

Review of Ronald Tabor's *The Tyranny of Theory: A Contribution to the Anarchist Critique of Marxism*

(Black Cat Press, Edmonton, Canada, 2013)

by Peter Rush

Introduction: The Danger of Marxism

With the collapse of the Soviet Union, the end of Communist systems in Eastern Europe, and the migration of China toward a hybrid statist-capitalist model, "Marxism" has greatly receded in the popular mind and in academia, bereft of its major support for the past 97 years—the supposedly "Marxist" nature of some of the globe's major powers. However, the 2007-9 near-depression in the U.S. and Western Europe, followed by what I call "stagcovery"—the anemic economic recovery in the U.S.—and a continuing "slow-burn" financial and economic crisis in Europe, are almost certain to propel greater numbers of people, especially students and left-leaning political activists of all ages—and in many countries—back toward what still stands in the popular mind as the most credible alternative to the current dysfunctional world economic system, "Marxism." And if the crisis deepens, much less if it becomes another major recession, or even a depression, the impulse toward Marxism, as well as toward other forms of leftism, will be that much more intense.

Perceiving the same danger, Ronald Tabor, a noted anarchist writer and analyst, wrote *The Tyranny of Theory, A Contribution to the Anarchist Critique of Marxism* (2013), to analyze the substance of Marxism in hopes of preventing it from becoming popular again if there is another period of political radicalization in the United States (and abroad, for that matter). In Tabor's words, the collapse of most Communist regimes (and the overt embracing of free market mechanisms by most others, like those of China and Vietnam while retaining a nominal "Communist" designation) "created a crisis of Communist ideology, or 'Marxism-Leninism.'" (p. 1) Communist nationalized property and central planning, properly associated as Marxist policies, meant that "Communism as an ideology, and Marxism more broadly no longer looked as valid as they once did." (p. 3) This "created a unique opening for anarchism. Specifically, it gave anti-authoritarian tendencies a real chance to emerge as a significant force, theoretically and practically, on the left in the United States and internationally." (p. 6-7)

"Unfortunately," Tabor goes on to state, "the crisis of Communist/Marxism-Leninism may not be permanent," with academia remaining a stronghold of Marxism, Marxist organizations growing again, and "the recent economic crisis and its aftermath...creating the conditions for a revival of Marxism and Marxist organizations." (p. 7) "In such circumstances, Marxism will most likely revive and grow in influence...What matters is that Marxism has many features that make it extremely attractive to people angry at the injustices of capitalism and anxious to make the world a better place." (p. 8) "As a result, the current 'window of opportunity' that has been available to anarchism [and I would add, "to any non-authoritarian or non-ideological movement or organization"] may be limited. I suspect that as the radicalization that I believe is now beginning picks up steam, Marxism and the Marxist left will reemerge as significant, perhaps even dominant, forces, both in the realm of radical theory and in concrete political influence." (p. 8-9)

Responding to what he considers (in which view I concur) the danger of Marxism attracting, once again (for the third time during post World War I periods of radical upsurge, the previous being the 1930s and the 1960s), many of the "best and the brightest" of (largely) young activists who will emerge in such a period, Tabor has written a masterful examination, and refutation, of the nearly the entirety of

Marx's theoretical corpus. Second, he has shown how Marx, despite his own conceit to the contrary, never graduated from being a philosophical idealist of the Hegelian variety, demonstrating how every theory of Marx's, each of which can be shown to be falsified by history or contemporary reality, got that way (that is, false) because Marx (and Engels) imposed an idealist overlay and presupposed in the realm of thought every conclusion, that they then superimposed on material reality, "finding what they were looking for," to use a phrase Tabor repeats in several locations. Third, Tabor elaborates on how Marxism is not merely a collection of theories—were they merely that, they could be evaluated the same way scientific theories are, and found wanting, partially correct, or accurate, based on more or less objective facts—but a totalitarian belief structure in which no contrary evidence from the real world is ever recognized to exist, creating a hermetic ideological cocoon that imbues its adherents with a self-righteousness and certitude in their rectitude otherwise recognized as the mindset of the most radical and fundamentalist of religious sects. Fourth, Tabor shows how the impulse to action embedded in Marxism, the "unity of theory and practice," leads Marxists to not only believe in Marxism as an ideology rather than as a body of scientific propositions, but to seek to act in the world in such a way as to bring about a future that corresponds to what Marx said was the "inevitable" outcome of history, and in so doing sanction and promote totalitarian police state actions whenever they might find themselves in power, as indeed has occurred in every Communist state since the Bolshevik Revolution.

In my view, Tabor's presentation of his subject matter is a tour de force. I wish it could somehow get into the hands of activists around the world fighting the ills of the current world capitalist system, (and be popular and well-known on college campuses world-wide as well). If so, it could go a long way toward inoculating the radicals who will hopefully emerge in years to come against the danger of falling into the "black hole" of Marxism. In a sentence, Tabor shows that from the standpoint of theory, Marx's theories and conceptions, of class struggle, of the state, of "scientific" socialism, of history, of labor, of the accumulation of capital, of materialism, of "base" and "superstructure," of the "dictatorship of the proletariat," of "modes of production," of "consciousness," class or otherwise, and of philosophy, are each and all bankrupt, devoid of validity, without intrinsic interest or applicability to today's world (nor even to his own world either). In effect, "there is no there there."

If there is a weakness in Tabor's presentation, in my view, it is that he does not discuss what I consider to be the "many shades of Marxism." That is, he uses the terms "Marxism" and "Marxists" as if a single appellation can be applied to all instances of "Marxism," and to all who call themselves, or who are considered to be, "Marxists." Tabor considers that "Marxism itself is totalitarian" (p. 9) and that Marxism "is, and must be held, responsible for Communism." I would amend that characterization to state that what I would call "orthodox Marxists" who believe that it is their responsibility to bring about socialism by any means necessary (I think that pretty well sums up the "Leninist" version of Marxism, which most Marxists since 1918 have tended to style themselves as), secure in their self-righteous ideological cocoon, are totalitarian, and that that mindset has engendered the hideous totalitarian dictatorships from Lenin's and Stalin's, to Mao's, to Castro's, to Pol Pot's. But that, starting in the late 1930s with the Frankfurt School luminaries, and continuing on to the present day, many intellectuals who have styled themselves "Marxist" have deviated from the Marxist straight and narrow to create what Tabor calls "analytical" Marxism. Tabor actually does acknowledge this branch of the Marxist tree, but appears to consider them not really Marxist.

Moreover, as Tabor himself acknowledges in the passage quoted above, "Marxism" tends to be the pole to which people gravitate because of "features that make it extremely attractive to people angry at the injustices of capitalism." I don't think it is sustainable that everyone so drawn to Marxism is totalitarian, or becomes so once they decide they are "Marxists." I think the danger of totalitarian

thinking arises primarily in the context of avowed Marxist organizations, like the Communist Parties of yore, and a few remaining “Marxist-Leninist” organizations today. To the extent such organizations can attract new adherents to an “orthodox Marxist” belief structure, under conditions of political turmoil, to that extent they will tend to perpetuate and expand such a totalitarian version of Marxism.

But there are those today, exemplified by Wayne Price, who has written his own review of Tabor’s book, who styles himself a “Marxist-informed anarchist.” (Price is a veteran activist well known in Anarchist circles, who has been fairly closely associated with Tabor over the years and writes as a friendly critic.) Others call themselves “democratic Marxists.” Tabor believes that such designations are oxymorons, that one cannot be an anarchist and also have Marxist beliefs, or be a Marxist but embrace democracy. That may be, but my quibble with Tabor is that I think he needs to qualify that his attack on Marxism as totalitarian is limited to “orthodox” Marxists, and not everyone who claims to be a Marxist.

But that is a minor objection, against the strengths that Tabor’s book displays in its in-depth analysis and critique of the core theories of Marx and Engels. One of the ironies of Marxism, in my opinion, is how many people are drawn to it for reasons other than adherence to Marx’s theoretical doctrine. The Frankfurt School and subsequent intellectuals of the Sartre, Fromm, or Marcuse varieties, *did* take theory seriously, but they each carved out their own theoretical niches that by and large ignored most of Marx’s actual theories. The average person drawn to Marxism, however, typically has little interest in theory, and is drawn to Marxism because of its cachet, its reputation as the “place to be” if one wants to establish one’s anti-capitalist bona fides (ironically, even the word “capitalism” owes its usage as the name for the modern economic system to Marx’s popularization of it). What Marx actually wrote and believed are often of little or no importance—what matters is what he supposedly stood for—an overthrow of the capitalist system and its replacement by socialism. And many non-Marxists likewise like to associate themselves to numerous ideas they label as Marxist, like Wayne Price, for similar reasons. In my estimation, one of the prime values of *The Tyranny of Theory* is in showing such people that what they are drawn to is a hollow shell, a set of theories unworthy of support today, and of little or no value in informing today’s struggles.

The book does this by presenting a detailed analysis of the major theoretical components of Marxism as propounded by Marx and Engels themselves, to see what, if anything, from Marxist theory, has stood the test of time and should endure, and what has clearly been proven false by events, or is otherwise wrong, irrelevant or without interesting content. He deals with every major element of Marx’s world view, teasing apart each important component of Marx’s thought, from the theory of the state, the conception of history and the class struggle, and the “dictatorship of the proletariat,” to the labor theory of value and the analysis of capitalism, to the underlying philosophical content, including the concepts of idealism, materialism and the dialectic. Following his two opening chapters that present a summary of his major arguments, Tabor begins with a systematic presentation and analysis of every one of these concepts and theories, providing clear statements of what Marx (and sometimes Engels), wrote, followed by a thorough examination of each major concept or theory. He ruthlessly compares what Marx’s theories posit about history to actual history, revealing the former to be wildly out of touch with reality; he examines Marx’s view of the state and masterfully shows how absurd and counter-to-reality it is, and was even in Marx’s time; he shows conclusively that Marx’s understanding of economics was highly flawed, and that his forecasts of where modern capitalist society was heading have proven to be totally incorrect; he shreds Marx’s claim that his theories were “scientific,” showing instead that they were nothing more than philosophy, and bad philosophy at that, very similar to that of Hegel, despite Marx’s repeated claims to the contrary; and he reveals that Marx’s vaunted “materialism” was actually

its opposite, philosophical “idealism,” and the “dialectic” that he claimed was the driving engine of history and the class struggle was nothing more than an idealist mental construct.

Tabor’s labors, effective though they be in print may prove of minimal utility in combatting a future interest in Marxism, unless a broad audience can be attracted to read his book in the coming months and years. It is my hope that this review may reach a broader audience than *Tyranny* has so far and can inspire many readers to check out the “real deal” on the basis of this review. One of the conclusions that jumps out by the conclusion is that Marxism is only Marxism if it is based on Marx’s theories, or at least on Marx’s core concepts. Otherwise, it isn’t Marxism, which implies that “Marxist” organizations are nothing but political kindergartens, with a pretense of adherence to Marx’s theories, and which are actually nothing more than opportunistic mills seeking “gate receipts” (that is, recruits) by trafficking in Marx’s name without any serious connection to what Marx and Engels actually stood for. Tabor’s apparent hope (which I fully share) is that, by exposing Marx’s entire theoretical output as the very weak reed that it truly is, the emerging activists and leaders of the coming period will steer clear of anything that smacks of “Marxism,” finally destroying the reputation that “Marxism” maintains as the preferred opposition to capitalism.

Unfortunately, most people, including I am sure many readers of this review, don’t (yet) grasp the importance of theory at all, so may start with the view that they don’t care whether Marx’s theories were correct or not. They of course would therefore have little or no interest in Tabor’s book, or in this review. That would be unfortunate, because, as we look to the future, there is a great deal which must be invented or discovered if we are to forge a new society with new social and economic relations. While forging that future will *not* require theories of the Marxist variety (mental constructs comprising a belief structure), it will require intense intellectual activity, debate, research, creative thought and open experimentation, which in turn requires a mindset that is able to analyze honestly and competently. To the extent that “Marxism” enters the equation, activists need to be armed with an iron-clad knowledge of the manifest and manifold flaws in every segment of Marxist theory in order to ensure that Marxist organizations do not derail the movement.

With this dilemma in mind, I have chosen to segregate the more detailed analysis of Marx’s theories in the latter portion of this review, and to provide a very condensed, simplified presentation of Marx’s major theoretical arguments, and of the evidence that proves them wrong, along with some other remarks, and a review of Wayne Price’s review of *Tyranny*, in the first portion. The hope is that every reader will at least read the first section, which is sufficient to make the basic case against Marx, and then those that either desire a more detailed treatment, or who are unconvinced and want to see the fuller argument, will read whichever sections in the second portion interest them (or all of them).

Marx Summarily Presented, and Refuted

Anti-Capitalism

Before I delve into the major components of Marx’s theoretical outlook, one important fact should be noted, that goes a long way toward accounting for the reputation and longevity of Marxism in the popular mind, especially in leftist circles—Marxism is the only (I would say apparent) systematic look at capitalism from a critical standpoint. As Tabor stated in a private communication to me, “the (Marxist) analysis of capitalism is convincing (to some) because it is an attempt to grapple with the system as a

whole, which none of bourgeois economic theory really does.” Marx came to be seen as the champion of the working class in Europe against the hideous conditions of life under capitalism for those unfortunate enough to become wage slaves in the emerging factories of England, Germany and France. His charge that the capitalists “exploited” their workers by, in effect, stealing their “surplus value” resonated to millions of down-trodden workers, and to countless thousands of non-working class students and intellectuals who identified with their plight. All other theorists of capitalism were pro-capitalism, and if they had criticisms, they were for reforms, not for sweeping the system away.

As I develop below, there is an irony in this perception, for while Marx *did* champion the working class, he also championed capitalism as a necessary step on the road to liberation and communism, and was strongly in favor of the various tendencies that he attributed to it, above all what he believed was its constant and inexorable concentration and centralization of all capital into fewer and fewer hands, eventuating in the takeover by the state of the entire economy (actually expropriating the capitalists), paving the way for the socialist revolution and the dictatorship of the proletariat to take control over this centralized, nationalized economy that Marx thought was a supremely positive development.

It is to be hoped that Tabor’s revelation of what Marx truly believed in the realm of economics, and what he believed would happen to pave the way for socialism, will severely tarnish Marx’s reputation as a viable or credible alternative to capitalism. This is important as what is needed in contemplating how to deal with the manifest dysfunction of so much of capitalism today is fresh, contemporary, highly-informed critiques of what doesn’t work (and of what does work) of the present global capitalist system. I believe that Tabor has established that precious little, if anything, from what Marx actually wrote, is relevant today in this effort.

I now turn to the leading strands of Marxist theoretical architecture.

Historical Materialism

Marx posited a theory that history was a progression from a state of “primitive communism” to a stage of slavery (the ancient world of Greece and Rome) to feudalism, to capitalism, each stage being superior technologically and socially to the stage before it. In each stage, the primary factor was the “mode of production” comprised of the “means of production” (how the economy was organized and the technology used) and the “relations of production” (how society was organized, in classes, with a ruling class and one or more exploited classes). Marx claimed that each mode of production contained internal contradictions that over time undermined the existing relations of production, leading, relatively rapidly at some point, to the new means of production bursting through the old relations of production and establishing the new relations of the successor mode.

This theory is a crucial tenet of Marxism, because it supposedly establishes the truth of the claim that capitalism also contains internal conflict which will eventually lead to an overthrow of its relations of production, when the working class will overthrow the capitalist ruling class and establish the “dictatorship of the proletariat” which will usher in socialism, and over time the state will “wither away” and a state of communism will ensue, at which point history will for all intents and purposes be over. The argument is, that if every previous age operated this way, so too must capitalism.

Forecasts of history are intrinsically virtually impossible—except for Marxists. What gives Marxists the certitude that socialism as they define it is *inevitable*, and therefore a state of affairs that it is proper to hasten the arrival of, is the above notion of “historical materialism,” the supposed evolution of all previous history that culminates in modern capitalism. If this is wrong, if it is bad history, then the entire premise that socialism is inevitable, or even that it is desirable, crumbles.

Tabor in several chapters of *Tyranny*, explores every claim made, and documents that the theory is not only totally wrong, but absurdly so. There is no evidence whatsoever that history has gone through the stages he posits, nor that internal contradictions involving means of production led to class struggle and a change in relations of production. Rome and Greece had slavery, but were not predominantly slave economies. Feudalism did not develop within the previous stage, but 500 years later. Capitalism did not begin within feudalism, but outside it and after it. Instances of class struggle at any point in history were rare exceptions, not the norm or the main mode by which societies changed. Marx's conception was also totally Eurocentric. When one adds in other societies and empires, Marx's theory is shown to have nothing to do with any domain of known history. As far as I'm concerned, this entire theory is a fanciful fabrication. And without this basis, there is no basis for any Marxist to claim that Marxian socialism is the necessary end-point or destination for the working class, or society in general. Tabor documents all of the above and then some.

Marx also forecast that capitalist society would evolve toward greater and greater concentration of capital until it was all held by a very few capitalists, and that in most cases, the state would end up taking it over from the capitalists. Meanwhile, Marx predicted, the working class would grow larger and larger, as factories would also grow larger and larger, until vast "armies" of workers would dominate the social landscape. The small business sector (the "petit bourgeoisie" for Marx) would shrink, and the working class, the proletariat, would come to include the vast majority of the entire population. This would enable a socialist revolution and "dictatorship of the proletariat" where the means of production are already highly concentrated and centralized, and it would merely be necessary for the proletariat to replace the capitalists and their state, and take over this centralized capital itself and run it for the benefit of the proletariat.

Tabor equally demolishes this too. Clearly, no Marxist today can possibly dispute that Marx's predictions for capitalism have not come true, and not even come close. This *should* have helped to discredit Marxism, starting 120 years ago, but the hermetic intellectual environment of Marxism prevented this healthy reaction to the failure of Marx's core predictions. As Tabor notes, not a single forecast has come true. The working class grew a lot from his time, but has now been shrinking in the most developed countries, and while Marx's forecast that capitalism would become a global phenomenon has proved true, and working classes have sprouted and expanded in many previously pre-capitalist societies, it clearly will not even become the majority of any country, much less the predominant class that Marx predicted. The capitalists did create many huge corporations, but the process of the concentration of capital has ebbed and flowed since the 1890s, always reaching certain limits (such as around the turn of the 20th century) before receding, to later resume again—rather than the linear process culminating in all capital being concentrated in the hands of a very few capitalists that Marx foresaw. And the state has absolutely not taken over the means of production from the capitalists. And the middle class has grown to greatly outnumber the working class. Therefore, none of the preconditions for the socialist revolution that Marx envisioned has come into existence. Marx's theory, including his forecast of a socialist revolution and "dictatorship of the proletariat," has been totally falsified.

In 1949, six former Communist Party members who all became famous subsequently, contributed essays to a book entitled "The God That Failed," describing their disillusionment with Soviet Communism. That title should just as appropriately be applied to Karl Marx, by the turn of the 20th century, at the point that his core predictions were clearly proven totally wrong. Had Marxism been a normal movement, it would have dissipated as people realized it was a false religion. Why this didn't happen has a lot to do with how it had already become the religion of the working class of Germany, and the

elixir of radical intellectuals caught up in its circular and self-reinforcing ideology. It was *not* based on its intellectual content or power.

The Illusion of Marx's Economics

The centerpiece of Marx's theoretical output was his writings on economics, above all *Capital* (3 volumes, only the first published in his lifetime) and a few other published and a large volume of unpublished other writings. Marx maintained that labor was the source of all value, and that under capitalism, the average time it took to produce an item at a given level of technology was a measure of the value of the item or commodity. He said that workers were always paid less than the value they produced, which was the measure of how much they were exploited. He said that the difference between what a worker was paid and the total value of the commodity (the value of the labor used to produce the item, and the value of the item itself) was surplus, that the capitalist used either to reinvest, or to live off and spend.

Tabor shows with multiple items of evidence that this theory has no validity. When a technology can double what a worker can produce from one day to the next, what sense does it make to say that the increased production is all due to the labor-power of the worker, and not primarily to the new machinery. Also, "socially necessary labor time," Marx's term for what constitutes "value," cannot be translated into prices, or any measurable element at all, so it is effectively meaningless, nothing more than a mental construct of no value in understanding capitalism.

It is unfortunately not feasible to say much more about the content of Marx's economic theories in this section, because no one portion of the theory can be meaningfully summarized without summarizing many other portions, which would make this discussion too long. The reader is therefore strongly commended to the economic portion of the second section of this review (the final major heading). What Marx says is actually rather fascinating, as much for how it illustrates how a very intelligent man could spin a very elaborate theory for so many years, and lay a total egg, come up with not one usable concept that stands the test of reality or time, as for its intrinsic content.

However, there is one result that Marx's notion of the value of labor of necessity posits that is so counter-intuitive (and totally wrong) that it can pretty much make the case against Marx's economics single-handedly. Since Marx determines that surplus value is a portion (the unpaid portion) of the value of labor (the paid portion corresponding to the worker's wages), it follows that the greater the proportion of labor in the final product, the more surplus is produced. Since the proportion of labor is another name for labor intensity, it follows that the more labor intensive an industry, the *more* surplus (and hence profit) is produced in that industry. Marx not only infers this absurd, upside-down conclusion, but runs with it, saying that this means that capitalists will tend to shift investment from capital intensive industries to the more labor intensive ones, because they want the higher rates of surplus value being produced there. In reality, just the opposite is the case, which fact alone proves the falseness of the labor theory of value, which in turn makes false the entire edifice of economic propositions that Marx builds on this theory.

There are other tenets of Marx's economic theories, such the supposed "tendency of the rate of profit to fall," among others, that are too involved to briefly cover (see below for a fuller discussion), but Tabor effectively demonstrates that little if anything that Marx wrote about economics in the realm of theory has any relevance in explaining or understanding the workings of capitalism, then or now.

An important reason to understand the reality of the mirage that is "Marxist economics" today is that it is isolated pieces of Marx's economic theories that most often attract people and create the

illusion that Marx may have been wrong about some things, but he got some things right, especially in the economic realm. This, as we shall shortly examine, is the case with Wayne Price, who sees the creation of huge transnational corporations as vindication of Marx's prediction about unlimited concentration of capital, whereas in reality these corporations are a far cry from what Marx predicted. It is important for people to understand what Marx really said on the subject of capitalism and economics, in order to realize that Marx is all but useless to any understanding of modern capitalism.

Theory of the State and Socialism

Tabor devotes two chapters to Marx's theory of the state. Very briefly, Marx saw what he called "the state" (he never referred to governments) as part of what he called the "superstructure," largely determined by the means of production. He saw the state as primarily an instrument in the hands of the ruling class to maintain peace by finding ways to pacify and keep in their place the exploited classes. Under capitalism he believed the state would come to own practically all of the capital (means of production) of society, creating a perfect set-up for the working class to take over.

Tabor shows every aspect of Marx's theory of the state not to correspond to reality. States are in reality highly intermixed with the societies they govern, such that they are not merely instruments that the "ruling class" wields in order to suppress the masses. They have many, many more functions than just repression. Plus, they can, and very often do, act as independent actors on the stage of history, sometimes even against a ruling class.

Tabor points out repeatedly that Marxists have a love-hate relationship to the state, and that the love part wins out. The "hate" part is that the state, in their view, is the enforcer of capitalist rule over the workers, the agent of the ruling class, and of course, Marxist doctrine posits that the state will "wither away" after the establishment of socialism. But the "love" part fits what is more important to Marxists, namely, their view that they know what's best for the working class, and ultimately for all of society, and that the only way to bring their vision about is to use the state to do it. That was the rationale used by Lenin, and by all subsequent Communist leaders and Communist parties. Marxism is inherently highly elitist, positing that Marxists are the natural leaders to bring humanity to its future, so to use the state to achieve their goals comes naturally to those with this mindset.

The Marxist love-hate relationship to the state intersects the outcomes of Marxist economic and historical predictions in Marx's understanding of "socialism." It is clear from Marx's and Engels' writings, as amplified by Lenin, that "socialism" for all of them was a totally centralized, planned economy run by the state. What the Soviets did under Stalin, starting in 1929, when they nationalized virtually all of industry and started collectivizing agriculture, and what China did along the same lines creating their peasant "communes," is the one aspect of Communism which is 100% Marxist. Whether or not Marx would have approved of Stalin's, much less Mao's, methods, he would have approved of their goal, since "socialism" for him was total nationalization of the economy, run by the (proletarian) state. Marx clearly envisioned that the capitalists would do all the concentrating and centralizing, and when that process was essentially completed, the working class would take the economy over and run it even better, as a totally concentrated and state-owned enterprise.

Again, Tabor takes Marx to task for the naïveté of believing that a state that would have not only a monopoly on political power, but total control of the economy, would act in the interests of the working class and gradually divest itself of its power. Not only did that not happen in any Communist state, it is illogical that it ever would in any such state.

The True Failure of Marxism: “Socialism”

The Marxist doctrine of “socialism” as the state ownership of the means of production is one of the few precepts of Marx that, as mentioned above, has ever been tested, and the outcome of this test is of extreme importance for the future. Namely, the Soviet, and all other, Communist, regimes’ centralized, nationalized economies *can* and *should* be placed squarely at Marx’s doorstep, and doing so is extremely important, because it undercuts one of Marxism’s central tenets.

The lesson that the “Communist experiment” has proven to the world, and proven, I believe, for all time, that the Soviet Union, and all other Communist regimes, has taught the world, is: ***collectivized economies, planned centrally, are horribly inefficient and unable to provide the means to make their economies successful.*** This lesson is arguably the most critical one of all in evaluating Marx and Marxism, since such state-owned, “planned” economies are the absolute “guts” of Marx’s vision—the Communist experience proves *this core Marxist contention* to be utterly and hopelessly wrong. And if *it* is wrong, it means that *socialism* as Marx and true Marxists understand it, is an economically retrograde economic system, quite the opposite of the claim made for it by Marx and Marxism.

