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HERBERT MARCUSE AND THE DIALECTICS OF LIBERATION IN THE AGE OF TRUMP[1]

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1. Introduction

This paper is based on remarks I prepared for a plenary discussion with Andrew Feenberg at the bi-annual conference of the International Herbert Marcuse Society, which took place at York University, in Toronto, in October, 2017. The theme of the conference, "dialectics and liberation," alluded to the "Dialectics of Liberation Congress," which was held in London in July of 1967. That Congress brought together a remarkably diverse array of radical theorists, artists and political activists, many of whom played leading roles in the New Left and counter-culture movements of the 1960s and 1970s.[2] Marcuse's former student, Angela Davis travelled from Frankfurt – where she was studying Critical Theory and participating actively in the Frankfurt branch of the SDS[3] – to attend the conference. She had the following to say about it and the lecture Marcuse gave there:

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1 I would like to thank Marcos Nobre and Samir Gandesha for helpful feedback on earlier drafts of this essay.

2 For a collection of some of the talks that were given at the Congress, see *The Dialectics of Liberation* (Cooper 2015).

3 *Der Sozialistische Deutsche Studentenbund* (German Socialist Student Union).

> "Marcuse himself pointed out that liberation is necessarily dialectical and dialectics is necessarily liberatory. Precisely because of the absence of homogeneity and unity among the participants, their political strategies, their ideas, their lifestyles, the congress was animated by palpable imaginings of the possibility of forging alliances across these diverse and contradictory intellectual and activist oppositions precisely for the purpose of changing the direction of history. […] Today, it seems inconceivable that crowds of people at a political rally would be willing to enthusiastically applaud a philosopher trained in the classical tradition, who might just as easily evoke Kant and Hegel as Marx, Fanon, or Dutschke. […] The lesson I draw from these reminiscences is that we need to recapture the ability to communicate across divides that are designed to keep people apart. At the same time we need to substitute a nostalgic attitude toward Marcuse with one that takes seriously his work as a philosopher and as a public intellectual" (Davis 2004: 47, 49).

Davis' description of her former mentor's ability to break down barriers between different intellectual and political groupings – very much in the spirit of Freud's concept of Eros, as "forming larger unities," which was so important for Marcuse (Marcuse 1966: 24) – remains relevant and important today, as does her insistence upon treating Marcuse's thought both seriously and critically.[4] In what follows, I will first offer some rather abstract

4 Davis' stress on a critical approach to Marcuse should undoubtedly also be applied to her own important work as a theorist, public intellectual and radical political activist. She and Marcuse differed in their assessment of Soviet communism. Marcuse had published a book-length critique of "Soviet Marxism" already in 1958 and was – unlike Davis – highly critical of the Soviet intervention in Prague in 1968. Davis joined the Communist Party during this time and remained in it until 1991. In 1972 she met with the chairman of the East German Communist Party, Erich Honecker, and she returned to East Germany several times as a guest of honor in the following years. For his part, Marcuse supported left-wing critics of the East German government in the 1970s, such as Rudi Dutschke and Rudolf Bahro. In the 1980 U.S. presidential election Davis ran as the vice-presidential candidate for the Communist Party USA. Despite their political differences, Marcuse supported Davis steadfastly throughout the political persecution she endured

reflections upon the relationship between dialectics and liberation, before engaging in a more concrete discussion of an essay Marcuse wrote in 1972, "The Historical Fate of Bourgeois Democracy." Next, I will situate the essay within the two overlapping intellectual traditions in which Marcuse's own thought was most firmly grounded, namely, Hegelian-Marxism and Frankfurt School Critical Theory. Regarding the latter, I will focus, in particular on the Critical Theorists' rich analyses of authoritarian, right-wing populist and (neo-) fascist tendencies in modern capitalist societies. I will make a case for revisiting this tradition in light of the recent resurgence of such tendencies during the current era of neo-liberal global capitalism, which have culminated recently in the election of Donald Trump as the president of the most powerful state in the world. Finally, I will conclude with a brief look at the persistence of objective possibilities for emancipation, and of different forms of "rebellious subjectivity" that obstinately strive to realize such possibilities.

