kinds of productive resources than do others – these relations can be described as class relations.[17] The classic contrast in capitalist societies is between owners of means of production and owners of labor power, since "owning" is a description of rights and powers with respect to a resource deployed in production.

Let us be quite precise here: The rights and powers in question are not defined with

respect to the ownership or control of things in general, but only of resources or assets insofar as they are deployed in production. A capitalist is not someone who owns machines, but someone who owns machines, deploys those machines in a production process, hires owners of labor power to use them and appropriates the profits from the use of those machines. A collector of machines is not, by virtue owning those machines, a capitalist. To count as a class relation it is therefore not sufficient that there be unequal rights and powers over the sheer physical use of a resource. There must also be unequal rights and powers over the appropriation of the results of that use. In general this implies appropriating income generated by the deployment of the resource in question.

Variations in class relations

Different kinds of class relations are defined by the kinds of rights and powers that are embodied in the relations of production. For example, in some systems of production people are allowed to own the labor power of other people. When the rights accompanying such ownership are absolute, the class relation is called "slavery". When the rights and powers over labor power are jointly owned by the laborer and someone else, the class relation is called "feudalism."[18] In capitalist societies, in contrast, such absolute or shared ownership of other people is prohibited.

Class, Exploitation and domination

What makes class analysis distinctively Marxist is the account of specific mechanisms embedded in class relations. Here the pivotal concept is *exploitation,* although *domination* plays

an important role as well.

Exploitation is a complex and challenging concept. It is meant to designate a particular form of interdependence of the material interests of people, namely a situation which satisfies three criteria:[19]

(1) *The inverse interdependent welfare principle*: the material welfare of exploiters causally depends upon the material deprivations of the exploited.

(2) *The exclusion principle*: this inverse interdependence of welfares of exploiters and exploited depends upon the exclusion of the exploited from access to certain productive resources.

(3) *The appropriation principle*: Exclusion generates material advantage to exploiters because it enables them to appropriate the labor effort of the exploited.

Exploitation is thus a diagnosis of the process through which the inequalities in incomes are generated by inequalities in rights and powers over productive resources: the inequalities occur, in part at least, through the ways in which exploiters, by virtue of their exclusionary rights and powers over resources, are able to appropriate surplus generated by the effort of the exploited. If the first two of these principles are present, but not the third, economic oppression may exist, but not exploitation. The crucial difference is that in nonexploitative economic oppression, the privileged social category does not itself need the excluded category. While their welfare does depend upon the exclusion, there is no on-going interdependence of their activities. In the case of exploitation, the exploiters actively need the exploited: exploiters depend upon the effort of the exploited for their own welfare.[20]

This deep interdependence makes exploitation a particularly explosive form of social relation for two reasons: First, exploitation constitutes a social relation which simultaneously pits the interests of one group against another and which requires their ongoing interactions; and second, it confers upon the disadvantaged group a real form of power with which to challenge the interests of exploiters. This is an important point. Exploitation depends upon the appropriation of labor effort. Because human beings are conscious agents, not robots, they always retain significant levels of real control over their expenditure of effort. The extraction of effort within exploitative relations is thus always to a greater or lesser extent problematic and precarious, requiring active institutional devices for its reproduction. Such devices can become quite costly to exploiters in the form of the costs supervision, surveillance, sanctions, etc. The ability to impose such costs constitutes a form of power among the exploited.

Domination is a simpler idea. It identifies one dimension of the interdependence of the activities within production itself – what we have called the relations in production – rather than simply the interdependence of material interests generated by those activities. Here the issue is that, by virtue of the relations into which people enter as a result of their rights and powers they have over productive resources, some people are in a position to control the activities of others, to direct them, to boss them, to monitor their activities, to hire and fire them. Since the powers embodied in domination are directly derived from the social relations of production, domination can also be understood as an aspect of class relations. Class relations therefore imply not simply that some people have the fruits of their laboring effort appropriated by others, but that significant portions of their lives are controlled by others, directed by people outside of their own

control. In traditional Marxist terms this latter condition is called *alienation*.[21]

From abstract class relations to concrete class structures

The concept of class relations as so far discussed is defined at a very high level of abstraction. The relations are perfectly polarized between exploiters and exploited, dominators and dominated. Actual class structures within which people live and work are much more complex than this in all sorts of ways:

- Varieties of different forms of exploitation coexist: actual class structures can combine aspects of capitalist relations, feudal relations, and even various forms of postcapitalist relations of production.
- Exploitation and domination do not perfectly correspond to each other: managers, for example, may dominate workers and yet themselves be exploited by capitalists.
- The rights and powers associated with the relations of production are not perfectly polarized: all sorts of state regulations may deprive capitalists of having unfettered rights and powers over the use of their means of production; institutional arrangements like works committees or worker co-determination may give workers certain kinds of rights and powers over the organization of production.
- Individuals can have multiple, possible inconsistent, relations to the system of production: ordinary workers in capitalist production can also own stocks, either in their own firms (eg. ESOPs) or more broadly; families may contain people occupying different locations within the relations of production, thus indirectly linking each person

to the class structure in multiple ways.

While we will not discuss the various strategies for conceptualizing these complications here, one of the important issues in sociological Marxism is elaborating a repertoire of class structure concepts at different levels of abstraction in order to coherently understand this complexity.[22]

4. Sociological Marxism: the theory of the contradictory reproduction of class relations

Let us recall what we have said so far. We began by claiming that it is worthwhile to build Marxism, rather than simply use it (let alone bury it), because of its importance for understanding the obstacles and possibilities for egalitarian, emancipatory social change. This normative, political agenda provides the central motivation for worrying about these issues. We then reviewed classical Marxist theory, focusing on the part of the theory of history that tries to explain the trajectory of capitalism towards its ultimate demise and transcendence by socialism. We argued that while this theory provides a compelling vision, it is unsatisfactory as an explanatory theory. Marxism, however, also contains a theory of the contradictory reproduction of class relations. At the core of this theory is the concept of class as exploitation. We now want to show how this concept is deployed within the Marxist theory of social reproduction and how this can form of the foundation for developing sociological Marxism.

