



*On the 200th Anniversary of the Birth of Karl Marx*

**VERIFICATION OF KARL MARX'S REVOLUTIONARY  
INSIGHTS**

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**Summary**

The experience of social revolutions in Russia and other countries showed proletarian immaturity as a subject capable to provide purposeful transition of humanity from prehistory to the true history. It is explained not only by absence of true revolution theory but also by reduction of its population and role in historical process in relation with machine living labour displacement in production process. Marx's analysis of tendencies of production forces development was based on scientific achievements and their materialisation in technic and technologies, which allowed using natural processes as labour agents and gave Marx a foundation for prediction a self-negating tendency in classical capitalism as it existed in industrial society. Post-capitalistic society transformations, conditioned by the revolutionary process of replacement of mechanical machinery with new NBIC-technologies, become real in the course of deployment of scientific and technological revolution, confirm Marx's rightness regarding the objective process of capitalism's self-negation and inevitability of radical social transformations of the existence of modern post-industrial society.

**Keywords:** revolution, proletariat, capitalism, post-industrial society, evolution, self-negation, technique, technology, society.

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### Introduction

Karl Marx believed that a social revolution as a ‘period of revolutionary transformation’ of capitalism into communist society can be a success only if there are objective material conditions and a mature subject to perform the radical transformation that this transition involves. This can happen when such productive forces as are characteristic of the capitalistic mode of production – industrial mechanical machinery and related technologies (they form the basis for which bourgeois industrial and social relations in general) – develop and dominate inside bourgeois society. Man as a productive force and the subject of effective social relations should correspond to this level of development of productive forces. Thus, for a successful social revolution, certain prerequisites must exist in the society, to serve as a basis for a potentially new mode of production or a new social formation [Marx 1959, 7–8]. The subject of the socialist revolution, as Marx suggested, could only be the industrial proletariat, more than any other force interested in changing their position in society.

An experience in verification of these theoretical provisions was to some extent gained in the practice of social revolutions in Russia and some other countries.

## **Is the proletariat capable of carrying out a victorious revolution?**

The Russian revolution was not carried out according to Marx. In 1917, Russia was basically an agrarian country with predominance of natural economy. But by that time, capitalist elements (industrial production) had definitely been formed, though limited to several compact enclaves (St. Petersburg, Moscow, Donbass, the Urals). Although the industrial proletariat accounted for a negligible percentage of the country's population makeup (about 7.2 million in proletarian families, with only 1.8 million male workers) [Kara-Murza 2015, 46, 47], they were concentrated around large enterprises and rather efficiently organized. Thanks to high concentration of capital, by 1914 Russia had entered the stage of imperialism. Despite this, the country's economy noticeably lagged behind the developed capitalistic countries, in terms of development of its productive forces as such, and was still at the very beginning of the process of capitalist industrialization. Even though Russia was the fourth largest manufacturer in the world, showing the highest growth rates, it remained on the periphery of the capitalist world system and, according to V.I. Lenin (many years before I. Wallerstein's research), the country was doomed to constantly lag behind the leading nations of the capitalist world, to serve as their supplier of raw materials and purchaser of their consumer products, and thus to be unfavourably exploited [Lenin 1973, 299-427].

In early 20th century, there formed an idea that Russia was able to break away from its peripheral position and bypass the horrors of developmental 'wild' capitalism through a socialist revolution, in which the proletariat, allied with the poorer peasantry, had to win power, under the leadership of the working people's party, to carry out radical transformations of society, and ultimately build a socialist society as the first stage of a new social formation.

In his time, Marx considered such a course of events possible, under two mandatory conditions: simultaneous proletarian

revolutions in developed capitalistic countries and support of a revolution in Russia by their proletariat. The Bolsheviks also hoped for such support, and they came to head the process of the socialist revolution in Russia.

Marx and Russian revolutionaries following him understood perfectly well that seizure of power was not the end, but a beginning of a socialist revolution, to be followed by a long period of new social engineering, which required a high level of maturity of the subjective factor of the revolution – the party and the people’s masses would need full awareness of the methods of social transformation, making a transition from prehistory to history proper, i.e. consciously directed existence of social life practices. Therefore, Marx and Lenin saw the most important task in enlightening the masses, which would help the proletariat to realize their place and role in the historical process, and to raise them abreast of the challenges of the social revolution.