2. Dialectics and Liberation

In 1960 Marcuse wrote "A Note on Dialectic," a preface for a new edition of his study: *Reason and Revolution: Hegel and the Rise of Social Theory*. He describes there the relationship between dialectics and liberation in the following way:

> "Dialectical thought starts with the experience that the world is unfree; that is to say, man and nature exist in conditions of alienation, exist as 'other than they are.' Any mode of thought which excludes this contradiction from its logic is a faulty logic. Thought 'corresponds' to reality only as it transforms reality by comprehending its contradictory structure. Here the principle of dialectic drives thought beyond the limits of

in the early 1970s in the U.S.

> philosophy. For to comprehend reality means to comprehend what things really are, and this in turn means rejecting their mere factuality. Rejection is the process of thought as well as action. While the scientific method leads from the immediate experience of *things* to their mathematical-logical structure, philosophical thought leads from the immediate experience of *existence* to its historical structure: the principle of freedom" (Marcuse 1960: ix).

This essay is guided by the same spirit of critical and dialectical theory. I will move from philosophy to history and critical social theory. Already for Hegel, dialectical thinking moves by necessity from philosophy into history. For the early Marx, and the early Max Horkheimer as well (Horkheimer 1995b: 1-14), Critical Theory emerges out of a determinate negation of philosophy, which preserves the critical impetus and self-reflexivity of philosophy, while at the same time moving beyond it to an analysis of history and contemporary society.[5] But what is determinate negation and how is it related to the dialectical movement from philosophy to history, critical social theory and, ultimately, praxis? Marcuse describes determinate negation as "the governing principle of dialectical thought," and explains its inherently critical cognitive and practical function in the following way:

> "The negation is determinate if it refers the established state of affairs to the basic factors and forces which make for its destructiveness, as well as for the possible alternatives beyond the status quo. In the human reality, they are *historical* factors and forces, and the determinate negation is ultimately a *political* negation" (Marcuse 1960: xi-xii).

5 In his early writings, Marx argued that there is only one science, namely, the science of history, and that "When reality is depicted, philosophy as an independent branch of knowledge loses it medium of existence" (Marx 1978b: 155). In his later writings, however, Marx continued to stress the importance of philosophy for his critique of political economy. For a more detailed examination of Marx's *determinate* negation of philosophy, see Marcuse (2005: 86-121).

Normative philosophical concepts that fail to grasp and are not mediated by the concrete tendencies and objective possibilities that exist in the present, remain abstract in the bad sense – as Hegel pointed out in his critique of Kant's moral philosophy, or as Marx pointed out in his critique of the utopian socialists. As my friend and former student Maria Érbia emphasized in her important work on the concept of utopia in Critical Theory, utopias too can be abstract or concrete (Carnaúba 2017). An abstract utopia – such as the Habermasian ideal speech situation – is one that remains completely separate from any socio-historical analysis. A concrete utopia, in contrast, identifies the objective possibilities of human emancipation latent in the historically specific social conditions of the present. There are not – pace Hegel – any metaphysical forces at work in "History" which guarantee the realization of these latent emancipatory possibilities. At the same time, such possibilities can be described as objective, and such "utopias" as concrete, insofar as the material conditions for their realization already exist. Um outro mundo é possível! The principal barrier to the realization of a qualitatively different world, in which all people are able not only to satisfy their basic needs, but also to realize their human potential, are the historically specific social relations we have inherited from the five-centuries old project of modern global capitalism. One crucial element in the realization of such objective possibilities would be – as Marcuse emphasized in his work – the liberation of science and technology from such capitalist social relations.[6] To be sure, Marx argued that modern capitalism created the material conditions necessary for human emancipation. But even if we agree with Marx's argument, the

6 On Marcuse's theory of technology see Abromeit (2010). Portuguese translation: Abromeit (2011b).

progressive aspects capitalism possessed during its early stages have long since given way to its more fundamental regressive and destructive tendencies. As Marcuse put it in 1972: "[We have reached] a historical situation where human labor (intellectual and manual) has created the conditions for the abolition of servitude and oppression – goals which are blocked only by the capitalist organization of society" (Marcuse 2001: 183). One could say, in other words, that capitalist society has been faced with the dilemma of socialism or barbarism at least since Rosa Luxemburg uttered these words over a century ago. Her brutal murder by proto-fascist thugs grimly confirmed her predictions about the barbarization of society that resulted from capitalist imperialism and the first World War. The twentieth century revealed that human catastrophes such the two World Wars, the Holocaust and the use of atomic weapons and napalm on civilian populations were also objective possibilities in the most advanced capitalist societies.

