

Class Theory and History

Capitalism and Communism in
the USSR

**Stephen A. Resnick and
Richard D. Wolff**



**CLASS
THEORY
AND
HISTORY**

This page intentionally left blank

CLASS THEORY AND HISTORY

Capitalism and Communism
in the USSR

Stephen A. Resnick & Richard D. Wolff

First published 2002 by Routledge

Published 2013 by Routledge

2 Park Square, Milton Park, Abingdon, Oxon OX14 4RN

711 Third Avenue, New York, NY 10017, USA

Routledge is an imprint of the Taylor & Francis Group, an informa business

Copyright © 2002 by Routledge

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reprinted, reproduced, or utilized in any form or by any electronic, mechanical, or other means, now known or hereafter invented, including photocopying and recording, or in any information storage retrieval system, without permission in writing from the publishers.

Library of Congress Cataloging in-Publication Data

Resnick, Stephen A.

Class theory and history : capitalism and communism in the USSR / Stephen A. Resnick and Richard D. Wolff.

p. cm.

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN: 978-0-415-93317-9 (hbk)

ISBN: 978-0-415-93318-6 (pbk)

1. Social classes—Soviet Union. 2. Communism—Soviet Union. 3. Soviet Union—Social conditions. 4. Soviet Union—Social policy. 5. Communism. 6. Capitalism. I. Wolff, Richard D. II. Tide.

HN530.Z9 S6394 2002

305.5'0947—dc21

2001058940

Contents

Introduction	ix
--------------	----

Part 1: Communism

Chapter 1: A General Class Theory	3
The Classical Tradition	5
Our Basic Terms	8
Utopia and Communism: A Brief Digression	10
A Concrete Communism	13
Communist Class Structures: Centralization versus Decentralization	16
Culture, Politics, and Economics of Communism	20
Appendix: How Societies Differ—A Methodological Problem	42
Notes	44
Chapter 2: The Many Forms of Communism	51
Class and Property	52
Class and Markets	59
Class and Power	65
Classless Communism and Proletarian Dictatorship	71
Socialism and Communism	74
Notes	79

Part 2: State Capitalism

Chapter 3: A Class Theory of State Capitalism	85
Capitalisms and Exploitation	85
Justifying the Label “Capitalist”	88
Value Analysis for State Capitalism: A Technical Digression	92
Capitalisms, Communisms, and Socialisms	95
Notes	101

Chapter 4: Debates over State Capitalism	104
Conflicting Concepts	104
Power as the Theoretical Key	111
Weaknesses of Power Theories	119
Notes	126

Part 3: The Rise and Fall of the USSR

Chapter 5: Class Structures and Tensions before 1917	133
The Fundamentals: Feudal, Ancient, Capitalist, and Communist	133
The Complexities	143
The Contradictions and the Revolution	146
Notes	153
Chapter 6: Revolution, War Communism, and the Aftermath	156
Changing the State and Class Structures	158
Organizing the New Class Structures	164
A Class and Value Analysis of War Communism	169
Class Contradictions after War Communism	175
Notes	179
Chapter 7: Revolution, Class, and the Soviet Household	183
Bolshevik Class Blindness	185
New Economic Policy/Old Household Policy	192
Notes	202
Chapter 8: The New Economic Policies of the 1920s	206
Relations between Agriculture and Industry: An Overview	209
The NEP in Class and Value Terms	213
A History of NEP Contradictions	222
Adjusting State Industrial Capitalism	227
Revolution and NEP as a Transition to State Capitalism	229
Notes	231
Chapter 9: The Transformations of the 1930s	237
New Complexities and Contradictions	238
Communism in Agriculture	243
State Capitalism and Industry	257
The Industrial Workers	262

Stalinism and Class	268
Appendix A: The Value Equation for Collective Farms	273
Appendix B: The Value Crisis of Collective Farms	274
Notes	275
Chapter 10: Class Contradictions and the Collapse	281
Class Structures after World War Two	282
Postwar Culture	286
Postwar Politics	298
Postwar Economy	310
State, Enterprise, and Household Transitions	316
The Collapse	321
Appendix A: The Value Equation for Military Expenditures	325
Appendix B: The Value Equation for International Terms of Trade	326
Notes	326
References	335
Index	347

This page intentionally left blank

Introduction

This book offers a new interpretation of the USSR's birth, evolution, and death. We rely on the available literature in important ways. However, the "surplus" theory of class we find in Marx and use to analyze Soviet history differs sharply from the theories used by both its defenders and its critics. Thus, our focus on the multiple class structures that interacted across Soviet history enables us to extract and construct an argument not found in the available literature. That argument develops two especially controversial points: (1) that a particular kind of capitalist class structure comprised the actual class content of Soviet "socialism," and (2) that communism occurred only in very limited, subordinated realms of the Soviet economy and took the form of a communist kind of class structure. Our stress on class builds on earlier work (Resnick and Wolff 1986, 1987). Therefore, below, we only summarize the distinctive "surplus" concept of class that we deploy throughout. Applying our class analysis to communism, to a state form of capitalism, and to Soviet history continues the effort to insert class—in its particular "surplus" definition—into both popular and scholarly discourses on how societies work and especially on how they ought to be changed. Confrontations between capitalism and socialism/communism, globally as well as in the USSR, were a central part of twentieth-century history. In highlighting certain class dimensions of the lessons and legacies of those confrontations, we hope thereby to give this century's confrontations a more developed class consciousness.

Unlike other studies, this book begins (part 1) with a systematic, new kind of class analysis of what a communist economic system is and how it works. We elaborate a concept of communism, based on Marx, that defines it as a distinct, non-exploitative class structure. Whatever other kinds of communism Marx and others may have gestured toward (e.g., "classless" or "need-based"), the kind developed on the basis of Marx's class analysis is itself a distinct *communist class structure*.¹ Our goal in developing the concept of a communist class structure and exploring some of its variant forms is to pose and answer this question: Did the USSR ever establish any forms of a communist class structure, and if so, where, when, and what happened to them?

Part 2 offers a quite parallel analysis of a capitalist class structure and its variant forms. Among the latter, we single out the private and state forms. We explore the

possibilities and implications of social arrangements where state officials, rather than private individuals, appropriate the surpluses generated by laborers in productive enterprises. In distinguishing private from state capitalisms (in terms of how they organized surplus production and distribution), we construct a specification of state capitalism very different from most of those produced and applied to the USSR before. We devote chapter 4 to clarifying that difference. Our goal in developing a new concept of state capitalism is to pose and answer the question: Did the USSR establish a state capitalism, and if so, where, when, and with what consequences for the evolution of Soviet socialism?

The two opening sections of the book enable the much larger part 3 to argue that the USSR never attempted, let alone achieved, communism (not as a class structure and still less as classlessness) on a society-wide basis. Instead, the USSR represented, across its entire history, chiefly a state form of capitalism. The Bolshevik revolutionary state replaced the private form of capitalism that had prevailed in industry to 1917 with a state capitalism. As we shall show, Lenin said as much and also stated his hope to go further toward a nonexploitative class structure variously designated as socialism or communism. Stalin and subsequent leaderships abandoned that hope and rather redefined Soviet state capitalism as “socialism.” In their conception, socialism was a largely classless society led by a workers’ vanguard party that controlled the state.² That plus the state’s ownership and operation of industry made this society the opposite (and the transcendence) of capitalism. Their socialism was an early step on the road to the more fully developed future they called “communism,” where work would be based on ability and product distribution on need. Our goal instead is to show that Soviet socialism was not a step to communism but rather a state capitalist class structure.

From 1917 through the 1960s, Soviet state capitalism overcame several serious economic crises with remarkable successes. It mobilized its own resources as the world’s first claimed and sustained, albeit surrounded, socialism. It built a global support network based on opponents of capitalism everywhere. And its definition of its own state capitalism as socialism—and thus the negation of capitalism—became the standard conception for the twentieth century’s confrontation between the “two great systems” for most people on both sides. However, Soviet state capitalism eventually encountered a set of problems that proved insurmountable. As the economic downturn of the 1970s matured into a general social crisis in the 1980s, it spelled collapse. As we shall argue, the USSR had come full circle. Where the 1917 revolution had replaced private with state capitalism, the collapse of the 1980s served to accomplish the reverse shift. In such an oscillation, Russian capitalism displayed swings between private and state forms of capitalism that have likewise characterized capitalism in other countries (including the state capitalisms of the USSR’s allies).

