

**Facundo Nahuel Martín (Buenos Aires): «Marxism as a Critical Theory of Modernity: Social Movements and the Logic of Capital»**

Through the last decades, several intellectual and political shifts have led to significant questioning regarding the key concepts of traditional Marxism, in the context of what is usually called the “crisis of Marxism”. This intellectual crisis can be related to two important arguments against traditional marxism. The first argument amounts to its difficulties to deal properly with new social movements and the second argument rises the suspicion that Marxism’s normative concepts could be inherently related to totalitarianism.

First, traditional Marxism has been unable to deal adequately with the multiplicity and complexity of contemporary social antagonisms, that cannot be reduced to class struggle in a narrow sense but are referred to identity, subjectivity, the environment, gender and other different matters. The emergence of (or the renewed attention payed to) a diversity of social movements that exceed the workers movement, focusing on this broader number of social issues, has led to significant questioning of inherited Marxism as a “reductionism of the subject”. A contemporary formulation of Marxist thought should, thus, be able to provide a non-reductionist account of a plurality of social struggles that cannot be simply identified with class struggle as protagonized by the workers movement.

Second, some normative concepts of traditional Marxism have been questioned, rising the suspicion that the totalitarian debacle of the so called “actually existing socialism” would not be a mere historical accident or unhappy contingency. According to this criticism, the totalitarian drift would have an inherent relation with the emancipatory ideals traditionally raised by Marxism, in particular to the goal of constructing a social totality that would overcome the fragmented and divided world of commodity fetishism and alienation. The concept of totality, inherited from modern philosophy, would in itself entail the disacknowledgement of difference. The danger of totalitarianism, which marked the USSR and other historical experiences constructed in the name of Marxism, would then be inherent to the Marxist categories themselves, not just to their external application. Post-Marxist philosopher Claude Lefort (1981), for instance, claims that the Marxist project disregards the inherently conflictive and plural constitution of society, therefore failing to provide a concept of the political (and of human rights) compatible with democracy. The aspiration to construct a social totality (centered on the proletariat or emancipated mankind as an “identical subject-object” of history) would intrinsically lead to the totalitarian debacle.

Against this background of crisis of marxism, the presentation will introduce some of the key concepts in Moishe Postone's *Time, Labor and Social Domination* (1993), in order to develop the foundations of an alternative reading of Marxist thought. Traditional Marxism interpreted the categories of the critique of political economy (value, commodity, abstract labor) from the standpoint of class struggle, understood as the conflict between capital and labor. Class antagonism was thus seen as the primary antagonism of modern society, reducing other forms of social conflict to "secondary contradictions". At the same time, the emancipatory goal raised by class struggle was considered to be the realization of the proletariat, understood as the "identical subject-object" (Lukács, 1922) of history, that could finally overcome the divided or fragmented nature of commodity fetishism, building a social totality reconciled with itself.

According to Postone, Marx's fundamental concepts are not primarily related to class struggle or the workers movement, but instead are categories that structure and organize social mediation in modern capitalist society. This means that abstract labor, value and the commodity are not only economic concepts, but global and comprehensive categories of social mediation which configure the way subjects relate to each other and are constituted in modernity. Drawing on this reinterpretation of Marx, it is possible to give a non-reductionist account of new social movements. This account, while does not take the standpoint of labor as an *a priori* privileged subject of history, is still Marxist since it is based on the critique of political economy as a global theory of the forms of social relations in modernity.

Postone's reading of Marx involves, as well, a different approach to the concept of social totality. While traditional Marxism saw totality as an emancipatory ideal for the overcoming of capitalism, Postone regards it as the primary structure of capitalist social domination. Capital as an automatic, reified self-positing subject produces a social totality. Liberation from capital would entail the historical overcoming of totality (as governed by its global subject, capital) towards a more radical pluralization of the forms of social co-existence. The emancipatory ideals of the critique of capital, reinterpreted this way, are therefore inherently pluralistic.

In sum, the presentation will try to show that, following Postone's perspective, Marxism could be re-elaborated as a Critical Theory of Modernity that is able to confront the emancipatory potentials and the oppressive structures of modern society, in a way that does not pose a reductionism of the subject and does not lead to perilous totalitarian consequences.