ทฤษฎีมาร์กซ์แบบคลาสสิคและความจำเป็นในการให้เหตุผลทางจริยศาสตร์เกี่ยวกับความเท่าเทียม
Classical Marxism and the Need to Justify Equality

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บทคัดย่อ

บทความนี้ย้อนกลับไปศึกษางานเขียนของ จี เอ โคเฮน (G. A. Cohen) ที่ปฏิเสธคำกล่าวอ้างในทฤษฎีมาร์กซ์แบบคลาสสิค ที่มองการปฏิวัติโดยชนชั้นแรงงานและความมั่งคั่งเหลือเฟือทางวัตถุว่าเป็นสิ่งที่จะเกิดขึ้นโดยหลีกเลี่ยงไม่ได้ ซึ่งจากการตีความงานของมาร์กซ์โดยโคเฮน สองปัจจัยนี้จะนำไปสู่ความเท่าเทียมในการตอบสนองต่อความต้องการของมนุษย์ (need-satisfaction)ในสังคมแบบคอมมิวนิสต์ขั้นสูงอย่างหลีกเลี่ยงไม่ได้ แต่เนื่องจากความเท่าเทียมแบบมาร์กซิสท์นั้นไม่ใช่สิ่งที่จะเกิดขึ้นโดยหลีกเลี่ยงไม่ได้ โคเฮนจึงเสนอว่านักสังคมนิยมควรจะมีความชัดเจนมากขึ้นว่าต้องการสนับสนุนความเท่าเทียมแบบใดภายใต้ทรัพยากรที่มีอยู่จำกัด บทความนี้วิเคราะห์และสนับสนุนข้อเสนอของโคเฮน โดยบทความนี้ศึกษาความเป็นไปได้ที่จะมีกลุ่มชนชั้นแรงงานข้ามชาติเกิดขึ้น ที่จะมีทั้งอำนาจและแรงจูงใจที่จะผลักดันการเปลี่ยนแปลงแบบสังคมนิยมในระดับสากล ซึ่งถึงแม้ว่ามีกลุ่ม ชนชั้นแรงงานข้ามชาติเช่นนั้นจริง ผู้เขียนก็ยังสนับสนุนข้อเสนอของโคเฮนว่าเกิดการเปลี่ยนแปลงสังคมตามแนวทางสังคมนิยมได้ยาก เพราะลักษณะข้ามชาติของทุนนั้นบั่นทอนอำนาจของชนชั้นแรงงานข้ามชาติ ซึ่งทำให้ยากที่จะเกิดการเปลี่ยนแปลงแบบสังคมนิยม นอกจากนั้น บทความนี้สรุปการตีความงานของมาร์กซ์โดยโคเฮนเกี่ยวกับความมั่งคั่งเหลือเฟือทางวัตถุ และเสนอว่าความมั่งคั่งเหลือเฟือทางวัตถุและความเท่าเทียมแบบมาร์กซิสต์นั้น

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เป็นสิ่งที่น่าจะเป็นไปได้ยาก เนื่องมาจากข้อจำกัดทางนิเวศวิทยา และบทความนี้ยังชี้ให้เห็นว่า ถึงแม้ว่ามาร์กซ์จะมองว่าความมั่งคั่งทางวัตถุในระดับกลางๆ นั้นเป็นไปได้ แต่ความเท่าเทียมแบบมาร์กซิสท์นั้นก็เป็นเพียงแค่สิ่งที่เป็นไปได้ ไม่ใช่สิ่งที่จะเกิดขึ้นโดยหลีกเลี่ยงไม่ได้ และก็อาจจะไม่จำเป็นตามหลักของความยุติธรรม ฉะนั้นนักสังคมนิยมควรจะพิจารณาว่าควรจะสนับสนุนความเท่าเทียมหรือไม่ และสนับสนุนความเท่าเทียมแบบใด

