

TEMPORAL CAPITALISM: HOW TIME SHAPES DEMOCRACY UNDER CAPITALISM

KRISTOPHER PAGE

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## Abstract

This thesis uses a Marxist analysis of capitalism to better understand the relationship between capitalism and democracy by specifically looking at the way in which capitalism distributes control over time. Beginning by examining readings of prominent theorists of liberal democracy, such as Locke and Bentham, the thesis establishes how liberal democracy is supposed to function. Following this is a literature review introducing the debate on time inequality from both liberal and Marxist perspectives. By assessing these perspectives, the thesis shows that each offers useful analysis but leaves a space which this thesis hopes to fill. Using Marxist analysis of the wage labour relation and valorization of capital the paper develops a critique of capitalist democracy whereby the fundamental systems of capitalism situate it in opposition to democratic governance. With centralization of time under the control of capitalist employers the outcome of liberal democratic inputs is naturally skewed towards the owning class, and against the working class. Understanding time this way offers a route to its politicization and can serve as an argument against the seeming neutrality of capitalism by making explicit the fact that its core logic is oppositional and alien to a truly democratic society. The thesis contributes to the already existing time inequality debate in an original manner by combining the democratic understanding of liberals with the capitalist analysis of Marxists to analyze democracy without sacrificing an understanding of capitalism as the primary system through which temporal control is distributed. There is also discussion of some alternatives and ways of addressing temporal inequality. Real world examples such as the People's Campaign in Kerala and theoretical discussions from Richard Wolff and others. Hopefully showing ways to address unequal time whether through restructuring businesses entirely or offering governing structures which encourage participation and education to better facilitate those who typically do not get involved. The normative basis for this thesis is one of fairness or social justice. That having time distributed unequally, making democracy unequal, is unfair to many individuals who are then unable to govern themselves.

## Dedication

This thesis is dedicated to my family, who made all this possible.

## Acknowledgments

The author is grateful to Dennis Pilon, thesis supervisor, as well as Greg Albo and John Simoulidis, for their comments and input.

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# Chapter 1: Introduction

Capitalism and democracy are sometimes viewed as inseparable, even that a capitalist society is the kind of society which allows for the establishment of a democratic state. For example, a direct connection between capitalism and democracy is central to the views of writers like Milton Friedman in his book *Capitalism and Freedom*.<sup>1</sup> This connection is what I aim to dispel here by noting both that there are inescapable limits to the liberal democratic conception of democracy. Capitalism is not incidental to this failure of democracy but is the main cause. This is not to discount the major democratic successes made under capitalism (such as universal suffrage) but to force recognition that they came about not *because* of capitalism but in spite of it. In each case of major social reforms demanded by the people they were met with heavy resistance from capitalists and the capitalist state. Only through overwhelming demand were they able to achieve these reforms. This makes no sense if liberal democracy is understood as some sort of automatic self-governing of the people linked to capitalism. This argument is based in a demand for a fairer more just society, that distributing time according to the logic of capitalism makes society structured in a way to give certain people inherent advantages. A society which distributes time according to a different logic, one which allows for equal participation in the democratic system, is a better society because it considers fairness in the distribution of resources.

To begin, this paper will set out the debate over what liberal democracy is and what democracy was understood to be historically. By examining writings of major liberal theorists from Bentham to Schumpeter we can identify threads of continuity to see what they understood

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<sup>1</sup> Milton Friedman, *Capitalism and Freedom* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1962).

democracy as accomplishing and why they thought it was better than other forms of government. Through understanding the historical context in which they were writing we can also better understand what exactly they were saying, or who “the people” might have been in their particular invocations of them. More radical and Marxist writers on democracy will be useful in showing alternative constructions of what democracy means, going all the way back to the original meaning during the Athenian democracy, and in establishing the shortcomings of liberal democracy in meeting the stated goals of its theorists.

The specific component of capitalism that will be our focus is temporal inequality, or the unequal distribution of control over time. Other writers have shown time to be a social resource, one with inherent political value, and that capitalism necessitates an unequal distribution of it. This temporal inequality drives political power imbalances by granting certain groups in society greater and more effective political ability to act, which further cements these imbalances. This inequality of time is not incidental to capitalism but is fundamental to it. This distribution of time is central to the creation of surplus-value, making capitalism and time inequality inextricably bound together. Marxist analyses of capitalism have shown for a long time that this unequal distribution of time is fundamental, though foundational writers like Marx merely mention it in discussions with a different primary focus. To establish a more liberatory form of democratic governance this time inequality must be resolved, which can only be accomplished outside of capitalism. By its very nature capitalism necessitates significant temporal inequality through wage labour; workers are forced to sell their labour-time to the much smaller class of employers who then dispose of the workers’ labour-time as they choose. In addition to this, the process for generating surplus-value incentivizes maximizing the labour-time of workers. The more labour spent beyond that necessary for their own social reproduction generates more surplus-value, the

valorization process as described by Marx makes maximizing labour-time central to capitalism. Writers on time inequality seem to have taken separate ends of this discussion, with liberals noticing the inequality and the democratic importance but ignoring capitalism and Marxist writers doing the opposite.

There seems to be a limited amount of literature which links the temporal inequalities inherent to capitalism with a discussion of capitalist democracy. The point of this paper is to show that to properly understand the relationship between capitalism and democracy, specifically how capitalism naturally undermines democracy, one must look at the distribution of time that capitalism creates. Democratic government requires that people have access to the time required both to educate and inform themselves of politics and to take the actions they wish to support the policies and decisions that they do. Time is central to making deliberate, rational choices, not incidental to it. Without enough time people will use shortcuts for making political decisions, such as just voting for the same party each time without really caring if their platform has shifted much. But they also might just not vote at all. In all liberal democracies millions of eligible voters choose not to participate each election, e.g., the 2021 Canadian election had a turnout rate of 60 percent. That's 10 million people choosing not to vote. Each election when polling those who chose not to vote a major reason provided is that they did not feel they have the time necessary to do so. In a system which claims to enable the citizens to govern themselves, having millions of people who do not have the ability to participate makes that claim suspect at least.

By connecting capitalism and democracy through the distribution of time as a social resource I hope to show that democracy is not only failing to meet its ideal form, but that capitalism is what is stopping it. The reason for choosing time to explore this relationship is that while income inequality may be the more obvious aspect of capitalism which harms democratic

systems there is already so much literature covering it. Time is less explored in this way, offering some level of novelty. And I think it offers another relatable discussion for inequality similar to economic inequality. Many people feel that they do not have the amount of free time that they need, this analysis of capitalist distribution of time can help to explain why it makes sense for many of them to feel that way. Time is also a fundamental element of politics, while having vast economic inequality is harmful to democracy the only way to operationalize that monetary power is through durational time. If political campaigns, advertising, and lobbying were only allowed to take place for 1 hour then they would function less effectively. Being able to purchase labour-time and depriving millions of their own time, along with economic inequality, enables the capitalist class to powerfully assert themselves in the political sphere.

# Chapter 2: Liberal Democracy, Its Critics, and Time

## *Introduction*

To discuss democracy is to define it, either explicitly or implicitly, and ‘democracy’ as a term or concept or description of specific human decision-making or governing activities especially has had a long history with many different definitions. This chapter will explore how democracy, or ‘liberal democracy,’ has been defined and utilized by a range of thinkers, both mainstream and more critical, with an eye to assessing how well the theoretical definitions compare with the empirical reality. Specifically, the chapter will extract the key elements of democracy as defined by liberal democratic theorists and bring them into dialogue with more critical treatments of the issues. The impetus of this discussion is a quote from Rousseau that, “The English people believes itself to be free... it is free only during the election of the members of parliament. Once they are elected, the populace is enslaved; it is nothing.”<sup>2</sup> Rousseau’s provocative statement raises questions about many taken-for-granted assumptions about the relationship between elections and popular influence on government and the degree to which countries relying on such processes really are that democratic or making truthful claims about the substance of their governing systems.

In the spirit of taking Rousseau’s critique seriously, the discussion here will begin by trying to understand democracy, first by looking at liberal democracy as defined in the key themes developed in the writings of some central figures, second with attention to responses to those theorists, and third by taking seriously the impact of time on any substantive experience of democratic participation and accountability, and specifically on the claims of democratic

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<sup>2</sup> Donald A. Cress, ed., *The Basic Political Writings Second Edition*, (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company Inc., 2011), 219.

theorists. Armed with this notion of time as key factor in any democratic process, the chapter will turn to examining more radical ideas about how best to ‘do’ democracy, drawing from the ancient past up to the present.

The analysis of what is understood as conventional liberal democracy will use writings from major theorists such as Bentham, James Mill, J.S. Mill, and Schumpeter to understand this approach to defining democracy. Critics of this approach will then be drawn from rival theorists from their eras as well as researchers who provide evidence of the failure of liberal democracy to meet the lofty goals its proponents and expose the internal contradictions that produced those failures. Then the chapter will explore alternative, more radical definitions of democracy from critical democratic theorists such as Wolin, Ober, and Macpherson as a counter to the traditional liberal conceptions. These alternative definitions then set the stage for a more substantive approach to democracy that realize the goals that liberal democracy only promises and will be used in the later discussion to provide insight into the relationship between capitalism and democracy.

### *Liberal democratic theory*

Liberal democracy has many theorists, far beyond what could be covered in this paper, and so only a few major thinkers have been included. Those chosen is limited to Bentham, the Mills, Schumpeter, and Locke. While others could have been included this felt representative of both early liberalism and developments up to the 20<sup>th</sup> century. In their writings there are similar themes and arguments which repeat across authors which I will treat as generalized claims of what liberal democracy is, grouping these themes into ‘protection from tyranny’, ‘efficiency of interests’, and ‘popular sovereignty’. Analyzing these themes across the writings of these authors

can give us a deeper understanding of what liberal democracy is supposed to accomplish, and why they understood it is a better system of governance than competing models.

### *Protection from Tyranny*

The first establishing feature derived from liberal democratic theorists such as James and John Stuart Mill and Jeremy Bentham is that one of the most fundamental features democratic government offers is protection from tyranny. By granting citizens control of their government, they can both hold the powerful accountable and control and stop the harmful levels of extraction that existed under previous forms of government. This argument comes from their assumptions about human nature, though less so for John Stuart, that people are always merely selfish maximizers of pleasure so any undemocratic authority will abuse its power and harm the larger community.<sup>3</sup> This section will first establish what exactly these things mean to the writers, a later section will then examine how effective democracy is at accomplishing the ideals given to it. The theme of protection from tyranny can be divided into two key subthemes, holding power accountable and limiting harm and resource extraction caused by the competing interests of the dominant class.

#### Holding Power Accountable

Theorists of liberal democracy view the holding of voting rights by the citizens as an important method for holding the powerful accountable, something nearly impossible in many previous forms of government without perhaps a revolution. James Mill offers representative democracy as a method for holding power accountable, that by holding regular elections allows people to remove government officials from office who they feel are not representing their

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<sup>3</sup> C.B. Macpherson, *The Life and Times of Liberal Democracy* (Don Mills: Oxford University Press, 2012), 26.

needs.<sup>4</sup> This position was also endorsed by Bentham in his *Constitutional Code*.<sup>5</sup> Voting provides citizens the means to removing from office government officials who they deem to not be representing their interests. Government representatives, unlike kings, can be removed from power if they abuse it or do not use it appropriately. This is sometimes characterized less as holding government accountable while in office and more removing support later. Schumpeter, for example, describes it as merely “...evicting...” government by “...withdrawal of... acceptance.”<sup>6</sup> Liberal democratic theorists therefore vary on whether accountability means active control and rejection or merely withdrawal of support during the next election, but accountability in general is a standard tenet of liberal democracy.

#### Limiting Harm and Resource Extraction

James Mill and Bentham can be discussed together as they were both contemporaries and friends with very similar ideas. Both theorists of utilitarianism, they developed similar understandings of the purpose and structure of democracy. They both understood democracy merely as a system which protected against tyranny by ensuring property rights. James Mill’s *Essay on Government* puts forward this theory succinctly. From the utilitarian perspective “...the concern of Government is with [pains and pleasures people derive from other people]... that its business is to increase to the utmost the pleasures, and diminish to the utmost the pains...”<sup>7</sup> When discussing who should wield power in this utilitarian government Mill points out that there are only three ways to grant that power: to an individual, such as a monarch; to a small group, an aristocracy; or to the citizens, a democracy.<sup>8</sup> Because Mill is arguing for a government whose

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<sup>4</sup> James Mill, *Government* (London: Encyclopedia Britannica), 19-20.

<sup>5</sup> John Bowring, ed., *The Works of Jeremy Bentham Volume 9* (Edinburgh: Simpkin, Marshall, & Co., 1843), 102-03.

<sup>6</sup> Joseph A. Schumpeter, *Capitalism, Socialism and Democracy* (New York: Harper Collins Publishers, 2008), 272.

<sup>7</sup> Mill, *Government*, 4.

<sup>8</sup> Mill, *Government*, 7.



sole purpose is maximization of pleasure and minimization of pain of the group of citizens he proposes democracy as the best solution to the distribution of political power in society. He comes to this conclusion because this is the only one of the above three which has the government as members of the universal community of citizens. Since the leaders remain part of society, rather than distinct from and above it such as monarchs and aristocrats, the interests of the government and citizens remain aligned.<sup>9</sup> This then means that the purpose of government is achieved through democracy, or liberal democracy. Bentham agrees with this understanding of government, "...he was convinced that the only form of government which would promote the interest of the people was a representative democracy."<sup>10</sup> This view then holds that democracy is merely a system for protection against tyranny and the extraction of material goods from the community.

### *Efficiency of Interests*

The next component of liberal democracy is the idea that it naturally produces an efficient system for determining the interests of the voters by creating a "market" of political competition. The position of efficiency comes from the idea that modern states are so large and populous that other systems of democracy that involve more direct participation by the citizenry are unable to function because there would be too many competing interests at every meeting and too many voices trying to speak. This was theorized by Schumpeter in *Capitalism, Socialism and Democracy*, expanded later by other theorists. Schumpeter states that "...the role of the people is to produce a government... the democratic method is the institutional arrangement for

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<sup>9</sup> Mill, *Government*, 7.

<sup>10</sup> Philip Schofield, *Utility and Democracy: The Political Thought of Jeremy Bentham* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 250.

arriving at political decisions.”<sup>11</sup> Schumpeter followed standard economic logic in developing his theory of democracy, specifically the logic of the capitalist market and its associated system of competition. By reducing democracy to a methodology of choice for voters it supposedly allows for the large national governments of the modern era to determine rapidly and effectively what it is that their citizens want them to accomplish. Democracy here is viewed as an efficient system for determining what the interests of voters are by having politicians compete for their votes in the political “market,” much like entrepreneurs in the capitalist market. This is how C.B. Macpherson describes it, “...treats citizens as simply political consumers, and political society as simply a market-like relation...”<sup>12</sup> This is not treated as a justification for democracy functioning this way, merely a description or explanation of how liberal democracy and parties within it tend to function. This version of democracy, similar to that of James Mill and Bentham, empties the concept entirely of moral claims that writers like John Stuart Mill had granted it, instead focusing on the functionality of the system.

Expanding upon Schumpeter’s writing, and reinforcing the capitalist logic of the argument, is Bernard Berelson in his book *Voting*: “Where the rational citizen seems to abdicate, nevertheless angels seem to tread.”<sup>13</sup> This understanding of democracy applies the logic of the invisible hand from Adam Smith to political decision making by voters. Capitalist logic of self-interested human nature, much like the description offered by James Mill and Bentham, is therefore fundamentally bound up in this concept of democracy. Assuming generally equal competition between politicians who are offering different political “goods” voters merely choose from whichever politician is offering the better choice of goods. But this equal field of competition is a large assumption, especially in a capitalist society.

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<sup>11</sup> Schumpeter, *Capitalism*, 269.

<sup>12</sup> Macpherson, *Life and Times*, 80.

<sup>13</sup> Macpherson, *Life and Times*, 82.

Liberal democratic efficiency can be used as a criticism of other forms of democracy, that of the Athenians for example would become too slow to determine anything in a modern state as tens or hundreds of thousands of people may wish to enter the assembly to bring to bear points that they feel should be heard. A level of involvement on this scale could create massive roadblocks to accomplishing anything. With modern nation-states reaching the scales that they do, both in terms of population and actual landmass, offering everyone the ability to speak in government could create difficulties. With countries the size of Russia it may be far too difficult for people in some areas to effectively participate, and populations such as India could make it far too time consuming if many people wished to speak during any given meeting of government. Under liberal democracy it can take much less time to have more people participate in the system because voting takes less time to deliver a speech and the politicians are actively reaching out to the communities themselves as they are forced to compete between each other to earn votes. Concentrating the system within fewer people makes discussion quicker as fewer people need to speak. Because of this, while people will not always be able to have their favored policies passed, if it loses in competition with other policies, liberal democracy can at least determine more supported policies that can be passed.

### *The People as Sovereign*

The final characteristic of liberal democracy is the construction of “The People” as the sovereign. Rather than the state being governed by an individual, or a small group, who hold legitimate power liberal theorists have argued that for government to be legitimate the power of the government must derive from the people themselves. By giving the citizens the control over their government, through the ability to revoke that granted power, liberal theorists argue that the citizens have better capacity to protect and improve their lives. This is in comparison to previous

systems of government, where the people could only hope for a generous sovereign to allow them to improve their lives.

Both John Locke and John Stuart Mill make this point in their writings on government. Locke makes this point in relation to the state of nature. The beginning of a political community is "...by agreeing with other men to join and unite into a community..." and since this is where the community comes from, the powers of the government must also derive from this.<sup>14</sup> This is similar to the original protection from tyranny argument offered by the utilitarianism of Bentham and Mill but is somewhat distinct. What is different here is that writers like Locke did not necessarily view that the sole purpose of government was maximization of pleasure, but rather that it existed at the behest of the people. If it no longer suited the purposes of those it governed, they were fully within their rights to revoke its authority and begin anew.<sup>15</sup> In this conception of the state it does not exist as an outside party that increases pleasure but is more an extension of the will of the people.