3. Authoritarianism and the Dialectic of Bourgeois Society

The powerful tendency inherent in modern capitalist societies to realize barbaric, rather than emancipatory possibilities, has been demonstrated once again with the election of Donald Trump as the president of the United States. Although many people – especially those on the left – were shocked by Trump's victory, it would not have surprised the early Frankfurt School theorists.[7] Few people remember today that Horkheimer, Adorno,

7 For a more detailed examination of the relevance of early Critical Theory to grasping and combating contemporary right-wing populist and authoritarian political tendencies in the U.S., see Abromeit (2018a).

Leo Löwenthal and other members of the Institute for Social Research carried out a series of path-breaking empirical studies during their exile in the United States in the 1940s, which addressed the question of whether or not an authoritarian movement, similar to fascism, could occur in the United States. In his 1949 introduction to Leo Löwenthal and Norbert Gutermann's, *Prophets of Deceit: A Study of the Techniques of the American Agitator*, Horkheimer argues that the current social and political conditions in the United States are not conducive to the emergence of an authoritarian movement. But Horkheimer insists that it is still important to study the techniques of American agitators, because social and political conditions could change in a way that would be more favorable to the emergence of an authoritarian movement in the United States (Horkheimer 1949: xii). Four decades of neo-liberal hegemony have done just that. Neo-liberalism has changed social conditions in a way that has enabled not only the emergence, but now with the election of Donald Trump, also the accession to ruling power of reactionary right-wing populist and authoritarian forces in the United States. In what follows, I turn my attention to Herbert Marcuse's essay, "The Historical Fate of Bourgeois Democracy," which uncannily anticipates the current resurgence of authoritarian right-wing populism in the United States.[8]

Marcuse's essay was written in the context of a right-wing populist backlash of the so-called "silent majority" against the protest movements of the 1960s.[9] This backlash led to Nixon's

8 Marcuse never published this essay himself. It appeared for the first time in 2001 in the second volume of the "Collected Papers" edition of Marcuse's writings, edited by Douglas Kellner. For the full citation, see Marcuse (2001).

9 For a more elaborated version of Marcuse's analysis of the right-wing backlash in the early 1970s against the protest and new social movements, see Marcuse (1972: 1-58).

landslide victory over the liberal democrat, George McGovern, who had campaigned to put an immediate end to the war in Vietnam and to establish a guaranteed minimum income. Shortly after Nixon's victory, the United States launched its largest bombing campaign of the entire war against North Vietnam – the obscenely named "Christmas Bombings" of December 1972[10] – in which over 200 B-52 bombers targeted industrial sites in the densely populated cities of Hanoi and Haiphong. In the essay Marcuse sees Nixon's reelection as an expression of the self-transformation of bourgeois democracy into neo-fascism, and he argues that "bourgeois democracy no longer represents an effective barrier to fascism" (Marcuse 2001: 176). At the same, Marcuse insists that a socialist Critical Theory must preserve the emancipatory aspects of the liberal-democratic tradition, and that the negation of "bourgeois democracy" must be determinate and not merely abstract. He writes,

> "Compared to a neo-fascist society [...] bourgeois democracy, even in its monopolistic form, still provides a chance (the last chance?) for the transition to socialism, for the education (in theory and practice) and organization to prepare this transition. The New Left is therefore faced with the task [...] of defending this democracy while attacking its capitalist foundations, that is to say, to separate the political forms of capitalism from its economic structure. Such a separation is made possible by the dialectical relationship between form and content: the bourgeois-democratic form 'lags behind' the monopoly and state capitalist structure, and thus preserves liberal institutions germane to a previous historical stage

10 These bombings were also officially designated with the almost equally obscene name of "Operation Linebacker II," which euphemistically anesthetized the consciences – in a manner reminiscent of those masters of euphemism, the Nazis – of those responsible for the bombing of civilians, by equating it with a football game. For Marcuse's reflections on the obscene destruction of language and concomitant disabling of morality, see Marcuse (1969: 17-18).