คำสำคัญ: ทฤษฎีมาร์กซิสต์, สังคมนิยม, ความเท่าเทียม, G. A. Cohen

Abstract

This article revisits G. A. Cohen's rejection of classical Marxist claims concerning the inevitability of working class revolution and productive abundance, which, according to his interpretation of Marx, are supposed to make equality of need-satisfaction inevitable in higher communist society. As Marxist equality is not inevitable, Cohen stresses the need for socialists to be clearer about what form of equality they are justified in pursuing for conditions of moderate scarcity. The article evaluates and defends Cohen's position. With regards to the revolution claim, it explores the possibility that there exists an international working class with the power and motivation to bring about international socialism. However, even if such a class exists, the author ultimately agrees with Cohen that the transnational nature of capital would mitigate its power to achieve a socialist transformation. As regards the abundance claim, the article outlines Cohen's interpretation of Marx as envisioning massive abundance and argues that, so understood, it remains improbable due to ecological constraints, and therefore so does Marxist equality. Moreover, the article points out that even if Marx envisioned more moderate abundance, Marxist equality would not be inevitable but only possible, and far from obviously a requirement of justice. Therefore, socialists must consider what form of equality, if any, they are justified in pursuing.

Key words: Marxism, Socialism, Equality, G. A. Cohen

1. Introduction

G. A. Cohen is perhaps best known as the analytical Marxist who wrote Karl Marx's Theory of History: A Defence. Yet he ultimately rejected Marx's theory of history and devoted much of his career to doing normative political philosophy, particularly to theorizing about distributive justice. This article revisits Cohen's argument as to why socialists need to engage in moral justification of their egalitarianism, as presented in one of his Gifford Lectures, Equality: From Fact to Norm. Cohen here rejects classical Marxist claims concerning the inevitability of working class revolution and productive abundance, which, according to his interpretation of Marx, are supposed to make equality of need-satisfaction inevitable in higher communist society. Rejecting the inevitability of revolution, he argues that the transnational nature of capital has the consequence that there is no group of workers with both the power and motivation to change society. Rejecting the inevitability of abundance, he argues that it is improbable, at least in the foreseeable future, because of ecological constraints on humanity's ability to satisfy desired consumption levels. Therefore, Marxist equality is not inevitable and socialist economists and philosophers must consider what form of equality they are justified in pursuing for conditions of moderate scarcity (Cohen, 2000, pp. 101–115).

This article evaluates and defends Cohen's position in the hope of persuading other left-leaning scholars of the need for clear conceptions and strong moral arguments in the pursuit of equality. The first section revisits Cohen's rejection of the inevitability of revolution. Contra Cohen, it explores the possibility that there exists an international working class with the power and motivation to bring about international socialism. However, even if such a class does exist, the author ultimately agrees with Cohen that the ability of transnational corporations to absorb and expel workers, together with the unlikelihood of international solidarity, mitigates its power to achieve a socialist transformation. The second section revisits Cohen's rejection of the inevitability

of abundance. First, it outlines his interpretation of Marx as envisioning massive abundance and argues that, so understood, it remains improbable due to ecological constraints, and therefore so does Marxist equality. Second, it points out that even if Marx envisioned more moderate abundance, Marxist equality would not be inevitable but only possible, and far from obviously a requirement of justice. Therefore, socialists must consider what form of equality, if any, they are justified in pursuing. For this reason, the article also briefly notes some of the main egalitarian and non-egalitarian alternatives to Marxist equality in the contemporary literature on distributive justice.

2. Against the Inevitability of Revolution

The classical Marxist claim that revolution is historically inevitable, Cohen argues, is based on a particular conception of the working class. According to this conception, the working class is: (1) the majority of society, (2) the producers on whom society depends, (3) exploited, and (4) extremely poor. So conceived, revolution seems inevitable on the basis that a majority, on whom society depends for its labor, and which has nothing to lose because of its dire situation, has both the power and the motivation to bring about a socialist transformation. As Cohen says, classical Marxists thought that it was both "within the capacity and in the interest of the working class to change society, so that it could and would transform society" (2000, p. 107).

However, this conception of the working class on which the classical Marxist reasoning depends seems outdated. As Cohen argues, "there is now no group in advanced industrial society which unites the [above] four characteristics" (2000, p. 107). Of course, there are still important producers and people who are exploited and poor, but they tend not to be all of those things simultaneously and they do not constitute a majority of society. Consequently, there is no group with both the power and the motivation to achieve a socialist revolution (Cohen, 2000, pp. 107–108).

