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Original Article

Democracy in Marxism: Exploring Marx's Idea of "True Democracy"



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Abstract

This paper examines the preliminary relationship between democracy and Marxism by revisiting one of the earliest works of Karl Marx, which



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introduces his articulations on "true democracy". This includes some unique propositions regarding the normative and procedural aspects of democracy, the social nature of human beings, primogeniture and private property, and universal suffrage by exposing the contradictions within Hegel's theory of political institutions. The arguments are situated within his main concerns about overcoming the civil-political divide and expanding political emancipation to human emancipation. The strength of Marx's critique of the formal principle of democracy is situated alongside the plausible merits and gaps in his proposal for "true democracy" as an alternative. This paper explores what such an exegetical exercise could mean for Marxist practitioners in the present world.

Keywords: *Democracy, Marxism, German Philosophy, Political Institutions, Civil-political Divide, Suffrage*

Introduction

The lack of a conclusive definition of "democracy" not only makes it an "essentially contested concept" in political theory but also a peculiarly "ambiguous" one.¹ Despite this ambiguity, democracy appears to have acquired positive universal sanction in contemporary times. Yet, almost simultaneously, it also seems to have become more conceptually "footloose" and "vacuous" than ever (Brown, 2011, p. 44).

Employing the term "Marxism" is an equally challenging task. Any attempt to use it in singularity lands us in deep definitional problems. Translations of

Marxism into communist, socialist, social-democrat and other political projects have further complicated any endeavour to identify what "Marxism" may mean.

The relationship between democracy and Marxism became peculiarly embattled during the Cold War when the task of defining these two concepts became a political project, when "liberal democracy" was made synonymous with democracy and "Soviet socialism" was made the sole embodiment of Marxism or communism. In its aftermath, "democracy" became the "dominant emblem" of politics when it was considered to have overpowered "communism" and all Marxist political

endeavours were deemed “undemocratic” by this standard (Badiou, 2011, p. 6). This, however, has not meant that any conclusive definition of democracy has been attained or that explorations, reassessments, and critiques of democratic theories have ceased to take place. In fact, fresh inquiry into democratic discourses has become pertinent given the rise of “new authoritarianism” around the world, considered to be bred by financialised neoliberal capitalism (Satgar, 2021, p. 211).

Concomitantly, the collapse of “Soviet socialism” has also posed very pertinent questions before Marxists regarding their own conceptualisations of and commitments to democracy. This is not to imply that Marxists have had no prior engagement with ideas of democracy. Nevertheless, the ability of such critical enterprises to offer alternative principles and procedures so that a better notion of democracy may be practically applied have come under question. If one were to recognise, as some Marxists themselves do, that the concrete problems of exercising democracy in a transitional socialist society were not adequately stated, discussed, or answered by Marx, so as to speak of “silences” or “empty spaces” in

Marxism (Singh, 2006, p. 754), then it seems worthwhile to ask: How may contemporary Marxist practitioners engage with democracy in concrete contexts. What is available within Marxism, and what are the gaps in it regarding ideas and practices of democracy? These are some of my initial curiosities that led the way for this research work.

This paper offers an inquiry into the propositions of ‘Marxist theory’ in the realm of politics in general and on the theme of democracy in particular. To avoid entering into a gigantic and internally diverse arena that ‘Marxist theory’ in general has come to involve and imply, I shall limit myself to reflecting on the initial formulation of Karl Marx’s theoretical insights on democracy. This is available in one of his very first writings, Critique of Hegel’s Philosophy of Right (1843), which stands out for his preliminary propositions regarding “true democracy” in opposition to Hegel’s thesis.

