5 One-Sided Marxism

We must now consider some of the phenomena which result from the isolation of Being and Nothing, when one is placed without the sphere of the other, and transition is thus denied.

Hegel

We have seen that the side of wage-labour is not contained in Capital. Despite the recognition of the ‘worker’s own need for development’, that second ‘ought’ is not developed. And, even though the discussion in our last chapter has shown that Marx understood there to be a separate political economy of the working class – one manifested in the struggle to remove capital as a mediator between and above workers, it remains to consider some of the implications of Marx’s failure to incorporate this second side explicitly within capitalism as a whole. What logically follows from this one-sided Capital and from a Marxism which treats Capital as an adequate representation of capitalism as a whole?

ONE-SIDED TENDENCIES

As an incomplete epistemological project, Capital cannot present the tendencies of capitalism as a whole. If it develops only one side of the totality, then we find only capital’s tendencies and not those of wage-labour, only capital’s thrust to increase the rate of surplus-value and not wage-labour’s thrust to reduce it. Without the worker pressing in the opposite direction to capital, the tendencies presented in Capital are necessarily one-sided.

In the absence of the examination of the part of workers’ struggles in shaping the course of the development of capitalism, capital’s tendencies are taken as objective, even technical, laws inherent in its own essence. It cannot be considered surprising that inexorably rising organic compositions of capital and a falling rate of profit displace consideration of workers’ struggles when the latter are not developed as an essential element within capitalism as a whole. In place of the centrality of class struggle, productive forces march until they march no more.

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Thus, the silence as to the opposition from wage-labour, its continuing struggle to realise its own need for development, has produced the theoretical substitution of the opposition of individual capitals as the explanation for the development of productive forces within capitalism. In contrast to Marx’s concern to develop the introduction of machinery ‘out of the relation to living labour, without reference to other capitals’, what prevails is a focus on how competition drives individual capitalists to innovate. Thus, a phenomenal, outer explanation similar to that which Marx rejected in the course of (and after) the *Grundrisse* displaces an inner account based upon the opposition of capital and wage-labour; lost is the manner in which workers’ struggles impose upon capital the continuing necessity to revolutionise the instruments of production.

Similarly, centralisation of capital, that ‘expropriation of many capitalists by a few’ which is prelude to the expropriation of the expropriators, is seen as the result of the immanent laws of capital itself. Rather than emerging out of the opposition of capital and wage-labour, centralisation appears as the outcome of the struggle of capital against capital in the battle of competition. Thus, the basis not only for its dynamism but also for its senility is found in capital alone.

All of this is one aspect of the one-sidedness in the tendencies presented in *Capital*. But, there is another. We cannot even affirm that *Capital* has presented the one side of the totality, capital with its tendencies, adequately. Indeed, it is only with the completion of the totality that new sides of capital are fully revealed. Only then do we have capital which faces workers who are struggling for their goals, workers who are more than mere technical inputs to be stretched to emit more labour or to be produced more cheaply.

In capitalism as a whole, the two-sided totality, capital does not merely seek the realisation of its own goal, valorisation; it also must seek to suspend the realisation of the goals of wage-labour. Capital, in short, must defeat workers; it must negate its negation in order to posit itself.

Consider the discussion in the last chapter. There we saw that workers must unite in combination to secure for themselves the fruits of cooperation in productive activity. Only separation and division in social relations among workers permits capital to capture those gains from social production. Thus, a necessary condition for the existence of capital is its ability to divide and separate workers – in order to defeat them.

This inner tendency of capital, which has as its presupposition wage-labour-for-itself, is obscured by the failure to complete the totality. In short, without the explicit recognition of the goals of workers and their struggles to realise them, how then can we consider those actions of