As such, this fact alone is a conclusive proof that Marxism, at least any version of it that has any fidelity to Marx’s core contentions, got the most important questions 100% wrong, and that Marxist “socialism” is a disaster for mankind. Once this failure is recognized, the door is open for others (among whom, of course, are anarchists) to redefine “socialism” to mean non-capitalist relations of production, to open the door for fresh ideas on how to rescue humanity from the manifest disasters that have already occurred, as well as those looming on the horizon, under the current globalized version of “capitalism,” free of the delusion that a “socialized” (read “nationalized” or “collectivized”) economy is the answer.

Hegelian Philosophy and the Dialectic

Hegel believed that history was a progression through multiple stages of thought, and that in each stage, aspects of that stage would come in conflict with other aspects, (thesis and antithesis) and that the conflict of each would result in a synthesis, which would be the basis for the next stage. This was called the dialectic. Hegel believed that this progression was coming to an end in his lifetime, embodied in the Prussian state. Hegel was unabashed about the fact that this theory was philosophically Idealist, in that it was about the evolution of human thought.

Marx claimed to have found a similar process in history, so he called his theory “materialist,” and thought he’d corrected Hegel and taken the idealism out of him. Tabor brilliantly demonstrates repeatedly how Marx fooled himself in this conceit, that he really only succeeded in reclothing Hegelian philosophy in the terminology of history and “materialism,” but that fundamentally, all of Marx’s theories involve categories of thought that do not correspond to reality, that Marx imposes on reality, because he starts with the theory and that he seeks to illustrate it with, not validate it from, reality. His theory of the stages of history is precisely idealist in just this way—the notion of progressive stages fueled by dialectical conflict, is the voice of Hegel. The certitude that there exists a state of society of the future where conflict is at an end and history ends, Marx’s notion of communism, derives from Hegelian thinking—in the real world, there is no basis for any such expectation.

Marxist Totalitarianism

I have saved this for last even though Tabor opens his book with this topic, and reiterates it throughout the book. I believe it is best understood in the context of having seen the key precepts of Marx's theories. Tabor identifies in several locations the feature of Marxism that helps make it so pernicious, the fact that, to use my term for it, it is an ideology. An ideology is distinct from science in that scientific theories are understood to arise as improvements on earlier theories, and to likely be superseded by subsequent theories. Tabor devotes considerable space to examining the claims of Marxism to be "scientific," which it has strived since Marx's day to claim that it is, and finds it woefully wanting on just this score. Some of its theories are disproved as being contradicted by history, such as the absurdity of the stages theory of history or the expected evolution of capitalism. But others, like the "labor theory of value," or the "theory of the state" as part of the superstructure, are simply assertions that involve mental constructs that cannot be tested. As Tabor notes, a "theory" that cannot be falsified, at least in principle, is not knowledge. By this measure, very little of Marxism is knowledge.

But for a Marxist, every "failure" has an (after-the-fact) explanation that does not impugn Marxism. Every deviation from a prediction can, in hindsight, be "explained." So Marxism is a closed intellectual loop that can never admit it is wrong. In Tabor's words, "Because of all of this, Marxists and the Marxist movement as a whole exist in a self-contained world. Being a Marxist entails accepting Marxism more or less unquestioningly." (p. 24) As I have noted, this leads to a mindset of self-righteousness, and, as Tabor discusses it, Messianism, the belief of Marxists that Marxists are the saviors of humanity, that they must do whatever it takes to usher in socialism, and that the goal is so overwhelmingly, transcendently important for mankind that the means—up to and including the kinds of hideous totalitarian means employed by Lenin—always justifies the ends. This mindset, was quintessentially manifested by Lenin, who pioneered the notion of "substitutionism," the view that an organization of self-appointed Marxists has the right to determine what is best for the working class, and to try to make a revolution *in the name of* the working class that doesn't know its own interest, and if successful, *impose* that model for society *on* the working class, and on everyone else. It was this mindset that justified the myriad atrocities committed by the Bolsheviks against opponents and imagined opponents after taking power in 1917, on direct orders of Lenin, whose writings reveal him to have been a homicidal mass-murderer without compunction or conscience.

Tabor uses the word "totalitarian" to refer both to the theories and ideology of Marxism, and to the mode of rule initiated by the Bolsheviks and imitated by every other Communist state. I prefer the word "totalist" to describe the mindset of an ideology like Marxism, and would rather reserve "totalitarian" to describe the actual mode of ruling that we associate with that word.

Tabor also considers the theories of Marx himself to be "totalitarian," as already quoted. His full quote is: "The main thesis of my critique of Marxism is that it is, and must be held, responsible for Communism. In other words, it is my belief that the ideas of Karl Marx and Frederick Engels led directly to the establishment of totalitarian socio-economic systems in Russia, China....These regimes represent the underlying logic of Marxism, and the efforts of Marxists and Marxist organizations to create revolutionary societies in the future (should they get the chance) will, in all likelihood, lead to similar systems." (p. 11) Two pages earlier he informed that his concern is based on his recognition after 25 years as a Marxist himself, that "During those years and later, I came to recognize that Marxism itself is totalitarian. Although there may be Marxists who are committed to creating truly free societies, the overwhelming majority are not. Even if they were, the internal logic of Marxism virtually guarantees

that, when Marxists do come to power (if they ever do), the systems they will establish will be totalitarian, or at least extremely authoritarian.” (p. 9)

My point of disagreement is perhaps more terminological than substantial, but I do not find that Marx’s theories *per se* imply totalitarian rule on taking state power. Marx never imagined, and therefore never specified, what to do if his predictions failed. Marx made no provision for what to do if his forecasts came a cropper, he had no “Plan B.” Leninism was a response to the *failure* of Marxism, and was not, in my view, an inevitable extension of Marx’s theories. But that said, Marx’s theories *per se* were not the sum and substance of Marxism—Marxism also was and is the *ideology* just described, and this aspect of Marxism, certainly of orthodox Marxism, does, and did, lead to a totalitarian mindset at the moment that a fluky tear in the fabric of history enabled the Bolsheviks to take and consolidate state power in post-1917 Russia.

The Present Real Danger of Marxism

To return to the theme that motivated Tabor’s book, and my review, I believe that the most important reason that a resurgent Marxism, at least of orthodox Marxism, is of concern, is its nature as a belief system, an ideology, a hermetic thought-bubble, which vitiates the ability of its devotees to respond to the reality before them, and instead seeks to impose its own imagined “reality” on actual reality. As mentioned, Tabor’s book brilliantly elucidates and fully explores precisely this nature of Marxism, as a closed, self-validating system of thought that is virtually impervious to criticism, that cannot adapt to changing reality or discovered flaws in any part of its theoretical armamentarium, and whose devotees accordingly “cannot play nice” with others who might share many immediate goals but who do not subscribe to their version of “Marxism.” Tabor’s exhaustive proof that *this* is what Marxism fundamentally is, for me, what makes Tabor’s book so brilliant, and so important for today’s “movement(s).”

And it is this ideological nature of Marxism that ensures that the role of Marxist organizations in social protest movements will therefore be deleterious, importing useless arguments and arcane points of difference, if not outright wrecking social protests or taking them over (typically driving out a majority of activists who have no use for such antics). It will put them at odds with democratic and libertarian tendencies sharing such an arena, and will potentially lead to significant unpleasant and even factional discussions and political battles that will be unproductive and disruptive. The junction of a statist orientation with Marxist Messianism is a deadly cocktail.

The growing importance of Marxist organizations of the late 1960s’ inherently anarchist student movement, that both Tabor and I lived, is a perfect case in point, in which Marxist organizations bore a major part of the blame for the collapse of that upsurge with so little of lasting importance to show for it. Whether the New Left could have left more of a legacy had none of these people become “Marxist” no one can ever know. But the thought of a new crop of potential leaders being sucked in to such sterile organizations and intellectual enterprises I find terrifying. It’s hard enough as it is even in a radicalized situation to forge new forms of economic and social interaction, as I believe we must. Such an effort requires non-ideological people willing to work together, to discuss, do research, listen to each other, accept when reality proves an idea to be wrong, and be non-authoritarian in their intellectual manner. To the extent that some significant number of such people coming up get shunted into Marxism, that is the threat that I feel must be thwarted. Tabor’s book, by demolishing the intellectual basis for a belief in Marxism, is a very important contribution in the effort that must be mounted to discredit a reviving Marxism before it becomes a major force.

Therefore, I believe that those organizations, and any like them that still exist or are yet to be created, to the extent that they maintain the essential nature of historical Marxism, so brilliantly dissected by Tabor in all its major aspects in this book, are a sufficient threat to justify a full-scale effort on the part of all non-Marxist activists to discredit that brand of Marxism and to do everything possible to ensure it does not replay today its role in the '60s movement.

Tabor also identifies a collateral danger, namely the softness of many activists, including many anarchists, on the issue of Marxism. Tabor is concerned that “many anarchists have become complacent about Marxism. Some believe it to be irrelevant. Others seem to think it enough simply to denounce it as authoritarian. Still others, surprisingly, are sympathetic to it, believe that Marxism has a lot to offer anarchists.” Such is the apparent position, for example, of Wayne Price, whose shallow review of Tabor’s book appeared on the Anarkismo website (Dec. 2013) and was reprinted on the First of May Anarchist website, in which, as already noted, he described himself as a “Marxist-informed anarchist.” As his review shows, *Tyranny* was not successful in dispelling Price’s illusions about Marxism. Therefore, I turn now to my critique of Price’s review of Tabor, to best illustrate why Tabor’s arguments are important, and how they render obsolete and irrelevant most attempts to credit Marx with any insights relevant to the issues that future radical activists and movements will face.

The “Price” of Ideology

A long-time former colleague of Tabor’s, Price begins by praising Tabor’s book, the better to damn much of it when he gets into the nitty-gritty. He finds some aspects to dispute, and then indicates some areas where he is in agreement with Tabor, but ends up affirming his belief in some of Marx’s most absurd theories, that Tabor demonstrated redundantly do not hold up, without so much as a mention of Tabor’s take on them. And he totally ignores several of the major domains that Tabor analyzes and finds wanting, even though these sections are central to Tabor’s overall argument. Price certainly read the entire book, so his silence on so much of what Tabor wrote about so powerfully can only be explained by the presumption that Price’s starting point includes a strong belief in a great deal of the Marxism that Tabor is criticizing, and that he is so ideologically committed to preserving these beliefs that he cannot permit Tabor’s cogent arguments debunking these elements of Marx’s theory to penetrate.

One of Price’s points of disagreement with Tabor is that Price holds that the notion of a democratic (or libertarian) Marxist is not an oxymoron, that there has been a minority of Marxists, including Rosa Luxemburg, who interpreted Marxism in humanistic, democratic ways. Price also cites Marx’s support for the Paris Commune as evidence for Marx’s democratic tendencies. Price then goes on to cite Marx’s seeming reformism after the defeat of the Commune, urging the creation of workers political parties in Europe, and citing Engels mention in the critique of the Erfurt Program, saying that it was possible for workers to peacefully take over current states. I concur with Price in the way that I indicated above, that people who call themselves Marxists don’t *have* to be totalitarian to be Marxist. But I maintain that if a self-identified Marxist identifies only with very little of what Marx actually stood for in the theoretical realm, then there really isn’t much content to the label.

Price’s also cites Tabor against Tabor, ferreting out four instances where, in my view, Tabor made concessions to Marx that his actual analysis did not justify and actually falsified.

The first instance occurs on p. 20, cited by Price, where Tabor writes: “Perhaps the most reasonable...attempt [Tabor is discussing apologists for Communism] to defend Marxism from its own consequences is the claim that Marxism (or parts of it) remains valid as a set of analytical propositions....These include the class analysis of society, the analysis of capitalism, the materialist

conception of history, and the notions of 'fetishism' and 'reification,' among other ideas." I do not understand why Tabor here appears to credit Marx with valid ideas on at least the first three of these four items, as the rest of the book demolishes each of them. He has an entire chapter critiquing the materialist conception of history, two chapters on Marx's analysis of capitalism, as I have already discussed, and a detailed presentation of the flawed history that is *not* merely the history of class struggle. It is telling that Price gloms onto this unwarranted concession by Tabor, and ignores the fact that Tabor retracts the concession in reality by his discussion of each of these concepts.

Price mentions that he has written a book showing what is valid in Marx's "critique of political economy," which I unfortunately have no access to, so I cannot comment on whether Price has anything useful to say on this topic. But Price also quotes Tabor on economics, from p. 8 saying "Marxism...offers a detailed analysis of capitalism which has never been approached, let alone equaled, in its cogency, breadth and depth." This concession also left me surprised when I first read it, as Tabor's two chapters on this topic showed Marx's analysis of capitalism to have very little to commend it. He said something similar on p. 336, "It [Marx's analysis of capital] contains reasonable explanations of a great many aspects of capitalism," not one of which does Tabor mention anywhere else in the book. A little later, Price quotes Tabor again (p. 130) saying that "while much of capitalist evolution that has occurred since Marx wrote (including the global crisis of capitalism) is consistent with and apparently explained by his analysis, much is not..." Again, I can't find anything interesting that Marx predicted, and all I see is the 100% failure rate of his predictions. However, since Tabor wrote these sentences, Price certainly cannot be faulted for citing them, as they cohere with Price's defense of Marx, above all on Marx's economics and analysis of capitalism. But he can be faulted for not noticing that Tabor refutes the substance of each of these four instances in the body of his book.

Overall, Price seems to have missed most of the points that Tabor makes. Price evidently rejects everything that Tabor said about the "labor theory of value," since he defends it, and takes a cheap shot at Tabor's first mention of Marx's notion that socially necessary labor is "embodied" or "congealed" in commodities (which Marx absolutely said in numerous locations). Price stated that "value is not the 'embodiment' of the amount of labor that went into a specific commodity [Price here distorts Tabor, who specified "socially necessary labor"], it is the amount of socially necessary labor which went into it." Correcting for what Tabor actually said, is Price really saying that it is correct to say that value is "the amount of socially necessary labor..." but wrong to say that it is "the embodiment of the amount of socially necessary labor..."? Price plunges on to note that if a new machine lowers the socially necessary labor, the value represented by the commodity already produced, if it is still unsold, will decline, "so its value does not depend on the specific labor which went into the object." Did Price ever reread this paragraph? Tabor agrees that this is true according to Marx's theory, and makes clear that he is referring to the same Marxist concept of "socially necessary labor time" that Price is, *not* "the specific labor" that Price misquotes Tabor saying. Tabor agrees that the value, for Marx, will decline in this instance.

What is stunning is that Price ignores 95% of Tabor's two chapters on Marx's analysis of capitalism, where he shows many ways to Sunday what is wrong with the labor theory of value, in order to quibble on Tabor's use of the word "embodiment" which Marx himself frequently uses, while defending Marx's invalid and preposterous notion that surplus value comes only from labor, which is the most important point to be made, that Tabor makes several times, and that vitiates Marx's theory beyond repair. Price's silence on this vital issue speaks volumes.

Price then provides a list of events supposedly "explained by his (Marx's) analysis" of capitalism. Price cites:

1. “The continuation of the business cycle.” Yes, Tabor cites Marx’s belief that these would get worse and worse over time. But I would submit that Marx did not understand these cycles, and that his belief about them is in no way “explained” by his analysis—he hardly analyzes them at all. And they haven’t “gotten worse and worse,” rather obviously.
2. “The growth of larger and larger corporations.” Not really. The growth of the trusts in the 1890s was probably the closest capitalism has come to fulfilling Marx’s predictions, and countervailing tendencies have stopped the process of unlimited concentration that Marx actually predicted. Nothing today rivals the degree of concentration of the Carnegie-Morgan empires in steel and railroads, or Rockefeller in oil, around the turn of the 20th century. Only in banking would it be accurate that we have more concentration now than ever before. Marx’s prediction was fundamentally totally off, not validated. Price qualifies his meaning as huge corporations “dominating national and international economies”—true, but I don’t think Marx anticipated transnational corporate conglomerates, and it does not represent increasing concentration—there are hundreds of these mega-transnationals, and they are not in a trajectory to merge into fewer and fewer, and larger and larger, corporations, which is the only reality that could qualify this example as confirming Marx’s prediction
3. “Extension of the world market until it includes the whole world”—where did Marx predict this, and even if he did, so what, but I doubt he envisioned Asia becoming industrialized, he likely never thought about it one way or the other
4. “Unemployment has continued.” Big deal, it’s actually been cyclical, and while today the degree of unemployment is depressing wages, at other times unemployment has been so low that wages rose—unemployment rising and falling is hardly a meaningful or useful “prediction,” nor a confirmation of Marx’s prediction of a growing “reserve army of labor”
5. “There has been an integration of capitalist semi-monopolies with the state.” This one is a headscratcher, I don’t know what Price is talking about. The U.S. Government is *not* integrating with “semi-monopolies”—if anything it is privatizing more and more. I have no idea what Price is referring to.
6. “There has been a long-term tendency of the rate of profit to fall.” I know some studies claim to report this, but I submit that Marx had no idea what the rate of profit was, as he identified it as $p/(c+v)$, equalized across all industries, which, as I show in my detailed discussion below, is utter nonsense. And with profits at historic highs in recent years, most recently it would appear that profit rates may have risen. There is certainly no shortage of corporate profits, as proved by the growing inequality and appropriation of those profits by the ultra-rich. Price’s claim of “increasing stagnation in economic growth” as evidence of a declining rate of profit is unconvincing, I think the profit has just been misappropriated and looted by the ultra-rich, helping cause the stagnation (along with other factors), as I mention above
7. “Growing separation of financial affairs and supervision of industry”—I don’t have access to Price’s citation on this, but certainly, 99% of Marx’s discussions were of the role of “capitalists” as owners of the means of production, not managers, so if somewhere he made mention that capitalism would evolve from being headed by capitalist/owners to being run by CEOs and boards of directors, I doubt that many Marxists know he said this, and it hardly represents any blinding light of an interesting forecast

The above list demonstrates the opposite of what Price wants it to, in two respects. First, as my comments on it show, it in no way shows significant parts of Marx’s ideas to have proven themselves to be valid today. Second, it shows the shallowness of what Price understands as “Marxism.” Price’s

formulation is important: he describes these seven items as “explained by Marx’s analysis.” Really? What about any of these things is “explained” by anything Marx wrote? “Explained” would mean that Marx would have presented *reasons* why capitalism would have continued to consolidate and concentrate to the point that most of the productive forces would be glommed into a very few mega-mega corporations. Of course, that hasn’t happened, but an *explanation* would show (or attempt to show) *why* it happened. What’s worse, for Price’s argument, since it hasn’t happened, the real question for a Marxist has to be to explain why it *hasn’t* happened. On another point, Marx understood that panics and what we now call recessions occurred, and that unemployment would rise during one is hardly proof of a growing “reserve army of labor.” Marx’s forecast of this was for a continually growing such reserve army. Again, what Price, and any other defenders of Marx must account for is *why*, if Marx is worth paying attention to today, was he so wrong in this prediction, which now has 150 years to prove itself, and so far has fallen flat on its face.

I could go on to elaborate in similar fashion for all seven items, but I think it is clear that Price is clutching at straws here, desperately trying to find anything, anything at all, that he can point to and say, “see, Marx got some things right.” That this is what he is doing is further confirmed by what he lists as the things that he concurs Marx got wrong, and even more by the specific forecasts of Marx that were already proven wrong over 100 years ago, that he fails to cite at all (they should have been added to his list of failed predictions). Price is evidently attempting to bolster his own continuing faith in Marxism—perhaps he is really one of those “democratic” Marxists he cites. This is demonstrated by his admission of what is *not* explained by Marx’s analysis:

1. “the resilience and longevity of capitalism, lasting a century longer than Marx expected”
2. “especially, there was the prosperity after World War II”
3. “the failure of the industrial working class in the imperial countries to make successful socialist revolutions”
4. “Unexpected emergence of Communist countries with collectivized, non-bourgeois ruling class”

Seeing this list makes one wonder where Price’s mind was wandering during the repeated sections where Tabor repeated the predictions of Marx’s that didn’t come true, which Price conveniently left out. Whether the 7 items above can in some sense be teased from Marx’s writings, it is beyond question that the unlimited expansion of the proletariat, the total concentration of all capitalist enterprises into fewer and fewer, the disappearance of the petit bourgeoisie into the proletariat, the declining wages of the proletariat, and the takeover of the capitalist industries by the state, represented the clear, often-stated and unarguable predictions of Marx that justified his forecast that the proletariat would make a revolution and establish its dictatorship over the capitalist class.

Wayne, hello, none of these things happened. Why have you excluded them from your list above? Marx’s really central predictions totally flopped, and worse, as you note, capitalism is still here and the working class is farther than ever from any kind of class consciousness or interest in socialism. Hey, the white working class now votes more Republican than Democratic. What’s to salvage from Marx in this? To concede that Marx was “wrong” about the longevity of capitalism, but right, say, about that capitalism would expand to become a global system, is like a doctor saying that he got wrong that the patient had a swollen appendix, which he thought was a stomach ache, and the patient died as a result, but that he at least got right that the patient also suffered from a skin rash. Even *if* any of Price’s seven salvaged supposed correct items were, in fact correct, so what, when contrasted with the fact that everything that gave Marxism the vision of where it was going (socialism and then communism), and everything that animated its *practice*, working to help the working class to become conscious of its

world-historical responsibility to lead the revolution, has been shown to be upside down and backward, totally failed forecasts and understandings of where history, and capitalism, were headed.

Finally, Price cites Marx's anticipation of on-going class conflict, from on-the-job dissatisfaction to minor job actions to strikes to attempted revolutions. Excuse me, I believe that labor in the U.S. and Western Europe is as quiescent as it has been in nearly a century. What evidence of "on-going class conflict" that means anything is Price seeing?

Price cites Tabor in the early 1970s forecasting the end of the post-war prosperity "because of Marxist economic analysis." Tabor does credit "Marxism" for his analysis, but not Marx's economic theories *per se*, but rather a few concepts from several practicing Marxist at the time, including their analysis of the "permanent arms economy" and an interpretation of "fictitious capital," a notion posited by Marx but carried further by one particular Marxist writer (from a personal communication from Tabor). Tabor's forecast could not have been made from Marx's economic theories themselves, as far as I can see.

Finally, as I showed above, and Tabor also shows in many places, Marx's understanding of capitalism was essentially beside the point—he got most things wrong, starting with the law of value, yet Price states, "Marx's economic theory—his critique of political economy—has proven itself as an overall analysis of how capitalism functions." Price must be referring to his seven points above, ignoring the fatal implications of the first three points that he acknowledges were Marx's failures, and the other predictions that he doesn't cite that also failed. But since he is reviewing Tabor's book, that devotes 100 pages to showing just the opposite, that Marx got virtually nothing right that qualifies as "an overall analysis of how capitalism functions," what specifics from Marx is Price referring to. I defy Price to actually engage with Tabor and show why he thinks Tabor's discussion of so many of Marx's core economic concepts got it wrong .

What Price does say is breathtaking. He does mention that Tabor has "specific criticisms of many aspects of Marx's [economic] theory, such as the labor theory of value, as well as an overall criticism." But then Price states, "He (Tabor) claims that Marx took his theories too seriously, as really-existing objective laws rather than as some kind of metaphors." What? Marx didn't intend people to take him at his word, and that really what he called "laws" should obviously be understood only as metaphors? Speechless doesn't describe the state of mind that such inanities induce in the reader. Following the pointless attack on Tabor on the law of value for agreeing with Price on what Marx meant by it, which follows the above statement, Price goes on to state next, "In my opinion, the 'proof' of the economic concepts is the overall validity of the total economic theory. By 'validity' I mean that it is useful in organizing the data (what Ron called 'reasonable explanations of aspects of capitalism'), makes predictions which mostly come true, and provides guidance for action."

Space forbids giving this the length it requires to untangle the multiple absurdities this statement is composed of. "The 'proof' of the economic concepts is the overall validity of the total economic theory" is a tautological, totally circular argument. Substituting Christianity for "Marx's economic concepts" illustrates the point: "The proof of the validity of the tenets of Christianity is the overall validity of Christian doctrine as a whole." clearly relies on specious reasoning. Price asserts that the validity of Marx's economic theory as a whole proves that the concepts that compose it are valid. Duh. But the point is, that either the total economic theory, or the "economic concepts" that it is composed of, must be demonstrated independently to be correct. One cannot validate the other, since at least one of them must be proven true. Price makes no attempt to do this, unless his seven hapless points is the evidence he means to adduce. And, most importantly, since this is a review of Tabor's critique of Marx, this would be the moment to cue some of Tabor's arguments against Marx's analysis of capitalism. Other than his

pointless example on the law of value, Price mentions no other element of Tabor's critique of Marx's political economy, that occupied nearly 30% of his entire book.

When it comes to issues of philosophy, Price falls almost mum. He evidently rejects Tabor's, in my view brilliant, discovery that Marx's underlying method was Hegelian and Idealist, not "materialist," as he all but ignores the issue. He even cites that "many Marxists, especially libertarian Marxists, believe that the solution to Marxism's totalitarian tendencies is to return to the Hegelian roots of Marx's thought." What this even means is unclear. Hegel worshipped the totally autocratic Prussian state, and this is not a controversial viewpoint. Hegel as an antidote to totalitarian thinking? Is there another Hegel than the one I'm familiar with that Price has dredged up here? How a libertarian can square Hegel's clear worship of the state with libertarianism is beyond me.

