



IN DEFENSE OF "ZOMBIE MARX"

Sam H-L | 27 Apr 2020 | 24 min read

"There is no royal road to science, and only those who do not dread the fatiguing climb of its steep paths have a chance of gaining its luminous summits." -Karl Marx, Preface to French Edition of Capital Volume I

Fellow DSASF member Alex Biancardi recently posted an article on Medium entitled "What Should We Do About Zombie Karl Marx?" Though Biancardi's article does not mention Red Star San Francisco by name, there's no doubt that his piece illustrates a split existing within DSA as the organization tries to reckon with its own history, with the history of the socialist movement, and with the future of the working class struggle.

I think that a critique of Biancardi's piece is an excellent opportunity to highlight some major theoretical departures between Biancardi's view of Marxism and how most of those who identify as Marxists or revolutionary

socialists actually approach the work we're doing here in DSA. In Red Star San Francisco, we see critiquing and engaging with the openly-advanced positions of our comrades in DSASF not as petty factionalism, but as the process by which our chapter can clarify its positions on important issues and more coherently develop an approach to building working-class power.

I'll engage with Biancardi's piece as it is presented to us, but first, a quick summary: Biancardi argues that core parts of Marx's theories have been proven hopelessly false by history, and that in order to win a better future we must abandon the desire to resurrect Marx's corpse in an attempt to give new life to our modern struggles.

But Biancardi makes this argument from a misguided place about the real foundations and implications of Marxist theory, and in so doing muddies the water of an important conversation about how we are to best organize to win victories for the working class. There are two core focuses in his piece, each of which we will discuss in more detail further below as they come up. One, that the "labor theory of value" on which Marx bases his work on is incorrect, and the other, that the philosophy of "vanguardism" by definition leads to an inflexible and highly-elevated social class that stands above the proletariat.

What is important to remember about the labor theory of value is not that it is a microeconomic theory that is able to clairvoyantly predict *prices* on the order of a few weeks ahead, but in fact a *lens* with which to understand how our broader economy works. Prices fluctuate according to the supply and demand that they teach you in Neoclassical Economics 101, but at its core, the theory that the *value* of a commodity comes from the labor embodied in its production is a way of getting at the core of production and why it is we value things in the first place.

(See Red Star San Francisco's [two-video series on the Labor Theory of Value](#) for more detail here.)

And regarding Biancardi's critique of vanguardism, we must remember that the idea of a "vanguard" party comes not from Marx, but from Lenin! As a social scientist, Marx wrote mostly on the process by which he predicted the working class could *collectively* seize power. It was Lenin, and many thinkers following him, who wrote about how to create social formations that would best drive towards this collective seizure of power. This isn't to say that Lenin is bad (he's good!), but that we must bring a historical understanding of how the ideas we deal with came to be before we are able to best discuss how to move forward.

Now, with all that, let's discuss the piece.

Karl Marx is dead, in case you hadn't heard. I've been to his grave at Highgate Cemetery in London and checked. He's definitely dead.

Marxism, on the other hand, is undead. It stays underground, waiting for the next global economic crisis, at which point it has a small resurgence. Then it goes back underground.

What does this mean and why does it matter?

Many people in history are dead. George Washington is dead. The people he owned as slaves are dead. My grandmothers (Jean and Maxine both!) are dead. Leonard Cohen and Prince and Adam Schlesinger are all dead. Even Einstein is dead! Does the death of a person render their role in history null?

What is science, that force the author later claims to want to separate from Marxism, if not the process of organizing knowledge on the back of countless dead generations?

It seems that the zombie of Marxism has never quite recovered from that fatal blow, the fall of the Soviet Union. The mere mention of the Soviet Union sends the zombie scurrying back underground.

Yet Marxism always returns. And what's more, the zombie always shows some signs of life. Marxist class analysis never loses its charm. The owners of the world's means of production are exploiting the rest of us more than ever. The government is blatantly biased in the interests of the rich. Technology is better than ever, but poverty remains. We have the technology to solve climate change, but fossil fuel capitalists won't let that happen.