At the very outset, it must be stated that this thematic study has to inevitably confront a few contestations. The first is the tension between the ‘political’ and the ‘economic’ in the interpretations of

Marxist theory. This emerges from the general understanding that Marxism's view of social life rejects the "artificial and imaginary" split between the political, economic, social, and cultural parts of the social whole (Singh, 2006, p. 758).² Whether this interconnectedness of spheres negates or weakens the possibility of analysing the "political" specifically and primarily, or whether it is indeed possible to grant the "political" a fundamental place in the Marxist analysis of social life, has been an intriguing and contentious issue within Marxism. One such vigorous engagement continues to revolve around the "base-superstructure" metaphor. The subsequent modes of analyses, implicitly or explicitly, treat the economic "base" and the legal, political, ideological, and cultural "superstructure" as qualitatively different and compartmentalised spheres. The variants of these analyses speak of the "correspondence" or interaction of these spheres, but in which the economic "in the last instance" determines the rest.³ On the other hand, there is a Marxist strand that rejects this as "economic determinism" or depoliticisation of the economy. This "political Marxism" is, in turn, accused of abandoning the field of economics

and "neglect[ing] the most operative concept of historical materialism (mode of production)".⁴ My own curiosity regarding democratic norms, institutions, and processes does not rely on relegating democracy to a purely political (superstructural) terrain. However, one is motivated by the need to ascribe substantive worth to the political tools and actions that shape and translate the ideas of democracy in real life.

The second tension is between the writings of the 'young' and the 'mature' Marx that emanates from different views regarding Marx's Hegelian legacies. One strand insists that the young Marx (in the writings before 1845) was truly humanist and democratic; that his early writings permitted a Marxism that was free from positivism and crude materialism.⁵ A counter-argument underlines an "epistemological break" between the early and mature writings of Marx.⁶ The insistence is on the political superiority of Marx's later works (post-1845), which, instead of making Marxism a humanist or teleological project, concerns essentially with the structural analysis of social totalities. My own understanding is that the writings of the "young" and "mature"

Marx need not be sharply poised against each other. Since many of Marx's conceptualisations—like the abolition of private property, of alienation, and of the state—originate in his early works, the elaboration or development of these terms in his later works would be meaningless and insincere if divorced completely from his earlier usages.⁷ Accordingly, I find it worthwhile to look into one of the earliest texts of Marx.

My methodological tool for reading this text concurs with Quentin Skinner's insistence on "learn[ing] to do our own thinking for ourselves" (Skinner, 1969, p. 52). This directs us to the realisation that the main achievements of as well as gaps in the ideas of Marx are meaningless if detached from the specific context in which he employed those ideas, as well as from the manner and method of their communication to us—but also that an appropriate way to learn from the past is to be self-aware that our own present setting places constraints upon our imagination of and expectation from classical texts.

Marx's Encounter With Hegel

Marx's first views on democracy emerge out of the critique of German idealist philosophy, as well as in response to concrete historical experiences regarding state and society. What intrigued him about German philosophy since Kant was the antagonism between the 'is' and the 'ought' (Avineri, 1968, p. 8). It, therefore, should come as no surprise that his first systematic work is a critique of Hegel's *Philosophy of Right* (PoR), which is centred around the same concern.

The major task of philosophy for Hegel is explained by Charles Taylor as that of overcoming "opposition". Opposition can exist at various levels. One primary opposition is between belief and reality or the "mind" and the "world". But for Hegel, this opposition runs counter to the nature and purpose of the "knowing Mind". Hegel would protest that the Kantian idea of "a thing in itself" is incoherent because the philosopher using this term is positing something out of the reach of his mind, which actually cannot be out of reach because he himself is positing it. Further, he argued that philosophy has to be

dialectical—it has to capture the movement that takes place between objectivity and subjectivity. He also contended that one identity cannot sustain itself on its own but has to breed opposition. Further, this opposition is not simply opposition but will necessarily reassert itself in a recovery of unity—“A is A, A is also not A, and not A shows itself to be after all A” (Taylor, 1975, pp. 76-80).

Marx's acquaintance with Hegel made him think that he had found the idea within reality itself, thus eliminating the dichotomy Kant had left behind. But his early enthusiasm for Hegel developed into a critique of the Hegelian system. He felt that although Hegel's philosophy claimed to bridge the gap between the rational and the actual, it did not corroborate existing realities and that this dichotomy remained hidden in the inner contradictions of Hegel's theory of social and political institutions. Therefore, while Marx accepted Hegel's dialectical method, he opposed the Hegelian system arguing that the system put imaginary “spiritual” values before practical and material values. This system, therefore, had to be “overturned” so that reality would once again take precedence over “fantasy” (O'Malley, 1970, p. xii).