Price also makes zero mention of Tabor's lengthy discussion of Marx's whoppers when it comes to his presentation of history and the class struggle, in which arena the similarities between Marx and Hegel are most evident. Does his silence mean he stands with Marx on these assertions, despite the contrary evidence from history? His review bypasses this question.

Tabor also spends a great deal of time contrasting Marxism with science, showing that Marxism can only be understood as a philosophy, that cannot be tested as a science. Price would appear to disagree, but all he does is dismiss what he calls "Ron's attack on philosophical materialism. He develops his own version of philosophical idealism" which Price said he didn't find "convincing" nor "relevant." All I can say is that I found Tabor's development of Marx's Hegelian idealism to be devastating, and encourage the reader to decide for him or herself.

Overall, Price's review is highly disappointing, and seems to say more about Price than Tabor, since Price is at pains to not acknowledge even the most obvious domain in which Marx was a total failure, namely, his predictions for where capitalist society was going. Price would appear to illustrate the uphill battle Tabor faces in breaking into the ideology of Marxism, with which Price is clearly imbued. He selectively notes certain points, avoids others, and affirms aspects of Marx that Tabor has shown have no validity.

In summary, nobody would have anything approaching a fair understanding of even what Tabor attempts to do in his book, much less what he succeeded in doing, from Price's review.

The Way Forward

As mentioned earlier in my review, Price describes himself as a "Marxist-informed anarchist," and that sounds about right. I'm sure Price has no use for those aspects of Marxism that glorify the role of the state, including the dictatorship of the proletariat, or that would sanction the kinds of totalitarian methods used by Communist States over the last 100 years. He surely is not "in the Marxist bubble" that an orthodox/dogmatic Marxist would be in, and he can accept some elements of Tabor's critique.

However, he illustrates an aspect of the problem that Tabor, I am sure, recognizes, and that I concur in, namely, that Marxism is sterile, and that to the extent that even some of its theoretical precepts are adopted as "valid" and "correct" by radicals now and in the coming period, to that extent the movements that will emerge will have to deal with "static" caused by spending any time or emotional energy discussing or debating them. One message of Tabor's book, and of course my review of it, is that there is little productive that can come out of talking about any of Marx's theories covered in the book—not his forecasts for capitalism, not his view of socialism, not the dictatorship of the proletariat, not his view of the state, not his understanding of what he called the "proletariat," not his economic theories starting with the "law of value," not his conception of history and class struggle, not his notion of

“dialectics,” and not his so-called “materialism.” As we enter what may prove to be a tumultuous time, when above all what we need is clear-headed, fresh analysis of what is happening in the world and to the economy, and open, honest, democratic and respectful discussions of what to do to help bring into being a better society that can resolve some, if not all, of the nation’s and the world’s present problems, what we don’t need is the kind of discussion that Price put in his review, where to rebut his claims is merely to return to square zero. I devoted almost as many pages to critiquing Price’s review of Tabor as he did in his critique of Tabor, and all of it to merely clear away errors and sloppy thinking. Tabor’s book needs to be read with an open mind, ready to see that perhaps one has some preconceived favorable view of Marx that it is now time to jettison.

The other leading component of Tabor’s book is his development of what Marxism has been (and still is for “orthodox,” “dogmatic” Marxists, as I call them) as an ideology, a totalist (what Tabor calls a totalitarian) mindset ensconced within a theoretical “black box” that appears to explain everything that happens, no matter what it is, that in reality explains nothing. Wayne Price, although not fully within this ideological box, has apparently decided that he needs to believe that at least a major portion of Marx’s theories on economics and perhaps some other topics, is still “valid” (whatever that means to Price), and to the extent that he has made this decision, to the same extent he managed to shut himself off from seriously considering what Tabor actually said on some critical areas in which Tabor demolished some of Price’s cherished Marxist beliefs (above all in the area of so-called “political economy”). I, and Tabor, can only hope that enough people read Tabor’s book (and my review of it) who are open to honestly considering Tabor’s arguments, because I think that if they do this, they will come to appreciate Marx the way Tabor and I do. And I hope that Price may decide to revisit Tabor’s chapters on Marx’s analysis of capitalism in light of what I presented above on this topic in this review, and to approach them with a mind more open to concede the possibility that Tabor might be right after all.

With that, I have concluded my “summary” version of my review. What follows is a restatement of Marx’s precepts, and Tabor’s (and my) discussion and refutation of them, in significant detail, so that those wishing to delve deeper (or who are not convinced by the summary discussion above) can grasp the points in greater detail and specificity.

Marxism and Its Historic Responsibility (for Communist Totalitarianism)

The above title (minus the parentheses) is the heading for Tabor’s second chapter. In this chapter Tabor elaborates his belief that there is a “logic” of Marxism that leads to totalitarianism as exhibited in Soviet Russia and all other Communist regimes. Tabor opens the chapter thusly:

“The main thesis of my critique of Marxism is that it is, and must be held, responsible for Communism. In other words, it is my belief that the ideas of Karl Marx and Frederick Engels led directly to the establishment of totalitarian socio-economic systems in Russia, China....These regimes represent the underlying logic of Marxism, and the efforts of Marxists and Marxist organizations to create revolutionary societies in the future (should they get the chance) will, in all likelihood, lead to similar systems.” (p. 11) Two pages earlier he informed that his concern is based on his recognition after 25 years as a Marxist himself, that “During those years and later, I came to recognize that Marxism itself is totalitarian. Although there may be Marxists who are committed to creating truly free societies, the overwhelming majority are not. Even if they were, the internal logic of Marxism virtually guarantees

that, when Marxists do come to power (if they ever do), the systems they will establish will be totalitarian, or at least extremely authoritarian.” (p. 9)

While Tabor makes reference in a number of other chapters to aspects of Marxism that he calls “totalitarian,” it is in this chapter that he first lays out his case that the totalitarianism of the Communist regimes derives from an “underlying logic of Marxism.” Tabor states his case throughout this chapter in a variety of passages, that I have assembled to present his argument as completely as I could.

1. If (when) “Marxists do come to power (if they come to power) the systems they will establish will be totalitarian...” “...I do not believe it was an accident that 95% (99%?) of all Marxists supported the Communist regimes, and denied, explained away or justified the crimes committed by them. I believe that 95% (99%?) of Marxists in the future will think—and act—in the same way. Marxism, as I now see it, is a totalitarian doctrine, and every attempt to implement the Marxian program, no matter how well-intentioned, will lead to the creation of authoritarian and state-dominated, if not totalitarian, societies.” (p. 9-10)
2. “I will attempt...in the pages that follow...to discuss certain aspects of Marxism, to demonstrate why the internal logic of its ideas points to the establishment of totalitarian societies, and to show why Marxists, once in power, will implement measures that will sabotage their claims (and, in many cases, their own intentions) to create cooperative, democratic, classless, and stateless societies.” (p. 10)
3. “Marxism has demonstrated that it is a failure: it does not lead to classless, stateless societies...and are not even capable of promoting sustained economic growth (p. 11)
4. The “objective conditions” that Lenin and the Bolsheviks faced in 1917-1920 cannot be blamed for the regime’s adoption of totalitarian means, because they had lots of other options than taking over the soviets and turning on every other party, setting up bureaucratic rule of the economy, creating a secret police, and almost everything else that they did [the presumable intended relevance being that if it wasn’t “objective conditions,” it must have been their Marxism that led them down this path] (p. 17)
5. That the steps the Bolsheviks’ took, purportedly to preserve the revolution (Trotsky’s argument), “implies a substantial critique of Marxism: it is precisely what the Bolsheviks did—resort to bureaucratic brutal and dictatorial methods—and why they did it—because they assumed that the survival of the revolution was coincident with their control over the state—that reveals the totalitarian nature of Marxism” p. 18
6. “Despite its libertarian vision and goals, Marxism advocates the use of the repressive power of a centralized, dictatorial state, and coercive—that is, authoritarian—measures to achieve liberation” p. 18
7. Marxism “bases itself on a philosophy of history, of human nature, and of the nature of the universe, that justifies the necessity of repressive, authoritarian steps” p. 18
8. That the Bolsheviks “chose to hold onto power at whatever the price, no matter how barbaric the methods they used or to what moral depths they sank, says something about the nature of Marxism.” (p. 18)
9. For Marxism, “control over the state and the violent suppression of all enemies...are essential elements of the socialist revolution” while “democracy for the workers, peasants and other oppressed people, political liberties, the right to economic, social, cultural, and spiritual autonomy, are not.” (p. 18)
10. The argument that what happened in the Communist countries was based on a distortion of misinterpretation of what Marx believed begs the question of why so many leading Marxists,

including Engels, Lenin, Trotsky, Stalin and Mao apparently “got it wrong” and how it can be explained that Marxism “is so prone to being misinterpreted and distorted”, which leads to another question: (p. 20)

11. “Is there a connection between the supposedly real Marxism (that is, the ideas of Marx) and its various ‘distortions’? That is, is there something in Marxism that “points in the direction of these ‘distortions,’ that leads, in other words, to totalitarianism?” (p. 20)
12. “Many of the analytical propositions that are defended [by a certain species of analytical apologists for Marxism]...have totalitarian implications” which Tabor promises will be covered throughout the book (p. 22)
13. All the apologists have in common a “refusal to recognize and to admit that Marxism and Marxists must accept responsibility for what Marxism has wrought...that the responsibility for the nature of the Communist regimes, the atrocities they committed, and their ultimate collapse, lies with Marxism itself.” (p. 22)
14. “Marxism is responsible for totalitarianism primarily because its underlying philosophical assumptions imply it.” (p. 25)
15. “Marxism believes...that it is Marxism’s right and obligation to point the way to this goal [a socialist revolution that is the goal of the ‘laws of motion’ of history] [and] that the chief steps needed to achieve this are a violent revolution and a dictatorial state.” (p. 25)

I have already indicated (in the first section) my difference with Tabor’s presentation of this issue, namely, that within Marx’s theories *per se*, I do not find support for the view that they have a “logic” that leads to totalitarianism. Rather, I concur that what I call the “totalist” (Tabor calls it “totalitarian”) mindset of orthodox Marxism predisposes its practitioners to see themselves in Messianic terms as entitled to determine what is best for everyone, and if ever in the position of wielding state power, to use that power to impose their version of society using totalitarian methods if that what it takes to remain in power. Phrased another way, I contend that certain aspects of *being* a Marxist predisposed *some practitioners* of Marxism (but by no means all, or even most, prior to 1914) to go in a totalitarian direction *once they were in the uncharted [by Marx] territory* created by the *failure* of Marx’s theories—their *disproof* at the hands of reality. Such was the case, I would concur with Tabor, for Lenin.

The “Theory of the State” and “Dictatorship of the Proletariat”

Tabor’s next chapter begins his analysis of Marx’s specific theories, starting with Marx’s “theory of the state,” rendered in quotation marks because, as Tabor notes, Marx never articulated a “unified exposition of their analysis of the state,” despite the fact that “their conception of that institution is a fundamental aspect of their outlook and of what has since come to be called Marxism.” (p. 29) It is followed by a chapter on the “Dictatorship of the Proletariat” which is basically a continuation of the same discussion about the role of the state. I will review these two chapters together, at the end of which I include a section, based largely on material in a previous book by Tabor, *A Look At Leninism* (1987), which explores Lenin and the Soviet instance of taking state power and establishing a “dictatorship of the proletariat,” and also fleshes out to some degree what Marx, and Lenin, actually thought “socialism” was (which some may find rather surprising).

This topic is a natural follow-on to Tabor’s first two chapters, covered above, which state his case that the inherent logic of Marxism is to become totalitarian in practice when Marxists attain state

power. It is worth quoting much of the remainder of Tabor's opening paragraph in this chapter to fully grasp his argument: "In fact, theories of the state constitute critical facets of all totalitarian credos, not just Marxian. After all, a given ideology may be totalitarian ["totalist" in my lexicon] in its underlying logic, but if it lacks a focus on using the state as the means of transforming society, that is, of imposing its ideas, its totalitarianism will remain implicit. While Marxism contains many propositions that imply totalitarianism, it is Marx and Engel's view of the state, particularly that the state, in the form of the dictatorship of the proletariat (a revolutionary state built on the nationalization of the means of production), is the chief weapon in the struggle to establish communism, that renders their theory totalitarian in practice." (p. 29)

This formulation is helpful, as it permits another way to "get at" my difference with Tabor on this issue. I think the operative phrase is "...using the state as the means of transforming society, that is, of imposing its ideas..." I wholeheartedly concur that if a party representing at best a small minority of the population of a country takes power and manages to consolidate that power, and then seeks to impose a set of ideas that are alien to those of the society, that totalitarian rule is their only option. But the required question is, is it consistent with Marxism to seek to impose socialism on a society that is hostile to it? It seems to me clear that the whole burden of Marx's theories points to an unequivocal answer of "no." The entire *raison d'être* of Marx's system was the belief that the proletariat would become the overwhelmingly majoritarian portion of the population, such that on reaching the point of being able to take over the bourgeois state, only a small number of capitalists and their hangers-on would remain who would need to be repressed by the "dictatorship of the proletariat." Marx thought that class consciousness came from merely being a member of a class, and that at the point of socialist takeover (whether by revolution or democratic means), the proletarian government would not need to "impose" socialism on a hostile populace. It seems clear to me that Marx never contemplated a proletarian revolution under any other circumstances.

All of this highlights the importance of the unique instance where the first Marxist state was established, in Russia under Lenin, for understanding how Lenin's state became, and remained, brutally totalitarian, including repression of the very workers who helped engineer the original November putsch that overthrew the previous government and on whose behalf the revolution was presumably carried out in the first place. I shall return to Tabor's formulation, and my issues with it, in the context of my discussion of *A Look At Leninism* in the following section of this review.

Marx's "Theory of the State"

To return to Tabor's chapter on the "Marxist Theory of the State," Tabor begins by summarizing what can be said to constitute Marx's "theory of the state" in 16 points, most of which also include brief quotes from Marx. The salient points are:

- The state arose historically to mediate between classes with conflicting interests to keep the state from breaking apart in class conflict, and that the classes themselves came into existence because of "relative scarcity," a condition Marx described as where there is not enough material production for everyone to live in luxury, so society divides between at least one class that labors most of the time, and another class that rules.
- The economically dominant class controls the state.
- The state is part of the "superstructure" of society," which means its nature derives from the "material base" of society, which consists of the instruments of production, the social classes, and the relations among those classes.

- Occasionally the state becomes somewhat independent of the dominant class and the laboring classes, playing the two classes off against each other.
- The democratic republic is the highest form of the state in which the capitalist class exercises its power indirectly, and the executive of this state is essentially a committee for managing the common affairs of the whole bourgeoisie.
- As capitalism develops and the effects of periodic crises are felt, “the state will ultimately have to undertake the direction of production” such that “All the social functions of the capitalists are now produced by salaried employees...At first the capitalist mode of production forces out the workers. Now it forces out the capitalists.” (p. 34, quoting from Engels, *Socialism: Utopian and Scientific*).
- The first step in the revolution is the conquest of political power by the proletariat, raising that class to the position of the ruling class, whence it smashes the capitalist state machine, then builds its own state, the “revolutionary dictatorship of the proletariat” whose main task is to “wrest, by degrees, all capital from the bourgeoisie, to centralize all instruments of production in the hands of the state...and to increase the total productive forces as rapidly as possible...[according to] a common plan.” (p. 35, from Engels)
- This latter state is “not a state in the proper sense of the word” (p. 35, again from Engels), since, unlike other states in history, it “is the instrument of the vast majority to suppress the exploiting minority and thus do away with exploitation altogether.” (p. 35, Tabor’s words)

Tabor’s Critique of Marx’s “Theory of the State”

Tabor has a field day with virtually every significant element of Marx’s theory of the state. Here, and throughout the remainder of this review, I shall usually use bullet points to more compactly and efficiently highlight both Tabor’s critique of Marx’s ideas, and any critiques I have of Tabor or remarks of my own that extend Tabor’s arguments. Tabor makes the following arguments (of course, I can only briefly summarize what in the book are extended discussions):

- The state appears for Marx to arise “outside of human beings, through an unnamed, purely external factor, a kind of *deus ex machina*, whose functioning is made possible, but whose nature and origin are not explained, by the existence of relative scarcity.” (“Relative scarcity” for Marx is the situation where there is not enough for everyone to have a comfortable living, giving rise to “have mores” and “have lesses” (my terms) which basically coalesce into the rulers and the ruled, which is the origin of classes for Marx.)
- This point is important, Tabor notes, because it implies that all that is required to have the state disappear by itself is to eliminate relative scarcity, and indeed, this seems to be the basis, the entire basis, for the doctrine that the state under socialism will “wither away” as the forces of production grow large and “productive” enough to end “relative scarcity” by producing enough for everyone to live well.
- This also explains why the focus of the Marxists who have taken state power has been on increasing economic growth as fast as possible, typically adopting “the most brutal, authoritarian methods to do so,” which, “coupled with the idea that the state, in the form of the dictatorship of the proletariat, is the chief vehicle of the socialist transformation of society,” (p. 40) has led to the creation of huge state bureaucracies to bring about this rapid economic development.

- Marx's notion that the state is an instrument of the ruling class to control the laboring class(es) implies the separation of the ruling class from the state—Tabor asserts that the anarchist view (and surely the view of many others) is that the state is an “essential element in the structure of the society...ruling class and state are thoroughly intertwined...[as] part of...a more or less unified hierarchical, authoritarian structure that dominates society.” (p. 41)
- This distinction becomes especially important under capitalism, where it makes no sense to say that the capitalists “use” the state as their “instrument;” rather, “the state in capitalist society is a capitalist institution,” “a central component of both the capitalist economy and the capitalist society.” That is, Marx's notion implies that the capitalist class could in principle exist without the state, and the capitalist state could exist without the capitalist class—both, Tabor maintains, and I concur, are absurdities, the capitalist class only exists in and through the state that has evolved to serve the interests of the capitalist economy and society.
- This same notion that the state can be understood as separate from the ruling class leads to the view that it exists as something that can be taken over by the proletariat in a revolution, which would be impossible if the state is understood as “an intrinsic part of the structure of capitalist society.” Tabor notes that Marxist reformists have made this argument, that all they need to do is seize the capitalist state and use it to pursue their goals.
- Tabor also notes that the state, certainly the capitalist state, is not passive, as suggested by its being understood as an “instrument” of the ruling class, but active, and can and does in some circumstances seek to perpetuate itself, increase its relative power within society, act even without general agreement for the majority of the capitalist class, and on occasion take over and dominate even the capitalist class (along with everyone else), such as Mussolini's fascism and Hitler's Nazism, not to mention any number of military dictatorships since World War II.
- And as for the state withering away, this follows from the same misconception that, in Tabor's words, “the state has no internal dynamic apart from the class that controls it,” which underpins the belief that once controlled by the proletariat, as its tasks are completed, it will have no further function and will disappear of its own. At best this is extraordinarily naive (my comment), for the reason, as Tabor notes, that “how can the state wither away, when it now owns almost all of society's economic resources, when its internal dynamic is to extend its power, and all social forces that might resist it have been either eliminated (via repression) or deprived of all levers to do so.” (p. 45)
- I believe this argument is dynamite to this entire, core precept of Marxism, that Tabor so meticulously exposes to be what amounts to absolute nonsense. Marx fails to recognize that those in control of state power—and this is the more so the more authoritarian that state power is (that is, it is least so in the most democratic states, most so in dictatorships)—are actors who enjoy power and who want to retain it, if they can. In democracies, they have to fight for it in the democratic electoral arena. In dictatorships, once in power, only massive social forces arrayed against them have a chance, and the history of the 20th century has shown that it is virtually impossible for a dictatorship to be overthrown if it is willing to use its military resources against its own people—I don't believe there is a single instance of this happening (other processes, including outside pressure, have ended many dictatorships, such as in Latin America, but this required the military regimes to realize that history was against them and to eventually conclude that they had to cede power, and the Soviet-East Bloc fell only when, in contrast to

earlier instances such as Hungary in 1956 and Czechoslovakia in 1968, when the state declined to use its military/police resources beyond a very limited point—making the case).

- And of course, this is exactly what happened in the Russian instance, the first totalitarian state of the 20th century, and one of the most thorough in history—one which Hitler admired and studied, I believe (he was not nearly as totalitarian as Stalin).
- Tabor does not make the following point, but it is utterly consistent with his presentation: another factor that involves the state ties back to the issue of “relative scarcity,” since any state that exists in an economy where most people have to struggle to make a living (pretty much every society in world history) will have functionaries, so joining the government to be a functionary, or trying to influence the government via corruption (bribes, most commonly) of those functionaries, is a normal part of doing business. Today, government corruption is an enormous problem in a great number of countries, it impedes healthy economic processes, it distorts all kinds of things, and it impoverishes the people who have to pay the bribes, not to mention demoralizes the population. This is a perfect example of “the state” run amok, but Marx shows no hint of recognition of this aspect of states, especially modern states. There is some correlation between the extent of corruption and poverty of a country, and also significant correlation to dictatorships (like the Soviet Union, and likely even Russia today, China, etc.) versus democracies, though India is a democracy where its poverty factor engenders a huge amount of corruption.
- Finally, there is an irony in Marx’s positing that the working class, the “proletariat,” acquires its class consciousness solely from its position as a class oppressed by capitalist social relations. The irony is that, while this has spectacularly *not* proved to apply to the working class, it *does* apply to “government workers” especially those who see their job working for a government (a state) as their lifeline to survival, such that *their* viewpoint, their identity, will be bound up with maintaining their state job, and the state that supplied it to them. Not all workers for the state will automatically feel this way, this is not some “essence” oozing from the workplace, but simply the self-interest of people who, once protected by the power of the state which is guaranteeing their livelihood, will tend to protect the state in return. None of this occurs to Marx.
- Returning to Tabor’s analysis, he notes that Marx seems to think of the state’s primary function as repression, which downplays or ignores all the ways the state can influence the population in other ways, through education, provision of social services, how it runs a justice system, and many others, all of which, certainly in democracies (which Marx called the highest form of the bourgeois state) can help maintain the society in its capitalist nature. Tabor notes that for Marx, since the “essential” function of the bourgeois state is repressing the workers, the “proletarian” state is “essentially” just repressing the capitalists—again, completely failing to understand that repression per se is only a tiny fraction of what the modern state does, all of which would need to be addressed before any talk of the state “withering away” could even be brought to the table.
- I would add to Tabor’s argument that the history of modern capitalist development shows that, completely opposite to what Marx forecasted, the employers (the “capitalists”) over time, and sometimes only pressured by workers strikes or government mandate, have ended up sharing ever greater magnitudes (not necessarily in percentage terms) of their revenue with their workers in the form of wage and salary increases. The average and median standard of living in

Western Europe and North America is many, many times higher today in real terms than it was in Marx's time, describable (in sort of Marxian terms) as the capitalists taking some of the increase in surplus that derives from improvements in productivity, and passing it back as increased wages. I will discuss this in greater length later, but the point for now is that by doing this, the society has reduced any impulse toward revolution on the part of workers to very close to zero. In this sense, reformism has so far worked marvelously as a means of maintaining the capitalist system in force—it only really broke down during the crisis of the 1930s, and, I contend, will only potentially break down again if another comparable crisis were to occur.

- Tabor's next point is that Marx's theory of the state cannot adequately account for the multiplicity and characteristics of other classes besides the "ruling class" and the "laboring class." When it acknowledges other classes at all, it lumps them in with one of these two and has nothing interesting to say about them. Marx denies them any independent role, which history has disproven many, many times. In particular, the growth of the middle class to outnumber by far the traditional working class (as well as to absorb much of it) contradicts Marx's view one hundred percent. Mussolini's, and even more so Hitler's, recruitment of thugs from what Marx would have called the "lumpenproletariat," into street gangs that terrorized society and helped prepare the way for their respective takeovers, and afterward became part of the totalitarian terror apparatus, shows the crucial role that an alternate class played in assisting the takeover of the state by a force other than the ruling class. Marxism doesn't have a way to comprehend this eventuality.
- Tabor also points out that Marx's prediction of capitalism getting to the point that there will be almost no one who is not either a capitalist or a proletarian is the outcome merely of a very crude and ahistorical linear extrapolation from a few decades of working class growth in the mid-19th century. Tabor says that Marx basically elaborated a model of social reality "and then proceed[ed] as if this model actually determined the development of that reality, in other words, a tendency to believe that the model is more fundamental, more real, than the reality it is meant to explain," which thought process "is an expression of the underlying Idealist nature of Marxism." (p. 51)
- The other linear extrapolation Marx makes is that the process of business consolidation into trusts and monopolies would continue until there were only a handful of super-trusts and monopolies, and that the state would likely have to take these over to keep the system running. Again, while consolidation goes on all the time and some companies are utterly huge, nothing like what Marx envisioned has ever occurred, nor likely ever will.
- But for Marx, and here is a high irony, this tendency to concentrate on the part of capitalism was a *good* thing, because, for Marx, it was a step on the path to the "socialization" of the means of production, which was his vision of socialism—the state owning it all (on behalf of the workers, to be sure (sic)). As Tabor phrases it, "despite their claims to be opponents of the capitalist states and advocates of the abolition of the state, Marxists *act* on the belief that the capitalist state represents an element of planning and justice, a kind of immanent socialist principle, within capitalist society."
- In a final irony, Marx's belief that the state's chief function was maintaining a state of peace between ruling class and laboring class (of course protecting the power of the former over the latter) led him to postulate that as the working class gets ever larger, to the point that it is a threat, at that point, the state, "to prevent society from flying apart, becomes larger and more

powerful, consumes ever more social and economic resources, and increasingly appears to stand above society...[to the point] that the state becomes politically independent of the capitalists....The logical extension of this dynamic is the complete expropriation of the capitalist class by the capitalist state....the state...threatens to destroy the capitalists themselves.” (p. 53-54) Again, this is pure Marxian phantasy.