But some parts of the zombie Marx are rotten and beyond resuscitation. And it is those parts that prevent Marxism from ever becoming popular again. I want to quickly summarise those parts of Marxism that I think are dead and should be discarded. Perhaps, in this way, it would be possible to stitch together a strong, Frankenstein's monster of a post-Marxist ideology, that includes the sharp, relevant class analysis, but — unlike Marxism — is really ALIVE.

The author says that some aspects of the zombie Marx are rotten and beyond resuscitation, not because they are *incorrect* or *not useful*, but because they prevent Marxism from becoming popular — as if we were playing at a game of convincing people of good ideas, and the more convincing an idea

is the more likely we will be to win a better world by getting a majority of people to the side of the gooder idea!

A brief aside on the irony of the central metaphor here: the author claims that Marx is a zombie, the living dead, and the solution here is not to go for the headshot and bury the damn thing, as capitalists have learned to do whenever Marx resurfaces, but rather to cut around the necrotic tissue to... stitch together a Frankenstein's monster of post-Marxist ideology?

If we follow the argument to its conclusion it seems the only response to Marx that can be conjured is a shambling beast of even less coherence, one that comes from nowhere and whose first act as "living" creature can only be to turn on its creator and all of humanity alike, leaving chaos in its wake!

Ironically, the thing that is holding Marxism back is science. Or, more precisely, Marxism is held back by trying to be a science, when it never was.

The phrase, 'the Eternal Science of Marxism-Leninism' is one of the most terrifying 20th century propaganda slogans. The phrase comes from Stalin's official philosophy, Diamat, short for Dialectical Materialism. This philosophy, as expressed in Stalin's textbook, 'Dialectical and Historical Materialism', is one of the most megalomaniacal documents in world history. In this 52 page book, Stalin claims to develop a philosophy of... well, everything.

Stalin lays down the laws of development of nature and society, stating that everything develops according to a 'Dialectical' logic. 'Dialectic' itself could win an award for the philosophical concept with the largest number of

contradictory interpretations. But for now, spoiler alert: Stalin doesn't manage to produce a successful philosophy of everything in 52 pages.

Nonetheless, Diamat was the official philosophy of the Soviet Union. You could literally be imprisoned or executed if you made any scientific discoveries that contradicted Diamat.

Here the author seems to be hung up on a definition of the term "science" that is far more grounded in aesthetic gestures toward empiricism than in any concrete application of knowledge toward an understanding and shaping of the world.

What do we mean when we say that Marxism is a science? We mean simply that historical materialism, the fundamental philosophical basis of Marx's work, is a way of organizing and testing knowledge about the way that societies evolve. It does not stand above or apart from other aspects of natural science, but is a way of organizing our analysis in order to apply all of our learnings to affecting real social change.

As Engels writes in *Socialism, Utopian and Scientific*:

"Modern materialism embraces the more recent discoveries of natural science, according to which Nature also has its history in time, the celestial bodies, like the organic species that, under favorable conditions, people them, being born and perishing. And even if Nature, as a whole, must still be said to move in recurrent cycles, these cycles assume infinitely larger dimensions. In both aspects, modern materialism is essentially dialectic, and no longer requires the assistance of that sort of philosophy which, queen-like, pretended to rule the remaining mob of sciences."

No scientific theory of any kind is perfectly and immortally correct in the literal sense, but just as we should measure a scientific theory by its ability to explain existing phenomena and predict new ones to a certain degree of accuracy, so too should we judge historical materialism on its ability to describe the motion of history in a way that is *useful* for guiding our understanding of what is going on out in the world.

Here we see the author's core misunderstanding in the view of Marxism as science. Just as the discovery of quantum mechanics does not *disprove* Newton's laws of motion, but rather uses them as a foundation for knowledge that comes later, viewing Marxism as a science does not mean accepting anything Marx, Engels, or even Stalin said as gospel and eternal truth, but rather using their work to *organize present phenomena, explain our place in history, and test future approaches*.

(See Red Star San Francisco's zine on [Historical Materialism](#) for more information on what it means to learn from history).

How was Stalin so sure that his philosophy was true? Many contemporary Marxists will try to argue that Stalin is an anomaly in every regard. They say that he was simply a tyrant and a psychopath, as a way of avoiding any criticism of Marxism itself.

