CONTROVERSY / POLÉMIQUE

The Spectre of the *Manifesto*: Classical Marxism and Its Discontents

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Keywords: globalization; Marxism; neoliberalism; anarchism; utopianism; Autonomism; Stuart Hall; Perry Anderson; Meghnad Desai

Mots clefs : mondialisation; marxisme; néolibéralisme; anarchisme; utopisme; autonomisme; Stuart Hall; Perry Anderson; Meghnad Desai

The picture drawn in *The Communist Manifesto* of the remorseless, profit-driven spread of capitalism around the world seems a remarkably prescient sketch of the dynamic of globalization in the past few decades; like the protagonists for globalization today, Marx and Engels can barely contain their enthusiasm for the vitality of capital. "The bourgeoisie, during its rule of scarce one hundred years, has created more massive and more colossal productive forces than have all preceding generations together."[1] It is worth reminding ourselves of how they portray the development of the forces of production.

> Modern industry has established the world-market ….
>
> The bourgeoisie, historically, has played a most revolutionary part.
>
> … It has pitilessly torn asunder the motley feudal ties that bound man to his "natural superiors," and has left remaining no other nexus between man and man … than callous "cash payment." … It has resolved personal worth into exchange value, and in place of the numberless indefeasible chartered freedoms, has set up that single, unconscionable freedom – Free Trade. …
>
> The bourgeoisie cannot exist without constantly revolutionising the instruments of production, and thereby the relations of production, and with them the whole relations of

1. Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *Manifesto of the Communist Party*, in *Selected Works*, 1 vol. (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1970), 40.

Verity Burgmann, "The Spectre of the *Manifesto*: Classical Marxism and Its Discontents," *Labour/Le Travail* 96 (Fall 2025): 191–215, https://doi.org/10.52975/llt.2025v96.010

society. … Constant revolutionising of production, uninterrupted disturbance of all social conditions, everlasting uncertainty and agitation distinguish the bourgeois epoch from all earlier ones. All fixed, fast-frozen relations, with their train of ancient and venerable prejudices and opinions, are swept away, all new-formed ones become antiquated before they can ossify. All that is solid melts into air ….

The need of a constantly expanding market for its products chases the bourgeoisie over the whole surface of the globe. It must nestle everywhere, settle everywhere, establish connexions everywhere.

The bourgeoisie has through its exploitation of the world-market given a cosmopolitan character to production and consumption in every country. … In place of the old local and national seclusion and self-sufficiency, we have intercourse in every direction, universal inter-dependence of nations. …

The bourgeoisie, by the rapid improvement of all instruments of production, by the immensely facilitated means of communication, draws all … nations into civilization. … It compels all nations, on pain of extinction, to adopt the bourgeois mode of production; … it creates a world after its own image.[2]

Around the sesquicentenary of its publication in 1998, various scholars commented on the predictive and adulatory aspects of the *Manifesto*; they noted that it reads like a description of globalization.[3] Indeed, it appeared that Marxism was about to enjoy a conceptual resurgence, precisely because its analysis of the world economic system at last seemed so apt.[4]

Yet Marxism did not gain obvious traction during the huge, radical upsurge of the late 1990s and early 21st century, when meetings of transnational organizations associated with neoliberal globalization were regularly stormed by protesters. Known by various names in different parts of the world – "anti-capitalist," "anti-corporate," "global justice," or simply "anti-globalization" – this movement became well known by the time of the "Battle in Seattle," when protesters blockaded a meeting of the World Trade Organization (WTO) in Seattle between 30 November and 4 December 1999.[5] In fact, its origins date back to protests against the austerity of structural adjustment programs imposed on indebted developing countries in the 1980s and early 1990s; mobilizations in South America, such as the *piqueteros* of Argentina in the late 1990s and early this century; and demonstrations in Europe – for example, in

2. Marx and Engels, *Manifesto*, 37–39.

3. For example, Verity Burgmann and Andrew Milner, "Intellectuals and the New Social Movements," in Richard Kuhn and Tom O'Lincoln, eds., *Class and Class Conflict in Australia* (Melbourne: Longman Cheshire, 1996), 127–128.

4. A significant publication reassessing the *Manifesto* is Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *The Communist Manifesto*, ed. Gareth Stedman Jones (London: Penguin, 2002).

5. Much has been written about this movement. Some useful texts are Amory Starr, *Naming the Enemy: Anti-Corporate Movements Confront Globalization* (London: Zed Books, 2000); David McNally, *Another World Is Possible: Globalization and Anti-Capitalism* (Winnipeg: Arbeiter Ring, 2002); Emma Bircham and John Charlton, eds., *Anticapitalism: A Guide to the Movement* (London: Bookmarks, 2001).

https://doi.org/10.52975/llt.2025v96.010

France in late 1995, when the country was paralyzed by around five million workers striking against cuts to the minimum wage, welfare, health, education, and the public service.[6] Pierre Bourdieu argued that this *grand refus* was overwhelmingly popular because it was regarded as a necessary defence of everything public: "In a rough and confused form it outlined a genuine project for a society, collectively affirmed and capable of being put forward against what is being imposed by the dominant politics."[7] For Manuel Castells,

> These, and other movements spreading throughout the world, are ending the neo-liberal fantasy of creating a new global economy independent of society by using computer architecture. The grand exclusionary scheme of concentrating information, production, and markets in a valuable segment of population and disposing of the rest in different forms is triggering, in Touraine's expression, a "*grand refus*."[8]

Using the more inclusive terminology of "alter-globalization," this article investigates the political predilections of this movement during its heyday around the turn of the millennium and seeks to understand why a force leading the charge against neoliberal global capitalism ostensibly owed little to Marxism compared with its other avowed sources of inspiration. It finds that although Marxian analysis was being substantiated by the remorseless spread of capitalism around the world, there was a practical political problem related to the very salience of this Classical Marxian approach: that is, the Marxism of the Second International – in short, the Marxism expressed in the M*anifesto*.

This is the Marxism that underpins but is by no means completely congruent with Western Marxism, for currents within Western Marxism – discussed later in this article – have taken issue with Classical Marxism for being scientistic, determinist, and economistic: the characteristics closely connected with its tendency to be overawed by the dynamism of capital. In fact, as this article later argues, Marx did not necessarily endorse such an approach. Nonetheless, Classical Marxism *as commonly understood* is impressed by the productive forces of capitalism that will provide the conditions for socialism – so impressed that, conceptually, it cannot succour resistance to globalization, the material and ideological issue of our time. As J. K. Gibson-Graham argued in 1996, Marxist traditions have constituted capitalism as large, powerful, active, expansive, penetrating, systematic, self-reproducing, dynamic, and victorious, which has resulted in continual deferral of anti-capitalist projects of social transformation and non-capitalist initiatives of economic innovation.[9]

6. Alain Touraine, François Dubet, Didier Lapeyronnie, Farhad Khosrokhavar, and Michel Wieviorka, *Le grand refus: reflexions sur la grève de decembre 1995* (Paris: Fayard, 1996).

7. Pierre Bourdieu, *Acts of Resistance: Against the New Myths of Our Time* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1998), 52–53.

8. Manuel Castells, *The Power of Identity*, vol. 2 of *The Information Age: Economy, Society and Culture* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1997), 109.

9. J. K. Gibson-Graham, *The End of Capitalism (as we knew it): A Feminist Critique of Political*

To this extent, Classical Marxism could not at this crucial moment in the history of capitalism provide a discursive alternative to what Cecelia Lynch has described as "globalization's normative headlock."[10] This is because a spectre haunts contemporary Marxism: the spectre of the M*anifesto*.

The Making, or Manufacture, of Classical Marxism

Emphasis on the progressive function of capital, its role in developing the forces of production ready for a higher form of society, is an outlook shared by all three streams within the Second International (1889–1914): the "radicals" around Rosa Luxemburg, the "orthodox" under Karl Kautsky, and the "revisionists" like Eduard Bernstein. Despite differences on matters such as the relationship between the party and the workers, they agreed that the fullest possible expansion of the forces of production facilitates the ultimate transition to socialism, whether that is to be achieved by revolution or by reform.