I believe that Tabor’s dissection of Marx’s (and Engels’) “theory of the state” leads to the unavoidable conclusion that Marx had absolutely nothing of enduring interest to say on the subject, that he spun his theories based on his ideology, made history try to conform to these theories (in the process mangling history horribly), and has been proven to have forecast not a single interesting, much less valid, prediction of where capitalist society was headed. If Tabor’s book had stopped here, it would have demolished enough of Marxism—indeed, the absolute crux of Marxism—that it could be said to be already discredited beyond hope of resuscitation.

Dictatorship of the Proletariat

Tabor’s next chapter on the “Dictatorship of the Proletariat” zeroes in on this critical component of Marx’s “theory of the state.” Much of this chapter restates points from the previous ones, so I will focus only on new items here, primarily on Marx’s prediction for the “socialist revolution,” the “dictatorship of the proletariat,” and the predicted “withering away of the state” leading to “communism.”

Tabor evidently chose to include this chapter here because it continues the discussion of the “theory of the state” into the projected period when the proletariat has become the vast majority of the population and revolution becomes possible and feasible, where it sets up its own state. However, this discussion could just as readily have been included in his later chapter on “historical materialism,” because it is his theory of “historical materialism” that explains *why* Marx believed that socialism and communism were “inevitable,” and represented the highest (and last) stage of human history. I will discuss here Tabor’s discussion of just the prediction itself, and leave for my review of Tabor’s chapter on historical materialism the context that led Marx to this prediction, and the Hegelian basis for it.

Tabor first summarizes (p. 60) Marx’s thesis on this in four conditions toward which Marx thought capitalism was evolving:

- 1) The proletariat constitutes the vast majority of the population
- 2) The capitalist class has been reduced to a handful of people
- 3) The bulk of the social capital has been united through centralization and concentration into a few major blocks (trusts and monopolies, most of which have been taken over by the capitalist state
- 4) The proletariat is politically united and class conscious, that is, it desires a revolution and agrees on its tasks, including construction of the dictatorship of the proletariat.

Tabor notes that taken at face value, there will be almost nobody to repress since the number of actual capitalists will be little more than a handful, under which circumstances “the Marxist strategy might seem to be plausible.” That is, *if* these four had all occurred, maybe the “dictatorship of the proletariat” would not have become a dictatorship *over* the proletariat (and over everyone else), as it manifestly became in Soviet Russia and all subsequent Communist regimes.

I take Tabor’s point to mean that not only would the dictatorship of the proletariat not need to be totalitarian, it would appear almost benign, merely ensuring that the capitalists couldn’t somehow get back in the saddle. That is, it would be “no big deal.” This doesn’t square with the tenor of Marx’s

discussion of it, which makes it seem that the dictatorship of the proletariat *is* a big deal, and that the proletariat would actually dismantle the “bourgeois state” (whatever this actually means), and replace it with its own state, that he described as, as Tabor noted in his previous chapter, “a state that is not a state.” What it *is*, if not a state, is nowhere hinted at. Marx would appear to be simply flipping what he considered the “bourgeois” state’s primary function, repressing the proletariat, on its head, swapping capitalists for proletarians, so that under socialism, the tables are turned, and it is the proletariat that “represses” the capitalists. The intellectual shallowness and incompleteness of this notion should be obvious. Further, a moment’s thought confirms its absurdity, as the function of capitalist repression of the proletariat is to exploit it, but Marx surely cannot be saying the proletarian state will “exploit” the handful of capitalists (by what, paying them proletarian wages?), so the only function of “repressing” the capitalists would be to prevent them getting control of the state again. But once replaced by a government in control of the full machinery of the state that represents the proletariat, what possible means would the handful of capitalists, now dispossessed of their wealth and control over/ownership of the means of production, have of challenging the state anyway? What significant threat would need to be “repressed” at this point?

I think the implications of this need to be emphasized, because, to use language stronger than Tabor chooses to employ, I think this point is an excellent illustration of the utter bankruptcy of virtually all of Marx’s theories and ideas. *If* Marx were right, then these four conditions would take place, but then the period of the “dictatorship of the proletariat” would really be a non-event, hardly worth mentioning. That Marx instead foresees a need for the proletariat to create its own state just to stay in power is inconsistent with the rest of his theory about the evolution of capitalism. He can’t have it both ways. Either his four conditions are accurate, in which case there is hardly any need for a dictatorship of the proletariat, or they are not, in which case he is already wrong because one or more of his predictions are wrong. Logically, the only reason for a period of the “dictatorship of the proletariat” would be if there will be significant opposition to it from one or more important segments of the population, which, by Marx’s own theory, can’t be the now tiny and largely rentier capitalist class. If not the capitalists, who? Marx seems oblivious to the question. (Here Marx appears to come closest to validating to a degree Tabor’s contention—*if* Marx truly thought that the proletarian state *would* have to repress more than a relative handful of capitalists, then he would be guilty of using state power in a high-handed manner—but this is still a far cry from a tiny minority party wresting state power, which I still believe he would never have countenanced.)

This entire line of discussion I contend reveals the futility of trying to tease any real sense out of this entire notion of Marx’s. It is so shallow, so intellectually unsatisfactory, that it is mind boggling that he would even propound it—much less that so many intelligent people would find it persuasive—unless, at least in his case, he arrived at it through an alternate pathway of thought, which, as we shall examine shortly, is precisely the case, that pathway being thinly (but evidently effectively) disguised Hegelianism.

But this is devastating to Marxism’s very lifeblood, since the prediction of the inevitability of socialism is the single core prediction that justifies being an “active” Marxist. The “unity of theory and practice” amounts to the mandate to help bring about the “socialist” revolution based on the theory that it is both the required and the “inevitable” next step in the evolution of human society, and the way to finally free the working class, the “proletariat,” from the oppression and exploitation at the hands of the capitalists. It is the only possible justification for “substitutionism,” having a “vanguard party” like the Bolsheviks acting for where history is destined to go anyway. If capitalism doesn’t end up looking like Marx predicted it would, if even under capitalism the state doesn’t end up owning and running most if not all of the means of production, much worse, if capitalism doesn’t create a growing and increasingly

impoverished proletariat which grows to become the vast preponderance of the work force, but instead the “proletariat” as Marx envisioned it actually shrinks, as the middle class grows and as the working class actually steadily improves its lot—as we know of course is actually what has happened—then where does that leave Marxism and its dedication to bringing about a socialist revolution? It leaves it without justification, revealing Communist takeovers of states, starting with the Russian Revolution, as nothing but power grabs of opportunistic operatives who then impose their version of “socialism” on a hostile population—which in turn requires totalitarian use of the state to overcome the mass opposition to this imposition.

Therefore, I contend that an examination of Marx’s predictions is where the discussion of Marx’s own views on the subject should end. Everything that follows in the further evolution of Marxism must be chalked up to the response of Marxists to the *failure* of Marx’s predictions to pan out.

Marx’s Failed Predictions

However, to take up these predictions one by one, I have restated the substance of Tabor’s first three points above in five points, to include a few additional details he omitted, as follows:

- 1) The continual growth of the proletariat, the working class, presumed to be almost entirely unskilled or minimally skilled labor
- 2) A “survival of the fittest” process within the capitalist class, where fewer and fewer capitalists would own more and more of the means of production
- 3) The collapse of what he called the “petit bourgeoisie,” the shopkeepers and tradespeople, into the proletariat
- 4) The takeover of more and more of the capitalists’ capital by the state and the reduction of most of the former capitalist class into rentiers (receiving rent or dividends)
- 5) The transformation of more complex class relations into a simplified system where a tiny number of capitalists would confront a huge mass of immiserated proletarians

At that point, Marx assumed, by sheer weight of numbers if nothing else, the proletariat would find the means to overthrow the capitalists and take control over their capital, the means of production of society.

As I mentioned above, I contend that these five predictions for where society was going are the absolute heart of what Marx stood for, in theory and practice. I believe it is safe to judge Marx’s contribution to political thought and practice by the degree to which his view of where society was going has proved to be accurate. I believe this is a fair litmus test, because everything that Marx worked for his entire life, and everything that Marxists ever since have stood for, was aimed at bringing about the proletarian revolution that Marx forecast *based on these five predictions*. Should these not come about, all inevitability of a proletarian, or socialist, revolution, evaporates like dew on a summer’s morning. And if such a revolution is *not* inevitable, nothing remains for a true Marxist to do but pack up his marbles and go home—that is, swallow hard and accept that after all is said and done, Marx may have had a fine theory, but that theory has failed its supreme test of practice, and needs to be discarded, just as science would discard a theory that had flopped so spectacularly. But since Marxism is a philosophy, not a science, of course, very few Marxists have ever walked away just because the proletariat failed to swell to encompass the large majority of the entire population and position itself to take power.

In reality, as is obvious, all five have proven to be very far off the mark:

- 1) The “working class” understood as industrial and perhaps transportation workers, grew greatly, but never in its heyday approached even 50% of the workforce, and is now a relatively small percentage of the workforce in any country. And, more and more of the workforce is medium- to high-skilled, especially in the most developed countries, contrary to Marx’s prediction.
- 2) While corporate consolidation is certainly an ever-present feature of the capitalist landscape, nothing approaching Marx’s vision of fewer and fewer capitalists controlling more and more of the means of production has taken place (consider the trustification process of the 1890s in the U.S., which seemed to be fulfilling Marx’s prediction, only to reach a certain high point of consolidation of each industry, only to recede from that never again to be that concentrated). Moreover, “capitalists” no longer own the means of production in most instances—shareholders own them, the richest capitalist CEO’s merely run them (and often own large numbers of shares, to be sure).
- 3) The “petit bourgeoisie” is overwhelmingly the predominant class in society, comprised of everything from government bureaucrats to corporate bureaucrats and managers, to teachers, doctors, and nurses, to retail workers, and on and on. Some of these are usefully (and typically) called “middle class”, while others, at the low end of the wage scale, could be called “working class,” and often “working poor.”
- 4) Fascism came the closest (outside of Communism) to a state takeover of capitalist enterprises, and post-War Britain started down that path, but stopped, and later reversed it, but otherwise, there has never been a general tendency for capitalist governments to take over the industrial sector from the capitalists (this one from Marx has always baffled me, as I don’t think there was any tendency even in his own lifetime for this to happen, and why would he think it would?). And while many wealthy people do earn fortunes from rentier modes, the “capitalist class” of CEOs and other corporate top executives are the active captains of their companies, not the government.
- 5) And clearly, modern industrial societies have a huge diversity of occupations that defy simple characterization along class lines, and certainly there has been no general immiseration of the vast majority of workers over against a tiny class of rich capitalists or the creation of a mass of “proletarians” that has any discernible existence as a “class.”

In short, Marx’s core predictions were a monumental and total failure. Not one forecast has been even remotely vindicated. Many Marxists have attempted to claim that Marx was right on some, such as by citing corporate mergers to say he was right about concentration of capital, or to find explanations for why they haven’t come to pass, such as Lenin’s theory as laid out in *Imperialism, the Final State of Capitalism* to explain how imperialism had given capitalism a lease on life postponing its ultimate demise by letting it loot from its colonies. I do not believe that any of these are at all convincing. Wayne Price, in the cited review of Tabor’s book, has convinced himself that Marx’s forecast of the concentration of capital *has* been validated, as well as of the progressive takeover of this concentrated capital by the state. His first contention ignores what Marx actually predicted, and the ebbs and flows of corporate mergers in different periods confound any assertion that concentration has been steadily increasing over any extended period, and his second contention is flabbergasting and leaves me speechless, as I cannot imagine what he is referring to, as no such tendency is in evidence anywhere in the world—such would appear to be an example of how adherence to ideology can induce one to see things that aren’t there, in the desperate need to validate a flawed world view.

Proletarian Consciousness

This brings us to Tabor's fourth point, which was that "The proletariat is politically united and class conscious, that is, it desires a revolution and agrees on its tasks, including construction of the dictatorship of the proletariat." While the other (three, or five) factors are "objective" statements of what was, in Marx's estimation, certain to happen in and to capitalist society, this point switches to the issue of the mentality of the proletariat, inherently a "subjective" issue. Tabor makes the same distinction, noting that "a crucial underlying assumption of Marx and Engels' strategy is that the logic of capitalist development is not merely the creation of the *structural* prerequisites of capitalism...but also of an *ideational* prerequisite: ideological uniformity among the working class." (p. 63)

What Marxists are to do if this ideational requirement is absent is everything in terms of discussing what has happened to Marxism in the last 120 years or so. This is so because the question to be asked is, what if the proletariat, or a major portion of the proletariat, doesn't have this consciousness, this "class consciousness" and a recognition that it needs to take power in a revolution? Tabor poses a variant of this as a "thought experiment": what if the first three of his conditions exist, but the working class is divided into multiple parties (anarchists, reformist socialists, liberals) and many are just apolitical, such that only a minority favor taking over the state. Tabor asks what this minority would be impelled to do with the power of the state, and assumes it would have to suppress the anarchist, reformist, and other workers (and their parties), as well as the apolitical workers if they became aroused in the situation. (Tabor skips a step in his scenario, which is how, under such circumstances, that minority could take power at all.) Again, the logic leads to a dictatorship in fact *over* the working class (and the rest of society). That, clearly is one scenario, and corresponds, of course, in spades, to the case of Lenin's Bolsheviks.

Marx's answer would be that *if* the first three obtain, the fourth would be automatic, because he believed, as he stated in his *Preface to a Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*, as quoted by Tabor, "It is not the consciousness of men that determines their existence, but, on the contrary, their social existence determines their consciousness." (p. 225) In a nutshell, he is saying that *if* a the proletariat grows to encompass the vast majority of the population, and *if* its conditions of life are miserable due to exploitation at the hands of the capitalists, then those conditions of life "automatically" ensure that they *will*, without any prompting, come to the conclusion that they need to take over the state and establish socialism.

Taking Marx at his word, then, leads to the conclusion that no one really needs to do much, if anything, to organize the proletariat, because its consciousness will automatically be what it needs to be to make the socialist revolution and establish the dictatorship of the proletariat, when the evolution of capitalism has reached its final stage characterized by almost everyone being a proletarian. Of course, we know that Marx didn't practice such a philosophy, but instead formed the Workingmen's Association and sought to popularize his theories within the working class. However, Marx's theory was an essential part of his overall world-view, since he made the claim that in every era, under every mode of production, the consciousness of the masses (and indeed of everyone in society) was determined by their social relations. He counterposed this view to the prevalent one then (and still today) that there are many parts of the human psychology that are "human nature," that everyone shares. But having been forced to enunciate such a determinist, passive formulation for theoretical consistency (because any other view would, among other things, undermine the inevitability of the socialist revolution), Marx was not willing to sit back, but wanted to be part of the action, helping to spread "revolutionary consciousness" within the working class.

This view, which is central and essential to the entire Marxist edifice, is also self-contradictory, since if it were true, one wouldn't even need Marx or Engels, and certainly not legions of Marxists, to educate and agitate among the working class. This is a totally determinist view, which denies free will, and which Marx (nor any other Marxists) clearly didn't believe on the practical level, yet it is an essential part of the theoretical credo, without which the "working class," the "proletariat" are revealed as incapable of discerning their own best interest, and must be taught what that is by non-workers, by middle-class intellectuals, who know what is best for them. This is hardly the self-image that Marxists like to admit, even though it is undeniable.

The overarching importance of noting the distinctness of this fourth "end state" of capitalism for Marx, is that the failure of this fourth outcome to materialize has provided the context for almost everything that Marxism has become in the years since Marx's death. Within the German Social Democracy before World War I, where the working class did win many reforms, the fact that so many workers were, to use a more modern term, "co-opted" into belief that continued reform was all they needed created a crisis for many Marxists, who couldn't understand why the workers weren't more revolutionary. By the 1920s, the great Italian Marxist Antonio Gramsci, one of the few truly original and fresh Marxist thinkers of the first half of that century, was enunciating a doctrine of "cultural hegemony," which recognized that "bourgeois society" had successfully miseducated many workers to not see their proper class interest, and that the task of revolutionaries was to educate them, and he promoted the creating of revolutionary education of workers to cultivate true working class Marxist intellectuals.

The point here is that Marx's entire edifice rested on a determinist premise, that what would happen to capitalism, and how the working class would react, were both inevitable. It was only when it became clear that neither were, that would-be Marxists had to scramble to come up with variations from what Marx said in order to continue as "Marxists."

And What About the Proletarian State?

Marx not only failed to discuss the eventuality that the proletariat wouldn't be automatically revolutionary, he failed to examine in any way how the proletarian state might actually operate even if it *did* want a revolution, or what it would do once it controlled the state. For example, even if most proletarians agreed on the need for a revolution, what if different factions emerged with different ideas on *how* to wage revolution, or differed on any number of other questions, both strategic or tactical, including, perhaps, *how* to deal with the capitalists, say.

That is, to perform a thought experiment, let's assume that there somehow *was* the ideological unity of the proletariat that Marx forecast, and that that unity permitted and legitimized a proletarian revolution whereby democratically chosen representatives of the proletariat effected a takeover of the machinery of the capitalist state at a particular point in time with widespread popular support. But, then what? Who will run the economy? How will the continuing support of the proletariat be expressed? What are the tasks of the government that controls the state with respect to the economy? How do they decide what needs to be produced? How do they set wages? How do they reinvest in the economy? How do they do all the myriad things that the state now does apart from the economy, including social services, infrastructure, police and courts, education, and on and on. All of the things that are vital political questions in every state, and which are all out in the open in democratic states, are simply not in Marx's field of vision. And even though he may have (and Engels definitely did) countenanced the possibility of a democratic proletarian revolution, it cannot be inferred from this that

the ensuing “dictatorship of the proletariat” would merely continue bourgeois representative democracy. If he would, how could he maintain that the “bourgeois state” had been demolished, and replaced with a “proletarian state.” But he, remarkably, is totally mute on what happens to the apparatus of the state even in the economic realm, which is administering the economy as one huge universal monopoly, after proletarian takeover. How can such a state wither? Does Marx talk about gradual breaking up of the monopolies and huge conglomerates? No, and it would violate the core reason for socialism, the supposed huge benefits from a planned economy. In fact, how a planned economy can exist without a state is a glaring and vital question that Marx managed not to address.

Among other lacunae, Marx is silent on the issue of how the proletariat will have any influence on the economic planning he hails as the most efficient and highest form of economy. Will the working class vote on the top managers of this huge government conglomerate? Who knows, since Marx failed to address the issue? This failure constitutes yet another nail in the coffin of Marx’s views on this subject.

Tabor clearly shares my view expressed above, noting that Marx would have all management “placed in the hands of a national authority that supposedly represents the national interests of the working class. But the point is, there *are* no discernible national interests of the working class (unless one believes they can be deduced from a theory or from a supposed ‘science’ of economic planning).” (p. 70) One is left to infer that Marx believed that managing a huge, nationalized economy that had centralized all the means of production in the state, was a basically *mechanical*, self-evident task that nobody, certainly no proletarian, would disagree on. How utterly beyond naïve this is is stunning.

None of these rather obvious questions, that cry out for answers, is ever addressed by Marx (or Engels). Clearly, for them, the “proletariat” is nothing more than an abstraction, without texture, without content, with no *political* substance or interests. *How* does Marx expect them to rule? *How* will its “dictatorship” be effected and governed. That none of these questions is even of interest to Marx betrays his idealist methodology, since only in the realm of pure thought can such abstractions exist. Once one asks real-world questions, the absurdity of such mental constructs readily becomes apparent.

Before discussing Tabor’s conclusion to this chapter, I want to interpolate a section based on Tabor’s *A Look At Leninism*, a collection of articles he wrote in 1987 for the newspaper of the Revolutionary Socialist League (RSL), because it affords a more fine grained analysis of exactly what was “objective” and what “subjective” in the circumstances that led Lenin to set up a brutal, mass-murdering totalitarian state, arguably the grand-daddy of all totalitarian states ever since, all in the supposed cause of “Marxism” and the “dictatorship of the proletariat.” Also, Tabor’s discussion of how Lenin understood the Bolshevik Revolution, and also how he understood the natures of capitalism and socialism, are expanded on in ways that very usefully complement the above discussion of Tabor’s treatment of these topics in *Tyranny*, and actually flesh out what Marx himself most likely understood by “socialism.” Unfortunately, *Leninism* is not generally available, which is a shame, as it bears reading side-by-side with *Tyranny*, and if Tabor is ever able to reprint *Tyranny*, and has such an option, I would encourage including *Leninism* as an appendix.

Lenin, the “Bourgeois Revolution” and “Socialism”

To reiterate, I believe it is undeniable that the Bolshevik Revolution is the only “pristine” instance of a successful revolution that put a self-styled Marxist Party in power in a country by dint of its own efforts. Once ensconced in power, that position allowed it to organize parties in other countries in its own image, and there is not one other instance of a Marxist party that wasn’t helped in many ways by

the Soviet Union, including just by its very existence. Therefore, the issue that Tabor states is the “main thesis” of his critique, the charged responsibility of Marxism (that is, Marx’s “Marxism”) for the atrocities of Communist regimes around the world, boils down to whether Lenin, Leninism and what the Bolsheviks did after their successful putsch in Petrograd in November of 1917, can be blamed on Marx, or were, as I contend, the product of many subjective factors that didn’t have to be the way they were (which is not to say that some “objective” factors weren’t also present, merely that they weren’t determinative of the course taken), and that did not stem from Marx’s theories, except unless seen as “extensions” of them after Marx’s own predictions had failed, and which extensions must remain the responsibility of their author(s) alone, starting with Lenin.

Tabor’s coverage of Lenin, Leninism, his rationale for taking power, and some specifics of what he did in the early days of power in *Leninism* provide relevant information in the pursuit of answers to this question that is not covered in *Tyranny*, and that I have therefore chosen to review in some detail here. Page references in this section only refer to the page numbers in *Leninism*.

Bolshevik Subjectivism

It happens that Tabor has a chapter in *Leninism* that in my reading directly supports the case for what I call “Bolshevik subjectivism,” that is, the argument that the Bolshevik turn toward totalitarian rule as soon as they secured state power was as much a product of subjective aspects of Lenin’s character and of the Bolshevik Party that he so heavily shaped than of anything that can be pinned on Marx or Marxism. In a fascinating chapter entitled “The ‘Ethos’ of Bolshevism,” Tabor reviews these *subjective* features of the Bolshevik Party under Lenin, and under the conditions in Russia, especially after the failed Revolution of 1905. The Bolsheviks had to go underground again, only maintaining a very tenuous network of hardcore cadre. Under these conditions, the Party cultivated a cult of “hardness” that Tabor describes in some detail. By 1917, Tabor argues, the Bolsheviks, led by Lenin in this, already were predisposed to see brutality and ruthlessness as virtues, and therefore were already mentally predisposed to take repressive steps in which, say, summary execution would not only not be frowned upon, but would actually be exalted, and other means of repression would likewise be embraced. In fact, a few minutes searching on Google just brought up dozens of utterly chilling statements made by Lenin, mainly during the Civil War, about the need to execute hundreds, even thousands of people, including whole classes of people, like Orthodox priests, or kulak peasants, and to do so publicly, precisely as an example to everyone else. Tabor cites Lenin’s injunction to execute people who tried to bribe officials (an almost universal practice at the time) as an example of Lenin’s brutality, but this is just one of innumerable examples of Lenin’s proudly stated belief in the efficacy and necessity of brutality, terror and execution. And this general attitude of Lenin’s predated the Revolution, though it only found final expression when he had the power to carry out such dictates.

Surely, this subjective predisposition to see violence, brutality, and execution as necessary and justified, had to have been a big factor in Lenin’s and the Bolshevik willingness to rule by totalitarian means once in power. I do not see how this can be laid at Marxism’s (or Marx’s) doorstep. Another party somehow finding itself in power the way the Bolsheviks did but lacking such subjective viewpoints, might have cringed before the seeming necessity of taking such brutal measures, even at the expense of being defeated.

Yet another subjective factor making the Bolshevik Revolution possible at all was simply the personality and abilities of Lenin alone to impose his will on his party, and to lead them where they without him surely would never have dared to go—to overthrow the Kerensky government by a putsch

in Petrograd, not to mention to take all the steps that maintaining that power entailed. Again, this subjective factor, not some “logic of Marxism,” accounts for the virtual accident of Bolshevik (and hence of all subsequent “Marxist” states’) state power and totalitarian form of rule.

Necessity, or Choice

Tabor discusses some of the early actions of the Bolsheviks after taking power which reveal another important fact that undercuts the view that the Bolsheviks’ decision to become ever more dictatorial can simply be laid at the door of “necessity.” The reality is that a major part of the crisis that the Bolsheviks faced from early on after taking power was *not* true “necessity,” but was *self-inflicted*. That is, their own actions made their situation much worse, and it was only that much worse situation which then “required” their brutal response. Possibly the most critical one was the move, in June of 1918, to start requisitioning grain from the so-called “kulak” (rich) peasants, and prohibiting private trade by the peasants. In fact, there were too few rich peasants to provide much grain, and most peasants weren’t doing much more than just getting by, so this campaign ended up being directed at most of the peasants, and alienated them—who of course constituted by far the largest portion of the population. It was motivated, true, by the need to feed the cities and the army, but had the Bolsheviks embraced the peasantry, ratified their taking over the land from the landlords, and done what they could to compensate the peasants for the grain that was needed, rather than brutally taking it, they could likely have secured the support of most of that class for the revolution. As it happened, the only thing that rescued the Bolsheviks from their own stupidity was that the Whites were even more stupid, returning the land to the landowners in places that they conquered, forcing the peasants into a terrible “lesser of two great evils” choice to support the Bolsheviks, however grudgingly.

