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## A political economy of labor? A Learning Perspective

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### **A political economy of labor? A Learning Perspective**

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#### **Abstract**

This paper outlines a link between the critique of the political economy of capital – in line with Marx – and a conception of economic democracy based in the everyday experiences of working people. Theorizing learning in and for work life in a way which discovers what the political economy of capital disguises is seen as the material basis of developing new forms of social relations and democracy. A “political Economy of Labor” must conceptualize the needs and interests of the working people and the qualitative and material aspects of work life - as opposed to the exchange values and the “dead labor” which form the basic elements of the political economy of capital (Negt, 1984; Negt&Kluge 2014; Salling Olesen, 2009). Until now the relation between economy and political processes is mostly thought of as a relation between quasi natural economy and modifications enabled by the state. The Social Democrat Welfare systems are based in the redistribution of revenues and the provision of services that tend to be neglected or under-prioritized in a capitalist market. This model is under siege, both in terms of power and in terms of legitimacy. This paper will point to the potential for democratic social change based in the everyday experiences of work, depending on how the processes are understood and organized. The scientific task is to develop methods and theoretical tools to help excavate and understand these experiences and to help to form a vision/theory of the possibility of organizing the entire complex modern societal work and the exchange process as a (political) economy of the living workers.

The response to these great issues may be found in empirical investigations at the micro level – among others in the study of *work and learning*. The present state of capitalism – where industrial as well as the colonial tools for profitability are being exhausted - has in a way already set this scene – manifested in the interest in human resources, lifelong learning and emotional labor.

The notion of a political economy of labor is a theoretical framework in which the material (evolutionary and historical) development of the capacity to work is analyzed as a process of learning and self-regulation (Negt & Kluge 2014). Within this framework you can analyze work – also present day work under capitalist circumstances – as life processes in which concrete subjects relate to each other, to their work objects, their tools and their products.

The framework will focus attention on the zones of learning and self-regulation which are sometimes neglected. The framework has potential to provide a new perspective on the learning processes defined by the needs of work or what is going on in work, consciously or unconsciously.

I will outline the political challenges set by the political economy of (global) capitalism and discuss the potentials for a new democratic Marxism based in the experiences of working people. From this I will discuss the role of learning in and for work as a matter of producing self-regulative capabilities that may offer a material basis for a new democratic and sustainable political economy.

## **1. The Challenges Set by Global Capitalism**

Global capitalism seems to extend its dominance not only extensively but also intensively. The globalized economy seems to undermine the domain of politics (nation states and institutions) as well as the strength of working class (trade unions). The combination of neo-liberal policies and mass media penetrates social relations and culture of everyday life. But socialist thinking is running into a cul-de-sac if it only applies Marxism to understand the actual completion of a global capitalist system where every part of the world, every type of manufacturing and service, and every level of human needs are subordinated capitalism and shaped by exchange value relations. Marx did actually indicate theoretically that capitalism is objectively dependent on the material processes of living workers and the use values of their products and services. But he did not do much to elaborate the subjective dimension of these processes and their political potential. His political thinking was in a way a shortcut from the formation of an industrial working class and the ambition of overthrowing the entire capitalist system by the collective will of this class (although he also developed the structuralistic argument about the collapse of the system because of the declining profit rate). This shortcut enabled the fatal authoritarian interpretation and development of the idea of the proletarian dictatorship in the Soviet Union and elsewhere. A democratic socialism must, instead of systemic alternatives, revolutionary shifts and highly unlikely changes of power relations, focus on the potential of people for being the subject of a societal economy emerging from their own concrete material work and consumption within a capitalist economy.

