

THE VICISSITUDES OF THE IDEA OF THE ABOLITION OF LABOUR IN MARX'S TEACHINGS—CAN THE IDEA BE REVIVED?

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INTRODUCTION

One of Marx's most important ideas is the abolition of labour. Despite the centrality of this concept in Marx's early writings and to some degree in his later writings, it has not been much discussed in Marxist literature. Indeed, numerous Western Marxologists have discerned the humanist character of Marx's teachings and identified the desire to overcome alienation inside and outside production as their underlying motive. However, the radical Marxian vision—the abolition of labour—has not gained due recognition. Marxian thought is devoted to liberating humanity from all kinds of servitude, and the abolition of labour constitutes a major aspect of this liberation.

Of course, the Marxian concept of the abolition of labour has been considered by prominent thinkers such as Herbert Marcuse and Erich Fromm, who even try to integrate it into their own teachings, mainly into their socialist visions. It has also been discussed by Yigal Wagner and Michael Strauss from Israel, who do not hesitate to attribute great importance to it. Robert Tucker and Robert Steigerwald should also be mentioned as scholars who have considered the concept. Tucker rightly says that the communist revolution, as envisaged by Marx, would constitute a “radically new mode of production that altogether abolishes and transcends... ‘labor’ itself in the sense in which mankind has always known it.” Steigerwald's attitude to the Marxian idea of the abolition of labour is negative. In his book on Herbert Marcuse, he reproaches him for having adopted the “most exaggerated and most ‘eschatological’ conclusions of Marx, which he himself later gave up...: ‘the idea of abolition of labour’.” Certain aspects of this idea were discussed by Benedito Rodrigues de Moraes Neto and Bruno Gulli at the conference “Marxism 2000” (Amherst, Massachusetts, 21-24 September 2000). Both participated in the panel “Marx and Labor” with the writer of this article. Based on my interpretation of Marx's teachings, I belong to the undeclared school established by Fromm and, in particular, Marcuse.

Neither Marxists nor scholars who have dealt with Marx's concept of labour should be reproached for not giving the abolition of labour due consideration, since, as Steigerwald notes, Marx himself seems to have substantially retreated from this idea in his later writings. This retreat has far-reaching and, indeed, fateful consequences for the full realisation of human freedom. It suggests not only that production cannot be transformed into free activity, but also that exploitative social relations cannot be abolished.

At the core of the highest phase of communist society, as described in Marx's early writings, is the abolition of labour. The more famous abolition of private property, the well-known abolition of the state, and the lesser-known abolition of the division of labour

are all conditional upon the abolition of labour itself. Below it will be further elaborated that the abolition of labour is not an abolition of production itself but a transformation of the prevailing mode of production into a new mode that can no longer be termed “labour.”

For Marx, the transformation of the mode of activity, mainly of productive activity, into a new, non-alienated form of activity is essential for the transformation of society. If we do not change our mode of activity, any effort to create new, non-exploitative socialist relations will necessarily end in regression to the previous state of affairs. Naturally, such regression would not necessarily mean, for instance, the immediate re-emergence of capitalism. It means that exploitation can take many forms, even “socialist” ones. The reestablishment of capitalism may sooner or later follow the development of “socialist” forms of exploitation, if socialist experiments take place within a capitalist setting. Thus, any retreat from the idea of the abolition of labour is critical, for it marks the inevitable impossibility of abolishing exploitative relations. Although Marx never actually admitted to retreating from his belief in the possibility of abolishing exploitative relations, such a conclusion, as I will demonstrate, is unavoidable.

What, in effect, is the abolition of labour? How can we understand the relationship between this abolition and the abolition of exploitative relations? What are the possible reasons behind Marx’s retreat from the idea of the abolition of labour? Can we revive this idea, taking into account new developments in human technology? These are the questions that will be discussed in this article.

THE ABOLITION OF LABOUR IN MARX’S WRITINGS

THE IDEA OF THE ABOLITION OF LABOUR

In *The German Ideology*, jointly written by Marx and Engels in 1845-46, but whose anthropological-philosophical part was mainly composed by Marx, we read:

In all the previous revolutions the mode of activity always remained unchanged and it was only a question of a different distribution of this activity, a new distribution of labour to other persons, whilst the communist revolution is directed against the hitherto existing mode of activity, does away with labour (*die Arbeit beseitigt*).... (last emphasis added)

In a following passage Marx expresses the same idea in a somewhat different form:

While the fleeing serfs only wished to freely develop and fully realise the conditions of existence, which were already at sight, and hence, in the end, only arrived at free labour, the proletarians, if they are to fulfill themselves as individuals, must abolish the very condition of their existence hitherto, which has also been the condition of existence of all

society up to the present, that is, they must abolish labour (die Arbeit aufheben).
(emphases added)

In another passage in the same work we read:

Labour is free in all civilized countries [that is, it has become wage labour – labour that can be freely sold by its owner]; [in the communist society] it is not a matter of freeing labour but rather of abolishing it. (last emphasis added)

These citations reflect the radical nature of Marx's vision: the abolition of labour realised by communism is not the abolition of slave labour of the ancient mode of production; nor is it the abolition of compulsory labour in the feudal or Asiatic mode of production; nor is it tantamount to the abolition of wage labour of the capitalist mode of production. The last quotation indicates that the new, communist form of productive activity cannot be understood as the most free form of labour, that is, labour that is democratically organized by the workers. Communism would not be based on labour, but rather on a new mode of productive activity, which would break the continuity of human history—would abolish the most basic form of production, labour, which has prevailed from the outset of human history and become the basis, in different forms, of all exploitative societies.

In order to better understand the meaning of this new mode of production, termed the “abolition of labour,” we must examine Marx's teachings in greater depth.

Following Aristotle, Marx differentiates between two kinds of human activity. Any activity of the first kind is a means to an end, an activity that serves as a tool, as an instrument, for achieving a certain purpose outside itself. Such activity is a necessary mediator between the subject and its purpose. To denote this activity, Marx uses in his late writings the terms “purposeful activity” (zweckmäßige Tätigkeit) or “activity determined by the purpose” (zweckbestimmte Tätigkeit). Activity of this kind is subject to efficiency criteria; that is, its purpose should be achieved in the shortest way possible. Such activity may be abandoned if the purpose can be achieved without it. Following Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno, we refer in modern philosophy to such activity as “instrumental activity.” In performing instrumental material activity, man uses his own body, his legs and arms, as well as his mental processes—the attention and thoughts that direct the activity—as means or as tools. That is, he reduces himself to an instrument, thus committing an act of self-estrangement. Hence instrumental production is alienated production. This form of self-alienation is a primary fact of human existence, as will later be shown.