Another context of Marx's doctrinal dispute with Hegel on the question of social and political institutions was the emergent division between civil and political life. Rousseau first heralded this in his distinction between *homme* and *citoyen*—the separated spheres of private and public interests. In *The Social Contract*, Rousseau had asked how modern man could transcend this duality and be restored to a unified condition. This became a common concern for both Hegel and Marx. In the *Critique of Hegel's 'Philosophy of Right'* (henceforth referred to as the critique), Marx's criticism against Hegel's institutional conclusions and the counter-proposals he himself makes are stated primarily in terms of this common problem.

Hegel's claim is that this unity of particular and universal interests is effected within and by means of an institutional framework whose principal features are 1) a monarch who comes to the throne by birth; 2) an extensive bureaucracy of salaried civil servants who constitute an estate or class whose aims are identical with those of the state itself; and 3) an Assembly of Estates, in which representatives of the crown and the executive power come together with representatives of the civil estates to

deliberate and decide how the aims of the state and of civil society could be reached.

For Marx, however, this same institutional framework, which he judges to be an accurate portrayal of Hegel's own Prussia, is "an anachronistic and self-contradictory hybrid". The major problem was that Hegelian philosophy was essentially theological in character. What Hegel called the Absolute was in fact what the ordinary man identified as God. The PoR applies the concept of the Absolute to an account of man's social and political institutions. Feuerbach had already reversed this proposition by saying that the beginning of philosophy is not God, not the Absolute, but the finite, the determinate, the actual. Marx's reservation with Feuerbach was that he didn't pursue this argument further to the sphere of politics.

It emerges that both Hegel and Marx agreed that, under feudalism, economic and political life were intertwined. Marx called this "the democracy of unfreedom"—where civil and political society were unified but the people were unfree. This is in contrast to the modern world which was typified by the separation of civil and political society.

However, the manner in which Hegel and Marx evaluated this division was not the same. With the help of Hegel's text, Marx claims to see more clearly the distorted character of the world of politics. He diverges from Hegel to assert that this is a world not of mental realities or imaginary beings but of historical institutions.

Marx's Counter-Propositions: "True Democracy"

Even while criticising Hegel's institutional conclusions, Marx formulates the basic features of his own social and political theory using Hegel's framework. In place of Hegel's monarchy, Marx uses "true democracy"; for Hegel's bureaucracy, he eventually substitutes the proletariat as a universal class; in place of landed property under primogeniture, he advocates the abolition of private property; and he demands in place of the Assembly of Estates the institution of "universal suffrage" as the medium par excellence for the abolition of the state-civil society duality.

For the purpose of this study, the most striking proposition of Marx, is regarding "true democracy".

In monarchy, the whole, the people, is subsumed under one of its modes of existence, the political constitution; in democracy the constitution itself appears only as one determination, and indeed as the self-determination of the people...Hegel proceeds from the state and makes man into the subjectified state; democracy starts with man and makes the state objectified man...Man does not exist because of the law but rather the law exists for the good of the man. Democracy is human existence, while in the other political forms man has only legal existence. That is the fundamental difference of democracy. (Marx, 1970, pp. 29-30)

The crux of Marx's argument is that Hegel's reduction of the state to one person could have been prevented had he started from the real subject as the basis of the state, instead of starting from an imaginary subject called 'sovereignty'. For Marx, the will of the monarch stands for the expression of individual self-determination only formally; its real content is the solitary, arbitrary will of one person cut off from the universality of the general social consciousness. This could not be a

paradigm for rational self-determination since only the universal can be rational, and the monarch's will, by definition, negates universality. In Hegel's theory, the state is described as if it can be discussed without simultaneous reference to the individuals whose role it organises and mediates. Consequently, the individual appears in Hegelian philosophy only after the construction of the state has already been accomplished, but this mediation, according to Marx, is erroneous and superfluous.

