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Source: *Studies in Soviet Thought*, Nov., 1988, Vol. 36, No. 4 (Nov., 1988), pp. 233-250

Published by: Springer

Stable URL: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/20100377>

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MARX, TECHNOCRACY, AND THE CORPORATIST ETHOS

ABSTRACT. Communism, in Marx' mind, did not mean simple liberation, but the economics of liberation. The realm of necessity (*technē*) was to become the primary field for emancipation (*praxis*), the latter taking form in new institutions, responsive to real socio-economic needs. In this sense, the problem of technocracy and the corporatist ethos in Marx are part of a broader discursive structure, which links the experiences of workers through the industrial revolution with the philosophies of *praxis* as they reach from Hegel through Marković.

I. INTRODUCTION

The problem of technocracy is common to political programs which mix the impulse to democratic renewal with the impulse to modernization. That Marxist theory elaborated a formula for liberation is my operating premise: its dialectic moved from exploitation to emancipation. The problem of technocracy in Marxist theory arises when inquiry is made as to how this emancipation is to be achieved.

Karl Marx appreciated the accumulated material wealth and technological expertise of capitalist society. The revolution was, in a sense, a means for their advancement, the foremost advantages of the ascending proletarian order being the productive forces willed to it by the bourgeoisie. In Marx' words, "men never relinquish what they have won."¹ History was not simply the story of class struggle, but thereby the story of successive approximations toward an ever more modern, rational society. What the socialist regime acquired, it was also called upon to transform. Material forces of production (co-operative labor, technology, the factory itself) were to be expropriated by the new proletarian regime in order to abolish capitalist relations of production (wage-labor, commodity exchange). The mastery of one was necessary for the transformation of the other.

The question arises: is the formula for liberation reconcilable with the needs of such a modernizing regime? Reconversion and maintenance, after all, require economic planning, and the organizational and

Studies in Soviet Thought 36 (1988) 233–250.

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technical minds to make it work. Modernization makes necessary a definite authority structure, and a separation of functions within economic life, both of which border on a reproduction of capitalist relations of production, and on a recreation of the division of labor.

Both Jürgen Habermas and Albrecht Wellmer have recently identified the source for such corruption not so much in the peculiar characteristics of the modernizing regime, as in Marx' own "positivistic" reliance on instrumental action as the primary means to liberation. Or as Wellmer has written, the "intellectual-historic (*geistesgeschichtlich*) origin for the technocratic corruption of socialism" can be found in "latent features of Marx' own theory".²

To read Marx with such unintended consequences and latent features in mind makes for a selective and accusatory reading, without proper regard for the full dimensions of his emancipatory dialectic. For the problem of technocracy in Marx, as we define it here, is not co-equivalent with the problem of technocracy in the modernizing socialist regime, as we find it in history. Marx' fictional regime, propelled by advanced capitalist development, does not share the peculiar needs of the historical regime, burdened with low material development, and therefore with the primary tasks of accumulation, industrialization, urbanization, depoliticization.

Moreover, for all of Habermas' theses to the contrary, Marx' philosophical assumptions may be said to imply a fusion between labor and interaction, instrumental and communicative action — a conjecture which we will explore in this essay. Marx may have been negligent or naive about the cost of putting his ideal into practice,³ but this fault does not deprive the ideal itself of its internal coherency.

The task of this article is to discriminate between Marx' varied images on the nature of work and public power, matching his rationale for a new technocracy with his greater democratic vision. We will define in what sense, long before Thorsten Veblen,⁴ Marx elaborated his own notion of a proletarian technocracy. Both men may have understood capitalism as an outmoded system, as a fetter upon the productive capacities of the mechanical engineer, the factory manager, and industrial worker. The skills required of Veblen's technocrat, in fact, were the same as the skills required of the public functionary in Marx' future Communist society. Yet Veblen's limited concept of a new

bourgeois technocracy was designed to replace the failed capitalist entrepreneur in the field of industrial production, not to replace the system of commodity exchange as a whole. Ultimately, Marx sought to achieve efficient order in society by way of democratization of both the workplace and technical knowledge. Veblen wanted to make a better product; Marx a better man.

II. CAPITALISM

Marx was, at best, ambivalent toward capitalism, for it simultaneously promoted advances in technology and the “variation of labour” (within the factory), as well as “the reckless squandering of labour-power”. Given the fixed pursuit of profit, the worker was reduced to a level of bare existence. Capitalism’s rationalizing tendencies, its technological and organizational advances, were limited to the sphere of the enterprise, where all energy was directed to the maximization of profit. The great potentials of the working class and the stores of the world’s natural resources (beyond those necessary to the capitalist entrepreneur) were left either exploited or unused. He sought to overcome this contradiction through the “optimum use of the social productive forces”, by moving from the sphere of “private rationality to rationality on a social scale, to social economic rationality”.⁵ *This* is the process which requires careful exegesis.

