



JOURNAL OF POLITICS

ISSN : 2277-5617

An Annual Publication of the Department of Political Science, Dibrugarh University
(A Blind Peer-Reviewed Journal)

Vol. XX, 2020

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ECOLOGICAL CRISIS OF LABOUR PROCESS UNDER CAPITALISM : A CRITICAL INTROSPECTION

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Abstract

Socially organized labour is the motor force of almost all the advancements that humanity has ever achieved. However social organization and appropriation of labour can have catastrophic impacts in the natural world. Technological revolutions and the intensification of labour process leads to the dispossession of masses from the means of production and increase in the material crisis of nature. Paper attempts to see labour process and ecological crisis from the vantage points of and Marxism. Crisis in the reproduction of the conditions of production may give way to the re-emergence of state of nature. Critical responses to capitalism's second contradiction are scattered and unorganized hence environmentalism itself enters into a theorization crisis. Normalization of mastery over nature is at the same time mastery over the humans by humans. Annihilation and marginalization of human life therefore is a necessary condition for survival. Question relating to crisis of accumulation and loci of social change are explored in the article.

Keywords: Capital, Entropy, Labour, Property.

Introduction

Socially organized human labour can create wonders in the natural world. It had brought us the Taj Mahal, Great Wall of China, Burj Khalifa and many more. It is impossible for a single human to construct a huge mansion of this kind; it was made possible by the appropriation of massive individual labour processes within a social system of production. The first and foremost concern of this paper is to investigate the increasing intensity of crisis of nature generated by human production endeavours aiming at exchange as values.

Organized labour process is an official process of buying the right to labour thereby right to livelihood of the individuals. What is seen in the capitalist production practice is the growth of private competition into massive artificial structures of manipulation, preservation and survival. The kind of impact that massive production systems have in nature is immense. It raises radical questions of internal relations of nature. Life and its preservation happen within a class hierarchical society.

Positive mastery over nature is the *telos* of the modern political system. Any 'virgin' land or natural formations are same like Eden and can be made private by the application of knowledge through labour expenditure. Crisis generated by social production in the 'balance of nature' does not disturb the moral correctness of the common-wealth since it is an anthropocentric system in its purity and integrity.

Within the Marxist paradigm social organization of labour and mass production is a progressive process that liberates humans from the bondages of nature. He conceptualizes crisis as phenomenon limited to a human social organization. The increasing immiseration of the proletariat is the potential of social change. Social production system where the private individual process is bought at a massive scale leads to an economic and social crisis and once when it reaches its zenith there could be a radical system change.

Potential of social change in contemporary capitalism is not associated with the working class any more. Late capitalism is the epoch in history of the development of the capitalist mode of production in which the contradiction between the growth of the forces of production and the survival of the capitalist relations of

production assumes an explosive form. This contradiction leads to a spreading crisis of these relations of production (Mandel, 1972, p.564).

The paper attempts to conceptualize the potentials of radical system change in a post proletarian sphere. An ecological Marxist account of capitalism as a crisis-ridden system focuses on the way that the combined power of capitalist production relations and productive forces self-destruct by impairing or destroying rather than reproducing their own conditions (O'Connor, 1988, p.23). Crisis in the reproduction of the conditions of production is the contemporary crisis of capitalism.

Two hypotheses are proposed in the part where conceptualization of post-proletarian radical potentials appears in the paper. The first one is on the potentials of an increasing number of non-exchange value producing masses. The rate of congealing labour time in machinery experiences multiple revolutions with the advancement in science and technology in the late 20th and 21st centuries. Extreme potentials of carrying labour time. Popular Bamford excavators and hydraulic treks are the most pedestrian example. The amount of labour time these machines carry is immense. Intensification of labour reduces the size of the proletariat hence a larger part of the masses become unemployed. The working class shrinks in late capitalism. A huge part of the masses therefore enters into a non-proletarian or non-value producing identity.

The second hypothesis is based on the second law of thermodynamics. The transformation of matter from usable to non-usable form is part of larger universal process. Its intensity and catastrophic impacts are increased by socially organized labour. A unity of value and material crisis is suggested.

