

PRODUCTIVE EXCLUSIVITY AND THE CULTURAL REVOLUTION

COLE THOMAS HUTHER

As Chairman Mao said, a Marxist “must bring his ideas into correspondence with the laws of the objective external world; if they do not correspond, he will fail in his practice. After he fails, he draws his lessons, corrects his ideas to make them correspond to the laws of the external world, and can thus turn failure into success.”<sup>1</sup> To learn from the successes and failures of 20<sup>th</sup> century Socialism and to work for 21<sup>st</sup> century Socialism, there requires a critical Marxist analysis.

A thorough study on the source of private property and alienation concludes that the main goal of a socialist government is to eliminate productive exclusivity. Productive exclusivity is the regional specialization of production to where local communities require the exchange of goods with other communities. This includes food and all products of light and heavy industry. As long as there is productive exclusivity in a society, the material basis for Capitalism can never fully be defeated, and the material basis for a fully realized Communist society can never be attained. Tolerating productive exclusivity in a socialist society provides an avenue for pro-capitalist elements to influence the society from within. Any prioritization of exchange, even if it is an equal exchange within socialism, can be seen as a stepping stone towards the prioritization of free market exchange within capitalism.

The traditional model of 20<sup>th</sup> century Socialism (The Over-Production Model) was to focus on the over-development of productive forces to where there was a surplus of goods.<sup>2</sup> The theory is that the surplus of goods would result in class and wealth distinctions withering away as there would be more than enough for all people to completely fulfill their material needs. There would be no capitalist or working class, as all people, through a free-association of labor, could work whatever they want and

---

1 Mao Tsetung, *Quotations From Chairman Mao Tsetung* (Peking: Foreign Language Press, 1972), 210-211.

2 Alec Nove, *The Economics of Feasible Socialism* (Abingdon: Routledge, 1983), 15-20.

achieve a high and equal standard of living. The expropriation of labor is no longer necessary, or possible, to attain the desired standard of living. However, there are two main glaring issues with this method and theory.

The first issue being that the Earth (even the entire galaxy) has a finite amount of resources. The over-development of productive forces relies on an infinitely expanding access to an infinite amount of resources.<sup>3</sup> This is not sustainable. All production and resource extraction would have to be completely ecologically sustainable and only allow for completely ecologically sustainable growth, or the surplus of goods could not be maintained. Eventually the lack of resources would limit the amount of a certain good and access would have to be selectively allocated. This would prevent the use of over-production as a means to end inequality, and the allocation of goods requires a hierarchical entity that has a monopoly on violence to ensure this allocation (i.e. a state). As another goal of the Communist movement is the abolishment of the state, without the total surplus of goods, the state could never fully “wither away”.<sup>4</sup>

The second issue is the infinite nature of human greed. There is some truth in the Liberal axiom, “Communism works great on paper, but human nature gets in the way.” Humans can be greedy, and at what point of over-production is all human society satisfied? It is true that greed, as we know it today, did not manifest itself in the societal stage of “primitive communism.”<sup>5</sup> However, this was not due to the public ownership of the means of production, but to the lack of organized power structures. Greed can only manifest itself if there is the ability to take more than you need. Even with an unimaginably

---

3 Alec Nove, *The Economics of Feasible Socialism* (Abingdon: Routledge, 1983), 15-17.

4 Friedrich Engels, *Anti-Dühring* (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1947), Part III, Chapter 2.

5 Friedrich Engels, *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State* (Chicago: C. H. Kerr, 1902).

large surplus of goods, there is not a quantifiable point where a human has enough and wishes no more.

The 20<sup>th</sup> century Over-Production Model relies on the surplus of goods suppressing greed, and if people still wish to attain more there can never be a sufficient amount.

The primary focus of the Over-Production Model is on ending material inequality. However, the primary focus of a Socialist model should be on ending *alienation* (Productive Inclusivity Model). Alienation is the detachment of people from the process and the results of their labor. The byproduct of focusing on the abolishment of alienation is the end of inequality and Capitalism, while the Over-Production Model can only create *de jure* equality and allow the rise of an extensive informal market economy.

In one of Karl Marx's 1844 manuscripts, there is a section labeled *Private Property and Communism*, where Marx describes a fully realized Communist society as a, “Complete return of man to himself as a social (i.e. human) being – a return accomplished consciously and embracing the entire wealth of previous development.”<sup>6</sup> What Marx is describing is society where there is an end of alienation but retaining the material benefits that society has allowed over time. The Productive Inclusivity Model focuses on the former, while the Over-Production Model focuses on the latter.