> which is rapidly being surpassed. Advanced capitalism is adequately equipped for doing away with these institutions if and when the conflict becomes intolerable, while the left is still too weak to transform them into socialist democracy. Overcoming this weakness requires the use of the democratic institutions while combating the forces which, within this democracy, make the people themselves the harbinger of conservative, reactionary, and even neo-fascist tendencies" (Marcuse 2001: 177-78).

Like Rosa Luxemburg, and unlike Lenin and Trotsky,[11] Marcuse does not view the liberal-democratic political tradition as nothing more than window dressing for capitalist social domination. He follows the early Horkheimer's notion of a "dialectic of bourgeois society," which emphasizes the ways in which the critical philosophical concepts and progressive social institutions of the ascendant bourgeoisie have been increasingly undermined in the new historical stage of bourgeois hegemony. I use the concept of a "dialectic of bourgeois society" consciously as an alternative to a "dialectic of Enlightenment," in order to emphasize the historically specificity of the former and the lack of historical specificity in the latter.[12] As I have argued elsewhere, I see the early model of Critical Theory, which guided the Institute's work in the 1930s as a more promising point of departure for current efforts to revive and continue the Frankfurt s School tradition, than Horkheimer and Adorno's *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (Abromeit 2011a: 425-32).

It is only from this standpoint that one can make sense of Marcuse's concept of *bourgeois democracy*. I would like to point, in

11 For Luxemburg's critique of Lenin and Trotsky, see Luxemburg (1986a) and Luxermburg (1986b); and *The Russian Revolution*, https://www.marxists.org/archive/luxemburg/1918/russian-revolution/index.htm.

12 On the concept of the "dialectic of bourgeois society" in Horkheimer's early Critical Theory, and its differences from *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, see Abromeit (2016). Portuguese translation: Abromeit (2017b).

particular, to two specific aspects of this concept, in order to highlight the ongoing relevance of his and his Institute colleagues' analysis of right-wing populism in the age of Donald Trump. First, United States democracy is bourgeois because it is a product of the much longer history of *bourgeois society*. In German the concept of bourgeois society is *bürgerliche Gesellschaft*. The concept of *bürgerliche Gesellschaft* is perhaps the most important theoretical linkage between Hegel and Marx's thought. In English the concept of *bürgerliche Gesellschaft* is often translated as "civil society," thereby placing it in the tradition of Adam Smith and other 18th-century liberal political economists, who viewed modern bourgeois society as naturally harmonious, a "self-regulating mechanism," a *harmonie préétablie*, based on "natural law", and thus as the "end of history." In contrast to this Panglossian view of "civil society",[13] Hegel and Marx both recognize the self-destructive tendencies inherent in modern *bourgeois* society. Rather than viewing bourgeois society as something natural, both Hegel and Marx both *historicize* it, by identifying the internal contradictions that may

13 Beginning in the 1970s, there was resurgence of interest in the concept of "civil society," especially among scholars and political commentators interested in oppositional social and dissident movements in Eastern Europe. In most of this literature, a decidedly liberal notion of "civil society" was rehabilitated, namely, one that defined civil society in terms of a free public sphere, voluntary associations, pluralist politics, etc. but which severed the link to a critique of political economy that was so central to Hegel and Marx's concepts of *bürgerliche Gesellschaft* (bourgeois society). The increasingly widespread use of the term *Zivilgesellchaft* in German in the 1980s and 1990s also reflected this shift away from a Hegelian-Marxist, to a Kantian and Tocquevillian concept of civil society. See, for example, Cohen and Arato (1994). Such a liberal concept of "civil society," that no longer had any connection to a critique of political economy, may have been able to grasp certain aspects of anti-statist social movements in Eastern Europe, but once transported into the context of Western European and American "bourgeois democracies," it lost much of its critical force.

eventually lead to its supersession.[14] Both Hegel and Marx analyze a historically specific *dialectic of bourgeois society*, in which the progressive role that the bourgeoisie played during the early modern period – in undermining the ossified, patriarchal relations of feudal society and overthrowing the absolutist state – increasingly gives way to the repressive and destructive tendencies of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries – such as unbridled imperialism and fascism – as the bourgeoisie shed its pretensions to universality and emerged as a new hegemonic class. In short, Marcuse's description of the United States as a *bourgeois* democracy is intended to remind us that any critical theory of American society must locate it within this larger dialectic of bourgeois society, whose critical analysis was pioneered by Hegel and Marx, and continued by the early Frankfurt School theorists.[15]