The Marxist theory of the contradictory reproduction of capitalist class relations is based on three fundamental theses:

Thesis 1. The social reproduction of class relations thesis: By virtue of their exploitative character, class structures are inherently unstable forms of social relations and

require active institutional arrangements for their reproduction. Where class relations exist, therefore, it is predicted that various forms of political and ideological institutions will develop to defend and reproduce them. In classical Marxism these were typically referred to as political and ideological *superstructures* which reproduced the *economic base*.[23]

Thesis 2. *The contradictions of capitalism thesis*. The institutional solutions to the problems of social reproduction of capitalist class relations at any point in time have a systematic tendency to erode and become less functional over time. This is so for two principle reasons: First, capitalist development generates changes in technology, the labor process, class structure, markets and other aspects of capitalist relations, and these changes continually pose new problems of social reproduction. In general, earlier institutional solutions will cease to be optimal under such changed conditions. Second, class actors adapt their strategies in order to take advantages of weaknesses in existing institutional arrangements. Over time, these adaptive strategies tend to erode the ability of institutions of social reproduction to effectively regulate and contain class struggles.

These 3. *Institutional Crisis and Renovation thesis.* Because of the continual need for institutions of social reproduction (thesis 1) and the tendency for the reproductive capacity of given institutional arrangements to erode over time (thesis 2), institutions of social reproduction in capitalist societies will tend to be periodically renovated. The typical circumstance for such renovation will be institutional crisis –

> a situation in which organized social actors, particularly class actors, come to experience the institutional supports as unsatisfactory, often because they cease to be able to contain class conflicts within tolerable limits. These institutional renovations can be piecemeal or may involve dramatic institutional reconfigurations. There is no implication here either that the new institutional solutions will be optimal or that capitalism will collapse in the face of suboptimal arrangements. What is claimed is that capitalist development will be marked by a sequence of institutional renovation episodes in response to the contradictions in the reproduction of capitalist relations.

These three theses provide the core framework which anchors the agenda of sociological Marxism. As with the theory of capitalism's destiny, they are not meant to be simply an interpretative discourse but to identify real mechanisms that exist in real institutions.

The social reproduction of class relations thesis

In a fundamental sense, the issue of social reproduction applies to all types of social relations. No type of social relation – whether friendship relations, authority relations within organizations,a gender relations, or class relations – simply continues to exist in a given form by sheer inertia; there is always some kind of practice involved in maintaining the relation. But equally, those practices are themselves structured by social relations; they are not simply the unconstrained acts of voluntaristically acting persons. This is perhaps the most fundamental meta-theoretical idea in

sociological Marxism: social relations are reproduced (and transformed) by social practices which are themselves structured by social relations[24]. Here we will focus on the issues of reproducing class relations; in the next section we will examine their transformation.

While social reproduction is an issue for all social relations, different sorts of social relations pose different kinds of problems for social reproduction. Class relations, by virtue of their exploitative character, are an example of a kind of social relation for which social reproduction is a particularly complex and problematic business, requiring the deployment of considerable resources, social energy and institutional devices.

The exploitative character of class relations makes their social reproduction problematic for two reasons: First, these are relations in which real harms are imposed on some people for the benefit of others. Social relations within which antagonistic interests are generated will have an inherent tendency to generate conflicts in which those who are harmed will try to change the relation in question.[25] The fact that there will be a tendency for active efforts at changing such relations to occur imposes greater burdens on the practices of reproducing those relations; social reproduction does not simply need to counter tendencies for relations to decay or drift over time, but active forms of challenge and resistence. Second, exploitation confers important forms of power *on the exploited*. Since exploitation rests on the extraction of labor effort, and since people always retain some measure of control over their own effort, they always confront their exploiters with at least some capacities to resist exploitation.[26] Thus, not only do we have a social relation which breeds antagonisms of interests, but the disadvantaged within these relations have inherent sources of power to resist their exploitation.

Given these features of exploitative class relations, the first fundamental sociological thesis of Marxism predicts that where capitalist class relations are stable, an array of complex institutional devices will exist to reproduce those relations. The conditional form of this prediction is important. The claim is not that capitalist class relations will always be stable, but simply that such stability, where it occurs, requires active institutional supports. There is thus a kind of quasi-functionalist reasoning at work here, since class systems are seen as posing significant problems of their own reproduction, problems which will tend to provoke the construction of solutions. However, there is no homeostatic assumption that effective functional solutions are always forthcoming. Indeed, one of the central concerns of a sociological Marxist exploration of the problem of social reproduction is precisely studying the ways in which social reproduction is itself challenged, undermined, contradictory.

These institutional mechanisms of social reproduction of class relations exist both in the micro-settings of class relations and the macro-institutional supports of capitalism. At the micro-level the pivotal problem is understanding the ways in which consent and coercion are articulated within everyday practices, particularly in the labor process. At the macro-level, the central problem is the way various apparatuses – the state, the media, education – contribute to the stabilization of class structures.