Further, the monarchical state cannot become the authentically universal sphere also because it is only called into being by the particularisation of civil society, and is indeed its "other side". It is only the persistence of the civil-political division that sustains it. Were this contradiction to be resolved, Marx argued, the very basis of the state would "disappear". Correspondingly, for its existence, the state does not overcome the contradictions and inequalities within civil society in establishing its realm of universal equality; it simply suspends them. Real differences in civil society are characterised as non-political and thus non-effective in the realm of the state. Thus, for example, through political emancipation, the state

abolishes political distinctions based on birth, status, education and occupation, but it still allows these distinctions to act and assert their particular nature in their own manner. Therefore, far from abolishing these actual distinctions, the state presupposes them in order to exist (Marx, 1926, p. 54).

Democracy as Human Emancipation

Another important exposition of Marx is that although political emancipation “represents important progress”, it is not “the last form of human emancipation generally”. It is, however, the “last form of human emancipation within the existing world order” (Marx, 1926, p. 58). For the perfection of political emancipation is the perfection of the division into “bourgeois” and “citizen”. It is the reduction of man on the one hand to the member of civil society, the egoistic, independent, individual, and on the other to the citizen, the moral person. Thus, while the winning of the rights of the citizen represents a major advance over the structured inequalities of feudalism, freedoms of such kind express, in themselves, the partial nature of this emancipation. The great limitation of this purely political revolution, Marx insisted, is that it

dissolves civil society into its component parts without revolutionising these parts and subjecting them to criticism.

Thus, Marx’s evaluation of the civil-political division reveals two sets of related oppositions: first, the dissolution of civil society into isolated egoistic individuals “who are related by law”, and secondly, “the constitution of the political state” that is the more general estrangement of the state from civil society.

Here, one of the basic operative notions of his critique is that man is a *Gattungswesen*, a “species-being”—which specifies man as a conscious being, and has implications regarding man’s social nature. This notion of species-being lies behind Marx’s reference in the critique to the family and society as species-form and his reference to species-will in relation to the determination and execution in the political society of public affairs. The latter expression refers to the will of the individual man as a social being, rather than to any sort of collective or general will. Accordingly, where the state is in fact, what it ought to be, it represents the full realisation of man’s species-will. Further, the species-form viz. the

family, society and the state—are a necessary condition for man's development as an individual, fully social being. Such a relationship of the individual and society underlies Marx's use in the critique of the term *Gemeinwesen* (communal being) to signify both the individual and the society. Because of this, one must avoid postulating society as a kind of abstract thing which confronts the individual.

Overcoming the Civil-Political Divide

Having rejected Hegel's "semblance of a resolution" through the mediation of a "universal" state, Marx insisted that this contradiction is only truly resolved when civil and political life are reunited. Only through this reunification of "public" and "private" life can the division of "citizen" and "bourgeois" give way to the individual "real human being". He concluded that only when man has recognised and organised his own forces as social forces so that social force is no longer separated from him in the form of political force, that human emancipation will be reached (Marx, 1970, p. 140). For Marx, this human emancipation exemplifies the realisation of "true democracy". Thus: "Democracy is the resolved mystery to

all constitutions. Here the constitution not only in itself, according to essence, but according to existence and actuality is returned to its real ground, actual man, the actual people, and established as its own work." Moreover, every other political formation is a definite, particular form of the state in which the political man leads his particular existence alongside the unpolitical man, the private citizen. But it is only in democracy that "the first true unity of the universal and the particular" is realised (Marx, 1970, pp. 29-30).

Further, although the main target is a monarchy, Marx is developing his idea of "true democracy" against any abstract form of state—even a republic.