The social democrat tradition has, alternatively, theoretically dichotomized the relation between economy and democracy, accepting more or less the ideas of market dynamics as a result of the agency of “economic man” and referring all other human motives and drivers to be handled in the form of institutional politics, setting certain limitations and modifications to the market dynamics. This line of thinking has also produced significant results in the form of welfare states in some countries – until now may be the best “real existing democracies” - but it is also clear that the social democrat version of democracy is extremely vulnerable (the weakening of the nation state) and fails to provide convincing responses to some of the most the urgent issues caused by globalization – environment protection, climate, impoverishment, global migration. The political coherence and solidarity is threatened by flooding from material forces – in concrete as well as more abstract sense.

## **2. The role of research in work and learning**

The notion of a political economy of labor envisions a societal order in which economic relations and exchanges are based in the immediate needs and interests of working people. It is at first a logical reversal of Marx’ “Critique of the political Economy of Capital”(Negt & Kluge, 1981; 2014). But it opens a horizon for a process oriented, non-deterministic and hence empirical elaboration. The paper will present a theoretical framework in which the material (evolutionary and historical) development of the capacity to work is analyzed as a process of learning and self-regulation. Within this framework you can analyze work – also present day work under capitalist circumstances – as life processes in which concrete workers relate as subjects to each other, to their work objects, their tools and their products. In doing so they learn and conduct forms of self-regulation, sometimes fully aligned with the needs of the capitalist organisations and exchanges in which they are embedded, sometimes in a dual, separated or contradictory parallel process.

The potential for democratic social change is in the everyday experiences of the living work processes, depending on how experiences are understood and how processes are organized. The scientific response to the great issues on societal level may be theoretically informed empirical investigations on micro level – **among others in the study of work and learning**. The present state of capitalism – where industrial as well as colonial tools for increasing profitability are being exhausted - has in a way already set this scene – manifested in the interest into human resources, lifelong learning and emotional labor. The scientific task is to develop methods and theoretical tools to help excavate and understand experiences and to help forming a vision/theory of the possibility to organize the entire complex modern societal work and exchange process as a (political) economy of the living workers.

This framework will focus attention to zones of learning and self-regulation which are sometimes marginalized. And it will particularly give a new perspective on all the learning processes defined by the needs of work or going on in work, consciously or unconsciously.

### **3. The (European) new Left and Marxism**

The concept of 'Political Economy of Labor' which is vaguely suggested by Marx (several places in *The Capital*) is most convincingly launched by Oskar Negt and Alexander Kluge in *Geschichte und Eigensinn* (Negt & Kluge, 1981; 2014). I propose this concept as a potential framework for a re-writing of the ideas of subjectivity within a Marxian theory - which has implications for political as well as social scientific thought. Such rewriting would ground subjectivity in historical matter: Produced by and productive in the development of capitalism, and may be beyond? One of Oskar Negt's contributions is to address not only the critical theory as well as political practice, but also the gap between the two elements (Jameson, 1988; Salling Olesen, 2009). From the 1960'es this led to a creative concern with the essential processes that might bridge this gap: learning and democratization. I will focus on some concepts, which seem especially fruitful for theorizing this domain, according to my academic and political experience.

The concept, when launched, met a long felt need: In the theoretical interpretation of Marxism taking place in the student generation around 1970, when the theoretical follow up of the political tide from the Vietnam-movement and the European Student Revolt finally took the European new left back to the analysis of Capital and capitalism in the oeuvre of Karl Marx, there was always an irritation about the relation of this theoretical insight to political practice and to the ideas about emancipation.

The irritation was partly just intellectual - Marxism must encompass a consistent political strategy, which is neither idealistic nor mechanical in its understanding of potentials and conditions of political change. The irritation was also practical, may be particularly in the Scandinavian environment. The fact of a social welfare state of a relatively benign nature - with culturally liberal aspects, even - was unquestionable. The importance of the labor movement in the creation of this welfare society was also unquestionable. But the Social Democrat Labor movement had already in the 1920's sacked Marxism and believed in a (more) equal distribution of an ever growing cake, resigning from more fundamental changes of capitalist society. Having rejected the reductive theory and authoritarian political models of Communism most new left ended up in either an academic elitism, or in a quite productive, but very sub-cultural, politicization of everyday life, in the form of grass root based cultural and social movements. New spheres of political action emerged during 1960-70's. This 'life world politics' was also entirely dissolved from the sphere of work, which had been main driver of the entire capitalist modernization process, and thus also of politics and emancipation paradigms set up

by the labor movement. There were also examples of more radical socialist parties and more radical positions in the trade unions but the new European left of 1960-70's was not successful in engaging broadly. The request for an adequate concept of socialist democratization was urgent.