Much of the theoretical and empirical work in neo-Marxism from the 1960s to the 1980s explored this issue of social reproduction. To give just a few examples: Bowles and Gintis' (197x) analysis of education analyzed the functional correspondence between schooling practices and class destinations of children. They argued that schools attended predominantly by working

class children engaged in pedagogical practices revolving around discipline and obedience, thus facilitating the future roles of these children as exploited labor within production, whereas schools for more middle class or elite children inculcated autonomy and creativity, thus enabling them to better fulfill the roles of domination and direction of production. Schooling helps solve a problem of reproducing class relations: to enable children from different class origins to function effectively in their class destinations. Paul Willis (197x) also explores the ways in which schools constitute a context for reproducing class relations, but in his case the analysis centers on the ways in which forms of resistence by contributes to the reproduction of their place in the class structure. Burawoy (197x) in his work on "manufacturing consent" among factory workers argues that the interaction of adaptive strategies of workers on the shop floor and the political regimes of management generates "games" which help to make work tolerable and which generate a certain kind of consent to exploitation. Przeworski (1985) studies the ways in which the electoral rules of the game in capitalist democracies help to channel working class politics, which might potentially threaten basic capitalist interests, into practices which are consistent with the reproduction of capitalism, creating the conditions for a hegemonic form of rule. In each of these cases there is a problem for the reproduction of class relations posed by the potential for resistence to capitalist exploitation and domination. The institutional solutions do not eliminate this potential altogether, but, when successful, they do contain that resistence within acceptable limits.

The contradictions of capitalism thesis

If sociological Marxism was simply a theory of the social reproduction of class relations, it could easily devolve into a variety of functionalism. Indeed, Marxist analyses are often accused (sometimes correctly) of this: treating all social institutions as optimally functional for the stability of capitalism and the securing of the interests of the capitalist class. Much of the debate over the influential work of Louis Althusser (196/7..) on ideology and of Nicos Poulantzas (ref) on the capitalist state, for example, centered on the extent to which their arguments had an overly functionalist cast.[27]

The contradictions of capitalism thesis avoids this kind of functionalism. It argues that the social reproduction of class relations is inherently unstable and problematic, both because of the ways in which the institutions of reproduction themselves become objects of challenge and because of the ways in which capitalist development continually disrupts would-be functional solutions.

The tendency for institutions of social reproduction to erode over time has also been the subject of considerable research and theorizing. O'Connor's (1973) work on the fiscal crisis of the state argues that patterns of state spending that arise in an effort to neutralize certain crisis tendencies in capitalism and to contain class conflict are internally contradictory so that eventually they provoke a fiscal crisis which requires some sort of institutional transformation. Abraham's (197x) work on Weimar Germany argues that the adaptive strategies of different class actors taking advantages of the institutional opportunities in the Weimar republic eventually made the creation of a stable hegemonic block capable of reproducing German capitalism impossible under the existing constitutional framework. Claus Offe's (19xx) analysis of the

"crisis of crisis management" explores how the forms of rationality developed within state institutions to handle social tensions around redistribution become dysfunctional when the state needs to intervene more deeply into production in order to stabilize the conditions for capitalist reproduction. Writers in the French Regulation School (citations: Lipietz, Boyer) and the American Social Structures of Accumulation school (citations: Weiskopf, Bowles Gordon, etc.) have argued that in the immediate post-WWII period an institutional configuration called "Fordism" was consolidated which combined a specific form of state activity with a pattern of capitalist production and class compromise. This institutional arrangement facilitated a stable, sustained reproduction of conditions favorable for capitalist accumulation. The capitalist development spurred by this configuration, however, ultimately empowered workers in ways which undermined the capacity of the institutions to maintain these reproductive conditions, eventually leading to a "crisis of Fordism".

The institutional Crisis and Renovation thesis

The final core thesis of sociological Marxism is that the erosion of the effectiveness of institutions of social reproduction will tend to provoke episodes of institutional renovation, typically in response to situations of felt crisis. The prediction is that these institutional renovations will *tend* to secure the basic interests of the capitalist class, but there is no prediction that the resolution will always be optimal for capitalists and certainly not that capitalists will never be forced to make significant compromises in order to consolidate of new institutions.

Some of the most interesting research in sociological Marxism centers on the problem of

the process through which new institutional solutions to the problem of the social reproduction of class relations are generated. David James (198x) examines how in the aftermath of the Civil War and the destruction of slavery, the Southern planter class faced a serious problem in the reproduction of its class power. He shows how the creation of the racialized state in the American South in the post-Reconstruction era made possible the reproduction of particularly repressive forms of labor effort extraction in sharecropping. He then demonstrates how the eventual elimination of sharecropping by the middle of the 20th century set the stage for a successful challenge to the racial state. Edwards (19xx) shows how new institutional arrangements for the control of labor are created in response to the pressures generated by new technologies and changes in the labor process. Much of the research of social democracy and neo-corporatism can be viewed as an analysis of how new forms of "class compromise" are institutionalized to resolve problems of class conflict and social reproduction in the face of economic crisis (citations).

Taken together with the contradictions of capitalism thesis, the institutional crisis and renovation thesis does argue that capitalist societies are characterized by an inherent dynamic of change. In this way it is like the theory of capitalism's trajectory and destiny. But unlike the ambitious theory of history in classical Marxism, there is no claim here that the "punctuated equilibria" of institutional change is moving towards some predictable destination. What is predicted is a pattern of episodic reorganizations of capitalism and its support institutions in the face of the erosion of processes of social reproduction, but not that cumulatively these episodes have a tendency to increase the probability of socialism.[28]

5. Towards a Normative Theory of Socialism

If the theory of capitalism's destiny developed by Marx were valid, then there would be less need for an elaborate normative theory of socialism. If we had good reason to believe

(a) that capitalism will eventually become unsustainable,

(b) that as capitalism becomes less sustainable, the institutional supports that reproduce capitalism will tend to become more fragile,

(c) that as sustainability declines, the class forces opposed to capitalism will become stronger and stronger, and

(d) that the class location of people within the anticapitalist forces meant that they would overwhelmingly benefit from an egalitarian and democratic reorganization of production,

then it would be reasonable to suppose that through some sort of pragmatic, creative trial-and-error process some kind of viable socialism could be constructed. Where there is a will there is a way; necessity is the parent of invention. So, if the claims of the theory of capitalism's destiny were true, perhaps there would be less need for a positive theory of socialism, a theory which clarified its normative foundations and institutional principles. Once we drop the optimistic predictions of historical materialism, however, there is no longer a theoretical grounding for bracketing these issues.