The class analysis used in crafting this book’s arguments derives from the Marxian tradition, but not in the usual way, nor with the usual results. Marxism is now the richest, most developed repository of class-based critiques of capitalism. It became that over the last hundred years, as it spread from Europe to become a glob-

ally dispersed accumulation of many theoretical and practical efforts aimed at anti-capitalist class transformations. The Marxian tradition's deepening diversity has made it an indispensable analytic resource. From among its contesting theories, we deploy one—the kind of class analysis we have found most persuasive—to criticize the other theories used by the defenders and critics of the USSR over at least the last seventy years.

The key distinction between our kind of class analysis and theirs lies in the different concepts/definitions of class itself. Official Soviet—and most other—conceptions of class define it chiefly in terms of property and/or power. In the property definition, populations are divided into classes according to how much and what kind of property they do or do not own: the rich versus the poor and so on. In the power definition, populations divide into those who give versus those who take orders: the rulers versus the ruled. In short, these class analyses focus on the social distributions of property and/or power. In the classic economic formulation: capitalism represents *private* property and *private* market transactions, while socialism and communism represent *state* property and *state-planned* distributions. Here, socialism arrives once the state, *as the representative of the whole population*, has (1) taken property from its private owners and socialized it, and (2) abolished private market transactions (and hence the power of private transactors) and substituted state planning (state power) as the mechanism for distributing all resources and products.

In contrast, we define class differently. For us, class refers to how society organizes the production, appropriation, and distribution of surplus. Stated simply, this definition of class presumes that in all societies, one part of the population interacts with nature to produce a quantity of output. The total quantity of output always exceeds the portion that is returned to this part of the population (the workers) for its consumption and reproduction. This excess is the “surplus.” A second part of the population immediately receives this surplus from the producers. Finally, a third part of the population obtains distributions of portions of the surplus from the second part. Any society's class structure refers to how it organizes its population in relation to the surplus as (1) surplus producers, (2) surplus appropriators (and hence distributors), and/or (3) recipients of distributed shares of the surplus.³

As part 1 shows in considerable detail, a communist class structure is then one in which the producers and appropriators are the same people, whereas the class difference of capitalism is precisely that the appropriators are different people from the producers. The appropriators of the surplus *exploit* its producers—appropriate the latter's surplus product—insofar as and precisely because they are not also producers themselves. Part 2 then shows how a capitalist class structure can take either of two forms. In private capitalism, one or more persons with no official position in the state apparatus function as surplus appropriator/exploiter, whereas in state capitalism, the surplus appropriator/exploiter consists of one or more state officials.

The overwhelming preponderance of other analysts of socialism and communism, both advocates and opponents, have defined class in terms of who owns what property and who wields what power. The USSR was thus socialist or communist

in economic terms *because* it abolished private property and the market (private power), replacing them with collective property and state planning. Critics of the USSR have questioned its socialist or communist credentials chiefly on the same two grounds: it had not genuinely or sufficiently abolished private property and markets and/or it had not genuinely or sufficiently empowered the workers to control the state and production. Most analysts on all sides have ignored the social organization of the surplus. A small minority have paid it scant attention as something secondary to and derivative from the key issue of how property and power were distributed.

Our analysis, by contrast, foregrounds the social organization of surplus. We therefore investigate how the 1917 revolution changed the production, appropriation, and distribution of the surplus. After determining how property and power distributions were changed, for us the key question remains: How did those changes affect the social organization of surplus? The USSR's actual property and power changes do not render that question irrelevant, nor do they answer it. Changes in the social distribution of property and power, important in themselves, do not determine how the social organization of surplus has changed.

As this book shows, the Soviet revolution's alterations of property and power distributions did not abolish the basic organization of surplus—the way Soviet people were divided into producers and appropriators of surplus and recipients of shares of that surplus distributed to them by the appropriators. The USSR's organization of its industrial surplus—the priority focus of Soviet economic policy throughout its history—remained capitalist. The USSR did change the form of the capitalist class organization from a private to a state capitalism. For example, in place of private boards of directors appropriating the surplus produced by industrial workers, the USSR substituted state officials as the appropriators. The mass of industrial workers, as before 1917, produced a surplus appropriated by others and distributed by the latter to still others.

The insights yielded by a definition of class in surplus rather than in property and power terms are what this book seeks to demonstrate. We believe that this definition of class, a central contribution of Marx's work, was largely lost to the Marxian tradition after him. Reviving, developing, and applying it systematically generates the new interpretations of communism's distinctive class structure, of capitalism's oscillations between private and state forms, and of the USSR's rise and fall that this book presents.

The histories of Marxism and that of the USSR are deeply intertwined. This is hardly surprising given the Bolsheviks' Marxism and the subsequent leaderships' commitments to particular Marxian theories of history, economy, and their own policies. Those Marxian theories defined class in property and power terms. Soviet leaders powerfully and effectively urged just those definitions and theories on others. Remarkably, the critics of Soviet socialism—Marxian and non-Marxian—almost always shared the same definitions and theories, no matter how much the conclu-

sions they reached clashed with those of Soviet supporters. Since we reject their shared property and power definitions of class and deploy instead a surplus definition, our assessment of the capitalism/socialism confrontation and its embodiment in the history of the USSR is different from all of theirs. Thus, this book is unavoidably a critical engagement within Marxism as well as with the received histories of the USSR.

Given such objectives, this introduction should clarify what are *not* included among our goals. We are not historians and this is not, in the main, a work of empirical history. We appreciate and acknowledge the wealth of empirical history available to us from diverse perspectives.⁴ If our reconceptualization stimulates others to undertake close empirical research of Soviet and other histories, we will be gratified, but that research is not the task here.

Our purview is further limited by our focus on the USSR's class structures: their interactions with and influences upon the larger Soviet society. Hence we concentrate on internal aspects of Soviet history rather than the external forces that helped to shape it. No denigration of the latter's importance is intended. Similarly, we are only tangentially concerned with the qualities and quantities of outputs produced across Soviet history (matters of great importance to other theorists). Our focus is rather on the class dimensions, that is, on the relations among the Soviet people as they produced, appropriated, and participated in the distribution of surpluses. Of course, we are interested in property and power (alongside culture, religion, and many more aspects of Soviet society), but primarily in terms of their relationship to class in its surplus sense. Because class in that sense is missing from other accounts, we foreground it here. The point is to integrate the social organization of surplus into the analytic frameworks used henceforth to grasp the ongoing conflict between capitalism and socialism.⁵ We approach the particular history of the USSR as an important chapter in that conflict.

Nor are we primarily moralists (as were and are so many on all sides who have analyzed the USSR). Little attention is paid to the moralities entailed, for example, in Czarist policies before 1917 or in the practices of "Nepmen" and kulak farmers in the 1920s or in the policies of the USSR's Cold War enemies. Likewise, we try to keep the approach analytical rather than moral when considering abandonment in the 1920s of early Bolshevik commitments to socialized housework or the collectivization of agriculture in the 1930s or the privileging of the bureaucracies of state and party. Yet a moral concern does animate the book. The realization that a capitalist class structure survived and thrived in the modern society ostensibly most committed to its abolition touched our sensibilities and fueled our analysis. Provoked by the USSR's failure to overcome capitalism—and aided by important steps a few other Marxists took to begin to explain this failure—we believed that a basic and radical reconceptualization was needed.⁶ For present and future social movements aimed at advancing human society beyond capitalism, this book presents some basic lessons, both theoretical and practical, drawn from the Soviet experience.