Unfortunately, many of Karl Marx’s writings proved to be an ‘impregnable fortress’ not only for working masses, but also for the majority of intelligentsia [Gabriel 2014, 438]. This is not surprising. With his genius, Marx devoted more than 40 years of intensive creative work to the creation of his revolutionary theory. In order to master his heritage, a lay person needs much time and effort, which is unrealistic for most people who toil away to earn their daily bread, giving 8 hours a day to pursuit of their narrowly professional activities (before the revolution, even longer than that), plus housekeeping, raising children and restoring their energy for work. Hired workers practically do not have enough resources or time to master theoretical knowledge that is necessary in order to become a conscious subject of radical social transformations. At best, they have ideas about a new society that correspond to the level of their own empirical experience, ideological clichés and propaganda. Thus, they actually never stop being objects of manipulation. For this reason, in terms of their social maturity, the working people in

Russia and then, in the USSR were not adequate for the tasks set by the founders of the revolutionary theory. On the whole, analysis of our history makes one seriously doubt the ability of the proletariat to carry out a full-scale socialist revolution and then bring it to a victorious end.

Clearly, because of its disadvantaged position in society, the proletariat itself was not able to create a theoretical concept of building socialism without the help of representatives of the more educated strata of society. Workers themselves were only able to rise to trade unionism and spontaneous acts of mutiny against exploitation and social injustice. The hopes for massive ideological propaganda, the campaign for literacy, and later for the 'cultural revolution', mandatory primary and then secondary education as means of educating conscious builders of the new society did not quite serve the purpose. The hope for international proletarian solidarity did not come true, either. The proletariat of more developed countries did not support the Russian revolution, nor did they oppose the aggressive policies and military action of their bourgeois governments. No resolute actions of the proletariat were observed in the citadel of the capitalist world system (except Germany, devastated by WWI and humiliated by the Versailles Peace Treaty), since, as the theorists of the revolution themselves noted, those workers were in fact involved in exploitation of the working people of the colonial countries and their national capitalist peripheries. For example, back in the early 1980s, an employee in electronics in the United States got an average of \$ 5.41 per hour, or \$ 992.44 a month, while at subsidiaries based outside the US, the monthly salary for such work did not exceed \$ 50 in Indonesia, and \$ 45 in Sri Lanka. Part of the money earned by corporations was redistributed in favour of the workers of the parent firms [Rügemer 1988, 163,194]. We see the same practices at work now.

The working class in the USSR and in the countries of the so-called 'socialist community' did not show considerable revolutionary

creativity either, as they surrendered all their social and economic gains, without any significant resistance to the party/state nomenclature that appropriated state property. Even in response to intensified exploitation and infringement of their rights the working class did not take any political action to change the existing situation. The Communist Party of China also proved unable to withstand the spontaneous process of the country's transition to the path of capitalist development [Coase 2016].

Moreover, with increasing development of the scientific and technological revolution and replacement of mechanical means of production that used to accompany classical capitalism, with new-generation technology and methods, the seat of capitalism and its satellite countries effectively reduce the population of industrial proletariat as an attribute of industrial society. This class is leaving the historical scene and is unlikely to significantly influence world history in future. Perhaps, similarly to the period of bourgeois revolutions, the subject of radical transformation of modern post-industrial society will not be the social stratum or class of society whose existence is characteristic of the outdated mode of production, but the one that is born inside the current formation; it should represent the social structural basis of the future social system. Apparently, the subject of future social transformations will be the emerging mass stratum of employees from the intellectual sphere who, due to their level of education and creative skills, will be able to adequately assess their place and role in the historic process and uphold their right to truly human existence and development, although this whole forecast is still rather vague.