One option, of course, would be to continue the tradition of the Frankfurt School and other important currents of Western Marxism in which the normative dimension of Marxism is developed primarily as the Critique of Capitalism. Socialism, then, is the idealized negation of the oppressions of capitalism.

While this may provide us with a valuable moral anchor, it will not do as normative model of alternatives to existing institutions. We have witnessed several historical experiments of trying to build socialism in the aftermath of anticapitalist revolutions which relied heavily on moral visions combined with "where there is a will there is a way" and "necessity is the parent of invention". The problem, of course, is that what was invented with this will was not an egalitarian, democratic organization of production. If we have learned anything from the history of revolutionary struggles against capitalism it is that anticapitalism is an insufficient basis on which to construct a socialist alternative. In addition to a sociological Marxism which explores the contradictory reproduction of class relations in capitalism we therefore need a normative Marxism that illuminates the nature of the emancipatory project itself and its institutional dilemmas. The development of this normative theory is one of the essential tasks for Marxism in the 21st century.

As we see it, the development of a normative theory of socialism would have two principle concerns. First, normative Marxism must thoroughly understand the dilemmas and dynamics of the historical attempts at creating socialist relations. This concerns, above all, understanding the development and unraveling of state socialisms since, for better or worse, these constitute the main empirical cases for attempts at putting Marxist-inspired socialist ideas into practice. Partially the purpose of such investigations is to avoid repeating the same mistakes in the future, but more fundamentally the purpose is to enrich our general understanding of the institutional requirements for feasible emancipatory alternatives.

Second, normative Marxism must take more seriously the problem of theoretically

elaborating institutional designs embodying emancipatory principles. This does not imply the fantasy of developing fine-grained social blueprints which could be taken off the shelf and instituted through some massive project of social engineering. Marx rightly thought that such blueprints for socialism were implausible. But it does mean elaborating much more systematically the principles that would animate the pragmatic development of real institutions. This involves both thinking through the abstract design principles for realizing particular emancipatory ideals and studying empirical cases where some of these design principles may have been put into practice. We refer to this effort as "envisioning real utopias".

Understanding State Socialism

For those who desire to bury Marxism, state socialism, especially its Soviet variety, becomes its dirge. For them, Soviet communism demonstrates the bankruptcy and totalitarian danger of Marxism. There is nothing to be learnt or recovered. For those who wish to propagate Marxism, given the widespread disrepute into which it has fallen, state socialism is something to be avoided. Or at least the propaganda must be that state socialism has nothing to do with Marxist socialism. Even those who use Marxism have no use for state socialism except as a negative case, perhaps an expression of degenerate Marxism. They too want to dissociate themselves from the deceased body. Only those who seek to build Marxism, and not all of them, are likely to do a serious postmortem, extract the lessons to be learnt, the positive and the negative, in the one enduring example of socialism.

What has the history of state socialism to contribute to building a normative theory of socialism? Ironically, perhaps, modifications of the three theses of classical Marxism concerning the destiny of *capitalism* may help us understand the trajectory of state socialism: the nonsustainability of state socialism; the intensification of antisocialist challenges; and the transition to an alternative society, in this case some form of capitalism.

State socialism involved the central redistribution of surplus, appropriated by a class of "planners" from a class of "direct producers." Its appropriation was palpable and had therefore to be legtimized in the name of the superior knowledge of the planner about the needs of the people. This worked fairly effectively when the central task of state planning was mobilizing resources for basic industrialization against the backdrop of an underdeveloped agrarian economy; it encountered increasing contradictions when the central task became enhancing productivity within the industrial economy.

Central appropriation and planning led to a shortage economy in which the bottleneck was from the side of supply. If all that was required of the economic system was simple reproduction – the allocation of given inputs to produce a given array of outputs – then central planning was quite feasible and the supply-side bottlenecks could be overcome by various institutional innovations. In and of itself, this failure in state socialism was no more pathological than the chronic problem of market failure in capitalism with its excess production, the bottleneck of demand. And just as capitalism could counter the problem of demand failures in the market through various forms of state-generated demand, state socialism could counter the supply failures of state planning through various forms of quasi-market mechanisms.[29]

Where State Socialism had deeper problems, problems which it was unable to overcome, was in its dynamic properties, particularly the inability to innovate on a systematic basis. Bureaucratic competition for resources, unlike market competition, did not have the effect of generating sustained innovation. Relative to the capitalist world beyond, state socialist relations of production impeded the development of its forces of production. The result, over time, was deepening stagnation and increasingly problematic sustainability of state socialism.

There also seems to have been a tendency for state socialism to inspire challenges to its continuity. Because legitimacy was so central to its stability, state socialism was vulnerable to an imminent critique in which the ruling ideology that permeated the day to day practices was turned against the ruling class, the party state, for failing to realize its proclaimed ideals. In other words, because under the banner of Marxism these were proclaimed to be workers' states, it was not surprising that workers would take up struggle against them in the face of their failure to live up to their ideals. (Berlin, 53; Poland and Hungary, 56; Czechoslovakia, 68; Poland 1980-1; Russian miners 1989, 1991). In the end, the failure of state socialism was so dramatic that the ruling class lost confidence in all possible reforms, so that the only alternative was capitalism. With the discrediting of all forms of socialism and the demise of state socialism, a transition to some kind of capitalism became the "natural" solution.

Capitalism, of course, also had its crises, sometimes very deep crises, but this did not lead to its collapse because we argue, following Gramsci, it developed an expanded state and a vibrant civil society. Robust institutions of social reproduction were elaborated that could flexibly absorb challenges and respond through a process of iterated institutional renovation. While there were

clearly embryonic beginnings of and aspirations for such an institutional complex in state socialism – think of perestroika that aspired to a vibrant civil society, Solidarity which sought to create participatory institutions, and Hungary which created a significant second economy -- institutions of social reproduction never developed into fully fledged superstructures. We can only speculate about why these experiments never came to fruition, never stabilized; but they held within them the potentiality of a democratic socialism.

