

Marxism Exploded*

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I chose as my title "Marxism Exploded." Forgive me first of all for its extreme triteness, because the majority of those here know that Marxism exploded a long time ago. If I have kept this title, it is because it seems to me that there is still something more to say about this explosion, both to say and to discover. Moreover, although Marxism has already exploded, Marxist triumphalism has nonetheless not disappeared. Of course, in the Eastern countries they assert that Marxism as a theory or an ideology reigns uncontested in the world today, but this triumphalism exists in France as well. In this respect, I remember an article by Poulantzas which appeared in the *Observateur* not long ago, in which he said that Marxism reigned, that Marxism has triumphed. Certain Maoists say also that there is no longer any ideology in the world other than the proletarian or socialist, that bourgeois ideology has disappeared, has broken down. These appraisals are very

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debatable, given that precisely at this moment everything points to the scale being weighted on the other side, as if the Marxist fortress were besieged from all sides. Tendencies toward the pure and simple liquidation of Marxist thought are not new. In fact, we have witnessed several attempts of this kind since the beginning of the century. A pure and simple liquidation is extremely difficult to bring about. One cannot liquidate, declare null and void, erase the existence of, or relegate to archeology, an ideology adopted by more than a billion people, either consciously or institutionally. A more careful examination of the question is in order. Moreover, if I understand it correctly, the polemic has only begun. A certain number of works are being prepared for the opening of the upcoming season in which Marx will be attacked personally. They will note that he was a somewhat antisemitic Jew, that he slept with his maid, and so forth. I feel very strongly that something of a very low level is in the offing. On the other hand, the doctrinal attack continues. I have heard this formula that I find quite felicitous: Marxism, infantile disorder of capitalism. We should bear that in mind!

That explosion is now over and trivialized. When did it happen? How? Why? The dogmatism was of such a rigidity that an explosion was inevitable. There was, moreover, no accommodation possible. I recall, in passing, that we had talked much too much about dogmatism as though it were an ideological question. Now dogmatism really has no importance unless it is enforced by the police, something which always happens. There is no dogmatism without police to tend to it and to handle all the ideological and theoretical questions. Without that, dogmatism is not very important. It's simply the tendency toward absolute affirmations which crops up in the history of any thought. Thus, the appearance of dogmatism does not mark the date of the explosion. During the most dogmatic period, that is, of Stalinism, we suffered much embarrassment, much anxiety, those of us who worked from this orientation. Thus, I was told many times during the Stalinist period: "Dead Marxism, that is you!" Stalin was "the living Marxism, the creator." I remember having some marvel-

ous conversations on this subject with Jean Kanapa, at the present time a leader of the French C. P., whose political career was made possible by Stalinism. From that time on there was an explosion, however well or poorly hidden. That distinction between a dead Marxism, which was concerned with the texts, which attempted to reestablish Marx's thought, and a "living Marxism" which had created, in contrast to the thought of Marx, a state with exceptional strength, that itself was a certain kind of explosion. But the historical compromise is much older, dating back to before the First World War, before Social Democracy; I myself trace it back to Ferdinand Lassalle. Berlinguer's historical compromise was not so different from that of Lassalle when he made his deals with Bismarck, that is, when he agreed to locate himself within the existing state, with the objective thereby of transforming it. The neo-Marxists don't realize that they are Lassallians. Indeed, the Lassallian current has always been very deep and very powerful against or within Marxism. That represented already an explosion. As for Marxism-Leninism, we know enough about this subject to understand that on a certain number of points, Leninism is a patching-up of an already splintering Marxism and that, for example, on the peasant question, the contribution of Leninism was eventually to fill some of the gaps in Marx's thought that Marx at the end of his life had himself tried to fill. I've recalled many times that at the end of his life, Marx's thought was a thought with three broad terms: land, labor, and capital, although even in *Capital* one sees only two terms, proletariat and bourgeoisie. At the end of Marx's life, the third term had been fully restored in his thought. But Lenin went further, and since there was a void concerning the agrarian question, he filled it.