Marx valued the co-operative association of workers in the modern factory, a form of productive labor which was a constant in history, varying in character and scope with each epoch of production. Co-operative labor was not exclusively a “productive power of capital”, but only appeared in such a guise because it reached its most sophisticated form under capitalism.⁶ He explicitly recognized the contribution of co-operative industrial labor toward the rationalization of economic life. Here was a format which vastly increased the productive output for society while limiting the area of work to the factory itself.⁷

Marx further applauded the constructive powers of industrial organization: “when the worker co-operates in a planned way with others, he strips off the fetters of his individuality and develops the capabilities of his species”.⁸ Indeed, co-operative labor, in the form of the combined working day, in time allowed the worker to shorten his working hours

without subtracting from the total productive output. This was possible because “the combined working day produces a greater number of use-values than an equal sum of isolated working days”, and therefore “diminishes the labour-time necessary for the production of a given useful effect”.⁹ Here was a base upon which Marx would elaborate the economic functions of his developed Communist society.

Co-operative labor was not self-directing. Marx recognized a “function of direction” which emerged “out of the nature of the communal labour process” and which operated in the domain of the workplace, but again *not* as an exclusive operation of the capitalist mode of production.¹⁰ When he explained that — “it is not because he is a leader of industry that man is a capitalist; on the contrary, he is a leader of industry because he is a capitalist” — Marx implied that there was a leader of industry who was not a leader of capitalism. The complexities of operating any factory or any massive public works project simply demanded a directing authority.¹¹

Thus, where there was communal labor there was also communal authority, whose very form depended on the mode of production upon which communal labor operated. We need to highlight, then, the varied images which Marx himself used to express the different forms of authority through history, past and future. The directing authority in capitalist society, for example, was none other than the capitalist himself. He was the maker of co-operative industrial labor: the agent who brought the workers together, uniting them under a common plan and authority. Marx consistently portrayed him as an economic despot, a sovereign will in the field of production.

Co-operative labor and the directing work of the capitalist were not the only functions of the workplace peculiar to the capitalist mode of production. In advanced capitalist society, the capitalist neither labored nor supervised, but was the prototype of Marx’ superfluous man. As the first captain of industry, he eventually cast off not only his primary laboring function, but also delegated his directing function to a special corps of wage-earners, the “officers (managers) and N.C.O.’s (foremen, overseers), who command during the labour process in the name of capital”.¹² Added to this army was a “superior class of workers”, comprised of engineers and mechanics (we presume), which supervised and maintained plant machinery.¹³ Thus the capitalist mode of produc-

tion, and the corresponding development of the machine and automatic factory, promoted not only an exploited and dehumanized stratum of workers, but elevated at least part of that class to a higher place in the industrial order. If some workers were posted directly at the machines, while others were thrown out of work altogether, still others became managers of a kind, charged with the responsibility to supervise over this half-human, half-metal machine.

We might even consider these latter workers as members of a technocratic caste, distinguishable by their special application of *technē*, meaning organizational or technical skill, to the methods and modes of work. This technocratic caste was remarkable not only because it made its appearance under the despotism of the capitalist employer, but because this appearance signalled the very obsolescence of that capitalist, and the emerging technical and managerial competencies of the workers themselves.

If Marx' proletarian technocracy first began to function under capitalist production, we need ask: to what economic class do these technocrats belong? The answer has enormous bearing on the future course of Communist society. In Donald Hodges' estimation, this caste of workers was not at all part of the proletarian class, primarily because it was not exploited. By marking the technocrats as the "higher stratum of the proletariat", Hodges maintained, Marx was either mistaken or misleading.¹⁴ Hodges thereby isolated the technocrats from the proletariat, now a fourth major class, whose distinguishing feature was organizational and technical expertise.