Perhaps if state socialism had occurred in a more benign global environment, it might have avoided the extreme forms of authoritarianism that characterized these regimes and thus have allowed for a more vibrant and open associational life in civil society. This in turn might have created the conditions, which, in the face of the failures of overly-centralized bureaucratic planning, might have generated more coherent counter-hegemonic visions of socialism.Just as the internal contradictions of early capitalism led to an organized capitalism with its flanking institutions, under more propitious circumstances, state socialism might have given way to democratic socialism rather than capitalism.

The posing of a qualitative alternative to state socialism – capitalism – occurred in the context of a pervasive belief that state socialism had exhausted any capacity for renewal or development. Virtually no one believes in capitalism's immanent demise. It therefore seems unlikely that visions of radical egalitarian alternatives to capitalism will be spontaneously generated by struggles within capitalism. When capitalism runs into difficulties, the spontaneous impulse is to try to perfect it, rather than dismantle it. If Marxism is to render alternatives to capitalism credible, therefore, it is necessary for alternatives to be given coherent and compelling

theoretical force. Part of building Marxism in these conditions involves formulating "real utopias," utopias that are rooted in real practices, and embody feasible institutional designs that point beyond capitalism.

Envisioning Real Utopias

Marxists have traditionally been at best skeptical, and often sharply hostile, to anything that smacked of utopian thinking. Marx had nothing but disdain for what he called "utopian socialists" who built dreams in the sky rather than struggled for revolutionary change on the ground. Yet, as we have argued, building Marxism needs to go beyond a vision of critical negation of capitalism towards the exploration of alternative models. Such models should be "utopian" insofar as they try to embody in a serious ways the central values of traditional emancipatory projects of social change – radical equality, deep democracy, caring community, individual self-realization and freedom. But they should also be "real" insofar as what is envisioned are not fantasies or purely moral constructions, but feasible institutional designs capable of contributing to real human progress.

To flesh out this idea, let us consider in some detail one such real utopian idea: *unconditional universal basic income grants*. The idea of universal basic income long pedigree, but has recently been revived, particularly in European discussions (Van der Veen and Van Parijs 1986; Purdy, 1994; Van Parijs, 1992). The proposal has come under a variety of names: universal basic income; demogrant; citizen dividend. While the details may vary, the basic idea is quite simple: Every citizen receives a monthly living stipend sufficient to live at a culturally-defined

respectable standard of living, say 125% of the "poverty line." The grant is *unconditional* on the performance of any labor or other form of contribution, and it is *universal* – everyone receives the grant as a mater of citizenship right. Grants go to individuals, not families. Parents are the custodians of minority children's grants.

With universal basic income in place, most other redistributive transfers are eliminated – general welfare, family allowances, unemployment insurance, tax-based old age pensions – since the basic income grant is sufficient to provide everyone a decent subsistence. This means that in welfare systems which already provide generous antipoverty income support through a patchwork of specialized programs, the net increase in costs represented by universal unconditional basic income would not be extraordinary, particularly since administrative overhead costs would be so reduced (since universal basic income system do not require significant information gathering and close monitoring of the behavior of recipients). Special needs subsidies of various sorts would continue, for example for people with disabilities, but they are likely to be smaller than under current arrangements. Minimum wage rules would be relaxed or eliminated: there would be little need to legally prohibit below-subsistence wages if all earnings, in effect, generated discretionary income.

Universal basic income has a number of very attractive features from the point of view of radical egalitarianism. First, it significantly reduces one of the central coercive aspects of capitalism. When Marxists analyze the process of "proletarianization of labor" they emphasize the "double separation" of "free wage labor": workers are separated from the means of production, and by virtue of this are separated from the means of subsistence. The conjoining of

these two separations is what forces workers to sell their labor power on a labor market in order to obtain subsistence. In this sense, proletarianized labor is fundamentally unfree. Unconditional, universal basic income breaks this identity of separations: workers remain separated from the means of production (these are still owned by capitalists), but they are no longer separated from the means of subsistence (this is provided through the redistributive basic income grant). The decision to work for a wage, therefore, becomes much more voluntary. Capitalism between consenting adults is much less objectionable than capitalism between employers and workers with little choice but to work for wages. By increasing the capacity of workers to refuse employment, basic income generates a much more egalitarian distribution of real freedom than ordinary capitalism.

Second, universal basic income is likely to generate greater egalitarianism within labor markets. If workers are more able to refuse employment, wages for crummy work are likely to increase relative to wages for highly enjoyable work. The wage structure in labor markets, therefore, will begin to more systematically reflect the relative disutility of different kinds of labor rather than simply the relative scarcity of different kinds of labor power. This in turn will generate an incentive structure for employers to seek technical innovations that eliminate unpleasant work. Technical change would therefore not simply have a labor-saving bias, but a labor-humanizing bias.

Third, universal basic income directly and massively eliminates poverty without creating the pathologies of means-tested antipoverty transfers. There is no stigmatization, since everyone gets the grant. There is no well-defined boundary between net beneficiaries and net contributors,

since many people and families will freely move back and forth across this boundary over time. Thus, it is less likely that stable majority coalitions against redistribution will form once basic income has been in place for some length of time. There are also no "poverty traps" caused by threshold effects for eligibility for transfers. Everyone gets the transfers unconditionally. If you work and earn wages, the additional income is of course taxed, but the tax rate is progressive and thus there is no disincentive for a person to enter the labor market if they want discretionary income.