Liberal democracy as described by some of its key theorists offers three primary benefits: the first is that it allows voters to protect themselves from tyrannical rulers by holding their government accountable and reducing harmful resource extraction from the community by those who hold political power. Second is that it offers an efficient method for determining the interests of the community, more efficient than previous forms of democracy that would struggle to scale to modern nations and connecting those interests with competing politicians who can pass those policies. Finally, that it constructs a society in which the state does not derive its power from claims of birth right or from divine gift, but instead directly from the citizens themselves. Those same people can revoke that power when it is used against them because they

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<sup>14</sup> David Wootton, ed., *John Locke: Political Writings*, (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company Ltd.), 310.

<sup>15</sup> Wootton, *Locke*, 374.

constitute the sovereign power within the society. These three characteristics of liberal democracy supposedly make it a superior form of government to undemocratic and previous, ancient, democratic systems of government. It is also inextricably tied to capitalism as the fundamental assumptions being made by its theorists are those of a capitalist mind and society.

### *Critiquing liberal democratic theory*

This next part critiques the above claims made by liberal democratic theory—c critiques which have made for a long period of time. Many authors offer critiques, especially focusing on the difference between the theoretical claims and the material reality that liberal democracy consistently produces. Writers such as Ellen Wood critique it being merely democracy for the wealthy, and that this is in fact the original point of theorists like Bentham and Mill. In this understanding the US Founding Fathers’ redefining of democracy as representative, away from the ancient Athenian sense of direct, which forms the basis for our modern understanding of ‘democracy,’ was an intentional alteration of the meaning of democracy. “Not only did the ‘Founding Fathers’ conceive representation as means of *distancing* the people from politics, but they advocated it for the same reason that Athenian democrats were suspicious of election: that it favoured the propertied classes.”<sup>16</sup> There are both empirical and theoretical objections to be raised against liberal theory, that it is based on an elitist anti-democratic view of the majority of citizens, and that the material conditions it produces is not one in which the majority of citizens feel they are in control, nor do they actually seem to control much of anything.

### *Protection from Tyranny*

#### Wealth Extraction as Tyranny

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<sup>16</sup> Ellen Meiksins Wood, *Democracy Against Capitalism: Renewing Historical Materialism* (London: Verso, 2016), 217.

Bentham and Mill made the argument, shown above, that part of the tyranny that liberal democracy protects against is extreme extraction by the monarchs and aristocrats of the previous systems of government to the detriment of the larger community. Yet despite these claims, wealth inequality, which is already extremely high, is increasing each year. Alongside this rising inequality can be found rising poverty and increasing working hours. If liberal democracy does protect against the tyranny of wealth and resource extraction, then surely it would be doing a much better job at addressing these issues. Liberal theorists could make claims such as a universalization of social membership for each individual as they miss the fundamental analysis of class struggle that Marxism brings to the discussion. The liberal understanding of everyone as an aligned member of the same society is turning a blind eye to the reality of capitalism, and therefore capitalist democracy.

In his book *Capital in the Twenty-First Century* Piketty demonstrates how significant these inequalities are becoming globally, "...inequality of wealth has been trending upwards in all the rich countries since 1980-1990..."<sup>17</sup> and "...global inequality of wealth in the early 2010s appears to be comparable in magnitude to that observed in Europe in 1900-1910."<sup>18</sup> If liberal democracy protected against the tyranny of economic extraction then the far less democratic period of 1910 Europe should not be comparable in inequality to the 21<sup>st</sup> century. This suggests a failure in the form of democracy put forward by liberal democratic theorists, that it fails to meet one of its ideals. But this example alone does not conclusively show that the ongoing inequality should *necessarily* be considered extraction.

It might not be extraction because liberal theorists could argue that inequality itself does not signal a failure, even with increasing inequality all parties could be gaining, some may just

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<sup>17</sup> Thomas Piketty, *Capital in the Twenty-First Century*, trans. Arthur Goldhammer (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press), 437.

<sup>18</sup> Piketty, *Capital*, 438.

be gaining faster. Yet reports on poverty by the UN in rich liberal democracies are not encouraging. Philip Alston, the UN's special rapporteur on extreme poverty visited multiple rich democracies and his findings were striking. In the UK he found that both relative and overall rates of child poverty are increasing, with overall rates expected to reach 40 percent by 2021.<sup>19</sup> Poverty in the US, a country with multiple billionaires, also sits at approximately 14 percent, and child poverty at 25 percent.<sup>20</sup> Beyond these two countries is a global trend identified by Jason Hickel, looking at absolute numbers of poverty the data provided by the World Bank shows an increase globally. And further to this, since supposedly this reduction of extraction is a benefit of liberal democracy, global poverty rates look even worse with China excluded.<sup>21</sup> If liberal democracy is an enemy of economic inequality and unfair extraction then it is losing mightily. The only country which is significantly defeating inequality, China, is outside of the liberal democratic paradigm.

With already significant, and still rising, wealth inequality alongside increasing poverty there seems to be a limited level of success for liberal democracy when it comes to protection against extraction of wealth and resources from the larger community. In addition to this is more localized extraction, specifically that of wage theft. Marxists would argue that any wage relationship under capitalism is one of exploitation, and while liberals may counter that those workers are being fairly paid for their labour, liberal democracy cannot even guarantee this basic level of compensation.<sup>22</sup> Wage theft is a global phenomenon, not unique to liberal democracy,

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<sup>19</sup> Philip Alston, "Visit to the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland: Report of the Special Rapporteur on Extreme Poverty and Human Rights," (New York City: UN Headquarters, 2019), page 3.

<sup>20</sup> Philip Alston, "Extreme Poverty in America: Read the UN Special Monitor's Report," *The Guardian*, December 15, 2017, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/dec/15/extreme-poverty-america-un-special-monitor-report>.

<sup>21</sup> Jason Hickel, "Letter to Steven Pinker (and Bill Gates, for That Matter) About Global Poverty," *Jason Hickel*, February 4, 2019, <https://www.jasonhickel.org/blog/2019/2/3/pinker-and-global-poverty>.

<sup>22</sup> This is not to conflate wage labour and wage theft as one and the same, but merely pointing out that even if liberals disagree with a Marxist critique of wage labor as inherently a relationship of exploitation liberal democracy

but is not itself solved by it either. When workers are not paid the legally required minimum for their labour-time they sometimes have little recourse, and frequently it becomes their responsibility to prove the theft, in addition to being an underpaid minimum wage worker. A study of informally employed migrant workers in Toronto for example found that nearly all of them experienced some level of wage violation.<sup>23</sup> In the US as well wage theft is widespread, with annual violations potentially reaching \$15 billion dollars.<sup>24</sup> Despite the claim to stopping harmful extraction through liberal democracy, it appears that this continues regardless, with vast sums being extracted from workers and communities in multiple liberal democracies. Though this ideal put forward in support of liberal democracy by Bentham and Mill it does not seem to hold very well, perhaps it is much better at making sure the powerful are held accountable for their actions.

#### Successfully Holding the Powerful Accountable

The ability to hold the government accountable for its actions is also up to question, though liberal democracy offers an improvement on government accountability compared to that under feudalism, it still seems to struggle with this. Much like wealth extraction this runs into significant problems, specifically whether it ever actually happens and how voters are disinclined to do this. For the first problem we can look at historical examples of major scandals and what the fallout was for the members of government responsible. The use of torture under the Bush administration is a recent example. When it became known that the CIA was engaging in torture

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still cannot guarantee that workers will receive the wage that they are promised, and sometimes will fail to guarantee this in vast numbers of cases.

<sup>23</sup> Michelle Buckley, "Mapping Wage Theft in the Informal Economy: Employment Standards Violations in Residential Construction and Renovations," *Industrial Relations* 75, no. 3 (2020): 520, <https://doi.org/10.7202/1072345ar>.

<sup>24</sup> David Cooper, and Teresa Kroeger, "Employers steal billions from workers' paychecks each year," *Economic Policy Institute*, May 10, 2017, <https://www.epi.org/publication/employers-steal-billions-from-workers-paychecks-each-year/>.



practices to extract information about terrorist plots almost no one was punished in any way, except for a whistleblower. The DOJ declined to prosecute anyone for unknown reasons, and the names of the participants were kept secret because they work for the CIA.<sup>25</sup> With an event so drastic as an international abduction and torture program created to support a war without UN approval the fact that the punishment was minimal to non-existent suggests that liberal democracy struggles with this in practice. This is not to say that accountability is on par with previous forms of government, there was absolutely no way to do something like vote a corrupt king out of government. Regardless of whether it works every time does not suggest it does not work any of the time.

The second is partisan and in-group loyalty and the effect it has on voting behavior in response to corruption and other scandals. Research suggests that voters who are loyal to some identity components of the government are more likely to dismiss negative actions or view them in a positive light.<sup>26</sup> This suggests, since one of those identities is political party, that liberal democracy has constructed a system in which the people who must hold power accountable are incentivized to not do so. With voters becoming members of electoral parties, and therefore part of an in-group they become less likely to view the actions of government as corrupt if their favored party is in power. Liberal democracy seems unable to do anything about this, and in fact seems to reinforce it by having parties so prominent in the electoral system. Despite this critique, there may not be much that can be done about this problem, in-group loyalty may exist in this way beyond liberal democracy, and even outside capitalism.

### *Efficiency of Interests*

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<sup>25</sup> Sam Levine, "The One Man Jailed for CIA Torture Tried to Expose It," *Huffington Post*, December 10, 2014, [https://www.huffpost.com/entry/cia-torture-prosecution\\_n\\_6298646](https://www.huffpost.com/entry/cia-torture-prosecution_n_6298646).

<sup>26</sup> Hector Solaz, Catherine E. De Vries, and Roosmarijn D. de Geus, "In-Group Loyalty and the Punishment of Corruption," *Comparative Political Studies* 52, no. 6, 2018, 896-926.

Next comes the argument provided by writers like Schumpeter that liberal democracy provides a method for efficiently determining what the will of the people is from all the many conflicting ideas that they hold. By holding elections in which politicians compete as an equivalent to entrepreneurs vying for votes the system can ascertain some semblance of communal interest in all the noise, much like the supposed invisible hand of the capitalist economy.

Despite this, if one looks at political participation rates there is a direct correlation with economic class. Looking at data from the American National Election Study shows that "...the share engaging in [donating to a campaign, working for a campaign, and attending meetings and rallies] climbs with [socioeconomic status]."<sup>28</sup> This already skews the context in which the interests of the community are determined by underrepresenting the interests of poorer citizens. The interests of the community can hardly be determined effectively if those that are participating in the system are not representative of the larger community. Liberal democracy is instead efficiently determining the interests of some members of the community, with those members being wealthier than average.

This could mean that those who are underrepresented either do not care or feel that their interests are already effectively represented by their government. Statistics seem to suggest that people do not feel this way though. In a 2011 survey by Statistics Canada asking why people did not vote the most popular answers (28 and 23 percent, respectively) were "Not Interested" and "Too Busy."<sup>29</sup> Not interested also includes people who felt "...their vote would not have made a

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<sup>28</sup> Kay Lehman Schlozman, Henry E. Brady, and Sidney Verba, *Unequal and Unrepresented: Political Inequality and the People's Voice in the New Gilded Age* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2018), 87. Data covers years 1952-2012.

<sup>29</sup> "Reasons for not voting among those that did not vote, by sex and by age group, May 2011 federal election," Statistics Canada, last modified 2013-01-09, <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/daily-quotidien/110705/t110705a1-eng.htm>.

difference.”<sup>30</sup> In addition to this, among OECD countries only 51 percent of citizens still trusted their government as of 2020, barely a majority.<sup>31</sup> All of this suggests that the people who are outside the political realm, the ones whose interests are not being determined by the political “market” described by Schumpeter, are largely kept out of effective participation. Rather than them choosing not to engage because they do not care or because they already feel represented, their interests are just not being represented. To Marxists, who critique liberal democracy as a false democracy, this would come as no surprise as “The ideas of the ruling class are in every epoch the ruling ideas...”<sup>32</sup> C.B. Macpherson also notes that this assumption of equal competition struggles with material reality, “Some demands are more effective than others...it is the demands of the higher socio-economic classes which are the most effective.”<sup>33</sup> And despite proponents of this model of democracy using Adam Smith’s invisible hand metaphor they do not also follow his logic surrounding the role of the state, not as a neutral arbiter overseeing society but a creation specifically for protecting property rights.<sup>34</sup> Taking more from Smith we can see how he might view the idea of politicians as competing entrepreneurs, similar to businessmen in the economic market. Smith viewed rule by merchants as “...the worst of all governments...”<sup>35</sup> as they have an interest to “...deceive and even oppress the public...”<sup>36</sup> Under capitalism this class of individuals and professional politicians can begin to blend together. In Canada approximately 20 percent of MPs hold “...rental, investment real estate...”<sup>37</sup> In addition to this

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<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

<sup>31</sup> “Trust in Government,” OECD, last accessed 2022-01-12, <https://www.oecd.org/gov/trust-in-government.htm>.

<sup>32</sup> Lawrence H. Simon, ed., *Karl Marx: Selected Writings*. (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company Inc., 1994), 129.

<sup>33</sup> Macpherson, *Life and Times*, 89.

<sup>34</sup> Adam Smith, *The Wealth of Nations* (Toronto, Random House Inc., 2000), 674.

<sup>35</sup> Smith, *Wealth of Nations*, 537.

<sup>36</sup> Smith, *Wealth of Nations*, 250.

<sup>37</sup> Amanda Connolly, “At least 20% of Canadian MPs hold rental, investment real estate amid housing crunch,” *Global News*, April 19, 2022, <https://globalnews.ca/news/8767051/canadian-mp-real-estate-investment-amid-housing-crunch/>.

some business leaders seek entrance into politics, even successfully with politicians such as Michael Bloomberg and Donald Trump. Beyond his criticism of merchant rulers he also offers a strong criticism on the mental affects of industrial wage-labour on the workers, “The torpor of his mind renders him...incapable... of conceiving any generous, noble, or tender sentiment, and consequently of forming any just judgement...”<sup>38</sup> The theorists of liberal democracy do not see how these interests are inevitably unevenly determined, and in the case of the politics of the working class, warped by the context in which they exist. This makes sense ideologically as liberalism individualizes members of society, Marxism responds to this by understanding that the surrounding material conditions of people’s lives shape them.

### *The People as Sovereign*

Finally, we come to the idea that “the people” hold ultimate power, that they merely grant this to the government on their behalf. Despite this argument existing for hundreds of years and the people choosing their government through votes there are multiple pieces of evidence to suggest that they do not actually hold power. As discussed above there is rising inequality and poverty, working hours are stagnating or increasing even when productivity increases, and despite massive increases in productivity wages are stagnating as well.

As discussed above Piketty has clearly demonstrated massive, and growing, inequality in the 21<sup>st</sup> century on a level comparable to the early 1900s.<sup>39</sup> And alongside this rising inequality the UN has demonstrated rising instances of poverty in several wealthy liberal democracies.<sup>40</sup> If we accept the logic of capitalist humanity, as liberal thinkers like Bentham do, this suggests that the sovereign is composed of selfish pleasure maximizers who nonetheless are giving all the

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<sup>38</sup> Smith, *Wealth of Nations*, 734-5.

<sup>39</sup> Piketty, *Capital*, 438.

<sup>40</sup> Philip Alston, “Report of the Special Rapporteur on Extreme Poverty and Human Rights,” (New York City: UN Headquarters, 2019).

money to a select few while the rest of them impoverish themselves.<sup>41</sup> The only way this would make sense is if the people did not truly hold ultimate power under liberal democracy. The basic assumptions of liberal democracy are rendered incompatible with each other. Selfish pleasure maximizers would not impoverish themselves, but they are who should be composing the sovereign. Either people are not fundamentally selfish as capitalism proposes, or the people are not in control of their government.

In addition to this is the experience of the working class, who are the majority of the people who theoretically compose the sovereign. According to Christoph Hermann's study of neoliberalism their lives are getting more difficult, wages are stagnating, and work hours are stagnating or even increasing in some cases.<sup>42</sup> And this fits a broader trend across multiple countries according to Hermann's research. He found examples of this in Canada after the Common Sense Revolution of the 90s, as well as in Germany and the United States.<sup>43</sup> It would make no sense for any sovereign to impoverish himself while at the same time extending the amount of time they must spend working. The cause of this is neoliberal policy, which does not derive from the working class but is a reassertion of elite domination after the post-war era of working-class power.<sup>44</sup> A stagnating economy and powerful unions caused declining profit margins and in response to this economic policy began undermining labour unions, especially under Thatcher and Reagan, which halted progress on reducing the length of the working day. This could mean that the voters chose this new economic and political structure, but it was never sold to them as longer workdays and stagnating wages and the undercutting of political organization and power of the working class.

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<sup>41</sup> Macpherson, *Life and Times*, 26

<sup>42</sup> Christoph Hermann, *Capitalism and the Political Economy of Work Time* (New York: Routledge, 2015).

<sup>43</sup> Hermann, *Work Time*, 163, 169, 185.

<sup>44</sup> Jeffery Webber, *Red October: Left-Indigenous Struggles in Modern Bolivia* (Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2011), 312.

All of this suggests that by their own understanding of human nature liberal theorists are incorrect about who holds final authority within liberal democracy. If the people were the sovereign, they would not impoverish themselves because they are all selfish pleasure-maximizers; since they are being impoverished someone else must be the actual sovereign. They may have been misled by politicians overselling the need for neoliberal reforms, but if the sovereign can be misled for decades to the benefit of others, then it seems to hold little power in society. I suggest that the sovereign is some mixture of economic and political elites, those with greater resources, especially the resource of time. This means that liberal democracy fails at another one of the ideals proclaimed by its proponents; it fails at granting self-control of the people over their lives and does not make them the sovereign.