Activity of the second kind is that which is desired and performed for its own sake; that is, the activity itself is the doer's purpose. Such activity is not a means to an end; it is not perceived as a tool, as an instrument, for achieving another aim outside itself. Being the aim itself of the subject doing it, such activity is not subject to efficiency criteria and may be performed at will. In the early writings Marx refers to such activity as “free activity,” “self-activity” (Selbsttätigkeit, Selbstbetätigung). In the late writings he terms such

activity “self-purpose” (Selbstzweck). We may term such activity “non-instrumental activity.” Realisation of the second kind of activity within the scope of production would, then, be tantamount to the abolition of labour.

Early in his intellectual development, Marx did not distinguish between the terms “production” and “labour” (Arbeit). Differentiating between instrumental and non-instrumental production, he referred to instrumental production as “alienated labour” (entfremdete Arbeit) or “external labour” (entäußerte Arbeit). However, from the middle of the Economic-Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844, namely from the manuscript “The Relationship of Private Property,” he began to call only instrumental production “labour”; production as such ceased to be identified with labour (Arbeit). “Alienated labour” of the early phase and “labour” of the later phase both denote instrumental production. This point is best proven by an analysis of Marx’s concept of private property. For him, private property is not a primary social fact, but rather a derivative social phenomenon, which has historically developed from a certain kind of human activity, namely from alienated productive activity. Thus, in the early phase he says that “alienated labour is the...cause of private property.” After changing the terminology he says, for example, that “labour is the essence of private property” (that private property, or exploitation, is a manifestation of labour; that is to say, it is labour that has enlarged the scope of its means, thus turning other human beings into its live instruments). Apart from rare occasions, Marx never deviated from the new terminology; and these rare deviations occurred for reasons of linguistic convenience. Thus, “labour” came to signify instrumental production in most of his writings. In this context he sometimes uses the term “industry” (Industrie), not in its ordinary sense, but in a philosophical-anthropological sense. This term means either labour, instrumental production, or labour in its most developed stage, instrumental productive activity equipped with the most advanced technology. The abolition of instrumental production is defined as the “abolition of labour” (in *The German Ideology* and *Grundrisse*) or, less often, as the “abolition of industry” (Abschaffung der Industrie) or “liberation from industry” (as in the manuscript *On Friedrich List’s Book “The National System of Political Economy”*).

For Marx, the model for such new productive activity, which is not labour any more, is artistic activity. When I write a poem, draw a picture or sculpt a statue, I perform these activities for their own sake and not as a means to an end. One might ask: “Whenever I draw a picture or sculpt a statue, isn’t my activity a means to an end – the poem, the picture or the statue?” The answer would be that the activity of the artist is not a means to an end, but rather a path toward an end that is itself an end. In other words, the activity itself is an aim or purpose no less than the artistic object that it creates.

In *Grundrisse* Marx addresses this matter in several passages, illuminating his conception. Thus, for example, he discusses the nature of the activity of the mediaeval hand-worker. This activity used to have dimensions of creativity that substantially reduced its instrumental character: “Here is labour itself still half artistic, half self-purpose (Selbstzweck) etc., mastery.” In this sentence Marx clearly defines artistic activity as an activity that is an end in itself, namely as non-instrumental activity. Free, non-instrumental production would be fully artistic in character.

Play is also a model for non-instrumental activity, but, contrary to all kinds of material (gegenständlichen) artistic activity (the models envisaged by Marx), play does not create anything, does not have material results. As such, play cannot serve as a model for non-instrumental production. In addition, play is a kind of amusement, whereas artistic activity often involves great intellectual efforts and pain, until a new creation—a picture, a statue, a poem, a symphony—is brought into the world. Marx rejects therefore the idea of transforming labour into play. In this context, he praises Fourier for having expressed the idea of “elevating (Aufhebung)...the mode of production to a higher form.” However, Fourier’s model for higher, non-instrumental production cannot be accepted: “Labour cannot become play, as Fourier would like.” Marx speaks further of creating new subjective and objective conditions, “in which labour would become travail attractif (attractive work), the self-realisation of the individual, which in no way means that it would become mere fun, mere amusement, as Fourier in a childishly naive manner conceives it. Truly, free work, e.g. composing, is at same time precisely the most damnable earnestness, the most intense effort.”

But why should we transform the mode of production? Why should we abandon efficiency criteria, the most typical and definitive criteria of instrumental activity, in favour of other criteria, such as the producer's artistic experience and artistic enjoyment?

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN LABOUR AND PRIVATE PROPERTY

According to Marx, labour, namely instrumental productive activity, is the cause of exploitative and stultifying relations in human society. Exploitation (“private property” as exclusive ownership of the means of production), the social division of labour and the state are not primary social facts. Nor are they a later voluntary human creation uninfluenced by the basic mode of productive activity. For Marx, they have developed as a result—as an indirect, non-intended social result—of labour. Thus, we can abolish these social relations if we abolish their cause—labour. We shall demonstrate this line of reasoning by exploring the development of exploitation, that is, private property.

For Marx, labour – or “alienated labour” as he first termed it – is not a result of exploitation, but rather a very early phenomenon, one that has existed since the beginning of human history. From the very day that human beings began producing humanly, that is, consciously, they have shaped their productive activity as a means to an end, as instrumental activity—as alienated activity. Applying the terms “labour” and “industry” to denote instrumental production, Marx states that “all human [productive] activity hitherto has been labour, that is, industry, activity estranged from itself.”

In the article “Alienated Labour” (included in the Economic-Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844) Marx clearly says, applying the term “external labour” (entäußerte Arbeit) as another way to denote alienated production,

An analysis of this concept [of external labour] shows that though private property appears to be the reason, the cause, of external labour, it is rather its consequence....

This statement excludes any attempt to explain the development of alienated, instrumental, production as a result of private ownership of the means of production. The explanation should therefore take alienated production, not exploitation, as its point of departure.

Labour, that is, instrumental, alienated production, has two sorts of results: desired, planned results and unintended results. The desired ones are the final products that were the aim of production from the outset. As an aim, a desired result first exists ideally, namely as an image in the mind of the immediate producer, and as such initiates the process of production. The unintended results are processes and their consequences, either in nature or in human society, which are brought about indirectly by labour.

To denote the unintended social results of labour, Marx often uses the German term “naturwüchsig.” As to its simple meaning, which Marx himself applies often, this term may be translated into English as “grown naturally” or “genuinely natural.” But with regard to its special Marxian meaning, that is, denoting the indirect results of labour, it should be translated as “seemingly natural” or “as-if natural.” Thus social relations such as exploitation, the social division of labour or the state (the governmental relationship) are “as-if natural” results of labour. This means that they are seen as natural phenomena of human society and may even be perceived in common human consciousness as natural social powers, powers that govern human life no less than do natural forces such as climate and the geological structure of the earth. Actually, however, they are human “products,” albeit not voluntarily chosen and created, and can, under certain circumstances, be abolished. In this context Marx speaks about “as-if natural society,” and, in relation to the social division of labour, “activity which is not voluntarily, but seemingly naturally, divided.”