In *The Materialist Conception of History*, Kautsky maintained, "The more prosperous and expansionary the capitalist mode of production, the better are the prospects for the socialist system that will succeed it." Any ruinous paralysis of capitalist production would lead not to socialism but to the cancellation of its material possibility; therefore, the proletariat must not aim for the destruction of the productive forces of capitalism. Socialism, he insisted, will arise not from a collapse or failure or bankruptcy of capitalism but from its economic development and "the growth in numbers and the increase in moral, intellectual, and political strength of the proletariat."[11] In 1931 in response to the Great Depression, he deplored the distortion of free trade, which he deemed necessary for economic recovery.[12] In 1933 he wrote that democracy and the rise of socialism would be guaranteed only when a particular condition prevails: a mature proletariat brought into existence by the fullest development of the forces of production. "When such a proletariat is absent, there is no other road that can lead to socialism," for "anti-capitalism" must not be confused with socialism.[13] Peter Wollen argues that the inner logic of Kautsky's position – that socialism could only be achieved when capitalism had provided the economic preconditions through the development of

Economy (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Blackwell, 1996).

10. Cecelia Lynch, "Social Movements and the Problem of Globalization," *Alternatives* 23, 2 (April–June 1998): 157, 161.

11. Karl Kautsky, *Die materialistische Geschichtsauffassung*, vol. 2 (1927), 591, quoted in Massimo Salvadori, *Karl Kautsky and the Socialist Revolution, 1880–1938* (London: New Left Books, 1979), 344–345.

12. Karl Kautsky, "In schwerer Zeit," *Arbeiter-Zeitung*, 25 July 1931, quoted in Salvadori, *Karl Kautsky*, 350.

13. Karl Kautsky, *Neue Programme* (Vienna/Leipzig, 1933), 70–71, quoted in Salvadori, *Karl Kautsky*, 362–363.

https://doi.org/10.52975/llt.2025v96.010

the productive forces – suggests that the full potential of socialism is problematic until capitalism has expanded to the point where it has created the possibility of *global* change.[14]

The "radicals" agreed with the "orthodox" position that the development of the forces of production was a necessary precondition for creating revolutionary opportunity and the possibility of transition to socialism, but for Luxemburg, unlike Kautsky, capitalist development was by no means a sufficient condition.[15] The radicals' distinctive emphasis was the importance of raising the revolutionary consciousness of the working class in order to ensure that socialism rather than barbarism succeeded capitalism. Socialism to Luxemburg is not the inevitable product of iron economic laws; however, its "objective possibility" is nonetheless defined by the socioeconomic conditions of capitalism, because the development of the proletariat is dependent on capitalist expansion and on the breaking down of political barriers in the form of nation-states and economic ones in the form of tariffs.[16] Luxemburg argued in her 1898 doctoral thesis on the industrial development of Poland that the interests of both Russian and Polish workers were best served not by Polish independence but by the development of the forces of production in an increasingly integrated Russian/Polish economy.[17] In *The Accumulation of Capital* in 1913, she contended that the accumulation process demands access to the markets and the products of a non-capitalist environment, but once there is no non-capitalist environment left, accumulation must stop and the collapse of capitalism follow as an objective historical necessity.[18]

Capitalism's remorseless tendency to bring non-capitalist arenas into the embrace of the market ultimately creates revolutionary opportunity. In *The Junius Pamphlet*, Luxemburg writes,

> This brutal triumphant procession of capitalism through the world, accompanied by all the means of force, of robbery, and of infamy, has one bright phase: it has created the premises for its own final overthrow, it has established the capitalist world rule upon which, alone, the socialist world revolution can follow. … Only as the material conditions for the destruction of capitalism and the abolition of class society can the effects of the capitalist

14. Peter Wollen, "Our Post-Communism: The Legacy of Karl Kautsky," *New Left Review* 1/202 (November–December 1993): 92–93.

15. The most relevant writings of Luxemburg for understanding that her position was not "fatalist" in the Kautskyan sense are *The Mass Strike, the Political Party and the Trade Unions*; *Reform or Revolution*; and *The Junius Pamphlet*. All of these are extracted in Mary Alice Waters, ed., *Rosa Luxemburg Speaks* (New York: Pathfinder Press, 1970).

16. Norman Geras, *The Legacy of Rosa Luxemburg* (London: New Left Books, 1976), 31, 28.

17. Rosa Luxemburg, *Die industrielle Entwicklung Polens*, discussed in J. P. Nettl, *Rosa Luxemburg* (1966; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1969), 503–504.

18. Rosa Luxemburg, *The Accumulation of Capital* (1913; London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1963), 417.

triumphal march through the world bear the stamp of progress in a historical sense. In this sense imperialism, too, is working in our interest.[19]

Imperialism is the material precondition of socialism. "Though imperialism is the historical method for prolonging the career of capitalism, it is also a sure means of bringing it to a swift conclusion."[20] It is much easier to envisage Luxemburg than Kautsky at the Battle in Seattle, raising revolutionary awareness by drawing attention to the exploitative and violent practices of transnational corporations, but it is possible, too, given her writings on nationality, imperialism, and revolution, to imagine her analyzing globalization as creating the conditions for worldwide transition to a superior mode of production.

Where Luxemburg tempered the "orthodox" enthusiasm for capitalist expansion with impatience for revolutionary resolution, Eduard Bernstein's "revisionism" was characterized by conviction that capitalism had proven more resilient than Marx anticipated and Marx had been too pessimistic about the potential of democratic forms to tame its excesses. In 1899 in *Die Voraussetzungen des Sozialismus und die Aufgaben der Sozialdemokratie* (The premises of socialism and the tasks of social democracy), Bernstein alleged that the exploitation of labour was lessening as capitalists yielded to democratic organizations. He insisted there was a theoretical possibility that capitalism could cure its own problems by creating counter-trends to the crisis-creating factors Marx identified; nonetheless, socialism remained a desirable alternative to capitalism and could be achieved by peaceful, gradual, legal, democratic means.[21] Bernstein's emphasis on unilinear organic evolution toward socialism was as dependent on capitalist development as Kautsky's insistence that dialectical progression held the key to proletarian emancipation.

Despite other differences, the three streams within Second International Marxism shared assumptions about the dynamism of capitalism and its transformative significance that are summarized so eloquently in the *Manifesto*. Marx's other writings at this time also give explicit support for the kind of policies associated today with the WTO. In September 1847, Marx maintained that only unlimited total free trade would bring the productive forces of capitalist society to their full development and thus introduce the possibility of further

19. Rosa Luxemburg, *The Junius Pamphlet: The Crisis in the German Social Democracy*, in Waters, ed., *Rosa Luxemburg Speaks*, 325.

