

# PREFACE TO THE MEXICAN EDITION OF *Reading Capital Politically*

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ZAPATISTA AUTONOMY PROJECT







I am delighted that *Reading Capital Politically* is being translated into Spanish and published in Mexico. Mexico and Latin America have emerged as a central focus of both capitalist crisis and class struggle in this decade. What happens South of the United States is profoundly important for the American people. We are closely linked with Latin America not only by a capitalist integument of multinational corporations, international trade and financial institutions, and growing U.S. military intervention, but also by the international movement of working class migration. By making this book available in Latin America, the publishers are facilitating an international circulation of thought badly needed to improve our understanding of the character of the crisis, of the social conflicts that created it and of the new antagonisms to which it is giving birth.

The bulk of this book was written in 1975 and revised in 1977 and 1978. While I remain satisfied with the work as a whole, I would like to take this opportunity to reformulate some of the key points in the light of subsequent research. In addition, because this book was written primarily for an American audience, I would like to take a little space to indicate why what is written here may be of interest to Marxist intellectuals and workers in the Third World and how the theoretical points are still relevant outside of North America.

## I

First, some comments on the general framework. My interest in *Capital* is strategic, not scholastic. For me *Capital* is still of interest because we can read it politically -as a weapon for workers to wield in the class struggle. Such a perspective is sorely needed today in the midst of crisis when the battle lines between the classes are changing so rapidly. Most of what passes for Marxist theory ignores working class struggle, or treats it as one subject among others. For too many Marxists there is only one historical subject: capital. Corporate power, not workers' power is what interests them. Unable to recognize the revolutionary subjectivity of the working class, too many Marxist theoretical efforts one-sidedly adopt the perspective and language of capital. A key aspect of the methodology set forth in this book is the focus on the two-sided character of all concepts and relations within capitalism two sides that correspond to the two antagonistic class positions. There is today a vital urgency to carry out this kind of analysis: to grasp the reality of capital and to interpret Marx's analysis of it in terms of class struggle.

This problem surfaces in the discussion of value. In the history of Marxism the concept of value has rarely been scrutinized very closely. Marxists speak of "value," and of "surplus value" as if everyone knows what they are, as givens in the discourse. They also speak of the "law of value" as a determining principle of capitalism (and in the view of some, of socialism) yet this too is rarely

defined. None of these concepts are ever approached from the point of view of the working class.

When value is defined, it is usually in the terms of classical economics, within the framework of reference of Adam Smith or David Ricardo. Value the noun is taken as a referent to the quality a commodity has because of the labor it embodies. The labor theory of value is understood as a theory that a commodity has value if, and only if, it is the product of labor. It is labor that gives a commodity its value.

This theory is most often juxtaposed to the "subjective theory of value" of contemporary neoclassical microeconomic theory that says that the value of a thing lies in the eye of the beholder. Marxists reject this "subjective" view and prefer the "objectivity" of the labor theory objective because the labor embodied is independent of individual perspectives. It is simply the socially average amount of labor required to produce that thing.

Unfortunately for Marxists, intelligent bourgeois theorists won't let things lie at this point. Instead, they are likely to object that while it is true that the amount of labor required to produce a given commodity may be given, what does it mean to say that a commodity has value, or to speak of the value in a commodity, or to say that workers produce value? If the value a thing has is not its value to someone, then isn't this value metaphysical? Isn't it redundant to say that workers produce value when it is precisely their labor that constitutes the value? Doesn't this again mystify the meaning of value making it seem like some mystical quality imparted to an object through a worker's fingertips? These objections seem to me to be quite legitimate and appropriate given the usage often made by Marxists of Marx's concept of value.

In this book I have tried to clarify these issues by approaching the labor theory of value as a theory of the social relationships between workers and capital. In my reading of *Capital*, value is a term inherited from classical political economy that becomes for Marx a concept designating the central defining core of the class relationship in capitalism: labor. Simply stated, value designates work under capitalism.