Had they secured the willing support of the peasantry, the Bolsheviks would likely have won the civil war much more easily and quickly, and with far less brutality. They would, at least at that point, have had a far less pressing felt need to continue to wield arbitrary power, and would have had much stronger support nationwide, and therefore would not have needed a total police state apparatus to stay in power. All of this supports the view that the kind of police state that Lenin set up, which Stalin merely perfected and extended, was not an inevitable development because the Bolsheviks were Marxists, but had much to do with the subjective nature of the party, and the blunders it made based on its pre-existing predilection for violence, brutality, and its worship of the quality of “hardness.”

Lenin, “State Capitalism,” and the “Bourgeois Revolution”

I now turn to a brilliant treatment of an important topic in both the non-Communist Marxist (Trotskyist, etc.) and anarchist circles, the issue of how to characterize the nature of the Soviet Union that has raged for two-thirds of a century. Many, including Tabor, call the Soviet Union “state capitalist.” In *Leninism*, Tabor provides a fascinating explanation of *why*, once having taken power, the Bolsheviks felt impelled to institute what Lenin himself might even have agreed was “state capitalism.” (It is a pity that this explanation was not also included in *Tyranny*.) This explanation also justifies, I believe more strongly than Tabor’s arguments in *Tyranny*, his contention that a Marxist party that does come to power, at least in a country just entering its “bourgeois” (read rapid industrialization) phase, *would* be impelled to require a totalitarian regime, provided it remained true to Marx’s core views. Ironically, it *isn’t* in order to promote socialism.

I always knew that the stated justification by the Bolsheviks for taking power was to oversee the *bourgeois* revolution, not to establish socialism (at least, not for a while), but I never had any

understanding of what Tabor presents here, and how that view shaped so much of the Bolsheviks' thinking and actions. In *Leninism* Tabor presents Lenin's thinking on economics, specifically, the economics of overseeing a bourgeois revolution in an industrially relatively backward country, and in the process shows that Lenin's thinking went considerably beyond Marx's, and ironically actually completes Marx, essentially carrying through to its conclusion some points that Marx left fuzzy or incomplete.

Lenin correctly perceived that the Russian imperial autocracy, allied to the landowning (boyar) class, was stultifying Russia's industrial development, and that the capitalist class, such as it was, was not only weak, but was largely a creature of the state. But Marxist theory called for capitalism not only to be the hegemonic component of society, but for it to reach its omega point of near total concentration of economic activity, at which point it would be ripe for proletarian revolution. Given the weakness of the capitalist class in Russia, it can be assumed that Lenin could realistically foresee decades, at the least, of continued anemic industrial development and the continued dead hand of tsarism and boyarism—that is, that the capitalist class would fail to establish a “bourgeois” society and government, at least for a very long time, in effect postponing the ability of genuine capitalism to become the predominant “mode of production” in Russia into the indefinite future. One can sympathize with the dilemma this put him in. Ironically, no such dilemma confronted some of the other parties, such as the Social Revolutionary Party, which represented the peasants, or the democratic parties, because their task was much simpler—overthrow tsarism, and replace it with a democratic government. They didn't need to also then wait, perhaps decades, for capitalism to gradually become dominant, before they could act, as Marxist theory specified that a Marxist party would need to wait for the moment of capitalist development that theory posited as “their time.”

Lenin's solution to this dilemma was to posit that the Bolsheviks needed to take state power at the first available moment, in order to hasten the “bourgeois” transformation of Russia—call it “bourgeoisification.” He reasoned, as Tabor presents, that because the capitalist class was so weak, that if Marxists controlled the government, they could carry out bourgeoisification much more rapidly than the capitalists themselves could. But what did Lenin understand by the “bourgeois” revolution that he wanted Marxists to lead?

Here is where *Leninism* provides important material that would have enhanced the presentation of this discussion in *Tyranny*. While the following point was perhaps implicit, if not explicit in some location I am unaware of, in Marx, Lenin expanded on it in enough detail to flesh out the “Marxist” perspective on the centralization of capital and how that process paved the way for the proletarian revolution and the “socialist” phase (before the subsequent “withering away of the state.”) The perhaps unexpected reality is that, despite their implacable opposition to the capitalist class and its system of “exploitation” that made the lives of members of the proletariat miserable, Lenin, following Marx, thought the period of capitalist industrialization to be an almost unalloyed positive development, in several respects.

First, as Tabor states it, the Bolsheviks believed in the “inherent progressivism of bourgeois technology....The Bolsheviks were extremely fond of bourgeois technology, particularly the techniques of capitalist industry.” This extended beyond industrial (physical) processes as such, to “the overall methods and even structure of capitalist industry. This included the centralization, the hierarchical structure of management, piecework and other faces of (bourgeois) ‘scientific management’ (e.g., Taylorism).” (p. 44) This is kind of astounding, given that the methods of Taylor were the first time-and-motion studies designed to ramp up per hour output of workers by large amounts—all in the name of “greater efficiency”—speed-up writ large.

Beyond even this, however, is Lenin's (and likely Marx's, as we have already seen above) positive view of the centralizing tendency of capitalism. Tabor cites how Lenin held up the German postal system

as an exemplar of how imperialism was, in Lenin's words, "gradually transforming all trusts into organizations of a similar type...", that type being, as he specified in *The State and Revolution*, "a business organized on the lines of a state-capitalist monopoly." (p. 59) Lenin totally welcomed the transformation of the bourgeois economy into monopolies run by the state. And he held up the German economy as the exemplar among all capitalist economies: "our task is to study the state capitalism of the Germans, to spare *no effort*, in copying it and not shrink from adopting *dictatorial* methods to hasten the copying of it." (p. 51)

Here, in a nutshell, is the core of Lenin's thinking—concentration, centralization, monopolization, and state takeover of the resulting monopolies, is to be welcomed from capitalist society, which process the proletarian revolution should emulate, at least in Russia—this was written just after taking power, in early 1918. As Tabor points out, how much more evidence does one need that Lenin understood what the Bolsheviks created as "state capitalism."

Centralization, Nationalization and Socialism

Lenin helpfully goes still farther, into territory I don't believe Marx ever did, describing the point of takeover by a supposedly proletarian government, of this already monopolized economy: "the organization of accounting, the control of large enterprises, the transformation of the state economic mechanism into a single huge machine, into an economic organism that will work in such a way as to enable hundreds of millions of people to be guided by a single plan..." (p. 41) In fact, for the Bolsheviks (and for Marxists generally), economic planning, specifically, centralized economic planning, was considered the primary advantage of a centralized economy. With Marx, they believed that the primary *economic* fault of capitalism, alongside the *social* fault of exploiting the workers, was its inefficiency caused by the chaos of the free market. Marx himself in his economic writings devoted untold pages to detailing how commodity production swings back and forth between overproduction and underproduction, with no means to avoid the waste that that entailed. Planning, which by definition had to begin at the top, was the Marxist answer to capitalist inefficiency in this regard. And that is why Marx and Lenin were happy to see capitalism become more and more consolidated into a few monopolies, and to have the state even take them over at this stage. It was all part of progress, of making production ever more productive and centralized, which they equated with being more efficient.

Finally, as Tabor presents, Lenin's understanding of the above informs his view of socialism, which turns out to be simply the takeover of the now-monopolized and state-owned totally centralized economy by the proletariat. Continuing from *The State and Revolution* quoted above on p. 59, Lenin says: "the mechanism of social management [the trustification of German capitalism] is here already to hand. Once we have overthrown the capitalists...we shall have a splendidly-equipped mechanism, freed from the 'parasite,' a mechanism which can very well be set going by the united workers themselves, who will hire technicians, foremen and accountants, and pay then *all*, as indeed *all* "state" officials in general, workmen's wages." (p. 60) This seems to imply that the major "reform" that he would carry out to the inherited state-owned, centralized economy, would be a levelling of wages, down to the level of "workmen." He qualifies this task as "rid[ding] the working people of exploitation." Tabor does not pick up this thread, which it seems to me says that Lenin would actually *lower* the total wage bill of the economy by *lowering* the salaries of everyone earning more than the basic workers ("workmen's wages"). He says nothing about raising that wage for the workers. For this to equal an end of exploitation implies that for Lenin, exploitation is *not* an objective taking away of surplus value that should remain with the worker, but merely a *relative* deprivation when others earn more than the

worker. By this reasoning, if one evens out everyone's pay scale, presto, exploitation is history, even if the level of that pay scale is low.

Lenin is equally silent on how, in Russia, which had a very backward industrial base, which was very far from being even at the level of German capitalism (which, in Lenin's fantasy estimation, was on the road to becoming state capitalist), his "proletarian" government would bring it to this state. The quote above from p. 41 about transforming the "state economic mechanism into a single huge machine" was putting the cart light years ahead of the horse in the Russian context. The task, clearly, for Lenin, was to fulfill the task of the *bourgeois* revolution, which was to *create* the industrial base and bring it to a high level. He, Marx, and Marxists in general clearly saw such a mature development of capitalism as key for socialism because only with such a degree of industrialization could sufficient goods be produced for everyone to live decent lives free from want, at least of basics. Any "proletarian" takeover before that point, and one would have the dilemma that Lenin clearly faced, though he didn't address it in this quote, which was, how to rapidly develop industry, which requires keeping wages as low as possible to provide more surplus to reinvest in more production. That is, *as* the state capitalist, even a "proletarian" government would need to pay wages at the same level as capitalists would in order to accumulate enough surplus to rapidly expand industry. I don't know if Lenin ever addressed this problem, but it flows from the very meaning of running a state capitalist regime in an industrially underdeveloped country.

And of course, this highlights that Stalin was merely carrying out the implications of this dilemma in his forced industrialization campaign that kicked off in 1929 and which numbered among its victims millions of peasant killed in the forced collectivization that followed, a collectivization intended to wring the peasantry dry to help feed the new army of industrial workers (Tabor said that recent estimates place the number of those who died during this period, most from starvation, at 20 million, far higher than I ever learned in college years ago).

Lenin's development of what the "proletarian" revolution that he and the Bolsheviks led meant is elucidating in its revelation that he saw the "armed proletariat," as he called it, as carrying out the *tasks* that the absent (now expropriated) bourgeois, capitalist class was historically supposed to carry out. He doesn't address directly the obvious question: if the armed proletariat is running a capitalist industrialization, wouldn't they need to run the economy exactly as the capitalists would have? But his answer would appear to have to be "yes." Tabor quotes Lenin on the implications of taking over the economy: "Until the higher phase of communism arrives, the socialists demand the *strictest* control by society *and by the state* over the measure of labor and the measure of consumption..."—meaning, presumably, wages, hours and working conditions. And, the "vital and burning question of *present day* politics" is "the expropriation of the capitalists, the conversion of *all* citizens into workers and employees of *one* huge syndicate—the whole state..." And, "The whole of society will have become a single office and a single factory..."

This carries an astounding implication: the "Marxist" rulers' mandate is to govern in lieu of the *capitalist* class, exactly as that class would have done, only jumping ahead to Marx's omega point of capitalism where all capital has merged into one giant, centralized enterprise run by the state. The Marxist state is now the sole employer, and it will treat the employees exactly the same (badly) as the capitalists would have, if anything more brutally. Tabor cites how they worshipped "efficiency," which reached its apotheosis in the "Stakhanovite" campaign, in effect a super-Tayloresque effort to get workers to speed themselves up to exhaustion.

Once the rationale, that the point of state power is to complete the bourgeois phase of industrialization, is recognized, so much else that appears hard to explain for a "Marxist" party falls into

place. Of course any truly autonomous locus of worker self-governance such as a soviet (which means council) or a trade union must be crushed, just the way the capitalist class would crush (or try to crush) them, in order to keep down wages and maintain poor working conditions. Only because they are the state, they are much *more* able to do so, where the workers lack the intervention of a truly bourgeois state that sometimes can make reforms that help the working class. And *here* we find the strongest rationale, I believe, for the felt necessity to establish a totalitarian regime—only such a regime can force the peasants to send a huge portion of their grain to the cities, and later to become part of collective farms, and force the workers to stay in line and not strike or protest brutal working conditions, low wages, in short, impose all the ills of unbridled capitalism. This again shows how apt is calling such an economy “state capitalist,” because even though there are no capitalists and the state owns the means of production, it runs them the way a capitalist would, with the workers being merely powerless employees, wage slaves just as under capitalism, with no say over their workplace, or even their government.

But saying this creates an important ambiguity over what the “socialist” revolution is. That is, as Lenin laid it out, “socialism” is when the proletariat takes over the state capitalist monopolized economy from the capitalist state, and replaces that state with its own to exercise a dictatorship over the previous tenants of the state. But if the government is *already* composed of the proletariat (or its vanguard party), when does this “socialist-in-principle” state which is managing a capitalist economy, become “socialist” in fact? Logically (but not realistically), it would be when, in its management of the economy, it brought industrialization to the same level that it would have been in had a truly capitalist state and bourgeois class been running it. But how would such a point ever be determined? And what difference would it make? Again logically, it would seem to imply that at some level of industrial development, extreme capitalist exploitation, taking most of the surplus value and investing it, would more or less suddenly be recognized as no longer necessary, and workers’ wages could now be raised substantially, and the “capitalist” exploitation would no longer be considered to be taking place. But there would be no actual *event*, nothing in the least dramatic, to mark this changeover from a proletarian state capitalist system to a proletarian socialist system. I can’t believe that such a nominal, statistics-driven determination of when “capitalism” officially expired, and “socialism” commenced has ever been contemplated by anyone. But I believe its existence is required by Lenin’s contention that the proletariat must first make the bourgeois revolution, in order to later usher in “socialism.” I have presented what amounts to a *reductio ad absurdum*, but I think it is justified, and makes clear that Lenin’s notion that the proletariat could carry out the bourgeois revolution is the absurdity that it clearly is.

Such is the odd state that Lenin’s notion of the proletarian revolution having the historic task of completing the bourgeois transformation of the economy leads to. Tabor comes to an analogous conclusion in his discussion (p. 64 and other places) of what the socialist revolution meant to Lenin, namely, that it is largely a “change in form.” Tabor states that the *content* of social relations, “the content of the old society—bourgeois technology, bourgeois managerial techniques, hierarchical structures, factory discipline and, I would suggest, bourgeois social relations—remains.” Tabor continues: “Lenin actually believed that the overall structure and methods of capitalist industry could be taken over, in *toto*, by a proletarian state.”

Socialism as Productivity Plus Administration

So in this sense, there is little distinction between the Bolsheviks taking power in the name of making the bourgeois revolution, and of making the socialist one. The meaning, for Lenin, of the

“bourgeois revolution,” is nothing more than the rapid and large-scale development of an industrial economy—the social relations of that economy seem not to interest him—such that when the capitalists have succeeded in creating the material basis for abundance, it is time for the proletariat to dump them and take that abundance for themselves by literally just plugging themselves in at the head of the previous state capitalist structure, without changing any of the bourgeois social relations.

And lest there be any confusion on this point, in *The State and Capitalism*, Lenin spells out what “socialist” industry looks like: “it must be said that large-scale machine industry—which is precisely the material source, the productive source, the foundation of socialism—calls for absolute and strict *unity of will*, which directs the joint labors of hundreds, thousands and tens of thousands of people. The technical, economic and historic necessity of this is obvious, and all those who have thought about socialism have always regarded it as one of the conditions of socialism. But how can strict unity of will be ensured? By thousands subordinating their will to the will of one.” He goes on say that if everyone were class conscious, the “will of one” would be “mild” like that of the conductor of an orchestra, but if such consciousness is lacking, “*unquestioning subordination* to a single will is absolutely necessary for success of processes organized on the pattern of large-scale machine industry.” (p. 42) That is, “class consciousness” means that one, on one’s own, comes to the exact same viewpoint as the “one” who is in charge—any difference with that “one will” is by definition an indication of insufficient “class consciousness.” Leave aside any other factor, and this view of Lenin’s alone is justification for, and explanation of, his totalitarian government.

Later on in *The State and Revolution*, Lenin makes a further reference to how he pictures socialism as an economic system. He clearly sees it as mainly a matter of “administration” of the economy, as if there was somehow an obvious path that administrators are simply there to implement. “Accounting and control—that is *mainly* what is needed for the ‘smooth working,’ for the proper functioning, of the *first phase* of communist society,” Lenin writes. Over time, as the majority of people “exercise control” over the capitalists, “this control will really become universal, general and popular,” after which point, having “learned to administer the state *themselves*...from this moment the need for government of any kind begins to disappear altogether.” (p. 62) As Tabor points out, Lenin’s discussion completely leaves out any mention of the *political* dimension of the situation. It’s as if Lenin defines socialism as nothing but economic management, and the state as having no function other than to protect capitalists’ ability to exploit people, under capitalism, and no function other than to exercise control over the former capitalists, under socialism. (As we’ve seen, this certainly accords with what Marx also believed.) Of course, the role of any modern state is so vastly larger, with thousands of issues that need to be debated, and over which there will differences of view even among people in the same party, that Lenin’s entire discussion becomes all but meaningless. His failure to discuss the state as a *political* institution is really rather stunning.

The Non-Necessity of Bolshevik Totalitarianism

I believe that Tabor’s review of these issues in *Leninism*, interpreted as I have done, is sufficient to establish that while the Bolsheviks did face dire “objective” challenges, their resort, pretty much out of the box, to authoritarian, totalitarian police state responses cannot be written off as the only available response to the necessities they faced. Rather, they had choices at every point—they *chose* not to share power with the Left SRs and possibly others, they *chose* to alienate the peasantry by banning private trade and attacking the “kulaks,” and they had many other choices, many of which made their “objective” challenges *more* challenging. The proper question is, had they made better choices

throughout, had they been motivated by a reluctance to use violence except as a last resort rather than as a first resort, had they had more (or indeed any) respect for human life, had they not cultivated ruthlessness, had they not developed a propensity for brutality, and on and on, would they have been able to find other responses that did not lead to the totalitarianism of the first modern police state that Lenin began building pretty much from Day One? I think the question answers itself.

But there is another sense in which it might be said that Lenin *was* impelled by the “logic of Marxism” to create a totalitarian state. This is the logic that flows from Lenin’s notion as presented above that it was necessary, at least in Russia, for the proletariat (or its “vanguard” party) to effect the *bourgeois* revolution on the grounds that the capitalists cannot or will not do it, for the reason that socialism cannot arrive until the tasks of that revolution are accomplished, namely, that the country has been largely industrialized, in the course of which process the means of production have become concentrated into the hands of a tiny number of capitalists or taken over directly by the state. I don’t think this “logic” can be laid at Marx’s feet, because he never envisioned the proletariat making the bourgeois revolution. But once that premise is accepted, it puts the “proletariat” (that is, the vanguard party acting in its name) in charge of doing the job properly assigned to the capitalists, that of the mass industrialization of the country.

And without capitalists, how can such a “proletarian” state proceed if not by imposing nationalization of the means of production on a population that is “not with that program.” I think that only Stalinist, totalitarian methods could have achieved the level of rapid (if wasteful and often incompetent) rate of growth of industry in the 1930s in the Soviet Union. So the argument here would be that even if the Bolsheviks had not implemented their totalitarian state in those early years, they would have had to create it if they were ever to achieve the rapid industrialization that their program called for.

I believe that even this argument ultimately does not hold water. Nothing in Marxism posits that the proletariat either could, or should if it could, take power before a bourgeois revolution, or act to carry out that revolution and then to act “*in loco bourgeoisie*” to do the work of the capitalists of industrializing the country. I don’t think it is trivializing the discussion to say that Lenin’s view boils down to a question of the impatience of Marxists, who in the instance of Lenin’s Bolsheviks preferred to run a brutal, repressive, dictatorial regime in order to instantly achieve a hypothesized moment when the state would take over a unified capital from the capitalists, rather than wait for the capitalists themselves to bring matters to this point.

Several other points should be noted. First, of course, all of this is premised on the preposterous view by Marx that capital would simply continue accumulating in every larger agglomerations owned by fewer and fewer people, and that, for a reason nowhere explained, at some point along the way the state would become the owner, and the former capitalists merely coupon clippers, a rentier class. Since that manifestly hasn’t happened, and it’s hard to believe that anybody today, even a hardened Marxist, would stick to this particular prediction of Marx, the entire rationale for Marxists to nationalize the economy, if done on Lenin’s premise of making the bourgeois revolution (which is the only seeming “objective” justification for running a dictatorship) drops away.

Second, once tsarism and landlordism are swept away, why would there be any continuing fear that capitalism would not develop rapidly on its own? Let’s say that Lenin and the Bolsheviks saw the need of the putsch they carried out against the Kerensky government because they saw that government as letting the country fall into chaos, and as refusing to make a separate peace, which was arguably necessary. *If* the Bolshevik perspective had been simply that a thorough-going and effective bourgeois government needed to obtain, then they would have had no need to try to rule all by themselves. They

would have sought and welcomed support from the Left SRs, the soviets, and any other parties, knowing that their ability to establish the basis for rapid capitalist growth required a strong, relatively popular, stable government. As the bringers of such a revolution, they could assume they'd have a strong seat at the table of government, even as they shared power with other parties.

It seems to me that this perspective would have been *more* in line with Marx's thinking than the course taken. If you're going to establish the bourgeois revolution, then establish it, don't jump to a point farther advanced in the supposed evolution of capitalism than any fully industrialized state had yet even gotten close to. Again, the Bolsheviks were at the very least far too impatient. They clearly reasoned, "hey, we have power, and if we share it, there are no guarantees for the future, who knows if we will eventually become a majority, or be forced out of government altogether. Let's not take that chance, and stay in power now, whatever it takes." I believe that that probably expresses the subjective Bolshevik view of the matter in 1918-1920 (and beyond). If so, then their path to totalitarian rule was driven by their own subjective choices at several points, not by the "logic of Marxism." Purely and simply, their totalitarianism was implemented for the purpose of staying in sole possession of power, for the sake of staying in power, and cannot be justified on any ideological grounds, Marxist or otherwise.

My discussion of Rosa Luxemburg is relevant here to make the same point. For the "logic of Marxism" to be the propeller of totalitarianism, one would have to argue that she would have done just what Lenin did if put in his shoes, and I don't believe that is sustainable. I can't picture her using totalitarian means to repress all other parties, brutally attack the peasants and generally brutally repress and murder thousands of people the way the Bolsheviks did, replete with secret police and the rest of it. I believe her Marxism was of a very different nature than Lenin's, and would have led to a very different outcome had she been in Lenin's shoes.

I now turn to the rest of Marx's theoretical constructs.

Marxism as Totalist Ideology

I have made clear that I believe Tabor's book is a tour de force, which constitutes a very powerful refutation of virtually every theory that Marx propounded. It is also very dense, and I found myself having to read much of it two and even three times to catch gems of analysis I had missed, or forgotten, from previous reads. At the end of the day, he analyzes, and finds wanting, pretty much every proposition that constitutes each theory he treats.

Since Marx did construct a "theory of everything," it should come as no surprise that all components of this grand theory fit together and mutually reinforce each other. This creates a challenge for anyone critiquing the theory, since it must be teased apart into separate domains in order to be analyzed. Tabor systematically goes through what he considers the major theoretical domains, examining each in significant detail, but because each domain is just part of the grand theory, he necessarily finds himself restating certain points already stated previously, which are redundant from the standpoint of the reader, but necessary for the analytical point at hand.

Therefore, to make this review more compact, and minimize redundancy in the review, I have chosen to restructure Tabor's design. Since every theory of Marx, as Tabor demonstrates, is merely an instance of an idealist, Hegeloid methodology, I have chosen to subsume Marx's theories on class struggle and the stages of history, on the inevitability of socialism and communism, on materialism and the "dialectical method," and on the supposed scientific nature of all of his theories, under the rubric of the Hegelianism that Tabor utterly convincingly shows to underlie all of these theories. I reserve only Marx's treatment of topics directly involving economics and the nature of the capitalist mode of

production, for its own section, even though it is equally infected with Hegelianism, because it represents the heart of what Marx is generally known for, and warrants separate billing to dispel the notion that he had anything to say on the topic.

As a result, below, when I discuss the theories I have grouped under the Hegelian heading, I will be drawing material and quotes from Tabor that may come from two or more different sections in the book. I will therefore rarely be referring to the chapter headings that the material comes from, though I will continue to provide page references. The importance in this review is to present each instance of Hegelianism revealing itself through each specific theory as clearly as possible.

We turn now to the first of these sections.

Karl Marx: the Second Coming of Hegel?

One of the most compelling, and devastating, themes that Tabor develops throughout the book, and that he shows permeates virtually every major theoretical construct of Marx, is that each theory ends up revealing itself as having little or nothing to do with reality, whether contemporary or historical, and instead as deriving from Marx's underlying and thoroughly ingrained philosophically Idealist way of analyzing everything, an idealism that is quintessentially Hegelian. I have coined the neologism "Hegeloid" to describe Marx's variant on Hegel, meaning his sharing of Hegel's idealist methodology, but varying it to appear to be "materialist" because it appears to be based on "reality," that is, history, science, and contemporary social and economic reality.

Given Marx's importance in modern history, to understand him as a thorough-going Hegelian is to rewrite history in a big way. It is to assert that the movement that spawned Soviet Russia, Communist China, the other Communist states, and countless parties around the world, not to mention informing the thinking of untold numbers of intellectuals and a stellar array of well-known and popular authors who style(d) themselves "Marxist," was Hegelian, and these millions of people and dozens of parties were all, and ironically, *unknowingly*, acting on the basis of a rather weird (to our modern day way of thinking) idealist philosophy of a flash-in-the-pan philosopher who could be said to have had "intellectual hegemony" in the realm of philosophy for a decade or two almost two hundred years ago, but who today nobody but nobody "follows" or calls their guiding star.