Negt and Kluge (Oskar Negt, 1964; Oskar Negt & Kluge, 1972, 1981) offered a decisive development in Marxist theory. They provided a logical complement to Marx' theory as developed in Grundrisse (Marx, 1858) and Das Kapital (Marx, 1867-83.), an entirely renewed version of the historical materialism. Preserving an overall civilization aspect of history it promises a way out of the determinism of the Capital analysis, and avoids the somewhat mechanical quality of the historical civilization sequence as developed especially by Friedrich Engels and the communist political theory. It seemed an essential asset facing the basic question then and today: How can we in the middle of the flexible and comprehensive ability of Capital to subordinate all materiality and subjectivity, see any material dynamics which can produce substantial changes? Utopian perspectives must take their point of departure in the constitution of capitalism itself in order to be realistic. And realism is what distinguishes productive utopian perspectives. Translating a book title by Negt: "Now only utopias are realistic" (Oskar Negt, 2012).

#### **4. A Bid for Completing Marx**

'Political Economy of Labor' ('eine politische Ökonomie der Arbeitskraft') which was Negts & Kluges expression in 1981- is rather a conceptual outline than an elaborate theory. May be this dynamics, until now objectified as a part of the societal organization of work, is just now appearing as a conceivable reality. Negt & Kluge (Negt & Kluge, 1981, 2014; Salling Olesen, 2009) here and elsewhere make a point of this vagueness - we are dealing with an explorative concept, open by definition in order to be open to a real historical development.

The very formulation of the concept is in dialogue with Marx, as a negation and (utopian) counterpiece to the political economy of capital. Marx in Das Kapital sometimes uses similar concepts ('political economy of the working class' or '...of work'). Additionally, Marx in marginal notes admits, that the value of work has a 'historical and moral element' but he avoids to assign it a basic status, his focus is on the fact of its societal subordination in exchange and accumulation processes (Negt & Kluge, 1981, pp87 ff; pp 139ff). Marx assigns the same status to other natural and material elements in the societal production (the natural and material base of the social processes). According to Negt & Kluge (op cit) 'the Political Economy of Labor' is a programmatic framework for an analysis - equally comprehensive and in-depth as the 'Critique or the Political Economy of Capital' - only taking the living worker as the axis of the analysis.

Negt & Kluge (Negt & Kluge, 1981, 2014) take their point of departure in the evolution, i.e. in the biological history of the human species, continuing into a civilisation history: It deals with the material processes of acquiring the ability to work, from elementary bodily traits of the species (upright walking, hand grips) to language, intelligence, and normativity - and thereby the interwovenness of the evolution (phylogenesis) with the material history of a gradually upcoming societal organization. The material - biological and social - production of labor is a reiterating process which - though (now) also a part of the capitalist reproduction circuit - is independently constituted and materially based on its own reproduction. By phrasing it 'the political economy of *living work*' you might emphasize the link between the biological reproduction and the societally produced subjectivity. Only quite late in human history, in the 16<sup>th</sup>-17<sup>th</sup> Century, did the social relation of Capitalism arrive and now organize the

reproduction process, thereby constituting the structures and contradictions as they appear in the capitalist modernization process. The concept actually used by Negt & Kluge, political economy of labor, however emphasizes the connotation of labor, work in the context of capitalism.