20. Luxemburg, *Accumulation of Capital*, 446.

21. Peter Gay, *The Dilemma of Democratic Socialism: Eduard Bernstein's Challenge to Marx* (1962; New York: Collier Books, 1970); Lucio Colletti, "Bernstein and the Marxism of the Second International," in *From Rousseau to Lenin: Studies in Ideology and Society* (London: New Left Books, 1972). Bernstein's work was published in English with the title *Evolutionary Socialism* by the Independent Labour Party in Britain in 1907; see the Marxists Internet Archive, accessed 31 July 2025, https://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/bernstein/works/1899/evsoc/.

https://doi.org/10.52975/llt.2025v96.010

change. While most socialists resented repeal of the Corn Laws, Marx welcomed this on the grounds that economic activity would be regulated instead by the capitalist free market; if there were limits on the free functioning of the market, the capitalist system could not develop those forces that would ultimately change it from within. In January 1848, Marx told the Democratic Association in Brussels that free trade was the main vehicle for change, and he applauded those workers' groups that adhered to the Anti–Corn Law League on the grounds that repeal of the Corn Laws gave protectionism a death blow and thus paved the way for the internal transformation of capitalism: "Free Trade dissolves the hitherto existing nationalities and pushes to its climax the tension between proletariat and bourgeoisie. In one word, the system of free trade precipitates the social revolution."[22]

Marx's well-known writings on imperialism also appear to favour the glowing report card given the remorseless spread of capitalism in the *Manifesto*. Teodor Shanin summarizes the common perception that Marx abhorred colonial oppression, as well as the hypocrisy of its many justifications, and said so in no uncertain terms, "but accepted it all the same as a possible stage on the way of progress towards world capitalism and eventually to world socialism, i.e. a fundamentally positive if terrible step on the long road to the New Jerusalem of men made free."[23]

Yet Shanin emphasizes that Marx's writings after the experience of the Paris Commune in 1871 reveal a greater sensitivity toward "archaic" social forms. Shanin argues that with this evidence of the first post-capitalist experiment, Marx gave greater consideration to the actual nature of social and political organization in the future socialist society. At the same time, the discovery of "prehistory" during the 1860s and 1870s brought "primitive" societies within the circle of historical study; linked with these studies of prehistory came greater knowledge of the rural non-capitalist societies enmeshed in a capitalist world, such as India. Steeped as he was in Hegelian dialectics, Marx could believe that children resembled their grandparents more than their parents; thus, the "primary" commune, such as that of the European peasantry, dialectically restored on a new and higher level of material wealth and global interaction, entered his images of the future communist society. From this point, Marx increasingly accepted "uneven development" in all its complexity and put new stress on the regressive aspects of capitalism. Shanin contends that Marx moved away from the notion of "unilinear progress" – and its accompanying concept of the "Asiatic Mode of Production" or "Oriental Despotism"

22. Karl Marx/Friedrich Engels, *Werke*, vol. 4 (Berlin, 1956), 308, 457–458, cited in Shlomo Avineri, *The Social and Political Thought of Karl Marx* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1969), 252.

23. Teodor Shanin, "Late Marx: Gods and Craftsmen," in Teodor Shanin, ed., *Late Marx and the Russian Road: Marx and "the Peripheries of Capitalism"* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1983), 6.

– to explain the static ahistorical nature of societies dependent on external forces to stimulate internal changes.[24] However, the socially valuable aspects of the primary commune, threatened by capitalist intruders, were nonetheless best salvaged via further economic development. Shanin summarizes the late Marx's position: "The corporate aspect of the commune's existence could prevail, once revolution had removed the anti-commune pressures and the advanced technology developed by Western capitalism was put to new use under the communal control of the producers."[25] As Marx put it in the "Letter to Zasulich," "the new system to which the modern society is tending will be a revival in a superior form of an archaic social type."[26]

Shanin explains how these thoughts of Marx were rarely acknowledged by his contemporary associates and followers. Indeed, they were directly repressed and denied publication, against Marx's express wishes, by organizations and individuals such as the Emancipation of Labour group, Plekhanov, Zasulich, Axelrod, and others. "Already in Marx's own generation there were Marxists who knew better than Marx what Marxism is and were prepared to censor him on the sly, for his own sake."[27] In a St. Petersburg newspaper in 1908, Bernstein explained away Marx and Engels' "populist" deviation by maintaining that they restricted the expression of their skepticism about peasant communes "so as not to disappoint too much the Russian revolutionaries," who "attached great significance to the question of commune property."[28]

The Second International was especially significant in handing down to socialist posterity a Classical Marxism devoid of Marx's distaste of those to whom the punchline of Marxist analysis was the adoration of irresistible laws of history, used as the licence to do nothing.[29] Shanin refers to this received version of Marxism as "the massive brainwashing of interpretation initiated by the Second International" that was still powerful enough to turn into a "blind spot" Marx's later embrace of a multiplicity of roads of social transformation, within the global framework of mutual and differential impact.[30] Though he died in 1883, Marx had begun to recognize the problems that came to concern "developing" societies in the 20th century and the inadequacy of the unilinear "progressive" model for historical analysis and political judgments about the

24. Shanin, "Late Marx," 5–6, 15.

25. Shanin, "Late Marx," 16.

26. Quoted in Shanin, "Late Marx," 17.

27. Shanin, "Late Marx," 18.

28. In *Minuvshie Gody*, no. 11 (1908), 17, quoted in "David Ryazanov: The Discovery of the Drafts (1924)," in Shanin, *Late Marx and the Russian Road*, 130.

29. Shanin, "Late Marx," 21.

30. Shanin, "Late Marx," 18, 20.

https://doi.org/10.52975/llt.2025v96.010

best way to promote the socialist cause.[31] Subsequent generations of adversaries and official descendants were conceptually blind to this development in Marx's thought; much of so-called "neo-Marxism" is Marx's Marxism. It was Marx who laid the foundations for the global analysis of "unevenness" of development, "a new approach to global capitalism, its not-so-capitalist companions of the world scene, and also the prospects for socialism – issues and doubts our own generation came to call its own."[32]

Denying Marx's later-life insights and sensibilities, a "received version" of Marx was strengthened after his death by Engels' writings in the early 1890s, influenced by Plekhanov's anti-peasant position. Engels argued in 1892 that the decline of the Russian peasant commune with capitalism in overwhelming presence "must serve the cause of human progress."[33] Of the European peasantry in general, he wrote in 1894 that

> our small peasant, like every other survival of the past modes of production, is hopelessly doomed … in view of the prejudices arriving out of their entire economic position, the upbringing and isolation … we can win the mass of the small peasants only if we make them a promise which we ourselves know we cannot keep.[34]

During the Second International period, Marx, according to Shanin, was "engelsised" and Engels, still further, "kautskised" and "plekhanovised" into an evolutionist mould.[35]

Whatever Marx's actually existing position by 1883, there is an accepted Classical Marx – the received version created by the Second International in its own image – whose views are not in doubt. Indeed, Thomas Piketty's powerful 2014 opus, *Capital in the Twenty-First Century*, argues that the process of globalization has confirmed the Marxist principle of infinite accumulation. The very high level of private wealth attained since the 1980s and 1990s in the wealthy countries "directly reflects the Marxian logic."[36] It is not difficult to visualize the Classical Marx applauding the new globalization project of capital in the same vein that he and Engels waxed so lyrical about mid-19th-century developments. If this Classical Marx were present today and asked what he thought of globalization, one could be excused for suspecting he would say that the forces of production were in an impressive stage of development and that this process would ultimately facilitate socialist revolution

31. Shanin, "Late Marx," 29.

32. Shanin, "Late Marx," 30.

33. Engels to Danielson, 1892, in *Perepiska, Marksa I Engel'sa* (Moscow, 1951), 126, quoted in Shanin, "Late Marx," 24.

34. Marx and Engels, *Selected Works*, vol. 3 (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1973), 460, 469, quoted in Shanin, "Late Marx," 24.

35. Shanin, "Late Marx," 24–25.

36. Thomas Piketty, *Capital in the Twenty-First Century*, trans. Arthur Goldhammer, (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2014), 10–11.

or encourage a peaceful democratic transition to socialism as the proletariat became larger and more confident.

What, then, is the proletariat to do in the meantime: suffer the policies and practices associated with globalization – increased capital mobility, privatization, decreased public-sector spending, redistribution from labour to capital, anti-union industrial relations legislation – and be silent? Piketty reveals, over 600 or so pages, how the policies and practices of neoliberal globalization have dramatically increased wealth and income inequality since the 1970s and had a hugely detrimental downward effect on wage levels in developed countries. Globalization, he comments, weighs particularly heavily on the least-skilled workers in the wealthy countries.[37] Nor have the workers of the world in general benefitted from neoliberal globalization. Verity Burgmann's 2016 *Globalization and Labour in the Twenty-First Century* traces the drastic consequences on workers of the redistribution from labour to capital in the past 40 years and describes how labour organizations have emerged in new places and embraced novel strategies to face the challenges of neoliberal globalization.[38]

An instinctively radical response to the discontents of globalization is militant resistance; many mobilized in the alter-globalization movement to contest the corporate agenda of bringing the entire planet into the embrace of the market. This seemed the most appropriate reaction from the left-wing standpoint of liberty, equality, and collectivity. By contrast, the Classical Marxian emphasis on the dynamic and progressive role of capital as it spreads itself around the globe did not render it well suited to articulating the discontents of globalization. Instead, there were responses to neoliberal globalization that expressed resignation or admiration, articulated during its ascendant period prior to the global financial crisis of 2008, from within an expressly Marxian paradigm. A few examples must suffice: those of Stuart Hall, Perry Anderson, and Meghnad Desai.