Notes

1. We have shown elsewhere how Marx's work enables the specification of a distinctly communist class structure (Resnick and Wolff 1988). We believe that such a communist class structure is not only implied by Marx's economics, but is also the appropriate model for what any possible communism in the USSR could have exemplified. It is clear to us that the kind of communism prefigured in the notions of classlessness (ability-based work systems and need-based distribution systems) were never germane descriptions of what actually happened in the USSR. Indeed, its leaders typically recognized this by referring to the Soviet actuality as socialism and its ultimate, future goal as communism. In contrast, communism conceived as a class structure in which the same people who produce the surplus are also its collective appropriators, differentiates it usefully from all exploitative class structures to which it is an alternative. Thus, for example, in capitalist, feudal, and slave class structures, the persons producing the surplus are not the same as those who appropriate and distribute it. Part I of this book elaborates and systematizes the definition of such a communist class structure.
2. Stalin's and his successors' use of "classless" underscores the difference between their concept of class (which they derive from Marx) and the class concept informing this book. In their definition, class is a matter of property ownership, specifically property in means of production. A class system is one in which some people own more than others. Thus the USSR's leaderships eventually decided that since they had socialized property—i.e., made it all (or nearly all) into collective property—they had thereby abolished classes. This view contrasts starkly with our approach in which any redistribution of property still leaves open the issue of whether and how the production, appropriation, and distribution of surplus have changed. For example, if the property collectivization leaves some groups in the society as producers and others as appropriators, our class analysis rejects any notion—such as that prevalent in the USSR—that classes were abolished.
3. Marx describes these three parts for capitalism as follows: "[W]e regard the capitalist: 1. as the person who immediately appropriates the whole surplus-value created; 2. as the distributor of that surplus-value created between himself, the moneyed capitalist, and the proprietor of the soil" (1969, 108).
4. This book makes special use of historians of the USSR whose interests and theoretical sensitivities provided us with material closely related to our class analytical interests. Many of these were Marxian, such as Dobb, Carr, and Baykov; some were not, such as Nove. While new data and literature have since become available—some of which we cite—the alternative theoretical frameworks applied to Soviet history have not changed much for quite some time. Thus our selection among secondary sources was governed more by historians' substantive approaches than by their dates of publication.
5. We seek to persuade both those who ignore all concepts of class and those who use other class concepts yet ignore or marginalize the surplus notion of class.
6. Throughout the text, we cite many Marxists (as also many non-Marxists) whose work has been useful in various ways to construct our argument. However, we acknowledge a special debt to one writer, Charles Bettelheim (1976b, 1978). His different kind of class analysis (defining class in power rather than surplus terms) informed a remarkable understanding of the USSR and what he saw as its failures to build a communist economy and society. What we learned from him clarified why and how we had to proceed differently.

PART 1



Communism

This page intentionally left blank

CHAPTER 1

A General Class Theory

This chapter presents what neither Marx nor Engels ever provided: a systematic, nondeterministic class analysis of communist societies. To be clear, Marx, Engels, and others within and without the Marxian tradition did produce diverse conceptualizations of communism, and they still do.¹ Indeed, the idea of communism as the “good life” existed for centuries prior to the works of Marx and Engels. Consider, for example, the believers for whom true Christianity arrived only when individuals renounced their worldly property and affirmed the distribution of material wealth to others on the basis of their needs.² Closer but still before Marx and Engels, the “utopian socialists” argued for establishing communal societies ruled by reason and good will in contrast to the anarchy and greed they saw in the ruthless capitalism of their day.³

We hold that all theorizations of communism so far have lacked two key qualities. First, no systematically nondeterminist (i.e., antiessentialist) perspective has been applied to define and elaborate a concept of communism. Secondly, no class perspective has been applied where class refers to the social organization of surplus: how it is produced, appropriated, and distributed in a distinctively communist way. Such a nondeterminist, class conceptualization of communism was missing not only from theorizations but also from the socialist and communist movements associated with them.

In part 1 of this book, in order to focus on developing the basic class analysis, we treat socialism and communism as roughly synonymous. However, toward the end of chapter 2 we will show how that class analysis enables and implies a new understanding of the profound differences between socialism and communism and the consequences of those differences. Parts 2 and 3 develop still further the differences between communism and socialism.

Among non-Marxist accounts of communism, the absence of class analysis—in

its surplus labor definition—is not surprising. However, it is initially puzzling within Marxian conceptualizations since they usually do refer to class. But closer inspection shows that Marxism includes multiple, different notions of class and hence of class analysis. For us, one of the most significant contributions of Marx was conceptualizing class as the production, appropriation, and distribution of surplus within society (Resnick and Wolff 1987, ch. 3). Yet this conceptualization has never yet been used to theorize that particular society—communism—that Marxists themselves have preferred. The existing Marxian treatments of communism, as we show below, used exclusively other, different concepts of class, those defined in terms of property and power rather than surplus. Thus they reached conclusions about communism, socialism, and the history of the USSR radically different from the conclusions of this book.

We believe that the absences of the surplus labor notion of class and of non-determinist reasoning within most Marxian conceptualizations of socialism and communism have imposed profound costs on the diverse movements favoring them over the last century. Those absences helped to thwart the revolutionary potential of the regimes these movements sometimes created: a possible transition from a capitalist to a communist class structure. Those absences contributed, as we show in part 3 below, to the widespread belief that the Bolshevik revolution had established either communism or at least a socialist transition to communism. We do not share that belief, since we do not agree with the conceptualizations of class upon which it depends. We reject both the criticisms that find Soviet socialism and communism to have “failed” and the defenses that affirm that socialism or communism “succeeded” in the USSR. For us, the communist or socialist alternative to capitalism never prevailed there.

In this and the following chapters, we offer a definition and theorization of communism and socialism that differs radically from those prevailing among both their proponents and detractors. This different theory yields a correspondingly different way to interpret events occurring within regimes claiming to have produced socialism or communism. We shall illustrate this difference by focusing on what most have considered to be the preeminent socialist/communist revolution in the twentieth century—that which occurred within the USSR.

The first section of this chapter presents the basic terms of our theory of communism with some attention to how it differs from other major theories, especially the traditional or classical Marxian view. Despite our rejection of the latter’s typically deterministic rendition of capitalism (in which inner economic laws of motion inevitably entail the revolutionary action of the proletariat), we nonetheless respond to that discourse in a specific way. Our analytical focus on class, conceived as the appropriation and distribution of surplus labor, and our commitment to overdetermination (rather than a determinist approach), comprise our responses to the different analytical approaches that have prevailed within the complex, contested history of Marxism (Resnick and Wolff 1987, ch. 1 and 2).

The Classical Tradition

Before we use our concepts of class and overdetermination to construct a new Marxian view of communism, it will be useful to summarize traditional notions of socialism and communism, especially on the Left. Common to most are two characteristics: collectivity and classlessness (Bernstein 1961; Bettelheim 1976b, 1978; Bottomore 1990; Bukharin and Preobrazhensky 1969; Dobb 1966; Engels 1969a; Kautsky 1971; Lenin 1969; Marx and Engels 1978; Muqiao 1981; Preobrazhensky 1966; Sweezy and Bettelheim 1971, 1985a, 1985b; Tugan-Baranowsky 1966). *Collectivity* characterizes a society devoted to fostering its social nature more than its private. For example, socialist/communist societies collectively establish and secure communal rather than private rights of ownership to property, above all to the means of production. They promote conditions of collective intervention in the economy. Collective planning replaces individuals' private-market decisions in regard to the distribution of resources—means of production and labor power—and of produced wealth. Culturally, there is the hegemony of a collective over a private, individualistic consciousness in regard to notions of equity, fairness, and the “good life” for all citizens. Politically, true democracy arrives, meaning that power rests securely in the collective hands of the people.

Classlessness, in the traditional view, characterizes a society that has eliminated its class divisions *understood in terms of inequalities in the distribution of property and/or of political power*. Placing (1) collective rights of ownership in the hands of those whose work yields the wealth of society and (2) effective power in the democratic collectivity of citizens removes the ultimate causes—unequal property and power distributions—of class divisions.

In the language of classical Marxism, posed most clearly in Engels's *Socialism: Scientific and Utopian* and Kautsky's *Class Struggle*, the essence of a socialist society becomes its achievement of a fully collectivist power both over the means of production (including labor power) and the distribution of wealth.⁴ The classical authors tended either to equate socialism and communism or to see the former as a way station to the latter. In this century socialism and communism became concepts and labels distinguishing often warring factions among the critics of capitalism—although the basic foci on collectivity and classlessness remained common to all. By contrast, our class analysis changes and therefore differentiates the two terms in a new way.