In reply, one might object to the limited focus on advanced industrial society and argue that at a broader level workers do reflect the four characteristics of the conception. That is to say, one might object that there exists an exploited and needy international working class, which constitutes a majority of the world's population, and on whose labor the global economy depends. Accordingly, it is within both the capacity and interest of this class to change the world, such that it can and will bring about international socialism.

Cohen, however, maintains that this objection is "instructively false" (2000, p. 111). Although the world's population contains producers who are evidently exploited and extremely poor, he argues that these producers do not form a majority within or across their societies, and that the relevant countries remain largely agrarian. Moreover, he insists that capitalism is not dependent on their labor because "the engine of production in today's world is the transnational corporation, which absorbs and expels sets of workers at will" (Cohen, 2000, p. 111). In other words, the ability of the working class in any particular country to exercise its power is mitigated by the ability of transnational corporations to move their production facilities elsewhere.

Do these facts remain true and undermine the objection? The International Labour Organization estimates that of the world's population in employment, the percentage of people working in agriculture has fallen considerably from 40.3% in 1996 to 26.2% in 2022, whilst during the same period the percentage of people working in industry has grown only slightly from 21.3% to 24%, and the percentage of people working in services has increased from 38.4% to 49.8% (International Labour Organization [ILO], n.d.). These shifts in employment by sector have predominantly occurred in upper-middle and lower-middle income countries (see ILO, n.d.), whose populations amount to roughly 75% of the world's population (calculation based on population data for 2022 collected by the World Bank (see World Bank Group, n.d.)). In upper-middle income countries over the relevant period, agricultural employment has fallen greatly

from 41.9% to 20.2% of total employment, whilst industrial employment has increased only slightly from 23.3% to 27.8%, and services employment has increased substantially from 34.8% to 52% (ILO, n.d.). In lower-middle income countries agricultural employment has again fallen considerably from 55.9% to 38.4% of total employment, whilst industrial employment has increased moderately from 15.4% to 23.4%, and services employment has increased from 28.7% to 38.3% (ILO, n.d.).

It therefore remains true that, across the countries which form most of the world's population, industrial producers do not constitute a majority. But it is noteworthy that the societies in question do not remain largely agrarian. A clear majority of the employed now perform either productive labor in industry or provide market and non-market services. This matters because the functioning of global capitalism does not rely only on industrial producers. It also relies on the provision of market services, such as the distribution of goods and business administration, as well as some non-market services and agricultural production, since education, housing and medical care are necessary to train and sustain wage-laborers, whilst you cannot put labor power to use in industry and services without food to fuel it. What seems to matter, therefore, is not whether industrial producers constitute a majority across the relevant countries. What matters is whether a majority of the world's wage-laborers across all employment sectors are exploited and needy, because it might then be true that there exists a group at the international level with the capacity (because of its numbers and the world's dependency on its labor) and the motivation (because of its exploitation and neediness) to overthrow global capitalism. Exploring whether that is true, however, is far beyond the scope of this paper. It would require the considerable theoretical work of defending conceptions of exploitation and need, prior to undertaking the substantial empirical work of selecting and evaluating statistics that accurately measure for those phenomena, so conceptualized, on a global scale. Nevertheless, for the sake of argument, assume

that such a group of wage-laborers exists. Would international revolution then be inevitable?