The Hegelian Origin of Marx's "Theory of the State"

The final two sections of Tabor's chapter on the dictatorship of the proletariat demonstrate the Hegelian influence on Marx's view. As Tabor summarizes this point from Hegel, "For Hegel, this process, which is ideal (a process of thought), underlies the development of human society, that is, history. What we see as events of history reflect, and are the material/political embodiments of, this underlying spiritual evolution." (p. 78) He sees all of history as a series of stages, in a progression, culminating, for Hegel, in the Prussian state of his day, which for him best exemplified in the material world an approximation of an ideal state of mind which he said represented absolute freedom. Marx explicitly claimed (or was it Engels) that they had "stood Hegel on his head," by eschewing the discussion of thought per se (the essence of Hegel's system), and replacing it with a focus on the material.

So, as Tabor lays it out, Marx said that "history proceeded through three discrete stages; that in each stage consciousness and material (economic) reality corresponds to each other; that each stage is the logical outgrowth of the previous one; that this development is (dialectally) propelled by contradictions within each stage; and that the final stage (indeed, that there *is* a final stage) represents human freedom, defined as a form of unification (human beings united with their own productive

powers...)." P. 79-80. Marx clearly believed he had taken the (dialectical) process from Hegel, but rescued it from its "idealist" shell and found it actually operative in history. That is, as Tabor explains it, "Hegel limited the complete achievement of the Absolute to the realm of thought. In contrast, Marx and Engels insisted that the Absolute, human liberation, fully take place in (material) reality. They were thus demanding that the goal held up as the outcome of Hegel's philosophy actually occur..." (p. 80)

A crucial common thread runs through both Hegel and Marx, namely, the importance of the state. "Hegel believed that the state in its various forms was the embodiment of Reason as it evolved in history" which led him to see the Prussian state, as it promised it would evolve to, a tri-partite state with three estates, the landowners, the church, and everyone else, as the highest embodiment of Reason on earth. Marx (and many other young Hegelians) did not see the Prussian state in this light, and the solution Marx came to was the one he enunciated in the Communist Manifesto and thereafter, that we have already analyzed, that capitalism itself "socializes" the means of production under control of the capitalist state, at which point the proletariat overthrows it and builds its own state, which then withers away. This, as Tabor shows, is Marx's "solution" to the Hegelian paradox (that freedom can truly only exist in thought even while Hegel also needed to find a concrete state to equate to freedom), where Marx can reject not only the Prussian state (rather obviously not a bringer of human freedom) but all "bourgeois" states, and look toward a "state that is not a state" run by the proletariat—the first state that truly represents the interests of all the people—on the road to abolishing the state altogether, which would (logically) therefore be a state of perfect human freedom. For Marx, Hegelian problem solved. For us, "solved," but still only in the realm of thought.

As Tabor shows, while Marx has changed the theory somewhat, it is not only no solution, it has not even escaped being just as idealist as Hegel's. The proof is in the pudding. As Tabor states in other locations, "Marx finds what he is looking for." That is, Marx *starts* with the notion that all of human history is "progressing" toward a state of absolute freedom. Truly, what other reason could there be to believe that history is advancing toward his definition of communism? Without starting with your conclusions as a matter of ideology, how can *anyone* know where history is headed in the "long run." How would one go about trying to argue for it? What evidence could one adduce for a forecast of a state of socialism under the dictatorship of the proletariat, followed by the withering away of the state? Much less that such a progression is "inevitable?"

So, just as Hegel did, Marx starts with a theory that he believes is right, and then subsumes reality as having to conform to that theory. Only such a thought process can explain what we have already analyzed, Marx's failed predictions that capitalism would evolve toward total state control of the economy, and all that he confidently asserts will follow in terms of socialism and communism. These are articles of faith for Marx, based on nothing. It is truly rather astounding that these forecasts of Marx have stayed around for over a century and a half and Marxists still believe in them.

Tabor states the case beautifully: "Although Marx and Engels thought they were materialists, they actually believed that the realm of theory (the universe of their concepts) is the true reality and that it is the very nature of the material world to develop according to the logic of their theory, the (dialectical) laws of motion of their concepts. So-called 'scientific socialism' is really the insistence that social reality, implicitly governed by the logic of the theory, come into explicit agreement with it." (p. 83) As I would put it, "The map creates the territory." Or, "The model governs the reality it is supposedly modeling." The significance of recognizing that *this* is the true methodology of Marx (and Engels) cannot be overstated—it vitiates practically everything in any way theoretical that Marx wrote (the vast bulk of his writing).

By rounding out his extended discussion of the state, dictatorship of the proletariat, socialism and communism with this presentation of how the entire construct is nothing but an idealist, Hegelesque projection from Marx's mind onto reality/history, carrying no factual or historical content or validation whatsoever, Tabor has utterly demolished Marx's claim to have added anything of value in this domain to the sum of human knowledge. Tabor shows how the same Hegelesque idealism pervades his "history" of class struggle, his "stages" theory of history, and his "economic" studies as represented in his magnum opus, *Das Kapital*, and above all his labor theory of value.

Class Struggle, History and Materialism

In his chapter entitled "The Materialist Conception of History," Tabor critiques the intertwined Marxist notions that class antagonisms and struggles underlie the history of mankind, that that history is a linear progression from one "mode of production" to another, propelled by "class struggle," that this progression is composed of three "stages," characterized by slavery, feudalism and capitalism to date, and that this progression will lead inevitably to socialism and communism.

Tabor summarizes what is often called "historical materialism" in a list of 14 points (covered in pages 186-89):

1. the "underlying motive force—the determining factor—of history is the development of human productive power" which includes both means of production (tools, machinery and raw materials) and labor, which together constitute the forces of production. Over time, the means of production become more productive as technology advances
2. each "type or level of production technology gives rise to and requires a unique set of productive relations, a specific social arrangement of human being (such as the ownership of property), through which this technology is controlled and utilized," which are known as the relations of production
3. the forces of production together with their respective relations of production constitute a mode of production, considered the "material base" of society
4. all but one mode is "exploitive," meaning that the forces of production are not advanced enough to provide everyone an easy living, so that classes arise with one class being a non-laboring class that exploits the labor of the other classes, which division gives rise to the "class struggle" between the exploitive and exploited classes
5. each mode of production has "its own unique internal dynamics,...its own contradictions... [which] determine the nature and history of the societies based on the specific modes of production"
6. the modes of production succeed each other, each more productive than the last, propelled by the tendency of the forces of production to become more productive over time
- 6a. [This is a very important point that Tabor left out somehow, that Marx states in his *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*:] "No social order ever disappears before all the productive forces for which there is room in it have been developed, and new, higher relations of production never appear before the material conditions of their existence have matured in the womb of the old society."
7. the material base gives rise to a "superstructure" of specific political, social, cultural and religious structures, including the state, appropriate to the mode of production
8. the superstructure is not always passive and can sometimes influence the base

9. human thought and consciousness “grow out of and reflect” the material conditions, the relations of production, though these, too, can affect the material conditions
10. within any mode of production, the forces of production continue evolving, to the point that they outgrow the relations of production, which become fetters on the continued development of the productive forces, leading to an intensifying contradiction between the forces and relations of production, intensifying the class struggle between the exploited and exploitive classes
11. at some point, the growth of the forces of production break apart the old relations of production and, typically rapidly, a new mode of production is established, and is reflected in the superstructure as a “period of violent class struggle or social revolution.”
12. the forces of production eventually create a mode of production (the bourgeois) capable over time of so expanding the production of material goods based on advancing technology and factories, that they can produce enough for everyone to live an easy life. At the same time, capitalism leads to an increase in the oppression and exploitation of the workers. These two developments taken together “create the material basis for the elimination of exploitation and of the division of society into social classes, and therefore, for the creation of a fully cooperative, democratic, and egalitarian society, communism.
13. the working class is “brought to its true—proletarian socialist—consciousness by its experiences under capitalism,” especially its struggles against the capitalists, such that the necessary outcome of the class struggle is the establishment, in the course of a ‘proletarian revolution,’ of the ‘dictatorship of the proletariat,’ the ‘proletariat organized as the ruling class.’”
14. under the socialist dictatorship of the proletariat, production is further increased, everyone has time “to participate in all aspects of the administration of society,” and eventually the state will “wither away.”

Tabor begins by pointing out that Marx’s use of “materialism” in the phrase “historical materialism” is not its philosophical connotation, as the opposite of “idealism,” but rather refers to “a theory that contends that history is based on, and determined by, the development of human beings’ ability to produce and distribute such ‘material’ products.” Tabor immediately notes that in reality a lot of elements of society, including even the state and state structures, are often considered “material,” and that Marx’s use of this term is a bit of a misnomer. More importantly, by calling his approach to history a form of “materialism” (Tabor proposes calling it economic materialism), Marx invites conflation of it with philosophical materialism, with which it logically has no connection at all, but which serves the purpose of making his theory appear to be philosophically materialist as well (philosophical materialism is often associated with the methods of science, which Marx claimed applied to his method), allowing the aura and prestige of philosophical materialism to rub off on “historical materialism.”

Tabor also notes that there are two ways to understand historical materialism: as a post-hoc framework to explain past history (analytic), and as a forward-looking methodology that predicts where history is going in the future (predictive). This is an important distinction, because Marx and Engels clearly believed it was both, and used the supposed explanation that the theory provided of past history to project where history was “inevitably” headed. For most Marxists in the glory days of the movement, including all associated with Communist states like Lenin, Che, Ho Chi Minh, Castro, plus many others (Kautsky, Luxemburg, etc.), Marxism was nothing if not the “unity of theory and practice.” However, as Tabor notes, in the 20th century, showcased by the luminaries of the Frankfurt institute for Social Research (the “Frankfurt School”), a bevy of individuals not associated to “official” Marxism have become famous as Marxists who confine themselves to the purely analytical type of Marxism.

History Makes a Fool of Marx

Tabor then begins the systematic dismantling of any shred of credibility for any of Marx's "historical materialist" tenets. In the interests of brevity, I will not take the time to list every telling point Tabor makes against the 14 points listed above, complete with quotes from his book. I believe that the case is so pathetically flimsy for every one of them that knocking them down is child's play for any historian, so I shall merely list a lot of instances that reveal Marx's view to be appallingly bad history, which invalidates everything he wrote on the subject. Almost all the points I will mention are covered by Tabor—I will note the few instances where I have identified something not mentioned by him.

The first item to note is that Marx discerned just five "stages" of history, each characterized by the mode of production appropriate for each, that Marx said that society goes through. They are: "primitive communism" (tribal societies with all property in common), Asiatic mode ("oriental despotism"), slavery, feudalism, and bourgeois industrial society, each with its characteristic forces and relations of production. It is not clear exactly where Marx fits Asiatic into his progression, but he identifies that societies progress through the other four modes in that order. Within a given mode of production, as already quoted above, that mode "determines the general character of the social, political and spiritual processes of life. It is not the consciousness of men that determines their existence, but, on the contrary, their social existence determines their consciousness." (p. 183, quoted from *Contribution*)

I must also note that Marx's stages theory can sometimes appear to have a superficial persuasiveness to it. We are often inclined to see progression from the ancient world, through the medieval world, to the modern world, which Marx appears to agree with, and that overall, technology and productivity do appear to have advanced steadily. But on closer analysis, this view is unsupportable by the facts.

The Communist Manifesto states one of the hugest bloopers in all of Marxism, in one of its most famous lines: "The history of all hitherto existing society is the history of class struggles." Tabor begins his analysis with this one, and starts ticking off all of the historical facts that refute it, starting with feudalism, which as he notes, Marx doesn't even get right in terms of definition, as feudalism "refers to the internal structure of the noble hierarchy," and that the proper description of the mode of production of the feudal period would be "manorial economy." And to argue that the period during which serfdom was prevalent in Western Europe was characterized by "class struggle" between serfs and nobles is ludicrous (my word, not Tabor's), as the instances of any kind of rebellion or resistance were few and far between. I would add that Marx managed to forget that northern and central Europe did not the entire globe encompass, and that side by side with "feudalism" there was the growth of cities, starting in Italy, and a thriving commercial economy, starting in the late "Dark Ages" and reaching a remarkable state of development with Venice, Genoa and Milan before the 15th century with Venice pioneering the techniques of running a police state, not to mention all of the northern European commercial cities of the Low Countries, the Hanseatic League, etc. What was the class structure of Venice? What was the "mode of production" of the late medieval cities?

Moreover, serfdom, an essential component of the feudal system, really only took hold in western Europe in the 10th century, and within 400 years was already abating in parts of England and France, and later Germany, even as it was just beginning in eastern Europe and Russia, where it persisted for centuries after its virtual disappearance from western Europe. Also, its first appearance was separated from the demise of the Roman Empire by four to five hundred years—totally refuting any notion that it started growing within the confines of the previous "mode of production" (which for Marx, was slavery under the Roman Empire). And, it was long gone centuries before the first capitalist or industrial

enterprise came into existence, again refuting that capitalism began under within the confines of the previous, “feudal” era.

Rather, as Tabor notes for the transition out of feudalism, that “the expansion of trade and the growth of the mercantile class that was responsible for it...can be said to have occurred *outside* the bounds of feudal society, properly speaking, rather than within it.”

And these facts further blow away any notion that it was “contradictions” between the “forces of production” and the “relations of production” within a stage that led to the progression to the next stage. With nearly half a millennium separating the Roman Empire from widespread feudal serfdom, and another near half-millennium separating the de facto ending of serfdom in England and France from the start of modern capitalist economy, what could be sillier than Marx’s theory?

To return to more examples, while the “West” suffered the collapse of the early “Dark Ages,” the Muslim world began a remarkable period of cultural ascendancy. What “mode of production” can Marxists ascribe to the Muslim world from 700 -1500 AD? And if “class consciousness” flows from the relations of production, where did the Golden Renaissance come from? Not to mention China during this entire period, with many periods of astounding intellectual sophistication that bore no relationship to Marx’s positing of an “Asiatic mode of production” based on “oriental despotism.” And then there are all manner of tribal societies—what would Marx assert their “mode of production” to be? Actually, tribal society is characterized, in Marx’s mind, by common property, which for some tribes, may be true. But many tribes in many parts of the world had hierarchies and pecking orders that represented “exploitation” of the weaker by the powerful. How would Marx fit the tribal cultures of the Mideast, Southeast Asia, Africa and the New World before Columbus, into his neat schema?

The ascription of “slavery” as the “mode of production” of the ancient world of Greece and Rome is, as Tabor notes, also wildly inaccurate, since, while slaves did exist in significant numbers, the primary “mode of production” was independent farmers, at least well into the Roman Empire period. And it is hardly the case that the Greek city states developed out of, much less within the framework of, primitive tribes practicing common property.

As to the notion that Marx’s stages are a linear progression, what sort of “progress” can be discerned in moving *from* independent agricultural producers (under Rome) *to* serfdom—how can this be anything but a retrograde development in social relations, not a stage along a road of progress?

And Marx was no less off the mark in his evaluation of modern society, where, as Tabor notes, far from conforming to Marx’s predictions, today, millions of members of the middle class (a class Marx does not even envision) and also the working class own stocks in corporations directly or indirectly, more and more large corporations are run by corporate executives, not traditional “capitalists” of Marx’s day, a very thriving sector of self-employed and small businesses continually renews itself and the economy, and Marx’s favorite term “proletarian” becomes impossible to define, much less to identify.

When it comes to the notion of the “superstructure,” Marx fares no better. As Tabor notes, the number of states in which the state directly controls the society, not as the instrument of a separate ruling class, but as itself, is legion. He cites the role in the economy of all the states in the ancient world where a central state maintained irrigation and flood control, from the Nile to the Tigris-Euphrates, to the Indus to the Yangtze and Yellow rivers in China. I would add, what was the “ruling class” in ancient Egypt, that conscripted tens of thousands to build the pyramids? In fact, it seems to me that Marx’s belief that there is always a “ruling class” is utterly flawed, amazingly so, as it doesn’t account for the centralized, bureaucratic empires that were the norm until the Roman Empire—Egypt, Babylonia, Assyria, Persia, etc., where emperors and god-kings ruled over everyone. And what about the rise of

absolute monarchies in Western Europe in the 17th-18th centuries, which class would a Marxist identify as using the state as their instrument? To pose the question is to realize how silly is the Marxist notion.

“Class Consciousness, Again”

Tabor then again tackles a central facet of the theory, the notion that, as already quoted from *Contribution*, “It is not the consciousness of men that determines their existence, but, on the contrary, their social existence determines their consciousness.” As clear as this seems, it also should strike anyone as absurd, impossible—if so, every member of society would think exactly like every other member who shared their class or their social niche. Put that way, its absurdity is clear. So, in other contexts, Engels in particular hedged his bets, and stated that “determines” doesn’t really mean what it appears to mean, rather, merely that one is a factor of the other. The belief in the inevitability of socialism belies this feeble attempt at covering over this absurd theory, since the only thing that makes socialism inevitable is that the proletariat will “inevitably” come to “class consciousness” that they need to make a revolution and take power in their own name. If that isn’t true, then the whole edifice crumbles to the ground.

This issue of “class consciousness” is of central importance, as I have already discussed above, because it becomes the arena in which Marxists of every stripe must face the fact that Marx was wrong about the “automatic” coming to socialist consciousness of the proletariat. But, if the proletariat won’t on its own come to see that its interest lies in overthrowing the capitalist state and taking over as the proletariat, and setting up a new state as a “dictatorship of the proletariat,” what is a Marxist to do? The general answer has been that Marxists must find a means to “educate” the working class to its (the working class’s) class interest in carrying out Marx’s socialist revolution. But (and I don’t recall Tabor discussing it quite this way), even posing this question this way is deadly for Marx’s entire program. Because, how does the Marxist explain why socialism is better for the worker? What gives the Marxist this confidence? The only basis in Marxist theory is that the entire march of history points in that direction. But we have just eviscerated that theory. If the theory is wrong, what basis is there to believe that the socialist revolution is inevitable, or even in the best interest of the proletariat? Maybe a partnership with the capitalists might work better. Maybe just the constant march of reformist improvements and gradual wage increases is better.

This point bears emphasis: if “socialism” is *not* inevitable, then what justification is there for Marxists to try to bring it into being, much less to take state power by military means and impose it on a hostile society by force of arms? Who are Marxists to determine that “socialism” is better for everyone (except the “capitalists” whoever they are) unless history somehow establishes that it is “inevitable”?

This possibility cannot present itself to the Marxist in a position of having state power who continues to believe that he is right about moving to socialism. He takes (and must take), as Tabor points out, the position that socialism must be implemented by force since the population is “too backward” to recognize that it is in their interest. But without inevitability, it is simply the arbitrary thinking of the Marxist that justifies him in imposing it on the workers.

Hegel to the Rescue

Tabor at this point rounds out his discussion of historical materialism by showing how everything in Marx’s theory also stems from an only slightly modified Hegelianism (recovering ground covered in the previous chapter). Hegel’s mind/spirit goes through distinct stages; Marx’s evolution of societies goes through the stages indicated, despite the fact that there is no support from actual history to support his

progression. For Hegel, each stage embodies a stage in the development of the idea of freedom; for Marx, it is the form of labor or labor-power that advances in each stage of history, each progression of the mode of production.

That is, for Marx no less than for Hegel, history is a *logical process* “that leads inevitably to human freedom. For both, history is progressive; it has a meaning, a direction, and a goal..., which is implicit in the beginning, explicit in the end. For both, history is the phenomenological reflection of a self-propelling, dialectically evolving principle or category, which represents humanity’s essence: for Hegel, consciousness; for Marx, labor.” (p. 236) Any differences between them are only apparent, because for Marx, “the Marxian essence, labor, is just as much a category of thought, just as much an abstraction, as [Hegel’s] thought.” (p. 236)

Tabor then takes his critique soaring to new heights, identifying one important area where Marx did diverge from Hegel. Hegelian philosophy was ultimately a restatement of Christianity, with this distinction noted by Tabor—Hegel has lost most of the emotional content of Christianity, “God/Jesus as love.” (p. 238) Hegel discusses love, but considers it inferior to consciousness/thought. However in Marxism, “this love or spiritual content is almost entirely eliminated, banished and exchanged for the soullessness of a would-be materialism.” (p. 238) Marxism, notes Tabor, sees notions of “soul” as “superstitious substitutions for ‘consciousness,’ which is already a secondary phenomenon...Marxism is thus a kind of soulless Idealism. Despite its materialist pretensions, its fundamental reality is made up of abstract categories—labor, social classes, modes of production...But these categories are without spirit; they are blind and pitiless.”

Tabor continues: “This combination of Idealism and soullessness is one of the reasons, I think, why Marxism tends to think about and to be concerned with humanity in the abstract, as Humanity, rather than as concrete human beings...the result, for both Hegel and Marxism, is to subordinate the concrete, the unique, the individual, to the lawfulness and the logic. The law and logic of history become more important than the events; the categories of theory become more important than the phenomena they are meant to explain. Humanity and History are more important than people.” (p. 239)

Space forbids exploring Tabor’s next section, on “Marxist Messianism,” in the depth it warrants, so this brief summary will have to do. Tabor claims that Marxism is a “restatement, in modern, secular terms, of the Messianic version of ancient Judaism, with the proletariat as the Messiah, the fully human (although anointed by God) savior of the Jews and all humanity, and with...Marxists as the prophets of the coming apocalypse.” (p. 240) Marxism fulfills the “need to believe that humanity and our history are significant.” (p. 240) Marxism thus operates very much like a secular religion, complete with “the sense of certainty that so often accompanies dogmatic belief: we are right and everybody else is wrong.” This attitude leads straight to categorizing opponents in the most extreme terms, such as “class enemy.” Marxists thus often exhibit “a tremendous arrogance [that] often results in unbridled fanaticism....It was such fanaticism that characterized the ethos of the Bolshevik Party and led, via the establishment and consolidation of a massive, all-powerful state, to the atrocities of Stalinism...” (p. 241-242)

This same arrogance and fanaticism leads Marxists, Tabor asserts, to see themselves as the saviors of humanity. “This substitutionalism, in which Marxists think and act in the supposed name and interests of the proletariat, emerges as a logical implication of Marxist theory itself, under circumstances where key Marxist prognostications...are not borne out.” (p. 242) I would, as I have noted above, caveat this with the revision that “it leads *some* Marxists to see themselves this way, because I believe that many who have a right to call themselves Marxists take a different path, acknowledge that for the time being the working class is hopelessly reformist, so taking power is off the table, and that it is necessary to wait until the next huge crisis of capitalism where a more Marxist-type outcome can be expected. I simply do

not buy that substitutionism is a *necessary* and the only possible path for a Marxist to take when the working class is clearly not moving in a revolutionary direction.

But I do not want my difference with Tabor on this point to blunt the force of his analysis of how Marxism becomes for some a dogmatic, soulless ideology that will justify killing millions of humans under certain conditions for the supposed sake of Humanity.

Marxist Philosophy

Tabor's penultimate two chapters cover Marxism from the standpoint of philosophy. Tabor exhaustively covers topics such as the degree to which Marx (and even more Engels) attempted to portray their method as "scientific" and as being just as scientific as natural science, denied that it was even a philosophy, but rather superseded all philosophy, and the history of idealist philosophy from Plato through Kant to Hegel. In the interest of limiting the length of an already very long review, I will leave this fascinating material for the reader to savor, and will touch on just a few salient aspects of Marx's own philosophy.

Tabor contrasts the Marxist approach with the methods of science, to which Marx and Marxism proclaim they subscribe. Nothing could be farther from the truth, as Tabor presents it, because science is an open system of thought where experiments are performed and evidence adduced, and where the weight of new evidence that cannot be explained by existing theory eventually leads to new theories with greater explanatory power. Individual scientists can blind themselves to evidence that doesn't fit a given paradigm, but every scientific discipline eventually takes note of discrepant facts and modifies and scraps old theories as needed to bring theory back in line with the latest discoveries. Were Marxism a science, the glaring discrepancies between the theory we examined in the previous section, and indisputable facts of history, would have forced a scrapping of the theory and its replacement with something else. The same would be true for its failed predictions for the evolution of capitalist society.

The reality is just the opposite, as we have seen repeatedly, and which is captured by what I have proposed be called "totalist" ideology. For those within the fold, everything that everyone else sees as refutations of the theory by reality, are explained away. As Tabor notes in several locations, a "theory" that, *post hoc*, can find a way to "explain" everything that happened in the past, even if the theory had predicted a different outcome, is no theory at all. Any purported theory that is unfalsifiable by the facts, that, in effect, "predicts" every possible outcome, is intrinsically meaningless. Such is the reality of Marxism. Marxism permits no "testable" hypotheses or theses, because it exists only by claiming to have already understood everything necessary about history and the world. It says it already knows everything there is to know about the broad outlines of human history.

Marx's writings on historical stages and the supposed "history of class struggle" in particular are examples of historical illiteracy writ so large, how Marx could have propounded them cries out for explanation. No one, above all no one of Marx's admitted erudition and scholarship, could have made such grotesque historical errors unless driven by an ulterior motive, an external need to find something immanent in history that would correspond to his predetermined philosophical, teleological, belief. Tabor nails Marx's mindset in a later chapter ("The Tyranny of Theory"), that "the universe in all its facets...can be encompassed within, and accurately represented by, one logically coherent world view of philosophy. This position is based on the conception that the universe, at bottom, is logical and that it conforms to and embodies a unified logical structure." (p. 329) This species of philosophical belief is often called "rationalist," but it is all an "illusion." As Tabor states a few pages later, "Despite its claims to be materialist, [Marxism] in fact contends that Marxist *theory*—the 'laws of motion' that Marx and

Engels claimed to have discovered—is the underlying, true reality, and that external reality—the reality we perceive—is a reflection of, and is determined by, that theory.” (emphasis added) (p. 331)

This is quintessential philosophical Idealism, as Tabor notes, and is precisely the methodology of Hegel, Marx’s primary innovation being the application of this approach to the study of economics and of history understood as the history of “class struggle.” Its divergence from actual history and (as we shall analyze later) from real economics is proof that it is not derived from an examination of reality, but rather seeks to find in “reality” only that which conforms to and seems to validate the theory.

