

## **Alienation or Liberation? Interrogating Marxist Approach to Labour, Leisure and Liberty**

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### **Abstract**

Sport is a key site of pleasure and domination, via a complex dialectic involving both the imposition of authority from above, and the joy of autonomy from below, and exemplifying the exploitation of the labor process, even as it delivers autotelic pleasures. Different theoretical and philosophical traditions look at the relationship between sport and societal structures and processes. The present chapter seeks to present an examination of the Marxian approach concerning labor and leisure in the context of liberty. It will begin with a general overview of the concepts of labor, leisure and liberty, explore Marxian view of human nature and the theory of estrangement, and investigate the conditions of labor and leisure in the capitalist society. Threading the three concepts, the study will finally consider Marxian conceptions of the realm of freedom and the realm of necessity in the context of labour and leisure, with reference to the Marxian Ideal Society-Communism. Finally, the article will attempt to interrogate the Marxian claim of the possibility of transformation of labour from the state of alienation to the state of liberation with the realization of the egalitarian communist society.

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**Keywords:** Liberation, Marxism, Sports, Leisure, Labour, Alienation.

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### **Introduction**

Sport is increasingly disputed ideological territory in social sciences. Existing literature with its safe and bland conception of sport trivializes and depoliticizes sports in particular and leisure time pursuits generally. Among the major introductory textbooks on social theories, very little attention is paid to the understanding of sports. Babbie (1983) does not mention sports or leisure as an institutional form. Wilson (1971) treats leisure activities as a subsection or work containing no theory or analysis. McGee (1980) does not mention sports and treats leisure activities as a problem which may arise in the future as people work less. Ritzer et al. (1982) has a very decent section on sports although it is primarily descriptive of organization and variety. Opposed to this happy, marginalized view of sports is a new genre of Marxian work embodied in the works of Paul Hoch (1972), Brohm (1975), Gruneau (1981), Sewart (1981), Chorbajian (1984), and Keil (1984). A Marxian perspective on sports has two major approaches: The first and more orthodox approach centers on the political economy of sports while the second focuses upon its ideological meaning for socialization as well as for the legitimacy within nations. However, comprehension of recent Marxian theories on games and sports and their implications to society and polity would require a prior understanding of the classical Marxist tradition and its

perception of the sphere of games and sports. The present study would, therefore, focus on the approach of Karl Marx, on whose philosophy the entire body of Marxist theory is founded, and interrogate his conceptualizations. With a general overview of the concepts of labor, leisure and liberty in the thought of Karl Marx, the paper will explore his views of human nature and the theory of estrangement, and investigate the conditions of labor and leisure in the capitalist society. Threading the three concepts, the article will finally consider the Marxist conception of the realm of freedom and the realm of necessity in the context of labour and leisure, with reference to the Marxian Ideal Society-Communism. Finally, these will be an attempt to interrogate the Marxian claim of the possibility of transformation of labour from the state of alienation to the state of liberation with the realization of the egalitarian communist society.

### **Karl Marx: Revisiting his Notions of Labour and Leisure**

Karl Marx is considered as a philosopher of labour, and labour constitutes a central place in his analysis of capitalism, his theory of human nature and his ideal of a classless society. According to Marx, labour, as a distinctive feature of man, appears alienated in the capitalist society. Marx is interested in the problem of transition to the classless society which requires the emancipation of labor. This transition finds its meaning in the relationship between the realm of necessity and the realm of freedom. Leisure is also an important theme in Marx's thought: it emerges as the prerequisite of freedom. Marx envisages technological development through which the quantity of labour is reduced and a transformation in the quality of labor corresponding to this reduction in quantity. Marx says that classless society as the realm of freedom depends on the concepts labor and leisure. Thus, it can be clearly seen that the concepts labor, leisure and freedom/liberty have a central place in Marx's philosophy.

At the time Marx was writing, metaphysics was in the grip of a dualism that seemed to separate mind from matter and, under the probable influence of a false understanding of Christian theology, often exaggerated a distinction into an antagonism. Marx rejected the dualist philosophy and stressed that not only was there an intimate relationship between matter and mind, but that the former largely determined the latter. In his view, political and social institutions and the ideas, images and ideologies through which people understand the world in which they live, their place within it and themselves - all these ultimately derived from the 'economic base' of society - the class relations into which men had to enter with one another in order to produce:

In the social production which people carry on they enter into definite relations that are indispensable and independent of their wills: these relations of production correspond to a definite stage of development of their material powers of production. The sum total of these relations of production constitutes the economic structure of society - the real foundation, on which rise legal and political superstructures and to which correspond definite forms of social consciousness. The mode of production in material life determines the general

character of the social, political and spiritual processes of life. It is not the consciousness of men that determines their existence, but, on the contrary, their social existence that determines their consciousness.<sup>1</sup>

This fundamental Marxist tenet contains certain implications for recreation. Firstly, since the human psychosomatic organism develops and changes under the influence of external conditions including the social environment, subjection to physical exercise not only develops that part of the body to which it is directed, but also has an effect on the body as a whole - on the personality. A strong bond exists between social and individual development and between the physical and mental development of the individual.