The concept of 'political economy of labor' addresses a theoretical shortcoming of Marxist theory by integrating several aspects of reproductive life processes and subjective expressions in the inner contradiction of capitalism. Capitalist modernization generates a broader cultural process out of these reproductive and subjective processes. Seen in this framework the continuous development of human work ability has two distinctly different stages: Before and after the original accumulation, which meant the separation of man from the means of production. Before this shift the means of production were body or 'extended body'. After the shift man become part of the 'labor force', a (wo)man who has and must have the ability to be combined with others and with the means of production, which are societally separated from him/her. Capitalism indeed is a dynamic force in the modernization process, but it is dependent on the condition that the labor force is reproducing and developing its work ability on its own. Capitalism in this way generates a historical dynamic which may go beyond it. In the colonial phase of capitalism this tension or contradiction has the form of cultural difference in spite of enforced cultural assimilation – I think that the recognition of indigenous culture and difference could be conceptualized as another materiality with its own version of what Negt & Kluge call "Eigensinn" (Negt & Kluge, 2014).

## **5. Education, Learning and Wage Labor**

The societal development of the labor force is becoming in this phase first a precondition of the capitalist development, and later a dynamic force potentially going beyond it, To the extent you see history as a civilizing history in which the development of work and relations around work play a decisive role. The intense political focus on (lifelong) learning from outside educational institutions (Rubenson, 1996) reflects a specific historical phase in which learning has become a central dimension in the reproduction of labor power. Consequently the conditions of transcending this phase depend on socialization and learning (and hence in thinking of a political economy of labor).

In the discussion of the 1970ies neo-Marxist inspiration was imported into critical education theory by the concept of qualification, which theoretically related education to the (re)production of societal labor force, and provided a relevant critique of the dominant (idealistic) educational thought and of progressive educational practice (reform pedagogy, humanistic enlightenment), explaining that the structure and function of education is independent of and may be also invisible for the educational actors (Salling Olesen, 1996; Salling Olesen & Weber, 2013). But it paid little attention to the contradictory concrete production process of the 'use value' of the work process, including the living worker. New developments in capitalist work life gave rise to a new discussion of the relation between work and means of production (technology) with the optimistic question of Kern/Schumann in 1984: *Ende der Arbeitsteilung?* (Kern & Schumann, 1984). The subordination of labor to qualification needs implies not only the more generalized skills and knowledge, but the demand for subjective qualities more than anything else. Even industrial workers must be cooperative, responsible, creative and autonomous. In Danish discussion we have used 'general qualification' as concept of these seemingly new requirements to the labor force (Salling Olesen, 1996). In the last 2-3

decades we have seen a shift in the emphasis of “advanced” organization thinking to emotional labour and also some critical awareness about the boundaryless nature of work.

It is clear that many of the classic measures of social control from the industrial capitalism are outdated with the shifts from big industry to automation. Is this qualitative change of work process and the new demands/options for 'humanization' and subjective involvement the end of the alienation (Entfremdung) of work? Is 'general qualification' a take off ramp for a 'the living work' to reintegrate and take control over the societal organization of life processes? The 're-subjectivation' of some work is of course not just congruent with earlier humanistic ideas of education and subjectivity - although some seem to assume so. It is not a return from the industrial shaping of man in some generations to an original humanity. Basic humanity has just within the period of industrial development changed radically. Children's social, intellectual and emotional capacities are others than before, and the adult workers carry a history of collective experience - more or less consciously - as base of all aspects of their work identity. The re-subjectivation of work does not mean 'taking work back to its original subjective quality' - it means inviting/demanding and allowing new forms of cooperation and/or new types of autonomy, which can be developed in relation to the social and societal context of work and technology today.

Several structural trends of post-fordism have reinforced the assumption about the inclining importance of general qualification. However, on the other hand a critical analysis may seriously question the optimistic implications of the trend. Both new forms of social control and new marginalization, first of all in the form of precarious employment make the changes to work quality far more diverse (Standing, 2011). There is no escape from analyzing the forms of development of subjectivity as dynamics taking place in a capitalist environment. But the theoretical search for a new political economy may look for the ambiguities of the material processes.