“Dialectics” and Progress

Tabor brilliantly lays bare the real thought process by which Marx came to his astounding conclusions. Returning to Hegel again, Tabor examines what Hegel called “dialectics.” Basically, as he lays out, Hegel identifies various stages in human progress, and identifies some essence of each stage, then finds something within that essence that is actually in contradiction to it. He then posits that these two aspects of the essence engage in struggle, out of which emerges a synthesis which subsumes both parts of the original essence but also transcends them. The short-hand expression for this triad of “theses” is “thesis,” “anti-thesis,” “synthesis.”

Tabor describes it thusly: “Hegel...tried to demonstrate that if left to itself, the dialectic, the dialogue of consciousness or mind with itself, does in fact lead to philosophic/metaphysical truth...[He] showed how, at each level of thinking, one thought generates its opposite, its contrary or negation, and how the conflict between these two ideas leads to the recognition that each thought is both true and false, that each thought contains some truth but is also limited and one-sided. The result of this conflict/dialogue is a kind of synthesis of both ideas, a new idea that preserve what is true in each thought, discards what is false, and ultimately transcends the debate between them. This synthesis—this new idea, which represents a new and higher level of thinking—then splits in two and undergoes the same dialogical process, but at a still higher level.” (p. 270-71) The end product of successive such confrontations is absolute truth, which was how Hegel understood God.

If the Hegelian dialectic bears an eerie similarity to Marx’s notion of stages of history each categorized by struggles between exploiter and exploited, resulting in a higher level of society, it is no illusion. This is the reason why Marx *must* define history as the history of class struggle, because the contending classes are the “thesis” and the “negation” or “antithesis,” and the “synthesis” is the emergence of a higher level of civilization out of the contest. Marx *must* reduce history to such a concept in order to sustain his starting belief in the dialectical process. The point to grasp is that he *started* with belief, philosophical belief, and was unable to recognize that it was a wild misfit to actual history—he blinded himself to the empirical absurdity of the “dialectic,” and insisted on finding it in reality, despite it being utterly absent from reality.

To be sure, Marx and Engels denied that they started with their dialectics, and imposed it on history. Instead, as explained by Engels in his *Dialectics of Nature*, “We are concerned...only with showing that the dialectical laws are really law of development of nature, and therefore are valid also for theoretical natural science.” (p. 273) He spent the rest of the book trying to prove that the laws of nature were “dialectical.” Engels’ purpose was “to establish the ontological basis, and thus the validity, of the Marxian conception of history, and through this, to substantiate the claim that the Marxian program is scientific, specifically, that socialism, to be achieved through the dictatorship of the proletariat, is inevitable. If material reality, the world of matter of the natural sciences, is dialectical, that is, conforming to and obeying a dialectical structure, then so, too, must be the material reality of human

history, the world of the forces and relations of production, which is ontologically based on the material world of Nature and, at least in the view of Marx and Engels, follows the same laws; in other words, human history must also conform to and obey a dialectical structure.” (p. 277)

This argument is absolutely central to the guts of Marxism, since, as discussed above, only this reasoning justifies seeing socialism as the necessary and proper direction for history to take. And it is based on a double error. The first error is seeing natural science as conforming to a “dialectical” process, of constant things confronting their opposites, leading to a higher understanding. The second error, even more absurd, is thinking that even if this were true in natural science (physics), that it would therefore also have to be true for human history. This latter conclusion is simply assumed as necessarily true. Engels stated it this way, as quoted by Tabor: “thus dialectics reduced itself to the science of the general laws of motion, both of the external world and of human thought—two sets of laws which are identical in substance, but differ in their expression in so far as the human mind can apply them consciously, while in nature, and also up to now for the most part in human history, these laws assert themselves unconsciously, in the form of external necessity...the world is to be comprehended...as a complex of processes...in which, in spite of all seeming accidentality and of all temporary retrogression, a progressive development asserts itself in the end.” (p. 278-79)

That is, progress in human history is ineluctable, no less than in natural science. As Tabor summarizes the case, “in other words, according to Engels, the dialectic underlies and drives the evolution of external reality (both natural and historical),. In so doing, it ensures...that this evolution will be progressive. But this is nothing but the Hegelian schema dressed up in materialist garb! Despite his claim, for Engels (and I believe for Marx), the dialectic is a logical structure that is immanent in material reality....This is philosophy (and Hegelian philosophy, at that), not science, because, as I’ve stressed there is no scientific proof that the dialectic, in the sense of the dialectical “laws,” inheres in material (or for that matter, in social) reality.” (p. 279) As Tabor expressed it a few pages earlier, “Marxian dialectics remains just as much of an abstract logical schema, just as much of an Idealist construct, as does the Hegelian.” (p. 276)

In my book, Tabor has made clear: “Case closed.”

Tabor’s second chapter on Marxist philosophy develops the basis on which Marxism claims to be “The Truth,” and how that belief affects (and disastrously warps) their morality. “But Marxists do differ from most non-Marxists in how they approach their moral/ethical decisions, and this in several ways. Probably most important, for Marxists, the stakes, the ‘ends,’ are almost always set at the highest level. From their point of view, what is at issue in many, if not most, of their decisions and actions is the fate of humanity.” (p. 306-7) If one really believes the stakes are that high, it is easier to contemplate acts that would otherwise be unthinkable.

Tabor goes on to identify seven beliefs of Marxists that warp their moral sense: (p. 308-313)

- 1) commitment to use of the state to implement their program
- 2) belief in the dialectic of “class struggle” that predisposes them to believe that only through violent struggle can progress ever be made
- 3) rejection of traditional, religious-based moral/ethical codes
- 4) belief in historical necessity and in the progressive, immanent logic of history
- 5) that morality is a purely historical product that is part of a given superstructure
- 6) that categories, abstractions like “the working class,” are more real than concrete human beings
- 7) Marxists’ belief in the absolute truth of their theory, the totalism of their belief system

The result, Tabor notes, is very similar to the case of religious zealots, who have many of these same beliefs. Tabor adds another notable feature: “Not only is Marxism a seductive doctrine, it is also

addictive. Once one becomes committed to it, one's critical faculties, at least concerning Marxism, become distorted. Marxists do not look at Marxism critically, to see what may be the matter with it, the way they look at other (bourgeois) theories...they go to great lengths to explain away the numerous contradictions and questionable propositions with which Marxism abounds." (p. 316)

Tabor then examines the issue of freedom versus necessity. He quotes Engels from *Anti-Duhring* which leaves no doubt that Engels (and one must presume Marx) consciously understood freedom in the same sense as did Hegel, as "the appreciation of necessity." Engels: "Freedom therefore consists in the control over ourselves and over external nature which is founded on knowledge of natural necessity." (p. 319) In Marxism, Tabor notes, "there is no freedom to resist the historic process. Both support for and resistance to the cause of the proletariat are determined, along with the illusion that this is a matter of choice...In sum, rather than believe in freedom, as most people conceive of it, Marx and Engels, like Hegel, were determinists." (p. 320)

My only caveat to this chapter is to note that many Marxists do not subscribe to everything here. As before, Tabor is describing how *some* Marxists—to be sure, the "most important" Marxists, namely, all of the Marxists that have ever found themselves in control of state power—operated once in control of the state. What Tabor has done is elucidate, brilliantly and comprehensively, the aspects of the Marxist belief structure or mindset that predisposed those who found themselves in power, however they got there, to so shed what most of humanity considers basic morality, in favor of the most unspeakable cruelties, terror and murder in the service of maintaining state power via totalitarian measures.

Today, more than at any time since 1917, I would wager that there a lot of Marxists (by their own estimation) would *not* recognize themselves in Tabor's description of Marxists. I suppose Tabor could argue that they aren't really Marxists, that anyone who does not fit his description should not be called Marxist. But this becomes sort of circular, because in order to deviate from Tabor's characterization of "Marxists," a Marxist who wanted to "fix" some of the drawbacks of traditional Marxism, to actually acknowledge some of Marxism's failures and other problems, that is, to make Marxism less an ideology and more a framework for investigation, would, in Tabor's view, be leaving Marxism behind, even though he still thought of himself as a Marxist.

This is why I believe that Tabor's ultimate achievement is not only to show all of the aspects of what might best be called "Orthodox Marxism" (to distinguish it from, perhaps, "Reformed Marxism") that explain how it became totalitarian in every instance in which Marxists took state power, but to demolish *everything* that Marx propounded in the realm of theory.

And to round out that discussion, I now turn to Marx's supposed forte, his analysis of capitalism.

The Illusion of Marxist Economics

When we come to examining Marx's economic theories, we jump from the domain of relative paucity of writings (so much of the theories reviewed so far can only be discussed by piecing together passages from disparate writings, since they in many cases were never clearly elaborated in organized form by Marx), to an absolute surfeit. We have Marx's earliest work on the subject, *Contribution to a Critique of Political Economy*, to three volumes of *Capital* (only vol. 1 being completed and published by Marx), 3 volumes of *Theories of Surplus Value* (also never published by him, assembled only posthumously), various letters by Marx seeking to clarify certain points, and probably some writings by Engels. The total is easily 2-3000 pages, much of it pretty densely, if not ponderously, written. Perhaps at least partly because of this, and because of Marx's manner of proceeding, with endless examples, hypothetical thought experiments, multiple attempts to explain the same concept, and other difficulties

in his own presentation, there has been utter confusion and disagreement over what Marx's economic theories, above all what his so-called "law of value," or "labor theory of value" really are not only among non- and anti-Marxists seeking to discredit Marx's economics, but among Marxists themselves who endlessly argue, and claim that other Marxists have it wrong.

I do not know whether Tabor perceived this section of his book to be the hardest to write about, but in my estimation, he should have, because it intrinsically is the hardest to treat in the same definitive fashion that I believe he has tackled the other domains of Marx's theory. Tabor has succeeded in showing lots of glaring flaws in Marx's economic theories, including failures of both inclusion and exclusion—aspects of his theories that are clearly inoperative if not flat-out wrong, and many aspects of capitalism as it actually exists that are outside of Marx's purview, and that falsify much of what he did discuss. By the end of the two chapters devoted to this topic (entitled "Capital—Karl Marx's Analysis of Capitalism"), no more of Marx's economic theories remain standing than survived Tabor's critique of Marx's theories in the other domains covered. Nothing of importance can withstand Tabor's test of consistency, logic, or accordance with reality.

This is all the more remarkable because economics was Marx's life project, that occupied him for most of his adult life, that he poured vastly more effort into researching into and writing about than any other area, and that consequently should be the arena in which we find Marx at his best, more cogent, persuasive, and in tune with his subject. That we don't, as Tabor shows conclusively, is even more stunning than discovering the weakness of Marx's theories in all other areas. If, as I contend and Tabor confirms, Marx's "economics" was, as I entitled this section, little more than an "illusion," a ghost of an economic theory with no connection to reality, then truly Marxism as a theoretical system is a dead horse, if indeed it was ever alive, a nice-sounding doctrine, like Shakespeare's Macbeth's description of life, "a tale told by an idiot, full of sound and fury, signifying nothing."

The difficulty of covering this topic, for Tabor and even more for me in this review, is that it takes a lot more space to fairly and accurately lay out Marx's theories, and even longer to then critique them, than was the case for the previous theories covered. And just grasping what Marx's theories actually were is also much more difficult, and the reader may be forgiven for having his eyes glaze over as I attempt to present enough of the core theory that Tabor's, and my, critiques of them can be seen as fair and valid. I urge the reader's indulgence, and patience, as the reward for following the argument will be to fully understand the extent to which Marx clearly suppressed his own critical faculties in pursuit of a chimera, a theory that conformed to his Hegelianism (of which he may have been unaware), failing to see what to our eyes are glaring inconsistencies and errors that leave one scratching one's head, "how could he have missed this detail, how could he have believed that theory."

As I've mentioned, Tabor's presentation makes many telling points, and explains a number of Marx's core precepts, but I found the organization of these two chapters a barrier to clearly following what Marx's theories are, and what Tabor's critique of them is. Everything is there, and some sub-sections are very powerfully presented, but the order of topics, I believe, make it difficult for the reader to readily see the various components of Marx's basic theory in a logical progression, accompanied by his devastating critique of each that should be presented very clearly. For example, in his first chapter, Tabor covers the concept of the "commodity," which relates to the labor theory of value, jumps to some questions of philosophy including reference to Hegel, then briefly covers "surplus value" and exploitation, without adequately presenting or critiquing either, before jumping off to some collateral questions. Then, his second chapter opens on the "accumulation of capital," then discusses several points that I would have placed much later in the discussion, hits what I consider a very key point on the productivity of capital, followed by a digression, only to finally come to a formal discussion of the "labor

theory of value” which is what I think he should have led the first chapter with. The final 13 pages of this chapter do not in my mind relate to *Capital* or Marx’s economic theories at all and should have been in a different chapter or a chapter by themselves.

I would have hoped that Tabor had done what he did in several of the other chapters, namely, begin with a numbered list of propositions, concepts and theories that constitute the basics of Marx’s theoretical contribution to that domain, and then spend the following pages critiquing the points listed. Rather than try to discuss Tabor’s arguments in the order in which he presents them, I have decided that the only way to lay out what is wrong with Marx’s entire corpus of economic theory is for me to list what I consider the essential elements of Marx’s economic theories, and to then critique them, drawing from and referencing relevant points made by Tabor as appropriate.

Marx’s Economic Propositions

Marx starts with the question of what he calls commodities. A commodity is a product produced in a capitalist economy, where everyone buys and sells everything (that is, as distinct from all pre-capitalist societies where most members of society were primary agricultural producers (farmers, peasants, serfs)), including their labor power, in a market. The concept of market is absolutely central to Marx, because he is obsessed with what he calls the “social” aspect of production and distribution. Here is my best effort to succinctly capture the essence of Marx’s economic theories.

1. When a person or factory produces a thing (Marx uses the word “thing” this way) for the purpose of selling it, it has “use-value,” meaning, that the producer doesn’t need it, and someone else does, because the thing will be useful to that person.
2. When the thing, which we can now call a commodity, is sold, it is said to possess “exchange-value.” For the moment, do not assume that the exchange value is the actual monetary price it sold for.
3. Its “exchange value” is the external form of something that inheres in the commodity, namely, its “value.”
4. The value of a commodity derives from the “labor,” or more properly, the “labor-power,” used to produce it. All value comes from labor or labor-power.
5. In the first approximation, in a given instance, say, a factory, the labor is said to be “concrete labor” which produces the commodity, using whatever tools or other technology is available, which has its use value, which makes it able to be exchanged in the market, where it will also have exchange value
6. In the marketplace, the commodity is exchanged for other commodities of equal value, which is to say, of equal labor (since labor is the source of value) embodied in the commodity, or for gold or other money in the equivalent of its value that can then be exchanged for other commodities
7. The market is absolutely central and crucial to everything else Marx treats, since the market is *the mechanism par excellence* that “socializes” the value, and it is only the socialization of the value that makes value something general about which anything interesting can be understood. Without the socialization of value via the market, each producer could produce the same commodity at widely varying prices and sell them, which would imply equally varying values, where logic would say that the value should be the same across the society for the same commodity.
8. Marx therefore understood “value” as ultimately expressing a relationship among people, specifically, the capitalist and the purchaser of the commodity; that is, value was not important

for its own sake, but because of the role it played as an intermediary, helping to express the “social relations” of capitalism.

9. It is the market which equalizes prices for each commodity, such that the notion of the value of that commodity can have meaning across the society.
 - [Marx seems to assume here, that such equalization is a given in capitalist society, where in reality various factors could lead the same commodity produced in the same way to vary based on geography, local conditions, local scarcity, etc.]]
10. With prices being equalized, in an equilibrium situation, for each line of production, it can be seen that the value of the commodity is really the expression of what Marx calls “abstract labor,” which is a socially average labor time necessary to produce the commodity, which will therefore almost never equal the specific value of an instance of concrete labor.
11. The measure of value is “socially necessary labor time,” understood as the average or predominant labor time across the society that it takes for the production of a given commodity.
12. Marx clearly envisioned that most labor would be unskilled, such as he saw so much of in mid-19th century England, but he allowed that skilled labor could be thought of as a compound of unskilled labor.
13. All value in a commodity comes from the socially necessary labor time to produce the commodity. The labor time is said to be embodied or congealed in the commodity (from Marx: “As values, all commodities are only definite masses of congealed labor-time.”)
14. No value comes from the machinery, technology or “capital” used by the worker to produce it. If a new machine allows a worker to produce twice as many of a commodity, the labor time congealed in each commodity would now be half of what it had been. Its value would be halved, the productivity of the worker doubled.
15. Labor itself is also a commodity, with workers interchangeable throughout the economy, just like any other commodity. But labor as a commodity has a unique property, namely, that it produces more value than it itself has. No “thing” produces value, which is to repeat point 13, that machinery and tools do not produce value, they merely pass on some portion of the value stored in them (since they are congealed labor too), only labor creates new value.
16. All of the above said, there is something very odd in Marx’s presentation—although most of the points above would appear to apply to capitalist production, it turns out that Marx’s discussion of the “law of value,” that the value of a commodity is the “socially necessary labor time” required to produce it, only applies, for Marx, to what he calls “simply commodity production,” which is basically independent producers, like tailors, shoe-makers, and the like, with which Marx starts his discussion in *Capital*, vol. 1, intending to take the simplest example of commodity production, and later expanding it to refer to capitalists who hire their labor power. The points that follow apply only to capitalist production.
17. The value of labor itself is the value needed to reproduce that labor, namely, whatever wages the worker needs to maintain the life of himself and his family. His wages will always be of a lesser value than that the capitalist who employs him obtains by the sale of the commodities that he produces.
18. The difference between what the worker produces (his use value) and what the worker is paid (his own value) is surplus value. Surplus value is what the capitalist gets “for free,” that is, in effect, unpaid labor-time, unpaid-for value, the portion of the work-day that the worker is working for the capitalist and not for himself. The capitalist uses the surplus value to reinvest in new machinery, to increase his capital, or for his own consumption.

19. The capitalist thus “exploits” the worker by not paying him a value equivalent to his use value.
20. The nature of capitalism is to constantly expand capital, and to improve the technology so that worker productivity is constantly increased. This entails lowering the socially necessary labor time of the commodity, which permits lowering the price. So, the value of commodities are decreased every time new technology increases productivity and gets adopted by at least most capitalists, which also reduced the price of commodities.
21. Marx develops a few mathematical expressions that he uses to try to capture the underlying relationships as they involve value under capitalism.
22. The cost of labor (wages) is expressed using the variable “v” which stands for “variable capital,” because only variable capital, that is, labor power, creates more value than it itself is worth (the value of its output “varies” from its own value), so the value of the commodity is greater than “v,” the value of the labor
23. The variable “c” stands for “constant capital,” the machinery and also raw materials and other inputs to the production process. Marx considered it “constant” because he believed that it merely imparted its own value to the commodity, not adding any value—its value contribution was “constant.” This point deserves to be highlighted. That is, Marx believed that the contribution of machinery to the production process was the “transfer” of a portion of the value of the machinery (its “value” as a commodity produced as the sum of $c+v+s$ in some other factory) to the commodity being produced. This is the only way he is able to maintain that the constant capital does not produce more value than it itself contains—it is just transferring some of its initial, fixed quantity of value to the new commodity.
24. The variable “s” stands for the surplus value. This represents the portion of value created by the worker above and beyond the cost (value) of the worker, expressed by “v.” The total value of the capitalist’s output is therefore expressible as the sum of these three, $c + v + s$.
25. The smaller v is in relation to s, that is, the larger the ratio s/v is, the greater the degree of “exploitation” there is.
26. The expression $s/(c+v)$ represents the rate of surplus value—the value of the surplus appropriated by the capitalist, s, compared to the value that created the commodity, $c + v$.
27. The goal of the capitalist is always to maximize his rate of surplus value—doing so is the primary driver of capitalism—so capitalists will tend to invest in those industries where the rate of surplus value is higher.
28. The ratio of c/v is called the “organic composition of capital.” This is important to Marx because, since he thought that all value came from labor, that is, from v, not c, in the equation, the greater the organic composition of capital, the relatively less v and the relatively more c is involved in the production process, meaning there would be less s produced because there is less v to produce it.
29. Thus, Marx maintained that capital intensive industries would tend to have much lower rates of surplus value ($s/(c+v)$) than labor intensive ones, because there is so much less “v” to exploit, less v to create surplus value. Marx maintained that for this reason, capitalism would tend to have widely differing rates of surplus value from industry to industry.
30. However, Marx observes that capitalists don’t use the category of s, surplus value, but rather profit, which he denotes by p, which is *not* derived from just the variable capital v, but from the total investment, which is $c + v$. That is, the capitalist, in effect, “sees” his profit as a return on what he has invested in both capital and labor. Marx calls the capitalist’s calculation of $c + v$ to be his “cost-price,” and $p/(c+v)$ to be his rate of profit.

31. Marx noted that if p were equal to s , then the capital-intensive industries would experience a much lower rate of profit than the labor-intensive ones, as the rate of profit would equal the rate of surplus value. But, Marx claimed, such divergence of rate of profit ($p/(c+v)$ as recognized by the capitalist—keep in mind that $s/(c+v)$ is strictly a theoretical construct so far, based on labor time (translated into prices)—while capitalists are acting on prices as they appear in reality) was impossible in capitalism, such that if such a divergence were momentarily to be established, capital would flow from the lower profit rate industries into the higher profit rate ones, until $p/(c+v)$ were the same across all industries.
32. That is, Marx maintained that profit would lose its direct connection to surplus value, such that, in a capital-intensive industry, the commodities produced would sell for *more* than $c+v+s$, in order to increment the capitalists profit beyond the quantity of s that the v would normally produce, while the inverse would take place in labor-intensive industries, where the commodities produced would sell for *less* than $c+v+s$, that is, that some of the surplus value actually created would not be translated into realized price of the commodities, and hence the profit would be lower than the s actually produced.
33. Therefore, in terms of Marx's law of value, capital-intensive commodities would sell above their true value (as defined by socially necessary labor time) and labor-intensive commodities would sell below their true value, defined the same way.
34. The effect would therefore be that the rate of *profit* (as distinct from the rate of surplus value) would be equalized, as a tendency, across all lines of production, which Marx maintained was empirically the case.
35. While this would appear to sever profit from surplus value, and the rate of profit from the rate of surplus value, Marx maintained not so at the level of the entire capitalist economy. He claimed that if all values of all capital were added up, that is, total c plus total v , divided into total s , for every capitalist firm, s would equal the total of all p as recognized by the capitalists. That is, at the level of the entire economy, s would equal p (c and v are the same in value terms as for the capitalist, for Marx). It is merely the distribution of that s among different lines of business that varies from the s produced in each line. But the "law of value" still operates to determine the total pie that constitutes the total profit of all capitalists.
36. Finally, Marx claimed there was a "tendency of the rate of profit to fall" as a consequence of the point listed above in item 20. That is, while at any given point in time, some industries would be more capital-intensive, others more labor intensive, the march of technology would over time increase the organic composition of capital (c/v) in *all* industries, so that *all* industries would tend to produce less surplus (which is a function of a (shrinking) proportion of v) compared to the total $c+v$. Marx recognized some countervailing tendencies but thought that on balance the rate of profit would still fall over time.

