

Contemporary Capitalism and the Revolutionary Possibilities 150 Years after *Capital* and 100 Years after Russian Revolution

Conference at New Delhi, November 2017 !!

Celebration of a work such as *Capital* cannot be a simple commemoration like that of any other work. This not-so-simple commemoration emanates from the nature and extent of influence that this work along with other writings of Marx has exercised. It has remained debated as much as any other work in social science. It has inspired analysis of societies and effected radical socio-political and economic transformations while it has also been critiqued by opponents as well as those who would call themselves 'internal critiques'.

What Marx did through *Capital* was, as Ernest Mandel puts it, "to lay bare the laws of motion which govern the origins, the rise, the development, the decline and the disappearance of a given social form of economic organization: the capitalist mode of production. He was not seeking universal laws of economic organization". In an unprecedented manner he explained and explored how capitalism as a system works. This involved not merely looking at its 'appearances' but also at its 'essence'. And it would be "inappropriate and unfair" to level the "charge that *Capital* "fails" to discuss many aspects of capitalism and what takes place within it", argues Andrew Kliman. He says that "it needs to be evaluated instead in terms of how successfully it reveals the inner connections." This massive project of Marx also becomes possible because it involved a huge effort on part of Marx who made it into "a rich and multidimensional text" as it drew "on a vast experiential world as conceptualized in a great diversity of literatures written in many languages at different places and times", writes David Harvey.

At different points of time Marx has been read and reread, obviously, in the changed circumstances in the back drop of the vast history of philosophy and society that experienced remarkable changes. For instance, Balibar and Althusser maintained that "only since Marx have we had to begin to suspect what, in theory at least, reading and hence writing means (*veut dire*). It is certainly no accident that we have been able to reduce all the ideological pretensions which reigned on high over the 1844 Manuscripts, and still craftily haunt the temptations to historicist backsliding in *Capital*, to the explicit

innocence of a reading". At another point Resnick and Wolff argued that they wanted to "read Marx's *Capital* from a surplus labor perspective" and they conceptualised "class in surplus terms" and applied the concept to contemporary societies such as the US and the USSR "to demonstrate how their organizations of the surplus contributed to their social injustices and inequalities". They, thereafter, dealt with how "most societies display multiple, different, coexisting and interacting sets of class processes: non-capitalist as well as capitalist class structures" and these class structures have difference while they interact as well. And they got into the question of women, surplus production and household through this trajectory. The rereading of Marx further led them to "recognize how different social sites could and often did display different class structures within societies". In other words, Marx's work, especially *Capital* even to this day remains a work that is reread.

It was 150 years ago that the first volume of *Das Capital* was published. With the publication of *Capital*, Ernest Mandel writes, what Marx did was to explain "above all the ruthless and irresistible impulse to growth which characterizes production for private profit and the predominant use of profit for capital accumulation". Capital has expanded but the process of appropriation and forms of inequality have only become acute. There seems to be a universal struggle between Capital and Labour unfolding in contemporary capitalism. This work explained to us the workings of capital and its contradictions which, Marx explained, will bring an end to this exploitative system. Despite the vociferous assertions of intellectuals post-World War II arguing that in the post-industrial society meant huge prosperity that rendered the dream of a socialist alternative meaningless. These intellectuals also ruled out the conflict between Labour and Capital as the fundamental one. However, the crisis struck capitalism periodically and it has tried out different means to override these through Keynesianism, neoliberalism, populism of different kinds, etc. Crisis seems to have become an innate part of its existence. It has kept the possibility of a revolutionary upsurge possible and one finds sustained struggle by masses across the world against its inhuman character. From Russian Revolution to the contemporary times when the politics of the Left seems to have taken diverse forms, when new subjects have entered the arena of struggle and demands for expanding/diversifying the anti-capitalist struggles have also come up new challenges have appeared vis-à-vis works of Marx.

There has been continued relevance of the two epochal events – publication of *Capital* and the Russian Revolution. While the former provided instruments of analysis and understanding the system that we inhabit the latter gave the hope that this system which flourishes on the idea of exploitation and accumulation can be substituted with another one. Whether the experiment failed or succeeded is a different question but it opens possibilities an *alternative* is as much important.

Department of Sociology, South Asian University in collaboration with Rosa Luxemburg Stiftung will be organising an International Conference on this occasion of the 150th year of publication of *Capital* and 100th year of the Russian Revolution. Today, we are in a position to not only revisit those two historic moments but also locate the contemporary in the light of this history. The conference would look at the following aspects, which are not necessarily exhaustive:

Marx, Marxism and the Making of the New Intellectual: With arrival of Karl Marx we find an intellectual who refuses to be bound within the borders and boundaries of the binaries such as intellectual and practitioner. His works defy such binaries and says how knowledge production is an overt political act. Karl Marx need to understood within that context.

Marxism and Making of Revolutions: It is important to understand how revolutions of 20th century were inspired by the works of Marx and more importantly his analysis in *Capital*. The Russian Revolution remains in this sense a significant moment. It is important to get into debates of whether it 'failed' or succeeded' but more importantly how it created the possibility to imagine an alternative. What lessons do we learn from such a revolution for the contemporary politics?

New Subjects in the Revolutionary Politics or the Re-examination of the Social Problematique: There have been huge debates around the world involving the significance of social identities and critiques often rejected Marxism for being too universalistic and ignorant about the need to bring these 'social' into the political struggles. Ingrained into this has been very oft critiques of how it failed to locate issues of migration, islamophobia, etc. It has been time and again proven by re-readings of Marx that his method always allowed the space for the 'social' to exist but the historical development of certain movements and their analysis and claim to be the only Marxists took away that dimension from Marxism.

Revisiting Capital: We seem to living under Capitalism, which is perennially under crisis. However, it still seems to survive and flourish. How would Marxian analysis emanating out of his understanding of Labour-Capital relations and his understanding of the workings of Capital look at this moment, more so when the capitalism of today may not seem like that of 19th century.

Departures in Marxian Analysis: Marx remains the Thinker of Working Class Politics but he has been understood in different ways ever since he wrote *Capital*. There are multiple interpretations of his work such as the ones mentioned above and which, obviously, indicates towards different strategies

that get employed in everyday politics. Hence, it is not only the interpretations of *Capital* but also the revolutionary politics emanating out of it.

Marxism in practice: There has been a general decline of the ‘traditional’ Left across the globe and newer forms of politics have emerged, which also go back to Marx to understand the workings of capitalism. These can be on account of different factors – ranging from the changes in the production process in respective economies to dislocation of industries and financialisation of economies to emergence of movements around indigeneity, caste, gender etc., which have also grounding themselves and their exploitative condition within the context of capitalism.

Above mentioned themes are not exhaustive but generic in nature. Abstracts of around 200 words are invited for the Conference to be held on November 3-4, 2017 (tentatively) in New Delhi. There are few grants available for travel and accommodation in Delhi. Please send your abstracts to marxistschool2014@gmail.com.

Date for abstracts: 25th April, 2017

Date for Intimation of Decision on abstracts: 15th May, 2017

Date for Submission of Draft Paper: 7th October, 2017

Date for Conference: 3-4 November, 2017

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