*The Limits of Liberal Democracy: Putting 'Time' into the Equation*

Now comes the question of why liberal democracy fails to achieve the goals of its theorists. I propose that at least part of the answer lies in understanding time as a resource and understanding how it is distributed throughout society under a capitalist system. All politics requires the basic passage of time, or what Elizabeth Cohen calls durational time, "...precise durations measured by clocks and calendars."<sup>45</sup> Any political actions or competition then takes place within and across blocks of time, if this durational time is unevenly distributed then the playing field is not level. I contend that time *is* unevenly distributed, that the ability to purchase labour time means you have extra time in your day to accomplish whatever goals you may have. This includes political lobbying or researching candidates. The wealthy have greater access to durational time and can take advantage of this for political gain. They can employ people to complete necessary labour for social reproduction, such as housekeepers, and they can employ

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<sup>45</sup> Elizabeth F. Cohen, *The Political Value of Time: Citizenship, Duration, and Democratic Justice* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 26.

people to engage in specific political action on their behalf. This grants them additional discretionary time they could use to research political candidates or contact their representatives. This gives them a political advantage over those with minimal access to free time who either cannot engage in these activities or can only do so in a more limited capacity.

What liberal theorists have missed in their understanding of democracy was a theory of how capitalism distributes time. Well known writers of participatory democratic theory even seem to be missing this discussion of time. Carole Pateman, for example, does not mention time as a resource in her book *Participation and Democratic Theory*.<sup>46</sup> Further, Robert Dahl discusses time but in a more individualized form, without connecting it to the larger logic of resource allocation inherent to capitalism. Dahl comes close to a discussion of time along these lines: “...the greater the number of people and the variety and disparity of interests involved, the more difficult the task and the greater the time required. Tolerance and mutual security are more likely to develop among a small elite...”<sup>47</sup> Yet in his later book *On Political Equality* he writes that while most barriers to political participation “...may actually grow higher and thus generate further political inequalities...” this does not apply to time as he feels comfortable assuming “...that time continues to enforce its implacable limits pretty much as it does now.”<sup>48</sup> The liberal view of time can come across as a stumbling block when it misses the structural importance of time as a resource. Wolfgang Streeck argues that there are two modes of distribution at tension in capitalist democracy. The capitalist system of distribution he characterizes as working according to “...*merit* by a ‘free play of market forces’...”<sup>49</sup> and the democratic as “...following social

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<sup>46</sup> Carole Pateman, *Participation and Democratic Theory* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970).

<sup>47</sup> Robert A. Dahl, *Polyarchy: Participation and Opposition* (London: Yale University Press, 1971), 37.

<sup>48</sup> Robert A. Dahl, *On Political Inequality* (London: Yale University Press, 2006), 84.

<sup>49</sup> Wolfgang Streeck, “The Crisis in Context: Democratic Capitalism and Its Contradictions,” *Max Planck Institute for the Study of Societies*, October 2011, 265. (Emphasis in original)

need...”<sup>50</sup> While Streeck was not writing about time specifically, the logic of his argument can be applied to it in the same way when time is understood as a resource. Capitalism distributes all resources according to a similar logic and one of those resources is time. A democratic distribution of time would then make sure people had access to enough time to effectively compete politically, by maintaining time equality there would be less of a tilting of the playing field.

### *Protection from Tyranny*

The idea that liberal democracy protects us from tyranny makes sense to some extent, in a vacuum for instance the idea of a government which is directly elected by and responsible to all its citizens should produce a government which represents their interests equally. Yet this does not take place as the interests of wealthier members of society are more likely to be passed, and they have easier access to government officials. Liberal theory would miss this as it was an elite project, rejecting the masses and having no conception of class. In addition to this though, I argue that a primary reason for this discrepancy is that liberal democratic theorists have no conception of time as a resource, the distribution of which dramatically affects political outcomes in society. Marx identified this problem long ago, that saying someone has a political right to participation is meaningless if they do not also have the requisite means to effectively act out this right. One of those requirements is enough time to educate themselves on relevant discussions and then the time it takes to make their decision formal, such as voting.

For similar reasons legal attempts at accountability can be difficult to accomplish, court cases can take years to complete which can be difficult for those who cannot afford to take the time to remain engaged in the legal dispute. Suing a massive international corporation can take

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<sup>50</sup> Streeck, “Crisis in Context,” 265.



years to successfully complete and if the one wishing to sue feels too small in comparison, they may believe that it would take up so much time and resources that it would not be worth it. "...[t]he average citizen...is afraid of courts and lawyers mostly because the cost, time, and the worry are too great."<sup>51</sup> The costs required of litigants can become too great who may feel that the conclusion may not be in their favor, and this daunting obstacle can be used to discourage holding the powerful accountable. The difficulty of legal accountability does not stop there as many representatives of the state are legally exempt from punishment for actions done in the service of their job. Diplomats and holders of high offices are granted immunity for many of their actions, even after they have left office.<sup>52</sup> Police officers and members of the military are also granted some level of immunity for actions taken on the job. These facts can make it difficult to make a case against violent actions by the state. With all these examples liberal democracy seems to offer only limited protection against tyranny, certainly more than feudal society offered, but it fails to live up to the ideals of its major theorists.

### *Efficiency of Interests*

As discussed above, politics requires durational time and those with more can pursue their political agenda with greater effectiveness. In terms of identifying the interests of the community these temporal inequalities lead to some individuals or groups being able to privilege their interests, either because they themselves have greater access to time, or because they can purchase the labour time of others who can represent them. Politicians can determine the interests of the community by what the community tells them, but the people who are talking to them are a skewed sample of the community. This skew happens in two ways. The first is that

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<sup>51</sup> John S. Palmore, "The urgency of economic litigation," *American Bar Association Journal* 67, no. 7 (July 1981): 814, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/20748843>.

<sup>52</sup> Chanaka Wickremasinghe, "Immunity of State Officials & International Organizations," in *International Law Fourth Edition*, ed. Malcolm D Evans (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 381.

large corporations can purchase labour time from many individuals to represent their interests endlessly, continually reminding politicians of what policies they want. This then skews the interests that politicians focus on towards large corporations. Macpherson describes this as the system responding to “...*effective* demand...” rather than just demand.<sup>54</sup> Because of this advantage of corporations of both hiring large numbers of people and hiring lobbying professionals when they do it creates an additional level of temporal inequality. When policy preferences are proposed to the state not all parties are equally effective at achieving success, “...where the demand is expressed in human energy input, one person’s energy input cannot get the same return per unit as another person’s.”<sup>55</sup> Professional lobbyists would have a greater return per energy input because they have more practice and practical knowledge around making convincing arguments for the policies of their employer. Time is a way to measure this input and if you can extract greater success with less labour-time then you have a temporal advantage, further cementing the advantage that corporations already have through their ability to purchase large amounts of labour-time.

Secondly, the population of political activists themselves is already skewed towards the wealthier end of the socioeconomic scale.<sup>56</sup> Because of their increased likelihood of participation they are also more actively sought out by political parties, making it easier for them to participate directly.<sup>57</sup> This suggests that it would take even less time for them to get involved than someone who is time poor and is not contacted by a campaign or a party, reinforcing the inequality further by making those with less time work harder to get involved. Both then push the interests that politicians are given towards issues more of interest either to the super wealthy mega-

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<sup>54</sup> Macpherson, *Life and Times*, 87.

<sup>55</sup> Macpherson, *Life and Times*, 89.

<sup>56</sup> Kay Lehman Schlozman, Sidney Verba, Henry E. Brady, *The Unheavenly Chorus: Unequal Political Voice and the Broken Promise of American Democracy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2012), 124-5.

<sup>57</sup> Schlozman, Brady, Verba, *Unequal and Unrepresented*, 85-7.

corporations or towards wealthier individuals, making the determination of the interests of the community very difficult. Time inequality leaves the poorest of the community locked out of effectively having their ideas voiced, they have less time to research which candidates might represent them best, and they have less time to engage in lobbying on their behalf.

### *Sovereignty of the People*

A liberal government supposedly derives its authority from the people themselves, as theorists like Locke argue, this would then make them the first sovereign to choose self-impoverishment and the enrichment of others on a massive scale. There are multiple ways to explain this, but the one developed in this essay is temporal inequality of capitalism. Marx describes the process of primitive accumulation as necessary for the complete development of capitalism, what this process entails is the divorce of workers from the land. After being dispossessed of the land they worked, both for sustenance and to pay their lords, they now become “free” and entirely dependent on wage labour. “The free workers are therefore free from, unencumbered by, any means of production of their own.”<sup>58</sup> These workers must then rely on employment by capitalists to survive. The capitalist-worker relationship plays a significant role in the distribution of time, specifically the length of the working-day becomes an important struggle.

The length of the working-day is not something that individual workers have control over but results from direct class struggle demanding that it be shortened. Christoph Hermann identifies and demonstrates this historical tendency. During the 20<sup>th</sup> century there were significant reductions in work time, but this either stopped or reversed after the 70s when powerful unions stopped demanding it as their power and size were drastically cut by neoliberal

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<sup>58</sup> Karl Marx, *Capital Volume I* (London: Penguin Books Limited, 1990), 874.

policies.<sup>59</sup> In addition to this many American workers would prefer fewer work hours and would even take a pay cut to do so, yet their employer does not give them this as an option.<sup>60</sup> Under capitalism workers are forced to spend hours working on behalf of capitalists, eating into the time that they can devote to politics. In addition to this, some are employed to work towards the political goals of the capitalists who hire them, i.e., lobbyists. Capitalists therefore have a disproportional amount of time they can devote to their political interests, while everyone else has a reduced amount of the same. This element of the capitalist system creates an inescapable imbalance of political pressure tilted towards the wealthy, undermining the ability of what liberals would call the sovereign to effectively control government.

#### *Beyond Liberal Democracy: More Radical Proposals*

Beyond these theories of democracy are many more radical conceptions of what democracy means and what it might have to look like for it to represent the people. Some theories of democracy rely on a historical approach, a look at the long-ago Athenian democracy. By understanding what it meant to those who invented the term and what it looked like when they used it, we can better understand what it might look like today, and whether liberal democracy achieves those same goals, though as we have seen it was intentionally divorced from the ancient original conception. Some of these understandings come from a different view of what the state is under capitalism. Liberal democratic theorists take the view of the state as a neutral body existing almost outside of society, a third party that competing interests can appeal to or take control of seats of power in. Marxists and other radical critics view the capitalist state as completely intertwined with the system, that it is not neutral but is a tool of the ruling class, though not exclusively one of domination.

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<sup>59</sup> Hermann, *Work Time*, 174-5.

<sup>60</sup> Julie Rose, *Free Time* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2016), 9.

## *How Does the Liberal Democratic State Work?*

None of this is to say that the liberal democratic state is simply a relationship of domination by elites because the interests of the many *do* manage to get made into policy. Every capitalist state makes some concession to the demands of the working class. The position of this paper is that the state instead represents a power relationship within society, specifically the balance of power between capitalists and the working class. There is both theory and history to support this position. Marxist theory accepts the fact that liberal democracy and capitalism offer some level of empowerment to the working class if it did not it would be entirely unable to explain successful social movements such as the Civil Rights movement or universal suffrage. These successful movements provide examples for the Marxist understanding of the state as a relationship of power between the dominant class and the dominated, but not as purely domination.

### *Part I: Marxist Theory of the Capitalist State*

While liberal democracy may not fully succeed at reaching the ideals of its defenders, it is not a relationship of pure domination by ruling elite. Instead, the liberal democratic state is a manifestation of the class relations within a given society.<sup>61</sup> What this means is that because capitalism divides society between owners and workers the liberal democratic (capitalist) state functions as a representation of the power struggle between those two groups. If workers become more powerful, they are more able to have favorable policy passed by the state, for example the post-war era shows that worker favored policy can happen over extended periods. This balance was then upended in the 70s with neoliberal politics, a response by the ruling class to reassert themselves politically and economically. These relations of power are not equally positioned, as

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<sup>61</sup> Nicos Poulantzas, *State, Power, Socialism* (London: Verso, 2014), 129.

the capitalist state is not a neutral entity which can be wielded equally by each side in the struggle as locations of power within the state can be shifted to maintain bourgeois control.<sup>62</sup> So, while workers can force more favorable contexts to some extent, there is a limit to their ability to control the state. Liberal democratic theorists describe democracy as a system of government which protects citizens from tyrannical rulers, offers the method for efficiently determining the policy goals of citizens, and granting those citizens self-determination as the sovereign of the nation. Yet it seems to fail at achieving each of these ideals to some degree and instead it functions as a system of control in which rulers cede reforms as they feel necessary to maintain their control in the face of an aggressive mass movement.<sup>63</sup> This also seems a better explanation than that offered by the above theorists considering the extended violent response some social movements receive, despite later being absorbed by the state and normalized. A system which efficiently determined the demands of the sovereign and implemented them should likely offer less violent resistant to those demands.

### *Part II: Historical Examples of Working Class Power*

This theory of the state works alongside historical examples of social movements originating in the dominated class. While the above description of liberal democracy offered in previous sections might suggest viewing it as mere domination with the window dressing of self-government, it fits alongside a Marxist conception of the state as a power relation which shifts over time but is ultimately dominated by one class. History would not be understandable if the state was exclusively about domination, as the working class has historically been able to force concessions out of the capitalist state through mass organizing, especially successful in highly unionized countries such as the Nordic states. At the same time, as discussed above, the liberal

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<sup>62</sup> Poulantzas, *State*, 138.

<sup>63</sup> Goran Therborn, "The Rule of Capital and the Rise of Democracy," *New Left Review* 103 (May 1977), 29.

democratic state does not offer true control of the government by the mass of citizenry. Movements such as the Civil Rights movement and the struggles of organized labour faced great violence from the state for many years.<sup>64</sup> This violent response suggests the state is not responding to the will of a sovereign but is fighting to maintain interests against those of its citizens. This may suggest that citizens did not support these movements, but after considerable pressure the state adopted some demands and parts of those movements were absorbed by the state. These concessions were granted not because the dominated classes took control of the state, but instead were a response to keep away much more radical parts of these movements.<sup>65</sup>

The liberal democratic state is not the democratic ideal that its supporters offer, but neither does it fail to offer avenues of political participation to the masses. The struggle between the dominant and dominated is therefore a real struggle, as there have clearly been historical shifts in the power balance, but ultimately only the ruling class maintains a foothold in state power.

### *Different Models of Democracy*

#### Athenian Democracy

As an alternative to liberal conceptions of democracy we can look at other, more radical, conceptions that can help address the issues discussed above. To start with we can look at Josiah Ober and his writings on how the ancient Athenians understood democracy. Democracy has long been accused of merely being mob rule, that the majority decides whatever it wants. But Ober shows that this history is mostly informed by the fact that major political writers, who personally

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<sup>64</sup> Therborn, "Rule of Capital," 33.

<sup>65</sup> Therborn, "Rule of Capital," 34.

disliked democracy, are some of the only writings we have from the time. That these writers are taken at face value can lead to a distortion of how Athenians viewed their democracy, and how successful it was as a system of government.<sup>66</sup> The important elements of Ober's analysis are those which would shape governance differently from liberal democracy. The major differences are direct democracy, rather than representative, sortition instead of elections, and a divided elite created by the mass domination of politics.<sup>67</sup>

#### Direct Democracy

The first significant difference for Athenian democracy is that there were not elected representatives, but rather that the people themselves showed up to debate political decisions. Meetings were entirely open to the public: "...any citizen could get up to speak...frequently the actual decree had been proposed at the Assembly by a voluntary speaker."<sup>68</sup> This level of direct policy control provides the ability of the people to flex their power more actively as sovereign, rather than having it filtered through the politics of an elected representative. This would also allow those less represented by the liberal democratic system as described above, frequently the poor, to have their voice heard as they would make the majority. Unfortunately, direct participation might have a limited effect on temporal inequality, those with greater access to free time would still have an advantage when getting their voice heard, though it could reduce this advantage to some extent.

#### Sortition

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<sup>66</sup> Josiah Ober, *The Athenian Revolution: Essays on Ancient Greek Democracy and Political Theory* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996), 22.

<sup>67</sup> Ober, *Athenian Revolution*, 23.

<sup>68</sup> Ober, *Athenian Revolution*, 23.



Second is sortition, or the choosing of government officials by lottery rather than election. This would completely upend the political “market” as proposed by liberals like Schumpeter, doing away with a supply and demand style of voting which understands voters as consumers. While not directly addressing temporal inequality this could provide a way to do so by increasing the number of time poor individuals in positions of power. Despite this it could run into problems because the government would still exist within the context of capitalist time inequality. This could lead to issues where the voices heard by the people chosen are dominated once again by the wealthy.

### *Divided Elite*

Concluding Ober’s point is the fact that because Athenian politics was dominated by mass engagement it created natural divisions among the elite members of society. Leaders may have attempted to pander or deceive the masses for their benefit, but they were unable to unify as under capitalism. “The rich Athenian litigant, well aware that his fate hung on the opinions of resentful jurymen, was at pains to dispel their distrust by demonstrating himself to be a man of the people.”<sup>70</sup> As wealthy Athenians had every possibility of being in court themselves, they had an incentive to maintain this relationship with members of the masses as someone with a poor reputation would suffer a disadvantage in court cases. This prevents elite members of society from becoming unified against the interests of the many. By aligning interests between some of the wealthy and the rest it creates weaknesses in that solidarity which can be exploited to the advantage of everyone else.

### Wolin’s Democracy

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<sup>70</sup> Ober, *Athenian Revolution*, 27.