A major cause of the defeat of the Russian revolution and subsequent restoration of capitalism in Russia was insufficient maturity of the subjective factor of the revolution and, above all, of the party that headed it. The Communist Party of the Soviet Union turned out to be essentially a party of industrial modernization, and under its leadership, within a historically short period Russia turned

from a country on a periphery of world capitalism into a superpower whose productive forces reached a level of development adequate to mature industrial capitalist society. According to Marx, bourgeois production (economic) relations and all other social relations must correspond to the existing level of productive forces. The social 'Centaur system' that domineered during the 70 years of the Soviet power [Toshchenko 2011, 22-27], Soviet society that tried to combine two incompatible features: productive forces that reflected all the stages of capitalistic formation and social relations that were created artificially and did not go together either with capitalism or socialism proper. Those relations endured so long because they were supported by the ruling party's dictate and ideological manipulation of the masses, mobilizing them with ideas of their historic mission in construction of a new glorious future – socialism and communism. Such Centaur-type social systems can emerge and exist when the economic basis of a social formation has not reached its full maturity yet, so it is possible to force people to live and act contrary to the mainstream of historical development. But when the material base of the new mode of production gains dominance, all 'Centaur systems' come to an end and are doomed to perish. Their production relations have to adjust to the created productive forces.

Formation of production relations adequate to the productive forces of a mature capitalist society occurred in Russia during the Perestroika and social upheaval in the early 1990s. In the countries of the 'socialist community', this process was carried out approximately at the same time, due to the weakening of Soviet political and economic domination. In China, the end of the 'Centaur system' is coming about in a somewhat different way. There, this process happens as parallel formation of capitalistic production relations together with accelerated industrial modernization and significant expansion of a new technological social order: borrowing and copying technologies of post-industrial society. The rapid growth of economy and well-being allows the Communist Party of China, while

maintaining Marxist rhetoric, to retain its authority [Ouyang, Zhang 2017]. There are two possible scenarios for further development in China, with uncertain probabilities: it may be either complete transformation of the Communist Party, discarding all appearances of socialist orientation in society's evolution and openly admitting the victory of capitalism (which is a very likely development), or the highly questionable possibility of the revisionist party turning into a genuinely revolutionary one, with accelerated development of a new technological social order and deeper transformations of the fundamental social basis that will become adequate to the new social formation.

The Russian anti-capitalist revolution came to a tragic end because in Russia, correspondence of production relations characteristic of mature capitalism to the level of productive forces was established only when, like in other industrialized countries of the world, a revolution in productive forces based on the use of nanotechnology began to develop rapidly; this revolution ultimately leads to a radical change in the whole social organization. The Russian revolution was defeated when Soviet society acquired productive forces adequate to the social organization of society that had served as the goal of the revolution. The validity of our statement is confirmed by the practice of self-negation of capitalism in the Post-modern era.

The verification of Marx's social theory shows that whereas he initially relied on the proletariat as the subject of a social revolution, further, in the course of actual class struggle and ongoing analysis of development of productive forces, he increasingly doubted the ability of the proletariat to independently create a new society. This most alienated social class, due to its limited social opportunities of achieving sufficient maturity that is required to ensure a transition from prehistory to history proper, was unable to create a fundamentally new system of social existence. These doubts deepened after Marx examined the trends of development of material productive forces and realized that the process objectively leads



to replacement of human labour in the production process with materialized scientific achievements and use of natural forces and processes as 'agents of social labour', which triggers a change in the place and role of the proletariat in production and, in general, in the historical process.

### **K. Marx's Social Insights of in the Context of the Technological Revolution**

In his other social and economic insights, Karl Marx was quite right. Unfortunately, some of his ideas did not become public until much later. Thus, for some reason, Marx did not fully use his own studies conducted in the 1850s, devoted to the development of technology in capitalist society, in preparing *Das Kapital* for publication. Perhaps the main purpose of this work was study of the process of capitalistic formation up to the emergence of its classical form – as a mature industrial society. Marx may also have had fears that his ideas in that period were rather a priori insights about the future post-industrial stage of self-negating capitalism, as manifestations of those ideas had not yet become fully visible and therefore could have been perceived by contemporaries as groundless conjectures. In a word, these studies were published and became available to scientists and readers only 100 years after they were written. And only now, when Marx's insights find material embodiment in the practices of post-industrial society, we can appreciate Marx's correctness, both the heuristic and practical potential of his insights.