Engels sheds more light on this point in his largely forgotten article, “The Contribution of Labour to the Evolution of Man from the Ape,” which was written in accessible idiom in 1876 and published in 1895. All the hitherto modes of production, he says, have been based on “achieving the nearest and immediate useful effect of labour.” This useful effect is either the final product to be consumed or a certain interim stage that is necessary to produce the final product, such as an irrigation system or arable land. This way of shaping production indirectly brings about changes in nature and in human society that can be immense in magnitude. Engels speaks of the “unforeseen impacts (Wirkungen),” the “remote natural effects (Wirkungen),” and the “remote social effects” of labour. He first discusses the indirect effects of labour on nature, such as changes in the physiological structure of farmland and ecological damage. Later, he discusses the indirect impact of labour on human society, stating that exploitation has developed as an indirect effect of labour on social relations:

In the present mode of production [i.e., labour, and not the capitalist mode of production, which is the modern manifestation of labour] we consider – in relation to nature, as to society – only the first and most tangible outcome; and then we are astonished that the more remote effects (Nachwirkungen) of the actions directed to this end turn out to be quite different, mostly entirely the opposite... that private property based on one’s own

labour must of necessity develop into the lack of property for the workers, while all possessions become more and more concentrated in the hands of non-workers...

However, Engels does not elaborate in this article on the specific way in which exploitation has developed as an indirect social effect of labour. (His famous work, *The Origin of the Family, Private Property, and the State*, is not a philosophical-anthropological inquiry and cannot be of much use in this research.)

We can find in Marx's writings three explanations concerning the historical, as-if-natural development of exploitation. They can be seen as three aspects of the same explanation. The first and the second appear mainly in the *Economic-Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*, often in the same article, "Alienated Labour." Sometimes these aspects even overlap each other. The third one appears in *The German Ideology* and in the late writings, mainly in *Outlines for the Critique of Political Economy from 1857-58*, known as *Grundrisse* (the first word of the German title). We turn to the first explanation.

Instrumental activity is not only a self-relationship – that is, an activity in which the subject uses himself, his body and soul, as a means to an end—but a relationship with the outside world as well. In such activity, the environment, nature, is perceived and treated as a complex of means, in the form of tools and materials, for achieving the final goal—the desired products. Nature is not perceived as something to be enjoyed in the process of production, for example, as diversified use values that may be experienced aesthetically in an artistic mode of production. Marx speaks in this context of the "external relationship to nature" and of the "self-estrangement of man from nature." However, other human beings are also part of the environment, part of nature, so man views and treats them as a means to an end, mainly as live tools. In this way exploitation develops. Exploitation is in its essence the use of other human beings as means to an end, and this use is a result of instrumental production—of labour.

According to the second explanation, labour—"alienated labour" as Marx first termed it—or instrumental production, is self-estrangement, which involves self-servitude. When man uses himself, his body and his mental powers, as a means, he deprives himself of spontaneous, free life. In other words, he does not view, and does not experience, his activity as rich self-development, as source of enjoyment, but as useful action. Marx expresses it by saying that when labouring, man turns his "life activity," his "productive life," into "a means to his physical existence." As labour lasts longer and becomes more intensive in the wake of the multiplication of needs, self-servitude increases, becoming harsher and harsher. One of the aspects of this self-servitude is that of man's making himself subservient to the "rule" of the product, turning the latter into the "master" of the process of production. This state of affairs is a result of man's reducing himself to a means while conferring to the product the status of the sole end within the scope of production. The end, as Aristotle has already noted in *Ethica Nicomachea*, is superior in value to the means—instruments and actions—of achieving it. Naturally, man, standing outside of production, is its ultimate end. However, once he sets up a requested product

as an end within the scope of production—as the aspired end of a certain act of production—he must, having the status of a means, adapt himself to the “requirements” of that product. In *Capital*, Marx elaborates on this self-servitude:

He [the worker] not only effects a change of form in the natural material on which he works, but he also realises in it his own purpose (*Zweck*), which he knows, a purpose that determines, as if by force of law, his *modus operandi*, and to which he must subordinate his will. And this subordination is by no means a lonely act.... The less the worker is attracted by the content of labour (*Arbeit*), and the mode in which it is carried on, and the less, therefore, he enjoys it as play of his own bodily and intellectual powers, the more attentive he must be. (emphases added)

Man then looks for ways to get rid of this self-servitude and impose it upon his fellow man. We may say that man has an intrinsic drive to free himself from instrumental activity, and, if such activity seems to be necessary (as in economic life), to impose those aspects of it wherein “he...does not feel content but unhappy” on his fellow men. Other human beings should be treated harshly by me, should be exposed to pain and suffering. On the other hand, dialectically, the way I treat myself makes it easier for my fellow man to take over my activity, to use me and subject me to the rule of his own product. In this way exploitation comes into existence. Marx formulates it in the *Economic-Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844* in several ways, which can be seen either as descriptions of a real historical development or as analyses of the inner logic of an existing social relation:

When man confronts himself, he confronts the other man. What holds of a man’s relation to his labour, [to] the product of his labour and to himself, also holds of a man’s relation to other man and to the other man’s labour and object of labour. (emphasis in the original)

Thus through estranged labour man not only creates his relationship to the object and to the act of his production as to powers that are alien and hostile to him; he also creates the relationship in which other men stand to his production and to his product, and the relationship in which he stands to these other men. Just as he turns his production into the negation of his self-fulfillment, into his punishment; just as he creates his product as a loss, as a product not belonging to him – so he creates the domination of a person who does not produce over his production and over the product. Just as he estranges from himself his own activity, so he confers to the stranger activity which is not his own.

As these quotations demonstrate, Marx’s second explanation of the development of exploitation stresses that the use of the fellow man as a means, as an instrument, in the process of production is a result of man’s using himself as an instrument, that is, a result of instrumental, alienated production.

Marx says, furthermore, in words that hold true for both of the first two explanations, that when another man wishes to use me as a means to an end, he finds, since I am used to treat myself as a means in my production, a ready instrument. In other words: He does not have to turn into a means a human being whose activity is not, in its very nature, a

means, but rather an end in itself; he simply finds a live instrument before himself and gets hold of it. The instrumental, alienated, form of my activity facilitates its use by other humans.

We should emphasise, as Marx himself does, that by freeing himself from self-servitude, which is an aspect of labour, and imposing servitude on his fellow man, man does not free himself from alienation. His new activity, namely exploitation, the “activity of private property,” as Marx terms it, is instrumental activity, a means to an end—the final product of the process of production (as in slavery and feudalism) or financial profit (as in capitalism). As such it is alienated activity. Alienation is not identical with suffering and with the loss of economic freedom.

The propertied class and the class of the proletariat present the same human self-alienation (*Selbstentfremdung*). But the former class feels at ease and strengthened in this self-alienation, it recognizes alienation as its own power and has in it the semblance of human existence. The latter feels annihilated in alienation; it sees its won powerlessness and the reality of inhuman existence. (emphases in the original)

We turn now to Marx’s third explanation of the development of exploitation.