Throughout the book I also treat value as "imposed" work. Why? We know from the study of primitive accumulation that Marx began in the *Grundrisse* and in *Capital*, that work was imposed on people by capital as it took over society. We know that capital reorganized society by seizing people's land and tools and forcing them to work for it. Labor is not just one activity among others in capitalist society. It is both the central activity around which capital organizes life, and it is a coerced activity. In *Capital*, Marx explains in bloody detail that "value theory" is central to the analysis of capitalist society because forced work is, and always has been, the heart of capitalist command. This is why you can

because of this inter-sectoral conflict is inevitable (women will struggle against men, as well as against capital, etc.) We can only strive to organize our struggles such that their collective effect is to undermine capital and encourage the emergence of diversity and independent growth.

We have here a theoretical approach rooted in the very dynamic of class struggle. This is the meaning of a political reading of *Capital*, and the meaning of a political reading of the class situation itself. In the introduction which follows I argue that we must "begin from a strategic analysis of the pattern of development of working class power as the only possible ground for answering the question of how that power can be increased. Such an analysis requires starting from an examination of workers' actual struggles; their content, how they have developed, and where they are headed". This is just another way of saying that while we recognize the two-sided social relations of capital, we must always focus on our side. We must identify those conflicts that escape capitalist integration, those struggles that constitute true moments of self-valorization. Along this path we escape from the taxonomy of modes of production. We abandon a priori definitions in favor of the development of our struggles. It is here we must begin; if we wish to win.

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do they want with wells, tractors, high yielding seeds, etc? the same thing other people want: higher output, less necessary labor and more time for self-directed activities.

Self-directed activities? This brings us to the concept of self-valorization, and the analysis of the positive content of working class demands. About the specific relevance of this subject to the Third World, I want to make only two observations.

First: even though workers in the Third World are lower on capital's international wage hierarchy, and are more frequently unwaged, and consequently may have less power, less wealth and less space for maneuver than workers in the developed countries, the identification of that time and space they do have remains essential as the starting point for further struggles. There are few workers who are so abysmally oppressed and totally controlled, both physically and psychologically, that they have lost all independent desires and action. However limited, that independence provides the only possible foundation of autonomous struggle. It is only by appealing to and building on that foundation that any group of workers can mobilize itself or reach out to and mobilize others for complementary action whether that action be coordinated passive resistance (slow down, sabotage) or aggressive militance (strikes, public demonstrations, armed struggle).

Second: I think that the sphere of peasant struggles for land that have done so much to rupture capitalist development in this century provides one of the most vivid examples of independent self-determination both against capital and for separate goals. Just as the acquisition of the wage can be either a means of pacification within capital or a means of renewed struggle against it, so too with land. There are undoubtedly instances in which peasants, once having obtained land, withdraw from conflict with capital and become either a self-reproducing part of the latent reserve army or petty bourgeois land owners. But, the history and present reality of peasant movements is also filled with counterexamples in which the acquisition of land becomes the basis for further demands. When the land is a means for the development of new needs and provides the space for the development of independent community cultural institutions festivals, dances, story telling, oral history that reject capitalist values and lead to new forms or organization against domination, then we are within the sphere of self-valorization. The fact that these activities may not take the same form as those of urban workers, or that peasant visions of an alternative society may be quite different from the projects of university intellectuals, is of the same order of importance as the fact that many other sectors of the class (men, women, blacks, whites, and so on) differ in their visions.

We need not look for homogeneity in struggle, or even for frictionless complementarity. Under capital the working class is organized hierarchically and

not have Marx without value theory, as modern neoricardians sometimes suggest. Marx's whole analysis of capitalism places value, or imposed work, at the center of attention.

Marx's value theory is objective in the sense that production requires some given amount of labor that is the outcome of the two opposed subjectivities of the capitalist and working classes. But we can see one sense in which the labor theory of value is also a subjective theory. For capital, work has value in the sense that it is essential to its attempts to organize society. A commodity that requires a large amount of labor is more "valuable" to capital than one that requires little, because production of the first affords greater scope for putting people to work than the production of the second.

From the workers' point of view, of course, the situation is exactly reversed. Unlike capital, workers do not define their lives solely by work. They usually prefer, *ceteris paribus*, technologies that require the least necessary labor to produce a given product. The problem that capital intensive technology poses for workers lies not in the reduction of required work, but in the loss of jobs the primary way to obtain income within capitalism. In the post-craftsman age of mass production we can even say that for workers a commodity has more value the less labor it requires because the reduced labor sets their lives free for other activities.