Methodology and the conceptual apparatus

Documented academic thought is the major source of the article. Fundamental modern political scientific positions on nature and human life are taken from the two treatises on government by John Locke. Moral correctness of labour expenditure and expansion of the frontiers of private is a major concern of Locke's book. Human production of the world is conscious process that organizes social life in hierarchical orders. The diverse capacities or intensities of human

action are brought to a level of labour process. Exchange is target of production and it cannot happen between same commodities. Natural diversity in the human production process is a necessary condition in conceptualizing the expansion of the private. The concept of dual character of labour has been modified to investigate capitalism's ecological crisis. Karl Marx's Capital: A Critique of Political Economy Vol. I is the original source from where the material, natural and immaterial/ value unities are taken.

Marx's concept of dual character of labour where labour process has been identified as a unity of abstract and concrete labour is modified into a unity of value production and material chaos. Works of David Harvey, Joel Kovel, Paul Burkett and James O'Connor are used to develop the conceptual apparatus.

Modern Political Science of Labour

The "labour" of his body and the "work" of his hands, we may say, are properly his. Whosoever, then, he removes out of the state that Nature hath provided and left it in, he hath mixed his labour with it, and joined to it something that is his own, and thereby makes it his property (Locke, 2003, p.116).

Right to property in its naked form is the right to exclude others from the fruits of labour process. An assertion like my body is my property is not logically upsetting (Becker, 1976, p. 653-664). How such exclusion would work? My attempt here is to see the situatedness of property within modern political systems. A multitude of autonomous bodies and their mutual exclusion and internalizations is the context of modern politics. Privacy is often expressed in an environment of diversity. The mutual exclusion and inclusion process of diverse privacies are governed by the common wealth.

Privacy and liberty are expressed once when congealed human labour is exchanged. The artificial human political system allows the natural process of labour to advance in a conditioned environment. Hence the state is a human work of art or formality that (de) certifies and preserves labour processes. The natural strangeness, autonomy of body and labour process leading to a conscious self centric exchange system forms the skeletal structure of social organization. In a

political context where personal affiliations to power considered unethical; official definitions of production relations cannot be love relations. Quantifiable values are exchanged following the clauses of the contract between private parties; is guaranteed by the commonwealth. Not an atom of love enters into the process of production and exchange as medium.

Non-emotional modern labour processes create crisis in the relations of nature. David Hervey in his book, 'Justice Nature and Geography of Difference' begins the chapter on the domination of nature and its discontents with two contrasting quotations from Aldo Leopold and Karl Marx. The former finds the potential of environmental degradation in the human consideration of land as commodity belonging to them. When we, according to Leopold, see land as a community to which we belong may use it with love and respect. The latter in his book, *Floor-plans of Political Economy (Grundrisse)* writes labour in bourgeois societies should directly produce value i.e. money and similarly money should directly purchase labour. Money thereby directly and simultaneously becomes the real community and hence dissolves all other human communities (Harvey, 1996, p.120).

Marxist Science of Labour

Labour is the movement through which the entire living organisms produce their biological stability within nature. It is a natural process by which the living beings assemble reasonable environment for their existence. Hence labour of any type is a process of formalization of matter. The formalization of the nature could be a process of internalization, externalization and resistance. The strategy and reason of the labour is not an individual choice within a social framework. The autonomy and independence of labour diminishes with revolutions in production relations. The examination of the labour process in production was the major break that Marx brought into the theorization of the social relations.

The role of nature in labouring and production was observed by Marx as follows:

Labour is, first of all, a process between man and nature, a process by which man, through his own actions, mediates, regulates and controls the metabolism between himself and nature. He confronts the materials of nature as a force of nature. He sets in motion the natural forces which belong to his own body, his arms, legs, head and hands, in order to appropriate the materials of nature in a form adapted to his own needs. Through this movement he acts upon external nature and changes it, and in this way he simultaneously changes his own nature. He develops the potentialities slumbering within nature, and subjects the play of its forces to his own sovereign power (Marx, 1982, p.283).

Labour is a cognizant process within the setting of a human society, this way it is distinct from other natural powers that cause alterations. All the living beings within the nature apply some kind of labour for survival. There are numerous living life forms that amass the matter that is accessible within the nature. What makes the human society unmistakable from other categories of living beings is the capacity construct up and produce. Generation within the human world is not something like a weaver fowl makes its settle, the winged creature makes the settle as a part of its (natural) quality subsequently the structure or the plan does not alter as a result of a thought prepare. Marx outlines within the same passage of the chapter in capital how the human labour contrasts from the labour of other creatures.