Again, any proper application of historical materialist principles would explain the emergence of the twentieth century Soviet Union, however you feel about it, as one that necessarily *emerged* from the social conditions that preceded it. Stalin's USSR is not an aberration, but a part of the history of real existing socialism that we have inherited today. In this way, we must see all living attempts at socialism not as deviations from the course of history, but quite literally as *experiments* in the scientific process of

understanding the motion of history towards the establishment of a classless society.

What is to be done about our history is, of course, an answer to which any 5 given Marxists may have 5 different answers with many different branching pathways regarding the lessons we must take (the industrial state of Russia pre-1917, the various factors leading to the New Economic Plan and the USSR's response to it, "Stalin / Trotsky 1 v 1 on Rust iceaxes only," etc. etc.). But I simply don't think that amongst most Marxists it is true that "many will try to argue that Stalin is an anomaly in every regard."

But you can actually see this kind of intellectual arrogance throughout the history of Marxism. Both before and after Stalin, many Marxists have claimed that dialectical and/or historical materialism is a science, and that it gives us access to absolute truth about history and society.

Take the writings of György Lukács and Louis Althusser, two highly-influential 20th century Marxist philosophers. In both of these authors' writings, you will find the idea that Karl Marx created a breakthrough in science. The alleged breakthrough can be summarized in this way: Marxism recognizes that all ideas are ultimately determined by class ideologies.

Not quite. As Marx says in the preface to *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*:

"In the social production of their existence, men inevitably enter into definite relations, which are independent of their will, namely relations of production appropriate to a given stage in the development of their material forces of

production. The totality of these relations of production constitutes the economic structure of society, the real foundation, on which arises a legal and political superstructure and to which correspond definite forms of social consciousness... The mode of production of material life conditions the general process of social, political and intellectual life. It is not the consciousness of men that determines their existence, but their social existence that determines their consciousness."

In other words, ideas in general emerge not from "class ideologies" as if class is some eternal form that has always existed and has no historical basis, but from *social practice* of all forms, a process agnostic to class composition. This, above anything else, is the central philosophical development core to historical materialism!

And since the historical development of social practice has organized people into classes, and ideas emerge from the social practice that is dominant at a given period of time, then it is clear that ideas must therefore have a relationship to the material class relations that form them in the first place.

In plain English, this entails that almost everyone is being duped all the time, according to the needs of capitalism. It entails that every area of culture and industry ultimately serves the needs of capitalism. It entails, in Althusser's words, that "History is a process without a subject"; that nobody controls history, it just happens to us, driven by economic developments. Meanwhile, historical materialism is presented as the only way of seeing absolute truth about society and history, and also as the only working class perspective.

Historical materialism is not the "only working class perspective" in the sense that it must in any formal way be developed by and for the working class. The goal of Marx in developing historical materialism was to explain

the motion of history as struggles between classes, and one of those class struggles at the time at which Marx was writing was between the developing urban proletariat and their owner class, the bourgeoisie. Marx saw in this class relation a series of irreconcilable contradictions between those who produce value on one hand, and those who expropriate it on the other, and wanted to trace those contradictions to their inevitable conclusion – revolution of all existing class structures.

Marxism is not some organic way in which the working class “bears witness to itself” or “tells its story”, but rather a *tool* with which the working class can better understand its position and effectively organize itself to seize power and revolutionize production.

There really is not a big difference between these theories and Stalin's Diamat. Like Diamat, they are completely theoretical statements, that are not based in any historical generalizations. Furthermore, they present their own theories as the ultimate science, that could even explain the behaviours of other scientists. They present their critics as not only false but bourgeois, on the basis that their science is the perspective of the 'working-class'.

Is the author saying here that the theories advanced by modern science are in no way explained by the class formations pushing them forward? That, for example, modern economics in the academy has no relationship to the process of neoliberalization and market reduction that is eating the world? Or the development of nuclear physics in the twentieth century had nothing to do with the American race to develop a nuclear weapon in order to bring a swift end to WW2 and establish hegemonic power in the war's aftermath?