Where Cohen's counterargument to the objection is strongest is not in his claim that an exploited and needy majority does not exist at the international level, but in its recognition of how the transnational nature of contemporary capitalism serves to mitigate the politico-economic power of wage-laborers. As even if a majority of the world's wage-laborers across all employment sectors are exploited and needy, the world is not dependent on the labor of any one national sub-group that forms a part of that larger international group. Imagine, for example, that a national sub-group imposes a general strike. This action will interrupt the functioning of the relevant country's economy, and perhaps have significant negative consequences at the international level in the short term, depending on how interconnected its labor in industry, services and agriculture is with the economies of other countries. But the strike poses no great threat to global capitalism in the long term, even if the sub-group in question happens to be relevantly interconnected to a high degree. Transnational corporations operate across all employment sectors and, as Cohen emphasizes, can hire and fire sets of workers at will in virtue of their ability to move between countries. Consequently, no one national sub-group of an international working class by itself has the power, through withholding its labor, to bring global capitalism to its knees, as in the long term much of that national sub-group, so long as transnational corporations employ a significant proportion of it, can be expelled and its labor substituted by that of another national sub-group. To counteract this mitigation of their politico-economic power the various national sub-groups of an international working class would have to refuse employment in solidarity with each other. This, of course, is consistent with the rallying call of The Communist Manifesto: "WORKING MEN [AND WOMEN] OF ALL COUNTRIES, UNITE" (Marx & Engels, 1977a, p. 246). However, international working class solidarity seems very unlikely. As Cohen argues, "the cultural diversity across

nations and the huge gulfs between them in actual and expected living standards make mutual identification … difficult" (2000, p. 112). Indeed, it is hard to imagine wage-laborers in one country refusing employment in solidarity with wage-laborers in another country, with whom they might share little in common, even if they are not particularly needy, let alone if they are needier or in extreme poverty. Far from being historically inevitable, international working class revolution therefore seems highly improbable.

3. Against the Inevitability of Abundance

The classical Marxist claim that resource abundance is historically inevitable relates to Marx's Critique of the Gotha Programme. Marx here provides an account of how he envisions society's resources being distributed in the lower and higher phases of communist society. In the lower phase of communist society, the first phase after capitalism, resources will be distributed in accordance with people's labor contribution minus a deduction for common funds (the contribution principle). Ownership of the means of production no longer influences people's distributive shares. But Marx nevertheless objects to the contribution principle on the basis that "it tacitly recognizes unequal individual endowment and thus productive capacity as natural privileges" (1977, pp. 568–569). In other words, Marx objects that because of differences in people's natural abilities the contribution principle rewards some more than others, and it is therefore "a right of inequality" (1977, p. 569). For example, if, because of her greater natural abilities, A's labor contributes more to the wealth of society than B's labor, the contribution principle will allocate a greater share of society's wealth to A than B for the same period of hours worked.

A luck egalitarian, such as Cohen, would consider this an unjust distribution on the basis that it is not sensitive to responsibility. That is to say, the inequality of outcome is unjust because it does not reflect genuine choices, against a background of equal opportunities, for which the parties can therefore

reasonably be held responsible; neither A nor B is responsible for their greater or lesser natural abilities to produce, and so that factor should not influence their distributive shares (see Cohen, 1989; Knight, 2013).

Marx, however, is not a luck egalitarian. His objection is that the contribution principle reflects no consideration for people's differing needs. For example, B's basic needs might be greater than A's because she has a large family to support, whereas A might have no dependents. Alternatively, B's needs of self-realization might be greater than A's because her self-realization involves expensive pursuits, such as photography, whereas A's needs of self-realization might only involve cheap pursuits, such as poetry. Marx believes "these defects are inevitable in the first phase of communist society … [because r]ight can never be higher than the economic structure of society and its cultural development conditioned thereby" (1977, p. 569). Yet, he states that in the higher phase of communist society, "after the productive forces have also increased with the all round development of the individual, and all the springs of co-operative wealth flow more abundantly …, society [can] inscribe on its banners: from each according to his ability, to each according to his needs" (Marx, 1977, p. 569). In other words, people will contribute labor according to their ability, but society's resources will be distributed according to people's needs (the needs principle). As Cohen says, "the unambiguous message of [the needs principle] is that what you get is not a function of what you give, that contribution and benefit are separate matters" (2011, p. 219). People give because others need, not because they expect to be rewarded in return.