In the traditional view, the socialist/communist revolution, by transforming private to fully social (collective) ownership, eliminates capitalism. Capitalism's privateness, in this view, had become a fetter on human history. While it had developed great new production techniques (socializing masses of people in great factory and office conglomerations), it could not realize their potential to generate wealth. The reason was private ownership and its attendant markets, profit motives, and so forth. To secure their private profits and unequal distributions of wealth, income,

and political power, the capitalists systematically blocked the full utilization of the very means/forces of production they had developed.

For these classical writers, the socialist/communist revolution thus restores a social harmony (correspondence) between the forces of production (technology) and the relations of production (property distribution). That restoration, a new socialist/communist economy, then determines its superstructure of communist politics and culture. The new economy, having socialized productive property, permits the forces of production to renew their march forward, thereby ushering in an age of plenty. The classical theorists conclude, in direct contrast to Adam Smith's alternative utopian vision, that it is socialism/communism, and not capitalism, that finally will liberate human society from poverty and its social consequences.

For Lenin (1969), this revolution enables as well the withering away, but not yet the complete disappearance, of the state. For although its singular cause—class division—has been eliminated (because the private ownership of the means of production was abolished), “bourgeois rights” still remain. Lenin meant that in the first stage of postcapitalist society, the distribution of wealth would depend on the labor performed by each worker. Only later could the basis of distribution become individual needs—the definition of a specifically communist society. In the initial post-capitalist “first phase of communist society,” a fundamental inequality remains in society: despite radically different individual needs, rewards nonetheless depend on individual labor performed. Since this distribution is not based on needs, it breeds tension and conflict in all societies where it occurs. Managing these creates the need for a transitional state.

True communism or the “higher phase of communist society” awaits, for Lenin, the unfolding of socialism, defined as the lower phase. Socialism's historic role is to enable the pouring forth of vast wealth from the no-longer-constrained socialized forces of production and to create a new human being finally liberated from the alienation bred by capitalism. Only when the higher phase has been achieved, when the constraints of capitalist poverty and capitalist human nature are finally broken, will there be the elimination of the underlying need (cause) of a state. Only then can Marx's famous aphorism apply and be extended from the economic to include also the political and cultural aspects of social life: “from each according to ability, to each according to need.”

The classical tradition's view of communism has received its challenges over the years. Perhaps the most important, from a leading Marxist theorist at the beginning of this century, was Eduard Bernstein's *Evolutionary Socialism* (1961). His emphasis shifted from property distribution (the relation of haves to have-nots) to power distribution (the relation of rulers to ruled). The central issue became democracy.⁵ Whether or not aware of Bernstein's arguments, many subsequent writers conceived communism to be a society that embodied full equalization of power, i.e., “true” economic, political, and cultural democracy for its citizens. Power largely displaced property in definitions of class and hence of the difference between capitalism and communism.

Although most writers affirmed that collectivity and classlessness defined a communist society, their different interpretations of Marx, Engels, Kautsky, Bernstein, Lenin, and others produced different conceptions of communism/socialism. Some emphasized property distributions while others stressed matters of politics and democracy. These differences often coexisted within the same groups, parties, and individuals, stimulating debates in the growing left movements. Sometimes they erupted into fierce oppositions and played central roles in splits within the movements.

For example, most leftists defined communism in terms of more or less collectivized ownership of the rights to the means of production *and* more or less democracy. To these notions of collectivity, others (e.g., Engels 1969a; Kautsky 1971) added the collectively planned (rather than market) distribution of resources and products. For them, removing private ownership of the means of production removed the need for as well as the desirability of private markets as means of distribution.

Replacing markets by collective distributions managed by state agencies became a definitive signature of socialism/communism over capitalism. Yet other formulations (e.g., Lenin 1969; Sweezy and Bettelheim 1971) moved this discussion in somewhat different directions. For them the key issue was whether effective state power really (and not just formally) lay in the collective hands of workers. Defined as true democracy, that became *the* criterion of genuine socialism as a transition to communism. In their view, much more important than collective ownership of the means of production and collective mechanisms of distributing output, the essential issue concerned who within the collective possessed effective power (over wealth, the state bureaucracy, workers, cultural life, and so on).

Increasingly, across the twentieth century, the terms of debate over socialism and communism shifted. While there was a continuing focus on property and production, the emphasis increasingly settled on power and democracy. These became the more fundamental, focal criteria of whether or not a society was socialist/communist.

Interestingly, the shift to concern with how power is distributed in society was echoed in non-Marxian accounts of socialism and communism. For example, Nove (1983) proposes a “feasible socialism” that prioritizes the distribution of power in society and its consequences.⁶ His socialism combines workers’ collectivized rights to the means of production with a competitive market economy. The bad sides of markets (business cycles and unequal income distributions) would be offset by state planning and collectivized property ownership. These two kinds of collective interventions represent what is good about socialism. Socialism’s bad sides (power concentrated in an omniscient state’s planning board) would be swept away by decentralizing power into the individual hands of market-related buyers and sellers. Nove’s notion of socialism—the “good life”—offers Engels’s collectivized property ownership, but now tempered by Bernstein’s full economic democracy and Smith’s competitive markets.

Our Basic Terms

We differ with all these writers from whom we have learned much. Because we understand Marx's social theory—and especially his class analytics—differently, we produce a different notion of socialism and communism. The notion of class we glean from Marx is neither defined as nor derived from unequal distributions of property or power. Such factors, although interactive with any society's class structure, are nonetheless fundamentally different from it.

By class we mean, in the first place, a process in society where individuals perform labor above and beyond ("surplus" to) that which society deems necessary for their reproduction as laborers (Resnick and Wolff 1987, ch. 3). In simplest terms, one part of the population does such necessary and surplus labor and receives back the fruits of the necessary labor for their own reproduction. These laborers deliver the fruits of their surplus labor—the "surplus"—to another part of the population that then distributes it to still another part. A class analysis in this sense *classifies* individuals in a society in terms of their relationship to this surplus. It asks who performs the necessary plus surplus labor, how is this socially organized, and how does the organization of the surplus impact the larger society? Secondly, a class analysis asks who first receives the surplus from the laborers, to whom do these receivers then distribute it, for what purposes, and how do these distributions affect the larger society? The analysis is particularly concerned with whether it is the same or different groups of people who respectively perform, appropriate, and/or receive distributions of the surplus. It is likewise interested in exploring the interdependence among these groups and how multiple, different organizations of the surplus may coexist within a society. Finally, after specifying a society's arrangements for producing, appropriating, and distributing surplus—i.e., its class structures—this kind of analysis explores how nonclass processes of society (political, cultural, and so on) interact with the class processes in a mutually constitutive way.

This concept of class defined in surplus labor terms is very different from the other concepts that have prevailed in discussions of socialism and communism to date. As we noted, in such discussions class has typically meant a grouping of individuals within a community according to the property they own or the power they wield.⁷ Our writings have emphasized the theoretical and political consequences that flow from these alternative definitions of class (Resnick and Wolff 1986, 1987). In our judgment, many class analyses have missed completely the unique surplus labor notion of class offered by Marx and thus could not appreciate how alternative systems of surplus labor shape society differently. Too many agendas for social change have excluded the transformation of how surplus labor is produced, appropriated, and distributed. The history of the USSR exemplifies the disastrous consequences of such exclusions for the project of moving beyond capitalism.

The second key difference between our approach and those prevailing in the debates over capitalism, socialism, and communism concerns the issue of deter-

minism. As argued elsewhere, we have found persuasive a consistent, if minority, perspective within Marxism (associated especially with Lukacs, Gramsci, and Althusser) that rejects determinism (Resnick and Wolff 1987, ch. 2). Thus, one aspect of society is not the ultimate determinant of the others. A superstructure of politics and culture is not reducible to being the effect of an economic base.

The goal of social analysis is not to find the key, determinant cause or causes that “explain” social structures or historical change. By contrast, in our view, most discussions of communism and the USSR have been determinist.