It is hardly controversial to say that a theory of knowledge concerned with

how history is shaped by material forces has something to say about, for example, the type of science produced when labs are funded by the Office of Naval Research or anonymous donations from Jeffrey Epstein. Nor is it controversial to posit how, given these conditions, scientists might organize themselves in order to continue being able to put food on the table.

Perhaps that kind of intellectual self-confidence has its place in hard sciences. However, we know from the experiences of socialism in the 20th century that it leads to vanguardism in the political sphere.

By 'vanguardism', I mean the tendency of certain revolutionary intellectual groups to appoint themselves as the spokespeople for the working class, based on their privileged access to the truth. If that vanguard group manages to seize power in a country, they can then call themselves a 'dictatorship of the proletariat', using Marx's most destructive phrase. This allows them to say that they are a government by the Proletariat, when they are in fact a government by and for the vanguard class.

There are quite a few new terms thrown out within this paragraph. In order to unpack them, it's useful to bring a historical view to some of the ideas on display here, rather than approaching them as dissociated constructs that can be dealt with on their own.

First, the concept of the "dictatorship of the proletariat" — what's important to remember here is that in Marx's view of history, the dictatorship of the proletariat is not some abstract force that comes out of nowhere. Marx's view of social revolution advanced the idea of the "dictatorship of the proletariat" not in the 20th century view of "dictatorship" as the idea of

“some guy in a big fancy uniform who has a bunch of power” but as a way of understanding how *classes* wield power *collectively*.

In the historical materialist view of society, the state as a governing force *emerges* out of the class relations preceding it, in order to mediate those class conflicts to maintain the order of rule for the dominating class. In societies existing under the current mode of production, namely capitalism, the state exists as a *thing above society, rather than part of it*, which nevertheless exists in order to preserve the dominance of the capitalist class.

The state may create all sorts of false forms and strange offshoots of extending suffrage and political representation in order to hide that dominating power, but as its historical basis is in that mediation between classes, it will always serve ultimately to benefit the dominant class. This is why it is conceivable that we might vote in leaders who do concretely benefit the working class as part of that mediation process, but I doubt that even the most electorally-focused members of the DSA believe that we will vote in a complete end to the capitalist mode of production.

So here we have developed a state function which fundamentally serves to provide democracy *within* that dominating class, but which nevertheless exerts its democratic will *upon* the dominated classes, with a small amount of mediation and flexibility allowed. In other words, the current situation is a dictatorship as well, it is simply a *dictatorship of the bourgeoisie*!

So the idea of *the revolutionary dictatorship of the proletariat* is nothing more than Marx's view that in the process of seizing power and eventually abolishing class distinction, the proletariat must *by necessity* establish some sort of structure in order to mediate the class relations that still exist following the moment of revolution — that is, by politically suppressing the bourgeoisie's attempts to reconstitute its power. This “dictatorship,” Marx and Engels argue, is by definition an entity which has a limited time scale.

When society reaches the point where forces are no longer necessary to mediate class relations because class distinctions have eventually withered away, the need for the state itself will wither away along with it.

(See Red Star San Francisco's recent Zine on the Workers' State for more information on Marxism and the state.)

Now to understand what is meant by the other concept criticized in this paragraph, "vanguardism," it's important to understand the context of early Twentieth Century revolutionary organizing. Marx and Engels wrote largely on the social scientific foundations of a revolutionary movement — the use of historical materialism as a guiding set of scientific principles by which to understand the world and organize our movements. The task of modern revolutionaries has been to take those principles and apply them to the real process of history as social movement, a task which much of the last century-and-a-half has been spent attempting in various forms.

Core here is something that critics of Leninist modes of organizing seem to either forget or ignore: the goal of a revolutionary movement is to win power for the working class and overturn the present mode of production — nothing less. As we discuss what Lenin and others have written on the importance of a vanguardist approach to organizing, we must keep that historical and strategic view in mind. For the goal of a vanguard is never to stand from *without* and direct the motions of a *different* class, but to adequately and diligently work *within* that class to develop revolutionary ideology and build up the ranks of future leaders of a socialist movement.