A Socialist society is intended to replace Capitalism, but it has been seen that the Over-Production Model is incapable of truly replacing Capitalism because it cannot defeat the core essence of Capitalism, private property. Private property is the non-collective ownership and control of the means of production. The means of production are the materials needed and used for production. Private property is intrinsic to Capitalism, and without the complete abolishment of private property,

---

6 Karl Marx, *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844* (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1959), Third Manuscript, Second Section.

Capitalism will always maintain a material basis to re-assert itself. Capitalism is reliant upon the existence of private property. Karl Marx in the *Communist Manifesto*, states that “the theory of the communists may be summed up in the single sentence: Abolition of private property.”<sup>7</sup>

Private property is ultimately the source of alienation. More specifically, alienation is the byproduct of laboring for private property. Private property is intrinsically alienated from someone else, and it is in the production for *exchange* that alienation arises. In a commentary on *Éléments D'économie Politique*, Marx touches on this:

“My work would be a free manifestation of life, hence an enjoyment of life.

Presupposing private property, my work is an alienation of life, for I work in order to live, in order to obtain for myself the means of life. My work is not my life.”<sup>8</sup>

To produce for the sake of exchange is to produce a commodity. A commodity is merely another form of private property. An exchange of commodities relies on the notion that someone else is alienated from the means to produce the commodity themselves. They are alienated from the means of production that were used in its production, and the commodity producer is alienated from their product. Even with *de jure* public ownership of the means of production and the absence of a Capitalist class, to a community that relies on exchange to obtain goods, there remains *de facto* private ownership for those goods. To produce a commodity is to work for an exclusive (i.e. alienated) interest. A commodity retains the key alienating feature of private property. In the 20<sup>th</sup> century Socialist societies, private property continued to live on in the commodity.

---

7 Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *Basic Writings on Politics and Philosophy* (New York: Anchor Books, 1959), 21.

8 Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *Gesamtausgabe* (Berlin: Marx-Engels-Verlag, 1932), in section “Comments on James Mill, *Éléments D'économie Politique*”.

The method and theory behind the Productive Inclusive Model is that the only way the production of commodities, and private property with it, will cease is if there is no longer a need for exchange. The essence of exchange is productive exclusivity. Exchange is only needed because a community cannot produce all the goods it needs for its internal consumption. The only way that people will cease to exchange is if they have the ability to produce whatever good they need themselves.

Exchange should be seen as the dangerous remnant of capitalism, and should be the primary target of socialist economic organization. A society which retains exchange due to productive exclusivity retains the key link to capitalism which can be yanked to pull back a society into fully-fledged capitalism. The Over-Production socialist model's focus on ever-increasing production leads to ever-increasing exchange, both of which are goals of a capitalist model. It is not difficult to see how the Soviet elites eventually came to embrace state capitalism, which can be the only outcome of the Over-Production socialist model.

A Socialist society requires the abolishment of productive exclusivity otherwise the interests of private property will remain in force. Karl Marx, once again in *Private Property and Communism*, describes what he labels as “Crude Communism.” Many of the 20<sup>th</sup> century Socialist governments, like the Soviet Union, were in a state of Crude Communism due to productive exclusivity. Marx describes these societies as “aware of...the transcendence of human self-estrangement [end of alienation]; but since it has not yet grasped the positive essence of private property [productive exclusivity], and just as little the human nature of need, it remains captive to it and infected by it [exchange]. It has, indeed,

grasped its concept, but not its essence.”<sup>9</sup> The existence of black markets in the 20<sup>th</sup> century Socialist bloc should be a testament to the flaws of the Over-Production Model in eliminating private property.

The entire basis of the Over-Production Model revolves around a society where the “sole purpose of life and existence is direct, physical possession.”<sup>10</sup> In the productive exclusive Over-Production Model, the alienating effects of commodity production continue as, “private property persists as the relationship of the community to the world of things.”<sup>11</sup> The government focus on ever-increasing production for the purpose of exchange with other communities in the country replaced the interests of the Capitalist class, as “*labour*... in which every person is placed, and *capital* as the acknowledged universality and power of the community.”<sup>12</sup> All Soviet Citizens were now workers who worked for the interests of other communities as opposed to their own communities, and the *de facto* private ownership of the means of production by the other communities continued to alienate the workers. This is what Marx is alluding to when he points out that

“how little this annulment [the Over-Production Socialist Model] of private property is really an appropriation is in fact proved by the abstract negation of the entire world of culture and civilisation [a Capitalist society], the regression to the unnatural simplicity of the poor and crude man who has few needs and who has not only failed to

---

9 Karl Marx, *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844* (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1959), Third Manuscript, Second Section.