However, in 1914 the working class in Europe had already been defeated, purely and simply because it did not succeed in preventing the war. The Second International went into cold storage throughout the war. This war took place, and the working class, which had undertaken, implicitly or explicitly, through all sorts of tribunes and theorists, to avert the war, did not succeed in doing so. That was another defeat, a splintering,

and since 1917 the separation between theory and practice has been evident. In 1917 Lenin wrote *The State and Revolution*, where one finds those famous expressions that I never cease to quote, because famous as they are, they are constantly forgotten: The state in the proletarian revolution, the state in the socialist revolution, is a state that is withering away, which cannot *not* wither away, which has already begun to wither away. In fact, the strengthening and consolidation of the state occurred immediately, under Lenin himself, then Stalin. The separation between theory and practice is overwhelming (*éclatant*) if I may say so; hence the explosion (*éclatement*) had already begun in political practice with the war itself, and within Marxism between theory and practice with the October Revolution—this Soviet Revolution which was to reduce the Soviets to so small a role.

Let's consider the term Marxism itself. We should, I believe, erase it from our vocabulary. The term Marxism already contains within it all the dogmatism. The tenor of the term is dogmatic. *In fact, there is no such thing as Marxism.* Marxism does not exist. But it has so penetrated our vocabulary that it would be extremely difficult to alter the connotations of this term. There is no Marxism! There are a certain number of concepts put forth by Marx which constitute a "theory", but Marxism as a system does not exist. So much is this so that these concepts, which are linked in terms of the economy—exchange value, use value, organic composition of capital, etc.—these concepts leave entirely open the political problem. If one takes them by themselves, one systemizes them and they lead to economism, but in Marx's thought, if one follows it in its dynamics, these concepts remain open in terms of political problems. They pose the problems, but leave them to be resolved by action. There is no theory of the state in Marx; there are hints of one, but no real theory.

There is no Marxism; there are *several* Marxisms! I'd even go so far as to say that the Sino-Soviet schism is not a schism within Marxism, but rather that there is a Chinese Marxism and a Soviet Marxism. And in the same way, there is an Italian Marxism and a French Marxism and other Marxisms in other

countries. These are tendencies, schools of thought, if one wants to call them such. But Marxism is to be expunged from our vocabulary. All the more so since one should include whatever has been labeled “Marxism” in a much vaster, global movement. In fact, I believe that the transformation of the modern world began toward the middle of the nineteenth century, that is with industrialization and the consolidation of a new type of state, and that it was subject to opposing theoretical expressions and formulations. There was immediately established a right and a left of the revolutionary movement, of the workers’ movement, and the theorists who situated themselves on the left—this is not always clear—formed part of this movement (I’m talking about Bakunin). The theorists who situated themselves or were situated on the right, like Lassalle, also formed part of this movement. I think that at the end of the nineteenth century one must take Marx, Lassalle, and Bakunin as three distinct, and indeed opposed and contradictory, expressions of the same overall movement.

As you can see, I’ve done everything possible so that Marxism would explode. I’ve gone as far as to contest its very name. In the global movement one sees the appearance of all sorts of expressions, of attempts at theoretical formulations. When one speaks of Marxism and thereby tries to exclude such and such from Marxism, this step seems to me both childish and old-fashioned. To say that Marxism is Lenin and not Rosa Luxemburg, to say that Rosa Luxemburg is not a Marxist, is a bad joke. To attack this person or that, and to say that this one is Marxist and the other one isn’t, seems to me a bad methodology, a bad line of thought. The correct line of thought is to situate the works and the theoretical or political propositions within the global movement of the transformation of the modern world.

As far as my own work is concerned, I’ve believed for a long time that what I do, what I write is totally outside the framework of what is called “Marxism”. To try to extricate the concept of the *everyday*, of *everyday life* does not enter precisely into the framework of what is usually called Marxism. And I’ve certainly been told that! For example, emphasis on

the concept of *difference* is certainly not in Marx! On the contrary, it contradicts a great number of Marx's texts which attempted to bring about a certain homogeneity—not that of the political state, but that of labor, industrial labor—a worldwide homogeneity.

Now I would like to determine in a more precise fashion the internal causes and reasons for Marxism's explosion, as well as the external causes and reasons. We must understand that the internal and external are only arbitrarily separate and that these two contradictions are convergent and not separable. We've known for a long time that dialectical materialism, both the dialectic and the materialism, historical materialism, does not form this monolithic unity that used to be celebrated in Stalin's time. Already with materialism and with dialectic, there were fissures which have existed for a very long time, but which dogmatism camouflaged. As for the relationship between historical materialism and dialectical materialism, it is problematical. I won't belabor this point. The important thing is to remember that there are a certain number of Marx's texts in which he says that the growth of the productive forces is incompatible with capitalist relations of production—these are even the texts most frequently cited. Here we face our first problem. There is a growth of productive forces with capitalism. The texts are belied by the facts. But there are other texts of Marx which are much more ambiguous on the subject of growth and the possibilities of growth within the framework of capitalist relations of production. Still, the clearest texts say that capitalist relations of production impede the augmentation of the forces of production. But this is linked to a more general problem, that of the accumulation of capital. I believe that Rosa Luxemburg was profoundly right to show that the conceptual reasoning in Marx not only does not explain the accumulation of capital, but renders it difficult to understand. When Rosa Luxemburg declared that in the canonical formula, the famous market value formula, created value = constant capital (C) + variable capital (V) + surplus value (S)—the canonical formula which has never been refuted and which is moreover impossible to refute because it's almost tautolog-