A spider conducts operations which resemble those of the weaver, and a bee would put many a human architect to shame by the construction of its honeycomb cells. But what distinguishes the worst architect from the best of bees is that the architect builds the cell in his mind before he constructs it in wax. At the end of every labour process, a result emerges which had already been conceived by the worker at the beginning, hence already existed ideally. Man not only effects a change of form in the materials of nature; he also realizes his own purpose in those materials. And this is a purpose he is conscious of, it determines the mode of his activity with the rigidity of a law, and he must subordinate his will to it. This subordination is no mere momentary act. Apart from the exertion of the working organs, a purposeful will is required for the entire duration of the work. This means close attention. The less he is attracted by the nature of the work and the way in which it has to be accomplished, and the less, therefore, he enjoys it as the free play of his own physical and mental powers, the closer his attention is forced to be (Marx, 1982, p.284).

What distinguishes production from natural evolution lies in the dimension of consciousness as shaped by language and social organization. Human beings work with a mental image of nature; we represent the section of nature before us – itself virtually always modified by previous labour – then act upon it to transform it according to an envisioned end. In every instance, some prearranged configuration of nature-as-transformed-by labour is imaginatively appropriated, then rendered according to a plan. Production is therefore inherently demoralizing and incorporates the future; that is why we call it production, to make with a view ahead (Kovel, 2007, p.234).

Labour applied by the *Homo sapiens* was of a different type in the animal world, human labour was powered with critical ability or it was/is a conscious activity. The conscious interaction with the nature in course of social evolution led to the emergence of deliberate production. It is the organized system of production that makes the humanity different. Engels in the 'Dialectics of Nature' observes that,

The human life stands dependent and at the same time different from the animal life. Most of the animals can achieve to collect; but man produces, he prepares the means of life, in the widest sense of the words, which without him nature would not have produced. This makes imposed any unqualified transference of laws of the life of the animal societies to human society (Engels, 1983, p.80).

For Marx there are three simple elements for the (human) labour process they are (1) purposeful activity, that is work itself, (2) the object on which that work is performed, and (3) the instruments of that work. Labour always has a purpose; it might be aimed at getting food or defeating something or destroying someone. Labour cannot be performed in vacuum; it must be performed on an object. The things the labour separates from the immediate environment are the objects of labour, Marx writes in volume one of Capital:

The land (and this, economically speaking, includes water) in its original state in which it supplies man with necessaries or means of subsistence ready to hand is available without any effort on his part as the universal material for human labour. All those things which labour merely separates from immediate connection with their environment are objects of labour spontaneously provided by nature, such as fish caught and separated from their

natural element, namely water, timber felled in virgin forests, and ores extracted from their veins (Marx, 1982, p.291).

Marx interprets labour as the subject and nature as its object of activity. Labouring transforms the nature and its internal relations and at the same time the mode of labouring changes according to the natural conditions, therefore the labour is a process of mutual transformation. Nature is understood through the labour process, the progress in the process brings out new knowledge regarding the configuration of the nature.

The evolution of the society is at the same time is an evolution in the methods of labouring. Production of use value under the social system is not an isolated labour like a hunter gatherer plucks and eats to satisfy his/her appetite. In a social production system previously produced use values- instruments like machineries, tools etc-are employed. A social production system is not a collection or set of independent labour, it is a larger process of production which undergoes frequent evolution. In 1933, Herbert Marcuse wrote an essay proposing that the material activity of human beings, or labour, has two consequences or results. He called them the “objective and subjective moments” of labour. But either “moments” or effects are also two-sided. The objective result of labour is, first, the object produced, the material product; more generally, the visible world of objects, in capitalism what Hegel called a “heap of commodities” and second, the material basis of a particular social order, or what Marx called the social relations of production. On the one side, labour produces objects and on the other these objects physically reproduce not only the producers but also the social order or class system (O'Connor, 1999, p.38).

The masses in the margins of social production

Capital by its very nature crosses the boundaries of the nation state and becomes a global formation. The independent non-exchange-oriented production systems were delegitimized by the official state along with capitalist development.