[T]he modern state is an accommodation between the political and non-political state. In democracy the abstract state has ceased to be the governing moment. The struggle between monarchy and republic is itself still a struggle within the abstract form of the state. The political republic (*that is, the republic merely as political constitution*) is democracy within the abstract form of the state. Hence the abstract state-form of democracy is the republic; but here

(*in true democracy*) it ceases to be mere political constitution (Marx, 1970, p. 31, my italics)

Here, it is worth taking note of the ‘mere-ness’ of political constitution. Marx considers this at length in his other essays too. For example, in *On the Jewish Question*, while considering the example of Jewish emancipation, Marx suggests that political emancipation of religion means only the freedom to worship as one chooses and not freedom from the superstition and alienation that religion is seen to express. Under freedom of religion, the individual is liberated from religion only through the medium of the state and only in a political, and thus partial, way. This purely political annulment of religion, as of private property, consists only in declaring distinctions of religion/private property to be non-political—that is in confining these differences to civil society. Thus, “the contradiction in which the religious individual is involved with the political individual is the same contradiction in which the bourgeois is involved with the citizen, in which the member of bourgeois society is involved with his political lionskin” (Marx, 1926, p. 36).

Marx insists that political emancipation ensured the dissolution of the old order in which civil society had manifested a directly political character. This process reached “completion” in the French Revolution, following which class distinctions of civil society became transformed into merely social differences in the private life of no significance in political life (Marx, 1970: 80). However, while the French Revolution established the universalisation of the political realm, it correspondingly generated universal particularisation within civil society. It established “juridical and political equality only upon the basis of a new and deeper inequality” (Colletti, 1992, p. 32). Marx identified that what appears to the individual to be “complete freedom” is really nothing but the free movement of “his alienated life elements”. This way, Marx argued, the individual in the “modern world” comes to lead a double life. Just as Christianity had taught of inequality on earth but equality in heaven, similarly people become “equal in the heaven of their political world yet unequal in the earthly existence of society” (Marx, 1970, p. 80).

Introduction to this work written five months later.

Search for a Universal Class

Combining his historical studies in the development of political bureaucracy with his personal experience with the censors and bureaucracy in general, Marx presents a long and biting criticism that condemns the bureaucracy as a closed corporation which transforms the universal aims of the state into another form of private interest. It is not a universal class but a "pseudo-universal" class whose members disdainfully regard popular life as material to be manipulated in the pursuit of their own careers. His search for a universal class, whose identity is not imaginary, a class whose interests are identical with the interests of man's universal, social nature draws his attention to the existence of a social stratum which was at once essential to the economic workings of modern society yet excluded from its material and spiritual benefits. In the *critique*, he speaks of a class characteristic of modern society which is marked by the lack of property and the need to labour. This class, he notes, is less of civil society than the basis upon which the spheres of civil society rest and move. Interestingly, the term 'proletariat' appears not in the *critique* but in the

Democracy as Abolition of Private Property

Hegel's identification of landed private property governed by primogeniture as a principle of socio-political unity provides the occasion for Marx's first systematic examination of the nature and political significance of private property (Marx, 1970, pp. 97-102). Marx is quick to point out the evident contradictions in Hegel's own text: Hegel is correct in identifying private property as the basis of the political state. However, this fact is hardly to be celebrated; for it means that the state, rather than being the objectification of the political sentiment of the people is instead the objectification of private property in its most anti-social and anti-political form. Rather than being a principle of socio-political unity, as Hegel tries to make it, private property is a principle of social dissolution, a power which disintegrates social life, and which makes the state a sphere of illusory universality masking the egoistic pursuit of private interest, a tool in the competitive struggle for economic advantage. Marx also examines the humanistic implications of

primogeniture, moving on to a more philosophical plane. He notes that in the primogeniture there is a reversal of the subject-predicate relationship in terms of which Hegel himself understands the nature of property: for Hegel, property is a thing subservient to the will of its owner; the essence of property is its alienability according to the owner's will. But Marx would argue that in primogeniture the property is inalienable because it passes from first-born to first-born and therefore appears to be the subject of the will, and the owner's will the predicate of the property; thus, man is the serf of his own property. This conclusion sets the stage for his own assertion that the abolition of private property is essential to the achievement of the socio-political ideal of the *Gemeinwesen* (common being).