This notion of a fourth great class, and its attendant "bureaucratization of socialism", is a novel and useful methodological tool, a point of departure for exploring the dynamics of later Marxism. Yet Hodges corrected and redefined Marx, with a reading of later Marxists in mind, through a rationale of his own making. Perhaps Marx, who made a reasonable case as to why these managers *were* exploited, should be allowed to speak for himself. The supervisor, after all, received his wages from the workers, just as the workers received their own wages from their own labor. Although derived from the profit of enterprise, Marx defined the wages of superintendance as "independent and completely separate" from both "profit in general" and the "profit of enterprise in particular".¹⁵ The supervisor performed the functions of,

but in no other way possessed capital. The capitalist bought more leisure time for himself precisely by way of exploitation of the supervisor (who received a wage for his special work). The employer simply “devolved” the work of exploitation onto a new wage-earner, whose work it was to exploit.¹⁶

We proceed, then, to one of the central links in the Marxian revolutionary process. Without these superintendants and technical experts as integral parts of the proletariat, Communist society can neither emerge nor ever hope to function. The passages in *Capital* 3:23, in which Marx devoted considerable attention to this managerial stratum, are crucial in defining the shape of Marx’ concept of technocracy. In the space of no less than five pages, he repeated an equal number of times that the work of supervision and management both: (1) arose “from the antithetical character, the domination of capital over labour”; yet, (2) was also a neutral or “particular function arising from the nature of all combined social labour”.¹⁷ The work of technocracy, as we have already defined it, was altogether separable from capital — that is, was peculiar to co-operative labor itself. Marx had saved it for the future.

This logic dictated that supervisory and technical skills began with the capitalist entrepreneur and industrialist, but were delegated, and forever more belonged, to the proletariat. In Marx’ mind, the future course of historical development depended on the certainty that the supervisor and technician, originally serving the capitalist, would now serve the proletariat. They were the advance guard of Communist society: the first proletarians who knew a measure of fulfillment, and who would prepare the way for the proletarian class, as a whole, to receive the benefits of technical knowledge. The manager and technician of capitalist society predated the more complete man of the Communist future.

III. SOCIALISM AND THE COMMUNE

How did this emerging technocracy change with the advent of the socialist regime? Did Marx continue to advocate the rule of supervisors and technicians in Communist society? Who managed production, and how was it managed, after the political revolution? A few methodologi-

cal distinctions are first necessary in order to introduce the problem, for Marx was ambiguous about defining the format of public power in emerging Communist society. When writing on the conquest of the state, he did not tie the new socialist regime to set political and economic measures.¹⁸ These gaps make analytical reviews such as this all the more worthwhile, for Marx' writings reflect, at times, an astounding lack of directness, highlighting the need to draw out some of his own unstated assumptions.

We must first differentiate between the two primary tasks of the socialist regime: the conquest of the state, and the regulation of labor time. In the lower stage of Communist society (socialism), Marx' emphasis was on self-preservation before self-fulfillment (by the worker, for the worker).¹⁹ The revolution, for its very survival, required men of political (read "party") expertise who would be able to exercise a certain ruthlessness.²⁰ Thus Marx originally proposed the conquest of the bourgeois state, rather than its spontaneous destruction, as the first requirement of the proletarian revolution. The captive state was to defend and advance revolutionary gains by destroying the economic conditions which were at the root of bourgeois politics. Transitional Communist society was imperfect in these ways: it appropriated, in the interests of expediency, some of the forms, functions, and even personnel of capitalist society.

The qualitative difference between managerial and technical functions in the transitional phase, as apart from developed Communist society, is instructive. In transitional socialist society, the technocrat was involved in the reconversion process, and therefore was imbued with the politics of expediency. Such tasks matched poorly with the more sophisticated functions of the future technocrat. If public authority in the socialist regime was an expedient, public authority in developed Communist society was structural. The socialist regime, we know, tolerated the program of labor certificates as a substitute for market exchange, a system which allowed men to receive a share of social wealth based on work, not need.²¹ Future Communist society, with its higher task of regulation of labor time according to the general plan, could not accept such a compromise and still be true to itself.

Marx was not averse to enlisting the aid of former bourgeois, of whatever talents, in the service of the revolution.²² Class composition

was at a breaking point, with bourgeois elements continuously joining the proletariat, whether by enlightened decision or by economic necessity. This development was both inevitable (the proletariat can be re-educated only so fast) and desirable (the first mission is self-preservation).²³ One is even tempted to conclude, given the famous passage in *The Communist Manifesto* which describes the proletarian dictatorship,²⁴ that Marx simply recast the co-operative labor and directing authority of *Capital* into different roles, now subservient to the needs of the socialist regime. This is a valid assessment. Great care, however, must be taken in the interpretation, for this recreation of roles did not mean a reproduction of capitalist relations of production, nor a capitalism without capitalists (two fashionable labels). Marx put the co-operative and directing functions of production to use for socialist gains only so as to begin to eradicate the fetters and wastefulness of capitalism, which accompanied 'progress', and which were but obstacles in man's ascent to a more rational form of social organization. The tasks of the socialist regime were not simply to finish the job of industrialization and modernization begun by the capitalist (requiring industrial armies and state controls), but to begin to liberate the working masses from illiteracy and poverty (requiring land, agricultural, and educational reform). The whole scheme of Marx' proletarian dictatorship makes most sense not in terms of dispossession and levelling, but in terms of the general elevation of living standards, and of an ever-widening circle of popular participation in the life of the state.