Classical Marxism Meets Globalization

In the early days of neoliberal ascendancy in Thatcher's Britain, Stuart Hall argued in *Marxism Today* for the need to accept "the terrain of a new phase of Western economic development" – that is, the inevitability of "the 'globalisation' of capitalist production" – for there was no hope of "escaping the consequences of this global revolution of production." His rationale was classically Classical Marxian. The "global market forces," Hall insisted in 1985, are "setting the parameters of manoeuvre." The new Right (neoliberalism) looks like the historic force that has the confidence to ruthlessly clear the way for a re-energized world capitalist market, whereas the Left has rarely been in

37. Piketty, *Capital in the Twenty-First Century*, 497.

38. Verity Burgmann, *Globalization and Labour in the Twenty-First Century* (London: Routledge, 2016).

https://doi.org/10.52975/llt.2025v96.010

such need of healthy, solid doses of realism "in the sense proper to any Marxist perspective," of understanding the determining limits, the inescapable lines of tendency and direction, established by the real world. "It is what Marx … used to call 'the real movement of history,' which … is transforming everything in its wake." It is not by chance, Hall maintained, that the Marxist conception of socialism was grounded in analysis of the historic tendencies of capitalist development, which is why the key work was called not socialism but *Capital*. Hence, "there is no way in which a socialism for our own times can evade the terms of reference of the forms of social and economic organisation which currently dominate the centres of advanced production in the modern world." In words remarkably redolent of the *Manifesto*, Hall continued:

> There are the new technologies, which are rapidly reshaping skills and social identities, regrouping the workforce into new divisions and destroying the older patterns of work. … [T]here are the new forms of capitalist production … rapidly advancing the international division of labour …. [O]n line factory processes … are being rapidly eroded …. [T]he economic programmes and demands formulated with this type of industrial economic organisation at its heart, are becoming unevenly obsolete.…
>
> …[T]he character of the world market is being refashioned by a new dynamic.[39]

Respect for this dynamic was articulated at the dawn of the new millennium by Perry Anderson's editorial announcing the New Series of *New Left Review*.[40] Surveying gloomily the decline in the previous two decades of the leftward impulse and the uncontested and universal diffusion of neoliberalism, he urged that the test of *New Left Review*'s capacity to strike a distinctive political note in the future should be how often it can calmly shock readers by calling a spade a spade, rather than falling in with the well-meaning cant or self-deception of the Left. The only starting point, Anderson insisted, for a realistic Left today is "a lucid registration of historical defeat," for capital has comprehensively beaten back all threats to its rule, the bases of whose power were persistently underestimated by the socialist movement.[41] The authority of Marx, particularly his attention to the internal momentum of capitalism, underpinned Anderson's defeatist pessimism.

> For the Left, the lesson of the past century is one taught by Marx. Its first task is to attend to the actual development of capitalism as a complex machinery of production and profit, in constant motion.… No collective agency able to match the power of capital is yet on the horizon … if the human energies for a change of system are ever released again, it will be from within the metabolism of capital itself. We cannot turn away from it. Only in the evolution of this order could lie the secrets of another one.

39. Stuart Hall, "Realignment – for What?" *Marxism Today* 29, 12 (December 1985): 15–16.

40. Perry Anderson, "Editorial: Renewals," *New Left Review* 2/1 (January–February 2000): 5–24.

41. Anderson, "Editorial: Renewals," 10, 15, 16.

In the meantime, "neo-liberalism as a set of principles rules undivided across the globe: the most successful ideology in world history." Anderson predicted that the political correlation of forces would remain stable so long as there was no deep economic crisis in the West; little short of a slump of interwar proportions looked capable of shaking the parameters of the current consensus.[42]

This editorial was published as the Western world began reeling from the shock and aftershocks of the Battle in Seattle, widely deemed the coming-out party for the alter-globalization movement. This widespread and energetic movement stirred, if not shook, the parameters of the consensus deemed secure by Anderson. In Seattle, participant Chris Carlsson had witnessed

> a profound unity among people fighting for decent lives as workers, people fighting for a healthy relationship to global ecological well-being, people fighting sweatshops and child labor, people fighting to save old-growth forests and stop toxic waste dumping, people fighting to save subsistence agriculture and family farms, and so on.[43]

Such activists would have found no inspiration in the lessons from Marx as described by Anderson.

A few years later, in his spirited defence of the Classical Marxist understanding of capitalism, Meghnad Desai was expressly dismissive of those activists: "the radical anticapitalists of Seattle and Prague and May Day demonstrations wish, expect and predict the end of globalisation. But what if capitalism did not die imminently – or at least, not in our lifetimes or, say, the next hundred years?" Reviewing the last few decades of globalization, Desai maintained that capitalism showed, through the new technological and institutional revolutions – information technology, deregulated capital movements, the emergence of the WTO – that it still had tremendous potential. "It was not about to lie down and die … This is where Marx regains his relevance. His is the only serious attempt after Adam Smith's to understand the dynamics of capitalism."[44] Of the neoliberal ideologues and practitioners he, like Hall, wrote in ways that evoke the *Manifesto*:

> They were in fact restructuring the economy to restore profitability. … [C]apital flows were to reshape the economies of individual countries. The migration of capital to cheaper production locations impelled a search for new economic activities – services rather than goods, sophisticated innovative goods rather than the stable manufactures on which postwar economies had been built. New technologies were also being introduced in a parallel process unguided by the visible hand of government planning.…
>
> … Entrepreneurs relying on venture capital and a talent for risk-taking came together in Silicon Valley. In an unorganised, unplanned way, their competitive activity helped to

42. Anderson, "Editorial: Renewals," 17–18.

43. Chris Carlsson, "Seeing the Elephant in Seattle," 19 January 2000, FoundSF.org, https://www.foundsf.org/Seeing_the_Elephant_in_Seattle.

44. Meghnad Desai, *Marx's Revenge: The Resurgence of Capitalism and the Death of Statist Socialism* (2002; London: Verso, 2004), viii, x.

https://doi.org/10.52975/llt.2025v96.010

create the IT revolution … a process that defied the logic by which many critiques of capitalism had thought the world worked.[45]

Unable to conceal his enthusiasm for the processes detailed, Desai described how new firms were toppling the giants from their perches, new industries were being created. Capitalism was not a static or steady-state process. It sought profits where it could, and innovation was the process by which profitability could be revived. This was "creative destruction" in our lifetime. He added that if free trade in West European agriculture were to become the norm, it would collapse, and the sooner the better. Yes, he gloated, the decade following 1989 was to see a rejuvenation of global capitalism not seen since 1914: the return to the world of *The Communist Manifesto*.[46]

In another sideswipe at those who were contesting the injuries of the new world order, Desai commented that capitalism had not just survived; it had been rejuvenated and showed no prospect of imminent collapse, or even aging. "It is still unbelieved in many circles. Many point to the injustices, inequities and costs of the new dispensation. Others wish for a return to the heyday of Keynesianism." Capitalism, he explained, with barely a hint of apology, is a profit-driven system of accumulation and incessant search for new technologies to increase productivity. As such, it is prone to cycles, crashes, and panics. It is the best arrangement for the alleviation of poverty and misery, even as it destroys jobs and restructures economies. To understand the "illogicalities" of anti-globalization concerns, it was necessary to see the present phase of capitalism as an outcome of recent historical processes, "because globalization has hardly begun."[47] The truth of Marxism, Desai insisted, was submerged during much of the 20th century with the Bolshevik experiment, which committed untold crimes and evoked the prophecy that capitalism would die soon, defeated by the new Soviet order.