Problematising the Political Legislature

For Marx, all inconsistencies and self-contradictions of Hegel's political philosophy are found in his account of the Estates. The term 'estate' has both a civil and a political significance for Hegel. In its civil form it is 'a group of class of men having similar profession or occupation or enjoying the same

legal, economic, or social status'. In a political context, it appears in the plural (estates) and signifies a representative body which mirrors in legislative deliberations 'the diversity of particular interests in the country'. The Assembly of Estates is the structural form of representative political legislature (O'Malley, 1970, p. xlvi). Within the legislative body, representatives of the various civil and political elements—the crown, the bureaucracy, and the civil estates—meet to debate and determine the course of the nation-state (O'Malley, p. xlix). And it is this Assembly which Hegel identifies as the best medium for the achievement of civil-political unity in the modern state.

However, for Marx, nowhere more than in the Estates is it so evident that the modern state is not objectification of the political consciousness and sentiment of the people. Because, instead of enabling the people to participate in public affairs, the Estates render the pursuit of public affairs an illusion and, moreover, an illusion monopolised by bureaucratic officialdom. And the reason is that the Estates are an anachronism, a medieval institution offered as the cure for modern ills. Moreover, in their modern form, the Estates are a hybrid; for while one house related to its corresponding

civil estates (the landed gentry) in almost purely medieval fashion, the other estate corresponded to the commercial and industrial class in modern fashion. For Marx, this hybrid is also a contradictory one—on the one hand, the state itself becomes a dependent extension of civil society because in them, the legislature's essence is guaranteed by independent private property, and the legislature's existence is guaranteed by the privileges of the corporations. On the other hand, that relationship is intended to guarantee the independence of the state relative to private interests because as a universal class the members of the Estates are to forgo their civil class interests in favour of the universal interests. Thus, they are simultaneously representatives as well as non-representatives of their class interests (O'Malley, p. lxi)!

Marx, again, argues differently. For him, the people are the real subjects of political consciousness and sentiment, and sovereignty lies in the people. Accordingly, he demands a constitution opposed to the Estates and the monarchy, a constitution adequate to the "species-will". These demands converge in his assertion of democracy as the only constitution that matches

human's true political nature. According to him, only in democracy is a person the real of the constitution, and the state really an objectification of man's social species-being. Moreover, only in democracy do the people fully participate in determining and executing public affairs.

Democracy Through Universal Suffrage

For Marx, the means for this participation that constitutes "true democracy" is "universal suffrage". He insists that only democracy in the form of universal suffrage can achieve what the Estates effect in a purely illusory way, namely the transcendence of the dualism of political state and civil society. This leads Marx to claim that in true democracy, the political state disappears wherein civil society would abandon itself as such if all its members were legislators (Marx, 1970, pp. 31, 90-91, 119). This is elaborated further in the closing pages of the Critique where Marx argues that "unrestricted active and passive suffrage" raises civil society "to an abstraction of itself, to the political existence as its true universal and essential existence". But, this abstraction is simultaneously the transcendence of the abstraction too:

In actually establishing its political existence as its true existence, civil society has simultaneously established its civil existence, in distinction from its political existence, as inessential...Within the abstract political state, the reform of voting advances the dissolution of this political state, but also the dissolution of civil society. (Marx, 1970, p. 121)

Thus, the genuine abolition of the historically conditioned modern dualism of state and civil society is to be effected through universal suffrage.

Here, one cannot say for certain if Marx is developing a procedural plan of democracy or/and if he is abandoning the idea of representation altogether. What is certain is that he is critical of Hegel's understanding of categories such as election which is the political act by which civil society decides upon its political choice. According to Hegel, the direct participation of all in deliberating and decision-making on political matters of general concern "is tantamount to a proposal to put the democratic element without any rational form into the organism of the state, although it is only in virtue of the possession of such a form that the state

is an organism at all". That is to say; the democratic element can be admitted only as a formal element in a state organism that is merely a formalism of the state. Marx, of course, argues that it is the democratic element—that is, the direct participation of all through universal suffrage—which should be the actual element that acquires its rational form in the whole organism of the state. Otherwise, such an exercise would merely be "a drill, an accommodation, a form, in which it does not exhibit what is characteristic of its essence". Marx, therefore, is critical of the universalisation of suffrage under mere "state formalism". His demand for universal suffrage holds a deeper meaning:

Deliberation and decision is the effectuation of the state as an actual concern. The very notion of member of the state implies their being a member of the state, a part of it, and the state having them as its part. But if they are an integral part of the state, then it is obvious that their social existence is already their actual participation in it. They are not only integral parts of the state, but the state is their integral part. (Marx, 1970, pp. 117-118)

That universal suffrage was rather a means of overcoming the 'merely' representative principle and of breaking the confines of 'merely,' political democracy is understood when he says: "The drive of civil society to transform itself into a political society or to make the political society into the actual society, shows itself as the drive for the most fully possible universal participation in legislative power" (Marx, 1970, pp. 118-119). Therefore, Marx's usage of "universal suffrage" suggests that the aspiration to universal suffrage is a symptom of civil society's striving to realise its political existence. However, even that realisation does not automatically lead to the realisation of true democracy, so long as the division between the civil and political life persists.

Prospects and Omissions

In this paper, I have tried to develop my own reading of the merits and gaps in a seminal yet relatively ignored theoretical work of Marx regarding his propositions on democracy. I have searched for the areas in which he has engaged with the ideas, values, and practices of democracy. I have found that democracy, as a theoretical

conception and a political aspiration, is integral to Marx's basic concerns about resolving the contradictions between political-social institutions of a society and the social beings that reside therein. Nowhere in his later works have I encountered such meticulous arguments about political institutions, specifically on monarchy, bureaucracy, and legislature. His counter-proposals—true democracy, a universal class of species-being, universal suffrage as the means of direct participation in political sphere, and the abolition of private property have also been discussed elaborately here. My inferences from this reading have been:

First, Marx's critique of the state and its social and political institutions (as they existed in the Prussian context) through a sharp critique of Hegel's justifications for those very ideas and institutions are some of the most powerful strengths of his work. There are some philosophical and theoretical inferences that not only help us understand but also question some of the subsequent discourses on democracy by Marx and other Marxists. For instance, we could now trace the philosophical basis for the insertion in the Communist Manifesto of "winning the battle of democracy" as one of the two tasks of the proletarian revolution.

This was later more concretely addressed by Marx in *The Civil War in France* where he talks about the Commune as the “direct antithesis” to existing monarchical state (Marx, 1950). The second task of the proletarian revolution was, “to raise the proletariat to the position of the ruling class”. One could be compelled to ask why the task of “winning the battle of democracy” became almost obliterated and increasingly overshadowed by the task of establishing “dictatorship of the proletariat” in subsequent political practices.

Second, when Marx projects the practice of universal suffrage as leading to true democracy, and the realisation of “species-being” as leading to human emancipation, he provides us glimpses of his conception of a future communist society. He competently presents a preliminary outline of an alternative vision of society and human nature within what he calls “true democracy”. However, Marx’s usage of universal suffrage is in the context of a society where representative democracy was built on suffrage restrictions. Today, universal suffrage is generally operative in all societies, albeit with imperfections. Although Marx’s call for universal suffrage is set in an entirely

different historical and social context, even within this gap in time and place settings, one can still ask: could there have been better clues in Marx’s work to address the challenges and problems in representative democracies that have already solved the issues of suffrage restrictions? Further, is it presupposed that universal suffrage shall always advance the abolition of civil-political dualism? If yes, what is the basis for this supposition? If no, what are the circumstances under which universal suffrage can be a medium for the achievement of their unity?

Additionally, when Marx says that “whether all as individuals should share in deliberating and deciding on political matter of general concern is a question that arises from the separation of the political state and civil society”, or that the en masse invasion of civil society in the sphere of legislative power is the drive of civil society “to make political society its actual existence”, he leaves the questions of delegation, leadership and implementation mechanisms vaguely answered in both the above possibilities. Therefore, leaving it open for us to interpret that he is espousing a powerful concept of direct democracy without being available for a defence against the problems that accompany

the idea and practice of direct democracy. The realisation of true democracy as the first "true unity" of the particular and the universal leaves a whole array of classical political problems—such as the need of representation and mediation, rights of the individual, collective rights, checks and balances in political structures, the structure and function of political parties, relationship with the masses—unaddressed.