The main criterion of labour, as of every instrumental activity, is efficiency. This means first that the products should be produced, or attained, in the shortest way possible. With the growth of the community and the multiplication of needs, this criterion may mean the production of as many products as possible in the shortest time possible. Urged by this drive, men permanently look for new means of production, either by expanding existing means—having new soil, new hunting arenas and so forth—or by inventing new techniques and instruments. One of the most prevailing measures is the conquest of new land, usually by a united community. Marx describes war in this context as “the great communal labour.” As such it is aimed at achieving new means of production, new land, and so on, or at defending existing ones. The most effective enlargement of the means of production is the conquest of inhabited land, that is, of land cultivated by its native residents. It is a conquest of a complex means of production that has integrally connected human “components.” The conquerors view these human beings as “organic appendages of the soil,” as “natural conditions” like trees or cattle, of their production. The first kind of private property, that is, of exploitation, is landed property—slavery and feudalism. It should be added that the individual exploiters view themselves as organs, or parts, of the supreme community, the tribe, or the state, and that individual private property, individual exploitation, is perceived and practiced as mediated by and subject to the supreme communal property—tribal or state property. Marx defines this kind of property, very unusually, as “communal private property.” By this definition he purports to say that the community is the supreme exploiter, that is, an exploiter of another community.

In two statements that can be seen as summaries of the three explanations of the development of private property, Marx says:

The whole of human servitude is involved in the relation of the working man to production, and all relations of servitude [slavery, feudalism, and capitalism] are but modifications and consequences of this relation.

Labour is here the chief thing, the power over the individuals, and as long as labour exists, private property must exist. (emphasis in the original)

Private property, or exploitation, itself enhances alienation, namely instrumentality. One of its forms, industrial capital, brings instrumentality to its culmination. In this context Marx describes private property as shaping or determining labour. However, in the final analysis, private property is a result of labour. And since private property is a manifestation of labour, “private property is the means (Mittel) by which labour alienates itself.” (emphasis in the original)

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE ABOLITION OF LABOUR AND THE ABOLITION OF PRIVATE PROPERTY

If labour, instrumental production, is the cause of private property, private property cannot be abolished unless we abolish labour. Or in another formulation, if a certain mode of activity is the cause of a certain social relation, the abolition of that mode of activity will bring about the abolition of that relation. In the manuscript “Alienated Labour,” for example, Marx says (still applying the term “alienated labour” for denoting instrumental production),

alienated labour is the immediate cause of private property. As the first side falls, the other side must fall as well.

In the manuscript On Frederick List’s Book “The National System of Political Economy” (1846, first published in 1972, almost 90 years after his death), Marx says,

We must attack not only private property as a material state of affairs [as ownership of objects], but private property as activity, as labour, if we want to strike at it a mortal blow.... The abolition of private property will become a reality, if we perceive it as the abolition of “labour,” an abolition which has naturally become possible by labour itself, that is to say by the material activity of society [namely by the technological achievements of social production]. (last emphasis added)

In a broader theoretical discussion, Marx says that the transformation of instrumental into non-instrumental production brings about the abolition of the indirect, as-if-natural social results of labour. He declares that communism is the first social movement that abolishes “all as-if-natural (naturwüchsigen) premises” of human society, that is, private property, the social division of labour and the state. It does so not via purely political or economic arrangements that may be necessary as a precondition, but by abolishing the most basic form of alienation. Humans will never be able to shape their social relations freely unless they abolish the hitherto most basic form of production, labour, that necessarily brings about different forms of the dominant relationship, as long as we adhere to it.

Only at this stage [in communism] does self-activity coincide with material life [namely with production], which corresponds to the development of the individuals into total individuals and to removing all as-if-naturalness (Naturwüchsigkeit). The transformation of labour into self-activity corresponds to the transformation of the hitherto conditioned intercourse into the intercourse of the individuals as such [as free subjects]. (emphases added)

The abolition of private property is an abolition of an as-if-natural, “remote effect” of labour. The specific explanation may be as follows.

As we have seen, private property is an instrumental activity, and as such its structure resembles that of labour. This similarity leads Marx to define private property as a form of labour in which one person uses a combination of both natural or artificial objects and other persons, that is, human “objects,” as a means to an end. This instrumental relationship to other human beings is an indirect result of labour. By modifying or abolishing labour, then, we modify or abolish private property. When men discontinue producing instrumentally, they cease to relate to their natural and human environment as a means to an end, thus ceasing to bring about instrumental social relations. As we have seen above, Marx viewed the new mode of production—which is tantamount to “abolition of labour”—as analogous to artistic activity. Artistic activity is, as he emphasises, an end in itself, an activity performed for its own sake. When humans produce artistically rather than instrumentally, they are not subject to the criterion of efficiency. Therefore, they neither view nor treat their environment, that is, either natural objects or human beings, as a means to an end. When natural objects are turned into moments of creative activity, human beings can become partners in that same activity. When my activity is not a form of self-servitude but rather self-fulfillment, when it is performed for its own sake, I am not driven to seek ways to get rid of it and impose it upon my fellow man, even if it involves great intellectual and physical effort. In other words, with the universal, or multi-sided (by Marx often defined as “total”), non-instrumental appropriation of the means of production—their appropriation for operation not according to efficiency criteria but rather according to criteria of aesthetic experience—private property ceases to exist.

Marx rejects the idea that labour can be non-exploitatively organized, that is, that production dominated by efficiency criteria can be planned in a truly democratic way according to principles of social equality within and outside production. Only non-instrumental production can really be organized as a “participatory economy” or as a “democratically planned, non-market economy” (if I may apply modern concepts here). Marx even goes so far as to argue that as long as efficiency criteria dominate our calculations, capitalism, which is based on free competition, will be more efficient than any other social formation.

It is one of the greatest misconceptions to speak of free, human, social labour, of labour without private property. “Labour” by its very nature (Wesen) is unfree, inhuman, unsocial activity, determined by private property and creating private property.... An “organization of labour” is, therefore, a contradiction. The best organization that can

preserve labour is the present organization, the free competition, the dissolution of all its previous seemingly “social” organizations. (emphasis in the original)

The key sentence in this passage states that “organization of labour is a contradiction.” It means, first, that any attempt to abolish exploitation by organizing labour—namely production shaped as labour—in an egalitarian way (that is, by applying “rationality” as denoting social justice) would necessarily fail. It also means that the much-cherished conception of organization of labour presumes that labour would become more efficient (or more rational in terms of efficiency) by removing economic competition, namely the anarchy of the free market, which is a highly inefficient factor in the modern economy. However, wherever this conception is realised, a less efficient economy is established, since the anarchy of the market—despite its cyclical crises stemming from the lack of coordination between production and consumption—is the most efficient “organization” of labour.