10 Ibid.

11 Karl Marx, *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844* (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1959), Third Manuscript, Second Section.

12 Ibid.

go beyond private property, but has not yet even reached it [still experiencing alienation from private property].”<sup>13</sup>

As the importance of productive inclusivity in abolishing private property has been established, the question remains on how to do it. There are historical examples that can serve as a possible guide for future application of the Productive Inclusive Model. The People's Republic of China under Chairman Mao saw some of best historical examples in the People's Commune and urban agriculture. Chairman Mao and others in the Chinese Communist Party were well aware of the need for productive inclusivity. The Maoist People's Commune Model and Maoist urban planning can be seen as a partial application of the Productive Inclusivity Model.

Mao Tse-tung, as the Chairman of the Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), from 1945-1976, was concerned with the great degree of productive exclusivity in China. As a peasant farmer himself, the disparity between the urban and rural areas were always on his mind. The urban-rural divide is the most drastic feature of productive exclusivity. Even in 1848, Marx and Engels, in *The Communist Manifesto*, lay out the ninth demand of the communists being the “combination of agriculture with manufacturing industries; gradual abolition of the distinction between town and country, by a more equable distribution of the population over the country.”<sup>14</sup>

The changes in the rural areas took the form of the People's Commune. The purpose of establishing the People's Communes was to develop self-sufficient productive inclusive communities that “directly own and develop to the limit of their abilities all the resources of the area”, and would

---

13 Ibid.

14 Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *Basic Writings on Politics and Philosophy* (New York: Anchor Books, 1959), 28.

serve as a basic unit within a fully-realized communist society.<sup>15</sup> They were truly revolutionary as they handled not only farming, but “industry, commerce, education and military affairs.”<sup>16</sup> Communities were encouraged to use their own initiative to open local co-operative run industries to supply the People's Commune, and all of China, with goods. Rural communities, which before had to rely upon the exchange of goods with the urban area, were now producing goods through industries of their own.<sup>17</sup> Work within the People's Communes was for the community, and all members were “entitled to take part in decisions about their collective.”<sup>18</sup>

The People's Communes began to appear as part of the Great Leap Forward (1958-1961).<sup>19</sup> The Maoist People's Communes were collections of rural villages organized into large collectives where land was collectively worked and tools were collectively owned.<sup>20</sup> The size of the People's Communes varied in different locations, and throughout the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution (1966-1976), the size was frequently adjusted to find the optimal size for local self-sufficiency.<sup>21</sup> Each People's Commune was made up of Production Brigades (roughly a few villages), which were in turn made up of Production Teams. On average, the typical size of a Commune in southern China was around

---

15 Anna Louise Strong, *The Rise of The People's Communes in China* (New York: Marzani and Munsell, 1960), 8.

16 Ibid., 7.

17 “The Commune System (1950s),” *Asia for Educators, Columbia University*, 2009, [http://afe.easia.columbia.edu/special/china\\_1950\\_commune.htm](http://afe.easia.columbia.edu/special/china_1950_commune.htm)

18 Greg O'Leary and Andrew Watson, “The Role of the People's Commune in Rural Development in China,” *Pacific Affairs* 55, no. 4 (Winter, 1982-1983): 594

19 Anna Louise Strong, *The Rise of The People's Communes in China* (New York: Marzani and Munsell, 1960), 13-17.

20 Mobo C. F. Gao, *Gao Village: A Portrait of Rural Life in Modern China* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i, 1999), 53.

21 Mobo C. F. Gao, *Gao Village: A Portrait of Rural Life in Modern China* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i, 1999), 19.

10,000-20,000 people (or around ten production brigades), and some even were as large as 60,000 people during certain years.<sup>22</sup>

It was during the Cultural Revolution that the People's Communes took on their most productively inclusive form. In 1963, Jimo County, an area that held 30 People's Communes just north of Qingdao in Shandong Province,<sup>23</sup> had no commune industrial enterprises.<sup>24</sup> In just the first year of the Cultural Revolution, 15 commune industrial enterprises were formed based on local initiative, and by the end of the Cultural Revolution in 1976, Jimo County had 2,557.<sup>25</sup> These rural industrial enterprises produced equipment to increase agricultural production which in turn provided the raw materials for the local industry.<sup>26</sup> Through Jimo County's own self-reliance, during the Cultural Revolution, they managed to increase industrial potential by 170% and grain production by 40%.<sup>27</sup>

Another example of efforts for rural productive inclusivity during the Cultural Revolution was in the Qinglin Production Brigade in the southern Chinese province of Jiangxi, an area with just under 3,000 people in 1966.<sup>28</sup> By the end of 1976, the Qinglin Production Brigade had ten diesel engines,

---

22 Ibid., 18-19.

23 Dongping Han, *The Unknown Cultural Revolution: Life and Change in a Chinese Village* (New York: New York University Press, 2008), 3.