We affirm instead the Marxian notion of “overdetermination”: the proposition that all aspects of society condition and shape one another. Hence it is not possible to reduce society or history to the determinant effect of some one or a subset of its constituent aspects. What theory or explanation does—all it can do or has ever done—is to select and draw attention to some aspects and some relationships of whatever object it scrutinizes. That object’s overdetermined complexity and ceaseless change place a comprehensive grasp beyond any theory’s reach. All theories and explanations remain partial, open to ceaseless addition, contestation, and change. This is because, to be intelligible, they can focus on only a few aspects. They necessarily leave out most of the other aspects.

Thus, our analysis, which is focused on class in terms of surplus labor, is distinguished by *not* asserting that class is what determined the rise and fall of the USSR. Ours is not a determinist class analysis intended to confront alternative analyses arguing that what determined Soviet history was politics, bureaucracy, technical productivity, or any other essentialized cause. Instead, we produce a class analysis of communism and the USSR to draw attention to aspects that other analyses overlooked and to relationships that they missed.

Even those who did use a concept of class in their studies of communism and its relation to the USSR rarely if ever used class defined in surplus terms used here (Dobb 1966; Preobrazhensky 1966; Sweezy and Bettelheim 1971; Bettelheim 1976b, 1978; Muqiao 1981; Mandel 1985). For them, class refers to groups of people who wield unequally and unfairly distributed power and/or property. For the property theorists of class, capitalism disappears and classlessness arrives once productive property is fully socialized. For the power theorists, the same result depends instead on the achievement of a fully egalitarian, democratic distribution of power. Communism and socialism are, then, societies that have abolished or are abolishing power and/or property elites.

This chapter offers a surplus labor-based definition of socialism and communism. A communist class structure exists if and when the people who collectively produce a surplus are likewise and identically the people who collectively receive and distribute it. As we shall argue, this is the relevant concept of communism for assessing efforts over the last century to establish communist societies. This concept of communism likewise serves well to demarcate it from the other major social organizations of surplus (capitalist, feudal, slave, and individual self-employment).

Finally, this concept of communism is especially well suited to craft a systematic differentiation of socialism from communism and to organize the economic history of the USSR as the interaction of different, coexisting class structures presented in part 3 below.

Our theorization of specifically communist class structures (in terms of surplus labor) will show that they can coexist with a vast range of different political, cultural, and economic arrangements—a vast range of nonclass processes. That is, communist class structures interact with the other nonclass aspects of the societies in which they exist. They cannot and do not alone determine them. Hence societies with communist class structures may exhibit varying political forms ranging from those that are fully democratic in nature to those that are clearly despotic. They may display property ownerships that range from the fully collective to the very private. They also may exhibit radically different ways of distributing resources and wealth, from full scale central planning to private markets, including markets in labor power and means of production. Chapter 2 explores these forms in some detail.

We refer to property, markets, planning, power, politics, and culture in general as processes that together comprise a communist society's nonclass structure. The term *communism* thus refers to a communist class structure interacting with the nonclass structure that comprises its social context. The interaction between the class and nonclass structures changes both in a continual process of development. It thus follows that there are countless forms of communism corresponding to all the possible ways in which nonclass structures can affect a communist class structure with which they interact. Indeed, it is also possible that the interaction will go further and produce a transition from a communist to a different class structure. The important methodological issues raised by the problem of conceiving of social structures and changes in this way are treated in the appendix to this chapter. We will use this approach to specify what communist and noncommunist class structures existed in the USSR and how they interacted and evolved across its history. That will provide the basis for our conclusions, explaining why communism never came to Soviet industry, why its place in Soviet agriculture was so limited, and why Soviet socialism was actually a state form of capitalism.

Utopia and Communism: A Brief Digression

Debates about communism have always proceeded in the shadow of a certain utopian sense of the word. Utopia here refers generally to images of societies that are striving to produce or have arrived at a certain fullness and perfection of community. Utopia can be simply "the desire for a better way of being" (Levitas 1990, 8) or "the assumption that there is nothing in man, nature or society that cannot be so ordered as to bring about a more or less permanent state of material plenty, social harmony and individual fulfillment" (Kumar 1991, 29).

Before and after the Soviet revolution, communism meant for many a society in which inequality and injustice generally were eradicated (with "socialism" perhaps a society in transition thereto). Communism often embodied utopian longings for

societies that did more than just equally distribute wealth and power. Inequalities of gender, race, and ethnicity would likewise be gone. Even the more elusive cultural forms of inequality and injustice would be eradicated by a communism that made tolerance, nurturance, honesty, artistry, openness, and love the dominant features of interpersonal relations.

Many Bolsheviks inside the USSR, as well as sympathizers outside, understood Soviet policies and actions at least partially in utopian terms. Their goal of communism meant quite literally a completely just, democratic, and personally free social order in which every individual achieved full self-realization in the context of a loving community. The formulation that sometimes captured these longings was the equation of communism to “classlessness” (Resnick and Wolff 1988). While for some, utopian formulations served merely as lofty rationales for narrowly self-interested policies, for others honest utopian longings were central to their commitments to Soviet policies. Of course, Bolsheviks and other radical activists were hardly unique in mixing utopian longings into their practically oriented discussions and projects. Liberals, conservatives, and reactionaries likewise have always had their utopian images of just societies. They too justified their policies, more or less honestly, in terms of moving society closer to their utopian images.⁸

We respect the utopian longings within social analyses and programs. Indeed, we share many of those on the Left. However, we also differ from them in two ways. First, we wish to *add* a notion of class conceived as the social process of producing and distributing surplus labor. That notion has largely been missing in the utopian as well as the more practically oriented understandings of communism.⁹ Theorizations of utopia rarely include direct, explicit attention to reorganizing the production and distribution of surplus labor in communist rather than other kinds of social arrangements. Instead, they focus on and essentialize one or another nonclass process as defining utopia and therefore serving as the goal for utopians. For many, Sir Thomas More’s *Utopia* provides the canonical definition. His utopia would banish inequalities by abolishing private property (1964, 53). It would reorganize labor time to produce abundant wealth (chiefly by making a larger proportion of the population do labor): “if you consider how large a part of the population in other countries exists without working” (71). Finally, when wealth is abundant and “everything belongs to everybody” (146), wealth can be distributed according to “what he and his require and, without money or any kind of compensation, carries off what he seeks” (77).

Taken together, the reorganization of property ownership, labor time, and wealth distribution define the utopian economic structure for More. Missing is any notion of how utopia would reorganize the production, appropriation, and distribution of the surplus (not surprising in a book published 350 years before Marx).¹⁰ What remains puzzling, however, is why after Marx’s contribution so many utopian theorizations—and particularly those interested in connecting notions of utopia to communism—continue to ignore the social organization of the surplus.¹¹ Beyond our desire to add class to utopian thought, we differ from most utopian discourses in a second way derived from our commitment to overdetermination. Thus we do not

fasten on any one aspect of a communist society (utopian or otherwise) in the belief that achieving it will necessarily or automatically achieve all the other aspects. Thus, achieving a collective ownership of wealth does not guarantee achieving, for example, either a democratic political system or a communist class structure. Likewise, achieving the latter does not guarantee or entail the former.

From the standpoint of overdetermination, utopians cannot rely on some socially determinant essence: change it and all the rest of the utopian and/or communist vision will necessarily fall into place. Utopians have to struggle for all the dimensions of the society they desire; achieving any subset does not guarantee achieving the rest.

On the one hand, our understanding broadens the utopian communist vision by adding a class-as-surplus-labor perspective ignored or missed heretofore. Yet it also detracts, because it recognizes communist forms that could include features far removed from utopian longings. If economic, political, and cultural inequalities and injustices could characterize variant forms of communism, why should left theoreticians and activists struggle for a communist future? Might theoretical and political energies be better spent on reforming rather than overthrowing capitalism? How should we choose between a more equal, more democratic capitalism and a less equal, less democratic communism?

We offer no facile answers to these real concerns. For us, communist instead of exploitative class structures comprise a worthy goal in themselves. This is a moral, ethical, and even aesthetic judgment. The same holds for the other, nonclass elements of our utopian vision. Both the class and nonclass elements of a communist utopia have to be won and sustained since neither guarantees the other; at the same time, their coexistence is much more desirable than either without the other.