Labour is the origin of economic egoism. When we act instrumentally, as we do in the economic sphere when we shape our production as labour, we consider and treat a fellow human being either as a means to an end or as an obstacle to be removed from our way (as a “negative means,” if I may use the term). That is, we act egoistically. Private property, or exploitation, as we have seen, is a manifestation of labour, that is, labour that has enlarged the space of its means. We get the utmost from any activity when we act in accordance with its inner logic. Thus, we get the utmost from labour or from its manifestations when we act with economic egoism. Marx suggests that modern, industrial capital is the full realisation of the essence of private property, namely of labour.

The diminution in the interest rate, which Proudhon regards as the abolition of capital and as a tendency to socialize capital, is therefore in fact rather only a symptom of the total victory of working capital over squandering wealth—i.e., the transformation of all private property into industrial capital. This is the complete victory of private property over all of its qualities, which are still in appearance human, and the complete subjection of the owner of private property to the essence of private property—labour. (emphases added)

If industrial capital is the full realisation of labour, then modern, industrial capitalism is the most efficient form of labour. Socialist formations shaped as new forms of labour will always be less efficient than modern capitalism.

Soviet Socialism failed not because it did not succeed in finding or inventing a suitable planning system and sophisticated calculation tools and techniques (for example, computerized planning), but because it represented an organization of labour. Necessarily it had developed as a new form of exploitation, as a new kind of “communal private property,” as state private property. Soviet socialism can rightly be viewed as a modern form of oriental despotism, as an exploitative mode of production based on the negation of (individual) private ownership of the means of production. As it tried to organize

labour on a national scale, it proved to be less efficient than the capitalist mode of production. In short, labour, as instrumental activity, is both egoistic (essentially relating to fellow human beings as a means to an end) and doomed to have indirect natural and social effects. As such, it will always defy all attempts to plan and organize it systematically on a social scale.

NON-INSTRUMENTAL TECHNOLOGY

One of the main aspects of the abolition of labour is the abolition of the instrumental character of technology. This abolition—in an anthropological-philosophical sense defined by Marx as the “abolition of industry” (Abschaffung der Industrie) or “liberation from industry” (Befreiung von der Industrie)—would transform machines and machine systems from their roles as the tools and mechanical complexes of instrumental activity into moments of non-instrumental, creative activity. The idea of the abolition of instrumental technology is built into the idea of transforming production into artistic activity, although Marx does not elaborate on this point: Artistically shaped production cannot be realised, unless we turn machines into mechanical complexes that can be used as components of free activity. It should be stressed that the Marxian idea of the abolition of industry does not mean the abolition of highly developed technological production, a return to a primitive state of nature, but rather turning production into technologically developed non-instrumental activity.

On a very high level in the development of productive forces, the efficiency criterion will lose all real meaning, as any flow of products will be able to satisfy human needs. People will no longer build machines simply as means to an end, but rather as moments of creative activity, that is, as activities shaped according to other criteria, such as self-fulfillment and beauty (aesthetic satisfaction at the product being created and the environment). Marx did not develop the technological side of the idea of the abolition of labour for reasons to be dealt with in the next chapters.

MARX’S RETREAT FROM THE IDEA OF THE ABOLITION OF LABOUR

In the late phase of Marx’s scientific work, a trend of retreat from the idea of the abolition of labour becomes more and more apparent. In some cases, for example in *Capital*, he retreats completely from this concept, asserting that production cannot be turned into self-activity, that is, cannot be freed from its labour form, and thus cannot become the basis of human freedom. In other writings, however, he still acknowledges the idea of the abolition of labour. Indeed, such writings in Marx’s later stage often present a contradictory description of future society by both advocating and retreating from the idea of the abolition of labour. It seems that as a result of new “insights,” Marx tended to retreat from the idea of the abolition of labour. Nevertheless, as he was aware of the consequences of such a retreat for the prospects of abolishing exploitative relations, he hesitated to abandon the idea completely.

In *Grundrisse*, written in 1857-58, Marx still maintains the idea of the abolition of labour. In this major work, often referred to as *Capital’s Draft*, Marx states:

Capital's ceaseless striving towards the general form of wealth drives labour beyond the limits of its natural want (Naturbedürftigkeit) and thus creates the material elements for the development of the rich individuality, which is all-sided in its production as in its consumption, and whose labour also therefore appears no longer as labour, but as the full development of activity itself, in which natural necessity in its direct form has disappeared.... (emphasis added)

In another passage, Marx speaks of a higher phase of human development in which increased free time will be dominated by "higher activity" or the "full development of the individual," thus creating a new, "different subject," that is, a human being who cannot help but strive to shape his activity non-instrumentally. Man will re-enter production and take part in it as this different subject, thus re-shaping production and in effect abolishing the "abstract antithesis" between free time and labour time. For Marx, as we have seen above, the abolition of this antithesis can be achieved by shaping production as artistic activity.

One year after this illuminating discussion in Grundrisse, Marx seems to have changed his mind abruptly regarding the possibility of abolishing labour. In *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*, published in 1859, Marx states:

As purposeful activity (zweckmäßige Tätigkeit) directed to the appropriation of natural factors in one form or another, labour is a natural condition of human existence, a condition of the material interchange between man and nature, quite independent of all forms of society. (emphasis added)

Here, Marx defines labour as "purposeful activity," as useful activity, as activity that is not an end in itself—instrumental activity. The labour character of production, that is, its instrumental structure, which is a primary fact, cannot be changed by human historical development. In other words, even in a highly developed technological society, human beings are not free to choose the most basic mode of their productive activity. Communism, though not mentioned by name, is undoubtedly not excluded here.

In *Capital*, written mainly from 1864 to 1867, Marx's tendency to retreat from the idea of the abolition of labour intensifies. Thus, in the first part of this masterpiece, Marx says,

The labour process, resolved, as described above, into its simple and abstract moments, is a purposeful activity (zweckmäßige Tätigkeit) which aims at production of use-values, appropriation of natural substances to human needs; it is a general condition of effecting the exchange of matter between man and nature, that is, an eternal natural condition of human existence, and therefore independent of every social phase of that existence, or rather it is common to all social forms of this existence. (emphases added)

In another passage in the same part we find almost the same formulation. Marx emphasises that labour, defined as "purposeful productive activity," is an "eternal natural

necessity” (ewige Naturnotwendigkeit), namely, “a condition of existence, which is independent of all forms of society.” Both formulations express the same idea: the labour form of production cannot be abolished. Human beings must come to terms with this feature of production, just as they must come to terms with the domination of natural laws. In all forms of society, indeed even in the highest phase of communism, humans are forced to shape production as labour.