To understand value in the way I have outlined calls for a redefinition of both capitalism and the working class. Instead of defining capitalism in terms of property ownership of the means of production, we can define it as a social system based on the imposition of work. We can also define it in terms of control over the means of production, but only if we recognize that the most important meaning of "control" in this context, is that of being able to coerce people to work. Similarly, instead of adopting the usual view of the working class as waged workers, we can define the working class as the class of people on whom capital is able to impose work. This includes not only the industrial proletariat that produces commodities, but also women and students who do the housework and school work of reproducing labor power, the unemployed of the reserve army who do the work of making the labor market function, and (as we will see) the peasantry.

In the light of the above understanding of value and capital as social relations of imposed work, we can now focus our attention on what must be the central issue: the content of working class struggle. Whereas capital seeks to create a working class in-itself by forcing people to work for it, that working class defines itself as a class for-itself by struggling against this imposition of work, against the reduction of people to mere worker. Beyond this, and even more importantly, there is a positive content to working class struggle when people

struggle for their own development separate and against capital. Let us look briefly at these two sides of working class subjectivity.

In capital surplus labor dominates and subordinates necessary labor. That is, whether any useful labor can be undertaken is dependent upon its ability to provide surplus labor (surplus value) to capital. The working class struggle against work amounts to an affirmation of the need for necessary labor to dominate surplus labor that there be no more surplus labor than is required by the development of necessary labor. For capital work is an end in itself the only way it knows to organize society. For people in general work is primarily a means to the acquisition of the use-values they want. For capital, rising productivity the center of its relative surplus value strategy is a means to extort more work. For workers struggling to end the subordination of their lives to capital, rising productivity is the means to abolish work to continually reduce the sphere of necessary labor toward zero work while constantly expanding available wealth.

These observations lead us to the inevitable next step in the analysis: the exploration of the positive content of working class struggle. The analysis of these struggles by Marxists has often dismissed workers' concrete demands as "economistic." Those Marxists have thus failed to explore those demands and the needs on which they are based. Yet it is only here, once we pierce the distortions of capital's efforts at cultural control, that we can begin to identify how workers' struggles both prefigure and create elements of a new kind of society. The demand for "control" of the means of production by the working class is here revealed to mean using them to reduce necessary labor and to meet diverse human needs that are constantly being redefined.

The focus in this book on the two-sided character of all concepts and relations within capitalism is a first step in the identification and analysis of working class struggle. If we focus exclusively and consistently on the working class side of this analysis we take a second step in the study of the content of the revolutionary subjectivity of the working class. The third step is that of isolating the positive content of that subjectivity.

Let us look, for example, at the discussion of the working class side to use-value as opposed to capital's side. Capital seeks to control food to force workers to work to get it. Workers seek food to build their struggles but also for its enjoyment. Capital employs energy for domination. Workers employ energy to free themselves from the role of worker and to expand their creativity. The use-value of land to capital has always been that of providing a place to put people to work, and that of a resource to keep out of others' hands so that they can be put to work elsewhere. The use-value of land for workers is to give them a resource that can help make them independent of capital, a resource where they can reduce their labor to necessary labor, and, as productivity rises, reduce the

capitalist labor market. A basic critique of capitalism has always been that it has allocated labor unequally-- those who do work for a wage are forced to work far too long, those who are denied a waged job have no work at all. (Although they are also forced to work far too long looking for work and reproducing themselves.) The revolutionary suppression of the labor market will eliminate these phenomena as we know them today. The declining amount of necessary work can be distributed more equally in society.

In the second place when we analyze the actual content of workers' struggles in the Third World we discover that like all workers they rarely seek work per se but either a wage (and then higher wages and less work) or land on which they can escape the labor market. Let us look at those who struggle for a wage. One example that is very important for the United States are those Latin American peasants who cross the border looking for a waged job. Many of these migrant workers seek the wage as a means to obtain certain specific goals (e.g., a given quantity of money with which to buy land or equipment for their farm). In these situations successful migration, strikes, and legal action to obtain wages and then higher wages also mean a reduction in the amount of time they must work to earn their target income. For those who have waged work, the struggle for higher wages is not just a demand for more material wealth. Higher wages are used to reduce the labor involved in reproduction (housework, subsistence farming, and so on). More money means less hustling to make ends meet; more food from stores and less scrounging of garbage heaps; motor scooters or cars instead of hours of hit or miss public transit; washing machines instead of hand laundry. And, higher wages provide a stronger basis to demand shorter working days, weeks and years.