ical—the quantity V goes to the working class, and since the working class can not purchase more than V , how then, she asks, can S be realized? That's the problem with the realization of surplus value. In order to have accumulation of capital, according to Marx himself, it is necessary to have a realization of surplus value, and the manner in which he poses the problem renders the realization of surplus value inconceivable. The problem of the growth of productive forces in the capitalist means of production is thus one aspect of the problem which is larger than that of the accumulation of capital, which is laid out unconditionally by Rosa Luxemburg, and which has brought about, and must bring about, a certain reconsideration of the theory itself. The accumulation of capital is doubly impossible if one restricts himself to Marx and to what Marx said about the logical connections of the concepts, first of all, on capitalist relations of production, then on the question of the realization of surplus value. This is my first point.

There is a second point. I would like to recall the fate of alienation. To be sure, this concept (which is perhaps more a figure of speech than a concept) has no theoretical, epistemological status. It represents incredible pedantry to raise the question of its epistemological status for a concept, a metaphor, or even a figure of speech that has played so important a role in the consciousness and in the knowledge of concrete conditions, that is, in the passage from the lived to the conceived. I think that the campaign against the concept of alienation comes from epistemological pedantry and a kind of scientific and positivistic rigidity, which furthermore strips Marxist thought of some of its dimensions. What is noteworthy here (and here I am being provocative) is that this concept, or alleged concept, or pseudo-concept, or metaphor, or figure of speech, with all its vagueness, was the very leaven of Marxist thought. The leaven was thrust into the obscurity of reality—but whose reality? Not only that of the working class, but also that of women, of youth, of colonized people, in order to make them conscious and aware of the situation as they lived it, but did not yet conceive it. Alienation was the intermediary

between the blind reality, even that of the working class, and the more clear conception.

The same is true of the concept of *ideology*. There is nothing more difficult to define than ideology. This is so true that in *The German Ideology* the term ideology is treated in an extremely unfavorable fashion, whereas in Lenin it is treated in such a favorable manner that Lenin talks about revolutionary ideology, of socialist ideology, of proletarian ideology. This means that the concept in Lenin has nothing to do with the concept in Marx. Only the world is the same. Monolithism, the unity of Marxist thought, had already exploded. Moreover, through Lenin and his extreme confusion about ideology, the concept has spread, drifted like a trail of smoke, to the point where it has been adopted more or less everywhere, despite its ambiguity, and this makes it comparable to the concept of alienation.

I would say the same thing about *dialectics*. We have a lot of trouble with dialectics. Logic itself is defined forcefully, powerfully. Who doesn't talk about logic? Who doesn't have his own logic? Whereas dialectics is much more obscure than logic. It works differently. It works in depth, with all its ambiguities, with all the difficulties of theoretical expression.

We are therefore not concerned with a doctrinal unity, with a unity which positions itself on the plane of the conceived, in the conceived, in the concept. We are concerned with something complex in quite a different way, with quite another aspect. If one looks at Marx's conceptual reasoning, one sees it is economistic. Indeed, Marxism has almost always been economistic, except in the case where one jumped from economics to politics, often in a rather dizzying leap, as in Lenin, and then generally the science is economic and the politics are voluntarist. One "politicizes". The politicization does not come from science, but from the will. One leaps from scientism to politicism. I insist on the fact that there is no political theory in Marx, that there are only hints of one. The clearest are those concerning the dictatorship of the proletariat, this dictatorship that Marx ties obstinately to an extended democracy and to the withering away of the state (a fact which

one has ignored in all the discussions, even the recent ones: one contrasts dictatorship of the proletariat to democracy, one abandons dictatorship of the proletariat to become democratic, whereas for Marx dictatorship of the proletariat *was* democracy and the withering away of the state). In Marx there is only a critical theory of the state. For him the state must wither away and the revolution is the withering away of the state. There is no revolution if there is no withering away of the state, in Marx's view.