Secondly, in liberal capitalist society, whose prevailing ideology is that of 'independent' decision-making and 'free' contracting between 'equal' social atoms, sport has normally been regarded as the concern only of the individual, a feature of life unconnected with classes and social values, with economics and society's mode of production; little attention has been paid to it as a social phenomenon. To the Marxist, however, sport is part of the social superstructure and therefore strongly influenced by the prevailing relations of production - not something 'in itself' and so divorced from politics; a society's pattern of sport will ultimately depend on the specifics of that society's socio-economic foundation, its class relationships. Moreover, says Marx, "with a change in the economic foundation, the entire immense superstructure is more or less rapidly transformed"<sup>2</sup> the nature of sport can therefore be expected by the Marxist to alter with any change to a new socioeconomic formation.

Thirdly, the acceptance of a dualist metaphysic, a sharp separation of body and mind, had often led to a concern with things of the mind at the expense of bodily activities. Marx emphasized that practical activities have a decisive impact on all human development in the broadest sense. None more so than work, through which people could change themselves as well as Nature. In Marx's words:

Labour is, in the first place, a process in which both man and Nature participate, and in which man of his own accord starts, regulates, and controls the material reactions between himself and Nature. He opposes himself to Nature as one of her own forces, setting in motion arms and legs, head and hands, the natural forces of his body, in order to appropriate Nature's productions in a form adapted to his own wants. By thus acting on the external world and changing it, he at the same time changes his own nature.<sup>3</sup>

This proposition implies a strong link between work and such other bodily activities as physical exercise and games-playing. It has led some Marxist historians to seek the origin of games and sports in practices in primitive society leading to the improvement

<sup>1</sup> Cf Karl Marx, *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*, Chicago, 1904, pp. 11-12.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>3</sup> Cf Karl Marx, *Capital*, Moscow, F.L.P.H., 1961, p. 177.

of physical dexterity and utilitarian skills vital to working and hunting. In this, they refer to Engels, who wrote "The use of various forms of weapons in work and military activity among primitive peoples developed their mental and physical abilities."<sup>4</sup>

From his studies of early bourgeois society, Marx came to the conclusion that production was actually inhibited by, inter alia, the denial to the workers of time for recreation which would help restore their energy for production and make it more efficient. Marx was concerned with civil society's need for workers to obtain more free time - not only for pure leisure but also for recuperating their strength and applying themselves more vigorously to productive work after reasonable rest and recreation. What he saw as the sheer wasteful inefficiency of the capitalist production of his day in neglecting the recreative functions of play agitated him:

The capitalist mode of production (because it absorbs surplus labour) produces . . . not only the deterioration of human labour-power by robbing it of its normal, moral and physical, conditions of development and function. It produces also the premature exhaustion and death of this labour-power itself.<sup>5</sup>

### **Alienation of Labour and Leisure Under Capitalism**

According to Marx, there are four aspects of estrangement in a capitalist society: i) man's estrangement from the product of his labour, ii) man's estrangement from his life activity, iii) man's estrangement from his species-being, iv) man's estrangement from man. In the context of labor, leisure and freedom, man's estrangement from his life activity has an important place; therefore we must dwell on this aspect of estrangement in detail. In the capitalist mode of production, everything is bought and sold. Bourgeoisie sees everywhere a commercial value. It distinguishes itself from all class societies. Labor is also a commodity in the capitalist mode of production. Worker, for sustaining his life, has to sell his/her labor power because he does not have any means of production. His labor belongs not to himself, but to the other, to the capitalist. It is under the capitalist's command; it is not his free activity. Labor, which is nothing other than the characteristic feature of the human nature, is a means for the subsistence of the worker. In the capitalist society, the individual character of labor vanishes by the division of labor and the usage of machinery. As a result, the worker becomes a part of the machinery. In capitalism, labor is considered as a measure and source of wealth, but it becomes a part of the means of production and therefore loses its individual and concrete character. It has been "robbed of all real-life content" and is performed by "abstract individuals". The appearance of labor under capitalism has an alienated character, and labor becomes alienated labor.