Marx' democratic credentials do not need to be belabored here. Such a public work as *The Civil War in France* of 1870—1871 (sometimes underestimated as eminently opportunistic), or the more personal 'Notes on Bakunin's *State and Anarchism*' of 1874—1875 should dispel any doubts as to Marx' democratic intentions. These works provide sufficient evidence that Marx considered the "expansive political form" of the democratic republic as the sole legitimate basis for the dictatorship of the proletariat. This juxtaposition was proper to Marx' mind because dictatorship was not narrow and partisan, but majoritarian and class-based, one in which responsibilities were delegated, from the bottom up, by way of the democratic republic. "The whole people will govern and there will be no one to be governed." The

basis of the democratic republic was to be election by universal suffrage, although now purged of all original bourgeois stigmas.²⁵

Although the workers' state "begins with the self-government of the Commune", it ends with what Marx called the neutral "administrative functions" assumed by a new managerial group (Bakunin's "despotism of a governing minority"). The tenor of Marx' 'Notes' reveals that he did not fear the exercise of authority in the future Communist regime, or the simple division of labor by technical definition. Once class society and bourgeois politics had been abolished, Marx understood that there would be: "(1) no governmental function; (2) the distribution of general functions has become a business matter which does not afford any room for domination; (3) the election has none of its present political character".²⁶ The *Manifesto* further states that where there was once a bourgeois state, there would now be merely a "new superintendence of production", functioning above a "vast association of the whole nation" — but a superintendence nonetheless!²⁷

In order to keep transitional administrators from creating a permanent division of labor for themselves (Hodge's fourth great class), Marx and Engels were prudent enough to approve of "elective, responsible, and revocable" status for the new functionaries. The "parasitic excrescence" of the bourgeois state was an organ superimposed on society; the new state was to be an organ completely subordinate to it. State officials, as delegates from various local assemblies (presumably to be organized by both locality and enterprise), were not only to be chosen by the people by way of universal suffrage, but were to "be at any time revocable and bound by the *mandat impératif* (formal instructions)".²⁸ This notion of formal instructions may be understood not only as a principle of accountability, but as a principle of workers' self-management as well. Formal instructions would give workers a real policy-making role.

From draft to draft, there was no compromise in *The Civil War in France*. As a whole, it represented this historical socialist regime as "the direct antithesis" of the old central government of France, now replaced by a "self-government of producers", one in which "united co-operative societies" would "regulate national production upon a common plan". The government was limited to a number of corporate functions — "real business" matters of "how to put the right man in the right place",

within a range of achievable economic goals.²⁹ Were the functions of this transitional regime premature? The whole scheme of workers' democracy may seem to be too delicate to withstand the stresses of the first years of revolutionary transformation (when politics continued with considerable intensity). Yet we need to recall that Marx was not so much speculating into the future as applauding a historical reality, and not without some flourishes of his own. He was not unmindful, even in *The Civil War in France*, that the revolution must pass through "long struggles" and protracted "historic processes".

No other statements offer better proof of Marx' wide field of vision (and of his ultimate goals) than do his views on education, for one of the primary functions of the socialist regime, as insurance on the future, was the work of re-education. In the first years of the socialist regime, he de-emphasized the need for a traditional education, calling instead for the establishment of technical-vocational schools (the "combination of education with industrial production"). Technical education was to become the mainstay of socialist education.³⁰ How could Marx, who was so intent on liberating man from the horrors of the automatic factory, write in such a way? Perhaps the notion was fully in line with his dialectical process from exploitation to emancipation, as here defined, and not inconsistent with what we might call the emergence of a new technocracy in developed Communist society.