Exactly what level of productive abundance Marx thought historically inevitable and a necessary condition of the needs principle is open to interpretation (e.g., see Buchanan, 1982; Elster, 1985; Geras, 1985). According to Cohen (2000, p. 114):

> The achievement of Marxist equality ("From each according to his ability, to each according to his needs") is premised on a conviction that industrial progress will bring society to a condition of such fluent abundance that it is possible to supply what everyone needs for a richly fulfilling life. There will then no longer be any occasion for competition for precedence, either across individuals or between groups. A (supposedly) inevitable future plenty was a reason for predicting equality [of need-satisfaction].

In defence of his interpretation, Cohen refers to a passage from The German Ideology in which Marx and Engels appear to deny the possibility of communism without such a massive level of abundance. Specifically, they claim that "so long as the productive forces are still insufficiently developed to make competition superfluous …, the classes which are ruled would be wanting the impossible if they had the 'will' to abolish competition and with it the state and the law" (Marx & Engels, 1977b, p. 184). For competition to be "superfluous," Cohen suggests, can only mean that "everyone can have everything he wants without prejudice to the wants of others" (1995, p. 132). If that is what Marx and Engels meant, the claim does appear to be that communism, and therefore the needs principle, is possible only after technological development of the productive forces generates a level of abundance that has the consequence that people no longer have to compete over goods and services to satisfy their basic and self-realizing needs. In Cohen's words, "abundance eliminates the problem of [distributive] justice, the need to decide who gets what at whose expense, and a fortiori, the need to implement any such decisions by force" (1995, p. 127).

Cohen rejects the inevitability of abundance, so understood, and therefore the inevitability of Marxist equality, because of the ecological crisis. He claims it is indisputable that Western levels of consumption cannot be achieved for

the entirety of humanity, or even sustained in the West, by continuing to draw on fossil fuels and unsustainable use of other natural resources (Cohen, 2000, p. 113). Furthermore, he emphasizes the uncertainty that exists, as well as his own skepticism, as to whether desired levels of consumption can be satisfied by drawing on new forms of energy and materials, at least in the foreseeable future (Cohen, 2000, p. 113). He therefore concludes (Cohen, 2000, p. 115):

> We cannot rely on technology to fix things for us; if they can be fixed, then we have to fix them, through hard theoretical and political labor. Marxism thought that equality would be delivered to us, by abundance, but we have to seek equality for a context of scarcity, and we consequently have to be far more clear than we were about what we are seeking, why we are justified in seeking it, and how it can be implemented institutionally. That recognition must govern the future efforts of socialist economists and philosophers.

Revisiting this argument, is there any more reason now to think that desired levels of consumption can be satisfied for humanity as a whole by drawing on new means of satisfying them? Specifically, assuming humanity's aggregate desired levels of consumption do not substantially fall, is continued economic growth possible to the degree, as Cohen interprets the abundance claim, that "everyone can have everything he wants without prejudice to the wants of others"?

In the field of green political economy, bioenvironmentalists would argue no, on the basis that there are limits to economic growth as a result of a limit to the earth's capacity to support life. To stay within that limit, often referred to as the earth's "carrying capacity," requires sustainable use of both the earth's natural resources and the ability of its "sinks" (forests, oceans and

soils) to absorb pollution and waste. In this regard, three requirements have been suggested: (1) that renewable resources (e.g., soils, water, forests, fish) are used at rates "no greater than the rate of [their] regeneration," (2) that non-renewable resources (e.g., fossil fuels, mineral ores) are consumed at rates "no greater than the rate at which … renewable resource[s], used sustainably, can be substituted for [them]," and (3) that pollutants "can be no greater than the rate at which … [they] can be recycled, absorbed, or rendered harmless in [the earth's] sink[s]" (Daly, 1990, as cited in Meadows, Randers, & Meadows, 2005, p. 54). The problem, on which all bioenvironmentalists agree, is that humanity's current levels of consumption are either near or already beyond the earth's carrying capacity (Clapp & Dauvergne, 2011). In other words, the global political economy is not functioning within the above three requirements of sustainability. Together with population growth, bioenvironmentalists argue that a main cause of this "overshoot" is the relentless pursuit of economic growth, as without a technological fix that enables growth within the requirements of sustainability, especially regarding the provision of considerable amounts of clean energy, "more growth only means more [unsustainable] consumption of natural resources and more stress on [the earth's] waste sinks" (Clapp & Dauvergne, 2011, p. 11). If corrective measures are not taken, bioenvironmentalists therefore predict some kind of ecological crash, most likely characterized by severe environmental damage and an uncontrollable decline in both population and industrial capacity (Clapp & Dauvergne, 2011). Although a crash of this kind has yet to occur, bioenvironmentalists "continue to argue that population pressures and limits to growth do exist" (Clapp & Dauvergne, 2011, p. 55), and that curbs on population and/or economic growth are necessary to avoid it. Thus, according to the bioenvironmentalist position, a level of productive abundance that eliminates the problem of distributive justice is highly improbable, at least in the foreseeable future, without an extraordinary technological fix.