The idea that capitalism, while it lasted, was a progressive mode of production whose unfettered development was preferable to reactionary alternatives was forgotten. Now it has come back with a vengeance. Capitalism has become truly global, and it has not yet reached its limits … Marx has had his revenge.[48]

Most people on the Left were glad Marxism had shed association with Bolshevism. However, it was not simply Bolshevik taint that explained Classical Marxism's inability to connect with those who were opposing capital's globalization project but also its too-habitual respect for the dynamism of capital, which rendered it insufficiently anti-corporate. Its analysis of capitalism seemed so correct at this time, yet Classical Marxism *as an emancipatory project* had limited salience for the very significant movement that had erupted

45. Desai, *Marx's Revenge*, 275.

46. Desai, *Marx's Revenge*, 276–277, 291.

47. Desai, *Marx's Revenge*, 303–305.

48. Desai, *Marx's Revenge*, 315.

in opposition to capitalism's globalizing ambition. Alter-globalization politics left mainstream Marxism behind in its radical wake. It was ironic that a movement badged as "anti-capitalist" and "anti-corporate" should have derived so little inspiration from Marxism.

Alter-Globalization: The Resurgence of Older Radicalisms

Desai claims Marx has had his revenge, then asks, "But will he ever get his reward? Will there be Socialism beyond Capitalism?"[49] The answer to that from a Classical Marxist perspective is yes – but only if the working class waits long enough. In the meantime, was there any point in "summit-hopping" – storming the citadels of corporate power, such as WTO meetings – in the style of the alter-globalization movement? Various writers, including Castells, predicted the emergence of new forms of radical politics in the era of globalization.[50] Yet it is more obvious that hitherto existing forms of resistance have re-emerged. In the opposition to neoliberal globalization, we have witnessed the resurgence of older and even pre-Marxist forms of radicalism: utopianism and anarchism. These are political currents that Marx and Engels deemed outmoded or that Marxism subsequently vanquished, but in alter-globalization politics they have wreaked their revenge on Marxism.

Utopianism

In the *Manifesto*, Marx and Engels inform us that Utopian socialist systems such as those of Saint-Simon, Fourier, Owen, and others sprang into existence in the early undeveloped period when feudal society was being overthrown and the proletariat was undeveloped, and that they "necessarily failed" because the economic situation did not then offer the material conditions for the emancipation of the proletariat. "The significance of Critical-Utopian Socialism and Communism bears an inverse relation to historical development. In proportion as the modern class struggle develops and takes definite shape, this fantastic standing apart from the contest, these fantastic attacks on it, lose all practical value and all theoretical justification."[51] This complacency was reiterated in 1880 in *Socialism: Utopian and Scientific*. Utopian thought, Engels confidently reminds readers, belonged to the period in which the capitalist mode of production was still very incompletely developed. "To the crude conditions of capitalist production and the crude class conditions corresponded crude theories." The Utopians' mode of thought that for a long time governed the socialist ideas of the 19th century was "a mish-mash allowing of the most

49. Desai, *Marx's Revenge*, 315.

50. Castells, *Power of Identity*, 68–69.

51. Marx and Engels, *Manifesto*, 60–61.

https://doi.org/10.52975/llt.2025v96.010

manifold shades of opinion."[52] The utopianism the M*anifesto* denounced as obsolete is deemed by Marxist historians to have perished in 1848 and the heroic age of Utopian Socialism finished by the middle of the 19th century.[53]

Yet, with globalization a dominant material and ideological construct, and the normal sources of opposition paralyzed by their perception of the power of capital, utopianism re-emerged as a characteristic of radical politics in the period of globalization – not Utopian Socialism as such but utopianism as a transformative impulse. Utopia, according to Fredric Jameson in 2005, had recovered its vitality as a political slogan and a politically energizing perspective, and he affirmed the vital political function of Utopia at that time. It was easier, he noted, to imagine the end of the world than the end of capitalism.[54] Utopia was therefore all the more attractive and urgent. To adapt Mrs. Thatcher's famous dictum, there was no alternative to Utopia. The invincibility of capitalism was not so much the issue, but the crippling universal belief that there was no alternative to capitalism, that no other socioeconomic system was conceivable, let alone practically available.

> The Utopians not only offer to conceive of alternate systems; Utopian form is itself a representational meditation on radical difference, radical otherness, and on the systemic nature of the social totality, to the point where one cannot imagine any fundamental change in our social existence which has not first thrown off Utopian visions like so many sparks from a comet.[55]

As David Graeber, a serial alter-globalization "summit-hopper," observed, it was difficult to find anyone who had fully participated in such an action whose sense of human possibilities had not been profoundly transformed as a result. "It's one thing to say, 'Another world is possible.' It's another to experience it, however momentarily."[56] Another prominent alter-globalization activist and intellectual, David McNally, concluded his study of resistance to globalization with Oscar Wilde's observation that a map of the world that does not include Utopia is not even worth glancing at. He ended with heartfelt argument about the power of "the utopian idea, the dream of a better world" in opposing those who would discredit the search for real alternatives:

> Utopia marks a place yet to be found, a place where unnecessary suffering has been eliminated, where solidarity and happiness live. … It is a place where people have escaped commodification to live as free beings, as ends in themselves, no longer means for the enrichment of a few. It is a place where nature is no longer degraded and destroyed, where

52. Frederick Engels, *Socialism: Utopian and Scientific*, in Marx and Engels, *Selected Works*, 1 vol., 397–398, 404.

53. G. D. H. Cole, *Marxism and Anarchism, 1850–1890*, vol. 2 of *A History of Socialist Thought* (1954; London: Macmillan, 1970), 12, 57.

54. Fredric Jameson, *Archaeologies of the Future: The Desire Called Utopia and Other Science Fictions* (London: Verso, 2005), xi–xii, 27, 199.

55. Jameson, *Archaeologies of the Future*, xii.

56. David Graeber, "The New Anarchists," *New Left Review* 2/13 (January–February 2002): 72.

people are celebrated in the richness of their diversity. It is a place where life is worth living, the space of hope.[57]

Jameson argued that the Utopian form itself was the answer to the universal ideological conviction that there was no possible alternative to the system: the increasing inability to imagine a different future enhanced rather than diminished the appeal, and also the function, of Utopia. "The very political weakness of Utopia in previous generations – namely that it furnished nothing like an account of agency, nor did it have a coherent historical and practical-political picture of transition – now becomes a strength in a situation in which neither of these problems seems currently to offer candidates for a solution." The secession of Utopia from political possibilities as well as from reality itself now more accurately reflected our current ideological state of mind in the current period, in which capitalism had, as in the industrializing period immediately following the revolution of 1848, expanded tremendously and generated a wealth calculated to smother the perception of its flaws and incapacities for a time.[58] Utopia thus expressed our relationship to a genuinely political future. Jameson wrote that although we were only at the stage of massive protests and demonstrations, without any conception of how a globalized transformation might proceed, Utopia forced us precisely to concentrate on the break itself: a meditation on the impossible, on the unrealizable in its own right.[59]

Moreover, the utopian extremism of the alter-globalization movement's demands was complemented by utopian expectations of the movement itself, reminiscent of the "Chiliastic horizon" of utopianism analyzed by Karl Mannheim.[60] The response to the Battle in Seattle was euphoric – millenarian, in fact. Jeff St. Clair described the period from Sunday, 30 November, to Thursday, 4 December 1999, when the WTO met in Seattle as "five days that shook the world."[61] John Charlton's interviews with Seattle protesters recorded "the almost breathless accounts, of people experiencing a birth of the new."[62] Chris Carlsson's internet diary commented how "it was absolutely exhilarating to be in the midst of this polyphonous cacophony" and insisted that "the ruling class ideology of endless prosperity and growth in a democratic capitalist world of 'free' countries has suffered a slap across the face in Seattle.