Next is Sheldon Wolin, who offers a more radical form of democracy. A lifelong critic of modern democratic theory Wolin has written multiple books about liberal democracy, and while he does not have a specific blueprint of how democracy would work, he offers theoretical basis for what it would need. Rather than writing about specific institutions Wolin mostly focuses on democracy as a relationship of power within society, that the *demos* has the actual power to make decisions rather than merely be consulted on mostly formulated decisions.<sup>71</sup> This would be unlike many modern referendums or opinion polls in which people are asked whether they support or reject a proposal, this is mere consultation. His construction of democracy relied on far greater participation of citizens than liberal democracy seems to grant, and Wolin recognizes that this would require a supportive culture and understanding of our role within society.<sup>72</sup> This conception of democracy he describes as "...managing together those powers that immediately and significantly affect the lives and circumstances of others and one's self."<sup>73</sup> Democracy to Wolin is less a specific blueprint, and more an ongoing learning experience in which the citizenry learns to manage their powers and themselves. These powers cannot be granted by elites on high but must be taken by the people. Revolutionary moments in history are, for Wolin, democracy coming into being.<sup>74</sup>

Wolin also believed that democracy must be rooted locally for it to have any meaning to citizens as national politics can feel too large and distant to mean much if you are not connected to anything else.<sup>75</sup> To further this Wolin argues that the culture must include an increased level of public control over systems of communication to govern responsible and fair access to

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<sup>71</sup> Sheldon S. Wolin, *Fugitive Democracy and Other Essays*, ed., Nicholas Xenos, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2016), 90.

<sup>72</sup> Wolin, *Fugitive Democracy*, 377, 398.

<sup>73</sup> Sheldon S. Wolin, *Democracy Inc. Managed Democracy and the Specter of Inverted Totalitarianism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008), 260.

<sup>74</sup> Wolin, *Fugitive Democracy*, 97.

<sup>75</sup> Wolin, *Democracy Inc.*, 291.

accurate information so that the citizenry can be effectively informed.<sup>76</sup> Wolin's conception of democracy explicitly rejects both the state and liberalism as a "...corruption..."<sup>77</sup> making it incompatible with liberal democracy. He also rejected the unequal distribution of resources inherent to capitalism because it leaves those with few resources only limited potential for democratic participation, or "...fugitive democracy."<sup>78</sup>

While Wolin does not provide a specific blueprint, unlike many theorists of liberal democracy who offer descriptions of specific systems of government such as parliamentary, he does offer an idea that can be approached. This idea is useful for critiquing however democracy may be constituted at the time as it provides an ideal type which we can use as a comparison and offers a less rigid way of understanding democracy as less a system of rules and constitutions and more as a process.

#### Macpherson's Democracy

Finally, I want to look at C.B. Macpherson's description of participatory democracy in *The Life and Times of Liberal Democracy*. He offers a brief description of what it might look like, offering two models as well as a description of how we might achieve them. The how is less important for this discussion so the focus will be on the models themselves. Macpherson describes a pyramidal system of government, where at the local level there is direct democracy with smaller layers above that of elected representatives who are directly responsible to the layers below them.<sup>79</sup> His second option to this is almost identical, but in his opinion more practical and would still potentially function similarly. Instead of constructing a pyramidal system of Soviet-like democracy, keep the current structure but have the existing political parties

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<sup>76</sup> Wolin, *Democracy Inc.*, 292.

<sup>77</sup> Wolin, *Fugitive Democracy*, 377.

<sup>78</sup> Wolin, *Democracy Inc.*, 255.

<sup>79</sup> Wolin, *Democracy Inc.*, 108-112.

institute the pyramid structure within themselves.<sup>80</sup> Macpherson acknowledges that political parties seem unlikely to accomplish this task, having never been willing to do so before, but he argues that what has stopped them is that they exist within a class-divided society and essentially serve two masters.<sup>81</sup> Because Macpherson believes capitalism is the fundamental problem for democracy he would see it as something that would have to be abolished for democracy to function anyway. While Macpherson remains somewhat vague in terms of political ideology, not being a socialist but also criticizing liberal democracy from a left-wing perspective, especially in comparison to writers like Bentham and Mill who very clearly viewed themselves as liberals, it provides another ideal which can be used as a comparison for understanding the success of democratic systems.

### *Conclusion*

In the writings of its major theorists liberal democracy is primarily about securing the protection and self-government of citizens and efficiently determining what policies they wish to enact as they are the ones in control. While liberal democracy does offer a marked improvement upon civil liberties and political participation compared to many previous forms of government, it consistently fails to live up to these promises.

It struggles with holding the powerful accountable and seems to have minimal or no direct connection to harmful levels of wealth and resource extraction by the dominant classes. Holding the powerful accountable becomes difficult for ordinary citizens as the costs can be too great to bear, or the ones responsible for harm may even be entirely immune from prosecution. While theorists believed that making members of the government come from the citizenry rather than an elite aristocracy on top of them would align their interests and stop or reduce these

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<sup>80</sup> Wolin, *Democracy Inc.*, 112-4.

<sup>81</sup> Wolin, *Democracy Inc.*, 113.

inequalities, it seems to have done very little to accomplish that. In fact, in the past several decades it has been getting actively worse at dealing with this problem. The countries most capably dealing with it are state lead economies such as China, which reject liberal democracy.

Liberal democratic systems of government can determine the interests of the populace, but it does so in a skewed manner and the state historically responds with violence to any demands it wishes to ignore. Certain interests inevitably end up more effectively and consistently argued and put forward to government, making the inequalities self-reinforcing as the playing field of politics continually tilts towards those who started with an advantage.

Finally, it appears to not grant sovereignty to the people, as inequality, poverty, and working-hours all seem to be worsening for the many. No sovereign in history has intentionally impoverished itself constantly at the behest of another, without the use or threat of military might or some other form of coercion. That the logic of liberal democratic theorists relies on a capitalist understanding of human nature as selfish pleasure-maximization means this should make even less sense to them. These failures are not suggesting that liberal democracy accomplishes nothing, it does offer avenues of political participation to citizens. Labour, student, and other non-dominant social interests can compete at some level in politics. Yet they are competing in a field of power relations dominated by the ruling class, and therefore have limited efficacy in comparison to that dominant class.

The structures of temporal inequality which produce this problem, while mentioned throughout this first section will be elaborated in much greater detail in the second section. Capitalism necessitates these temporal inequalities to produce surplus-value, or profit. To abolish these elements of society, protecting democracy, capitalism itself must be understood as the target.

## Chapter 3: What is Time Inequality?

Now we can turn to the primary focus of this paper, temporal inequality. This section will be broken into two parts. The first part will address what exactly temporal inequality is with a literature review looking at both liberal and Marxist conceptions of it. Looking at writers like Elizabeth Cohen and Julie Rose can provide an understanding of how liberal theorists see inequalities of time, as a resource distribution and justice problem to be addressed by the state. For the Marxist perspective we can look to Nicole Marie Shippen, and Kathi Weeks who understand it as bound up with the capitalist system, and that rather than redistributive policies akin to a welfare state equivalent for time it would require a much more drastic approach to solve. The second section will address the ways in which capitalism produces and necessitates temporal inequality, both through the wage system and the valorization process. Understanding wage labour as both the sale of labour time and simultaneously its purchase helps better understand the necessity of this inequality to capitalism. And beyond the surface function of wage labour as unequal distribution of time is the process of valorization, or the production of surplus-value, which takes place during surplus-labour, incentivizing increases in the temporal inequality of wage labour.

The argument that capitalist manufacturing infrastructure has the capacity to eliminate this tension is pre-emptively responded to by pointing out that capitalism does not intend to produce material wealth, which could almost eliminate the labour process, but is instead interested in surplus-value and the reproduction of capital. With these sections I hope to show that not only is time a resource that can and must be distributed properly for a functioning democracy, but also that capitalism is fundamentally opposed to this redistribution, and therefore so is the capitalist state that supports it.

### *Liberal theorists of time inequality*

The discussion of time inequality will start with liberal writers and how they understand time inequality. First it will be useful to define what exactly we are talking about in terms of what time people have unequal amounts of. There are two definitions we can compare here between Julie Rose and Robert Goodin who define it differently, and therefore arrive at different understandings of who is time poor. Rose defines free time as "...the time not committed to meeting one's own, or one's dependent's, basic needs."<sup>82</sup> This means that everyone who works long hours or who must spend lots of time either maintaining their home or caring for the needs of their dependents would be considered time poor. She maintains that ignoring time as a resource is one of the reasons it has become so highly unequally distributed, with some people having lots of free time, and others having very little. She offers further nuance to this definition by suggesting that engaging in labour which is not strictly necessary would not count against your amount of free time. She offers an example comparison between a wealthy heiress who chooses to work as a model when she feels like it and a day labourer who has no choice about whether they work because they have no wealth to fall back on. In this comparison the heiress should not be considered as having a similar amount of free time as the day labourer, even if they spend similar amounts of time at work. This is because the heiress can decide to not work whenever she wants, because the wage she receives is irrelevant compared to the wealth she can use to cover her basic needs.<sup>83</sup> This definition of free time has some merit as it allows us to see how time as a resource can be consumed by many elements of our lives which can make our use of it for something like political participation difficult. It also allows us to distinguish between

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<sup>82</sup> Rose, *Free Time*, 58.

<sup>83</sup> Rose, *Free Time*, 43.

the ultra-wealthy working a job for something to do and someone working the same hours with far less wealth.

*Rose, Free Time*

In a symposium on Rose's book *Free Time* Desiree Lim offers a similar perspective on the necessity of free time, but from a republican perspective of non-domination politics. Using a similar understanding of free time Lim makes a republican case for guaranteed free time, rather than from the liberal egalitarian perspective of Rose. Lim's argument goes that republican theory favors non-domination politically, and this must include the relationship between workers and their employers. To maintain a non-domination relationship workers must be able to check the power of their employers, Lim offers three mechanisms to enable workers to accomplish this. First, requiring all uses of power are justified to those subject to that authority; second, that those subjects are able to push back against that power if it goes against their interests; and finally, that those who exercise power which harms the subjects are punished effectively.<sup>84</sup> In order to effectively use these mechanisms to respond to arbitrary power workers must be able to dedicate the necessary time to organizing themselves as without this capacity they would be unable to enforce rules, rendering them effectively non-existent.<sup>85</sup> Essentially, Lim is attempting to arrive at the same place as Rose, time is a necessary resource for social justice to emerge, but has found a different pathway to get there. Both Rose and Lim offer a compelling case that time must be guaranteed to citizens for them to effectively organize their interests and protect and ensure that their rights are materially relevant.

*Goodin, Discretionary Time*

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<sup>84</sup> Desiree Lim, "Domination and the (Instrumental) Case for Free Time," *Ethics and Philosophy*, 77, <https://doi.org/10.31009/LEAP.2017.V5.07>.

<sup>85</sup> Lim, "Domination," 83.



However, there are critiques from other time inequality authors, especially Robert Goodin. Even though they largely agree with Rose that time inequality is a significant concern for social justice Goodin's definition of free time distinguishes between free time and discretionary time in a way that allows for a more in-depth understanding of who is time poor than Rose's might allow for. For Goodin, defining free time, or spare time, merely in terms of time spent outside meeting your necessities (and those of dependents) misses an important understanding of how people choose to use their time.<sup>86</sup> While meeting those necessities is important, many people wish to achieve a higher standard of living than just not being in poverty, or having a minimally clean house. This definition of free time therefore would lead to, for example, the belief that single parents are just as time poor as dual earner households with no children.<sup>87</sup> Because of this Goodin uses the term "discretionary time," meaning time one spends going beyond the minimum in paid work or meeting other necessities because while that time may be spent addressing things which are necessary it is not required, but is instead a choice about how to spend time. This distinction between spare time and discretionary time allows us to know something more important than whether someone is engaged in paid labour, it can tell us how much of that is a choice, or how much "temporal autonomy" that person has.<sup>88</sup> Rose's definition can distinguish between someone to whom a wage is almost entirely meaningless and someone who needs to work long hours to survive but would not distinguish between someone working a job with long hours because they like purchasing things but do not have the wealth of an heiress to purchase things with that the wage instead offers them and someone working the same length of time because they must. This distinction matters because of the autonomy

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<sup>86</sup> Robert E. Goodin, James Mahmud Rice, Antti Parpo, Lina Eriksson, *Discretionary Time a New Measure of Freedom* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 34.

<sup>87</sup> Goodin, Rice, Parpo, Eriksson, *Discretionary Time*, 261.

<sup>88</sup> Goodin, Rice, Parpo, Eriksson, *Discretionary Time*, 27.

component to time, the person choosing long hours is making a choice, rather than being compelled to work long hours to live.

Goodin's framing the autonomy that people have being the important component of free time makes sense as the ability to choose what one does with their time is fundamental to any notion of freedom. The government may state that certain rights exist and are inviolable, but only with the control over how you spend your time can you exercise those rights. This is what makes time so important to democracy, any level of political engagement requires you to have the time to participate. Voting as a right is meaningless to someone who cannot find the time to get to the voting booth for example. Discretionary time is especially important to politics as time is a necessary element of informed deliberation, with a short time frame the decision may be made under the pressure of a deadline rather than fully formed deliberation. This is in addition to the mental side effects that resource scarcity can create in people. Resource scarcity is not only bad because it can deprive people of necessities, but it can also shape the way that we think and even the quality of our thinking. Resource scarcity, such as having very little discretionary time, can affect our cognitive capacity. For example, research has shown that when concerned or stressed about the scarcity of a resource it becomes harder to focus on other things, lowering results on an IQ test by 13 points.<sup>89</sup> Being stressed about your lack of discretionary time would therefore hinder your ability to deliberate on a complex decision, such as voting or evaluating a government policy. This further suggests it makes sense for time to be understood as a necessary resource for political deliberation, and therefore democracy.

*Cohen, Political Value of Time*

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<sup>89</sup> Sendhil Mullainathan, and Eldar Shafir, *Scarcity: Why Having So Little Means So Much* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, LLC, 2013) 52.

This also ties into Cohen's writing on how the state controls our time. While she does not specifically focus on time inequalities, the distribution of time is rendered political by her, like Rose. Cohen studies the ways in which time is used as a political tool of control by the state to measure certain changes, or cause deliberation. Prison sentences and waiting periods for government licenses for example both use "durational time" to accomplish specific things. The length of a prison sentence is a determination by the state of which "...demands a person serve time for behavior that renders them unfit for full citizenship."<sup>90</sup> As the state uses time as a political tool, so to do everyday citizens. Time is a fundamental component to politics, as it is to everything, because all actions require the time for them to take place. That may seem an observation so obvious as to not merit comment, but it is significant for democracy. As mentioned above, democratic decision making requires deliberation to be truly accurate. Time is not just an element of deliberation though, "It is integral to being measured and deliberate."<sup>91</sup> Free time and discretionary time, whichever definition is used, is integral to a functioning democratic system as it is what allows the *demos* to make measured decisions. In some ways money and time are fungible, purchasing the labour-time of someone else to fix a household appliance for example, but in political decisions making the necessary process for decision making cannot be outsourced to someone else. Even without money, politics will always require time.

Each of these writers approach time from a liberal perspective. Rose repeatedly uses a liberal egalitarian approach to justifying time as a resource which much be equally distributed, Cohen understands time through the lens of a liberal state, and Goodin assumes the employer-employee relationship throughout his book. Each of them makes interesting and useful points of

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<sup>90</sup> Cohen, *Time*, 127.

<sup>91</sup> Cohen, *Time*, 101.

analysis, and yet all three of them miss a central element of time inequality, capitalism. They do mention it in some sense, with Rose discussing overemployment, and Goodin flexibilization of employment. Yet the broader system of capitalism seems to go unnoticed. This is especially strange in the writings of Goodin who quotes Marx multiple times, and in a critique of Rose wrote "...until we overcome the necessity for the vast majority of people to rent their time to employers simply to survive, there will be gross inequality in the amount of time over which different people have control."<sup>92</sup> This liberal framework therefore still largely leaves out the central reason time is distributed so disparately. Which is why we will then turn to Marxist writers of time inequality, to better understand the role that capitalism plays. After this next section, which argues that time inequality is a fundamental element of capitalism, we can then move on to see how this means that capitalism naturally undermines democratic functions, making the two systems incompatible entirely.

But again, discretionary time too runs into problems. Part of the reason Goodin offers this distinction between spare and discretionary time is the idea that people could choose to work shorter hours than they do, and yet they do not.<sup>93</sup> Yet he seems to have no theory as to how working-day lengths are determined, whether it is chosen by employees or employers. If workers have minimal to no control on the length of the working day the distinction between spare and discretionary time loses some of its bite because choosing certain jobs which pay beyond the cost of necessity would have long non-optional hours anyway. So, their discretionary time, while theoretically under their control because they could work fewer hours, might as well be considered functionally equivalent to time that they do not have autonomous control over. This definition makes sense for workers who *can* control their working hours, but this does not apply

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<sup>92</sup> Goodin, "Freeing Up Time," *Ethics and Philosophy*, 37, <https://doi.org/10.31009/LEAP.2017.V5.04>

<sup>93</sup> Goodin, *Discretionary Time*, 104-05.

to many employees, which is why Goodin suggests government policy for flexibilization of work hours. While Goodin's methodology offers some nuance missed by Rose's, it also seems to be based in a world which does not yet exist, in which far more workers than now have autonomous control over the length of their work hours. This world may not even be possible under capitalism, or it may not have the effect that Goodin hopes it will.<sup>94</sup>

### *Marxist Writers*

While the writers discussed above either ignore capitalism entirely, or do not treat it as a central element of temporal inequalities, there are Marxist theorists of time inequality that do point out this connection. Identifying the central relationship which controls people's time as wage labour pinpoints capitalism as the primary controller of time, and a singularly important producer of temporal inequality. Goodin even identifies this in a response to Rose, arguing that significant temporal inequality will always exist under the capitalist mode of production, and yet seems to largely ignore or at least leave it alone in his solutions to those inequalities. Marx does not focus on temporal inequality, and yet this is a constant underlying theme of his writings. Multiple modern writers have constructed understandings of how Marx conceptualized time and how capitalism both fundamentally produces these inequalities and necessitates them to produce profit. Nicole Marie Shippen notes that the construction of time in the production sphere, the commodity form, has and is expanding into all other aspects of our social lives, exemplified by the phrase "time is money." This commodified understanding of time is a product of capitalist logic, and despite it appearing to be a neutral statement is a political logic which can be challenged with other conceptions of time. Tombazos and Postone identify the centrality of time in capitalist production. Valorization requires labour-time and, specifically, surplus labour to

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<sup>94</sup> In Christoph Hermann's book *Capitalism and the Political Economy of Work Time* flexibility policy is shown to have historically been used by capitalists to control workers more effectively and extend hours.

exist making “excess” labour-time required for capitalism to function at all. These connections between capitalism and time are what liberal theorists are missing when they are discussing inequalities of time, and while they still offer compelling and empirically robust analyses, the solutions they offer fall short because of this blind spot.