In the classic era of industrialism you would name the socialization to masculine, bodily oriented and collectively controlled wage labor as the 'general qualification'. The British cultural sociology, the 'anti-psychiatry' and M. Vesters historical study have accounted differently for the historical creation of the subjectivity of wage labor (Salling Olesen, 1998; Vester, 1974; Willis, 1977) - and it is useful to make clear that also this work socialization has a specific shape of subjectivity involved - distorted may be, but also involving products of learning processes - new skills, new social insights, new levels of self-regulation - as compared with previous historical phases. The (absent) conception of subjectivity in neo-Marxian theory of education and learning tends to emphasize the adaptation of personality to exchange values (commodity form) and/or the destructive impact of capitalism into socialization - excluding the basic driving forces of biological life as well as of social learning - or separating them in quasi- naturalistic personality models. In order to overcome these deficits in theorizing learning we have made use of Alfred Lorenzers (Lorenzer, 1972; Salling Olesen & Weber, 2013; Schaffrik, 2002) synthesis of psycho-analytic and Marxian tradition to develop a methodology for understanding learning in life history contexts. We study socialization and learning in the context of work empirically, which can only be seen as a first step in theorizing the relation between societal structures, social interaction and ontogenetic development (Salling Olesen & Weber, 2013).. The epistemological point in these references to learning research is that the understanding of the development of the societal subject of labor must be found in the micro-processes of the living work(er).

## **6. Self-Regulation between Biology and Civilizing Historical Development**

According to basic Marxist materialism the human subjectivity has its origin in the work process: Man produces his own nature by the material interaction. A critical analysis of the contradictions and possible directions of the new material forms of work and corresponding qualification requirements must be examined in their subjective genesis, not by their capitalist rationality: The subject-object-interaction as a concrete historical process. We need a concept of work subjectivity as a historically produced capacity, which is produced in a complex of new life conditions even influencing biological reproduction, cultural shaping of life world and socialization, traditional and systematic mediation of knowledge and production of consciousness etc. - and fulfilled in a lifelong experience process by the individual. The societal shape of work and production is the context, which provides - indirectly through socialization conditions and directly in work as a life world - differentiated conditions for experience building - which may also in turn (re)produce divisions of labor.

The Negt/Kluge (Negt & Kluge, 1981, 2014) analysis of the development of work ability is based on an assumption about a basic regulatory principle, called self-regulation. It is related to biological organismic ideas, both to nature in general, and in the form of evolutionarily acquired self-regulation. On the other hand it is related to human autonomous interactivity located in the value and right of the individual, but also in the situatedness in history of the individual. Together they form the basis of what Negt & Kluge emphatically call the "Eigensinn", one of the key words in the title. It is a concept which is hard to translate – in American writing at least three translations appear which each of them transfer, but also potentially separate, one important aspect of the meaning: Autonomy, Self-Will, and Obstinacy – as it is illuminating discussed in the American translation (Jameson, 1988; Negt & Kluge, 2014).

Self-regulation is participation in the comprehensive mutual self-regulation of nature, and it is the ability to be a subject in this interactive regulation. Subjectivity is thus a developed and enriched ability of self-regulation - the ability of the individual to acquire the cumulated history of species up to his/her time as a bodily and psychological shaping, and as a conscious historical experience. There is an aspect of development, and an aspect of reproductive balancing. The critique of societal forms depends on the link between them.

Historically produced and collectivized regulations (not unlike the idea of institutions in action sociology (Berger & Luckmann, 1966)), which for the individual appear to be objective, are the result of subjective contributions in the social history. Once produced institutions (or structures) appear to the individual as objectivity, and since man produces his 'nature' in the subject-object-interaction, they may give rise to new forms of self-regulation. Capitalist societal organization of work is a product of human action - such an objective, coercive and ever changing condition, which calls for and enables new forms of self-regulation. It cannot be dismantled, done away, by critique, but interaction 'experience', learning about this objective condition as a socially produced relation, is decisive for changing it.