Market liberals reject the bioenvironmentalist position; not least because it contradicts the dogma that economic growth is the solution to social problems, such as unemployment and poverty, never mind that many social problems could perhaps be solved by redistributing existing wealth. As Clapp and Dauvergne (2011) explain, market liberals not only view economic growth as essential to raising living standards, they also consider it essential for the welfare of the environment. The rationale is that higher average per capita incomes makes possible the allocation of funds to tackle environmental problems and fosters a political will to that end (Clapp & Dauvergne, 2011). This is somewhat logical. After all, environmental problems are unlikely to be the primary concern of a poor society. Moreover, even if the political will exists to tackle such problems, a poor society may not have the capacity to do so.

As to the bio-physical limits to economic growth, market liberals deny the existence of any such limits. Instead, they "place great faith in the ability of modern science and technology … If resources become scarce, or if pollution becomes a problem, humans will discover substitutes and develop new, more environmentally friendly technologies" (Clapp & Dauvergne, 2011, p. 6). This faith in science is not entirely blind as the history of humanity is indeed one of scientific and technological progress. Nevertheless, there is no guarantee that technological progress can sustain infinite economic growth. And, in terms of evaluating the abundance claim, even if science succeeds in enabling growth for the foreseeable future, by developing the required levels of clean energies and substitute materials, we are far from a level of abundance that would make unbounded equality of need-satisfaction inevitable.

What if Cohen's interpretation of Marx is mistaken? Perhaps Marx envisioned a more moderate level of abundance as necessary for the implementation of the needs principle. Marxist equality, although not inevitable, may then at least be possible. For example, although Elster concludes that Marx might have envisioned a level of abundance that eliminates the problem of

distributive justice, which he dismisses as “hopelessly Utopian” (1985, p. 231), he explores an analytical reconstruction of Marx as having “a hierarchal theory of justice, by which the contribution principle provides a second-best criterion when the needs principle is not yet historically ripe for application” (1985, p. 230). On this view, development of the productive forces at some stage results in a level of abundance that enables the implementation of equality of self-realization as a requirement of distributive justice. This principle of equality seeks to distribute society’s resources to the end that people’s needs of self-realization are satisfied “to the highest extent compatible with [their satisfaction] to the same extent for everyone else” (Elster, 1985, p. 232). Similarly, Geras (1985, pp. 81–83) argues that Marxist equality must operate within some standard of “reasonable” needs, on the basis that abundance without limits is an absurd fantasy. Moreover, he maintains that Marx thought capitalism was unjust, even if he did not think that he thought so, such that the needs principle, rather than having to be reconstructed as a principle of justice, is fundamental to Marx’s own view of a just society (Geras, 1985).

Elster’s reconstruction and Geras’s interpretation of Marx do not, of course, amount to descriptions of an inevitable egalitarian future. Rather, they are normative positions. Specifically, consistent with the basic concept of justice (see Swift, 2014, pp. 13–15), they amount to claims about what people are due, and what they are not due, in terms of a morally obligatory and thus coercively enforceable distribution of society’s resources. Should those who are sympathetic to Marx’s ideas therefore look to develop a theory of distributive justice that is based on the needs principle? Of course, dogmatically “scientific socialists” will not wish to engage in normative political philosophy. But those who are open to moral theorizing may wish to explore this option (see Gilabert, 2015). On the other hand, they may instead come to embrace an alternative form of egalitarianism or even a non-egalitarian alternative, either as a requirement of justice or only as something that is morally desirable.

