

Conclusion: Our political task is the overcoming of capitalism (Online Article)

Historical Note

This online article was published on the [group 1917](#) website on 14/12/23.

Content

Conclusion: Our political task is the overcoming of capitalism

The overcoming of capitalism entails the overcoming of production founded on value as the measure of social wealth. As we have seen above, value in the sense of objectified labour is a historical category and hence subject to change and abolition. It can even be argued that on an individual level, what most people really value is free time, not labour time. Most people work as a means to an end, namely, as a means for acquiring the material wealth that would enable them to live a better life in their free time. They understand labour time as a necessary cost for achieving this end.

Consequently, labour time is instrumental, not something valuable in itself. What is valuable in itself is free time. This is evident from the fact that most people would not work if they could afford to do so, opting for leisure instead. It is also evident if we consider our housework practices. When we acquire appliances which enable us to do the housework faster, such as dishwashers and vacuum cleaners, we all simply spend less time doing housework. We value these appliances precisely because they reduce necessary housework and increase our free time to do whatever we consider enjoyable or worthwhile. Human well-being increases the more the realm of necessity (necessary labour e.g., housework) is minimized and the realm of freedom (free time, self-determination) is maximized.

On the level of capitalist society though, free time is considered valuable only as a means for labour time: free time enables us to rest in order to have energy to work the next day. In other words, our capitalist form of life rests on a reversal of our proper means and ends. In this form of life, the ultimate end is the accumulation of material wealth qua value, not the use of such wealth as a means to human flourishing.^[1] This reversal of means and ends is the main problem of our capitalist form of life, as it is inimical to human well-being and flourishing. We may achieve some well-being under capitalism, but this is despite capitalism and not because of it.

To truly live well and flourish, we need to rectify this reversal of means and ends. To do so, we need to overcome value qua labour time. The overcoming of value obviously requires the overcoming of the capitalist relations of production that posit value as the measure of wealth. In the communist society that would follow the overcoming of the capitalist relations of production, wealth would be measured in terms of a new kind of free time, "*disposable time*" [Marx], qualitatively different from the free time we experience today.^[2] It would be identified with the freedom to develop human potentialities and with this very development itself, not with value. The present-day bourgeois antithesis between free time and labour time would be abolished, and free time itself would be identified as productive and not as mere idleness. It would be productive in the sense of developing

our individual and collective capacities qua human beings, e.g., our knowledge and science, our capacity for self-expression, our artistic and physical powers etc. In this society, technology would be valuable for increasing and facilitating our freedom. It cannot directly produce value qua objectified labour, but it can directly produce value qua free time. The productive forces and the economy will grow rapidly. They will no longer be hindered by crises and the profit motive, increasing our free time and collective capacities even further.

It should be stressed that capitalism will not collapse on its own. This is a popular misconception falsely ascribed to Marx, but which Marx never held. While capitalism undergoes recurring crises, it reconstitutes itself through them, destroying enough wealth so that the cycle of surplus value production can begin anew. The contradictions of capital create the possibility for its overcoming, but only the possibility. The overcoming of wage labour and value requires a transformation of our mode of production and social form of life, i.e., of the way we produce and live. This transformation can only happen via the political class struggle of the proletariat as a class. The proletariat needs to take advantage of the widespread discontent that the capitalist contradictions beget and channel it into a communist revolution. It needs to seize control and ownership of the means of production and organize society on the basis of rational planning. If this does not happen, the contradictions will continue to operate and constantly reproduce themselves.

From the collection of “[Our Position on Capitalism: What It Is, and Why We Should Be Against It](#)”.

[1] Even the capitalists cannot readily use their wealth as a means to human flourishing. They can use some of it as such a means, but if they use a lot they risk ceasing to be capitalists and becoming proletarians. To be a successful capitalist, one needs to constantly reinvest their profit for the production of more profit, otherwise one risks going out of business.

[2] But what this new labour would concretely look like and what this new time concretely feel like is probably impossible to imagine from the standpoint of the capitalist present.

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Last update: **2025/10/09 13:33**