

Ahmed is keen to stress that transphobes are not feminist killjoys, even if they, too, believe themselves to be ‘difficult women’ speaking against the grain. For Ahmed, they have in fact ‘taken the place of the patriarchal father’. Yet there seems little in the concept that prevents it from being claimed by transphobes, should they wish to. Ahmed

even uses Mary Daly’s description of the ‘hag’ to define the feminist killjoy. Daly is author of *Gyn/Ecology* (1978), which is most politely described as doing what it says on the tin. Without a strong theoretical scaffolding to guide us, we’re left with one arbiter of who is or isn’t a feminist killjoy: Ahmed.

Hannah Boast

## Real movement

Karl Marx, *Critique of the Gotha Program: New Translation* (Oakland: PM Press, 2023). 99pp., £10.99, 978 1 62963 916 1

Why republish Karl Marx’s *Critique of the Gotha Program* today? In the introduction to this new translation, Peter Hudis gives two reasons: the new translation contributes to our understanding of Marx’s views on post-capitalist society and it is intended as a political intervention. Providing a clearer understanding of what communism would look like is vital for struggles today.

The Gotha program was the unifying document of the two main working-class parties in Germany. In 1863 the former collaborator of Marx and Friedrich Engels, Ferdinand Lassalle, founded the General Union of German Workers (ADAV). Marx had fallen out with Lassalle in 1862 due to political and theoretical differences, specifically Lassalle’s efforts to form an alliance with the dictatorship of Otto von Bismarck. Wilhelm Liebknecht, a former member of the ADAV and August Bebel, both supporters of Marx, founded the Social-Democratic Party (SDAP) in 1869. Both parties were around the same size in 1875 when Liebknecht and Bebel enter negotiations to unify with the ADAV without consulting Marx and Engels. The Gotha program was the founding document of what was now called the Socialist Workers Party of Germany (SAPD). Marx and Engels originally saw the event as a retrospective capitulation by Liebknecht and Bebel’s party to the views of Lassalle, who had died in 1864. What later became known as the *Critique of the Gotha Program* was an internal letter Marx sent to Liebknecht, Bebel, Ignaz Auer and August Geib.

Reading the *Critique of the Gotha Program* is vital for any understanding of Marx’s conception of communism. It demolishes numerous myths related to Marx’s views that have developed since his death and that have

since grown into dogma. Firstly, the idea that Marx’s contention that communism is a living movement embedded in the self-activity of the working class, and made possible by the contradictions within capitalism, meant that he rejected all forms of speculation about a future communist society is only true up to a certain point. Marx discussed the outlines of a communist society throughout his career to a greater extent than is usually acknowledged. While acknowledging the early contributions of those grouped together as ‘Utopian Socialists’, including Saint-Simon, Charles Fourier and Robert Owen, Marx in *the Communist Manifesto* explicitly rejects prescribed plans for a future communist society which lack or have defective strategies for arriving at their end goal. In the letter that contained his *Critique of the Gotha Program*, Marx declares: ‘every step of real movement is more important than a dozen programs’. Nonetheless, Marx believed a correct theoretical understanding of the communist goal directly influenced the effectiveness of parties. He was hardly benevolent towards rival tendencies, spending large amounts of his time producing works like *The Poverty of Philosophy*, a critique of the anarchist Pierre Proudhon. As Hudis points out it was often in his more directly political interventions that his positions on communism were outlined.

Secondly, Marx rejected the ‘iron law of wages’, the idea supported by Lassalle among others that wages would be driven to subsistence levels under capitalism. Marx outlined in *Wage Labour and Capital* and *Value, Price and Profit* that his notions of immiseration should be measured against the expanding wealth within capitalism. In contemporary terms, he was discussing relative

poverty over absolute poverty (of course both are a feature of capitalism). Marx was particularly annoyed that the Gotha program contained support for the ‘iron law of wages’, potentially alienating trade unionists struggling for higher wages.



Thirdly, the notion that Marx’s conception of communism relies on ignoring individual differences in skill, effort and disposition in production is refuted in *Critique of the Gotha Program*. Marx specifically discusses how in the ‘first phase of communism’ workers will be paid in tokens relative to the time they work. This formal equality is based on a real inequality as some workers will be more skilled, more productive than others and yet will receive the same amount in payment. The ‘second phase of communism’ will abolish this inequality to the effect that consumption will be based on human need. Despite various conservative stereotypes to the contrary, Marx makes it clear that collective ownership of the means of production does not mean that individual consumption items are held in common once distributed.

Up until the Paris Commune in 1871, Marx’s statements were ambiguous on the question of the state. As Hudis points out, Marx learned from the Paris Commune that the capitalist state needs to be smashed rather than taken over. Marx’s only revision to the *Communist Manifesto* and his updates to the French Edition of *Capital Volume 1* revolve around this insight. Marx’s understanding of the relationship between the state and the construction of communism requires careful delimitation and the new translation of the *Critique of the Gotha Program* makes an invaluable contribution to our understanding of this issue.