## **7. Self regulation in work and economy?**

Self-regulation of work means developing bodily and psychic capacities to handle it in its specific form, and at the same time revealing its historical character and changeability. Both on the level of the concrete work process, and on the level of societal organization. In this perspective you can examine work qualification in terms of the development of self-regulatory capacities, and the horizon of self-regulation. In the discussion about the new industrial models it is interesting to examine the concrete historical self-regulation of workers in the work processes in relation to fundamental differentiations and societal constraints set by the basic

social structure, capitalism and the sustainability of the material process, and the qualities and sustainability of the work process as experienced by the living worker him-/herself.

I see a political economy of labor as a conceptual framework for the examination of learning in work processes in capitalism. On one hand there is an abundant variation of the basic economic relation between employer and worker, on the other hand work processes form a dynamic and variable context for subjective engagements. Especially the forms of self regulation and the subjective horizon that defines it is important. In the experience of classical wage labor only a limited version of self-regulation is appearing: 'The social contracting relation with capital'. The self-protection of the labor force is a limited form of sustainability regulation. However, in the ambiguity of the concept of the free worker by Marx appears on one hand the historical precondition for capitalism, on the other hand the precondition for new types of self-regulation. At the same time as modernization suck out the material substance and identity of people, dissolves traditional bands, it also relieves energies and sharpens new contradictions. It produces at least resistance, and sometimes more: learning, experience building and utopian attempts to establish self-regulation in ever widening horizons. The workers learned something new, as necessities and possibilities by capitalism. Beside the technical skills they had to they learned how to protect their own work force. They also learned new forms of association, they had to and have the chance to extend their horizon.

Now we seem to be able to leave the industrial era behind - either leaving this type of work to new classes of marginalized 'slaves' ("precariat") like in classic eras of high civilization, or improving the overall quality of work time for everyone. The great and exciting question in relation to present day industrial development is: to which extent and in which aspects will workers extend their self-regulatory capacity, and to which extent will this learning process enable/enforce new developments in societal work? On workplace level, the question is about participation and the horizons in terms of products and the ecological quality of processes. Do workers develop ideas and capacities for regulating sustainability which correspond with the material qualities of production? But the question must also be regarded in a societal scale. They have had the chance to learn about growth and unlimited possibilities, they have also experiences with the reverse aspects of overcrowded cities, pollution, etc. How do people relate these horizons of experience?

In alternative organisations of work and economic exchange there may be different learning conditions, but also shared societal aspects. Of course such initiatives - like cooperatives, "green" productions, self-help networks etc. – are institutional reforms that have to exist within an environment of market economy or sometimes state redistribution, but to the extent they give rise to learning processes they may also produce new forms of self-regulation, with a new horizon. This is may be the most decisive outcome of cooperative enterprises and new types of social economy (second labor market etc.) as long as the political economy of capital is predominant in the societal exchange. Ideas about cooperative and sustainable economy are few and weak in present day theoretical discussion, even in the critical discourses. It is remarkable to see that most prominent critics of the (neo)classic market economy are in fact arguing from a moral or religious view (f.i. Hermann Daly but also George Soros in a special petit bourgeois manner). There seems to be an urgent need for illustrative reality to support theoretical imagination. The concept of self-regulation, linking the reproductive regulation of nature and the civilized, societally learned self-regulation of man, is extremely important as the ground for a new concept of real economy, based on 'use value' in Marx' sense.

## 8. Modernization - a Democratic Learning Process yet to be Completed

Modernization creates for the first time in history the preconditions - structurally and in terms of elementary satisfaction of needs- for individual subjectivity in mass scale. But this is not the same as securing the individuals a subject status. Capitalist modernization at the same time creates a societal interdependence, at the end an interdependence of global nature. This defines the problem of politics of the modernization process: Does the cultural process match the challenges and inner contradictions in that modernization? Can people learn enough to be self-regulative in a modernized world?