The trend of retreating from the abolition of labour reaches its peak in a well-known passage in the third part of *Capital*. In this passage, Marx differentiates between two spheres of human activity, the “realm of necessity” and the “realm of freedom” and says:

The realm of freedom commences in fact not before the point where labour, which is determined by want and external purposefulness (äußere Zweckmäßigkeit), ceases. It lies, in the very nature of things, beyond the sphere of material production.... The freedom in this field [of material production] cannot consist of anything else but of the fact that the socialised man, the associated producers, regulate their interchange with nature rationally, bring it under common control, instead of being ruled by it as by a blind power; that they accomplish their task under conditions most adequate to their human nature and most worthy of it. But it always remains a realm of necessity. Beyond it begins the development of human powers which is an end in itself (Selbstzweck), the true realm of freedom, which, however, can flourish upon that realm of necessity as its basis. The shortening of the working day is its fundamental premises. (emphases added)

Here, as in the early writings and in *Grundrisse*, the highest freedom consists of non-instrumental activities. In the first part of *Capital*, Marx defined the multitude of activities that are ends in themselves as “the full and free development of each individual.” The realm of freedom encompasses all of these activities. The realm of necessity, in contrast, consists of unavoidable instrumental activity. For Marx, the most genuine and strongest human drive is to be active in a non-instrumental manner, that is, to be engaged in artistic creation or in play. If—in spite of this drive—we act instrumentally in certain fields, this is a result of natural or historically developed social and material circumstances that cannot be adapted to non-instrumental activity. Production, Marx tends here to believe, cannot be taken out of the realm of necessity. That is, production must be shaped instrumentally—namely as labour. Even when humanity has developed to the point where genuine scarcity has long been overcome, some features or qualities of production, not explained in the passage, cannot be changed, thus preventing humans from transforming production into non-instrumental, free activity.

In a later manuscript, *Critique of the Gotha Program*, Marx softens his retreat from the idea of the abolition of labour, allowing this idea to reappear. The reappearance of this idea alongside continued expressions of retreat from it leads to an unavoidable contradiction. We find the same development in Engels’ writings. While he clearly supports the retreat from the abolition of labour in his theoretically important article “On Authority,” he contradicts himself in his famous *Anti-Dühring* by trying both to maintain the old concept of the abolition of labour and to retreat from it as well. It seems that Engels’ renewed interest in the idea of the abolition of labour is not based on any new

cognition, but rather is nostalgic. After briefly discussing Critique of the Gotha Program and Anti-Dühring, we shall consider the possible reasons that Marx, and Engels as well, retreated from the idea of the abolition of labour. In our discussion, we will consider some of the arguments employed in Engels' "On Authority."

In Critique of the Gotha Program, written in 1875, Marx first states that in a higher phase of communism the division of labour would be abolished. Such abolition—which is by no means equivalent to abolishing the many branches of production—can be an aspect of the abolition of labour only if it means the ability of human beings to be active non-instrumentally in different branches of production. Marx, however, does not clarify this point. Rather, in a very problematic sentence, he states that in the higher phase of communist society labour would “become not only a means of life but life’s prime want.” As a means to an end, labour cannot become a prime need. Satisfying a need is essentially an end in itself. Any activity that is a means to an end is basically neither a need nor the satisfaction of a need. Instrumental activity may create the conditions or the objects for satisfying a need, but it is not itself the satisfaction of that need. Another, non-instrumental activity in which these conditions or objects constitute essential moments will satisfy the need. Thus labour creates the objects for eating and drinking, which are non-instrumental activities (and as such are not subject to criteria of efficiency). It may also create the objects for artistic activities—for drawing, for playing music—and for play. The above-cited sentence is clearly self-contradictory unless we interpret it as expressing Marx's considerable desire to temper, though not to abolish, the labour character of production. Also, the highest phase of communism would be characterized by the following principle: “From each according to his ability, to each according to his needs!” This formulation is another sign of the retreat from the idea of the abolition of labour. Here, production is not defined as the satisfaction of a need, the need to be active non-instrumentally in the interchange with nature, but rather as a social mission to whose execution everyone should contribute according to his physical and intellectual abilities. The strong should work longer and more intensively than the weak; one person might assume a managing role, while another would perform a simple factory job.

In Anti-Dühring, published serially in 1878–79, Engels defines the new, namely socialist, mode of production as the emancipation of man, which he further describes as the liberation of productive activity. Production, he says, “will become a pleasure instead of being a burden.” The division of labour, an aspect of instrumental production, or labour, would be abolished, and man would be able to “develop all his faculties, physical and mental, in all directions and exercise them to the full.” Human emancipation as described here is tantamount to the abolition of labour. In the same passage, however, Engels states that this reorganization of production would guarantee that “no individual can throw on the shoulders of others his share in productive labour, this natural condition of human existence.” This is a clear contradiction. As in Capital, labour is defined here as a “natural condition,” that is, as the sole form of production that mankind can neither choose nor abolish. Since labour, then, is involuntary activity in all forms of society,

including socialism, socialism would necessarily be characterized by a just distribution of labour, not by its abolition.

Both of the above mentioned works are by no means a deviation from the trend toward retreating from the abolition of labour. Their uniqueness consists in the attempt to soften the retreat, to make it more acceptable to Marx and Engels themselves.

In Marx's late writings we find no expression that can be easily interpreted as a retreat from the theory of the abolition of private property. However, such—full or partial—retreat is unavoidable, and stems from the full or partial retreat from the idea of the abolition of labour. We do find expressions in Marx's writings that can be interpreted as retreat from the abolition of the state. In *Critique of the Gotha Program*, a manuscript in which Marx both negates the idea of the abolition of labour and, at the same time, seeks to maintain it, he discusses the changes that the state will undergo in communism. We have, he says, to find out which functions of present society will remain in communist society in such a way as to be defined as “analogous to the present functions of the state,” and he goes so far as to criticise the authors of the Gotha Program for having failed to deal with the “future state (Staatswesen) of communist society.” A fair discussion of Marx's theory of the state would go beyond the limits of this article. Suffice it to say that the state, like private property, is an indirect result of labour, and any retreat from the abolition of labour necessarily leads to retreat from the abolition of the state.