*Weeks, The Problem with Work*

While Goodin identifies and then ignores capitalism when discussing time inequality Weeks, along with other Marxists who write about time inequality, focuses much of her analysis on capitalism and the wage relation itself, which is why her proposed solution is to critique the “work society” as she calls it. The work society being a culture which privileges wage labour as something inherently good, and necessary to leading a good life similar to Weber’s analysis of the Protestant work ethic.<sup>95</sup> Because Weeks’ argument is about challenging the social conception of wage labour as necessary or inevitable, she does not directly address the democratic importance of this inequality. She also focuses her criticism of the wage relation and the resulting time inequality from the perspective of the labourer, or the seller, but every sale is also a purchase. The other side of this relation is just as important in a discussion of time inequality because it shows who has more time beyond what others do, and what they can do with that time politically.

Wage labour is central to the temporal inequalities being discussed here; it is the primary system through which control over time is distributed. People sell their time in exchange for a wage so they can afford the basic necessities of life. At the same time, other people are purchasing control over that time, disposing of that labour-time howsoever they deem appropriate. This, by definition, creates an inequality of time as control over time is being shifted

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<sup>95</sup> Kathi Weeks, *The Problem with Work: Feminism, Marxism, Antiwork Politics, and Postwork Imaginaries* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2011), 47.

in one direction only, to the purchaser. Weeks correctly identifies early on that “...we work because we must...,” because capitalism relies on the necessity of finding a job for the majority to be able to afford necessities, they are forced into the labour market.<sup>96</sup> Wage labour is central to life under capitalism for the working class, and outside basic social reproduction is the thing that they will devote most of their time to, in some cases of people who must work multiple jobs even spending more time at work than outside it. As this is central to capitalism it makes sense to place capitalism front and centre when concerned with resolving temporal inequalities, and yet liberal writers discussed above largely seem to ignore it, Cohen only mentions this as analogy for example: “...we can no more understand how capitalism works in the absence of analyses of wage labour than we can understand how a political system works – particularly a democracy – without analyses of how the political time of its subjects is treated.”<sup>97</sup>

The time spent in wage labour must be addressed in discussions of temporal inequality, Goodin does to some extent, but his solution offered is flexibilization of work hours.<sup>98</sup> As a liberal he offers a solution from an individualist standpoint, viewing workers each as an isolated subject who can negotiate better working hours to take control of more of their time Goodin agrees that while not every job might allow for this, as some workers have more flexibility in negotiating working hours than others, here is still an opportunity that a larger number of workers would be able to take flexible hours than there are currently, whether through labour organizing or state mandates of flexible hours. There are two problems that I can identify with this solution. The first is that the implied understanding of how the length of working days is determined seems faulty, treating it as an even exchange between the capitalist and the worker, rather than seeing it as a power struggle between classes. The second is that even if this solution

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<sup>96</sup> Weeks, *The Problem with Work*, 37.

<sup>97</sup> Cohen, *Time*, 15.

<sup>98</sup> Goodin, *Discretionary Time*, 267-7.

was used by the state, creating policy which required employers to offer more flexible working hours and wages, this would only be able to do a limited amount to solving the problem, time would still be unequally distributed, and in fact always will be under capitalism, as Goodin himself identifies.

The way that the length of the workday is determined seems to have little to do with the wishes of individual workers, but rather relies on collective action forcing capitalists to reduce those hours, and the surplus-value that would have been produced in that extra labour-time. Hermann covers this in detail, following historical developments which affected work hours, reductions, and increases.<sup>99</sup> What seems to be the case is that rather than individual workers choosing to work fewer hours, or more flexible hours, collective protests forced the state to place limits on work hours. The ebb and flow of worker and capitalist power serve as a measure for the successes and relevance of work reduction movements.<sup>100</sup> Goodin's and Rose's solution of work time flexibilization, while potentially helpful for reducing temporal inequalities seems to be missing a theory of how to get there, merely leaving it up to the state to decide to pass new legislation. Because of their liberal politics they treat the state as a neutral body standing outside or above society which might impose laws based not on relations of power within the state but some sort of moral claim to a fair amount of free or discretionary time. From a Marxist perspective the capitalist state is not a neutral party, but fundamentally invested in the system.<sup>101</sup> There are power struggles within the state between the interests of workers and capitalists, with successes on both sides, yet it is always tilted towards the advantage of the bourgeoisie.<sup>102</sup> This is not to say that it cannot be done, there have been significant periods of success for labour

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<sup>99</sup> Hermann, *Work Time*.

<sup>100</sup> Hermann, *Work Time*, 109-133.

<sup>101</sup> Max Adler, *The Marxist Conception of the State: A Contribution to the Differentiation of the Sociological and the Juristic Method*, ed., Mark E. Blum, (Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2019), 20.

<sup>102</sup> Poulantzas, *State*, 138.



movements, just look at the post-War labour movement. Yet this period of labour power had a fundamental contradiction built into it, identified by Michał Kalecki in his paper *Political Aspects of Full Employment* which eventually led to its collapse and the resulting turn towards neoliberalism.

Even if this proposal of flexible work hours was adopted *en masse* it would not solve significant temporal inequalities. Goodin knows this, specifically stating the inequality will continue under any form of capitalism.<sup>103</sup> Flexible working hours does nothing to address the core relationship, wage labour remains the dominant system of time distribution. Concentrating time in the hands of capitalists who are taking control of it away from the masses which make up the working class. This leaves the same inequality largely intact that Goodin and Rose write about, merely fiddling with the edges of it a bit. Weeks identifies a cultural construction of wage labour as something natural or inevitable, "... [wage labour] might be tinkered with but never escaped."<sup>104</sup> The liberal perspectives of writers discussed above makes wage labour something not to be ended or radically altered, but instead to be tweaked with in the margins, yet this very perspective means that the inequality they seek to address cannot be resolved.

### *Marx*

This identification of capitalism is found in Marx's writings as well, though Marx does not necessarily focus on temporal inequality it is an inescapable fact of his analysis of capitalism. In *Capital* Marx describes how profit, or surplus value, is generated. This process, called valorization, works by squeezing more value out of a worker's labour than the value or amount paid for their labour. Labour is what gives a commodity its value, specifically socially necessary labour-time. If this were all that happened under capitalist production then it would produce no

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<sup>103</sup> Goodin, "Freeing Up Time," 37.

<sup>104</sup> Weeks, *The Problem with Work*, 7.

profit, as the production cost would equal the eventual sale price. Surplus-value is able to be extracted from the process by what Marx describes as a “trick.”<sup>105</sup> It is possible to get this extra value because a capitalist worker engages in both necessary labour, which is the amount of labour required to cover the basic costs of living that they have, and surplus labour, or the labour which produces profit for the capitalist.<sup>106</sup> These two forms of labour are not separable under capitalism. It is not the case that the first few hours are necessary and then they become surplus, but they happen simultaneously.

Because this is how capitalism generates profit, and the objective of capitalists is to maximize profit to increase their capital, the system inherently requires workers spend extra time labouring and the capitalist is incentivized to maximize this amount of time. As time is of direct democratic importance this pits capitalists against democracy, rejecting a democratic distribution of time in favor of a distribution of time that maximizes profit. This is similar to the tensions identified by Streeck between capitalism and democracy, a tension over modes of distribution. Streeck’s focus was market distribution vs social distribution, but the logic applies just as much to the distribution of time. The tension lies between a democratic impulse towards justice and fairness, with each getting what they need and the impulse of capitalist logic to distribute resources based solely on “...marginal productivity...”<sup>107</sup> Applying this same logic to time makes sense as time is already effectively redistributed and almost exclusively in favor of capitalists as most people are forced to sell control over their time to capitalists. This is exactly what Goodin commented on, yet his solutions to temporal inequality include no direct challenges to capitalism but merely some state redistribution and subsidies for those with the least discretionary time.

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<sup>105</sup> Marx, *Capital*, 301.

<sup>106</sup> Marx, *Capital*, 300-1.

<sup>107</sup> Streeck, “Crisis in Context,” 265.

## *Shippen*

Shippen, similar to Rose and Cohen, offers a justice-based argument for challenging the unequal distribution of time. She approaches this from a Marxist perspective, yet it is reminiscent of the liberal egalitarian position of Rose. Pulling from the writings of Marx, Shippen is essentially arguing that people need access to time which they can control so that they may develop as humans. Even beyond Marx this fight for additional time has a historical element to it, specifically the many demands for shorter working days made by unions, such as the 8-hour workday. “The fight to shorten the working day is a political demand of the working class for the recognition of their humanity beyond mere survival.”<sup>108</sup> With a guaranteed amount of time beyond working and addressing basic needs workers can develop their human potential instead of living almost animalistically on instinct. Time is fundamental to the development of a person’s humanity as it requires durational time to take place, creative exploration and creation which helps determine such development: “...when I...create an object...without being alienated...I am better able to contemplate my humanity in that object.”<sup>109</sup> In order to create something or to contemplate the existence of ourselves or others requires durational time not occupied with other labours.

But the effect capitalism has on our perception and use of time is not limited to the world of work. Her writing focuses on what she terms the “colonization” of time, whereby the logic of capitalism expands outwards into all other non-work social relations. Much like Weeks, Shippen argues that leisure can be understood as a challenge to the logic of capitalism as it can show an alternative logic of time distinct from the commodified form under capitalism. This desire to

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<sup>108</sup> Nicole Marie Shippen, *Decolonizing Time: Work, Leisure, and Freedom* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), 44.

<sup>109</sup> Shippen, *Decolonizing Time*, 45.

reject commodified time and offer easier access to leisure is good to Shippen because, if increased *en masse* through a significant increase in the size of the welfare state, this can undermine the capitalist logic of time by removing people from constantly engaging with necessities.<sup>110</sup> This idea of the welfare state is not without examples. In Nordic countries for example there are many robust social programs and, as Goodin noted multiple times throughout his study of time distribution, the citizens of those countries frequently have significantly more discretionary time than countries with less universal welfare programs. This solution does seem to influence the distribution of time, yet it barely seems to address the processes through which the distribution takes place. It reduces time spent in wage labour and can offer people alternatives to work if they choose to use them, yet that inequality still exists and is unresolvable beyond the abolition of capitalism.

### *Martineau*

A consistent theme amongst Marxist writers on this subject is that time as we understand it today throughout our lives is not necessarily a default or natural experience. The quantifiable, generalizable form of time, or clock-time, that we live, even outside work, became slowly became hegemonic through hundreds of years of imposition. This process goes back to the 1300s with the deployment of work bells in European cities and towns which determined the length of the work day in industries being paid by the day.<sup>111</sup> This kicked off significant labour struggles as the employer was the one in control of the work bell, workers felt that they needed more control in the determination of the work day than just having their employer ring a bell

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<sup>110</sup> Shippen, *Decolonizing Time*, 69-70.

<sup>111</sup> Jonathan Martineau, *Time, Capitalism and Alienation: A Socio-Historical Inquiry into the Making of Modern Time* (Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2015), 56.

whenever they chose.<sup>112</sup> As bells were controlled by employers they represented a relation to time that was not neutral, but a time that was controlled directly by the employer. Workers did not wish to grant absolute control over the beginning and end of workdays to the one exploiting their labour. Control was taken back by silencing or taking control of the bells for their own purposes. "...at Thérouanne in 1367, an edict promised the wage-labourers that the bells would be 'forever silenced,'..." while in other places bells were repurposed for community interests of the workers.<sup>113</sup> In comparison to a bell controlled directly by an employer, a clock would have the air of neutrality as it measured uniform abstract time, rather than subjective time determined by an individual. These labour struggles were the beginning of the capitalist system of time that we use every day now, rather than being the natural way that humans perceive time it became the default because of its centrality to capitalism. The way that labour-time is bought and sold as generalizable units of time, usually as abstract hours, only makes sense under clock time. This framework of time is necessary for capitalism to function, but is not in itself sufficient, "...abstract-time units must be in existence...but also such abstract time-units must also have a social objectivity, a social validity..."<sup>114</sup> This social value of abstract time-units becomes universal as the logic of capitalism becomes the dominant logic of a society.

The process of capitalism becoming dominant is a process of dispossession for the many of the land they used to control as peasants. Marx calls this primitive accumulation, and this is the beginning of the modern time inequality that we face, "For this inequality of time to be institutionalized, the proletariat had to first be put into a situation where they had little choice but to sell their labour-time in order to survive."<sup>115</sup> Capitalism becomes the dominant mode of

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<sup>112</sup> Martineau, *Time*, 57.

<sup>113</sup> Martineau, *Time*, 59.

<sup>114</sup> Martineau, *Time*, 119.

<sup>115</sup> Shippen, *Decolonizing Time*, 56.

production through dispossessing people of their means of survival, locking them out of production for self-sufficiency and making them dependent on the market and wage labour for survival. This economic equivalent to original sin would sufficiently establish the inequality of time as becoming dependent on wage labour means selling time to the capitalist class, concentrating time in the hands of a much smaller class. Yet, as David Harvey argues, this process of accumulation does not stop once capitalism has been established but continues as a necessary element of capitalism maintaining itself. Harvey argues that capitalism has an “inside-outside dialectic” in that it needs an ‘other’ outside of itself to create stability.<sup>116</sup> This ‘other’ may exist externally to the system already, additional population, reserve labour in the peasant class yet to be proletarianized, or colonial labour; if none of these are available capitalism can create this ‘other’ by developing technology to lay-off workers who will then be reabsorbed into the system as an outside group.<sup>117</sup> As people are either pushed off the land that they work or replaced by technology both the land and means of production are further concentrated in the hands of fewer people. This coincides with the natural development of the capitalist system, monopoly.<sup>118</sup>

While the forms of deprivation and exclusion which make up this process have changed to include methods such as intellectual property rights like patents, the process has retained the same logic of accumulation overall.<sup>119</sup> Privatization of land or other formerly public goods and the modern financial system are able to make people dependent on the market in ways they may not have been previously. With reductions in social benefits under neoliberalism as well as increased demands placed upon those receiving those benefits, alongside stagnant wages and

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<sup>116</sup> David Harvey, *The New Imperialism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 141.

<sup>117</sup> Harvey, *The New Imperialism*, 141.

<sup>118</sup> Vladimir Ilyich Lenin, “Imperialism: The Highest Stage of Capitalism,” in *Imperialism and War*, ed. Phil Gasper (Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2017), 37.

<sup>119</sup> Harvey, *The New Imperialism*, 147-8.

rising costs of living, people are forced to rely on solutions offered by the market to problems that the market is the original cause of.<sup>120</sup> This system of debt, while supposedly offering a way towards financial power, can be a trap which locks people in poverty which can force them to take additional jobs, forcing them to sell even more of their labour-time.<sup>121</sup> This process of accumulation by dispossession, as Harvey calls it, is a natural process of capitalism, the ever expanding accumulation of capital in the hands of fewer and fewer people. Yet they are not only accumulating capital, as they accumulate greater control of the means of production and capital, they can purchase more labour-time. Concentration of labour-time is a natural part of the capitalist mode of production, and rising temporal inequality becomes a natural element of society.

As we can see, then, capitalism makes temporal inequality inevitable, just by the very nature of the system. Wage labour as the purchasing of labour-time automatically creates an imbalance in the distribution of time, just by the very nature of the sale the purchaser of labour-time has a greater amount of time at their disposal. In addition to this, capitalism creates an incentive to maximize temporal inequality. The process of surplus-value creation makes controlling larger amount of labour-time better as it allows greater generation of profit. Wage labour and valorization are fundamental to capitalism. Without addressing capitalism these major sources of inequality will remain unchecked. This is the central problem with liberal theorists who write about this subject. Many of their solutions rely on an assumption of capitalism continuing to exist or at least be unchallenged. Goodin identifies this problem, that capitalism necessitates these inequalities, but even his solutions remain focused on the margins of the system. Instead of challenging the processes of capitalist production Liberal theorists look

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<sup>120</sup> Susanne Soederberg, "The US Debtfare State and the Credit Card Industry: Forging Spaces of Dispossession," *Antipode* 45, no. 2 (2013): 509-10, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-8330.2012.01004.x>.

<sup>121</sup> Soederberg, "The US Debtfare State," 501.

for ways to tweak this problem at the margins with things like flexible labour or Sunday (or other day) closure laws. Yet without addressing capitalism directly they fail to address the single biggest factor in the very problem they are concerned with.