A third, and perhaps one of the most vivid examples of the struggle against work is the extremely widespread demand by the peasantry for land. Some claim that they only want to work! But is it really true that peasants are narrow minded dolts who can imagine only the self-imposition of dawn to dusk work?

I think the examination of peasant struggles reveals something quite different. In many Third World countries where access to the wage is tenuous and the chances of increasing it are small, peasants see in the land not only independence from a labor market stacked against them, but a way to reduce the necessary work they must perform and to open more time for self-determined community activities. Whether they are, on the average, correct can be ascertained by looking at the expenditure of energy for work and reproduction by those in the labor market and comparing it with that in the peasant community. But one thing is certain, as a forthcoming, detailed study of the Mexican peasantry by Ann Lucas amply demonstrates, the successful acquisition of land by unwaged peasants often fails to pacify them or to remove them from social conflict. On the contrary, it broadens their power base. It strengthens their further demands for productivity raising technology. And what

This understanding of the centrality of the need to impose work in the Third World is explicit in contemporary discussions about the New International Economic Order, especially about issues of trade and technology transfer. Third World capitalist elites have demanded the liberalization of trade in the products of those labor-intensive sectors most effective in solving the unemployment problems of the Third World i.e., those most effective in providing opportunities to put people to work. The "problem" of unemployment was one of the major development issues of the 1970s. From First World institutions such as the Organization for Economic and Cultural Development to many Third World spokespersons, trade liberalization was seen as the key to the optimal use of that one resource in which poor countries were said to have a "comparative advantage": cheap labor. From Taiwan and Singapore to the Mexican border, labor intensive assembly lines were pointed to as one way to industrialize and to solve the "unemployment problem" at the same time. This issue of "jobs" is also at the center of the debate on appropriate technology. The transfer of capital intensive technology is condemned because it discourages local job creation, i.e., putting people to work. This has been a continuous source of irritation from the critique of enclave industrial development (e.g. oil and other extractive industries) to that of agricultural mechanization.

One of the central objections to the Green Revolution was that the income and rising land prices it produced often led to job destroying mechanization. Honest humanitarians worried about the loss of peasant income. Capitalist political strategists worried about those peasants taking out their anger in revolutionary struggle. When humanitarians have no understanding of the central role of imposed work in capitalist society, they often find themselves agreeing with a solution proposed by one faction of capitalist strategists: labor intensive farming methods (the vaunted Japanese Model) and aid to small farmers (the World Bank strategy). Once we do understand that role, we can subject such policies to a much more precise political analysis of how any given suggestion might affect the balance of class power. We can examine, for example, whether labor intensive methods in any given situation, would be a means to impose work and stabilize the peasantry, or whether they would be an unavoidable but temporary step toward further struggle.

But even when we recognize the centrality of the imposition of work in Third World capitalism and the way that recognition leads to a redefinition of the working class, what of the associated struggle against work? Is this a valid insight into the demands and struggles of Third World workers? Some may have difficulty with this. How, they may say, can you possibly speak of a struggle against work, a struggle for zerowork, to the people of poor countries, where high unemployment and the scarcity of work are prime reasons for poverty? In the first place unemployment and scarcity of [paid] work are functions of the

necessary labor even further. Land also provides them with space for the free development of their own projects. Food for enjoyment. Energy for freeing time and creativity. Land for freeing time and providing space for self-activity. Enjoyment, free time, free space and creativity, all these as the basis of further struggle and the beginning of self-directed development.

In the analysis of abstract labor I argue that it expresses capital's fundamental indifference to the peculiar qualities of useful labor. It is the desired result of capital's attempt to homogenize all persons and all of human life into one undifferentiated, malleable essence: work. Against this the working class poses its own homogeneity in struggle which is actually based on a multilaterality, the multilaterality of use-value and of ways of being. Capital attempts to grind people into one "working" class. The struggles of those people affirm their irreducibility to one dimensionality, their refusal to have their lives defined by work. Against capital's oneness, they pose their own multiple and differentiated selves, desires and goals. Against capital's composition, they recompose themselves in their own terms. As the multilaterality of social groups explodes capital's unity, it also explodes their existence as working class. Difference, multilaterality, these are key elements of self-direction. Thus the autonomy not only of the class against capital and for-itself, but of sectors of the class with respect to each other.