IV. COMMUNISM

Although Marx did not criticize the riches and use-values which serve man, he did criticize the values of exchange which man was made to serve under capitalist exploitation. By abolishing the system of commodity exchange, meaning the impersonal "material relations between persons and social relations between things", he sought to promote the "direct social relations between individuals at work".³¹ Market relations were now to be supplanted by a common plan of production and distribution. Marx' object was to match human needs with human talents, so as to fulfill personal expectations of both: inequalities of skill were to serve equality of condition. Yet when he sought to replace "the *wealth* and *poverty* of political economy" with "the *rich human being* and the *rich human need*", Marx expressed much more than an

idealistic vision of the future.³² The concept of rich human being meeting rich human need, expressed so well in 1844, corresponds precisely with a later construction from 1875, which really amounts to a whole new economics: "From each according to his ability; to each according to his needs!"³³

This new economics was not a haphazard system of voluntary give and take. In the "higher phase of Communist society" of which Marx wrote, there was to be no room for waste (as with that of the labor certificate system). The first priority of Communist planners was to regulate labor time, which in turn would determine the amount of productive output to be used to meet social needs. In other words, labor time's "apportionment in accordance with a definite social plan maintains the correct proportion between the different functions of labor and the various needs of workers' associations". Marx hesitated to speculate as to precisely how labor time in particular, and the production and distribution of goods in general, would be apportioned in developed Communist society.³⁴ He made room, then, within the realm of the general economic plan (central planning), for autonomous decision-making at lower levels (workers' self-management). As several economists have elaborated, however, the general plan took precedence, with which all lower level decisions need be in correspondence.³⁵

Such economics called, moreover, for new cadres of public functionaries: planners to determine the overall capacities and needs of society; perhaps even lesser administrators to assign production quotas and distribute the "total social product"; technicians and engineers to ensure the proper application of scientific-technical knowledge; and finally, the bookkeeper.³⁶ As a legacy from the accounting complexities of the commodity exchange system (the producing, buying, selling, and pricing of goods), bookkeeping became even more important a function in Communist society, where a precise recording of the production and distribution of goods would ensure the proper socio-economic equilibrium. If capitalist bookkeeping allowed capitalist man to maximize profits, socialist bookkeeping allowed socialist man to maximize use. Bookkeeping was not a police function of the state planners, but a service function of the new regime, ensuring not so much "order", as the certainty that needs would be met and that jobs could be had.

There was more to the regulation of labor time than simply meeting

human needs. For the task of Communist man was also to minimize labor time. The less time necessary for society to produce meant more time open for individuals to pursue more creative, intellectual activities.³⁷ Still, there was a Sisyphean task to all living: “the realm of freedom really begins only where labor determined by necessity and external expediency ends.” These were constant and universal distinctions. Man could not escape from doing battle against space and time, confronting and mastering nature. This was not a curse, but precisely the way to self-liberation and fulfillment.³⁸ When Marx wrote about Communism in such a way, he really was no longer thinking in terms of the whole revolutionary process, from capitalism to socialism to Communism, but in terms of daily life and its fixed concern, the realm of necessity. Where there was a realm of necessity, there was also a mode of production, and therefore both co-operative labor (or the fully automated factory) and the supervisory function. In line with Marx’ general statements on its transitoriness,³⁹ Communism was not so much concerned with the realm of freedom, which was each individual’s concern, as with the realm of need, the way men economized in society. Communism was not liberation itself, but the economics of liberation: how the working day was shortened, in the most rational and humane way.

In view of this interpretation, Marx advocated a technocracy even for the distant future (given an exact definition of terms). I say this not with the history of later Marxism in mind, but with the conscious constraints of Marx’ own theory as support. The technocratic label need not consign Marx to the role of unknowing apologist for a “new class”, for technocracy may be understood to denote the new authority in Communist society, one which was derived from the free association of men and women and one which served not itself (as the capitalist served himself), but served a higher rationality, the common plan as such.

According to Marx’ own criteria (*Capital* 3: 23), technocracy was the only viable authority structure for Communist society: not invested from above, but chosen (and receiving its wages) from below. His emancipatory plan did not lead to a plain democracy, but to an economic democracy, requiring managers and technicians, over and above free association (where there is co-operative labor, there is also a

function of superintendence). Economic democracy is co-equivalent with technocracy, where a managerial group, perhaps periodically rotated by function, properly regulates labor time.

Indeed, as long as man still participated in some way in the direct production process, Marx still made a remarkable distinction between the different strata of workers, a distinction which had its source in the earlier dichotomy between co-operative labor and the directing function: workers who were “being formed” (be they young or old), as against those who were “already formed”. Whereas the first group of workers found “discipline” in labor (through obedience), the latter group found labor, the direct production process, to be “materially creative”, an arena in which to practice skills and upon which to apply the “accumulated wisdom of society” (which they had as their special countenance).⁴⁰ Marx offered his readers a glimpse here of none other than combined social labor and the particular function of supervision in *Communist* society.