Nevertheless, the critical strength of Marx's work apart, his solutions to the problems are powerful evidence of their hopes for and conception of a better future society. He competently presents a preliminary outline of an alternative vision of society and human beings within what he calls "true democracy". However, the legacy left to his followers on the problems of realising and actualising the journey towards this postulated future remains somewhat ambiguous. Moreover, the substantive, as well as the procedural aspects of democracy in between the transition from mere political democracy to true democracy, is inadequately available to the readers. Perhaps, this is because Marx belonged to a different time and society in which the problems and challenges that we face today had not

yet materialised in concrete terms. Yet, it is the methodology employed by Marx to articulate his critique as well as advance his alternative propositions that stand out above all.

Furthermore, a reading of Marx's very first propositions on topics such as the state, democracy, legislative, suffrage, etc. supports a claim that the pervasive and ubiquitous presence of 'the economic' in political processes and phenomena need not rob politics of its specific character or make it less prone to a particular treatment. Correspondingly, an exclusive interest on political institutions and political processes does not imply a sole call for purely political democracy or an attempt to insist on the separation of politics from economics or vice versa. Rather, what emerges from this study is the need to take seriously the social and economic constitution of what is considered to be 'the political' and how they are presented in their political facets to people who must act politically in relation to them.

Notes

1. From W. B. Gallie's coinage of "essentially contested concepts" and Philip Green's description of democracy as "remarkably ambiguous" concept.

2. Singh argues that Marxism, contrary to conventional understanding, postulates the primacy of politics, not economics. An interesting distinction is made between revolutionary politics and a theory of politics to contend that the latter is “absent” and “ignored” in Marxism. The reasons for this are placed in the complex nature of politics itself which is not amenable to law-like tendencies in the way that economics is. Added to this is the fact that although Marx had expressed a desire to come up with an exclusive account on The State, he was not able to fulfil it in his lifetime.
3. One example would be Ernest Mandel’s refusal to reduce the explanation of the ‘Stalinist phenomenon’ to superstructural phenomena: “In the final analysis, the various superstructures that may arise from the same social base result from the contradictions and transformations of the base itself. The key to the superstructure is never found in the superstructure itself...it [has] deeper socio-economic roots” (Mandel, 1978, pp. 127-128).
4. This is Guy Bois’s critique of “political Marxism”. In response, scholars have invoked Marx’s insistence that “capital is a social relation of production” to ascertain that social, juridical and political forms and relations (the “superstructure”) are not merely secondary reflexes or external supports, but “constituents” of a mode of production and production relations (the “base”) (Wood, 1995, pp. 23-26).
5. The return to the Hegelian sources of Marxism, for instance, marked the tradition termed ‘Western Marxism’ which emerged as a challenge to Soviet Marxism and included individuals such as Gramsci, Lukacs, Korsch, and currents such as the Frankfurt School which shifted the emphases of Marxism from political economy to ideology, philosophy, culture, art—all laced by politics. For an overview of this school of thought, see A Dictionary of Marxist Thought, 1991, s.v. “Western Marxism.”
6. This view is directly associated with Louis Althusser who claims that the writings of the “young” Marx cannot be considered a part of Marxism: “Of course Marx’s youth did lead to Marxism, but only at the price of a prodigious break with his origins, a heroic struggle against the illusions he had inherited from the Germany in which he was born, and an acute attention to the realities concealed by these illusions” (Althusser, 1965, p. 84).
7. This is in concurrence with Shlomo Avineri’s position that the mature writings of Marx must not be considered as a closed system with which his earlier writings must be opposed: “If Marxism built on an analysis of the whole of Marx’s thought would suggest shifts of interest and emphasis in his analysis and vision during his development, this would still not mean that either the ‘young’ or the ‘old’ Marx be dismissed as wholly irrelevant” (Avineri, 1968, pp. 2-3).

Disclosure Statement

I do, hereby, declare that this article is an original piece and there exists no potential conflict of interest.

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