The second crucial dimension of Marcuse's concept of bourgeois democracy refers to the social-psychological dynamics of modern capitalist societies. In the 1930s Max Horkheimer and Erich Fromm developed an analysis and critique of bourgeois character

14 For Hegel's dialectical analysis of bourgeois society, which highlights both its historically progressive role in establishing qualitatively new forms subjective freedom in the modern world, and the powerful tendencies inherent within it that would drive towards self-destruction if left unchecked, see the section on "Civil Society" (Hegel 1967). In his famous 1859 "Preface" to *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*, Marx explains his decision – some fifteen years early – to shift from the study of philosophy to the critique of political economy, because "the anatomy of civil society [*bürgerliche Gesellschaft*] is to be sought in political economy" (Marx 1978a: 4). Like Hegel before him, Marx viewed political economy as the science which had developed the most advanced – if, of course, still fundamentally limited – theory of the contradictory dynamics of modern capitalist society.

15 For example, Adorno described the United States as a "radically bourgeois country,"and as a country in which capitalism existed "in its complete purity without any precapitalist remnants" (Adorno 1970: 310); and Adorno (1998a: 241).

structures, which supplemented Marx's critique of political economy with key insights from Freudian psychoanalysis. In his writings from the 1930s, Horkheimer spoke of the "anthropology of the bourgeois epoch," by which he meant the historically specific constellation of character structures that emerged in tandem with modern capitalism (Horkheimer 1995a: 49-110).[16] Like the Canadian political theorist, C.B. MacPherson, Horkheimer analyzed how a specifically bourgeois forms of subjectivity – which MacPherson called "possessive individualism" and Horkheimer called "instrumental reason" – emerged during the early modern period (MacPherson 1965).[17] But Horkheimer went beyond MacPherson in demonstrating how the imposition of repressive bourgeois character structures upon the lower classes created resentment, which could easily erupt in revolts or collective social movements. Horkheimer demonstrated how bourgeois political leaders in the early modern period – such as Cola di Rienzi, Savonarola and Robespierre – sought to harness this resentment and direct these social movements against the local ruling aristocracy, whom they branded "enemies of the people." In the late modern period, in general, and in twentieth-century fascism, in particular, similar leader-follower dynamics emerged, but with new "enemies of the people," such as communists and socialists, as well as Jews and other ethnic minorities.[18] Whereas Horkheimer

16 On Horkheimer's concept of the "anthropology of the bourgeois epoch", see also Abromeit (2011a: 248-300).

17 On the parallels – and differences – between MacPherson's and Horkheimer's theories of the historical formation of bourgeois subjectivity, see Hansen (2015).

18 In the essay Horkheimer argues that "The typical course of these bourgeois movements is being repeated in the present; the form is now grotesquely distorted because the progressive function which those past efforts filled in regard to the possible elimination of the prevailing contradictory state of

examined the historical dynamics of such populist movements, Erich Fromm analyzed the social-psychological mechanisms involved, such as the strong tendency of bourgeois leaders to provide their followers with forms of ersatz psychological gratification, such as the imagined love of the leader, membership in a powerful imagined community, and the leader's permission to engage in sadistic acts against official "enemies of the people" (Fromm 1936).[19]

In his 1972 essay Marcuse refers explicitly to this work by Horkheimer and Fromm from the 1930s. He writes, "the American system has mastered, in a terribly efficient way, the depth dimension of satisfactory submission beneath the political dimension. The real issues recede before the instinctual affirmation of the image: the people find themselves in their leader" (Marcuse 2001: 170). The fact that these and other tendencies that Marcuse identified in 1972, have only become more powerful in the four and a half decades since he wrote it, highlights the ongoing relevance of the early Frankfurt School's analyses of right-wing populism and authoritarianism.[20] Most recent analyses of the resurgence of right-wing populism in Europe and the United States have been

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society is today no longer linked with the bourgeoisie's activity, but has passed over to groups dominated by the latter." He also describes the triumph of fascism in certain European states as "a bourgeois pseudorevolution with radical populist trappings, wholly contrary to any possible reorganization of society" (Horkheimer 1995a: 60-1,97).