A common understanding of Marx’s vision of a post-

capitalist society follows the schema of the smashing of the capitalist state, the creation of the dictatorship of the proletariat, a transitional state for the suppression of the capitalist minority, a socialist period with a nationalised economy followed by communism. The term ‘dictatorship of the proletariat’ is often thought to have originated with August Blanqui although there is no evidence of this. As Hudis points out, this schema is not fully aligned with what Marx describes in *Critique of the Gotha Program*. Marx does describe a ‘political transition period’ of the ‘revolutionary dictatorship of the proletariat’ which would essentially be a state democratically controlled by the workers for the suppression of the bourgeoisie. There is no mention of a socialist phase – as Hudis notes Marx tended to use the word’s socialism and communism interchangeably. Both the first and second phase of communism described by Marx do not mention the existence of a state. As communism is premised on the abolition of social classes and the state’s function is described as being for the suppression of one class by another, the state does not exist in any form of communism according to Marx. The difference between first and second phases of communism is based on the shift from consumption being based on hours worked to consumption based on human need. The division of labour and the division between mental and physical labour is abolished in the second phase of communism. Confusion on this issue has been created by previous translations in which the word *Staatsfunktioenen* has been translated as state rather than state functions. Marx asks: ‘what transformation will the body politic (staatswesen) undergo in Communist society? In other words, what social functions analogous to present state functions (staatsfunktioenen) will remain at that juncture?’

Previous translations imply the state’s existence under communism, whereas the new translation has a greater consistency with the overall arguments put forward by Marx in the text. Hudis incorrectly describes Vladimir Ilyich Lenin as reading into *Critique of the Gotha Program* a distinction between socialism and communism. But in *State and Revolution* Lenin is clear that Marx only discusses the first and second phases of communism while the distinction between socialism and communism is described as being based on Engels’s preface to *Internationales aus dem Volkstaat* written in 1894. Engels notes that the name social democrat may ‘pass muster’ but is

‘inexact’ for a party whose goal is ‘not merely socialist in general, but downright communist’.

Why do these past debates matter? The new translation is described by Hudis as an intervention in present day struggles that are often characterised by an ethos of anti-capitalism without having an ‘adequate conception of our goal’. Rising hopes captured by Syriza, Podemos and Corbynism (among others) in Europe produced the real prospect of left governments between 2014 and 2017; correspondingly a spate of predominantly left accelerationist writings on what a post-capitalist society might look like were published. Whether influenced by the early work of Nick Land or a specific reading of the Operaismo tradition, the work of Nick Srnicek and Alex Williams, Antonio Negri and Michel Hardt (prior to the publication of *Assembly*) have focussed on linking technological shifts in contemporary capitalism to the development of a communist future. The destructive aspects of class struggle are neglected in this approach, while the line between the future use of technology under communism and a celebration of current productive practices are frequently blurred. The weakness of these approaches, regardless of intention, is that they have given agency to technological advances over the struggles of the exploited and oppressed.

The defeat of radical left electoral projects and the continued rise of the far right and fascism have led to a renewed theoretical emphasis on defining capitalism itself. Yanis Varoufakis has repurposed for the radical left

the originally conservative concept of ‘techno-feudalism’ coined by Glen Wely and Eric Posner, Cedric Robinson’s conception of ‘racial capitalism’ is increasingly discussed and deployed, Maurizio Lazzarato’s concept of ‘political capitalism’ has restated the role of violence and state repression in the continued reproduction of capitalism. Maintaining a link between adequately defining capitalism and an orientation towards existing struggles is vital.

Hudis points out that Marx in *Critique of the Gotha Program* puts the emphasis on the self-activity of workers in creating a communist society. Marx criticises the Gotha program for demanding that the state fund cooperative societies. He declares that the ‘only’ value of cooperative societies is if they are the ‘independent creations of the workers’, not protégés of the capitalist state. If Lenin once described socialism as Soviets plus electricity, the emphasis needs to swing back towards the Soviet pole of that formulation. Peter Linbaugh in the afterword to *Critique of the Gotha Program* concisely declares Marx does not ‘paint pictures’, he takes ‘photographs’. Marx generalises his theoretical concepts by learning from workers struggles rather than abstract model building. Hudis correctly points out that discussing and understanding what we are fighting for is crucial to guiding the struggles of today. What requires further elaboration is the missing link between ongoing struggles and a future communist society: that is, strategy.

Chris Newlove

## Spectres of value

Christopher J. Arthur *The Spectre of Capital: Idea and Reality* (Leiden: Brill, 2022). 449pp., £148.00 hb., 978 9 00451 517 8

Christopher J. Arthur’s latest, perhaps most significant book to date, *The Spectre of Capital: Idea and Reality*, presents his distinctive approach to value form theory and Hegelian Marxism. The culmination of a career in Marxian philosophy, *The Spectre of Capital* recapitulates earlier theoretical innovations – the dialectics of sociation, dissociation and association, a renewed articulation of the labour theory of value, Arthur’s ‘homology’ thesis – within a more comprehensive theory, the system-

aticity of which derives from a newly foregrounded proposition: capital should be conceived as ‘spectre’. (See also his earlier essay, ‘The Spectral Ontology of Value’, in *RP* 107 (2001).) *The Spectre of Capital* is a systematically dialectical reconstruction of Marx’s *Capital*, expounding a dualistic method to grasp the reality of economic form. Capital, Arthur argues, ought to be elucidated in relation to a concrete other that retains an unsystematisable ontology. Here, value forms are understood as ‘simply