Class struggle—but which classes? To the extent that one has taken into account only the working class, one has accentuated the role of the working class, one has created workerism, and the results have not always been very good, and they still aren't. Which classes? If one looks closely, one notices that the question of the middle classes is glossed over in Marx. And worse than the glossing over, he speaks of polarization of society which has not taken place (but there we move on to the external contradictions).

External contradictions, that is, those that come from outside the doctrinal structure. There, we find ourselves confronting an immense failure, the failure to valorize work. Marx (Marx's thought is not simple and he also discovered nonwork) following some theorists of his time, discovered that the machine was destined to suppress labor (which is expressly stated in some texts of the *Grundrisse*). In his writings Marx also defends labor, even manual labor, and he has the idea that one can extract from labor a sense of life, an ethic, and an aesthetics. Thus, the failure is immense, but it is not a simple failure. The failure springs from what great societies, notably the Soviet and Chinese societies, have created under the banner of this idea, or this ideology. From the outside, the failure is enormous. Viewed from within for those who live it, it is much more slowly, very slowly in fact, that they have become conscious of the fact that the valorization of labor is beginning to disappear, for a number of reasons, not only due to theoretical criticism or ideological criticism, but also and especially because of the rise of automation which devalues labor. Not to mention the question of leisure time. That the

society of labor has become one of deceit, of fallaciousness, of leisure, we notice every day. But I observe, in the failure in the ideology of labor, this failure which is not yet acknowledged (far from it), since the valorization has become institutional, even in our own country, I observe that the valorization of labor is collapsing and with it a certain interpretation of "Marxism". Another observation: capitalism has held its own, has transformed itself more than we were told it would, that is, there has been a growth of productive forces. I've participated in some really involved argumentation, some ideological acrobatics in order to prove that there wasn't a growth of productive forces. I have heard very intelligent people, from a particular Trotskyist tendency, make the following statement: The productive forces include nature, labor, the organization of work and the division of labor, technology, and knowledge. Yes, there has been a growth of knowledge, but there has been a destruction of nature. Thus the gain from technical improvements is matched by a loss from the destruction of nature. They negate each other, so there is no growth of productive forces. This argument, I must admit, has not convinced me. It *seems* that there is a growth of productive forces in capitalism. The problem is that this affirmation is incompatible with a number of Marx's affirmations.

Elsewhere, the state has spread throughout the world, has consolidated itself in the majority of those countries, including those where Marxism, in its Leninist variant, is an institution. It has become very strongly consolidated, and nothing but that. The process is so different from that set forth by Marx that we are obliged to take note of it. The peasant question was not always subordinate to the industrial and worker question, and the three terms—land, capital, labor—this "Sacred Trinity" as Marx says somewhere, has reappeared with all its force. There have been peasant revolutions. However, Lenin, who added to Marx's thought on these issues, did not solve all the questions relative to the land, because he did not study (or studied very little) the questions of the subsoil, whereas now we are in a position to take into account rents from the subsoil, and he took very little account of urban rents and the question

of urban soil, which means that the teaching of Marx and Lenin on the land, the soil, and the subsoil considered as elements of production have had to be reconsidered. Those who have limited themselves to the texts of Marx and Lenin have constructed a dogmatic edifice that is extremely sterile.

The world level. We face here a serious problem because I'm talking about something with which I'm not familiar. I don't know what it is, but I know that it is coming. I know that we are on all sides prey to the "world" aspect. It seems that all our conceptions, all our institutions, even the states—the state being globalized—are prey to the "world" aspect. For the moment, the "world" aspect has no real existence; I speak in a restrictive and, moreover, relatively distinct sense of the real world. What is real in the world aspect is the world market. We aren't sure how it functions, but we know that it exists, and we know that there is only one world market, despite the attempts by the socialist countries to create a second world-scale market. The world market has even absorbed this and that so-called socialist country, like Cuba, for example. China defends itself relatively well as it has a sort of open sieve onto the world market called Hong Kong, which permits it, to a certain degree, to contain the pressure of the world market while attracting to itself a certain number of advantages. The pressure of the world market is very strong. I simply note that there the theory is not very well elaborated.