As the trend toward retreating from the abolition of labour develops and becomes dominant in his writings, Marx changes his attitude toward the question of organising labour. Now he seems to believe in the possibility of a socialist organisation of labour and states that the “the workers must seize political power in order to establish the new organisation of labour” (emphasis added). The new, socialist organisation of labour would be democratic in its very nature. In *Capital*, his major work, which is dominated by the retreat from the abolition of labour, Marx says in this respect:

Let us now imagine, by way of change, a community of free individuals working with means of production owned in common and consciously applying their many individual labour-powers as a social labour-power.... The total product of the community is a social product. One portion of this product serves again as means of production. As such it remains social. The other portion is consumed by the community members as means of subsistence. Therefore, it has to be distributed among them. The mode of this distribution will change along with the particular mode of the social organisation of production and the corresponding historical degree of development of the producers. Only for the sake of drawing a parallel with the production of commodities, let us assume that the share of each individual in the means of subsistence is determined by his labour-time. In that case labour-time would play a double role. Its allotment according to a social plan determines the proportion between the different kinds of work to be done and the various needs. On the other hand, it also serves as a measure of the individual contribution of each producer to the common labour and consequently of his share, to be individually consumed, in the common product. The social relations of the people, with regard both to their labour and

to its products, are transparent and simple, both in production and consumption.
(emphasis added)

The principle of the socialist planning of labour would be efficiency, much as the planning of any other instrumental activity. However, the socialist planning of instrumental production, although mainly subject to efficiency criteria, would integrate into production non-instrumental elements, that is, elements of self-fulfillment and satisfaction. The democratic character of planning is supposed to prevent the development of a ruling class, and is in itself—though Marx does not underline this—a non-instrumental element. Marx goes so far as to suggest that the democratic planning of production would liberate humans from the seemingly natural (*naturwüchsigen*) social results of labour. Accordingly, he modifies his conception regarding the origins of as-if-natural (*naturwüchsigen*) social relations. The roots of the modified conception can be found in earlier writings, such as *The German Ideology* and *Grundrisse*, but it is presented in its fully developed form in *Capital*.

As we learn from the “improved” conception, instrumental production has been hitherto narrow and short-sighted; that is, it has been private activity—either a separate group activity or an independent individual activity—that seeks to produce an immediate specific product. As such it has turned human beings into subjects incapable of grasping the socio-economic system as a whole and of reproducing it as such by a conscious, planned deed. The rise of commodity production as the universal mode of production, namely, the rise of capitalism, is the culmination of this split up and short-sighted instrumental production. The indirect, unintended results of labour, both in nature and society, stem from this narrowness and short-sightedness, that is, from a specific form of instrumental production, not from instrumental production as such. In capitalism, in which all production is divided into many private, independent, and unconnected activities motivated by the wish of gaining immediate financial profit, the mutual relationship constituting a whole—the market—develops not as a result of a conscious, planned deed of the producers, but rather in a seemingly natural way, thus imposing itself upon them as an external, unchangeable power: “Their social movement takes the form of movement of objects, which rule them instead of being ruled by them.” Other social relations are transformed into socio-economic phenomena included in or intrinsically connected with the market, consequently becoming part of the socio-economic whole imposed on them as a natural power. Thus, the division of labour—which in its form as independent and unconnected different economic activities is the basis of commodity production—is turned into an economic relation shaped or dictated by the market: “The division of labour within society is mediated by the purchase and sale of products of different branches of production; the connection of partial operations within a workshop is mediated through the sale of different labour-powers to the same capitalist, who uses them as a combined labour-power.” In other words, “the division of labour is a productive organism (*produktionsorganismus*), which has grown up as-if-naturally (*naturwüchsig*) and the threads of which have been woven and are continuously woven behind the backs of the producers of commodities.” Exploitation ceases to appear as such and is transformed into production through and for the market. Being subject to the rules of the market, namely competition, it necessarily takes the form of an economic

activity aimed at permanently making profit translated into an ever-increasing sum of values embodied in different economic forms, mainly in means of production and labour-power. In other words, the structure of the market forces the capitalist to absorb as much surplus labour, that is, surplus value, as he can. In this respect, Marx speaks of the capitalist as “personified capital,” as a social agent whose exploitative activity, the activity of capital, is imposed on him or her and society by the as-if-natural power of the market.

Socialism would be a comprehensive, long-sighted planning of the socio-economic whole. The common planning of the whole would first include the organization, namely the preservation and regeneration, of nature as the basic universal condition of production; it would also include the production of raw materials and machines (by the department for producing means of production) in accordance with the requirements of the production of consumer goods (the requirements of the department for producing means of consumption), as they had been qualitatively determined and quantitatively measured by all members of society according to their various needs. In addition to this, it would include the exact measurement both of the share of each member in production as socially organised activity and of his or her share in the social product. In this way, full coordination between the different departments of production and between production and consumption would be constituted. Thus the socio-economic whole would become a conscious creation of all members of society; that is, social relations, society itself, would become such a creation. Marx defines the epoch that would follow capitalism as the “conscious reconstitution of human society.” Humans would in this way get rid of the seemingly natural (*naturwüchsig*) character of their society: “The image (*Gestalt*) of the life process of society, namely of the process of material production, will not strip off its mystical veil, until it becomes a creation of freely associated humans, consciously controlled by them in accordance with their definite plan.” In short, not the abolition of labour, but its comprehensive democratic planning is the basis for human liberation.

The questions that this change in Marx’s conception raises are of great gravity: Can instrumental production, and instrumental activity in general, be democratically regulated? Will the democratic planning and shaping of instrumental production be so broad and deep as to prevent the development of a governmental hierarchy? Will exploitative relations not be created, in an indirect, latent form, as a result of maintaining the instrumental form of production? Marx’s retreat from the idea of the abolition of the state suggests that the answer to the first two questions cannot be positive. In *Capital* he says, thus contradicting himself, that any socially combined labour, necessarily gives rise to a “commanding will” (*kommandierender Wille*) as the coordinating and unifying factor. This “commanding will,” he says further, “is a productive labour that must be performed in every [socially] combined mode of production,” that is, in communism as well. I would argue that all countries of Soviet-style socialism have not developed as democratic societies because each of their economies has been shaped as an organization of labour—as an organization of instrumental production. In societies or small communities that are legally based on the abolition of private property the exploitation of the direct producers can take the form of wage gaps and other material benefits for those holding high positions in an economy shaped as an organisation of labour. Such

exploitation has been inherent in Soviet socialism. The success of Israeli kibbutzim until the eighties was mainly a result of the broad integration of non-instrumental elements, defined as the “self-value of work,” into production. A major aspect of the—regressive—socio-economic revolution that the kibbutzim have been experiencing for the last fifteen years is the conscious abolition of the non-instrumental dimensions of production, and the full subjection of the economy to efficiency criteria. The unavoidable result has been the rise of classes in the kibbutzim, often explained as stemming from human nature. It seems that the social insight of the early Marx is superior to the social analyses of the later Marx.

WHY MARX RETREATED FROM THE IDEA OF THE ABOLITION OF LABOUR

What are the possible reasons for Marx’s fateful retreat from the idea of the abolition of labour? It seems that the main reason is a certain feature of industrial production that may be termed the “instrumental character of technology.” This character, to be elaborated upon in the following lines, is so innate, that Marx and his life-long intellectual and political colleague, Engels, became convinced that it does not allow mankind to abolish labour in any modern society, including a communist society.

In their long study of the capitalist mode of production, Marx and Engels also dealt intensively with the nature of modern mass production technology. In Chapter Thirteen of the first part of *Capital*, “Machinery and Modern Industry,” Marx surveyed the structure of modern machinery, the nature of technological improvements, and the function of time—indeed, the entire character of technology. It seems that Marx and Engels concluded that modern technology has an instrumental character that cannot be substantially changed. By the “instrumental character of technology” we mean that the main criterion of modern technology is efficiency. Machines and machinery are built according to this criterion, since they are said to serve instrumental production as means, and, like all means, are measured according to their efficiency. Modern technology, a tremendous human achievement, has sprung directly from instrumental production. Therefore, it is instrumental to the very core and cannot help but develop along instrumental lines.