Fourth, unconditional universal basic income is one way of valorizing a range of decommodified caregiving activities which are badly provided by markets, particularly caregiving labor within families, but also caregiving labor within broader communities. While universal income would not, by itself, transform the gendered character of such labor, it would counteract some of the inegalitarian consequences of the fact that such unpaid labor is characteristically performed by women. In effect, universal basic income could be considered an indirect mechanism for accomplishing the objective of the "wages for housework" proposals by some feminists: recognizing that caregiving work is socially valuable and productive and deserving of financial support. The effects of basic income on democracy and community are less clear, but to the extent that basic income facilitates the expansion of unpaid, voluntary activity of all sorts, this would have the potential of enhancing democratic participation and solidarity-enhancing activities within communities.

There are, of course, significant questions about the practical feasibility of universal basic income grants. Two issues are typically raised by skeptics: the problem of *labor supply*, and the

problem of *capital flight*.

A universal basic income is only feasible if a sufficient number of people continue to work for wages with sufficient effort to generate the production and taxes needed to fund the universal grant. If too many people are happy to live just on the grant (either because they long to be couch potatoes and or simply because they have such strong preferences for nonincome-generating activities over discretionary income) or if the marginal tax rates were so high as seriously dampen incentives to work, then the whole system would collapse. Let us define a "sustainable basic income grant" as a level of the grant which, if it were instituted, would stabley generate a sufficient labor supply to provide the necessary taxes for the grant. The highest level of such grants, therefore, could be called the "maximally sustainable basic income grant." The empirical question, then, is whether this maximally sustainable level is high enough to provide for the virtuous effects listed above. If the maximally sustainable grant was 25% of the poverty line, for example, then it would hardly have the effect of rendering paid labor a noncoercive, voluntary act, and probably not dramatically reduce poverty. If, on the other hand, the maximally sustainable grant was 150% of the poverty level, then a universal basic income would significantly advance the egalitarian normative agenda. Whether or not this would in fact happen is, of course, a difficult to study empirical question and depends upon the distribution of work preferences and productivity in an economy.

Apart from the labor supply problem, universal basic income is also vulnerable to the problem of capital flight. If a high universal basic income grant significantly increases the bargaining power labor, and if capital bears a significant part of the tax burden for funding the

grant, and if tight labor markets dramatically drive up wages and thus costs of production without commensurate rises in productivity, then it could well be the case that a universal basic income would precipitate significant disinvestment and capital flight. It is for this reason that Marxists have traditionally argued that a real and sustainable deproletarianization labor power is impossible within capitalism. In effect, the necessary condition for sustainable high-level universal basic income may be significant politically-imposed constraints over capital, especially over the flow of investments. Some form of socialism, then, may be a requirement for a a normatively attractive form of basic income. But it may also be the case that in rich, highly productive capitalism, a reasonably high basic income could be compatible with capitalist reproduction. Particularly in generous welfare states, the increased taxes for funding a basic income might not be excessive, and the technological and infrastructural reasons why capital invests in developed capitalist economies may mean that massive capital flight is unlikely. Maybe.

Universal basic income is not the full realization of the emancipatory vision of Marxism. It does not create democratic control over society's productive capacity, it does not produce radical egalitarianism, it does not eliminate domination in production, it does not eliminate capitalist exploitation, although it may render it less morally objectionable. Nevertheless, it is probably a feasible institutional design with many normatively attractive features that advance some of the core goals of the socialist project.

Universal Basic Income is only one example of a model envisioning real utopias. Other examples would include John Roemer's (19xx, 19xx) proposal for an institutionally feasible form

of market socialism; various innovative ideas about ways of deepening democratic governance through a new articulation of the state and secondary associations (Cohen and Rogers, 199x) or through the elaboration of new forms of empowered deliberative participation of citizens in political decision-making (Fung, 199x; Fung and Wright, 2000); and proposals to create egalitarian market institutions through sustained redistribution of assets (Bowles and Gintis, 1997).

All of these proposals in various ways challenge the prevailing idea that there is no alternative to capitalism. If people generally believed that capitalism was inevitably doomed within their lifetimes, then this itself would undercut the notion that there was no alternative. But if this belief is dropped, then articulating alternatives is a necessary condition for putting alternatives on the historical agenda.

Envisioning real utopias, however, is meant to be more than just an ideological strategy for challenging fatalism. Because of the contradictory quality of social reproduction in capitalism, under certain political conditions, aspects of these institutional designs can potentially become part of pragmatic projects of social reform even within capitalist society. There are many possible capitalisms with many different institutional arrangements for social reproduction. One crucial issue for normative Marxism is the extent to which it is possible to introduce and sustain significant aspects of emancipatory institutional arrangements in some varieties of capitalism. Although the arguments of sociological Marxism suggest that the constraints of social reproduction of class relations necessarily make any emancipatory project within capitalism difficult, this does not imply that elements of emancipatory alternatives cannot be prefigured

within the contradictory reality of capitalism.[30] Envisioning Real Utopias is thus, ultimately, part of an active agenda of social change within capitalism rather than simply a vision of a destiny beyond capitalism.

6. Conclusion:

We have argued in this paper that the main theoretical ideas of Marxism can be grouped into three broad clusters: a theory of dynamics and destiny of capitalism -- historical materialism; a theory of the contradictory reproduction of capitalism – sociological Marxism; and a normative theory of emancipatory alternatives.

Classical Marxism developed during the early phases of industrial capitalism. It brilliantly captured the historical dynamics of that period – the extraordinary power of capitalism to transform the world, to destroy preexisting class relations and forms of society, but also its inherent tendency to crisis and self-destruction. This dynamic self-destructive logic of capitalism was given theoretical coherence by historical materialism.

Sociological Marxism was present in embryonic form within classical Marxism, but only later did it become an elaborate, developed theoretical framework for understanding the new array of institutions built up around capitalism, counteracting its tendency towards self-destruction. Historical Materialism and Sociological Marxism complemented each other – one explaining the trajectory and ultimate destiny of capitalism, the other the impediments towards movement along that trajectory. Together they provided a grounding for Marxist-inspired political parties who saw their mission to be overcoming these impediments – particularly those

embodied in the state – and thus hastening the arrival at the destiny.