The natural extension of opposition to any form of "vanguardism" in working-class organizing is necessarily *tailism* — the idea that any form of pushing *forward* the real movement of proletarian organizing is fated to failure, and that we must wait for movements to spontaneously erupt.

If that is to be our organizing principle, what is the point of any of this? Are we to discard any knowledge we have gained about society and its functioning, saying that this knowledge must be inherently oppressive? Mustn't we then take this fatalism to its logical conclusion and give up talking to anyone who doesn't already see themselves as part of our movement?

As Lenin writes in *Left Wing Communism: An Infantile Disorder*:

"Any Bolshevik who has consciously participated in the development of Bolshevism since 1903 or has closely observed that development will at once say, after reading these arguments, 'What old and familiar rubbish! What 'Left-wing' childishness!'"

...

The mere presentation of the question—"dictatorship of the party or dictatorship of the class; dictatorship (party) of the leaders, or dictatorship (party) of the masses?"—testifies to most incredibly and hopelessly muddled thinking. These people want to invent something quite out of the ordinary, and, in their effort to be clever, make themselves ridiculous.

...

Repudiation of the Party principle and of Party discipline—that is what the opposition has arrived at. And this is tantamount to completely disarming the proletariat in the interests of the bourgeoisie. It all adds up to that petty-bourgeois diffuseness and instability, that incapacity for sustained effort, unity and organised action, which, if encouraged, must inevitably destroy any proletarian revolutionary movement."

In a study of history it is clear that movements guided by vanguardist principles have been those most successful in organizing and gaining power for the working class in practical terms. This is not to say that any existing socialism won and established following these revolutions has been an enduring or unqualified success, attested to by the fact that we still live under a capitalist mode of production. But if our goal is to understand the successes and failures of revolutionary movements, to throw out the strategies that allowed the Bolsheviks to win power in 1917 or the Chinese Communist Party to defeat the Nationalists is a foolish approach.

If, on the other hand, Marxists let go of their claim to being 'scientific', then it would be clear that government by vanguard is government by and for unelected officials, not by 'the workers'. In other words, the use of the word 'science' in Marxist-inspired governments is a good example of how claims to knowledge are used to establish social power.

Just as the philosopher Michel Foucault often argued, it is instructive to look at the use of 'knowledge' in historical power struggles. The term 'knowledge' has been frequently used to justify oppression in the past few centuries. The establishment of 'knowledge' is a social process that Marxists themselves play a role in.

Here we see the same sort of ahistorical use of Foucault's work as a cudgel against Marxism that led Sartre to call him "the last barricade the bourgeoisie can still erect against Marx." To discuss oppression, even within the Soviet Union, as some abstract power relation between people that cannot be analyzed in terms of material relations and how production is organized — this falls prey to the same enervating instincts that can have no

effect but to make us throw up our hands and give up at the prospect of ever understanding the world, let alone hoping to change it.

We as Marxists refuse to apologize for the establishment of “knowledge!” We know that we have a role to play in the liberation of the working class and we are proud to play that role.

The term ‘science’ is ideal for totalitarian regimes because it has a connotation of absolute knowledge. Ironically, natural scientists themselves do not claim to have absolute knowledge. But it is undeniable that the connotation exists. When a government claims to have absolute knowledge over a subject, they are claiming that it is not a matter of debate. Thus, claiming that something is scientific can be a method of shutting down opposition to an idea. This is why Diamat was so important for Stalin in his attempt to stifle all opposition to his rule.

I would claim that ‘science’ can have a role in a truly democratic political discourse. But, only to the extent that we are talking about the natural sciences, such as medicine or physics. At the point that governments start to claim that they have a ‘scientific’ understanding of society or history, that’s when alarm bells should start ringing.

In order to think that you understand society or history scientifically, you essentially need to think that human beings behave predictably enough to to model and predict their behavior. Regardless of whether that is achievable—and I doubt it—why would you want to be able to do that? The reason is often the ‘will to power’: an attempt by an individual or group to exploit others.

And this, perhaps more than anything, is the core issue with the “tailist” tendency that runs through our present day social movements — to see a “will to power” and think not “what an admirable quality in a working class that, for the first time after decades of sustained oppression, now has the opportunity to see itself again at the center stage of history” but rather “what a childish and dangerous notion it could be for a class to want to win and keep power!”