24 Dongping Han, *The Unknown Cultural Revolution: Educational Reforms and Their Impact On China's Rural Development 1966-1976* (PhD diss., Brandeis University, 1998), 304.

25 Dongping Han, *The Unknown Cultural Revolution: Educational Reforms and Their Impact On China's Rural Development 1966-1976* (PhD diss., Brandeis University, 1998), 305.

26 Ibid., 305.

27 Ibid., 274-305.

28 Mobo C. F. Gao, *Gao Village: A Portrait of Rural Life in Modern China* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i, 1999), 269.

seven rice mills, one flour mill, and two cotton gins<sup>29</sup> with a population of roughly 3,500 people.<sup>30</sup>

They had even managed to construct three massive dykes, measuring nine kilometers long, to assist in local agricultural irrigation without any outside assistance.<sup>31</sup>

Urban areas were not left out of the drive for community self-reliance. Urban centers are defined as a populated area, of 2,000 or more, where less than half of the population engages in agriculture.<sup>32</sup> The biggest push for urban agricultural production came out of the food shortages during the Great Leap Forward. Cities were forced by the conditions to redirect their resources to produce food to support their populations, and this resulted in urban populations experiencing “the most varied diet they have ever known.”<sup>33</sup> All cities had to make this switch, but the best example of the reduction of urban productive exclusivity in Maoist China would be the city of Shanghai.<sup>34</sup> The American journalist Anna Louise Strong called Shanghai the “prize example of how a city can raise food.”<sup>35</sup> Shanghai citizens first began cultivating algae and hearty yeast to supplement their diets, but it soon gave way to a surprisingly effective urban agricultural environment.<sup>36</sup> All available soil in the city,

---

29 Ibid., 168.

30 Ibid., 269.

31 Ibid., 169.

32 Anna Louise Strong, *China's Fight for Grain* (Peking: New World Press, 1963), 14.

33 Anna Louise Strong, *China's Fight for Grain* (Peking: New World Press, 1963), 26.

34 Ibid., 23-24.

35 Ibid., 23.

36 Anna Louise Strong, *China's Fight for Grain* (Peking: New World Press, 1963), 20.

from alley-corners to backyards, began to be dedicated to the growing of vegetables, and chickens were raised in housing compounds.<sup>37</sup> It was estimated the Peking held as many as two million hens.<sup>38</sup>

However, the most important development in Shanghai productive exclusivity was the spatial decentralization of population and the diversification of production. To break up the dense city of over seven million, smaller “satellite cities” were established to surround Shanghai at a distance of eight to fifteen miles out.<sup>39</sup> Each of these “satellite cities” were specialized in a different area of industry, and the land in between the urban centers was dedicated to recreation and agricultural production.<sup>40</sup> The farmlands on the outskirts of the city completely fed their own agricultural workforce, and city denizens would volunteer to partake in agricultural production.<sup>41</sup> The changes in Shanghai are a guide to the organization of urban centers in a Productive Inclusive socialist model. The community of Shanghai now had a greater reliance on their own productive capabilities and could directly engage in the production of the goods they personally consumed.

Any 21<sup>st</sup> century Productive Inclusive socialist model will need to find ways to develop community self-reliance for both urban and rural areas. The focus on decentralization in Maoist China proves to be a valuable resource. However, even Maoist China was defeated by the rise of Deng Xiaoping and the reintroduction of Capitalism. The material basis of capitalism in China was not totally defeated.

---

37 Ibid., 21-22.

38 Ibid., 22.

39 Ibid., 23.

40 Ibid., 23-24.

41 Ibid., 21-24.

The lurking material basis for the resurgence of Capitalism in a Socialist society only highlights the necessity for the complete and total public ownership of the means of production by the abolishment of productive exclusivity. Chairman Mao said “it must not be assumed that the new system [Socialism] can be completely consolidated the moment it is established, for that is impossible.”<sup>42</sup> For Socialism to succeed in the future, it requires Marxists to perform some self-criticism, and acknowledge the flaws of 20<sup>th</sup> century Socialism. The re-application of old Marxist ideas to the modern historical conditions would only result in a repeat of the fall of the socialist bloc and the continuation of the interests of private property.

---

42 Mao Tsetung, *Quotations From Chairman Mao Tsetung* (Peking: Foreign Language Press, 1972), 27-28.