57. McNally, *Another World Is Possible*, 275.

58. Jameson, *Archaeologies of the Future*, 232.

59. Jameson, *Archaeologies of the Future*, 232–233.

60. Karl Mannheim, *Ideology and Utopia: An Introduction to the Sociology of Knowledge* (1936; London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1976), 190–197. This is discussed in more detail in Verity Burgmann, "Archaeologies of Anti-capitalist Utopianism," *Arena Journal* 25/26 (2006): 99–122.

61. Jeff St. Clair, "Seattle Diary: It's a Gas, Gas, Gas," *New Left Review* 1/238 (1999): 95.

62. John Charlton, "Talking Seattle," *International Socialism* 86 (Spring 2000): 16.

https://doi.org/10.52975/llt.2025v96.010

History has asserted itself."[63] Other alter-globalization mobilizations evoked similar jubilation.[64]

Mannheim's descriptions of the chiliastic moment in utopianism evoke this euphoric vocabulary around Seattle and similar confrontations: "Chiliastic optimism"; "orgiastic energies"; "recollection of ecstasy." Of the individual chiliast he writes in ways that could describe the contemporary "summit-hopper" – "His attitude is characterized by a tense expectation … always on his toes awaiting the propitious moment … on the lookout ready to take the leap." The chiliastic experience, he notes, "hallowed the chance moment." The alter-globalization movement's collective enthusiasm for "summit-hopping" is brought to mind by Mannheim's observation that "Chiliasm sees the revolution as a value in itself, not as an unavoidable means to a rationally set end, but as the only creative principle of the immediate present, as the longed-for realisation of its aspirations in this world." Such ecstatic experience, he observes, represents a danger to the existing order, "for it is constantly under temptation to express itself outwardly, and only prolonged discipline and repression transform it into quietism."[65]

It was 9/11 – the terrorist attack on the World Trade Centre on 11 September 2001 – that finally offered transnational capital the opportunity for prolonged discipline and repression, a serious problem for the alter-globalization movement, though its utopian radicalism continued for a time to mount significant challenges to global capitalism, especially in non-anglophone parts of the world.[66] For a brief period, ecstatic experience had endangered the existing order. Such was the value of utopian extremism, the practical outcome of demanding the impossible and musing upon the unrealizable. In Mannheim's words, "with the relinquishment of utopias, man would lose his will to shape history."[67] In *fin-de-siècle* alter-globalization utopianism, Fourier was having his revenge.

Anarchism

Marx took issue with anarchism directly – for example, in *The Poverty of Philosophy* and *The German Ideology* – but the tension between Marxism and anarchism was more famously played out in Marx's confrontations with Mikhail Bakunin, described by G. D. H. Cole as "exemplar of the nineteenth-century anarchist sensibility" and "the great antagonist of Marx in the First

63. Carlsson, "Seeing the Elephant."

64. Burgmann, "Archaeologies," 111–118.

65. Mannheim, *Ideology and Utopia*, 192, 193, 197, 203, 195, 212, 196, 213.

66. Marjorie Mayo, *Global Citizens: Social Movements and the Challenge of Globalization* (London: Zed Books, 2005); Jen Couch, "This Is What Democracy Looks Like: The Genesis, Culture and Possibilities of Anti-corporate Activism," PhD diss., Victoria University, Australia, 2004.

67. Mannheim, *Ideology and Utopia*, 236.

International." Cole's analysis of their disputes is pertinent to the present. He explains that Marx, with his eyes fixed on the development of capitalist society in its most advanced forms, saw the coming struggle in terms of a conflict between capitalists and proletariat, and regarded every group that did not fit into this diagnosis as standing for a declining or obsolescent social form. Bakunin, on the other hand, thought of the revolution mainly as a ceaseless struggle between oppressors and oppressed – including the peasants and lumpen-proletarians disparaged by Marx – with the momentum of revolution located primarily in groups of the downtrodden wherever they were found and irrespective of their economic relation to the means of production.[68]

Because of these attributes, and in contrast with Marxism, anarchism has successfully connected with the concerns of people discontented by globalization. The *New York Times* in August 2000 described anarchism as "the creed that won't stay dead" as "the spread of world capitalism resurrects a long-dormant movement."[69] Academic commentary confirms the re-emergence of anarchism as a significant aspect of contemporary alter-globalization politics. In maintaining that anarchism was the "dominant perspective" within this politics, Barbara Epstein acknowledged that Marxian political economy *analyses* of globalization were read by "anti-globalization" activists but that their decided preference was for anarchist visions of a future society and anarchist forms of organization.[70] According to Graeber, anarchism had reappeared where it was at the end of the 19th century, as an international movement at the very centre of the revolutionary Left. "Anarchism is the heart of the movement, its soul; the source of most of what's new and hopeful about it," and "most of the creative energy for radical politics is now coming from anarchism."[71]

As the comparison between Marx and Bakunin suggests, anarchism can speak to the downtrodden wherever they are found and inspire the revolt of those such as peasants and lumpen-proletarians who have never found a place in the Classical Marxist hall of fame. In 2001, Michael Albert summarized contemporary anarchism as "the widely awakening impetus to fight on the side of the oppressed in every domain of life, from family, to culture, to state, to economy, to the now very visible international arena of 'globalisation,' and to do so in creative and courageous ways conceived to win improvements in people's lives now, even while leading toward winning new institutions in the future." He anticipated anarchism could well become "a main 21st century source of movement inspiration and wisdom in the effort to make our world

68. Cole, *Marxism and Anarchism*, 213, 230.

69. Joseph Kahn, "The Creed That Won't Stay Dead," *New York Times*, 5 August 2000, 1. I am grateful to Andrew Ure for this reference.

70. Barbara Epstein, "Anarchism and the Anti-globalization Movement," *Monthly Review* 53, 4 (September 2001): 7–9.

71. Graeber, "New Anarchists," 69, 61–62.

https://doi.org/10.52975/llt.2025v96.010

a much better place."[72] Amory Starr's major study of "anti-corporate" politics noted in 2000 that anarchism was alive, youthful, and international; involved with animal rights, feminism, antiracism, police and prison abuse, music, homeless issues, and free speech. "As an international movement it is historically aware, intellectual and prolific."[73]

Anarchism, compared with Marxism, more easily embraces the multitude of the oppressed under globalization, and even more effortlessly connects with people's concerns about how decision-making takes place within corporations and agencies such as the WTO, International Monetary Fund, World Bank, and World Economic Forum. Alter-globalization protesters typically emphasized their commitment to participation, transparency, and decentralization, in conscious contrast to transnational capitalist structures; it was to anarchist theory and practice in relation to issues of hierarchy, domination, and control that the movement turned in its aspiration to confront corporate rule and provide alternative egalitarian political forms.[74] Anarchism easily articulated opposition to the hierarchical and elitist manner of corporate decision-making, whereas a Classical Marxian analysis might conceivably demur if the imperatives of capital accumulation demanded that investment decisions be made in undemocratic ways. It became well known that mobilizations typically comprised a multitude of "affinity groups"; less well known was that these were used historically in anarchist movements, notably in Spain in the late 19th century.[75] That they were emphasized by the alter-globalization movement as an organizational principle indicated the important contribution of anarchist theory and practice to the new movement against neoliberal global capitalism.

Anarchism's appeal also rested, admittedly, on the problem of Marxism's "Bolshevik taint." Graeber referred to the resurgent anarchism as the "diametrical opposite of the sectarian Marxist groups."[76] Colin Barker's defensive and apologetic study of the role of socialists within "anti-capitalist" politics conceded that suspicions about socialist organizations were widespread and comprehensible. He insisted socialists had to change: "they must be more open to impulses from without, more discussive in style, more able to relate to a multitude of new issues and arguments," and they need to be inwardly democratic.[77] In seeking to connect with the discontents of globalization, Barker

72. Michael Albert, "Anarchists," in Bircham and Charlton, eds., *Anticapitalism*, 324, 326–327.

73. Starr, *Naming the Enemy*, 112.

74. David Held and Anthony McGrew, *Globalization/Anti-globalization* (Cambridge: Blackwell, 2002), 113; Starr, *Naming the Enemy*, 16.

