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Post – Fordist Economy and Lukács’

Ontological Foundation of Social Classes

Critical Perspectives on Slavoj Žižek’s Perception of “Commons”

Abstract

Keywords: social classes, commons, ontology, labour, social being

This paper is positioned to critically examine the work of Slavoj Žižek and especially his interpretation of what Hardt and Negri call “the commons”. The changes in the nature of labour are considered in terms of their impact on the connection between economy, society and production relations and especially raise the question of social classes.

Žižek refers to antagonisms that are sufficiently strong to prevent global capitalism from indefinite reproduction and locates them in the privatization of the so called “commons” · the shared substance of our social being: the commons of culture, of external nature, of internal nature and the gap that separates the Excluded from the Included in the international market economy. He sees the progressive "enclosure" of the commons as a process of proletarianisation of those who are thereby excluded from their own substance. The notion of exploitation or "reification" in the classic Lukácsian sense is then no longer enough to grasp today’s capitalist dynamics (especially intellectual property). Furthermore, a return to the category of rent is suggested instead of profit.

Such an approach raises some crucial questions for reflection. The paper proposes that a return to the later work of Georg Lukács and his ontological perception of labour as the fundamental category of social being would be very useful in order to grasp the real content of the changes. With reference to contemporary Marxist readings of Lukács’ later work, such as that of the Brazilian philosopher Sergio Lessa, the paper examines the relationship between labour (metabolical interchange man-nature) - abstract labour, intellectual - manual labour and productive - unproductive labour. In conclusion, the paper asks for their validity in modern capitalist societies and criticizes from such a viewpoint Žižek’s thesis.