The essence of these ideas is as follows. In its drive to maximize profits, capital stimulates accelerated development of the productive forces. The material and technical basis of industrial capitalism is automated mechanical machine production. This level of productive forces development correlates with production relations and class structure of society, where the proletariat constitutes the overwhelming majority of the population, and the exploitation of

human resources and their productive skills ensures the functioning of capitalist society. This is the time of greatest importance of the proletariat in the historical process. However, attaining the classical height of developed capitalism, society does not immediately form a qualitatively new state. The new society ripens inside the old container, and the maturing of new productive forces corresponding to the future social formation must needs take place in the mother society's womb. The new productive forces arise at this stage of historical development due to ongoing competition that provokes implementation of scientific gains in material production and in technology, which gradually replaces mechanical machinery. This marks the beginning of a new revolution in productive forces, which naturally requires the transformation of previous production relations and all social practices. This process takes quite a long time. Now we understand that it constitutes a certain transition period, referred to as 'post-industrial' or 'post-capitalist' society (among other names). It is then that the process of capitalistic self-negation takes place, as Marx foresaw.

How does it show? At the stage of the emergence of mature capitalism, the main factor that generated growth of profits was increase in the use of labour force in production, if the workers were given less remuneration than the value of the goods produced. This unpaid labour created a surplus product – the source of capital growth. Things began to change following dramatic increase in the use of machinery and natural production agents (wind, steam, water, physical, chemical and biological processes, etc.). The use of such labour agents in production, which cost nothing to the capitalist, being included in the cost of goods manufactured, simultaneously reduces the cost of labour, because the increase in labour productivity on this basis reduces the price of goods, including reproduction of 'labour' regarded as a commodity item. Increase in productivity of machines also increases the volume of surplus value. Therefore, in all branches of production, there continues the process of replacing

human labour in production by machines and other 'agents of social labour' (Marx), all those natural and artificial processes that are now used in nanotechnology. In a word, with scientification of production, capital does not only function as means of depreciating the value of labour force, but also as a means of its negation. 'Here, the necessary labour directly turns here into unnecessary – overpopulation... Instead of the desired increase in employment, the task becomes, to reduce as far as possible the number of workers required for production of surplus labour' [Marx, 1973, 548]; thus, part of the population is pronounced to be redundant. In this, the basic features of classical capitalism are negated: growth of the proletariat and the increase of the unpaid labour share. From this situation, a number of consequences follow, demonstrating self-negation of capitalism in its basic foundations.

Instead of increasing the numbers of employed workers, society has to prevent social upheavals and to support unoccupied strata of population with food and nutrition, medical care, clothes and footwear, education, leisure occupations, et al. Social states will invest huge resources in such programmes. The financing comes from public consumption funds, mainly from taxes collected from the working members of the population; therefore, the latter are increasingly exploited. This seems to refute the current statements about alleviation of the exploitation level in developed capital countries. In many countries, the unoccupied part of the population has ceased to be a 'reserve army of labour' or a contingent of potential military reservists, since they have not done military service or received occupational training. From the high-life viewpoint, these people are the 'dispensables', and society will be better off when it gets rid of them [Delyagin 2010, 130–131]. One way to relieve this headache is to pay off to all citizens (regardless of employment) a so-called 'basic income', sufficient to provide minimum means of subsistence. People who qualify for such welfare may not go to work, but they can use the payments as an extra to

earnings proper, or as a starting capital, if they mean to raise their living standard. Such an experiment is already being tested in Finland, and some other countries are about to follow. This creates an illusion of voluntary transition to a primitive ‘socialist distribution system’ of means of subsistence. In fact, it is a way of adapting post-capitalism to real processes of satisfying people’s basic needs with the help of new technologies, peculiar to the emerging social state, where exploitation of labour force as a source of profit becomes an anachronism [Mason 2016, 193-209].