Our theoretical commitment to overdetermination has still further implications for how we think about the relation of communism and utopia. If each part of society is overdetermined by all the other parts that push and pull it in all manner of directions, that influence it this way and that, that partly combine to sustain it and partly to disintegrate it, then each part embodies all these diverse, contesting, sustaining-yet-also-undermining determinations. In short, the class and nonclass parts of any society and the relation between them are *contradictory* (Resnick and Wolff 1987, 5–7). The Marxian theory we deploy thus finds contradictions in all societies, not only in capitalism. Communism in all its forms will, we presume, likewise display its distinctive contradictions. We cannot imagine a communism, however utopian, without its contradictions.¹² Even a utopian communism would contain contradictions within and between its class and nonclass dimensions. It would change as these contradictions have their effects including all sorts of struggles over change.

The quest for utopian community that has haunted and enticed human societies for millennia has not always been the same quest. Utopias, as mental constructs of living persons, are likewise overdetermined, hence contradictory, and hence always changing. Utopian visions help to change societies just as social changes helped to

change utopian visions. Their dialectical interplay has always changed them both. Our argument here, then, reacts to recent social changes by yet again altering the meanings and social impacts of communism and utopia.

The history of the USSR, like the histories of many other movements with strong utopian components, represents bold experiments to alter fundamentally the way property is owned and controlled, goods are produced and distributed, cultural life is experienced, and power is wielded. We have little quarrel and much agreement with most of the utopian aims. While the USSR in particular did take certain initial steps after 1917 in the direction of some utopian aspects of communism—radically diminishing inequalities of wealth, power, and cultural freedom—it did not, with rare exception, take steps in creating communist class structures. We shall argue that the failure to create communist class structures and the resultant lapse into state capitalist structures instead contributed to the reversal of even those steps toward utopia that were taken initially. The absence of communist class structures helped to undermine, in the Soviet case, the utopian dimensions of the Bolshevik movement and revolution and many of the utopian impulses beneath them. The costs of conceptual blindness toward the organization of surplus labor proved extremely heavy.

A Concrete Communism

Marx's analysis of capitalism in *Capital* concentrated on the particular kind of capitalism dominant in his day and in the minds of his readers. While acknowledging that other kinds and forms of capitalism could and did exist, he devoted secondary attention to them. We propose likewise to begin our analysis of communism in this chapter by concentrating on the particular kind that strikes us as closest to most reader's notions about the term. However, we will be more interested in the variant forms of communism—tangentially in this chapter and then more systematically in chapter 2.

The communism we begin with thus exhibits two familiar qualities widely associated with communism: (a) state-managed distribution of resources and products, as the antithesis of market-allocated resources and wealth, and (b) collectivized as opposed to private ownership of means of production. In other words, such a communism has organized property ownership and the distribution of resources and products in these particular ways. The question for us, then, is to ask how it has organized the production, appropriation, and distribution of its surplus.

To answer this question, we turn first to the already developed literature on the basic alternative ways to organize the surplus (Resnick and Wolff 1987, ch. 3). These are the capitalist, feudal, slave, ancient, and communist class structures: the five major kinds of class structure recognized and analyzed in the Marxian tradition. Each class structure is a distinctive combination of a unique fundamental class process (producing and appropriating surplus labor) and its subsumed class process (distributing the appropriated surplus). Of particular importance to Marx and to us, the feudal, slave, and capitalist class structures exhibit exploitation. This is defined

as a fundamental class process (by definition entailed by certain class structures) in which the performers of surplus labor are not also the appropriators and distributors of the surplus. Serfs, slaves, and proletarians produce surpluses appropriated and distributed not by themselves but rather by feudal lords, slave masters, and capitalists. By contrast, the ancient class structure—in which an individual produces, appropriates, and distributes his/her own surplus individually—while not exploitative by definition is also not collective, communal, or communitarian in the way central to Marx's communist project. In each class structure, the appropriator generally distributes the surplus so as to reproduce that class structure.

A communist *fundamental* class process, as we noted earlier, is defined as one in which the same individuals who perform the surplus labor collectively also receive it collectively. As Marx wrote: "they [the workers] *themselves* appropriate this surplus either of the product or of the labor" (Marx 1971, 255, Marx's emphasis). A communist *subsumed* class process is one in which these collective receivers of surplus labor also collectively distribute it. They do so to pay for the performance of non-class processes (political, cultural, and so on) deemed necessary for the existence of the communist fundamental class process.¹³ These might include surplus distributions to lawyers, teachers, entertainers, security personnel, and others to provide the specific services that comprise the conditions of a communist class structure.

Communist appropriation differs in general from noncommunist appropriations in that (1) the producers are also the appropriators of their surplus, and (2) the appropriation is done collectively, not individually. Thus, in a capitalist class structure, for example, different individuals typically occupy the two fundamental class positions: one group performs the surplus labor while a different group appropriates the surplus.¹⁴ In the class structure of individual self-employment, while the same person is both the producer and receiver of surplus, the appropriation is individual, not collective. It is thereby differentiated from communism which alone has both collective appropriation and an identity between the collectivities of producers and appropriators.

Corporate kinds of capitalism actually entail a kind of collective rather than individual appropriation (notwithstanding the individualism celebrated by most capitalist societies). A collectivity of individuals, namely the corporation's board of directors, appropriates surplus labor. However, this capitalist collectivity is *not* identical to the collectivity that would appropriate in a communist class structure; it is not the *same* collectivity as that which produces the surplus labor. That is why, unlike a communist class structure, corporate capitalism represents a form of exploitation.

Specifying communist fundamental and subsumed class processes in this way defines a communism without exploitation but with classes and hence with class conflicts. People in such a communism struggle over the size of the communist surplus and over its distribution. Some people secure their livelihoods by being collective producers and appropriators of the surplus, while others live by receiving distributions of it. These two groups of people occupy different communist class

positions. In our view, Marx provided the analytical basis for as well as gestured toward this class notion of communism. The specification of such a communist class structure enables the rethinking of Soviet history presented in part 3. Finally, we develop and explore this notion of communist class structure because it has rarely received the attention in Marxist literature that it deserves.¹⁵ Many of the complexities and diversities of communism have therefore been missed.

One group of individuals in a communist class structure labor collectively for a certain number of hours per day producing the basic goods and services that Marx called use-values. One portion (x) of these hours—the “necessary” labor—yields a bundle of use-values that is returned to these laborers for their consumption, for the reproduction of their capacity to work. It is necessary in the sense that it comprises the quantity of output laborers require to work. What is “necessary” depends on the unique history of each time and place.

However, the laborers work for additional hours (y) above and beyond the necessary hours (x). Following Marx, these additional hours worked (y) comprise their surplus labor. In a communist class structure, the product of this surplus labor—the surplus—is received collectively by these same laborers. It is not received as profits by another group of people as would be the case in a capitalist class structure. The label *communist* applies to this class structure because it specifies how the surplus labor and its fruits are appropriated: collectively by those who have produced it.

Once received by the workers who have produced it, the surplus is distributed to secure whatever nonclass processes are deemed necessary to ensure that this collective organization of the surplus, the communist fundamental class process, continues to exist. In other words, this distribution aims to secure those nonclass processes of social life (political, cultural, and economic) that induce, inspire, or compel communist laborers to work those extra hours (y) beyond what is necessary (x) to their reproduction as laborers.¹⁶ This distribution of the received surplus labor warrants the label *communist subsumed class process* because the workers who produced the surplus labor not only received it collectively—the communist fundamental class process—but also distribute it collectively to secure the conditions of existence of this communist class structure. Those who received such distributions were thereby paid and equipped to perform various nonclass processes (teaching, policing, politically mobilizing, etc.) designed to secure the specifically communist organization of surplus production and appropriation. Such recipients are thus communist subsumed classes.