Nowhere is the two-sided analysis and the examination of the workers' perspective more complicated than in the category of the measure of value: labor time. Within work time the division seems simple: in the aggregate, necessary labor time creates use-values for workers that are used by them; surplus labor time creates profit as means of domination for business. Yet we know from the class analysis of use-value that much of "necessary" labor creates commodities with little or no actual use-value for workers. Again, the division between work time and free time appears simple: work time is time for capital (except for part of necessary labor time). Free time is time for workers' self-development. But here too we know that part of free time is structured by capital to inhibit its creative use by workers. In short, self-development only takes place in that portion of work time and free time that can be clearly analyzed as being turned against capitalist domination and used for self-development.

In the analysis of the forms of value, we can see how money and the money wage, while the clearest and most appropriate form of value, are turned by the working class into levers of power against capital. Money, we learn, is the universal equivalent. In the labor market, we see that capital tries to use the wage to brand each and every person that receives it as "worker." We can almost visualize a scorched "W" seared into outstretched palms. If capital is successful these waged "workers" come to exist for capital only as factors of production. The money wage for capital is a first, formal statement of its redefinition of

people as labor-power, of its design to degrade their multi-sided humanity to one quality: labor. On and off the job, the now constituted "working" class exists only for capital. On the job the class produces commodities. Off the job, the rest of life is geared to the expanded reproduction of labor power it is organized around the work of re-creating the ability and willingness to go back to work. If all goes well for capital this is what happens.

But of course things do not always go well. Time and time again business fails to impose its organization of life on people. It fails to confine them within its definition of working class. It fails to control, or harness, or anticipate the multifaceted, autonomous self-development of the class. It holds wage money out to people like a mirror that pictures them dressed and ready for work. But they take the money and then use absenteeism, strikes and sabotage to demonstrate that they are not factors of production, that they are not just living tools defined by work. They use the labor market to get money and then employ these weapons to convert work time into play, or to escape from work to realize their own plans, individually and collectively. They take the money and use it as revenue (destroying its role as capital) to acquire the use-values they need for their own development. By seizing time and by converting money the quintessential expression of value into a weapon against capital, workers carve out an increasing area of autonomy for their self-directed development.

Against capital's all resolving dialectic of work, the working class develops its own self-determination. This path of self-determination is one hardly explored by Marxists, and yet, it is only along this path that any future beyond capital can lie. In his recent, brilliant political reading of the *Grundrisse*, *Marx Beyond Marx*, Italian Marxist Antonio Negri has explored this path of working class self-determination as it emerges within Marx's theoretical analysis of the class struggle. Against the valorization of capital, there is what Negri calls the self-valorization of the working class. Self-direction, self-valorization, these are terms which evoke not only the autonomy of working class struggle against capital, but also the notion of a separate direction, of an independent process that both destroys and escapes capital's own determinations. Separateness and independence, these are the central qualities of working class subjectivity as it breaks free from capital and emerges as a multi-sided human subjectivity.

The building of this power of self-valorization, separate from and antagonistic to capital, occurs in all the moments and spaces of life that the working class is able to extract from capitalist domination. Yet, how are we to identify these moments and spaces in a world in which, as Critical Theory has so acutely analyzed, capital has sought to shape all of life inside and outside of the factory? Where orthodox Marxism has been quick to locate capitalist despotism in the factory and where Critical Theory has laboriously detailed capitalist cultural domination and the instrumentalization of working class struggle, we must learn to recognize and to explore the sphere of working class struggle that

is an attempt to classify people into one category or another by their dominant role. If a worker works most of the year in a factory then that worker is classified as a member of the working class. If a person lives on the land most of the time, then that person is a peasant, not a worker. This is stupid. What we should see is that there are many roles or functions played by the working class in its relation to capital, and that individuals move from one function to another at different points in time. When a worker is in the factory, that worker is a productive worker. When that same worker is at home doing housework or working on the land in subsistence agriculture, the function has changed now we are in the sphere of the reproduction of labor power but the worker is still a worker, still part of the working class.