75. Jackie Smith, "Globalizing Resistance: The Battle of Seattle and the Future of Social Movements," *Mobilization* 6, 1 (Spring 2001): 10.

76. Graeber, "New Anarchists," 72.

77. Colin Barker, "Socialists," in Bircham and Charlton, eds., *Anticapitalism*, 334–335.

admitted in effect that socialists had to become more like anarchists. Back in 1917, Trotsky had upbraided Russian anarchists for being isolated individuals who had played out their role and who should go to where they belonged: to the dustbin of history.[78] His advice now seemed impertinent and inappropriate.

Notwithstanding media beat-ups about the violent activities of isolated masked anarchists at alter-globalization demonstrations, anarchism undoubtedly gained ground over Marxism within alter-globalization politics. In part this was due to the felt problems mentioned by Graeber and Barker, but the perceived determinism and defeatism of Classical Marxism played an important part. The resurgence of anarchism suggests that its form and content resonated with the concerns of those discontented by globalization. But, Jameson reminds us, both Marxism and anarchism are left revolutionary movements. "Ideology becomes visible, indeed, not necessarily in political and social attitudes, but rather in that ultimate visceral commitment which turns on capitalism itself."[79] For example, at the huge mobilization in Melbourne in September 2000 against a World Economic Forum meeting, the anarchist Autonomous Web of Liberation explained that it was "a non-hierarchical, decentralised and autonomous network … committed to taking direct action for social and environmental justice through creative resistance to capitalism."[80] Anarchism was able to provide more creative resistance to capitalism than could Classical Marxism in that historical conjuncture. Bakunin was wreaking his revenge.

An Alternative Marxism for the Globalization Epoch

Within the Western Marxist tradition, the economic determinist rendering of the Classical Marxian legacy has long been contested. From its point of origin in the 1920s, the "critical" Marxism of Georg Lukács, Karl Korsch, Antonio Gramsci, Anton Pannekoek, and others stressed agency and consciousness to underwrite a leftist rejection of political fatalism. This moment of revolutionary optimism failed, and the emphasis within Western Marxist thought shifted away from celebration of the emancipatory potential of human self-activity toward more pessimistic intellectual themes that emphasized the domination of capital.[81] Yet rejection of political fatalism remains a submerged tradition within Western Marxist thought that attempts not to advance pure subjectivity against the older "objective" orthodoxy but to restore

78. James Joll, *The Anarchists* (New York: Grosset and Dunlap, 1966), 11.

79. Jameson, *Archaeologies of the Future*, 196.

80. S11–AWOL, leaflet, Melbourne, 2000.

81. Andrew Milner, *Re-imagining Cultural Studies: The Promise of Cultural Materialism* (London: Sage, 2002), 82.

https://doi.org/10.52975/llt.2025v96.010

a subject-object dialectic.[82] Those who have done battle on behalf of this submerged tradition include Jean-Paul Sartre and E. P. Thompson, for example, in their arguments with Louis Althusser, whose structuralist Marxism caricatured in extreme form the interpretation of Marxism handed down from the Second International and thereby highlighted its dangers for revolutionary, or even reformist, proletarian practice.

History to Sartre was not order but rational disorder: at the moment when it maintains order – structure – history is already on the way to undoing it. "Man receives structures; and in a sense it can be said that they make him. But he receives them as he is engaged in history, engaged in such a way that he cannot fail to destroy them, to constitute anew that which in turn will condition him." Each generation takes "another distance," which allows the change of structure; history is the real overcoming of structures in totalizing praxis, whereas Althusser, Sartre complained, wants to make the structure privileged in relation to history. Sartre stresses Marx's comment that "the secret of the worker is the death of the bourgeoisie."[83] Thompson not only emphasized that classes are the subjects of history and that the working class makes itself as much as it is made; he reminded us that Marx and Engels ceaselessly ridiculed the pretensions of bourgeois economy to disclose "fixed and eternal" laws. When capital and its relations are seen as a structure, in a given moment of capital's forms, the structure can allow for no impingement that could modify its relations, for this would threaten the integrity of the categories themselves. Thompson notes that this is an extraordinary mode of thought to find in a materialist such as Althusser, for capital has become Idea, which unfolds itself in history.[84]

The relevance to alter-globalization politics of the issues posed by Sartre and Thompson is apparent, but it is the Autonomist Marxist contribution to the critique of determinist Marxism that attracted the most attention from alter-globalization activists, for it has developed in conscious response to the challenge of globalization. It was precisely the problems for practical political action of emphasis on the power of capital and its accumulative logic as the unilateral force shaping the world that prompted the emergence of this distinctive understanding of Marxism. The situation of Italy in the 1970s was a foretaste of the dilemma facing Marxism in the era of globalization. In these historical circumstances, Antonio Negri found Classical Marxism problematic: unhelpful in responding to the felt needs of the Italian proletariat at a time of extraordinary working-class struggles. The defence and extension of

82. Russell Jacoby, "The Politics of Subjectivity: Notes on Marxism, the Movement and Bourgeois Society," *Telos* 9 (Fall 1971): 119.

83. Jean-Paul Sartre, "Replies to Structuralism: An Interview with Jean-Paul Sartre," *Telos* 9 (Fall 1971): 112–115.

84. E. P. Thompson, *The Poverty of Theory and Other Essays* (London: Merlin Press, 1978), esp. 253, 297–298, 303.

working-class needs against the logic of the market became an important part of the identifiable core of Autonomism.[85]

Negri's working-class standpoint Marxism can be understood as the opposite of the conclusions drawn around the same time by Althusser, for whom actual practical struggle was of no concern. Negri experienced the cycle of struggles after 1968 as the emergence or maturation of a working-class subjectivity that demanded a political project on its own terms, outside of the objective critical framework: "What is the working class today, in this specific crisis, no longer merely as object of exploitation but as subject of power?" Negri questioned the method of Classical Marxism, principally because of its inability to give the subjective standpoint of the working class a central role in the critical process. He argued that this did not mean Marxist thought should be negated, but it did need to be reoriented or inverted, to subordinate the critique of capital to the "positive proletarian project." Negri's reading of Marxism insisted that, "far from ending up in a 'process without a subject,' the evolution of Marxian thought instead closely follows the organisational reality of the revolutionary subject. The true result of the critique of political economy is always necessarily this subjective rooting."[86]

It was the pressures of the class struggle, according to Michael Hardt, which forced the question of subjectivity onto the top of the agenda, because the Classical Marxian approach to understanding capital never succeeds in unifying itself with the standpoint of the working class so as to recognize the proletariat as the direct and effective agent of social transformation, capable of recreating and managing society. Acknowledging this involves investigation of the real conditions and behaviour of the working class in a way that allows identification of the actual working-class standpoint and interpretation of the working class as a revolutionary subject: the working class is not only the object of exploitation but also the active subject that constitutes itself and projects a new society on the basis of its needs and desires. This Autonomist inversion of the Classical Marxist approach does not signify a departure from Marx but is rather an attempt to recognize the emergence of the working-class subject as central to Marx's mature thought. The working class rises up in Negri's thought as a strong social subject rooted in the material conditions of labour and aspiring toward power and refining its capacities of self-expression

85. Steve Wright, "A Party of Autonomy?," in Timothy S. Murphy and Adbul-Karim Mustapha, eds., *Resistance in Practice: The Philosophy of Antonio Negri* (London: Pluto Press, 2005), 75. See also Steve Wright, *Storming Heaven: Class Composition and Struggle in Italian Autonomist Marxism* (London: Pluto Press, 2002), in which Wright reaches far beyond the well-known writings of Negri and presents English-language readers with a broader array of Italian Autonomist thought.