To illustrate, consider again Elster's analytical reconstruction of Marx. It is far from obvious that justice requires society's resources to be distributed so that people's needs of self-realization are equally satisfied. Perhaps what justice requires is an alternative form of equality of welfare, such as equality of happiness or preference-satisfaction. Alternatively, perhaps what justice requires is a form of equality of resources, as opposed to in all probability distributing resources unequally to achieve some form of equality of welfare. Furthermore, perhaps justice does not require any form of equality of outcome, whether in terms of welfare or resources, but equality of opportunity for welfare or resources. Justice would then be responsibility-sensitive, permitting unequal distributive shares of welfare or resources when the inequality of outcome reflects genuine choices, against a background of equal opportunities, for which the agents could therefore reasonably be held responsible (see Arneson, 1989; Cohen, 1989; Dworkin, 1981a, 1981b). Then again, perhaps justice does not require any form of egalitarianism. Perhaps, upon reflection, socialists come to doubt the value of equality and prefer instead to embrace some form of sufficientarianism or prioritarianism. On the sufficiency view, what matters is not equality, but guaranteeing that everyone has enough to live a minimally decent life (see Frankfurt, 1987; Shields, 2020; for criticism, see Casal, 2007). On the priority view, what matters is neither equality nor sufficiency, but giving distributive priority to benefiting the worse-off (see Parfit, 2002). These are some of the most fundamental issues that socialists ought to consider if they believe in equality. For as Cohen argued almost thirty years ago, but which many have not heeded, since equality is not inevitable, socialist economists and philosophers need to be far clearer about what form of equality (if any) they seek, why they are justified in seeking it, and how it can be implemented.

4. Conclusion

In summary, this article evaluated and defended Cohen's rejection of the inevitability of an unbounded equality of need-satisfaction, which is a consequence of the supposed inevitability of working class revolution and productive abundance, as claimed by classical Marxists, and his insistence that socialists must therefore consider what form of equality they are justified in pursuing for conditions of moderate scarcity.

As regards the revolution claim, the article explored the possibility, contra Cohen, that there exists an international working class with the power and the motivation to overthrow global capitalism, such that revolution is inevitable. However, it was argued that, even if an international working class of that kind does exist, the world is not dependent on the labor of any one national sub-group that forms a part of it, which, given the ability of transnational corporations to absorb and expel workers, makes unity across sub-groups necessary if the whole is to exercise its politico-economic power. In short, national sub-groups would have to refuse employment in solidarity with other national sub-groups to take the fight to global capitalism. As that seems unlikely, because group identification across cultures and living standards is difficult, it was concluded that revolution is highly improbable.

As regards the abundance claim, the paper outlined Cohen's interpretation of it as eliminating the problem of distributive justice and his rejection of it in virtue of ecological constraints. Evaluating that rejection, the paper considered the positions of bioenvironmentalists and market liberals within the field of green political economy. On the bioenvironmentalist view, such massive abundance is highly improbable, without a miraculous technological fix, because of bio-physical limits to economic growth. On the market liberal view, which denies bio-physical limits to growth exist, on the basis of a somewhat blind faith in science to develop solutions, such abundance is more plausible, but nevertheless still highly improbable in the foreseeable future. In sum, the

paper supported Cohen's rejections of both the revolution and abundance claims, as he interprets them, and therefore his rejection of the inevitability of Marxist equality, as he interprets it.

Finally, the article also considered the implications for Cohen's argument of him possibly misinterpreting the abundance claim. In this regard, the author argued that, even if Marx envisioned a more moderate level of abundance as necessary for the implementation of equality of need-satisfaction within limits, the upshot is that equality is not inevitable but only possible, and that it is far from obvious that such equality is a requirement of justice. Therefore, socialists must still decide whether equality is something that they value, and if it is, they must consider what form of equality they are justified in pursuing. For this reason, some of the main egalitarian and non-egalitarian alternatives to Marxist equality in the contemporary literature were briefly noted.

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