### *Conclusion*

While liberal theories of temporal inequality do provide both useful justifications for its import and sharp analyses of its effects, they miss the larger cause of this problem. Capitalism is almost never mentioned and when it is discussed the problem brought is not connected to capitalism as a fundamental element, but rather as an issue with how, by chance, modern society has decided to distribute time. This is the gap that Marxists can fill, by identifying the processes of capitalism which produce these problems. Wage labour by its very nature produces an inequality of time; an employer automatically has more time under their control because they have purchased it. This is not incidental to capitalism but foundational to it. Despite this, liberal theorists only minimally address it in their writings on time inequality. Goodin identifies this problem, but then largely ignores capitalism except to offer the solution of tweaking employment hours for individual workers in larger numbers to offer flexibility. Rose notices that some people are overemployed, in that they would take a pay cut for fewer hours but cannot do so, but she too largely ignores capitalism as something to be addressed. Instead offering state solutions guaranteeing time to all, such as a secular version of Sunday closure laws. Similarly, valorization, or the production of surplus-value, whereby capitalists employ labourers to simultaneously work necessary and surplus labour to squeeze profit out of them. Capitalism incentivizes maximizing this labour-time, ensuring a desire for increasing inequality, and yet liberals also ignore this in their discussions of time. If this process was upended, capitalism would cease to function. Temporal inequalities are therefore inherent to the capitalist system,



they cannot be significantly addressed without tackling capitalism itself. Liberal theorists either do not realize this or choose to continue trying to merely tweak the system. Marxist writers, on the other hand, directly connect these processes with time, Weeks and Shippen make clear that capitalism relies on and reinforces these inequalities. Despite this recognition though Marxists do not then connect time to democracy in the way liberals do. Liberals make explicit the fact that time as a resource is necessary for any political action one might pursue, with Cohen remarking that time is a necessary element of deliberation. Therefore, it is necessary to combine the liberal and Marxist theorists, to connect capitalism and democracy through the framework of time distribution. The final part of this paper relies on this connection to show that because of these processes of capitalism, which liberals do not address, democracy is directly undermined. This is why capitalism is incompatible with democracy in any sense except the neutered version of liberal democracy that we have now.

This commodification of time and the naturalization of time-discipline across society effectively dominates our thoughts and experiences, even outside of the workplace. The social effect of capitalist time and the maximization of labour-time can limit the possibility of human potential by locking people into functioning solely on necessity. By focusing on necessity people lose interest or ability to participate politically as they have more significant concerns to address, or when they have time to rest, they may frequently choose to just passively relax. This lack of political engagement of the working class provides an advantage to the ruling class. By not participating their interests are represented by less struggle in the field of political power. And if the wage system is maintained capitalists can hire people to aggressively represent their interests, more effectively too as they can hire professionals who have no other concerns.

## Chapter 4: Why Time Matters for Politics

This final chapter first discusses both material and abstract manifestations of temporal inequality in politics. I will start with the seemingly trivial observation that any amount of political participation requires time, and then move on to discuss political lobbying and the fact that any economic system is, at a basic level, an organization of time. Moving into the abstract there is a discussion of the importance of time for human development, that having access to discretionary time is necessary for us to reach our full potential as humans. Both points, the abstract and the material, reinforce the importance of time for politics by attaching it to both philosophical moral arguments, and factual observations of the material world.

After this comes an analysis of both theoretical and real-world alternatives to liberal democracy that have managed to forge their own space within the confines of liberal democracy. Richard Wolff's *Democracy at Work* provides a theoretical path to creating worker control over means of production by redesigning the workplace of capitalist production. Participatory budgeting as developed in Porto Alegre, Brazil, and the People's Campaign in the state of Kerala, India provide material examples of left-wing politics managing to generate significant participatory government that provides goods to the people who need them more effectively. There is then a response to the potential counterargument that the Nordic social democracies have resolved this tension. The analysis focuses on Sweden, but by looking at the failure of ideas like the Meidner plan, rising inequality, and worsening labour conditions under the neoliberal wave the struggle still exists despite apparent harmony.

With each of these parts hopefully the limitations of capitalist democracy can be shown both materially and philosophically. With the temporal advantages for the wealthy who can afford to purchase labour-time and the undemocratic structure inherent to an economy organized

according to capitalist production. Alternatives to capitalist democracy, both theoretical and actual, offer inklings of a different social structure, yet these two are shackled by the rules of the capitalist system, limiting their full capacity to achieve democratic governance.

### *Durational Time*

All politics takes durational time, regardless of how you wish to engage you require the time to do so. If some people do not have adequate access to the time that they require their political voice is devalued or even silenced. The process of political decision making can only take place through durational time, and beyond this extremely obvious statement, durational time is also a necessary component of the process. Process *is* durational time; deliberative thinking essentially is just an exercise in time. People's political voice can be silenced in many ways, a very strong example is criminals who cannot vote.

This has been discussed above but durational time is fundamental to politics, and liberals have done a good job of identifying this when it comes to temporal inequalities. But beyond this we can see how this inequality manifests in the material world by looking at lobbying statistics, a sort of proxy for labour-time devoted to politics. Understanding who engages in lobbying and politics the most shows how these temporal inequalities, which have now been established as inherent to capitalist production, naturally undermine liberal democracy.

### *Lobbying and Unequal Political Voice*

Under capitalism the wealthy (individuals or organizations) can purchase large sums of labour time, and this time can then be devoted to political lobbying. This concentrates narrow interests' power by allowing them to concentrate the durational time of the political processes. This political advantage tilts the political field to the advantage of the time rich, which then reinforces the inequality through policy and regulatory capture. The originating inequality

though is based in the production process of capitalism. Wage labour is an unequal relationship of time.

In a collection of essays analyzing political voice in the United States there are two important pieces of information identified. The first of these is that participation in political activity increases with higher socioeconomic status (or SES). This applies across multiple ways of participating in politics, including “campaign work,” “protest,” and “campaign contribution.”<sup>122</sup> This study uses SES, which is not directly free or discretionary time, but we can combine this with the time inequality research discussed above. Goodin’s research shows that people who have higher wages, which would equate to a higher SES, experience the “...greatest ‘time-pressure illusion.’”<sup>123</sup> In this context this means that those who earn higher wages have a greater amount of discretionary time, which makes sense in concert with the data from the other study as greater discretionary time would let them fit political participation in their schedule more easily. In addition to Goodin we have research which identifies a relationship between increased free time and increased political participation. Brady et al identified this relationship in a paper in the 90s, more specifically stating that “Roughly speaking, each additional hour of free time per day leads to about one-third more hour of political activity per week.”<sup>124</sup> This is in contrast with what they also noticed about political donations, which are only determined by income, having no connection to free time.<sup>125</sup> This difference also goes to show the importance of paying attention to time as a resource under capitalist democracy as income is clearly not the sole contributor to political activity and therefore influence.<sup>126</sup> This argument can be extended

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<sup>122</sup> Schlozman, Brady, and Verba, *Unequal and Unrepresented*, 86.

<sup>123</sup> Goodin, *Discretionary Time*, 107.

<sup>124</sup> Henry E. Brady, Sidney Verba, and Kay Lehman Schlozman, “Beyond SES: A Resource Model of Political Participation,” *The American Political Science Review* 89, no. 2 (June 1995): 284, <https://doi.org/10.2307/2082425>.

<sup>125</sup> Brady, Verba, and Schlozman, “Beyond SES,” 284.

<sup>126</sup> Schlozman, Brady, and Verba, *Unequal and Unrepresented*, 86.

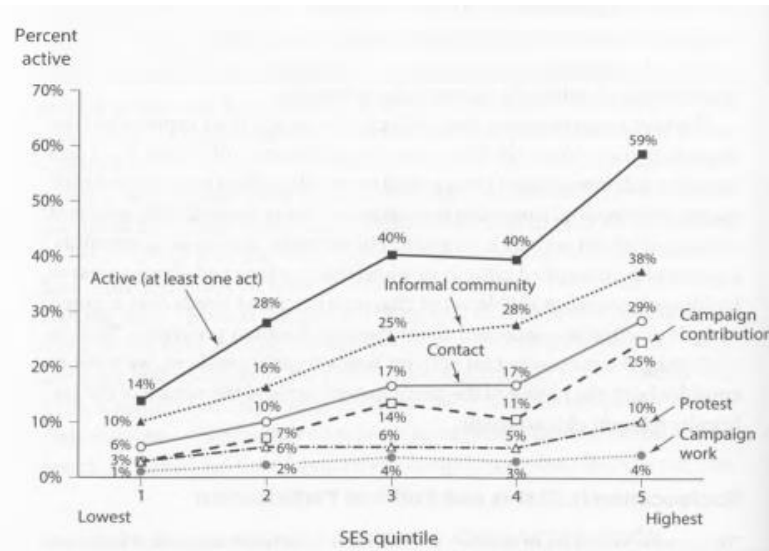
further into more specific identity based arguments. There is both a gendered and racial discussion to be had on time inequality and political voice. Firstly, the relationship between women's workload in the house and on the job, combining to create a double workload which puts them at a further disadvantage democratically. Authors such as Luxton, Weeks, and Schor identify this labour-time concern of modern women.<sup>127</sup> Second, extremely high incarceration rates of certain identity groups such as black men, locking them out of effective political participation, silencing their political voice.<sup>128</sup>

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<sup>127</sup> There is not space to treat this discussion with the depth it requires, to explore outside of this piece though, *Getting by in Hard Times* (Luxton), *The Problem with Work* (Weeks), and *The Overworked American* (Schor) are very good sources to start with. Sue Ferguson's *Canadian Contributions to Social Reproduction Feminism, Race and Embodied Labor* is also useful consultation for a Marxist understanding of intersectionality.

<sup>128</sup> Elizabeth Cohen identifies imprisonment as a very powerful source of political voice being silenced. For a discussion of overimprisonment (specific to the US), Michelle Alexander's *The New Jim Crow*.

With these pieces of evidence combined we can see that money can be a proxy for



discretionary time to some extent, and that a higher SES is related to a greater amount of discretionary time. This is what skews the economic interests of political advocates but is not the most significant element which causes inequalities of representation such as the one between corporations and social welfare groups. This data was acquired at the individual level and therefore can only reveal inequalities between individuals rather than entities like corporations, which is where the truly massive inequalities come into being. Because of the nature of capitalism described in chapter 2 corporations are essentially concentrations of time, as large corporations can purchase vast amounts of labour-time which they can then direct at political lobbying. So, while at the individual level those with more discretionary time (typically those that are wealthier) are more likely to participate in politics, corporations are the group most significantly represented in government lobbying.<sup>129</sup>

<sup>129</sup> Schlozman, Brady, and Verba, *Unequal and Unrepresented*, 86. (chart)

Later in the same book the author has a table which shows the percentage makeup of interest groups based on who or what they are advocates for. The plurality of interest groups are corporations (36.6 percent), while an extremely tiny amount represents the interests of the poor (1.1 percent).<sup>130</sup> This data is specific to the United States though, meaning it could be argued that this inequality has less to do with capitalism as a system and more with its manifestation in a specific country. Yet international data suggests similar trends in other liberal democracies as well, according to data collected by the OECD and Integrity Watch. Corporations and business organizations are the two groups which met with members of the European Commission most between 2014 and 2019, with NGOs/civil society being third.<sup>131</sup> The lobbying organization which met with commissioners the most was the Confederation of European Business, an organization which represents employers all over the EU and 7 non-EU members.<sup>132</sup> All of these pieces of lobbying data suggest an inequality in representation, which makes sense when wealth concentration is also understood as time concentration.

Corporations have an advantage in government lobbying actions because they can purchase so much labour-time. As discussed above all politics requires durational time to take place, this also applies to lobbying as the activities of lobbyists must necessarily take place within the process of deliberation for the politicians being lobbied. Therefore, wealth and money are not exactly a proxy for time, the purchased time cannot be exercised instantly but must be exercised by a worker within a period conducive to lobbying (i.e., they cannot effectively lobby

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<sup>130</sup> Schlozman, Brady, and Verba, *Unequal and Unrepresented*, 156.

<sup>131</sup> "European Commission," Commission Meetings, Transparency International EU, last accessed January 22, 2022 <https://www.integritywatch.eu/ecmeetings>.

<sup>132</sup> Second was the European Trade Union Confederation, which specifically represents workers, but many of the top 10 represented business interests instead of workers. The graph showing the 10 most significant interest groups can be found at the end of this paper.

whenever they want, they can only use time during which the person or group they wish to lobby can receive their message).

*All Economies Are Organizations of Time*

Time is distributed according to the logic and needs of capital as a living organism.<sup>137</sup> The economic system we live under determines how we use time, and the ways in which we organize control over it. Rather than human necessity or democratic control (if those would be disparate logics) capital takes a commanding position over time. Postone and Tombazos notice this, that capitalism is not a static system but is its own organic being with demands and necessities. Regardless of economic system an economy is, at a basic level, an organization of time. Under capitalism this organization is in large part out of the hands of the many. How we spend our time working is left up to the capitalist class, whether we produce a certain commodity or not is decided only based on the self-interest of a single or small group of capitalists. As Marx puts it, "...since commodity production presupposes the division of labour, if the society buys these articles, then in so far as it spends a portion of its available labour-time on their production, it buys them with a certain quantity of the labour-time that it has at its disposal."<sup>138</sup> The decisions of how this labour-time is then spent by society is left up to the desires of the capitalist class, who merely desire to produce abstract value, rather than material wealth. Under a democratic system these decisions about how society should spend its time would be under the control of the people as they are the acting authority within society, and could instead be redirected towards producing material wealth.

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<sup>137</sup> Stavros Tombazos, *Time in Marx: The Categories of Time in Marx's Capital* (Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2014), 13.

<sup>138</sup> Karl Marx, *Capital: Volume III* (London: Penguin Books, 1991), 288.



Since all economies are just systems of organized time the difference between economies is one of how the organization is decided. For example, under feudalism many decisions of how to spend time are made by individuals. As most of the time spent by a peasant farmer would be under their own control, with only the period in which they must produce surplus for the lord being time outside of their control, the economy of time was largely made by heads of household. While I would not argue that feudal society was more democratic than liberal democracy as peasants had no political democracy, they did have a greater level of control over how they spent their time.

Under feudalism there could be only minimal and hazy control over time, including labour-time, as the ability to measure time was inconsistently available to most of society, and even the parts to which technology was more readily available there were still difficulties of precision. As discussed above machine-based time measurement remained in specific to the studies of scientists even after the invention of the clock. Marc Bloch provides an example from 1284 that to determine the age of “...one of the greatest heiresses of the Capetian realm...” there had to be a full investigation.<sup>139</sup> This lack of precision would limit the ability of democratic controls over time as we understand it today, many people would not be able to be precise enough to specify hours of work and hours of rest for example. Yet despite this there is still a marked difference in how time was exercised the labouring class under feudal production. Martineau identifies some of these differences, some of which are quite significant from capitalist time use. For instance, peasants who were in control of their own production would have their labour determined by the concrete times of life, “...cycles of day and night, on the

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<sup>139</sup> Marc Bloch, *Feudal Society Volume I: The Growth of Ties of Dependence*, trans. LA Manyon (London: Routledge, 1965), 74.

passage of seasons, the cycles of birth, decay and death...<sup>140</sup> Outside of precision there was a difference in understanding how labour was to be performed, even in the cities which had begun developing early capitalist wage relationships. “In Ghent on 6 December 1349, the aldermen issued a proclamation ordering the weavers to return... but thereafter allowed them to start and stop work at the hours of their choosing.”<sup>141</sup>

This kind of labour-time control by workers would have to be abolished to allow for capitalist production which must manage each moment of labour to maximize extraction of surplus-value from the production process, both by ensuring focus and efficiency of the task at hand and by synchronizing the divided labour of capitalism. This alteration of working time was met with resistance by the workers, likely recently pushed off the land and now forced into the wage relation of capitalism. This brings the introduction of “...the time-sheet, the timekeeper, the informers and the fines.”<sup>142</sup> All these systems were designed to control the time of workers not used to having their labour-time controlled by a third party and who did not like the idea. For example, in Commynes fines were issued against workers who appeared after the ringing of the work bell which determined the beginning of the workday.<sup>143</sup>

We can further notice this difference by looking at how time was altered under early capitalist relations, especially the European cloth manufacturing industry, the social relations which would later lead to widespread adoption of clock or abstract time as Postone argues. The modern perception of time as interchangeable, equal, units of time is not a natural one but one which pre-capitalist societies would not have even understood or found useful. Something

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<sup>140</sup> Martineau, *Time*, 77.

<sup>141</sup> Jacques Le Goff, *Time, Work, & Culture in the Middle Ages*, trans. Arthur Goldhammer (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1974), 46.

<sup>142</sup> E.P. Thompson, “Time, Work-Discipline, and Industrial Capitalism,” *Past & Present*, no 38 (December 1967), 82, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/649749>.

<sup>143</sup> Le Goff, *Time, Work, & Culture*, 47.

interesting that Postone identifies is that the emergence of this specific version of time cannot be explained just by the natural course of technological advancement. In Western Europe, where abstract time emerged, it first started being used only after they had developed the technological capacity to measure it.

Water clocks appeared as early as 807 and the flow of water, being uniform, would allow for the construction of a time measuring device which could construct time as continuous equal units, yet despite this, instead "...complex water clocks that marked the (variable) hours with ringing bells were constructed... it would have been simpler to mark constant uniform hours with water clocks."<sup>145</sup> In addition to this, abstract (capitalist) time seemed to gain no purchase within China even after they had produced similar water clocks, even later when mechanical clocks were imported into China they were "...regarded and used essentially as toys..."<sup>146</sup> This suggests that the abstract time of capitalism does not emerge as a natural result of technological advancement, but rather as a result of social conditions which create a need for precise measurements of commensurable time units, i.e. capitalist wage relations.