86. Antonio Negri, "Partito operaio contro il lavoro," in S. Bologna, P. Carpignano, and A. Negri, *Crisi e organizzazione operaio* (Milan, 1973), 105, 103n7, quoted in Michael Hardt, "Into the Factory: Negri's Lenin and the Subjective Caesura (1968–73)," in Murphy and Mustapha, eds., *Resistance in Practice*, 9–10, 14, 28.

https://doi.org/10.52975/llt.2025v96.010

and self-organization in society. The revolutionary subject is both the driving force and theoretical result of Marx's endeavour.[87]

Harry Cleaver coined the term "Autonomist" Marxism and used it to describe a variety of movements, politics, and thinkers who have emphasized the autonomous power of workers: their ability to define their own interests and struggle for these, to go beyond mere reaction to exploitation and take the offensive in ways that shape the class struggle and define the future. In particular, this tradition within Marxism stresses the autonomy of the working class vis-à-vis capital.[88] The working class can do away with capitalism and create a different sort of society, but capital will always require a working class; labour existed prior to capital and could therefore do so once more, whereas capital is inescapably dependent on labour for the creation of surplus value. Negri anticipates "autovalorization" or "self-valorization" in which the dialectical spiral speeds the circulation of struggles until labour tears itself away from incorporation within capital; the working class is a "dynamic subject, an antagonistic force tending toward its own independent identity."[89]

Moreover, working-class struggles determine capitalist development. According to Mario Tronti, these struggles "set the pace to which the political mechanisms of capital's own reproduction must be tuned," for he is adamant that "the beginning is the class struggle of the working class." Such understanding is inspired by Marx's observation in *Capital* that the impetus for capital's intensifying use of industrial machinery came from proletarian movements' demanding a shorter working day. Thus, the Autonomists argue that capital does not unfold according to a self-contained logic but is driven by the need to forestall, co-opt, and defeat labour – the "other" that is both indispensable and inimical to its existence.[90] Nick Dyer-Witheford described the Autonomist standpoint succinctly in 1999:

> Far from being a passive object of capitalist designs, the worker is in fact the active subject of production, the wellspring of the skills, innovation, and cooperation on which capital depends … Labor is for capital always a problematic "other" that must constantly be controlled and subdued, and that, as persistently, circumvents or challenges this command.

87. Hardt, "Into the Factory," 14–15, 27–28.

88. Harry Cleaver, preface to *Reading Capital Politically*, 2nd ed. (1979; Leeds: Anti/Theses, 2000), 15, https://files.libcom.org/files/cleaver-reading_capital_politically.pdf. See also Steve Wright, "There and Back Again: Mapping the Pathways within Autonomist Marxism," libcom.org, accessed 31 July 2025, https://libcom.org/article/there-and-back-again-mapping-pathways-within-autonomist-marxism-steve-wright; Cleaver, "Welcome," Texas Archives of Autonomous Marxism, accessed 31 July 2025, https://la.utexas.edu/users/hcleaver/txarchintro.html.

89. Nick Dyer-Witheford, *Cyber-Marx: Cycles and Circuits of Struggle in High-Technology Capitalism* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1999), 136; Antonio Negri, *Revolution Retrieved: Selected Writings on Marx, Keynes, Capitalist Crisis and New Social Subjects* (London: Red Notes, 1988), 209.

90. Mario Tronti, "Lenin in England," in Red Notes, *Working Class Autonomy and the Crisis* (London: Red Notes, 1979), 1; Dyer-Witheford, *Cyber-Marx*, 66–67.

Autonomism insists Marxism affirms the power not of capital but of the creative human energy Marx called "labour."[91]

In *Empire*, Hardt and Negri argue that the history of capitalist forms is always necessarily a *reactive* history: capitalism undergoes systemic transformation only when forced to. "The power of the proletariat imposes limits on capital and not only determines the crisis but also dictates the terms and nature of the transformation."[92] Whereas the dominant interpretation of Classical Marxism emphasizes the logical development of capital, Autonomist Marxism insists that capital depends upon the working class for its reproduction and therefore labour insubordination is the driving force of capital. In the beginning is the scream.[93] This inversion of the Classical Marxian emphasis on the power of capital is at the heart of Autonomist Marxism, rendering it better able than Classical Marxism to fan the flames of discontent, for it can countenance the capacity of labour to contest neoliberal globalization, as the working class recomposes itself and asserts its autonomy.

To understand labour-capital relations historically, Autonomism has developed the notion of "cycles of struggle": the process of composition, decomposition, and recomposition of the working class. Forms of struggle at any particular time are expressions of the composition of the working class: when capitalism introduces changes to restore order, it aims to bring about a decomposition of the working class; this decomposition gives rise in turn to the development of new forms of struggle, or a recomposition of the class.[94] With this understanding, globalization is not the unstoppable process occurring naturally due to the internal momentum and dynamism of capital – the preferred interpretation of its enthusiasts[95] – but a strategy and rhetoric consciously pursued by capital to subdue and subordinate labour. The neoliberal globalization project of capital has been motivated by the need to "decompose" the problematic other of labour to enhance profitability. Decomposition has undoubtedly occurred, but, according to Autonomist theory, recomposition will eventuate, introducing new categories of workers, such as the cybertariat and cognitariat.

91. Dyer-Witheford, *Cyber-Marx*, 65.

92. Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Empire* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2000), 268.

93. John Holloway, *Change the World without Taking Power* (London: Pluto Press, 2002), 1, 163–166.

94. Negri, *Revolution Retrieved*, 5–42; Antonio Negri, *The Politics of Subversion: A Manifesto for the Twenty-First Century* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Polity Press, 1989); Holloway, *Change the World*, 166, 162.

95. For example, Thomas Friedman states that some writings on globalization are misleading: "those that suggest globalization can be stopped. It can't. It's inevitable." ("Roll Over Hawks and Doves," *New York Times*, 2 February 1997, quoted in Lynch, "Social Movements," 173n58.)

https://doi.org/10.52975/llt.2025v96.010

Hardt and Negri foretell the appearance on the world scene of the organization of the Multitude "as political subject, as posse," which will determine when and how the possible becomes real.[96] Where the *Manifesto* assigns a privileged role within the process of radical social change to capital, *Empire*, as Steve Wright observes, assigns this role to a militant proletarian subject.[97] Hardt and Negri note that militancy today is a positive, constructive, and innovative activity; it repeats the virtues of insurrectional action of 200 years of subversive experience but at the same time is linked to a new world. "This militancy makes resistance into counterpower."[98]

The publication of *Empire* in 2000 brought Autonomist Marxism to international attention. In 2004, its sequel, *Multitude: War and Democracy in the Age of Empire*, depicted the Multitude as "the living alternative that grows within Empire," a network that "provides the means of encounter so that we can work and live in common."[99] *Commonwealth*, the final volume of the *Empire* trilogy, articulates the project of resistance of Multitude against Empire both "within and against" it. The Multitude is "learning the art of self-rule and investing lasting democratic forms of social organisation" through sharing and participating in the "common."[100] In contrast to more Classical Marxian texts, *Empire* in particular became a point of reference for many activists in the growing struggle against globalization.[101] Such activists became attracted to the Autonomist reading of Marxism because the determinism and fatalism inherent in Classical Marxism encouraged enthusiasm or resignation in relation to the globalization of capitalism. Whatever shortcomings Autonomism might otherwise have, in contrast to the admiration for the dynamism of capital articulated in the M*anifesto*, this alternative Marxian paradigm that developed the notion of Empire and Multitude seemed better able to inspire resistance to neoliberal globalization.

96. Hardt and Negri, *Empire*, 411.

97. Wright, "Party of Autonomy," 101.

98. Hardt and Negri, *Empire*, 412–413.

99. Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Multitude: War and Democracy in the Age of Empire* (New York: Penguin, 2004), xiii–xiv.

100. Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Commonwealth* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2009), vii–viii.

101. Wright, "There and Back Again," 1, 12; Timothy S. Murphy and Adbul-Karim Mustapha, "Introduction: The Real Movement and the Present State of Things," in Murphy and Mustapha, eds., *Resistance in Practice*, 1.