As mentioned above, for Marx, labor as a free and conscious activity is the characteristic of human nature; however, under the capitalist mode of production it

<sup>4</sup> Cf Engels, *The Origin of the Family, Personal Property and the State*, F.L.P.H., Moscow, 1958, p. 28.

<sup>5</sup> Cf Karl Marx, *Capital*, p. 265.

becomes alienated because the worker is forced to sell his labor power to the capitalist and this labor is no longer a free and a conscious activity. Labor is not related to the essence of the worker; it is something external to him. "He, therefore, does not confirm himself in his work, but denies himself, feels miserable and not happy, does not develop free mental and physical energy, but mortifies his flesh and ruins his mind."<sup>6</sup>

This process of labor seems not fulfilling or liberating the worker but makes him a slave. As a result of man's estrangement from his true life activity, the worker therefore only feels himself outside his work, and in his work feels outside himself. He feels at home when he is not working and when he is working he does not feel at home. Since the labor and its product do not belong to the worker he is not free for actualizing his potentialities while working. Labor is not an activity which is performed freely in capitalism, on the contrary, it is an activity from which the worker wants to escape when there is no vital need for it. As a result, therefore, the worker only feels himself freely active in his animal functions - eating, drinking, and procreating, or at most in his dwelling and in dressing-up, etc.; and in his human functions, he no longer feels himself to be anything but an animal. What is animal becomes human and what is human becomes animal. Because his life activity is not a free and a conscious activity, the worker feels himself an animal while working; he sees working process as a process from which he needs to escape immediately. However, free time is desirable for the worker, a time in which animal and man are alike. The worker sees these animal functions as ultimate ends. Since the working process is a nightmare for the worker, the free time he has is not a time in which he can act for realizing himself. Because the process of work is not preferable for the worker, his leisure is not for creative activities. As Joffre Dumazedier puts it, "dull work is most often accompanied by dull leisure."<sup>7</sup>

The laborer's free time is not leisure but only empty time. The working class, to be sure, has a certain free time, as Marx says in *alienated Labour*, but its free time is only a means to work; free time is devoted to relaxation; it is only a compensation for work. Labor of the working people does not provide time for actualizing their potentialities because their free time provides only their ability to work again; consequently, their labor is for the sake of leisure of the bourgeoisie. Marx argues that division of labor lies at the foundation of differences between classes. The division of labor means the division of free time and labor time, idleness and necessity of labor. Bourgeoisie has maximum, whereas proletariat has the minimum leisure. Leisure of the former depends on the necessity of labor of the latter. Thus, leisure and its alienation also has an important place in Marx's political philosophy. The capitalist society leaves no time to the worker for his self-development. What is expected from the worker is only work; the realization of his potentialities is not a significant issue.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>7</sup> Cf Joffre Dumazedier, *Toward Society of Leisure*, trans. EM Steward, London, The Free Press, 1967.

## **The Realm of Freedom and the Realm of Necessity**

The labour which is alienated, forced and involuntary is considered to belong to the realm of necessity in the capitalist society, whereas leisure, non-working time is considered to belong to the realm of freedom. According to Marx, since labor is not self-confirmation of man and since it is merely a means to continue man's physical existence, it is right to say that labor is a necessary activity under the capitalist mode of production. Man's labor under the capitalist conditions is not a means to actualize his potentialities, nor does it depend on one's own wishes. Labor is not an activity for freedom but servitude. Similarly, leisure in the capitalist society also has nothing to do with the realm of freedom. Leisure, in the end of the long working hours, is relaxation time, or a time for satisfying animal needs. Sean Sayers argues that labor time and free time are opposed to each other in the capitalist society, and to be free is seen as not to be working. According to him, "...alienated and oppressive work has existed alongside an alienated and disconnected sort of freedom."<sup>8</sup>

## **Communism as Liberating Labour and Leisure**

For Marx the abolition of the division of labor is necessary to emancipate the working class from estrangement and the abolition of the division of labor means the abolition of capitalism. Marx, first of all, sees labor as the process of humanization, secondly shows how labor is estranged, and finally envisages a society in which estrangement of labor is abolished. Especially in Marx's vision of a new society, in contrast to capitalism, leisure plays an important role. In Marx's communist society, expansion of the realm of freedom depends on the expansion of the time, which the individual must have for his freely and consciously chosen activities.