We as socialists must move past this line of thinking. We are socialists because we believe in the ultimate victory of the working class, and of all oppressed classes existing in our current social order. We believe that, in order for the working classes to win, the classes that oppress them must lose. We hope you will join us in fighting for that victory.

For these reasons, the zombie of Karl Marx cannot fully live again. Every time a Marxist group comes back from the dead, they alienate people with their romanticization of dictatorships, and their arcane knowledge. And even when they take power, that isn't a reason to celebrate, as the remaining Marxist regimes show.

I have one final example of arcane Marxist ‘science’ that we should dispatch with if we want to build a post-Marxist hegemony Frankenstein thing. We should absolutely rid ourselves of the Labor Theory of Value.

The Labor Theory of Value is the epitome of an arcane, supposedly ‘scientific’ Marxist idea. However, it leads to terrible economic analyses,

which are currently just an inverted reflection of neoliberal economics.

The theory goes like this: in capitalism, goods exchange in proportion to the socially-necessary labor-time required for their construction. Not exactly the most thrilling Marxist idea, but its surprisingly important, so let me explain.

To exemplify the idea, let's say it takes an average of 2 hours to make a sweater in our society, but only an average of 1 hour to make a sock. According to the Labor Theory of Value, the sweater would tend to cost the same as two socks. Simple enough.

On the basis of that theory, Karl Marx argued that he can scientifically 'prove' that workers are exploited by capitalists. He says that the Labor Theory of Value proves that labor is the source of all value. Because of this, Marx argues, the only way that capitalists can receive any profit is if they take some of the value that was created by their workers. Marx defines this value taken by capitalists as 'surplus value', and says that the process of surplus value extraction is therefore exploitation. It is the capitalists' robbery of the value created by the worker.

Neat theory. However, unfortunately, the Labor Theory of value is an empirically false theory. If the theory was true, then the more labor time it took to make something, the more that thing should cost. In reality though, the goods that cost the least are usually produced by the most labor-intensive industries, not — as the theory would predict — by the least labor-intensive industries.

The author here provides a deep mischaracterization of the labor theory of value, which boils down a complex analysis that can only make sense when describing a society's production process as a whole into the happenings of two people spending a total of three hours in a workshop.

The core of the labor theory of value is a recognition that any given commodity that we buy or sell — a sweater, a sock, a gold-plated HDMI cable — must be the product of essentially *two* processes of production: a set of pre-existing commodities that are to become the *means of production*, and the human *labor* required to turn those commodities into new commodities to be bought and sold.

So to look into the factory and say that we can determine the value of a sweater and a sock simply by how long it takes to spin the yarn into a sweater vs. how long it takes to spin the thread into a sock ignores the core way that the cost of the *means of production* factor into a commodity's value. To understand the value of a sweater, we must factor in not just the 2 hours of labor time required to produce it, but also the value of the yarn required for that production, and all of the fixed capital in the form of a factory, machines, etc. for which it is necessary to actually produce anything in the first place. As the yarn, the factory walls, the machines, etc. are all commodities themselves, we can then trace *their* production back to some form of similar value production, all the way back to the labor required to, say, plant the raw cotton and pick it, draw minerals from the earth to produce the metal of the machines, etc.

The combination of these two processes — means of production being transformed into new commodities and thus transferring their value into the commodity produced on one hand, and *labor* performed by the laborer (acting in the service of the capitalist) adding new value to the product on

the other — is the source of value, not just “time it takes in the factory to make a thing.”

It then should be clear to us that “the goods that cost the least are usually produced by the most labor-intensive industries, not—as the theory would predict—by the least labor-intensive industries” is a statement devoid of real meaning in this context. There are parts of Marxist economics where the labor theory of value needs to be advanced in order to better describe the real phenomena of the economy, but as mentioned at the top of this piece, it is a useful *lens* through which to view the social relations behind capitalism more than anything. Any argument about the validity or invalidity of the Labor Theory of Value in this piece needs better theoretical backing before the theory is to be thrown out as “empirically false.”

