

Review of Ronald Tabor's *The Tyranny of Theory*

A Contribution to the Anarchist Critique of Marxism (Black Cat Press, Edmonton, Canada, 2013)

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Editors' Note: Peter Rush is a long-time activist and theorist. This article is the first part of a longer review of Tabor's book, stating Rush's main points. In the full version, an elaboration of these points with full argument follows. The full version is available on our website, www.utopianmag.com, and can be downloaded from there.

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 deep-ens, 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 bright-est” 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” Marx-

ism. 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 sustain-able 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 democ-racy. 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, role 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 wile 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 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 (1950), 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 intensivity, 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 re-clothing 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 pre-cisely 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 super-structure, 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 accept-ing 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 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 asquiescent 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 means 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.

[This concludes the summary portion of Rush’s review. Please go to www.utopianmag.com for the second part of this review, which examines the topics above in greater detail for those interested in Marx’s theories in more specific terms, and in Tabor’s and Rush’s discussion of these theories.—Editors.]

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Peter Rush
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