Karl Marx's view of freedom can be defined generally as the liberation of the alienated man with his alienated creative activities in the capitalist society. This liberation also includes liberation from the division of labor and from class society. In the communist society, which Marx conceives as the society of the future, man, with his/her liberation from class society, would succeed in creating the conditions in which he could freely develop his/her abilities. In this society, necessity would not dominate the life of man and the contradiction between necessity and freedom would be resolved. What is necessary would be performed freely, and what is free would be a necessity. Freedom in Marx can be considered in this context. Then in Marx' view, freedom is not considered as opposed to necessity. Marx argues that the capitalist society depends on exploitation and alienation, that production is realized not for the sake of satisfying human necessities in the capitalist mode of production, but only for profit. For Marx, the capitalist mode of production is historical like every economic system before itself and it inevitably approaches to its own end. Marx envisages that the capitalist society will be replaced by the communist society. According to him, the

<sup>8</sup> Cf Sayers Sean, "Creative Activity and Alienation in Hegel and Marx" in *Historical Materialism*, 11, (2003), 1, 107-128.

proletariat, the grave-digger of the capitalist society, is the historical revolutionary, the only class capable to abolish this mode of production. Proletariat will put an end to the capitalist society by a revolution. This revolution not only puts an end to capitalism, but to the complete history of class society. In the communist society, which is to be established after the abolition of capitalism, every member of society will possess the means of production in equal degree. And, Marx argues that in the communist society the opposition, the contradiction between necessity and freedom will be resolved. He puts this as follows:

Communism as the positive transcendence of private property as human self-estrangement, and therefore as the real appropriation of the human essence by and for man; communism therefore as the complete return of man to himself as a social (i.e., human) being - a return accomplished consciously and embracing the entire wealth of previous development. This communism, as fully developed naturalism, equals humanism, and as fully developed humanism equals naturalism; it is the genuine resolution of the conflict between man and nature and between man and man - the true resolution of the strife between existence and essence, between objectification and self-confirmation, between freedom and necessity, between the individual and the species. Communism is the riddle of history solved, and it knows itself to be this solution.<sup>9</sup>

Marx, here, argues that there will be no contradiction between necessity and freedom in the communist society. That there is such a contradiction between necessity and freedom is the consequence of the structure of class society. Yet, Marx does not describe communism as a society dominated by freedom. In this society necessity continues to exist; what is important is the abolition of the contradiction between necessity and freedom. Hence, in the communist society, neither labor will correspond to the realm of necessity, nor leisure to the realm of freedom. For Marx, both labor and leisure appear as ends; in the communist society both will be required for man's freedom. In Marx's view of freedom, leisure has a central place because according to him, the reduction in necessary labor time and increase in the time for "the development of the individuals" will constitute the foundation of the realm of freedom in the communist society.

Here, Marx sees the concepts labor and leisure in the foundation of the realm of necessity and the realm of freedom. The realm of necessity indicates man's physical necessities and the activity which is performed to satisfy these physical necessities. Man's physical necessities belong to the realm of necessity. Since man is a part of nature, in all modes of society he is confronted with the necessity to satisfy his physical necessities; therefore, the realm of necessity continues to exist also in the communist society. The realm of freedom begins beyond the realm of necessity. Free time for man's own development corresponds to the realm of freedom. The point is evident: leisure is the basis of the realm of freedom. Marx argues that the realm of freedom is

<sup>9</sup> Cf. *The Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts*, pp. 73-74.

possible only for the civilized man and after the capitalist mode of the production; for this brings a definite collectivization of labor and an increased production. With the machinery's taking place of human labor, the reduction of working-day becomes possible. That the realm of freedom is possible beyond the sphere of actual material production shows that freedom appears only with leisure. And leisure is an ultimate end for full human development.

At first glance, in Marx, the distinction between the realm of freedom and the realm of necessity appear to correspond to the distinction between labor and leisure because the first sentence of the ceasing of labor is required and that the reduction on working hours is essential for the realm of freedom. However, Marx does not mean that what is required is not ceasing of labor, but that of labor "which is determined by necessity and mundane considerations." As Glen Eker puts it,

Marx's distinction between the realm of necessity and realm of freedom is not a distinction between labour and something else such as leisure and amusement, but is a distinction between labour directed to the satisfaction of physical needs and labour which is itself the first need of life.<sup>10</sup>

Therefore, freedom can exist within the realm of necessity. Such a view of freedom is immanent to Marx's theory of estrangement. In *Grundrisse*, Marx sees leisure as the basis of freedom. With the reduction in necessary labor time, all members of society would have time for self-development. It is clear that Marx sees leisure as the basis of the realm of freedom. However, Marx's conception of the realm of freedom does not exclude labor. Labor, like leisure, also continues to be necessary for the realm of freedom. Marx's theory of estrangement involves the liberation of labor from estrangement and labor's becoming a free activity. Labor, in the alienated form, is a means for servitude under the capitalist mode of production. According to Marx, labor is the characteristic of human nature. Thus, the abolition of alienation does not mean the abolition of labor, but the liberation of it. Marx talks about emancipated, non-alienated labor in the communist society as follows:

In a higher phase of communist society, after the enslaving subordination of the individual to the division of labor, and therewith also the antithesis between mental and physical labor, has vanished; after labor has become not only a means of life but life's prime want; after the productive forces have also increased with the all-around development of the individual, and all the springs of co-operative wealth flow more abundantly -- only then can the narrow horizon of bourgeois right be crossed in its entirety and society inscribe on its banners: From each according to his ability, to each according to his needs!