Having realized this, various Marxist economists have made new versions of the Labor Theory of Value, which are not open to the same criticism. However, in order to do so, they have either adopted circular arguments or become very vague.

It is clear that Marxists are really trying to hold on to the theory so that the theory of exploitation has some scientific status when in reality it doesn't need one. If people feel like they're being exploited by capitalists, then maybe they are. We don't need to quantify it. We also don't need or want a vanguard group of social scientists to lead us to revolutionary victory.

This view of “feeling exploited” as our lens on which we base our organizing leads to all sorts of backwards and reactionary responses. Who then are we to side with in these struggles? Are we to say that white racists “feeling exploited” by Latin American immigrants are maybe correct? Or

business owners who “feel exploited” by their workers’ demands for fair pay and power over their working conditions have a point? On the flip side, are we then to say that a worker operating in dangerous conditions living on a subsistence wage in a society that does not provide health care for all its citizens is only exploited when they *feel* exploited?

When we have no concrete analysis with which to ground our organizing, the inevitable result is confusion and disarray, which, as Lenin notes, is functionally equivalent to a disarming of the proletarian movement. The capitalists have many tools of empirical analysis to quantify the degrees of their exploitation, and I think it’s only natural that we employ some of our own to fight back.

Otherwise, we have a socialism which can only look at the world in all its motion and say, with the sound of sad trumpets behind it: “If people feel like they’re being exploited by capitalists, then maybe they are! If people don’t feel like they’re being exploited by capitalists, then maybe they’re not! If the capitalists feel like we should grind every working person into a nutritional paste when they hit the age of 65 then maybe we should do that! If we don’t want to win power and overturn a system of production by which one class gains its necessities of life through the brutal and unending exploitation of another, then maybe we should just all stay home and hang out!”

This might sound like a small debate, but the entirety of Marxist economics is built on the Labor Theory of Value. On the basis of that assumption, Marxist economists have built quantitative models to predict the movements of capitalist economies. But these ultimately prove just as useless as the neoliberal economic models that they imitate. They have low success rates of predicting the future of capitalism, despite the cottage industry of left-wing economic soothsayers.

For true democracy to be possible, we don't need a small group who understand society 'scientifically' or even 'economically'. We need people to mostly govern themselves at the municipal level, and to make decisions for themselves, using the knowledge that the hard sciences actually bring us. In other words, we need the system that Marx called 'communism', that is: local government, in which the power of modern technology is submitted to the control of the locality. Perhaps this is the main idea that we need to take from the Zombie of Karl Marx.

In this Frankenstein socialism based on no specific scientific or economic principles, how are we to determine the meaning of the concepts which are here outlined as if they dropped on us from the sky? What is a “true democracy” unconcerned with class struggle and economic relations? What is a “municipality” when disconnected from any persons who understand society in anything approaching scientific terms? Does this wiggly word of “mostly” indicate that beyond the municipal level our current systems of government and class organization are to remain entirely intact? How will we determine what knowledge the hard sciences provide if there are no guiding structures or fundamental principles behind our social movements?

And here, finally, the author summarizes Marx's view of “communism” as “local government, in which the power of modern technology is submitted to the control of the locality” — a proposition that bears little relationship to the real principles of Marxism. Marx concerned himself first and foremost with societies and their development, a problem of global scale. To ignore this aspect of his work cannot do anything but confuse the reader on what Marx actually believed communism to be.

It's strong evidence that there actually *is* a zombie Marxism out there.

There is a zombie Marxism which exists when we refuse to engage in the careful study and diligent action required in order to build a better world. A zombie Marx conjured when we lose our will in the face of the scale of the challenge Marx and so many others took on, the challenge which we who fight for socialism choose to pick up from the dead generations that came before us.

This bastardized zombie Marx exists only when our socialism concerns itself not with the true nature of our existence and how it came to be, nor our desire to win a final victory for the working class, but with a view of power and life and action that lacks a basis in real history. If, like us, you desire to win, we ask you to join us in looking at the successes and failures of past movements, learning from them, and working together in order to build something even better.

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LABOR THEORY OF VALUE PART 2

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