Appropriation and control over nature is necessary condition for the growth of capitalism.

Concrete labour process within and outside the frontiers of capitalist production are of diverse kinds. Differences in the modes of labouring give rise to different systems of knowledge. Capital by its very expansive nature appropriates and suppresses other production systems since it is a gigantic global formation.

The separation of the original producer from the natural conditions was at the same time to ensure the availability of labour force to the capitalist industry. The harnessing of workers' living and work conditions to an increasingly social production process evolving according to monetary criteria is and must be a process in which nature is likewise treated as a condition of monetary accumulation, both socially and materially. In this sense, the subsumption of labour under capital implies a parallel subsumption of nature under capital (Burkett, 1999, p.67). Elimination of the independent labour process thereby divorcing the masses from their means of production is a necessary condition for maintaining capitalist mastery of nature.

Social production under capitalism is far beyond the labour capital dialectic. Revolutionized technology holding huge quantities of labour time and its aggressive mode of operation both collapses the proletarian solidarity and the balance of nature. A larger part of the masses falls into the category of post-industrial neo-proletariat with little job security. This new class is sometimes categorized as neo-liberal working class and is not in fact a class in itself. They fill into the peripheries of social labour process (Gorz, 1982, p. 62). Radical potentials of system change have not been identified in these scattered masses.

The absence and presence of this vulnerable class in the production process are controlled through both official channels. The unchanging alien identities of migrant labourers or masses displaced by developmental projects or aboriginal populations are discovered through non-official channels. The kind of difference that the mainstream population feels and maintains with migrant labourers is not often exercised through the state apparatus. The cultural logic of contemporary capitalism operates through the dismantling of larger conceptual and political projects.

The entropy law and accumulation of capital

Material bodies of commodities are artificially preserved low entropy units. Production of commodities again demands a massive quantity of diverse low entropy material qualities. Usefulness of production and commodities centres on the specific order in which matter is arranged. The dependence of production on low entropy matter is unavoidable since there is no possible way to convert energy into matter or matter of whatever form into energy (Burkett, 2006, p.156).

The rate at which the capitalist production system increases the crisis of nature is soaring in comparison with pre-capitalist economic formations. Appropriation of natural space and dispossession of the scattered labouring class fill the material part of the production dialectic. This appropriation and dispossession process with reference to the fundamental laws of motion of capital must be limitless since what is produced is the use value of the unknown.

Any exchange, “eco-friendly” or non-eco-friendly, of value is the liberation of a particular quantity of energy that can never be brought back to a low entropy unit. Liberal positivist human responsibility suggestions are pretty popular in the contemporary environmental debates. Algor’s documentary “Inconvenient truth” ends up with a few moral prescriptions for reducing the carbon foot print.

The Do-it-yourself model of environmentalism of the west is ridiculed and displaced by another documentary by Joel Kovel; titled “*A really inconvenient truth*”. The centrality of exchange oriented industrial production in ecological crisis has been presented with evidence in the documentary.

Conclusion

How the social contract has to modify itself in response to ecological crisis, a new phase of state of nature, is the political question of the context. Environmental policies of the modern states are attempts to control ecological

crisis. Questions relating to the tragedy of the commons and decline of the gene pools are middle class concerns. Social Darwinist philosophy of the neo-liberal state modifies social hierarchies and draws new margins.

Accumulation of marginalized communities and the production relational growth of chaos in the material world are two identifiable potentials of a radical system change. However eco socialist proposition considering the mobilization strategies seem to be utopian at the moment.

Estrangement that the masses confront in their everyday life and crisis in situating themselves with changing environment take the form of ecological movements. These movements against the continuing divorce of masses from their means of production can be the loci of social change. The historical conditioning of nature undergoes a review within the eco-socialist theorization. Ecological movements unlike the organized trade union movements are not organized. Functioning of ecological movements is not as organized and scientifically and managerially administered as capital accumulation process. Ecological movements often subscribe to traditional patriarchal moral values and positions. Therefore, finding the totality of ecological movement as progressive social force is difficult. Recommending a return to the cultural past has been cited a major solution to the problem. Environmental ethics is therefore complex discourse and thereby eco social list theorization enters a conceptualization crisis.

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