This later technocracy did not imply dominion, but presumed the general elevation of men to a higher standard of technical and intellectual development. Such a prospect appeared benign to Marx precisely because of the potential for development which he assumed in the working class. Fully developed and self-reliant workers, after all, would have little to fear from managers. This was a level of progress, moreover, which was only completely realizable with the full-scale automation of the factory. The most challenging task for man was not to reduce the labor time of society to a minimum by organizational means, but to reduce man’s direct involvement in the production process altogether, by application of technical and scientific knowledge (intellectual labor). With full-scale automation, the realm of necessity was restricted to an even simpler process of regulation: “watching and supervising the production process”. In an automated workplace, man would no longer be worked upon by the productive process, but would “exist alongside” it. Work itself would be transformed into a self-activating and, to some degree, enjoyable activity, meaning the “appropriation by man of his own productive force, his understanding of nature and the mastery of it; in a word, the development of the social individual”.⁴¹

In developed Communist society, one need not fear the technocrat,

just as one need never fear the conductor of an orchestra. For the mode of production which made the conductor necessary, made the supervisor necessary as well (*Capital* 1:14, 3:23). The conductor served music and, in concert with his musicians, drew out their developed talents. Similarly, the fully-developed Communist man, call him a technocrat, served the general plan and, in free association with other men, allowed for the optimal use for labor time in the service of creative leisure. The application of one's *technē* to that end was surely one of the highest functions within Communist society. Or as Marx wrote in *Grundrisse*: "Really free labour, the composing of music for example", was "damned serious" work. Mastery over nature's "obstacles" through work, when carried out according to the social labor process and by application of scientific methods, itself amounted to "an exercise in liberty". As long as one was engaged in confronting and mastering nature, meaning one's own person ultimately, the result was "the self-realisation and objectification of the subject, therefore real freedom, whose activity is precisely labour".⁴² Marx hereby articulated the key premise of his philosophy of *praxis*, on the unity of the subject and object, which has been reaffirmed by thinkers spanning from Giovanni Gentile to Mihailo Marković.⁴³

In Marx' mind, *technē* was the primary field for *praxis*, a formula which follows necessarily from the fusing of manual and intellectual labor, and from technological progress itself. Conventional scholarship defines Marx in terms of distinctions: *technē* versus *praxis*, structure versus superstructure, instrumental versus communicative action, the realm of necessity versus the realm of freedom, the new economics versus the new democracy. Yet life does not reflect such neat categories, nor did Marx work with them in mind. Emancipation, after all, can begin only with control over the forces and relations of production. Control in this sense leads to the recovery of both a participatory and an intellectual component for laborers, allowing for both more efficient modes of production and increased creative time. *Praxis* cannot be posited in the politics of transition nor in Party organization alone, both of which serve the proletariat, but which do not define Communist society. Marx located *praxis*, or what we might call the totality of participation, in the workplace itself, and in the co-operative associations of producers in particular. The elusive problem of the identification of the subject-object finds resolution precisely in the new forms of organi-

zation and management which Marx envisaged for the workplace. Or as Alvin Gouldner has written: “Marxist socialism is the political economy of the ‘identical Subject-Object’.”⁴⁴

These problems of technocracy in Marxist theory call us back, ultimately, to the experiences of workers through the industrial revolution, and to the productivist mentality which informed socialist writings of the day. In William Sewell’s estimation, Marxism was partially informed by a dynamic “corporate idiom”, which was defined and redefined throughout the early 1800’s, particularly by the Revolutions of 1848.⁴⁵ We need, ultimately, to retrieve a sense of this mental world in which Marx lived and worked, one in which the productivist ethos fused with the democratic ethos to make for a novel plan for liberation, what we might tentatively call *corporate Communism*.

V. CONCLUSION

My primary purpose in this article has been to define the limits of a Marxian concept of proletarian technocracy, a task undertaken in order to rediscover the authority relationships which were proper to Marx. Many of the authoritarian images which have been thrust upon him have been accidents of history — accidents of the people with whom he lived (Bakunin), and accidents of the people who followed him (the organization men and planners in Lenin and Stalin). It is just as unfair to measure Marx against the Bakuninist critique,⁴⁶ before which no man is safe, as against the words of later Marxists who interpreted him. Marx’ own terminology presents obstacles as well. If, after all, *The German Ideology* and the *Critique of the Gotha Programme* attacked the bourgeois notions of “free labour” and of “free state” as both chaotic and capricious, was not authoritarian central planning the obvious Marxist alternative?⁴⁷