But these differences did not stop with the definition of necessity as Martineau points to carnivals and festivals which existed outside of this realm of necessity and labour, focusing on the aspects of life outside of these rules of hierarchy and production. "Even in purely quantitative terms, on average three months a year were devoted to such festive suspensions of official hierarchies and times."<sup>147</sup> This amount of time outside the sphere of production for the entire community and official hierarchies could not be acceptable to capitalism as it requires continuous growth and generation of value. Each of these historical points shows that our modern conception of time, and our organization of the modern 'economy of time' is not a

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<sup>145</sup> Postone, *Social Domination*, 204.

<sup>146</sup> Postone, *Social Domination*, 206.

<sup>147</sup> Martineau, *Time*, 82.

naturally developed system but rather one that was intentionally imposed to serve the logic of capitalist production, against the wishes of the people who were compelled to participate in that production and who used to have greater control over their labour-time.

While surplus was extracted from them through a larger power, such as military force, they were not undergoing continuous domination throughout the production process as it exists under capitalism.<sup>148</sup> They therefore controlled their time more to their interests, granting control of labour-time a more democratic bent in that the labouring class (representing the majority) determined largely how it would be spent. With modern technology the potential for democratic control is greatly increased with advances in agricultural production, meaning that people can produce without being bent to the necessity of nature and self-reproduction as peasant farmers would have been. This is to say that while peasant farmers under feudalism could exercise more control of their labour-time it would have struggled to be realized as they were still dominated by the need to produce enough for themselves and their families, as well as the local lord. With the technology of modern society, having already removed the lords from the equation, our capacity for food production and the advanced division of labour would allow us to escape the necessity of nature as well by producing more food more quickly than any feudal community could have achieved.

Under the capitalist mode of production control over labour time is moved beyond the control of those who are labouring, instead those who purchase their labour time make those choices. This takes away democratic control over large sections of the economy, despite how significant an amount of their life workers will spend labouring for an employer. While some workers with specialized skills may be able to negotiate with greater control over their hours, in large parts of the economy workers have no such recourse unless operating through a labour

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<sup>148</sup> Martineau, *Time*, 105.

union or something similar. The threat of organized labour is the only option for controlling one's time as a worker under capitalism, and yet this can be a treacherous exercise as capitalists respond with physical violence through the state or economic hardship by attempting to wait out striking workers or bringing in scabs. In his book on this subject Christoph Hermann identifies historical trends which point to the necessity of strong worker movements for pursuing shorter working hours, yet this is still undemocratic as many of these negotiations are not granted but must be forced out of the capitalist. Yet under capitalism the question of how society organizes its time has more significance because with our advanced productive capacities and far more social production systems we would be better able to make decisions around time which would involve more people and solve more necessities than smaller groups of peasant farms could have. This is clearly manifested in the ways technology is developed in the production sphere. Since the beginning of the capitalist era the productive capacity of society has skyrocketed using machinery which makes work far more efficient. This is a constant part of capitalism, Marx for instance commented on this multiple times in his analysis (does this need a citation, or can it be treated as obvious?). The early days of Ford provide a powerful example of the capacity for capitalism to increase production, "In 1910 Ford built 30,000 automobiles... That number more than doubled in 1912... and increased by 10 times in 1914... The number further soared to reach 1.7 million vehicles by 1924."<sup>149</sup> In the span of 14 years Ford was able to go from producing 30,000 cars to 1.7 million, approximately 56 times more cars per year. The rapid development of time-saving technologies such as assembly lines enabled more efficient production, yet these types of technological advances seem to not similarly develop into shorter working hours. While the productive capacities of capitalist societies increase massively, and to some extent many people have more discretionary time, a large part of this excess time only exists as

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<sup>149</sup> Hermann, *Work Time*, 62.

potential free time. Capitalism does not realize this extraordinary free time because surplus and necessary labour time are both treated as socially necessary. Marx uses the term “superfluous labour” to describe this essentially, from a Marxist perspective, excess labour, or the labour which humanity does not need but is maintained by capitalism “...so long as value is the source of wealth.”<sup>150</sup> This became especially obvious in the neoliberal period starting in the 70s with increases in both work time and work intensity, alongside increases in productive capacity. According to Hermann, “...the principal characteristic of the neoliberal work time regime is the widening gap between necessary and actual work time...”<sup>151</sup> There were powerful labour movements in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century demanding reductions in work time, and they were largely able to control this contradiction between work time and productive capacity. Neoliberalism halted this reduction, in many cases it even reversed this trend with work time increases in at least the US, Germany, Canada, France, and Sweden identified by Hermann.<sup>152</sup>

This potential for the liberatory aspects of productive technologies, and the shackles placed on them by capitalism, have been identified and discussed extensively by Marxist thinkers. In the 20<sup>th</sup> century writers such as Gorz, Lipietz, and Williams wrote about the coming crisis of free time because of these new technologies, warning that if society is not redirected away from labouring then capitalism will simply push people into unproductive labour such as household cleaning on behalf of the wealthier members of society.<sup>153</sup> Gorz called the jobs which were being created “economically ‘unproductive,’” as the “function of these jobs... the two, three or four hours you spent up to now mowing your lawn, walking your dog.... Are transferred

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<sup>150</sup> Postone, *Social Domination*, 374.

<sup>151</sup> Hermann, *Work Time*, 159.

<sup>152</sup> Hermann, *Work Time*, 174-5.

<sup>153</sup> Andre Gorz, *Capitalism, Socialism, Ecology* (London: Verso Books, 2012), 60.

to one or more service-providers who take over these activities in exchange for payment.”<sup>154</sup>

Because of jobs like these, as well as part-time and insecure, becoming normal Marxists argued that society can instead lessen the labour expended in society by individuals, taking advantage of our productive increases to shorten working hours. We know society was not altered in this way, leading to similar problems existing in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, written about by Srnicek and Williams.<sup>155</sup> Much like the Marxists of the 20<sup>th</sup> century Srnicek is arguing for societies liberation from labour. In a society which incorporated the economy into the sphere of democratic decision making we might explore moving away from wage labour as productive machinery expands. But we are unable to make this decision as it is held outside of our control.<sup>156</sup>

All this is to say that all economies being organizations of time, capitalism organizes time not to the benefit of everyone but to the maximization of value. This is a central contradiction that capitalism cannot overcome, the system functions according to the logic of producing value, or capital, rather than material wealth. “The *real barrier* of capitalist production is *capital itself*. It is that capital and its self-expansion appear as the starting and the closing point, the motive and the purpose of production: that production is only production for *capital* and not vice versa, the means of production are not mere means for a constant expansion of the living process of the *society* of producers.”<sup>157</sup> While compared to feudalism capitalism was immensely freeing of the forces of production, the underlying logic which releases this productivity also restrains it by bending it to a singular purpose. “The underlying fetter, in Marx’s conception, is that the general powers of humanity *must*, in a system structured by value, be used to squeeze as much surplus

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<sup>154</sup> Gorz, *Capitalism*, 61.

<sup>155</sup> Nick Srnicek and Alex Williams, *Inventing the Future: Postcapitalism and a World Without Work* (London: Verso Books, 2015).

<sup>156</sup> For additional Marxist analyses of 20<sup>th</sup> century productivity increases and the potential liberation from labor they could create see Raymond Williams’ *Towards 2000*, and Alain Lipietz’s *Towards a New Economic Order*

<sup>157</sup> Marx, *Volume III*, 358.

labour time from the workers as possible – although, increasingly, they *could* be used to increase social wealth directly”<sup>158</sup> Capital focuses the purpose of production to the reproduction of capital, rather producing material wealth to benefit the whole of society. Yet this organizing of vast sums of social labour time is not done with the involvement of the citizenry, or even the workers who engage in the actual production, but is all decided by the wealthy, those who own the means of production and therefore the time of people who must sell their labour-time to survive. This system of organizing time is not an inevitability but is instead a recently emerged system. Time under feudalism was organized largely by the workers themselves according to their own needs. On top of this they would produce a surplus on behalf of lords, but these were separate experiences of labour-time and outside of this surplus production they were left to their own devices. All economies are organizations of time, and we can choose how to organize our time, whether democratically for the benefit of human life or by leaving it up to capitalists who aims solely for maximum value.

### *The Focus on Time is Useful*

#### *Repoliticizing Time/Human Development*

Focusing on time in this way also allows for a repoliticizing of time. Mentioning time structures of feudalism offers the ability to make capitalist time seem less like a constant natural existence, but by politicizing it we can see that the distribution of it is a fully political decision, and one that we may want to take control of. Rather than viewing time and its distribution under capitalism as a neutral reality of the world we can see that the determination of how we use our time can be controlled by the many rather than the few. By showing this, it becomes easier to see the ways in which capitalism controls many facets of our lives and that this is not historically

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<sup>158</sup> Postone, *Social Domination*, 359.



common, but rather is a new development unique to the capitalist system. Through this we can imagine that capitalist time control can be removed, since it is a new existence, it does not need to exist, and it is not “natural.” Nicole Marie Shippen and Michael Lebowitz posit that capitalism is opposed to proper human development, that the way control of our time is organized under capitalism is fundamentally structured against self-development, or the achievement of the “good life.”

Shippen uses this argument as a central part of the discussion in her book *Decolonizing Time*, “A theory of time in capitalist modernity is extremely useful because it demonstrates the political nature of time under capital...”<sup>159</sup> By developing a theory of time we can see that what people might assume to be unchangeable about society and show them to be malleable. This therefore is important to developing a radical, anti-capitalist politics. This influence of capital on time is not exclusive to the realm of production as it has expanded into how we think about our time use even outside of work, epitomized in the phrase “work-life-balance.” This idea of balancing work and life treats it as something that must be determined by individuals, entirely removing them from the context of the capitalist economy that they exist in, and which grants them very limited control over the work time part of that balance as the length of the working day is not based on a mutually agreed upon decision determined by what individual workers need, but on maximizing surplus-value within the limits of work time imposed by the state. Shippen makes this argument by pulling from an Aristotelian-Marxist tradition which understands leisure time not merely as passive enjoyment of pleasure, but as time in which a person engages in critical analysis of life. Beyond just freedom from immediate labour, “...leisure is active contemplation of the lived experience.”<sup>160</sup> Much like Cohen’s recognition of

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<sup>159</sup> Shippen, *Decolonizing Time*, xiii.

<sup>160</sup> Shippen, *Decolonizing Time*, 29.

durational time as the basis for the deliberative decision making of politics, access to durational time which we control is necessary as contemplation of life can only take place through durational time, similar to politics. One cannot usefully squeeze all their contemplation into a smaller window for maximum efficiency as there is little value in contemplating faster, much like there is little use for deliberating faster.<sup>161</sup> This means that leisure, or contemplation, must reject the capitalist focus on efficiency in the name of constant production. Shippen argues that this means, "...leisure is the very antithesis of the logic of capitalism..." because it rejects these principles, rather than the liberal focus on the work-life balance which treats the need for capitalist production as a basic axiom of reality.<sup>162</sup>

Treating our ability to control our time as central to human development and democratic participation, alongside the benefits of those two working together, shows the social limitations of capitalism for humanity. Understanding durational time as a necessary part of critical evaluation makes clear that the domination of our time by capitalists reduces our ability to grow. It also redirects energy away from that potential for growth and pushes it towards producing surplus-value through alienated labour. Capitalism is opposed to fully realizing the potential for development within those who make up the working class, instead leaving that leisure time in the hands of those who control the time of other people. With fewer people able to live the examined life, most of society is pushed towards the unexamined life with time free of work more often used for passive consumption to rest from the workload of capitalism. This slows and limits the ability of humanity to develop socially and critically. By moving to a mode of production which did not distribute time and labour in this way there would be greater potential for many more people to engage in this and develop humanity quicker.

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<sup>161</sup> Except for emergencies, but what would emergency contemplation be?

<sup>162</sup> Shippen, *Decolonizing Time*, 33.

### *Alternative Democracies*

All this argumentation that capitalism and democracy are fundamentally opposed leaves open the question of what it might or should be replaced with. While we are unable to know what democracy might look like if capitalism is abolished, it will be shaped by the experiences of those who lived it. Despite this, contemporary authors offer frameworks and suggestions for what it could look like. Richard Wolff offers a system for democratizing the workplace, making democratic a large part of people's lives which remains undemocratic under capitalism. In addition to this Sheldon Wolin offers critiques of liberal democracy which, while not as particular as Wolff's, does offer a sort of ideal for comparison. With both authors' theory combined we can potentially see the future of democracy when it supersedes liberal democracy and becomes truly democratic.<sup>163</sup>

#### *Richard Wolff*

Expanding from the repoliticization of time we can then use that to imagine how other forms of democracy might look. Richard Wolff's *Democracy at Work* provides a framework for understanding how this might function. Wolff's WSDEs are a way to imagine an organization of time which is controlled by the workers themselves, rather than imposed on society at large by the capitalist class. Wolff approaches democratizing work from the idea that without democratizing the economy, by making individual businesses run democratically, then democracy in the rest of society remains incomplete. To accomplish this democratization of the economy Wolff proposes what he calls Workers' Self-Directed Enterprises, or WSDEs. The point of the WSDE structure is to give control over the appropriation and distribution of surplus

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<sup>163</sup> Beyond these writers it is worth noting that there are even more critical writers of liberal democracy such as Leo Panitch, Ernest Mandel (*Power and Money*), and C. Wright Mills.

produced by the company, granting workers absolute control over the surplus that they themselves produce, rather than a board of directors which had no role in creating that surplus. Wolff makes sure to distinguish WSDEs from worker owned and worker-controlled enterprises, as well as cooperatives as the control over surplus is apportioned differently than WSDEs.<sup>164</sup> This difference is because the board and manager roles are all exclusively filled by workers and are chosen by the workers themselves. This is different from worker owned or worker managed businesses because in the former workers would not replace the role of directing production and in the latter would only have the role of management, neither of these remove capitalists from the business, unlike WSDEs.<sup>165</sup> Because the workers control the surplus it removes the relationship of exploitation from the work, and because the specific workers who control the surplus have the same level of democratic control as others the workplace is truly democratically controlled.

This system of worker control also creates opportunities for workers to engage in democratic systems which would give practice for democracy outside of the workspace as well. If WSDEs existed alongside a more democratic political system this would allow for the two to mutually reinforce each other as participation in either would improve one's ability to participate in the other.

Discussed above is the fact that large corporations use the surplus-value produced by workers to engage in lobbying. This means that when workers are producing as an employee, on behalf of a capitalist, they are both being exploited directly through the extraction of surplus-value, but they are also then essentially working against themselves politically. As workers they may choose to participate in democratic politics, but during working hours they are working to

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<sup>164</sup> Richard Wolff, *Democracy at Work: A Cure for Capitalism* (Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2012), part 6.1-3, "What 'Self-Directed' Means."

<sup>165</sup> Wolff, *Democracy at Work*, part 6.1-3.

fund the political interests of their employers, effectively working against interests they may represent outside of work. Wolff includes this as an important part of WSDEs as the workers have total control of the surplus-value that the company produces, which means they can direct that surplus into efforts which support their preferred government policy. Part of this is a desire to contain democratic potential of workers, in other words “...spending to control the political landscape is another cost of capitalist business.”<sup>166</sup> Granting working control through WSDEs would allow them to re-orient surpluses towards policies that support further democratization of society and greater supports for workers. This system of democratic control over the workplace, both in production and ownership allows workers to have directly control over the time of their labour, rather than granting that time to small group or individual with different interests than them. This effectively democratizes the time of the workplace, with the potential to fundamentally reshape the organization of the economy of time and allowing for easier competition from workers in political matters as they now have access to the time previously owned by others, as well as the surplus used to purchase additional time.

This framework offered by Wolff has no real-world examples to look at making evaluating it more theoretical. The closest material example are co-ops, but Wolff specifically makes a distinction between WSDEs and co-ops. Evaluating it in terms of its value for the political Left, it suffers from idealism. Wolff does not offer a theory or plan for how to achieve this economy where workers own the surplus that they produce, though he readily admits that it would not be able to function within our current capitalist society.<sup>167</sup>

### *Deepening Democracy*

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<sup>166</sup> Wolff, *Democracy at Work*, part 9.2 “Containing Democracy.”

<sup>167</sup> Ellen David Friedman, “Book Review: Democracy at Work: A Cure for Capitalism, by Richard Wolff,” *Labor Notes*, May 1, 2014, DOI: 10.1177/0160449X14524708.

Authors Archon Fung and Erik Olin Wright have introduced a concept called Empowered Participatory Governance (EPG) which proposes a set of requirements for analyzing democratic systems which propose themselves to be of greater participatory organization than liberal democracy typically is. They put forward three principles that EPG must follow: practical orientation, bottom-up participation, and deliberative solution generation.<sup>168</sup> The first principle in this list means that the government structure must be geared towards achieving specific material goals, specifically "...goods to sectors of society that are often most grievously denied them."<sup>169</sup> By focusing on delivering material benefits to those most in need of them EPG is able to demonstrate the power of democratic politics to those who might traditionally be excluded from the benefits of liberal democracy. Second is bottom-up participation or designing systems intentionally to encourage and support participation from the citizenry, even those with minimal knowledge of or experience with democratic systems.<sup>170</sup> And finally, deliberative solution generation means that by having people participate directly in the deliberation of policy decisions they will engage in debate about how best to address problems. The process should be designed to produce debate reliant on justifications that decision makers find acceptable.<sup>171</sup> Debate in this context does not necessarily mean measured calm discussions, as politics can be controversial and heated arguments are not always a negative. Fung and Wright suggest that a political party might direct these discussions by proposing an agenda to create a specific focus for discussion, though this agenda does not need to be accepted.<sup>172</sup>

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<sup>168</sup> Archon Fung, and Erik Olin Wright, "Thinking About Empowered Participatory Government," in *Deepening Democracy: Institutional Innovations in Empowered Participatory Governance*, ed., Archon Fung, and Erik Olin Wright (London: Verso, 2003), 16-7.