This initial discussion has thus added a conception of the social organization of the surplus to the conventional notion of communism with which we began. That notion understood communism as collectivized (rather than private) property in the means of production and planning (rather than markets) to distribute resources and products. Our addition produces a particular kind of communism characterized by a communist class structure as well as collectivized property and planning. The next step in our argument is to explore the combinations of political, economic,

and cultural conditions (nonclass processes) that would be needed to generate and sustain such a communism and especially its communist class structure. However, before undertaking that task as the final discussion of this chapter, we offer a digression on the relationship between a communist class structure and two rather opposite criticisms that have long plagued discussions of communism: (1) that only small producing units could ever be organized communistically, and (2) that communism necessarily entails a highly centralized economy.

Communist Class Structures: Centralization versus Decentralization

Can we conceive the existence of these communist (fundamental and subsumed) class processes in relatively large-sized, technologically advanced, and secular societies, like the United States, or are they viable only in small, technologically simple, kinship-dominated and/or religiously motivated societies?¹⁷ Or, on the other hand, must communist class structures entail highly centralized economies? On a general level, we reject the premises of both of these critical questions. This follows from the notion of overdetermination central to our work. That notion refuses to essentialize any one or a subset of nonclass processes that must be present to enable a communist class structure to exist. Hence a communist class structure does not depend essentially on this or that particular condition: a limited number of participants, their religious fervor, specific spatial conditions, degrees of centralization, and so forth.¹⁸ What matters is only whether and how the totality of nonclass processes combine to overdetermine a particular class structure. Not the presence or absence of this or that *essential* cause, but rather how the presence or absence of any one social condition interacts with all the others in the society: that interaction overdetermines what kind(s) of class process will exist and survive there. Communism is, then, a feasible alternative for those class structures currently prevalent in United States society. It is not limited to small units nor does it necessarily entail centralization. To demonstrate these points, we shall consider how different social conditions can yield different kinds of communist class structures.

Although communism is defined by an identity between the collectivities of surplus labor producers and appropriators, their geographic locations may differ, depending on the specific social and natural conditions in the society. This means that communist production of surplus can occur in one space while its appropriation happens elsewhere. Part of the complex variation taken on by communist class structures can be attributed to this kind of difference in spatial locations occupied by communist surplus labor producers and appropriators.¹⁹

Such variations reflect a continuum of possibilities. In a decentralized arrangement, surplus production and appropriation occur at the same local production site. In a partially centralized arrangement, surplus labor appropriation is aggregated across particular subsets of producing units (regions, industries, and so forth). In a completely centralized arrangement, appropriation is aggregated across all producing units, irrespective of their location in society. To explore this contin-

uum, we first consider cases in which collective appropriation and production occur within the same producing unit. Then, we consider examples in which appropriation and distribution are aggregated across many units. As we shall see, each of these variations is feasible under differing technological conditions, size of populations, and so forth.

Suppose our producing unit refers to a single communist industrial or farming enterprise, an individual household, or a band of hunters. Whichever it is, the fruit of the communist surplus labor performed in that space is also appropriated there by that unit's surplus labor performers who literally come together as a collective to receive it. In some historical cases, this decentralized appropriation entails members of the producing unit meeting at particular intervals to receive as a group the surplus portion of the use-values produced by that unit. This surplus is physically gathered so that they may then collectively distribute it to local or distant recipients.

In different historical circumstances, it may not be practical or desirable to assemble the collective appropriators and the physical surplus in one place at one time. Because receipt of the surplus is always a social and not merely a physical designation, specific procedures and understandings would then have to be developed, including dissemination of all relevant information, to ensure the social positioning of the producers of the surplus as likewise its collective receivers and subsequent distributors. In such cases, communist workers' appropriating and distributing positions would be like those held by members of boards of directors in modern industrial corporations. Even if these workers never physically received the surplus, they might nonetheless function and be understood to function as the first receivers and distributors of that surplus.

The cultural, political (legal), and economic processes would have to be in place to ensure that the workers occupied those communist class positions. In this regard it is worth recalling that capitalist corporate boards of directors can and do delegate functions to subordinates while the board alone functions as the appropriator and distributor of surplus labor ("profits"). The communist collective of workers can alone retain their class position as appropriator even while delegating some functions to subordinates (to avoid, say, assembling physical surpluses, etc.). The tensions that might arise between appropriators and subordinates in the two different class structures would reflect their differences.

One kind of decentralized communist class structure can be found in a growing—if still relatively small—number of family households in the United States (Fraad, Resnick, and Wolff 1994, ch. 1). In them, certain household members collectively perform household labor and appropriate its surplus portion. They assemble collectively to distribute the surplus. For example, suppose a family household composed of several members. Collectively, they perform x hours of labor producing a bundle of use-values (prepared meals, cleaned rooms and clothes, repaired appliances, doctored family members, and so forth) that are considered necessary for their consumption—i.e., their reproduction as communist household laborers.

Collectively they also perform y hours above and beyond that. The communist class nature of this household depends on the proceeds of this surplus labor being received collectively by the same household members who produced it.²⁰

These family appropriators then collectively distribute the proceeds received (a communist subsumed class process) to secure the communist class structure within their household. For example, portions are distributed to individuals (within or outside the household) to perform nonclass processes needed to sustain household communism: maintaining household accounts, establishing and enforcing the rules of collective behavior there, producing and inculcating doctrines that legitimate or sanctify the collective surplus labor production and appropriation by all family members, paying taxes, etc.

This example of decentralized communist appropriation in a family household could occur under varying social conditions. For example, it might coexist with a household technology that is relatively simple in nature, a Christian theology affirming that true Christianity is communal, and a relatively large family membership. These are at least three of the specific conditions described in accounts of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century American communist households within the Shaker, Amana, Harmony, and other like societies (Nordhoff 1970). They may be contrasted with the advanced household technology, feminist theories, and much smaller family units characterizing communist households operating in the United States today (Fraad, Resnick, and Wolff 1994). Another example of decentralized communism can be provided by certain independent industrial or farm enterprises. There, collectives of workers would appropriate and distribute their surpluses in enterprises displaying the entire range of possible technologies and sizes. Although communist appropriation and production of the surplus occur in the same producing unit, some enterprises may not assemble all communist appropriators and the physical surplus at one location and time. Hence we may expect subordinate managers to appear within these enterprises as agents under the direction and control of the communist appropriators. They would receive a distributed share of the surplus for performing this management which has become a condition of existence for this communist class structure.

Despite wielding a degree of power over production and also over the surplus within such a decentralized communist class structure, these managers are not surplus appropriators. Power is one thing; appropriation is another. Hence, although communist producers-appropriators rely upon managers (perhaps enabling the latter to exercise some power over the produced surplus products), other social processes—laws, courts, schools, cultural traditions, and so forth—operate within society to secure the communist producers-appropriators as the only collective appropriators in society.

Of course, some social circumstances might arise enabling managers to become the actual appropriators and thereby displace the communist producers-appropriators. If this occurred, the identity between producers and appropriators of the surplus would have been broken. In the formal terms of Marxian class analysis, a commu-

nist subsumed class of managers would have transformed a communist into a non-communist class structure with themselves in the new noncommunist class position of appropriator of surplus labor rendered by others. Instead of receiving a distributed share of the communist surplus from others, such former managers would then appropriate surplus and make distributions from it themselves.

Such a transition to a noncommunist class structure is found in the history of the collective farms established in the USSR under Stalin. As detailed below in part 3, their producing members were initially the collective receivers of the surplus they produced there. However, the surplus was not physically delivered to them. Instead, managers were assigned specific tasks in relation to the surpluses, but they were subordinate to the communist collective farmers who appropriated and distributed the surpluses. Portions of the communist surplus were distributed to the managers themselves as their income and as means for the discharge of their duties; portions also were distributed to Soviet state officials who secured other conditions of existence for the communist collective farms, and so on. For some time, managers, party, and state officials wielded considerable power over surpluses, but the communist collective retained the functions of appropriation and distribution: a communist class structure. While the collective farmers remained the sole appropriators and distributors of the surplus, they shared power in determining its overall size and the sizes and destinations of its distribution with the managers, party, and state officials. Eventually heavy state intervention displaced collective farm members as appropriators of the collective farm surpluses. Communist class structures gave way to state capitalist class structures as state officials replaced producers as the appropriators of surpluses. The name “collective farm” was all that remained of the initial communist class structures.