Marx's Propositions Disputed

Phew! My purpose in presenting the above is to make it as clear as possible that literally nothing of any of that makes any real-world sense, or has applicability to a real-live capitalist economy. The emperor truly has no clothes. The great socialist guru, Karl Marx, is revealed as an idle inventor of odd theories that make no sense. There is such a cornucopia of idiocy embedded, it is hard to know where to start pulling on the yarn. To begin somewhere, here goes:

1. Marx starts with labor, whose use value is “labor power,” that creates commodities with the help of tools and machinery. He posits “value” based on “socially necessary labor time,” and “exchange value,” the external expression of “value.” However, there is a step here that Marx fudges, which is, how is a measure denominated in units of *time* (and never calculated, and intrinsically difficult if not impossible ever to measure with any degree of confidence, namely labor time “embodied” in a commodity) ever translated into *prices* (a measure recognized in reality and universally employed), namely, units of money? As far as I can tell, Marx slips around this one, simply jumping into money measures as if there is some sort of equivalence. But how could there be, if his notion of “value” really existed? The only way to do this would be to take the actual prices of commodities (assuming an idealized case where all industries are assumed to be in some sort of equilibrium where “price” equaled “value”), in every single industry, if not every factory, and empirically equate the labor time to the portion of price corresponding to v.
2. But this exercise would immediately reveal the absurdity of Marx’s notion of value, because from industry to industry, likely even product to product produced on different machines even in the same factory, labor time will equate to wildly different monetary values, even for labor of a comparable skill level, if for no other reason than that some machines will produce an output of commodities whose aggregate selling price is far higher than that produced by other machines which require the same number of comparably skilled workers to operate.
3. This simply makes evident that which is a mind-blowingly obvious flaw at the core of Marx’s theories, namely, that “value” is *not* created solely by labor-power, Marx’s variable capital, v. Tabor zeroes in on this central absurdity in Marx’s theories from a number of standpoints (pp. 146-154). He notes that Marx first makes his case for his “law of value” based on presumptions of “simple commodity production,” which is a pre-capitalist mode of production, and then blithely assumes he can carry over what appears plausible for such an idealized economy (that never existed) into capitalism. Ironically, as Tabor notes, Marx really just adopted his “labor theory of value” from Adam Smith and Ricardo. Once one is talking about capitalism, the absurdity of thinking that the “use value” of machinery (technology) for the capitalist is limited to the “value” that it imparts from itself to the products it produces is clear. Two different machines worth the same (having the same value, and the same monetary cost) could differ greatly in their productive capacities, such that starting with the same supposed “value,” one produces twice as much output as the other using the same amount of labor to operate them. For Marx, the “value” transferred to the commodity from the two machines would be equal, and the entire increase in productivity is credited to the worker, who is the self-same worker on both machines. So, the machine caused the worker’s productivity to magically double, but the worker is credited as the source and cause of this increase in productivity. To credit the labor-power, which is identical in both instances, for this doubling of productivity, makes no sense. The bottom line: capital creates value just as much as labor.
4. So, we have already demolished the core precept of Marx’s entire edifice. But it is worth continuing, to “hit him while he’s down,” to multiply demonstrate that Marx did nothing more than spin a fantastic hypothetical construct with no relevance for the real economy.
5. To clarify what we have already established, we have demonstrated that “socially necessary labor time” does *not* define the “value” of a commodity, and in fact, there is no way to abstractly define “value” for commodities apart from some measure of price. There is no “substance,” such as labor, labor-power, labor-time, or “abstract labor,” that is somehow immanent within a commodity, much less “congealed” from labor-power, and that stems from

the production process, that defines a thing's "value," other than a price for the commodity. Now, it can certainly be conceded that prices for things may be understood in some cases to misrepresent a thing's "value," such as when a store goes out of business and sells at below cost, or something becomes rare and sellers gouge consumers with high prices.

But I posit that a mirror image of Marx's notion is a viable way to understand "value" under capitalism, let's call it "socially necessary price." This would be where a capitalist has certain costs, for raw materials, rent, electricity, semi-finished products, and labor, to which he adds on a reasonable markup to cover his salary and funds for reinvestment, and sells his product for the resultant price. If every capitalist did that, price would reflect what one would intend to signify by "value." This notion of "value" demonstrates that there is simply no need to posit anything else as a source of value—value is the price of a commodity that passes on all reasonable costs of production plus a reasonable markup for the capitalist firm.

Tabor makes clear why Marx obsessively must credit labor alone for all value. He brilliantly shows how Marx is importing, again, what he does in every other theoretical realm, Idealist, specifically Hegelian, notions, and then "finding" them in material reality. (pp. 100-103). Tabor notes: "In ordinary language, commodities are products of labor; once expended, the labor no longer exists. In contrast, what does it mean to say, as Marx does, that labor is embodied in a commodity except that it is a kind of ethereal, non-material substance that reposes there?...despite Marx's claim to be a materialist, in his theory, human labor is a non-material substance underlying and determining the evolution of capitalism and history as a whole. (In fact, for Marx, labor is the essence of the human species, and history is the external, that is, phenomenological, reflection of the logical [dialectical] development of this essence.)" (p. 101) Marx has merely replaced, as Tabor points out, Hegel's progression of human mind/consciousness, for "human labor." I believe that Tabor has nailed the true, the only plausible, reason, for Marx to hang on to such an obviously ridiculous notion that labor time defines value regardless of the level of technology, and to deny that technology can be credited with adding value in the production process.

6. Tabor also makes a more general point in several locations throughout these two chapters, that applies to literally every aspect of Marx's economic theories, but especially to the "labor theory of value," namely, that Marx not only does not prove that anything he says is true, he does not even *try* to prove it. Across the board, all he does is state his contentions, as if he were an expert who had a basis for making such contentions, without the least regard to stating *why* he thought they were true. Why does he think labor time determines value, and technology does not? He doesn't say, nor even to appear to acknowledge the existence of the question.
7. Marx's notions of s , c and v and all utterly flawed and ultimately valueless. To take them one by one:
8. Marx refers to "constant capital," and in most contexts appears to think it is self-evident what he means by it. Nothing could be farther from the truth. At least three very distinct elements make up the non-labor portion of production, all part of what Marx considers "constant capital." The first is the technology, the machinery, often called "**plant and equipment.**" Here, Marx may in some locations deal with this issue, but mostly he doesn't. What, for Marx, constitutes the value of c understood as machinery, in his equation? The total value of all plant and equipment? That clearly makes no sense, what possible meaning could be derived from taking, say \$10 million worth of a new machine, and stuffing it into his equations for c ? He isn't spending that \$10 million in every production cycle. In fact, any rate, like Marx's rate of surplus value, must

have a time dimension to it, namely, the quantities of c , v and s expended per month, per year, or whatever. One would hardly cost out \$10 million the month it was purchased, and nothing for the next 5 years. Presumably, either the estimated depreciation cost, or more likely, an amortized cost calculation, will be actually used by the capitalist.

- But Marx defines c as the portion of the “value” of the machinery “transferred” to the product. If the value, for Marx, is equated to price of the machinery, then this concept might be basically the amortization cost of the machinery in the absence of any interest costs (normal amortization will cost the \$10 million plus total interest paid over the life of the loan). But even this is problematic, since the actual lifetime of a machine is not going to equal the estimated, or amortized lifetime. The machine could wear out prematurely years before it was paid for, be replaced years before it was paid for because a more efficient new machine was more cost effective even if the machine wasn’t fully amortized or depreciated, or it could last in production far longer than estimated. But for Marx, some portion of the “value” of that machinery is “transferred” to the commodity being produced, that is, subtracted from the value of the machinery, and added to the value of the commodity. But since the only way to calculate how much is transferred is by calculating backwards only at such time as the machine is replaced, dividing its total value by the number of commodities it helped build during its time in productive service, this value can vary widely and wildly. This exercise alone proves that the use of “ c ” in Marx’s expressions for value is, with respect to plant and equipment, a total absurdity, which invalidates every use Marx makes of this expression, above all the “rate of surplus value,” $s/(c+v)$.
- But it is unclear in any even whether this is actually how Marx is thinking, because when he discusses how c will grow to be many multiples of v in the more capital intensive industries, context suggests he is thinking of the total large and growing investment in capital-intensive plant and equipment, not the amount supposedly “transferred” to commodities in the production process.. Further, the very expression for Marx’s “organic composition of capital,” c/v , seems to imply the total capital stock (not some calculated fraction of its value transferred over some time frame) is what Marx intends here. Since Marx makes no differentiation between the “ c ” of c/v from “ c ” in $s/(c+v)$, if the organic composition of capital is about the total capital stock, then that is what the “ c ” in the rate of surplus value expression must also mean. Which, if so, makes this an absurd formula either way, whether it refers to total capital stock, or some amount “transferred” and “used up” in the production process.
- The very fact that Marx fails to indicate a time dimension to this formula— v is paid weekly, bi-weekly or monthly, most likely—what cycle is the “ c ” calculated on? That Marx doesn’t even appear to recognize that these questions need to be answered for his expression to have any real world meaning is further demonstration of how Marx’s “abstract” approach is hopelessly irrelevant to anything in the real world, and, frankly, ridiculous.
- But, problems with c don’t stop here. In most industries, a huge portion of the value of a factory’s output is represented by purchased inputs, mainly raw materials and semi-finished products. The contribution of the factory is merely the portion of value which is *added*. Marx in his calculations and examples, never appears to separate circulating “constant” capital from fixed constant capital. And if he were to account for it, how would he do it? His equations involving c , v and s account for the total value of a commodity, as if it were produced from scratch by a given quantity of capital. If circulating capital (call it c') must be deducted, then the

value added would be only $c - c' + v + s$, but the value of the commodity would include the c' . One more utterly muddled issue that Marx is clueless about.

- Finally, there is another portion of constant capital cost, called “overhead,” which doesn’t obey Marx’s strictures, in that it is not necessarily related to the quantity of production, since costs such as energy, water, back-office employees, and much of the cost of the “plant” (and other such costs), may have to be paid even if, say, business slows down and output falls. These components of costs will not decline in proportion, so what portion of them can be added for this component of “ c ” to Marx’s expressions.
 - In short, Marx’s c is actually a thicket of confusion, poor specification, and nonsense. That Marx simply used the simple variable “ c ” to represent all kinds of non-variable capital, and recognized, much less resolved, none of the above (and other) issues raised by the various kinds, simply further speaks to how little in touch with the world of real economics, or real capitalist production, Marx was.
9. v fares no better. Marx equates v to the wages of a worker, understood as the wages required to maintain him and his family to produce the next generation of workers. It’s a nice concept, but of no practical use, since there are so many variables affecting what this might translate into. A single man or woman would require a far smaller wage than a married father of 6 children, but Marx hardly proposes to pay the latter 8 times the wage of the former. And since people can survive on very different levels of income, how would one define the exact level that meets Marx’s criteria? Interesting theoretically, but of no practical value in estimating the value of labor to a capitalist employer.
- But worse, some of what a worker is paid represents surplus. The most obvious example is taxes, since Marx sees government as supported by surplus value (how else could it be supported, as it is not a capitalist earning from exploiting workers producing commodities). The portion of a worker’s wages paid in taxes is conceptually part of s , not v , in Marx’s terms. But he overlooks this little detail and considers the “ v ” calculated at the point of production to be a representation of v , evidently not realizing that some portion of it may go to taxes, which is part of s . And Marx also defines other aspects of society as also partaking of the surplus, areas of unproductive labor, so what the worker spends for some of the services he pays for would also end up supporting nonproductive workers, and hence would be part of s .
10. s is a mirror image of the issues with v . s is much more than merely what the capitalist retains from the exploitation of the worker. Marx knows, but seemingly forgets, that $c + v + s$ operates at the level of society to account for all value in the system, equivalent to GDP in Keynesian terms. In sum, none of these terms can be used the way Marx uses them, as a measure of value of a commodity, or in calculating an industry’s rate of surplus value or profit, given that they also must do double duty to account for the total value in the economy. None of his calculations and expressions using them, consequently, are of the slightest interest in describing capitalist economic activity.
11. And Marx got rate of profit wrong too, since the capitalist (and investor, such as shareholder via the stock market) looks for what is called Rate of Return on investment, which typically represents the cost of plant and equipment invested in, but does *not* include the cost of labor. So, rate of profit is p/C , where C is the total investment (say, the \$10 million for a new machine). It’s pretty basic: If I spend this much to increase production, what percentage of my investment will I receive every year, which is tantamount to interest, or yield. The cost of paying the

workers is covered by short-term loans and commercial paper, and paid off from sale of products, and is no part of the calculation of ROI. So, Marx here muffs another core capitalist concept.

12. A consequence of what we have established is that Marx's notion that the "organic composition of capital" defines labor-intensive industries as producing more surplus value than capital-intensive ones is just as wrong-headed as it seems at face value. The productivity of the average worker in a capital-intensive industry, in terms of value of output per hour, will be many times greater than that in a labor-intensive one. Marx's view is based on the assumption that labor-time translates as commensurable across all industries, so that surplus value is created at a constant ratio of labor time, so that more labor time (in a labor-intensive industry) means greater surplus value. In reality, the higher the productivity, the more value (defined as price) is produced.
13. And needless to say, there is no issue of a general, average rate of profit that violates the production of surplus value and is equalized across society. Empirically, there is no tendency for there to be an average rate of profit that most industries gravitate to—different industries have very different rates of profit, and this disparity can persist for decades. And there is no felt imperative on the part of capitalist firms to rush out of lower rate of profit industries into higher.
14. As for the "tendency of the rate of profit to fall," Marx's reason for adducing this is irrelevant, since higher technology increases output per hour per worker and does not by itself point to either a higher or a lower rate of profit—that would be more determined by the degree of competition in the sector which might drive prices down, reducing profit, or, say if under patent production, high prices might be obtained, raising the rate.
15. There are other "gaps" where Marx has conveniently avoided mentioning aspects of the life cycle of a commodity that have huge implications that impact Marx's presentation, such as:
16. Marx's examples and discussion always deal only with the final point of production of a consumer good, and operate as though the ultimate consumer bought the item directly from the factory, at the factory, because Marx always deals only with the value/price of a commodity as produced in a capitalist factory. But if the commodity at the point of production (the factory) has a value equal to $c+v+s$, how does Marx understand the price that that commodity sells for in a retail store, where there has been markup for at least one, and typically several instances of being transported, and at least one warehouse, on the way to a store, and then the store's markup, which amazingly can often be as much as 50% of the final sale cost. Final price would then be $c+v+s+D$, with D being some potentially relatively huge additional element of cost that is none of the other three. If all or part of D is, for Marx, conceptually part of c , v and/or s , then what becomes of his legion of examples that ignore the existence of this D ? They would no longer apply to a single factory. It should be noted that this is another instance where Marx appears to have been thinking of simple commodity production, where the producer sells his wares from his own establishment or local market, with no middlemen, and has "forgotten" that it needs to be rethought from top to bottom to accord with capitalist reality.
17. Transportation and warehousing, already mentioned, I believe Marx does discuss in some places in Vol. 3 of *Capital*, and he considers them productive, but I do not believe he makes sense of the muddle mentioned above in terms of his discussion of c , v and s . And if thought through, these functions would create an oddity and inconsistency in Marx's core conception, since the final prices of the same commodity would vary depending on length of distance

something had to be transported, mode of transport (slower modes typically cost less) and other factors unrelated to a commodity's "value" understood as "congealed labor." Was the commodity's value the labor congealed in its production only, or also in its transport and storage—neither option can be made consistent sense of.

18. I believe he also may, though it is ambiguous, have included the costs of retailing as "productive," but this is even harder to shoehorn into his basic theory of value, since how much a retailer marks up a price is highly arbitrary, varying by store, varying by marketing gimmicks like "sale" prices, varying by geographic location, etc.
19. Tabor makes a vital point at the beginning of his discussion, on "Marx's Method" that perhaps makes comprehensible these otherwise unexplainable lapses, namely, that Marx chose to build his theoretical architecture from the simplest models to ever more complex ones. (pp. 87-89) That is, he chose to "abstract" from a complex reality a very basic model to analyze first, with the intention of gradually reintroducing back in all of the factors initially left out. This has the ring of truth, where the entirety of Vol. 1 of *Capital* perhaps being limited, at least for the most part, to simple commodity production, Vol. 2 introducing circulating capital, and only really getting to fully capitalist production in Vol. 3, which he left incomplete. It would appear he had not even completed a very basic model of capitalist production, and had not yet faced the alterations needed to adapt the simple commodity production model for use in describing capitalism. And he certainly had not faced any of the questions I have raised above that don't fit his simple s, c and v construct. Tabor in fact told me privately that he's read one analyst of Marx who speculates that Marx never completed and published the second two volumes because he "lost interest," which would presumably have been because he realized that his entire method was flawed, in that he may have discovered that he has abstracted so much that when the aspects left out are added back in, they invalidate the original, abstracted, model. Tabor describes the issue thusly: "Whenever he reintroduces into his analysis factors he previously excluded, he always assumes, but never demonstrates, that those additional factors do not counteract the dynamics he has discerned through the use of his prior exclusion. In other words, he assumes that his partial models are consistent with one another." The result appears comparable to building a house without a blueprint of the finished house in mind, where, having laid the concrete foundation, one hadn't provided for where the plumbing pipes would go, hadn't allowed space for stairs between the floors, and any number of other omissions that the house can't be built without including back in.
20. Not strictly referring to my list of points in Marx's economic theory, but vital to seeing a fatal flaw in Marx's predictions for the direction of capitalism from yet another angle, Marx's entire presentation of his core theories does *not* seem to be in tune with his forecast that the proletariat would not only grow to encompass most of the work force, but that it would be immiserated, paid very little, which would be the goad for it to finally take power to end its economic misery. But if the proletariat is simultaneously the vast bulk of the population, and kept very poor, who, pray tell, is purchasing the ever expanding output of an ever more productive capitalist economy? Marx does not postulate or have even an inkling of a middle class such as we have seen develop in the last 100+ years, and clearly, if workers are paid in wages only a tiny fraction of the value that their labor power produces, and they constitute the vast majority of those who can purchase goods, the total value of society's production must vastly exceed the entire purchasing power of the proletariat.

- **This example alone collapses the entirety of Marx’s vaunted “economic” expertise into a pile of intellectual rubble.** In fact, even in Marx’s day, it had to be clear that the terribly oppressed workers in Britain’s textile mills whose plight Marx wrote so poignantly about, were *not* the consumers of their own output, but that consumers outside of the producing class had to exist to purchase them. Of course, Britain also exported a considerable portion of its output, including the portion sent to India where it bankrupted millions of “simple commodity producers” causing widespread misery there. This is one example of where Marx’s theory in one domain does *not* fit his theory in other domains.
21. This point deserves to be expanded on slightly, because it reveals another fatal flaw in his theory, a corollary of the point above. That is, that, contrary to what Marx predicted as a bedrock feature of his theory of socialism, capitalism actually *requires* that the capitalists over time *raise* the wages of their workers above the lowest value that they might be able to squeeze out of them precisely in order to create the consumers necessary to consume the expanding output. Henry Ford showed genius when he started paying his own workers \$5 a day, way more than any other capitalist paid theirs, and it worked like a charm, helping him sell his autos to his own workers, among others. Surely it is clear that, even though it often required strikes and organized labor and/or governmental laws to bring it about, perhaps despite what individual capitalists would have preferred to do, but that the capitalist *system* both *required* real wages of workers to rise, not fall as Marx predicted, and *was able* to do so. In fact, that is precisely why there has been so little tendency of the working class to consider revolting, because they see the hope of improvement in their lot, and only in the few occasions of economic crisis, primarily the 1930s worldwide, have any significant numbers toyed with Marxist ideology and looked toward “socialist revolution” as a possible option.

More could be said along the lines of the above, but I believe that what I have presented, much of which Tabor also presents, is more than sufficient to demonstrate **that there is simply nothing of interest in any of Marx’s strictly economic theories**, starting with the “law of value” and including his discussions of surplus value, c , v and s , the process of how a presumed “average rate of profit” gets established in every industry, and above all his “tendency of the rate of profit to fall.” Tabor told me that one economist and critic of Marx from the standpoint of standard economics today, characterizes Marx as “a secondary Ricardian economist,” and that sounds about right to me. He actually based himself very much on Ricardo, and attempted to extend Ricardo, and failed, so he would rightly have become a footnote to the early history of modern economics, in the same category of, say, the Frenchman Jean-Baptiste Say, who is best (and generally only) known for “Say’s Law” which said that supply creates its own demand—“Produce it, and they will buy it.” A curiosity who contributed nothing that persists today.

More Marx Flubs on Economics

Tabor also brings up a number of other excellent points in these two chapters on matters that relate to economics, but not to the specific items of Marx’s theory in my list above. I shall merely list them summarily, to indicate how they further erode any credibility due to Marx in the area of economic theory.

1. By his monomaniacal focus on strictly economic factors, Marx fails in accounting for the “development of the *entire* society...Marx...never proves that the economic dynamics determine the overall development of capitalist society.” (p. 91)

2. When Marx makes his dual prediction of unrestrained concentration and centralization of capital, and its takeover by the bourgeois state, he is making “two crucial but unstated assumptions...One is that the tendencies toward the concentration and centralization of capital will be carried out to their logical conclusions. The other is that the state acts in a manner totally consistent with the economic model.” (p. 91) Neither assumption, of course, was justified, and I must confess to never understanding a possible rationale for positing the second one, since nothing in Marx’s experience suggested that the state would expropriate the capitalists at some point. As to the first, it appears that Marx simply “looked out the window,” saw capital being concentrated, and assumed, with no thought or evaluation, that this could be extrapolated in a linear way to an end point where all capital is concentrated in the hands of a few capitalists, and/or the state.
3. Marx took a body of analysis, mainly from Smith and Ricardo, that shows how the “the system functions when the state does not intervene,” (p. 93) and “used his [models] to try to confirm his broader contention that economic dynamics determine the function of the state and the evolution of society as a whole. But, as we have seen, he can only do this by assuming it from the beginning.” (p. 93)
4. Marx and Engels wanted their opposition to capitalism and advocacy of socialism and communism to be seen as scientific, and “exploitation” as a scientific, not a moral, aspect of capitalist production. Tabor shows (pp. 107-113) first that while Marx may *seem* to prove that socialism is inevitable (that the forecast of its coming is therefore “scientific”), he does no such thing in reality, he merely “assumes it from the beginning.” And as for exploitation, Marx ends up implying that all appropriation of any part of the surplus value produced by a worker is exploitation, that “the entire product really belongs to those who work, the workers,” which would define the very mechanism by which capitalists expand the social capital (reinvest in more and better plant and equipment), which Marx views in a very positive light, as “exploitation.”
5. Tabor then analyzes the issue of “determinism,” noting that while the steady growth of technology and productive power has had a major impact on society, this influence is a far cry from being literally “the determining” factor that Marx claims for it. (pp. 113-123) Tabor notes that “Marx’s entire world view, including his analysis of capitalism and his program, is based on the combined propositions that social reality is determined and that material production is the determining factor, neither of which he proved. Instead, he assumed them and built the edifice of his world view on these assumptions.” I would say this strikes me as a fitting epitaph for Marx and his system.
6. Following a discussion of Marx’s view that capital dominates men that starts off his second chapter, Tabor then notes that “capital” cannot be limited, as Marx limits it, to physical, “material” objects such as machinery, and discusses what is now often called “intellectual capital,” understood to encompass the entire realm of science and applied science (technology) that is the cause of the ability to improve the productivity of capital. (pp. 135-142) (Elsewhere, Tabor also notes that the very organization of production can be a “productive force,” such as Henry Ford’s innovation of the assembly line where, by merely reorganizing the ordering of machines and positioning of workers, greatly more output could be achieved by the same workforce working no harder than before, or any number of subsequent management innovations (Deming’s teaching as adopted by post-war Japan are a dramatic case in point)).

7. Tabor then zeroes in on a point made above, that deserves restating, for its importance in undermining the essential ground of “Marxist economics,” namely, that “capital is in fact productive,” not just labor. (p. 142-43) By starting with the contention (never proved, never even attempted by Marx to be proved, simply assumed) that all value comes from labor, Marx attributes the incredible increase in productivity occasioned by ever-advancing technology, to labor itself, even when, say, replacement of an old machine by a new more advanced one operated by the same worker using the same skill-set as before, doubles that workers output per hour. To credit this improvement to the worker, rather than the machine, is rather obviously absurd. But to acknowledge this simple reality is to condemn virtually everything Marx ever wrote on economics to the trash heap of history.
8. Tabor next returns to the issue of exploitation in a fascinating section (pp. 143-45) with which I will conclude my discussion of this topic. Taking off from the previous point, Tabor notes that if capital as well as labor is productive, then the case that the worker is exploited simply because he doesn’t receive the full value that his labor supposedly created falls to the ground, because now, some portion of his increased productivity must be credited to the machinery, that the capitalist paid for and installed. Whether or not the worker is exploited then becomes an utterly indeterminate question of ascertaining what portion of his output can be credited to his labor, and what portion to the technology, and what portion to the labor of the capitalist who is responsible for creating the factory, installing the technology, etc. “In reality, no one knows the precise shares that all these factors contribute” Tabor notes, and probably never will. “And if this is so, the workers might not be exploited at all, but would merely be receiving their fair share of what is produced.” Indeed, such a possibility is real. And this utterly undermines Marx’s “scientific” contention that all workers are exploited merely by virtue of not being paid the equivalent of the total production of commodities that their labor is involved in manufacturing.
9. Tabor proceeds to back off from the implications of this statement, saying that exploitation can still be demonstrated, but not by the means that Marx uses (the “law of value”), but by history, showing that capitalists illegitimately at the dawn of capitalism benefitted from a process Marx calls “primitive accumulation” whereby “the peasants were forced from the land and the artisans dispossessed of their tools and machines, and were compelled to work for the capitalists.” It follows that if their possession of the means of production “is illegitimate by virtue of how they acquired them, then the appropriation of the entire economic surplus produced through the use of them is also illegitimate.” Tabor notes, however, that “this is a moral argument, not a scientific one.” I would argue that this is a very weak argument, as the processes that Tabor (following Marx) notes were specific to 18th century England, and that, once established, capitalism created an environment in which entrepreneurs who had or borrowed money could build factories and become capitalists, and that nothing they did to acquire ownership of their factory could be called illegitimate.
10. Tabor then makes a stronger argument for the existence of exploitation, which amounts to saying that if the workers do not receive a “fair share” of the wealth they create, and the ability to participate in the control over the means of production and the economy as a whole, and instead a tiny elite controls the social capital and appropriates “virtually the entirety of the social surplus and force(s) the vast majority of people to live in poverty and to work and otherwise act to further the ruling class’s narrow goals...”, a very strong case can be made “for the exploitative nature of the capitalist class and of the capitalist system as a whole.”

Ironically, Marx's actual economic theories never even purported to prove either that capitalism would eventually enter a terminal economic crisis or that it would evolve toward a state of ever greater concentration of capital. In an odd way they actually aren't even relevant to what constitutes the rest of Marxism. They are therefore irrelevant not only to any reality-based understanding of capitalism, they are irrelevant even to the rest of Marxism. Yet, trying to elaborate his understanding of capitalism was Marx's life work—85% of which he left unpublished at his death. And yet the notion has permeated the planet that Marx was above all a great economist, or at least an important one, and capitalist economists have been hammering away at "Marxist economics" for nearly a century. Hopefully, Tabor's book can find a broad circulation to dispel this mythology one and for all.