Marx argues that in the communist society labor would be not only a means to satisfy man's physical needs, but life's prime want. Labor would gain a different

<sup>10</sup> Eker Glen, *Leisure and Lifestyle in Selected Writings of Karl Marx: A Social and Theoretical History*, San Francisco, The Edwin Mellen Press, 1991.



dimension. Because human nature is characterized by free and conscious life activity of man, labor would cease to be a means and become the end of life in the communist society. Marx also defines labor in *Grundrisse* "as self-realization, objectification of the subject, hence real freedom." According to Bill Harrell work is "the ultimate end", "it has no utilitarian purpose but is an end in itself" and work is "the activity of freedom" in Marx's thought. In the capitalist mode of production, the worker is forced to sell his labor power for his survival because he has no means of production. For this reason, the works he is obliged to perform are not in accordance with his abilities and wishes. Each individual is confined to only one sphere of the process of production and labor in this sphere is not a free and conscious, but an alienated one. Marx argues that in the communist society the activities of man would be liberated and man could be engaged in a large variety of activities in accordance with his potentialities and his wishes. In the communist society, the individual will have the opportunity to perform in accordance with his wishes. Leisure does not mean relaxation or it is not for the sake of work as is it in the capitalist society. Here, labor and leisure intersect.

### **Concluding Observations**

Marx considers the division of labor, which Aristotle and Plato, the great Greek Philosophers see as the foundation of their perfect state, as a cause of alienation. According to Marx, it is necessary to abolish the division of labor in order to put an end to the servitude of man. In his vision for communism, the whole society must have both labor and leisure; every member of society must be responsible for satisfying physical necessities. And, everyone must have maximum leisure for self-development. Marx argues that the measure of wealth in the communist society will be leisure, because the wealth of society will be measured by its members' actualizing their potentialities, not by surplus value. Marx argues that in the communist society the contradictions between labor and leisure, between intellectual labor and bodily labor, between necessity and freedom will be abolished. Although the realm of necessity and the realm of freedom will continue to exist in all possible modes of productions, labor in the realm of necessity can be free because it will be a free and conscious activity in the communist society.

However, whether with the development of technology wherein the work is performed by the machines, the capitalist society is going to experience liberation of leisure and labour. This has been addressed by Marcuse. Marcuse as a Marxist philosopher departs from Marx's thought, accepts his theory of estrangement and employs his conception of the realm of necessity and the realm of freedom. Marcuse investigates the advanced industrial society and the possibility of a non-repressive society. He observes that the life of the individual is controlled in the advanced society. Marcuse considers alienated labor as equal to toil. Labor time of the individual is not for the sake of satisfying his needs, but for the requirements of the capitalist system. Domination over leisure is added to domination over labour; domination over the realm of production spreads to that of consumption. New control mechanisms, media

and false needs make the individual dependent on the capitalist system. The advanced industrial society, by offering a wide variety of goods and services, increases its control over the individuals. They feel themselves free and happy because they are capable of satisfying these false needs. The advanced industrial society surround labour time and leisure of the individual. Therefore, labor and leisure are means of servitude in the advanced industrial society. However, according to Marcuse technological developments also bring about the foundations in which a non-repressive civilization could emerge: automation in the process of production could abolish the necessity of labor. With complete automation, leisure could provide an area in which the individual freely actualizes his potentialities. Therefore, in Marcuse's thought leisure is the precondition of the realm of freedom. However, Marcuse says that the transformation of labor as well as leisure is necessary for the realm of freedom. According to him, "play" is the activity of the realm of freedom. Free play of human faculties coincides with leisure, and play, is performed in leisure. Consequently, labor and leisure are also seen as means of freedom in Marcuse's thought. The opposition between labor and leisure can be resolved, and labor could be an activity performed in leisure. Karl Marx and Herbert Marcuse seem to mark such a possibility. In a society, where labor is not seen as drudgery or toil, man could have a full enjoyment of his life and time as belonging completely to himself for actualizing his potentialities. As a natural being, man could be a free subject in his relation to nature, including the freedom and the means for satisfying his physical necessities.