19 Unfortunately and surprisingly, Fromm's essay – which Marcuse described as "the best thing he ever wrote" – has never been translated into English. For an analysis of this important introductory essay and its close theoretical proximity to Horkheimer's concept of the "anthropology of the bourgeois epoch," see Abromeit (2011: 282-94).

20 For two recent attempts to interpret the rise of right-wing populism in the U.S. from an early Frankfurt School perspective, see Abromeit (2018a); and Leeb (2018: 297-314).

written by political scientists and political theorists, who focus on the ways in which right-wing populism deviates from normative models of liberal democracy.[21] This emphasis on a normative model of democracy also figures prominently in the more recent work of Jürgen Habermas, who is often characterized as the leading representative of the "second generation" of the Frankfurt School. But this focus on normative political theory has become one-dimensional, and is theoretically inadequate to grasp the socio-historical conditions and social-psychological mechanisms that have driven the recent resurgence of right-wing populism – that is, what Marcuse's identified already in 1972 as the "neo-fascist" tendencies latent in contemporary bourgeois democracies. Although Habermas made important contributions to the establishment of liberal-democratic political culture in Germany in the post-WWII period, he broke with the older tradition of Critical Theory in at least two important ways.[22] First, he replaced the critique of political economy with a whiggish theory of social modernization as the differentiation of value spheres. Second, he replaced Freud and the early Critical Theorists' focus on the irrational manifestations of modern bourgeois society, with the evolutionary psychological theories of Jean Piaget and Lawrence Kohlberg. In his eagerness to embrace *liberal* democracy, Habermas has cast aside the conceptual tools he would need to

21 See Abromeit (2017a: 177-86).

22 For an analysis of Habermas' theory that grounds it in the post-war West German context, and the attempt to establish a functioning liberal democracy there, see Specter (2010). For an astute analysis of the important ways in which Habermas moves away from an interpretation of modern history as a "dialectic of bourgeois society," which was very close to the early Horkheimer's theory of modern history, towards a more positive concept of "modernity" as the evolutionary differentiation of value spheres, see McCormick (2007: 49-59).

analyze and critique *bourgeois* democracy. The interdisciplinary approach to the study of fascism, right-wing populism and authoritarianism that was pioneered by Horkheimer and Fromm in the 1930s, and continued by Adorno, Löwenthal and Marcuse in the 1940s, 50s and 60s, still offers a better alternative to grasping and combating these tendencies today than an approach, such as Habermas's, that relies too much on normative theories of liberal democracy (Abromeit 2018b).

4. Neo-Liberalism and the Return of the Neo-Fascist Tendencies

All that said, the analyses of the early Frankfurt School would still, of course, need to be updated in light of more recent historical developments. In that spirit, I will offer some concluding observations on how social conditions have changed since Marcuse wrote this essay in the early 1970s, that is, at a time when the Fordist-Keynesian period of capitalism was giving way to the new, neo-liberal period, in which we are – arguably – still living. As Terry Maley has also recently pointed out, Marcuse's essay presciently anticipated many of social developments in the neo-liberal period, even though that period was only just beginning in 1972 (Maley 2017: 209-31). Returning to the theme of the dialectics of liberation, I will first address the sharpening of social contradictions under neo-liberalism and then turn to the continued development of objective possibilities for emancipation during this same time.

There have, of course, been many discouraging and terrifying developments under neo-liberalism, which one could discuss. I would like to mention three such developments, which have been

analyzed by three of the most important critical interventions in the social sciences in the past ten years: Thomas Piketty's *Capitalism in the Twenty-First Century*; Guy Standing's *The Precariat: The New Dangerous Classes*; and Michelle Alexander's *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Color Blindness*. Although none of these studies emerged out of the tradition of Frankfurt School Critical Theory, each captures something essential about the new period of neo-liberal capitalism. Piketty painstakingly documents the dramatic increase in inequality and the massive concentration of wealth and power among a tiny elite, which have occurred in both Western societies and globally in the past four decades.[23] Standing highlights the proliferation of new forms of short-term and part-time "precarious" labor, which have undermined the security and created a climate of fear and uncertainty among large sections of the population in countries around the globe. Alexander documents the rise of mass incarceration in the United States, as a primary strategy of dealing with those "superfluous" persons – disproportionately Black and Latino – who have been unable to gain a foothold among the new, neo-liberal "precariat." In 1972, when Marcuse penned his essay on "The Historical Fate of Bourgeois Democracy," approximately