The instrumental character of modern technology expresses itself in various ways, and it will suffice to describe the most important ones, mainly according to *Capital*:

- i) Machinery should produce as many products as possible in the shortest time possible.
- ii) Technical improvements have one aim: to optimise the above relationship.
- iii) Machinery should save time. Movements either of machines or of workers that are non-instrumental, that is, non-purposeful, not useful, are forbidden. The working mode of machines, as well as of the workers who together with them constitute a mechanical whole, is not allowed to possess any elements of artistic creation or of play.

iv) Amortization should be kept to a minimum, thus strictly prohibiting any artistic or playful activity on the part of the worker.

v) Virtuosity should be transferred, as much as possible, from the workers to the machinery, thus making virtuosity more and more instrumental. As such, it supplants other aspects of technology and adapts itself to them, whereas human virtuosity always exhibits non-instrumental features.

In his short article “On Authority,” published in 1873, Engels rounds out Marx’s discussion in *Capital* regarding the nature of modern technology. The machine, or the machine system, he says, functions in modern industry as a “mechanical automaton” that deprives workers of their autonomy and imposes involuntary activity upon them. “The mechanical automaton of the big factory is much more despotic than the small capitalists who employ workers have ever been.” In the factory, humans usefully and purposefully serve the machine system. Engels regards this development as the heavy price that mankind is forced to pay for having subdued nature. Overcoming the forces of nature leads to the loss of the dream of free activity. It is, in fact—as he puts it—nature’s revenge on man. But, as he indicates, we must come to terms with this revenge if we do not want to regress to a much less developed state.

As we have seen, any retreat from the idea of the abolition of labour actually means accepting exploitative and other forms of non-free relations. If we want to save freedom, we must look for ways to preserve the idea of the abolition of labour.

CAN THE IDEA OF THE ABOLITION OF LABOUR BE PRESERVED?

If we accept Marx’s position, as fully developed in his early writings and probably partially maintained in his late writings, that the main cause of exploitation is labour, that is, instrumental production as such and not just a specific form of instrumental production, then we must direct our primary efforts toward abolishing labour. Marx’s retreat from the abolition of labour is, in fact, a departure from his historical outlook. Human beings, as opposed to animals, do not have a fixed mode of behaviour, nor do they have fixed forms of social relations. Human nature, then, is historical. Animals do not change the modes of their behaviour or the forms of their social relations; these can be changed only by biological evolution. People, in contrast, can change the modes of their activity and their social relations either directly or indirectly. Thus, it is impossible to understand why the mode of human productive activity should not be a part of this historical nature. That is, human beings should be capable of fully or partially changing their own productive activity. It is impossible to say whether labour could be completely abolished. Nonetheless, if we want to abolish exploitation or at least reduce it substantially, the concept of the abolition of labour ought to become a regulative idea. This means that we should strive to integrate more and more aspects of non-instrumental activity into production, keeping in mind the goal of completely abolishing instrumental activity. Such integration is fundamentally tied to a change in the character of technology. To use Marcuse’s language, we should strive to bring about a “convergence

of art and technique,” that is, to transform machines, or machine systems, into moments of non-instrumental, artistic activity.

Marcuse believed that Marx’s retreat from the idea of the abolition of labour resulted from a low level of technological development, which Marx mistook for a very high level. If this is the case, can we discern any recent technological development upon which a qualitative change in technology itself could be based? I believe that computer technology represents such a new development. This technology, which has been expanding since the eighties, has the potential to overcome, or rather displace, the instrumental technology embodied in the conveyor belt. Over the last decade, the boundary between free time and labour time has become blurred, and both are marked by computer technology. Free-time activity has become more and more computer-oriented, with computer technology being shaped as non-instrumental, that is, with computers or computer-directed objects as technological components of non-instrumental activity. As such, free-time computer technology could exert enormous influence, shaping its counterpart in the sphere of production. Such influence, however, would by no means be certain, since interests of economic and political domination could prohibit its free flow.

Computer technology could, on the one hand, be directed towards automation. Thus, it would be a continuation of the hitherto prevailing mode of production. Automation would not change the instrumental relationship to our productive activity, however, leaving intact the resulting instrumental relationship to our fellow human beings and natural environment; therefore, it might not bring about the abolition of exploitation, of the use of one human by another as a means to an end, even if there was no immediate and direct exploitation in the production process itself. On the other hand, computer technology could evolve toward the new direction hinted at here, whereby machines and machine systems would be transformed into moments of creative, that is, artistic or playful, activity. If we succeed in promoting this new direction, computer technology would become a “technology of liberation” (a term coined by Marcuse).

Marcuse, who did not live to see the rise of computer technology, believed that modern technology—technology as developed in the second half of the 20th century—could be transformed into a new, non-instrumental technology. Such transformation would liberate and develop a hitherto repressed feature of modern technology. As such it would enable the revival of the Marxian idea of the abolition of labour, or, as he puts it, the abolition of the late Marxian dichotomy of the realm of necessity and the realm of freedom. Even if Marcuse overestimated the technological possibilities of his time—of the sixties and seventies—he ought to be quoted in this context:

It is identical with the transition from capitalism to socialism, if socialism is defined in its most Utopian terms: namely, among others, as the abolition of labor, the termination of the struggle for existence – that is to say life as an end in itself and no longer as a means to an end.... This new, unheard of and not anticipated productivity allows the concept of a technology of liberation. Here I can only briefly indicate what I have in mind: such amazing and indeed Utopian tendencies as the convergence of technique and art, the

convergence of work and play, the convergence of the realm of necessity and the realm of freedom.

An important conclusion of this discussion is that the struggle to abolish exploitation is to a great extent a struggle over the nature of technology as applied to production. Socialists should undertake to initiate the non-instrumental development of technology used in production. Their political activity should aim, inter alia, at removing obstacles to the free flow of technological influence from the sphere of leisure time to the sphere of production. Socialists, I believe, should not devote so much time to the question of planning. By doing so, they necessarily concern themselves with planning labour, rather than with planning “non-labour.” To deal with planning labour is to deal with planning the past form of production, which cannot be fully planned. I would say that most of the planning methods and techniques hitherto developed by socialists mirror the indirect effects of labour on the human mind. The principles and practice of planning non-labour can only develop step by step with the development of non-labour.

If we fail to view socialism as the abolition of labour and fail to concentrate our scientific and political efforts on transforming production into non-labour, then capitalism, being the full realisation of labour and therefore necessarily the most successful mode of production within the realm of labour, will truly become the last stage of history, that is, the “end of history.”