With increasing scientification of production and removing the skilled worker from the process of production proper, the need for employment of many skilled workers in mass occupations is reduced. Control of automated machine systems is delegated to special equipment, and the role of the worker is often reduced to mere supervisory tracking of the performance of sensors. Now many workers have to change multiple occupations during their lifetime. But in fact, when they move from one industry to another, they essentially perform the same function – by pressing buttons of this or that colour, they respond to light or sound signals from the sensors. These changes in material production confirm K. Marx’s conclusion that penetration of science into the production process runs parallel to suppression of the workers’ intellectual development. With this demand for ‘ignorant’ workers, their mental and occupational development comes to naught [Marx 1973, 559]. These processes are further analyzed in a number of studies conducted by Russian and foreign researchers. One response to them underlies the crisis of public school education and tertiary training, and signs of their rapid and complete degradation in their forms that developed during the domination of mature classical capitalism. Now many graduates of colleges and universities fail to find workplaces either in the sphere of blue-collar employment or among the so-called middle class, whose numbers are noticeably decreasing. These graduates tend to rely on the basic income system, if it prevails [King 2018, 515]. Governed

by traditional bourgeois values, this society is unable to direct the amassing national wealth and human potential to the development of man and society as such. On the contrary, the powers that be are doing their best to increase their wealth by plundering the majority of their nation. Thus, Nobel laureate in economics, former consultant to Bill Clinton and expert of the International Monetary Fund J. Stiglitz writes about the blatant growth of inequality and injustice of income distribution among different strata of society, and he concludes that the existing capitalistic mode of social development does not have any prospects [Stiglitz 2017]. Wallerstein et al. come to similar conclusions on the basis of a mass of specific empirical data, foreseeing a decline of capitalism in the coming decades. It now exploits the NBIC technology, essentially opening Pandora's box; yet, its contents bring about true self-negation of capitalism in the course of post-industrial evolution [Derlughian (ed.) 2017].

The economic factors of capitalistic self-negation, predicted in relation to the revolution in productive forces, correlate with the revolution in the field of computer science that integrates people's knowledge into a kind of 'universal intellect' (K. Marx).

In Marx's time, it was impossible to foresee the specific changes in means of communication based on new information technologies, and the future total computerization; nor could he imagine the rapid dynamics of many traditional occupation going extinct, or emergence of so many computing and logistic processes, based on computer technologies in planning and designing, engineering of new technological systems, their use in banking and in calculations of economic transactions between businesses and agencies, in everyday life, in sport, or in military affairs. However, the rapid growth of social labour productivity based on the potential of 'universal intellect' today causes many social transformations of mature capitalist society. It is transformed, sometimes demonstrating properties that would be more expectable in a different social formation. Thus, the use of digital technologies in banking, which

originally pursued the goal of reducing the lowest level of banking lower personnel, ultimately led to the creation of prototypes of, and later, of crypto-currency systems, such as bitcoins, which basically negate the entire financial structure of the functioning credit and banking system, because such a system is transparent to all users and stops being an exploitation tool that is controlled by the ruling class and the bourgeois state. Now the traditional banking system, uniting with the capitalist state, is trying hard to discredit crypto-currencies, prevent their introduction and propagation, but, apparently, the novel monetary forms stand better chances of victory. Commodity-money relations can really turn into a convenient cash-free system for recording and controlling the activities exchanged between people, without any mercenary intermediaries. The settlement and payment system with plastic cards, and in the long term – via mobile electronic devices, essentially transforms the very essence of commodity and monetary capital transactions, as this is going to clearly assess the real contribution of a citizen to the national income and his/her due share in the national wealth. All this will disable the functioning of speculative capital and the social differentiation among citizens on this basis [Mason 2016, 42-56].

Expanding mass production of durable consumer goods with innovative equipment and technologies also leads to a general reduction of private property items, as the aggregate quantity of objects of private property tends to decline. For example, now in countries with developed information systems, many people prefer to use cars without owning them, as cooperative, joint, shared, rental, or hour-based goods. Due to availability of such tools everywhere and at any time for a small fee, using no resources but mobile devices, such services become much more worth the money, convenient, environmentally friendly, and they do not require additional costs for maintenance, parking, or operation. The same trend is observed in the use of housing. Personal mobility, absence of a rigid link to a particular place of work, study, recreation, etc., and availability