Modernity is first of all the cultural qualities resulting from the historical dynamic of capitalism - the industrialization and bureaucratization - but also rationalization of the life world and the spreading of the bourgeois democracy.

The concept 'modernity' used as an abstract epoch marker tend to dissociate a cultural discourse from the modernization as a social process. Giddens speak of 'radical modernity' (Giddens, 1990), others would like to speak about 'late' or 'developed modernity', meaning something more than a phase or a degree. Modernity is not a homogenous and well defined 'epoch in history'. It is a process still in its becoming.

But the search for authenticity in experience and the desire for self-regulation on modernized societal conditions is not only expressed in vanguard modernism. The 'popular' approach of wage labor in the early phase of capitalism was not only the defensive elements and the consumerism - it was also craftsmanship, masculine body culture and workers' solidarity. And later it has not only been consumerism, but also production of the individualized leisure and family culture, that is sometimes perceived as the decay of working class culture. Never the less all adult activities of real people are products of the capitalist modernization, but also vehicles in a modernization process still taking place. They may certainly be a remedy in crisis management of a capitalist economy and the national states - not sufficient but necessary. But they may also encompass the utopian potentials of the modernization project: The conditions of combatting marginalization, at the same time as taking steps to develop new qualities and expectations towards wage labor - the potential for renewal of the welfare state and developing new, democratic relations around specialist competences, deconstructing the regency of experts, etc.

It is difficult to imagine a better example than modern female workers, who have to cope with their (new) wage labor status, and develop their work capacities accordingly. The combined process of gender emancipation and societalization of work makes the women into subjects in a societal sense, and it is a process in its fulfilment by the fact that they do it. You might also call it a democratization of modernity, simply, by the shift in gender relations and the women becoming individual subjects. The labor movement - itself a product of modernity - developed a solidarity culture with strong premodern communitarian qualities, linked to societal concepts of interest and a national state oriented concept of politics. This solidarity culture, which constitutes its subjective quality and inner coherence, is now being eroded by the modernized life world and values of the members, but new solidarities are arising Which and how is still an empirical question of the future.

This is not only a question about 'political education'. It is not an evening class in working class culture, and also not a training course for elected representatives of the trade unions or the labor parties, but a broad and everyday life based experience building. In work life the

knowledge of a wider social context and involvement in a collective commitment beyond the workplace.

### **9. Anticipating a Political Economy of Labor**

We are back to the importance of a theoretical framework like the political economy of labor. Seeing the capitalist modernization (also) from the aspect of a production of subjectivity, emphasizing the learning and democratization aspects, we can find the possible material grounding for processes of basic social change, the end of which are not yet known. The political subject of socialist thought, the working class, was produced by capitalism, but it must itself transcend capitalism by learning processes. Without experience building and learning of new self-regulation no transgression of capitalism.

The political economy of labor is phrased as a direct upside down of the critique of the political economy of capital. Yet, as other critical theories, it ranges beyond, it forms a take off ramp for a utopian imagination beyond, which is not simply a negation of present reality. Capital and exchange value is a part of the civilization history of self-regulation - it may still remain so for a long time - the critical theory must focus not only on enlightening the contradictions and coercions in this present reality, but also in establishing new agendas and social forms in which a self-regulation can grow and develop. It will not be the classic Marxist theme - that the productive forces simply throws over capitalist property forms - technology have since long proven to be a more ambiguous force - but it might have to do with the restoration of materiality, the use values and life cycles ('Sustainability') after a long period of very one-sided exchange value driven development. Who knows what socialism means? The proletariat was not only a by-product of Capitalism, it was also a learning endeavor (Vester, 1974) - and so is true for its (auto)abolition. Die Aufhebung des Proletariats ist ein (kollektiver) Lernprozess.

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