23 Piketty's argument illustrates the *dialectic of bourgeois society* – discussed above in relation to Horkheimer and Marcuse's work – insofar as he documents the failure of twentieth and now twenty-first century capitalism to live up even to its own liberal bourgeois ideological presuppositions. One of Piketty's main points throughout the book, is that, in the wake of a period of relative decline of inequality in the mid-twentieth century, neo-liberal global capitalism has since the 1970s come increasingly to resemble – in terms of inequality, meritocracy and social mobility – the "patrimonial society" of the nineteenth century, in which inheritance was a much more important determinant of one's social standing and ability to accumulate wealth, than individual effort or choice of profession. For an examination of Piketty's important research from the standpoint of Critical Marxism and Frankfurt School Critical Theory, see Langman and Smith (2018).

300,000 persons were in prison in the U.S. By 2010, when Alexander's book appeared, that number had increased to over two million.[24]

Taken together, these three studies point to the complete inability of capitalism to realize the objective possibilities for human emancipation that have developed in the past few decades. The emergence of new forms of technology – and information technology, in particular – has continued the long-standing capitalist tendency to eliminate jobs or, as Marx put in more technical terms, to changing the organic composition of capital, by diminishing the ratio of variable to constant capital.[25] Our societies' ability to produce more use values with less wage labor, has not increased the prospects of human emancipation; on the contrary, under neo-liberal hegemony these advances in the means of production have led to a massive concentration of wealth at the top of society, new forms of poverty, insecurity and mass incarceration. Nowhere is the irrational logic of the "steering mechanisms" of contemporary neo-liberal capitalism in the U.S. more apparent, than in their unconscious choice to incarcerate of millions of its own citizens, rather than to distribute social necessary labor time and social wealth more equitably.

Unfortunately, as Marcuse also observed already in 1972, the role of the American working class and the so-called "white

24 For an astute discussion of the historical context in the 1970s, in which the backlash against the Civil Rights and Black Power movements set the stage for the rise of mass incarceration in the United States, see Taylor (2016: 51-73).

25 For a reinterpretation of Marx, which emphasizes the immanent tendency of capitalism to abolish wage labor from the production process – while at the same time constantly and irrationally reconstituting wage labor as the dominant form of social mediation – see Postone (1993). For a more recent overview of his argument, see Postone (2008: 120-46).

working class," in particular, has been predominantly conservative. Using the example of white working-class boycotts of school integration in Michigan, Marcuse describes how racism often trumps solidarity with people of color among the white working class. Marcuse characterizes the "capitalist morality of labor" as a "reactionary force" (Marcuse 2001: 180). The white working class celebration of the "virtues" of labor, demonstrates just how much they have internalized a bourgeois character structure (Abromeit 2013: 325-343). In view of such developments, Marcuse argues that the "transcendent elements of Marxist theory" need to be recovered (Marcuse 2001: 183). These "transcendent elements" derive more from Marx's analysis of capitalism's tendency to *abolish* labor, than Marx's identification of the industrial proletariat as the grave digger of capitalism. Marcuse's increasing focus near the end of his life on this crucial aspect Marx's theory has been continued by other unorthodox Marxist theorists, such as Andre Gorz and Moishe Postone (Gorz 2001; Postone 2008). It's these aspects of Marx's theory that are still most relevant today and which still point to the latent possibilities of emancipation from neo-liberal capitalism, and capitalism as such.

5. The Persistence of Emancipatory Possibilities ans Rebellious Subjectivity

Finally, I would like to point briefly to some other historical conditions that have changed since the 1970s, which favor the realization of emancipatory tendencies. First, the collapse of the Soviet empire in Eastern Europe and of the Soviet Union itself between 1989 and 1991 means that socialism is no longer immediately identified with Soviet communism in the public mind.

Persons under thirty today no longer have any memory of what it was like to grow up during the Cold War. This helps explain the lively and widespread interest in socialism among young people, even in the United States.[26] The remarkable success of Bernie Sanders, who explicitly described himself as a socialist, was driven largely by support from people under thirty. The membership in the largest socialist organization in the United States, the Democratic Socialists of America, has increased over sixfold in the past four years.[27] Most of these new members are under the age of thirty. The remarkable success of Jeremy Corbyn is Britain has also benefited greatly from the vigorous and widespread support of people under thirty.