of accommodation in any region, as well as mobile services and communication systems facilitate frequent changes of residence, rejection of acquiring ownership and chaining oneself to a particular habitat [King 218, 317–350]. The same tendency of growing preference of collective ownership of property is also observed in another area of modern post-capitalist society. The inhabitants of prosperous countries of the East and West are increasingly concerned about favourable environmental life conditions. Many people are concerned about the global warming, associated with widespread use of hydrocarbons for fuel and the formation of the greenhouse effect in the atmosphere. The number of alternative energy (such as water, wind, the sun, etc.) supporters is on the rise. They put forward many projects that find practical implementation. Among these, the solar energy is most promising. The program of its implementation involves conversion of roofs and walls of all buildings into electrical panels that accumulate solar energy for heating or cooling the rooms, for feeding household appliances as well as power plants, recharging cars and other equipment, and accumulating surplus energy in order to transfer it to a unified energy system of the district, city, country, or group of countries for the purpose of selling and making a profit. Here, the expediency and economy of creating a unified socialized energy system is clearly perceived, as it operated, for example, in the USSR, but the limitations of capitalist economic ideas do not allow each stakeholder to participate in this system as a private owner, which will actually bring all economic achievements to nothing, due to colossal costs for individual systems of production, transmission, storage and redistribution of energy, as well as settlements for its sale and purchase. It is interesting that such a system of production – generally public – and distribution of environmentally clean energy is put on the agenda and can be successfully implemented with great benefit for people in the new system of social relations. The technological basis for this has already been created within the framework of capitalism [Fücks, 2016; Rifkin 2017; Schwab 2018].

Nanotechnology emerged in capitalist society as a means of developing new combat equipment, aimed at achieving military hegemony of the capitalist world system, spreading all over the world along with economic competition and pursuit of profit, which enabled a few relatively small and technologically underdeveloped countries to develop their deterrence weapons, capable of limiting the expansionist plans of the capitalist world system; these countries safeguard their national interests and resist the hazards of capitalist exploitation, thus avoiding the fate of peripheral capitalist countries and pursuing independent policies.

Such a breakthrough in innovative technologies was the result of accumulated unprecedented technical capabilities for collecting and transmitting information via the World Wide Web as part of the the Internet, which, incidentally, was initially launched for military purposes. With exponential acceleration in improvements of information systems, availability, quantities and speed of information transfer and delivery, masses of users, virtually all people are able to follow on-line all news and events occurring in the real and virtual world. Man is becoming more directly involved in the socio-natural processes of the evolution of the planet's Universum. The decisions we take and carry out are going to depend on each person's awareness and adequate understanding of processes going on in the district, city, region, country, and the world as a whole. Current structures that govern society lose their unchallenged dominance: access to exclusive information and the use of this advantage for their own personal ends or in the interest of their clans and classes. The life of society is becoming more transparent, predictable, coherent, taking into account the interests of all its representatives.

### **Conclusion**

Wide industrial application of qualitatively new achievements that developed as part and parcel of capitalist mechanical machinery



brought mankind to a new stage of socio-historical development, during which objective conditions are created for negation of the habitual functional forms of a mature capitalist society, and embryos of a new social formation and principles for the evolution of the planetary socio-natural Universum. To a certain extent, K. Marx anticipated this in his social theory of self-negation of capitalism. Modern achievements in computer technologies, their informational support and their propagation synergistically increase the scale and speed of gratuitous creative activity of broad masses who master these new technologies. Such activities are increasingly dropping out of the sphere of capitalist commodity-money relations, and this used to be an inherent feature of capitalism. All these dramatically accelerate the process of development of the planet's socio-natural Universum, and its tendency to the point of singularity, the achievement of a qualitatively new level of development of social existence on the planet.

True, this is but an emerging trend of the development of the socio-natural Universum. Now there is fierce struggle under way, and the stake is mastering the achievements of NBIC technologies. This determines which of the two main scenarios of further social development will ultimately prevail: subordination of the scientific and technological revolution to the interests of the dominant classes and, consequently, prolonged preservation of the capitalist principles of social existence or, which is more likely, a radical transformation of mankind's life, when mature people form a mature society, i.e. a social association that can ensure its unlimited development in space and time and implement K. Marx's ideas of a society that gets rid of social inequality, whose goal will be all-round development of man. This may sound rhetorical, but we observe the emergence of objective prerequisites for this in the post-industrial society, which Marx predicted as far back as in the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

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