

Communism as Freedom (Online Article)

Historical Note

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Content

Communism as Freedom

According to Marx, the political overcoming of alienated labor in communism has two preconditions: 1) that a social class is tasked with overcoming said labor as its only way for achieving well-being, and 2) that said labor has increased the productive capacity of global society to the extent that it can guarantee the well-being of all its members. (161-2)[1] I have dealt with (1) in the article "[The Critique of Proletarian Labour](#)", and now I will deal with (2). Marx argues that the industrial mode of production has created, for the first time in history, a global society of such wealth that it has the potential of satisfying the needs of everyone: "the medium of industry [...] has prepared human emancipation, however directly and much it had to consummate dehumanization." (89, 162) This wealth currently has irrational form, being the alienated product of the workers' collective productive activity and enjoyed only by the capitalists. However, the overcoming of alienated labor entails this wealth becoming the collective wealth of all society, as it is the collective product of all society. Moreover, the overcoming of alienated labor entails that productive activity will attain its human form as the free self-expression and self-realization of human beings. Human beings will attain the freedom to become what they want to be via developing their capacities, and they will recognize themselves in the social world they produce. Communism is freedom in this sense.

The fact that workers are alienated from their productive activity and from each other means that they are also alienated from the ability to collectively control and direct society. Marx and Engels draw these conclusions most explicitly in *The German Ideology*. The sum of the workers' productive activity forms an unconsciously cooperative and interdependent whole regulated by the spontaneously occurring division of labor. The sum of people's material and mental life, i.e. society, is the product of this cooperative whole, of its collective productive activity. Living in society also entails a general interest. Given that workers are alienated from each other, their relations appear first and foremost as relations of competition. Each pursues her particular interest and does not recognize she is also participating in this collective activity and partaking in the general interest. The activity thus takes the form of an alien force with its own laws: "The social power, i.e., the multiplied productive force, which arises through the co-operation of different individuals as it is determined by the division of labour, appears to these individuals, since their co-operation is not voluntary but has come about naturally, not as their own united power, but as an alien force existing outside them". This force is the national and eventually the world economy or "world market". (163-4) The general interest likewise takes an alien form and is imposed on people because they do not recognize it as such. This form is the State. (160-1)

It follows from these considerations that the political overcoming of alienated labor in communism also entails for Marxism the workers' collective appropriation of the control and direction of society.

By recognizing themselves as the subjects unconsciously creating society in blind cooperation and interdependence, workers are tasked with consciously directing and developing their creation: "All-round dependence, this natural form of the world-historical co-operation of individuals, will be transformed by this communist revolution into the control and conscious mastery of these powers". (163-4) In communism, human beings will rationally legislate over and direct both their individual lives and the collective life of society, acquiring the position of free subjects. This is the second sense of communism as freedom.

Communism is not the end-goal of human development or history but only the next step in the dialectic of history. It is not the achievement of absolute freedom, but only the task of freedom's next necessary step, freedom from capitalism: "Communism is the position as the negation of the negation, and is hence the *actual* phase necessary for the next stage of historical development in the process of human emancipation and recovery. *Communism* is the necessary pattern and the dynamic principle of the immediate future, but communism as such is not the goal of human development." (93)

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From the collection of articles "[What is Marxism?](#)"

[1] All page numbers are from The Marx-Engels Reader, ed. Robert C. Tucker, 2nd Edition, W. W. Norton & Company, 1978.

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