Second, the advances in technology that contributed greatly to the onset of the "post-industrial" period already in the 1970s have continued and accelerated since then. Marcuse's growing interest in the emancipatory potential of automation in the 1960s and 1970s has become a topic of mainstream debate today. Take, for example, Germany's largest and most powerful trade union, IG Metall. After a series of strikes at the beginning of 2018, in which 1.5 million workers participated, the union won an agreement from employers to offer their employees more flexible hours, which includes the option of working as few as twenty-eight hours per week. Union leaders state that the demands for more flexible hours

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26 See, for example, "'The S-Word' How Young Americans Fell in Love with Socialism," *The Guardian*, September 2, 2017: https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2017/sep/02/socialism-young-americans-bernie-sanders.

27 DSA membership has gone from 6500 people in the Fall of 2014 to over 40,000 today. "Democratic Socialists of America see membership spike after Ocasio-Cortez Win," *The Hill*, June 28, 2018. http://thehill.com/blogs/blog-briefing-room/news/394679-democratic-socialists-of-america-see-membership-spike-after.

reflect "a newer mindset among younger workers" for whom time is often more valuable than money.[28] Such attitudes seem to confirm the prediction Marx made in the *Grundrisse* that when society reaches a certain level of material prosperity, real wealth begins to be defined as the amount of free time available to individuals and to society as a whole (Postone 2008). In the most recent French elections, the candidate of the mainstream Socialist Party, Benoit Hamon, campaigned on a platform to reduce the work week to thirty-two hours and to put in place a minimum income that would guarantee a decent standard of living for all French citizens, regardless of whether they worked or not. The fact that such discussions have entered the mainstream – including the rather conservative French Socialist Party – seems to signal a growing awareness of the objective possibility of creating a society in which wage labor no longer dominates our lives, and in which no one has to live in fear of falling into poverty.

Third, and finally, the elimination of work has also been accompanied by the erosion of bourgeois character structures. This can be seen not only in sociological studies of workers, who no longer define themselves primarily in terms of their jobs,[29] but also in the emergence of new forms of what Marcuse liked to call "rebellious subjectivity." Two of the most important forms of this "rebellious subjectivity" Marcuse praised already in the 1970s, namely the ecology and the second-wave feminist movement. Marcuse described "second-wave" feminism as the most potentially radical movement of the time (Kätz 1982: 208).[30] Marcuse viewed the ecology and feminist movements as radical, insofar as they

28 "German union wins right to 28-hour working week and 4.3% pay rise," *Financial Times*, February 6, 2018. https://www.ft.com/content/e7f0490e-0b1c-11e8-8eb7-42f857ea9f09.

29 See, for example, Sennett (2000).

threatened to undermine the social-psychological roots of modern capitalist societies, namely, the cold and calculating, domineering, patriarchal and heterosexist character structures that were developed first among the ascendant bourgeoisie and subsequently imitated or forcefully imposed among the lower classes and also colonial subjects. Since the 1970s, other forms of "rebellious subjectivity" have also emerged to challenge bourgeois character structures, not only by changing people's attitudes, but also by dismantling inherited forms of legal and institutionalized oppression. Here one thinks, for example, of the recent legal and civil rights victories, and the greater visibility and acceptance of gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender and queer individuals and communities. Of course, as the election of Trump has demonstrated, the hard-fought advances in the areas of environmental protection, equality for women and LGBTQ communities can be rescinded at any time. But recent polls that demonstrate a much greater acceptance and awareness of these issues among young people today, should remind us – as Adorno also did at the end of his life – that we have many good reasons to reject resignation and to uphold the basic aim of Critical Theory – as defined by Horkheimer in 1937 – "the abolition of social injustice".[31]

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30 Marcuse makes this claim in his 1974 essay "Marxism and Feminism", which appears (for the first time) in Portuguese translation in this issue of *Dissonancia*. Marcuse's high estimation of second-wave feminism may also explain why Angela Davis bestowed upon him the status of an honorary woman. See "The Philosopher Who Was Too Hot for Playboy," *The Conversation*, Oct. 3, 2017: http://theconversation.com/the-philosopher-who-was-too-hot-for-playboy-85002

31 Adorno (1998b: 289-93). Horkheimer (1992: 242).

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