So long as historical materialism was accepted, there was little need for sociological Marxism to embrace a normative Marxism that went much beyond the critique of capitalism. If we abandon the pivotal theses of historical materialism – the nonsustainability of capitalism thesis and the intensification of class struggle thesis – then developing a normative theory becomes critical for building Marxism. Sociological Marxism demands that we now pay close attention to developing alternatives to capitalism since the end of capitalism is no longer given as an inherent tendency and the attempts at socialism have not been successful. The normative Marxism must examine state socialism for the lessons as to what should be avoided and imagination of what might have been. But even more important are developing real utopias based on real institutions of capitalism, exploring the idea that those flanking institutions themselves potentially contain seeds of alternative societies.

Sociological Marxism without normative Marxism degenerates into cynical, pessimistic critiques of capitalism, ultimately encouraging passivity in the face of capitalism's enormous capacity for reproduction. Normative Marxism without sociological Marxism falls into an unanchored utopianism that is ungrounded in the real contradictions of capitalism and is unable to capture the imagination of people. Only by building Marxist with a combination of the two can the apparent naturalness and inevitability of capitalism be prevented from turning all alternatives into far-fetched impossibilities.

Endnotes

1. [[add footnote with citations and comments, perhaps discussing death of class debate]].

2. One can, of course, endorse the Marxist political and normative project of the egalitarian critique of capitalism and still reject the theoretical project of building Marxism on the ground that the flaws within the Marxist tradition make this task hopeless.

3. Because there are many marxisms, it often makes sense to speak of "the Marxist tradition" rather than "Marxism" as such. Alvin Gouldner (19xx – *The Two Marxisms*) has argued that Marxism is best thought of as an "speech community", a terrain of debate, rather than a unified theory.

4. The analytically most rigorous exploration of the implications of Marx's brief statement in the *Preface* for a general theory of the reproduction of capitalism is Cohen (1978; 1988 – History, Labour and Freedom: themes from Marx, Oxford University Press)

5. Give citations and illustrations: German Ideology for ideological reproduction. Communist Manifesto for reference to state as reproduction. Preface to a contribution for general statement of superstructures as reproducing class relations. Comments on democracy as a contradictory form of reproduction.– where does Marx talk about democracy as contradicting capitalism?

6. references to appropriate places in *Capital*.

7. Footnote on Gramsci with references.

8. Give relevant main references for Adorno, Benjamin, Horkheimer, Marcuse. Perhaps this could also have some substantive comments to back up this characterization: Herbert Marcuse's writing illustrates well the highly functionalist quality of the Frankfurt school's treatment of the problem of social reproduction....repressive tolerance, etc.

9. Give relevant references to Marx for the class struggle intensification argument: Communist Manifesto; Socialism: Utopian & Scientific; Capital. Also, perhaps, the following: Elster (1985 – section on Revolution) carefully elaborates the argument about the coincidence of the timing of the trajectory of the weakening of capitalism's capacity for reproduction and the timing of the increasing capacity of anticapitalist forces.

10. The intensification of class struggle thesis does not imply that revolution is only possible at the point when capitalism becomes completely moribund and unsustainable. Since the relevant anticapitalist forces come to know that capitalism is moving towards unsustainability, they have the possibility of organizing to overthrow before it reaches the point of complete internal

collapse. Unsustainability is still important in this revolutionary transformation for two reasons: first, the apparatuses which defend capitalism are weakened by the intensifying crises of capitalism even before complete unsustainability has been reached, and second, the knowledge of the eventual demise of capitalism plays a significant role in mobilizing people against capitalism.

11. Give main cite for falling rate of profit in Marx and overproduction in Engels.

12. This formulation is part of the larger, more abstract theory of historical trajectory in historical materialism. In historical materialism the bold thesis is advanced that it is a property of *every* class-based system of production relations that a) within each type of class relations there is a limit to the possible development of the forces of production, b) that the forces of production will eventually develop to reach those limits, c) when those limits are reached – when the relations fetter the further development of the forces – the relations will become increasingly unstable, and d) eventually this instability will lead to a transformation of the relations of production, enabling the forces of production to develop further. It is this "dialectic" between forces and relations of production which provides the basic dynamics for the theory of historical trajectory and which gives it a specific kind of directionality. For a systematic exploration of the logic of this theoretical structure, see G. A .Cohen (1978).

13. Like many Marxist terms, the term "socialism" has many competing meanings. Often socialism is identified with a specific institutional design, such as centralized state ownership of the means of production and cental planning. State ownership, however, is not an inherent feature of the concept understood as the "socializing" private ownership. The pivot is rendering social relations of production egalitarian and democratic. Many possible institutional forms could accomplish this. Capitalism as well comes in many different institutional forms: family firms; joint ventures; large multidivision corporations; worker co-determination firms; state regulated firms; etc. Socialism – understood as an egalitarian, democratic control over production – can also be envisioned in many institutional varieties: centralized state ownership; centralized ownership with decentralized control; market socialism; workers coops.

14. It might seem that the determinism of this prediction of the demise of capitalism would lead people to ask "why should I engage in struggle since capitalism is doomed by the laws of history whether or not I do so?" In fact, since one of the main impediments to people's participation in struggle is the fear that sacrifices will be pointless, having confidence in the ultimate victory of one's cause can help motivate people for action, making that victory more likely.

15. This does not, of course, imply that evidence exists for the converse counter-thesis that capitalism is indefinitely reproducible. And it also does not imply that there are no other possible arguments for the longterm nonsustainability of capitalism. Arguments of environmental limits to the sustainability of capitalism may well have persuasive force, and these environmental limits

may be reached by virtue of the internal dynamics of capitalism: because of the tendency of capitalist firms to ignore negative externalities and for capitalist markets to encourage very short time horizons capitalism may destroy its ecological conditions of existence. All that is being claimed here is that there are no convincing theoretical arguments of the distinctively Marxist variety for the nonsustaibability thesis.