We may conclude this discussion of decentralized modes of communist surplus appropriation with an example drawn from the anthropological literature on “primitive communism.” Consider a band of hunters appropriating and distributing the fruit of their surplus labor at the same location in which it is produced. Unlike most of the previous examples, the technology used is likely to be relatively simple. On the other hand, distributions of the surplus may be every bit as complex as in the other institutional forms. Similar to them, portions may be received by individuals located elsewhere in society, as when shares of the surplus are distributed to a headman located in the village, to village elders, or to still others there—i.e., warriors, priests, healers, traders, and so forth—to sustain activities believed necessary to the success of the hunt.

We turn now to a more centralized form of communism where production of surplus labor is local but its appropriation occurs on a more aggregated basis. To illustrate this form of communist appropriation, consider surpluses produced, respectively, in an industrial and a farming enterprise. We may assume that in both enterprises highly skilled workers operate advanced technological processes. The surpluses collectively produced in each enterprise are appropriated by a collective comprising both sets of workers. That collective might appropriate (literally gather)

the surplus in a central location different from both the industrial and farming enterprises. This example could be extended to increasingly aggregated communist appropriators across many communist enterprises and beyond them to communist households as well. Once again, subordinate managers might well be needed to organize the class structure so that its communist form prevails: that the producers continue collectively to appropriate and distribute surpluses.

It is, of course, quite possible that a society could contain more than one kind of communist fundamental class process. For example, it might display both centralized appropriation across its enterprises, while decentralized appropriation occurs within its households. Similarly, some so-called tribal societies may be characterized by the norm of centralized communal appropriation in most activities save perhaps the particular ones of hunting and household production of manufactures. In the latter, local producers practice local collective appropriation. Nor is there any reason to doubt that cultural and political processes may generate all manner of tensions, conflicts, and changes as members of a communist society determine whether, where, and when centralized versus decentralized appropriation is preferred.

This initial, brief discussion of decentralized and centralized kinds of communist class structures already suggests two noteworthy qualities of communism. First, it can display an immense range of variation in and coexistence among its forms: centralized and decentralized, high-technology and low-technology, large and small producing units, and so forth. Second, communism displays its own particular tensions, contradictions, and changes: for examples, in the mix of decentralized and centralized appropriation, in the delegation of subordinate management tasks, and in the ways noncommunist class structures can arise and displace communist class structures. To the variations and internal contradictions mentioned so far, many more will be added as our discussion proceeds. However, the primary focus and space limitations of this book preclude our exploring another whole level of variations and contradictions: those arising when communist class structures coexist socially with noncommunist class structures. A comprehensive study of communist class structures would have to include such situations. In addition, any concrete examination of an actual society would have to identify and explore interactions and contradictions among its multiple class structures—as we undertake in part 3.

Culture, Politics, and Economics of Communism

Now that we have outlined some basic class analytics of communist class structures and initially explored a small portion of their range of possible variations, we turn to the cultural, political, and economic contexts needed for such structures to exist. We will assume a modern industrial society with numerous industrial enterprises and households. Centralized communist surplus labor appropriation occurs across its enterprises, while decentralized communist surplus labor appropriation occurs within each of its households. In the enterprise economy, the collectivity of individuals who participate in the communist fundamental class process located within any given industrial enterprise appropriates surplus labor aggregated across all such

enterprises. In the household economy, each household's members produce surplus labor collectively, but they also only appropriate their own household's surplus.

Given this particular combination of communist class structures, we propose to consider some specific nonclass processes that would support such a communism. We presume that particular combinations of culture, politics, and economics must be present to overdetermine the existence of this assumed society's particular communist class structure. In other words, we seek to explore what nonclass dimensions of such a society would motivate individuals within its enterprises and households to collectively produce surplus labor and to collectively appropriate it. In short, what are the specific nonclass conditions of this communist society?

Asking what motivates individuals to participate in a communist fundamental class process might seem to invite an obvious answer: they "naturally" desire to appropriate all that they have produced. Yet, if this were indeed natural, then the existence of noncommunist fundamental forms of surplus labor appropriation—capitalism, feudalism, and slavery—would be problematic. For in these forms of appropriation, individuals produce surplus labor for the collective or individual appropriation of others. Giving the fruits of surplus labor to another—with nothing in return—is the precise meaning that Marx attached to those kinds of fundamental class processes that he grouped under the concept of exploitation (1990, ch. 9). Why might individuals prefer a situation in which they produce surplus labor for others rather than for themselves?

One possible answer is that individuals may believe communism to be an evil, perhaps a social arrangement hostile to religiously sanctioned, long-standing traditions. Or they might understand it to be inconsistent with or a danger to their freedom. In such circumstances, there might be little desire to participate in communism. People might well prefer capitalism, feudalism, or slavery even if they admitted that they would be exploited there.

A preference for capitalism might depend significantly on belief in a theory of capitalism that denies that it entails exploitation. Conceptualizing capitalism in terms of an inherent harmony among its parts, each contributing to production and drawing its rewards (incomes) in proportion to that contribution, legitimates capitalism as ultimately fair, equitable, and just. In such a conception, workers in capitalism are not exploited; they give no more than they get; profits are not a surplus they produce, but rather a reward to the resources and efforts provided to production by capitalists; and so forth. Communism is contrastingly depicted as inherently opposed to human nature: it refuses to recognize individuals' differing capacities and qualities and to provide for correspondingly different rewards. Hence it is unfair, oppressive, and economically inefficient. With communism depicted in this way, a preference for capitalism hardly surprises.

A good example of this kind of theorization is found in the United States over recent decades. Even when exploitation, however theorized, is admitted to have existed there, it is relegated to a distant feudal, slave, or even "robber baron" capitalist past. Even when criticisms are directed against capitalism today, class

exploitation is rarely if ever included. Thus communism does not now represent an alternative, nonexploitative social organization offered as part of a solution to U.S. social problems. Exploitation is conceptually invisible even to most of capitalism's current critics. Thus it vanishes as a "problem" of the United States needing a solution. Absent the issue of exploitation, the concept of communism has all the more easily been dismissed as not only no solution, but as an unrealizable utopian fantasy that, if actually attempted, yields an altogether inferior economic, political, and cultural arrangement exemplified by the USSR.

In this context, we can understand what an advocacy of communism in households and enterprises evokes in the United States. It is virtually equivalent to arguing for the introduction of a social cancer that would destroy the fabric of American life. Communist households would erode and then destroy those personal relationships between men and women within patriarchal families that form the bedrock of American society. Communist enterprises pose a parallel danger. By implanting a foreign agent in the economic body, communism would frustrate and then destroy individuals' different abilities to produce and reap wealth. Communism stifles humans' ability to act rationally; it spells economic ruin and irrationality. Advocating its establishment in society is the same as arguing for the underdevelopment of that society, an act that is mad or devious.

Even if other societies were understood as exploitative, whereas communism were understood to exclude exploitation, individuals might still prefer one or more of them to communism. They might see the latter and its "communal appropriation" as impracticable albeit perhaps charming utopian dreams. The best social arrangement "realistically possible" might be a relatively humane and democratic capitalism against less desirable forms of capitalism and against feudal and slave social formations.

A culture can also develop that affirms both that capitalism is undesirable and that communism is unrealizable. This would provide important conditions of existence for a class structure different from both. Individual self-employment—what Marx called the "ancient" mode of production (Gabriel 1990)—might then become the desirable alternative to capitalism and communism. Unlike capitalism, here the producer and appropriator of surplus labor is the same person; unlike communism, neither production nor appropriation is collective, it is individual. Self-employment can emerge—as it has throughout the history of the United States, for example—as the real or fantasized alternative, typically manifested in workers' desire to leave capitalist employment, open a small business, and thereby work for themselves rather than for others.

For communism to exist and survive, all such systems of meaning—such cultures—would have to be displaced in favor of others.²¹ Just as capitalism typically requires a culture rendering it as fair and just (and contrasting alternative class structures as evil, inefficient, and/or unrealizably utopian), so too communism would likely require a different culture interpreting it as the "good society" and attacking alternatives to it for their injustice and lack of freedom. A communist cul-