<sup>169</sup> Fung and Wright, "Participatory Government," 16.

<sup>170</sup> Fung and Wright, "Participatory Government," 16.

<sup>171</sup> Fung and Wright, "Participatory Government," 17.

<sup>172</sup> Fung and Wright, "Participatory Government," 17.

In addition to these principles, they suggest design structures relevant to EPG, devolving political power to smaller units more local to problems. This is not just the creation of smaller local units that advise the central governing structure but intentionally devolving decision making power to those smaller units.<sup>173</sup> Secondly, in conjunction with these now more powerful local units of government there needs to be greater centralization of "...supervision and coordination."<sup>174</sup> This allows the higher government agencies to coordinate across local groups, limiting any useless overlap and being able to step in where local groups may be failing or struggling to meet the needs of those they represent. Finally, EPG is state-centric, rather than attempting something like dual power the authors propose these political movements "...colonize state power and transform local governance..."<sup>175</sup>

Beyond this theoretical explanation of what rules EPG systems must follow and how it might solve problems of less involved system the authors provide multiple real world case studies as examples of their idea of participatory government. Of the four examples they provide only two will be examined here because they deal directly with control over central government roles more so than the other two. The first example is what is called Participatory Budgeting, originally developed, and popularized in Porto Alegre, Brazil. The second is a similar system, though less focused on budgeting specifically, created in the Indian province of Kerala. Porto Alegre and Kerala adopted policies which the authors identify as examples of EPG while under government of left-wing political movements. In Porto Alegre participatory budgeting was instituted under the Popular Front, head by the Workers' Party (Partido dos Trabalhadores, or PT) in 1989, and Kerala when the Left Democratic Front came to power in 1996.<sup>176</sup> Both

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<sup>173</sup> Fung and Wright, "Participatory Government," 20.

<sup>174</sup> Fung and Wright, "Participatory Government," 21.

<sup>175</sup> Fung and Wright, "Participatory Government," 22.

<sup>176</sup> LDF consists of Communist Party of India (Marxist), Communist Party of India, and various other parties.

regions have built in systems to make it easier for poor and non-formally educated citizens to participate in the democratic process, encouraging them and generating significant increases in participation numbers, alongside increasing community ties and interactions. This educational element allows people to overcome the most basic hurdles before they get involved and start learning how to participate in a democracy, one woman in Porto Alegre reported, “After starting to participate in the Forum of Cooperatives, I started to become involved with community leaders... wound up being elected... At first, I did not understand much, but with time I started to get it... It was an incredible learning experience in becoming a community leader.”<sup>177</sup>

Time, as noted by Fung and Wright, is a resource of importance in this discussion. It makes little sense for someone with very limited time and money to engage in politics if they will not see a material benefit any time soon, but by granting locals greater power in the distribution of resources poor neighborhoods are able to receive benefits faster, encouraging participation.<sup>178</sup> At the same time these are not national governments and can therefore be undermined effectively by post-fascist leaders like Bolsonaro who either dismantle smaller government bodies or cut their funding.<sup>179</sup> Because of its reliance on institutional support, making it vulnerable to changes in the political environment, it has been unable to maintain itself in Porto Alegre. Though it lasted for decades, originating in the 90s and lasting into the 2010s, it was suspended in 2017.<sup>180</sup>

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<sup>177</sup> Gianpaolo Baiocchi, “Participation, Activism, and Politics: The Porto Alegre Experiment,” in *Deepening Democracy: Institutional Innovations in Empowered Participatory Governance*, ed., Archon Fung, and Erik Olin Wright (London: Verso, 2003), 61.

<sup>178</sup> Baiocchi, “Participation, Activism, and Politics,” 64-5.

<sup>179</sup> Valesca Lima, « Brazil’s new leaders are challenging the tradition of participatory democracy. Here’s why.,” *The Washington Post*, June 7, 2019, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/2019/06/07/brazils-new-leaders-are-challenging-tradition-participatory-democracy-heres-why/>.

<sup>180</sup> Rebecca Abers, Igor Brandão, Robin King, Daniely Votto, “Porto Alegre: Participatory Budgeting and the Challenge of Sustaining Transformative Change,” World Resources Institute, last modified June 13, 2018, <https://www.wri.org/research/porto-alegre-participatory-budgeting-and-challenge-sustaining-transformative-change>.



In Kerala the LDF initiated the People's Campaign for Decentralized Planning when they were elected, and it has three core components. Local government decision making powers have been expanded at the levels of "...district, block, and [village councils] ...," there has also been major decentralization of expenditures with "...40 percent of all developmental expenditures... allocated directly to [Local Self-Governing Institutions] ..." and finally, the power to "...design, fund, and implement..." development projects has also been devolved to local officials.<sup>181</sup> The campaign also featured a significant training system to help citizens understand the rules of the system, as well as encouraging local participation through neighborhood councils.<sup>182</sup> This both saves people time and weaves democratic systems into the fabric of society, making participation more naturally occurring. Participation rates unfortunately struggle for committee meetings, about 11 percent of the voting population participated in the first round but it declined afterwards.<sup>183</sup> In addition to the concern about participation is what happens when the central Indian government is ideologically opposed to the Kerala model. When the Indian National Congress came to power "...despite its public declarations of support for the Campaign, the government has weakened the institutional mooring of the Campaign by promoting parallel structures... The government has also undermined the Campaign's formal and informal support structures..."<sup>184</sup> Even with some level of success shown from the Kerala model the state does not just ignore this decentralization of power, but, when those not aligned with the Left are elected, will seek to undermine, and regain control of the power formerly decentralized. Both of these efforts are vulnerable to concerted efforts to end them from above, with either powerful business

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<sup>181</sup> T.M. Thomas Isaac, and Patrick Heller, "Democracy and Development: Decentralized Planning in Kerala," in *Deepening Democracy: Institutional Innovations in Empowered Participatory Governance*, ed., Archon Fung, and Erik Olin Wright (London: Verso 2003), 78.

<sup>182</sup> Isaac and Heller, "Democracy and Development," 83, 103.

<sup>183</sup> Isaac and Heller, "Democracy and Development," 102

<sup>184</sup> Isaac and Heller, "Democracy and Development," 107.

or political interests opposing them. So, while the Kerala model and the Porto Alegre model demonstrate that smoothing over some of the time concerns of those traditionally locked out of liberal democratic politics, mainly the poor, they are still vulnerable to pro-capitalist state governments looking to restore the status-quo.

### *Response to Nordic Countries*

Throughout this discussion the reader might have been thinking of a background question as to how this might apply to Nordic countries. That if their democratic systems are more robust or produce less inequality and they seem to achieve the goals of liberal democratic theorists then capitalism and democracy can co-exist. Yet looking deeper into Nordic politics, specifically Sweden, there are two things to notice. First is that the tensions identified above have not been resolved, and second that even at the height of left-wing political power there appear to be limitations imposed by the system, constraining possibilities.

Sweden is generally rated very highly in terms of living conditions, along with each of the other Nordic countries, suggesting the possibility that its democracy has managed to overcome the problems created by capitalism. Yet this is not actually a counter argument to the larger point, but in fact reinforces it. If the Nordic countries have a more democratic society, or one that better represents the interests of the people then this would suggest that time distribution plays an important role in democracy. As established by Goodin in the first chapter of this thesis, citizens in social democratic welfare states have significantly more discretionary time than those in more traditional liberal democracies. In some cases, saving almost half a workday a week, which is almost 52 extra days every year worth of discretionary time over people in traditional liberal states.<sup>185</sup> Yet despite this capitalism is still actively undermining the social democratic

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<sup>185</sup> Goodin, *Discretionary Time*, 149.

system as well as limiting its political horizons. With the failure of the Meidner plan at the height of social democratic power, capital began to reassert control, and this manifests today in a level of neoliberalization even in Sweden identified by Hermann in his discussion of work-time.<sup>186</sup> Even in a country with a powerful labour movement such as Sweden work time has increased since the 90s and its unionization rate has declined from its peak of 85 percent in '93 down to 68 percent today.<sup>187</sup> So, while the Nordic countries may be better able to push back against capital and support a more robust democracy they are still struggling with the tension between capitalism and democracy. The Nordic model does demonstrate that with a more powerful working-class organization with better funding can overcome the time inequality to some extent. But this does not last indefinitely and the underlying struggle between capital and labour remains ongoing, and if labour is unable or unwilling to overcome this conflict then eventually it will slide back towards the interests of capital. A better solution then might be the abolition of capitalism entirely, to remove this tension from the equation. Like Porto Alegre and Kerala discussed above the capitalist system does not neutrally sit by while a state or regional government attempts to upend its traditional systems of power but will actively undermine and restrict them.

### *Conclusion*

Focusing on time in a discussion of liberal democracy illuminates the incompatibilities between capitalism and democracy. The former being a system which is built on controlling the time of others and centralizing that time in the hands of a much smaller group, and the latter being a system of government which relies of people having similar levels of access to the levers of government and the time to understand and wield them.

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<sup>186</sup> Hermann, *Work Time*, 143.

<sup>187</sup> Hermann, *Work Time*, 174.

## Lobbying/Durational Time

Durational time, which can be abstract or concrete, is a necessary component of political participation. Yet capitalism fundamentally shapes the distribution of time in society, concentrating it in the hands of a few. This creates material effects of political inequality, as wealthy corporations can purchase labour-time of lobbyists that can more consistently pressure government figures than other groups, workers, and the poor for example. This means that political decision making in liberal democracies, which holds maintaining private property as centrally important, is heavily influenced by wealthier groups. Below this level of corporate influence, the individual activists who participate are themselves wealthier, granting them the discretionary time to participate more often than the poorest. By skewing who has control of their time or the time of others, capitalism undermines democratic representation by creating a system in which the poorest have less representation and less ability to compete for that representation than those with the most time.

## The Capitalist Origin of Abstract Time

Tombazos, quoting Marx, states that all economies are at their basic level an organization of time. That whatever economic structure we produce under, there are social decisions being made as to how society should and must spend its time. The logic of capitalist time may seem a natural progression of time, or the only way to understand and organize it, but it was not that long ago that abstract time was violently imposed on society. Feudal production was frequently dominated by necessity, the necessity of the farmer to produce enough food for their family, or the necessity of planting certain crops at certain times of year. Yet labour-time was also under their discretion, rather than the constant supervision of the capitalist manager. Formerly feudal workers in the early days of capitalist relations resisted these changes as they were imposed over

time, until capitalist production became hegemonic. This is to say that capitalist time and the way we organize it is not inevitable or natural, but can be altered, or abolished and replaced entirely with a new way of organizing our time.

### Human Development

Focusing on time as a resource is useful for this understanding of democracy because it shows an unresolvable tension between the two and allows us to consider what other uses, we may wish to have for our time, an ultimately finite resource. Shippen, also using Marx's writings, identifies time as necessary to human development, that to improve ourselves and to even identify what improvement might mean, we require time to ourselves and with others to experience that process. Capitalism requires that we devote the most productive hours and years of our lives and the hours of society to production of commodities, not for the improvement of humanity, or maximizing our potential, but to maximize surplus-value and generate wealth for the very few. By considering time we can examine whether this is a purpose that we should devote lifetimes of hours to, or if we should construct a system which allows us to spend time reaching the heights of human potential.

### Alternatives/Response to Nordic Countries

There are even alternative conceptions of this being proposed today, some of them even being actively explored by large numbers of people. Theoreticians like Wolin provide ideal type constructions of democracy which can be useful as a comparator for existing systems, and Wolff provides an idea of a democratic workplace structure which shifts control of production and surplus distribution to the workers. But beyond the theoretical, Fung and Wright have identified case studies of participatory government around the world. In Brazil and India there are ongoing experiments with more participatory forms of government, and while they are still constrained by

the existing system around them, they have demonstrated strong outcomes for participation. With training for people new to exercising power and on the job experience being developed as people learn how to maneuver through the system of democracy, they even achieve the theoretical idea of Wolin by having democracy itself be a learning experience. This provides opportunities for those with less time by creating a system of government which feels more immediately responsive to their needs, incentivizing them to spend some amount of the limited time they may have at their disposal on government action. By specifically focusing on getting disadvantaged groups involved, as they did in Brazil and India, they can to some extent overcome local inequalities of time, though they then must wrestle with national politics.

# Conclusion

## *Liberal Democracy*

### *What liberal democracy is*

Looking at the writings of major liberal democratic theorists, from Bentham to Schumpeter, certain patterns emerge about what they thought liberal democracy could and should do. They viewed it as a political system which balanced the demands of the many with those of the few. It provided protection from absolute tyranny by making the government frequently replaceable and by making members of government part of the community they govern, aligning interests. Representatives and elections were considered an effective way to determine the interests of citizens, especially since modern states have grown to such large population sizes. And because of these it was considered a way for the power of the people to be represented in the government they lived under, offering a system of self-government.

### *How liberal democracy fails*

Yet there seems to be only limited success at realizing this image of liberal democracy in modern society. The protection from tyranny seems minimally successful with billionaires of epic proportions emerging who control wealth greater than that of some countries alongside rising levels of poverty. The effort to find the policy preferences of citizens conflicts with the interests of the wealthy minority who have greater political success and representation in all liberal democracies. And if it truly granted citizens the ability to govern themselves it would make little sense that they would increase their own impoverishment only to massively enrich a very small group.

## *Capitalism and Time*

### *Wage labour and Valorization*

While many liberal theorists have identified the importance of understanding time as a resource in theories of social justice, they frequently ignore the biggest contributor to time inequality, capitalism. When attempting to resolve temporal inequalities there must be an understanding of capitalism as it is the primary system through which control of time is decided. First of all, through wage labour, as workers are dispossessed of the means of production that they used to control in previous modes of production they are forced to sell their labour-time. But since every sale is also a purchase whoever has the means to purchase labour-time naturally has control over more time, when discussing distribution of time, the wage labour relation must stand front and center. Capitalism incentivizes maximizing this time inequality. The process of valorization of capital is central to capitalism and comes from workers engaging in surplus labour-time, labour-time beyond that needed for their own reproduction. Increasing surplus labour-time also increases surplus-value, the goal of capitalism. This means that capitalism is naturally opposed to any equal distribution of time, yet liberal theorists of time still seem to ignore it almost entirely.

### *Capitalism and Liberal Democracy*

Capitalism being the system which distributes time then becomes something which must be challenged to achieve a truly democratic society. It is important to understand it both as stacking the deck through temporal inequalities that it creates, and as anti-democratic.

### *Organization of time*



Second is the idea that all economies are organizations of time, an economy is merely thousands of decisions about how we use our collective time and towards what ends it is expended. Under capitalism these decisions are made by a tiny minority within society, they are made by those who control the means of production. Labour-time is not expended to achieve the needs of those in society, but to achieve greater levels of profit. A democratic society leaving the decisions of how to direct the energies of millions of citizens and the greatest productive capacities ever created in the hands of a few seems ridiculous is then organizing its entire economy and large parts of the lives of citizens non-democratically.

### *Human Development*

The focus on time is also potentially socially useful, from an Aristotelian-Marxist perspective the analysis of capitalist time distribution as a hindrance to the full development of human potential offers a powerful moral argument against this system of time distribution. When the economy is understood as a series of decisions of how society spends its time, with the realization that those decisions are entirely removed from the democratic process, we can see that our ability to develop our own potential is limited by capitalism. Millions of social hours are devoted not to the democratic decisions of our society, but instead to the demands of capitalists pursuing surplus-value for themselves, rather than any social benefit. Aristotle and Marx viewed time which we controlled as fundamentally important to our ability to develop ourselves as complex beings, to reach our true potential as a species-being. Yet capitalism as seen in the processes of valorization and wage labour is directly opposed to this control over our time as maximizing surplus-value becomes the driver of society. If the massive productive capacity of capitalism were put towards material social wealth the time spent labouring could be drastically

reduced with machinery, but the goal of capitalist production is instead surplus-value, which comes from the labour-power of humans.

### *Alternatives*

Multiple alternatives have been explored even within capitalist states, this paper does not examine anti-capitalist or communist systems of government, as well as theoretical examples. The theoretical frameworks proposed offer useful suggestions for thinking about how power and time might be distributed in a society more focused on democracy, offering a sort of regulative ideal to compare to liberal democracy. Wolff and Wolin both have useful insights into the functioning of capitalism and democracy, the existing examples of Nordic countries, Kerala's Campaign, and the participatory budgeting originating from Porto Alegre are useful for thinking about alternatives to liberal democracy. Wolff democratizes the economy, something frequently locked out of political discussion in any meaningful sense. Wolin recognizes that any truly democratic society would have to involve this people in a far less passive way than liberal democracy tends to with its regularly scheduled elections. Both are then implemented, with differences, in the three examples looked at. In Sweden the attempt to replace the owners of major industry with the workers, like Wolff's WSDEs, in the form of the Meidner plan fell apart. Kerala and Porto Alegre offer majorly decentralized systems of politics which encourage active participation and as a result increase networks of participation at throughout the community, much like Wolin's conception of democracy. Yet these too are vulnerable to the capitalist system and liberal democratic national governments which reject their political structure and undermine their foundations.

### *Concluding the Conclusion*

By exploring what democracy means, through liberal and more direct traditions, and then examining the structural makeup of capitalism this paper has hopefully revealed an unresolvable tension between capitalism and democracy. Rather than treating the two as inseparable, they should be understood as oppositional ideas. Capitalism and democracy can survive alongside each other only so long as the power of one is neutered. Democratic capitalism advantages the capitalist class politically by its very nature with how it distributes time. Liberal analysis of time as a resource continually fails to grasp the centrality of capitalism to this problem, despite detailed and insightful research. Therefore, the Marxist analysis of capitalism is needed, filling in the gaps left by liberal theory and demonstrating in detail the structural incompatibilities between capitalism and democracy.

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# Appendices

## Appendix A