16. The theory of the "superstructure" was quite underdeveloped in classical Marxism and generally regarded superstructures as rigid, largely repressive apparatuses, incapable of flexible adaptation and transformation in response to changing demands of social reproduction. The very use of an architectural metaphor to capture the mechanisms of social reproduction suggest this rigidity. The centerpiece of sociological Marxism is understanding how such institutions function, adapt and change.

17. "Powers" refer to the effective capacity of people to control the use of means of production, including the capacity to appropriate the results of that use; "rights" refer to the legal enforcement by third parties of those powers.

18. This may not seem to be the standard definition of feudalism as a class structure. Typically feudalism is defined as a class system within which extra-economic coercion is used to force serfs to perform labor for lords, either in the form of direct labor dues or in the form of rents. Here I am treating "direct economic coercion" as an expression of a property right of the lord in the labor power of the serf. This is reflected in the fact that the serf is not free to leave the land of the lord. This is equivalent to the claim that the flight of a serf from the land is a form of theft – stealing labor power partially owned by the lord. For a discussion of this conceptualization of feudalism, see Wright (1985: chapter 3).

19. For a more extensive discussion of these three principles, see Wright (1997:9-19).

20. The fate of indigenous people in North America and South Africa reflects this contrast between non-exploitative economic oppression and exploitation. In both cases indigenous people were excluded from access to the pivotal resource of their economies – land. And in both cases, by virtue of this exclusion the material welfare of European settlers was advanced at the expense of the indigenous people. The crucial difference between the two settings was that in North America, Native Americas were generally not exploited, whereas in Southern Africa indigenous people were. The result was that genocide was an effective, if morally abhorrent, strategy for dealing with Native American resistence: the white settlers did not need the Native America and thus they could simply be eliminated. Such a strategy is not possible where indigenous people are exploited.

21. The idea of alienation is also often used to describe a situation in which one's life is by impersonal forces -- such as "the market" -- over which one has no control rather than simply by the agency of other people. In this broader sense, one can say that while they are not exploited, capitalists, not just workers, are alienated in capitalism: their lives, like those of workers, may be controlled by "alien" forces – the market, competitive pressures, inflation, etc. The idea of alienation is also not exclusively linked to class relations: one can have one's life controlled by forces outside of one's control not simply because of how one is situated within the relations of production, but also because of one's relationship to the state, because of gender relations, etc.

22. For a discussion of the issues involved in coherently incorporating complexity into a concept of class structure, see Wright (1989 – Debates on classes – and 1997 – class counts).

23. The standard argument was that superstructures – particularly the state and ideology – existed to protect the economic base from challenge. Typically this argument took the form of a strong functional explanation in which the form of the superstructure was explained by functional requirement of reproducing the base. We are avoiding the use of the term "superstructure" here because of the tendency for this term to suggest too high a level of integration and coherence among those institutions involved in social reproduction, as well as an image of functional efficiency, which we believe is unjustified. For an important discussion of the explanatory logic of the concept of sueprstructure, see G. A. Cohen (1978; 1988: 155-179).

24. This idea is captured in Marx's famous aphorism: "[People] make their own history, but not just as they choose" – People engage in practices that can transform social relations but under constraints imposed by those social relations.

25. There are some difficult (and murky) metatheoretical issues invoked by the claim that exploitation generates "antagonistic interests" and such interests, in turn, have a tendency to create conflict. The implication of the statement is that the hypothesized antagonism of interests is objectively given irrespective of the subjective understandings of the actors. Many people reject the idea that interests can be in any meaningful sense "objective". The relations themselves may be objectively describable, but the interests of actors only exist as subjective meanings. In any case, the claim here not that antagonistic interests automatically generate conflict but simply that there is a *tendency* for antagonistic interests to generate conflict. It is not clear that this is substantively different from saying that there is a tendency for exploitative relations to generate subjectively antagonistic interests which in turn have a tendency to generate conflicts.

26. It is important to note that one need not accept the normative implications of the concept of "exploitation" to recognize the salience of the problem of the "extraction of labor effort" and the ways in which this generates conflicts and capacities of resistence. This is one of the cental themes in discussions of principal/agent problems in transaction costs approaches to organizations. For a discussion of class and exploitation specifically in terms of principal/agent

issues, see Bowles and Gintis (1990).

27. For discussions of the problem of functional explanations within Marxism, see: Elster ( ), Cohen ( ), other references.

28. In a sense sociological Marxism is *more* – rather than less – like a form of "evolutionary" theory than is historical materialism (the theory of history in classical Marxism). In the theory of biological evolution there is no inherent tendency for biological history to move towards some destiny. Homo sapiens are not the inherent destiny of single celled creatures 3 billion years ago. Rather, the actual trajectory of the development of species is a function of various kinds of dynamic processes combined with contingent events. Historical materialism, in predicting a general tendency for the trajectory of history to follow a particular course, is thus more like a theory of the development of an organism from conception to adulthood than it is like evolutionary theory. For a discussion of the relationship between the logic of social change in historical materialism and evolutionary theory, see Wright, Sober and Levine (1992).

29. For an extended discussion of the ways in which market-like practices emerge to solve supply-side problems in centrally planned state socialism, see Burawoy (Radiant Future).

30. The idea that emancipatory principles can be prefigured within institutions in capitalism reuns counter to the more functionalist versions of sociological Marxism. In the more functionalist versions, all significant, sustainable institutional innovations in capitalist society are viewed as in some sense contributing to stabilizing and securing class relations. While some institutional changes in the state, for example, may make life easier for ordinary people, these are at best palliatives which make capitalism more acceptable and thus more stable. Reforms which have the appearance of being more radical, of posing significant alternatives to capitalism, are either illusions or are quickly undermined and neutralized. If this strongly functionalist view of institutional possibilities is accepted, there is little room for emancipatory ideals to be embodied even prefiguratively in the institutions of capitalist society.