When a peasant takes a few days or weeks to look for waged work, that peasant passes from the latent to the floating reserve army. If there are no jobs, after a while the worker will pass back from the floating to the latent role. If there is a job, then for a while the worker will be part of the waged labor force instead of being unwaged. There is no change in class status here, only a change in the form of the relationship with capital! All persons who are forced to work for capital either reproducing themselves as labor power in the latent or floating reserve army or actually producing a product are part of that working class. The form of the imposition of work is secondary.

But what, some may ask, of the peasants who produce a surplus they sell on the market? Are these not petty bourgeois producers and outside the working class? The answer is that they are still very much part of the working class if the result of their work is only self-reproduction. It does not even matter if they hire waged labor, if they are only earning subsistence. These peasants are essentially piece workers for capital and the per-unit price they obtain for their agricultural products is their piece rate. To recognize this we must simply subordinate the analysis of form to that of content. If they are forced to work, and capital, but not they, earns a surplus above subsistence on their production, then the fact that the surplus is extracted via the market instead of through a direct piece wage is secondary. With piece wages the exchange takes place within the factory, with market piece-rates the exchange occurs outside it. When the factory consists of agricultural fields, the distinction is blurred in physical reality as well as in theory. This is something well known to contract farmers, and sometimes recognized by small "independent" farmers. During a recent farmers' strike in the U.S., the striking farmers divided their so-called profit, or net revenue, by the number of hours they worked and calculated their effective hourly wage. This wage, which on the average was quite low, they displayed to industrial workers in a bid for class solidarity! Let me repeat: the wage is not the only form through which the reduction of humans to abstract labor under capital is accomplished. Not in the Third World, not in the First. In all worlds where it holds sway the central problem for capital is the imposition of work, how it manages to do that is purely secondary.



From the point of view of the understanding of value and class relations set out in the previous section, we can reinterpret the meaning of the "capitalist transformation of precapitalist modes of production" through Green Revolution technologies. In the first place, the sector of wealthy peasants into which the Green Revolution was introduced was generally one in which the wage form of exploitation was already predominant. Where it was not, the transformation in worker status involved movements between un-waged and waged working class status, not between precapitalist and capitalist. The Green Revolution technology itself generally involved a higher organic composition of capital with the usual negative direct impact on waged employment. By raising productivity the Green Revolution increased relative surplus value (the relative amount of surplus labor extracted from those still employed in production) but also accentuated the problem of imposing work extensively. The failure of the Green Revolution to achieve its political goal of rural stabilization lay partly in contradictions such as these and partly in the militant autonomy of a peasantry which refused to accept such changes passively.

Central to this reinterpretation is the willingness to treat the peasantry as one part of the working class, and to analyze the dynamic of the relationship peasantry-capitalism in class terms. I want to be explicit here about the rejection of the view of the peasantry as belonging to some precapitalist mode of production. As authors such as Andre Gunder Frank and Immanuel Wallerstein have pointed out, peasants have been incorporated into and exploited by the world capitalist system since colonial times. But this is not enough, as many have vehemently insisted. It does not answer the charge that peasants are not part of the working class because they do not receive a wage. Clearly what is needed is a theoretical framework that allows us to deal with both their insertion into capital and the specificity of their situation at the same time.

I argue that the analysis of capitalism as a society based on the imposition of work, on value as imposed work, provides us with the necessary framework. This analysis recognizes that the imposition of work may take more forms than the labor market wage. Although the wage is the most perfect form within which to express the reduction of humans to abstract labor under capitalism, it is not the only form through which this is done. Within this theoretical perspective when peasants are not earning a wage, they constitute an important part of the unwaged sector of the working class. They play a role that is, in part, similar to that of unwaged housewives and students -- the role of reproducing their own labor power as part of the reserve army.

Let us examine this position of the peasantry a little more closely. It is clear that peasants are often linked to capital quite directly through part-time waged labor. This is the only role usually recognized by most Marxists as a "working class function." The problem with the usual analysis is partly methodological. There

is not dominated and instrumentalized. We must learn to identify the sphere of self-valorization as the only possible way to destroy capital and to create our own new world.

We know from the analysis of cultural domination that we cannot turn to the psychological criteria of "enjoyment" as a key to self-valorization. The psychology of domination/liberation is too complex to admit of such simple formulae as: capitalism is so alienating that whatever you enjoy must be liberating. We know that part of domination is the inculcating of at least a superficial acceptance that often includes the "enjoyment" of waged work, of housework, of school work, and so on. No, to find a way to grasp the moments and spaces of self-valorization, we must retain the class struggle as our only criterion. What does this mean?