To read Marx as an authentic thinker requires an exercise in detachment, in order to grasp the all-important premise, which the “*vulgus* cannot conceive” — namely “that forms developed in the womb of the capitalist mode of production may be separated and liberated from their antithetical capitalist character”.⁴⁸ This statement, together with the passages that accompany it, meant that the managerial stratum was salvageable. We might even mark it as the key productive force in the

revolutionary process — the one without which Communist society could not maintain itself. Technocracy was to function as an economic democracy. The optimum use of productive means, which meant extending economic and educational opportunity to the masses, required optimal people. This perplexing formula translated, in Marx' mind, into a functioning corporate structure: one of freely associated workers' co-operatives necessarily delegating authority to those persons among them best capable of administering the socio-economic plan, the "business" of production and distribution. Marx did not fear this corporate prospect. What the conductor was to his orchestra, the manager was to communal labor. One in enlightened service to a musical score; the other in service to the rational life.⁴⁹

NOTES

¹ Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *Selected Correspondence, 1846–1895*, trans. Dora Torr, Greenwood Press, Westport, Conn., 1975, p. 8 (Letter of 28 December 1846 to P. V. Annenkov).

² Albrecht Wellmer, *Critical Theory of Society*, trans. John Cumming, Herder/Herder, New York, 1971, p. 64. See also Jürgen Habermas, *Knowledge and Human Interests*, trans. Jeremy Shapiro, Beacon, Boston, 1971, pp. 25–42.

³ Henri Lefebvre has termed the Marxist dialectic as "an optimistic hypothesis, the expression of a nineteenth-century industrial rationalism", and as a belief in "a more or less continuous growth in the ability of modern societies to control nature". Henri Lefebvre, *The Survival of Capitalism: Reproduction of the Relations of Production*, trans. Frank Bryant, St. Martin's Press, New York, 1976, pp. 14, 45. Informed by the writings of Jacques Ellul, Herbert Marcuse, and Jürgen Habermas, we too often underestimate this optimistic industrial rationalism as either implausible or uncharacteristic.

⁴ The following comparisons are drawn from Veblen's classic account: *The Engineers and the Price System*, Viking Press, New York, 1940 (reprint of the 1921 edition).

⁵ Oscar Lange, *Political Economy*, trans. A. H. Walker, Pergamon Press, Oxford, 1963, pp. 175–177.

⁶ Karl Marx, *Capital: a Critique of Political Economy*, intro. by Ernest Mandel and trans. by Ben Fowkes, vol. 1, Vintage Books, New York, 1977, pp. 451–453.

⁷ "This simultaneous restriction of space and extension of effectiveness, which allows a large number of incidental expenses (*faux frais*) to be spared, results from the massing together of workers and of various labour processes, and from the concentration of the means of production". *Ibid.*, pp. 446–447.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 447.

⁹ *Loc. cit.*

¹⁰ Marx, *Capital*, vol. 1, pp. 450–451.

¹¹ “All directly social or communal labour on a large scale requires, to a greater or lesser degree, a directing authority, in order to secure the harmonious co-operation of the activities of individuals, and to perform the general functions that have their origin in the motion of the total productive organism, as distinguished from the motion of its separate organs. A single violin player is his own conductor; an orchestra requires a separate one”. *Ibid.*, p. 448. Just as objectification did not equate with alienation in Marx’ mind, nor did the directing function equate with industrial despotism.

¹² *Ibid.*, pp. 450–451.

¹³ *Ibid.*, pp. 545–546.

¹⁴ Donald C. Hodges, *The Bureaucratization of Socialism*, University of Massachusetts Press, Boston, 1981, pp. 18–63.

¹⁵ Marx, *Capital*, vol. 3, p. 507.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 511–514.

¹⁷ Marx, *Capital*, vol. 3, pp. 507–511.

¹⁸ “What is to be done immediately at a given moment in the future depends entirely on the historical circumstances”. *The Letters of Karl Marx*, selected and trans. by Saul K. Padover, Prentice Hall, Englewood Cliffs, N.J., 1979, pp. 333–335.

¹⁹ Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *The German Ideology*, International Press, New York, 1947, p. 66.

²⁰ Such a requirement explains the rejoinder to Kugelman, of 12 April 1871: that all “honourable scrupulosity” must be dispensed with by the central committee of the Paris Commune if its work was to proceed effectively. Marx and Engels, *Selected Correspondence*, p. 309.

²¹ From *Critique of the Gotha Programme*, in Robert Tucker (ed.), *The Marx-Engels Reader*, second edition, W. W. Norton, New York, 1970, p. 530.

²² *The Communist Manifesto* in *ibid.*, p. 481.