Let's move now to another aspect of this explosion. Marx had a global vision. This totalizing vision directly extended the philosophy, although it was no longer a philosophy in the classical sense of the word. I have tried to suggest the word *metaphilosophy* to describe this line of thought which remains global but which is no longer exactly a philosophy. According to Marx, the different sciences specialize, they even specialize inordinately, and not only the large branches such as sociology, demography, and political economy, but also the multiple domains, the multiple sectors which detach and distinguish themselves one from the other. Whence the birth of a criterion of *scientificness*, which is not free from ideological elements, even though the people who use it believe themselves free from

ideology. When one applies the criterion of scientificness to the work of Marx, one contributes to its explosion. It's the theory of epistemological rupture which has not played a small role in the explosion of Marxism, since even Marx's own work breaks in two, so that on the one side we have the youthful works, which are said to be ideological, and on the other side the mature works, considered strictly scientific. It's another form of cleavage, of explosion, about which we have not yet spoken. The pressure from outside causes the work of Marx to explode. One ends up retaining from Marx's work a sort of crystal, very purified, it seems, of ideology, but which contains in fact all the ideology of scientificness, and a concept or two—surplus value for example—although the whole chain of concepts, from use value to exchange value to the organic composition of capital, must be considered a movement of thought which cannot be reduced to a kind of center or pivotal point which is the theory of surplus value. Moreover, how does one separate out the theory of surplus value? The theory that Marx had so much trouble elaborating and which one could say was the subject of all his work in the preparation of *Capital* between 1848 and 1857. Thus, I believe that the whole chain of concepts should be retained, including the concept of organic composition of capital, so rarely and often so wrongly used.

Therefore, epistemology, while subjecting Marx's work to a strict criterion of scientificness, reduces it to a kind of hard and sterile kernel. Beyond that, one has an immense metalanguage, an immense discourse on the Marxist discourse; it is that which one calls Marxism. The explosion, the fragmentation of Marxism, is thus extraordinary. One more reason to stop speaking of Marxism. That said, we cannot get out of it so easily! The great doctrines have all exploded, something that has not prevented them from being extremely productive. One sees that with relation to Hegelianism. Concerning Marxism, all these fragments which have been dispersed from all sides have each been extraordinarily fertile. The most ambiguous concepts, the most equivocal figures of speech, such as alienation, have been the most fertile. Nothing has been sterile except the epistemological crystallization centered on itself:

that is sterility *par excellence!* Concepts such as alienation, class, class struggle, surplus value, etc., have been fertile here and there, have proliferated in this or that country, in this or that Marxism. There is nothing which, at the world level, has been lost. Exchange value and use value, for example: we have become aware that it was not necessary to relegate this antinomy to the category of the nonscientific. Should we say that the beginning of *Capital* is not worth the trouble of reading? On the contrary, we assert that the antinomy of exchange value and use value is a concrete antinomy, a sort of stubborn struggle in social practice, that is, in the functioning of society. Moreover, we know that use value is truly very threatened, and that exchange value functions in such a way that it seems to abolish use value. Threatened from all sides, use value defends itself as best it can, on different grounds: ecology, eroticism, sexuality. If there is a big offensive from exchange value, it is in part the result of the world market.

Through all that, it seems to me that I glimpse something else, something of which one can make neither a balance sheet nor a provisional inventory. On one side, if one maintains that Marxism is an entity, a monolithic doctrine, and, on the other hand, if we speak of the death of Marx, the balance sheet at the world level of experience at the global level is rather difficult to make. I believe that it is necessary to take into consideration both the Cultural Revolution and the Yugoslav experiment of self-management, even though the Chinese have time after time vomited up the Yugoslavs and vice versa. But I believe that an assessment of world experience must take all that into account. The world experience includes both the failure of authoritarian central planning in the U.S.S.R. and the Cultural Revolution to the extent that it is, or might be, an attempt to keep the political apparatus, the party, and the state from placing themselves above society. If this is the case, and I hope it is, it is part of world experience. The suggestions and interpretations of the Cultural Revolution are to be inserted into the world experience, but also, for example, May 1968 in France. The fact is that there are suddenly some powder kegs, some movements which were prepared during a period of

stagnation, and which suddenly occurred, in conditions that we must later try to understand, and that we can only in fact understand afterwards.

Can we make from all that a critical analysis? Yes, given that the specific analyses in the various domains have led to impasses and that we must still restore the world level of analysis, probably through political analysis. I would like to leave this question until later. I would like to take it up again after having examined the situation of anthropology, of history, of political economy—perhaps sexology—and to see if from all this debris, it will be possible one day to behold the resurgence of something which can stand, an edifice, or something else. For the moment, I attempt to answer provisionally: for myself, because I know this is not the opinion of everyone, theory reconstructs itself on the plane of analysis and political criticism. Why? Because totality, or globality, is at the disposition of the state, and because in the minds of philosophers, work is done on its representations.