When workers win time away from waged work (e.g. shorter work weeks, vacations) or when they win space for their activities (e.g. youth center, land) we must analyze what they do with that time and that space. If the activities become mechanisms of pacification and domination that succeed in helping capital to bind the class struggle within the competence of its own dialectical development, then we must concede that we are not on the terrain of self-valorization. If, on the other hand, those activities provide strength and become launching pads for further struggle that ruptures capitalist development, then we are truly within the space of self-valorization. Here the working class deepens its antagonism with capital by developing its own multiple projects autonomously. Examples of such moments are as diverse as working class experience. Let us look at some examples.

The theorists of capitalist hegemony have been careful to point out that working class struggle can be instrumentalized by capital if it can be managed in such a way as to promote capitalist development. In the post- World War II period perhaps the most important case is that of struggles for wage increases and work time reductions. To the degree that these increases and reductions were successfully linked by capital to productivity increases, they provided a prod to capitalist technological development and no serious threat. But, what these theorists have been unable to recognize or deal with, is the rupture of these links in the 1960s and 1970s as the struggle for higher income and the struggle against work combined to undermine capitalist accumulation. The emergence of industrial insurgency and community revolt (civil rights, urban insurrection, student and women's struggles) blasted holes in the smooth management of accumulation and created new spaces and times for further struggles. It was the emergence of these uncontrollable waves of struggle that build on themselves, creating a whole sphere of "counter-culture" and self-valorization, that threw the capitalist system into crisis. The crisis continues because capital has failed to regain control. It has failed to discover adequate strategies to reduce self-valorization to its own valorization. It must be our

project to move so quickly, to circulate our struggles so thoroughly, to build our power so completely, that we destroy or outflank every new capitalist initiative. Working class struggle against imposed work has created a crisis for capital. That crisis for capital is simultaneously an opportunity for us. It is only by exploring and building on the positive content of our struggles that we can make the most of that opportunity.



## II

While the forgoing analysis is developed largely in the abstract, and is thus applicable to all areas of capitalism, I want to discuss some of the specific ways this perspective is relevant to the Third World. Although this book is primarily a theoretical work, its writing grew out of a research project on the rise and fall of the Green Revolution. During the 1950s and 1960s U.S. foundations and foreign aid were promoting the use of high yielding grain varieties throughout Mexico and Asia. Research on the origins of that policy led me back to rediscover the involvement of those foundations in China in the 1920s and 1930s and then to explore the attempts of Northern capital to restructure the U.S. South at the turn of the century.

In developing a theoretical framework for the analysis of that historical experience, I began by emphasizing the distinction between modes of production and the transformation of precapitalist modes by an actively expanding U.S. capitalism. Yet, while researching the origins of the Green Revolution, I began to see a pattern of class interaction that did not fit my mode of production analysis of imperialism. What had appeared at first as one-sided, capitalist "offenses" often turned out to have been defensive reactions to autonomous peasant struggles that had taken the initiative in the class confrontation.

I began to see that the Green Revolution was only the latest in a long line of interventions that used technology as one weapon to contain and pacify rural insurgency. The various efforts to transform the rural U.S. South had been, in large part, a business response to the revolt of black slaves and then of farmers and sharecroppers (black and white) in the Populist upheaval of the late 1880s. Similarly, the experiments of the Rockefeller foundation in China not only had drawn on their experience in the U.S., but evolved in response to rapidly spreading Chinese peasant revolution. Even in Mexico the early Rockefeller plant breeding and public health efforts could be seen to be a "progressive" response to rising nationalism spurred on by popular demands on the elite that reached its height with Cardenas' land reforms and oil field nationalizations of the late 1930s. In Post-WWII Asia and Latin America there was, again, more to American imperialism than a simple minded aggressive expansionism. There was the urgent and pressing need to contain and crush widespread rural insurgency.

From this recognition of the defensive side to U.S. interventionism, it was only a short jump to seeing the Green Revolution technologies built around high yielding grain varieties as constituting a reactive strategy to contain and control peasant struggles. Here the class struggle (the relations of production) emerged as the central driving force of the forces of production. This did not fit into any of the variants of historical materialism.