²³ The Soviets, some years later, likened their own “technical intelligentsia” of engineers, technicians, and agronomists as a similar neutral class bloc: the great swing vote of the revolution. In the Soviet view, the primary need was to persuade it to join the proletariat proper in its leading role of “Socialist re-education”. See V. M. Molotov, ‘The Technical Intelligentsia and Socialist Construction’, in *Technocracy and Marxism*, Workers’ Library Publishers, New York, 1933, pp. 14–32.

²⁴ Tucker, *Reader*, p. 490.

²⁵ Karl Marx, *Selected Writings*, ed. David McLellan, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1977, pp. 562–563.

²⁶ *Loc. cit.*

²⁷ *The Communist Manifesto*, in Tucker, *Reader*, pp. 490–498.

²⁸ Hal Draper (ed.), *Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels: Writings on the Paris Commune*, Monthly Review Press, New York, 1971, p. 69.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 74.

³⁰ *The Communist Manifesto*, in Tucker, *Reader*, p. 40.

³¹ Marx, *Capital*, vol. 1, pp. 165–166.

³² In Communist society, “Not only wealth, but likewise the poverty of man — given socialism — receives in equal measure a *human* and therefore social significance. Poverty is the passive bond which causes the human being to experience the need of the greatest wealth — the *other* human being”. *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts*, in Tucker, *Reader*, p. 91.

³³ *The Critique of the Gotha Programme*, in Tucker, *Reader*, p. 531. On the Marxian economics of liberation, see Agnes Heller, *The Theory of Need in Marx*, St. Martin's Press, New York, 1976, pp. 121–125.

³⁴ “The way this division is made will vary”, he wrote, “with the particular kind of social organization of production and the corresponding level of social development attained by the producers”. Marx, *Capital*, vol. 1, pp. 171–172.

³⁵ See Lange, *Political Economy*, p. 179; and Włodzimerz Brus, *The Economics and Politics of Socialism: Collected Essays*, Routledge and Kegan Paul, London, 1973, p. 66.

³⁶ Marx, *Capital*, vol. 3, p. 590.

³⁷ David McLellan (ed.), *Marx's Grundrisse*, Macmillan, London, 1971, pp. 75–76.

³⁸ Marx expressed his thoughts on the realm of necessity in what was perhaps one of his most forceful statements of purpose: “Freedom, in this sphere, can only consist in this, that socialized man, the associated producers, govern the human metabolism with nature in a rational way, bringing it under their collective control instead of being dominated by it as a blind power; accomplishing it with the least expenditure of energy and in conditions most worthy and appropriate for their human nature. But this always remains a realm of necessity.” Marx, *Capital*, vol. 3, p. 959.

³⁹ *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts*, in Tucker, *Reader*, p. 93; and Marx and Engels, *The German Ideology*, pp. 26, 29.

⁴⁰ McLellan, *Grundrisse*, pp. 148–149.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 141–142.

⁴² *Ibid.*, pp. 123–124.

⁴³ See Giovanni Gentile, *Opere Complete*, vol. 23, *La filosofia di Marx*, Sansoni, Florence, 1955; and Mihailo Marković, *From Affluence to Praxis*, Univ. of Michigan Press, Ann Arbor, 1974, pp. 55–58. See also Richard J. Bernstein, *Praxis and Action*, Univ. of Pennsylvania Press, Philadelphia, 1971, pp. 11–83; and Kostas Axelos, *Alienation, Praxis and Techne in the Thought of Karl Marx*, trans. Ronald Bruzina, Univ. of Texas Press, Austin, 1976.

⁴⁴ Alvin Gouldner, ‘The Metaphoricity of Marxism and the Context-Freeing Grammar of Socialism’, *Theory and Society* 1/4 (Winter 1974), p. 406.

⁴⁵ William Sewell, *Work and Revolution in France: the Language of Labor from the Old Regime to 1848*, Cambridge University Press, New York, 1980, p. 222.

⁴⁶ Paul Thomas has recently begun to disassemble the anarchist critique of Marx: *Karl Marx and the Anarchists*, Routledge and Kegan Paul, London, 1980, p. 348.

⁴⁷ Paul Craig Roberts and Matthew A. Stephenson argue just this point, that “planning emerges as the single defining organizational characteristic of Marxian socialism or communism”; *Marx's Theory of Exchange, Alienation, and Crisis*, Praeger, New York, 1983, pp. 24–31.

⁴⁸ Marx, *Capital*, vol. 3, p. 511.

⁴⁹ My thanks to Bruce Douglass, Georgetown University, who directed the first phases of research and writing.

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