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Precarious Labor and Everyday Life

Abstract

In this paper, the author aims to use the legacy of Marxist criticism of everyday life in order to analyse the phenomenon of precarious labour in contemporary society. Given that the question of alienation of labour holds a central place in Marxist interpretations of everyday life, it begs the question how precarity, as the absolute alienation of labour, impacts daily lives of individuals engaged in insecure employment. The author's fundamental stance is that the precarity of labour is a structural characteristic of the capitalist mode of production, whose manifestations evolve in accordance with technological progress. In line with this perspective, the author follows Marx's general law of capitalist accumulation outlined in Chapter 25, Volume 1 of Capital with a vivid description of the "surplus population" or "industrial reserve army". At the core of this study is the question of how contemporary manifestations of precarious labour influence everyday life of the precariat.

Keywords

precarious labour, everyday life, insecurity, uncertainty, sociology of everyday life, Marxism, alienation of labor, Karel Kosik, Ágnes Heller, Henri Lefebvre

Introduction

The concept of precarity comes from the French language (*précarité*) and denotes insecurity or uncertainty. It can be said that insecurity is the most pronounced characteristic of life in contemporary society. The insecurity of everyday life originates in the economic sphere of society, specifically in the field of labour. Insecurity is transferred from the economic sphere to everyday life. Critics of the existing socioeconomic system will say that insecurity is one of the most prominent features of capitalism as a historically developed mode of production.¹ The very act of creating new value presupposes risk: the owner of the means of production or the one who invests in the creation of new value usually borrows advance capital necessary for the creation of new value. This act represents a risk for the person undertaking it, and the entire process of creating new value is accompanied by uncertainty and insecurity about whether the investment will pay off. Those who perform the labour necessary for the creation of new value, that is, those who sell their labour force on the labour market to secure their existence, experience a different kind of insecurity in this mode of production. However, in both cases, insecurity is a structural characteristic of the production of material life in the socioeconomic capitalist system.

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Friedrich Engels, *Condition of the Working Class in England*, Panther, London 1969;
Karl Marx, *Capital. A Critical Analysis of*

Capitalist Production, vol. 1, transl. Samuel Moore et al., Foreign Languages Publishing House, Moscow 1961.

However, in the history of capitalism, it is possible to distinguish several phases² of development characterised by a greater or lesser degree of life insecurity. The period after the end of the Second World War in the capitalist core, i.e., in its most developed countries, was marked by a higher level of job security, which was the result of a kind of social compromise, or concessions that the ruling class was forced to make due to the actions of the organised labour movement and competition with the extremely strong bloc of socialist countries led by the Soviet Union, which gained significant international reputation for its key role in defeating Nazism and fascism.

The period of job stability in the capitalist centre lasted only a few decades. The beginning of its end could already be discerned in the 1970s, and coincided with the positioning of neoliberalism as the leading ideological, economic, and academic paradigm in the United States and the United Kingdom.³ This process was completed with the collapse of the Soviet Union and the project of “real socialism”. During the last decade of the previous century, the process of flexibilisation and precarisation of labour became unstoppable. With the collapse of socialism and the bloc division of the world, conditions were created for the global domination of the neoliberal paradigm in the economy. The process of solidifying neoliberalism directly depended on weakening the social power of organised labour. The main point of attack by the ruling class on labor organisation was the prevention of collective bargaining with employers for precarious workers. This was achieved through the general atomisation of labour in the process of labour precarisation.⁴

“Migration” of industrial production from the capitalist centre to the periphery, i.e., underdeveloped countries, and the constant automation of production are constant threats to the work and life security of the workforce. The large number of workers and low cost of labour force in developing countries are a constant reminder to the working class of developed countries that they are replaceable at any moment by a huge reserve army of labour waiting to take the place of those currently employed.⁵ The constant influx of migrant labour into developed countries creates a similar effect.

The concept of precarious work has moved from the academic sphere into public discourse over the past decade and has become part of everyday speech. The onset of the global economic crisis in 2008 greatly exposed the unsustainability of the existing system of capital accumulation and led to a re-examination of entrenched social ideas. During this period, the term “precariat” came into wider use to designate a category of workers without stable employment, who perform jobs occasionally and temporarily, for only part of the usual working hours, and survive from one temporary job to another. The consequences of such a work regime for everyday life are far-reaching. Shedding light on the everyday life of precarious workers is the primary theoretical task of this paper. In order to meet the conditions necessary to fulfil this task, it is necessary to first consider the concepts of precarious work and the precariat, and then the most significant theoretical concepts of everyday life.

1. Precarious Labour and Precariat

There is no universally accepted definition of precarious work, as it takes on different forms in different regions, countries, and political systems. The International Labour Organisation (ILO) has identified some common characteristics of all forms of precarious work. According to the broadest definition,

precarious work is one that enables employers to transfer risks and responsibilities in the work process onto workers. Essential features of precarious work include: uncertainty about the duration of employment, lack of access to social protection and other benefits commonly associated with standard employment, low wages, legal and practical obstacles to workers' association and union organising, and an unclear and uncertain relationship between workers and employers.⁶ Precarious work does not necessarily include each of these characteristics. There are many forms of precarious work in which there is no third party or intermediary between the worker and the employer. There are also examples of certain forms of union organising for precarious workers,⁷ as well as categories of well-paid precarious workers whose standard of living exceeds that of the working class.

Precarious work became the subject of increased sociological interest during the 1970s.⁸ This period temporally coincided and was logically connected with the beginning of the ideological, political, and economic hegemony of neoliberalism. The use of the term precarity is primarily associated with French sociologists and economists. According to Lambert and Herod, the first person to use the term precarious work in the social sciences was Dorothy Day in 1952, in an article in the *Catholic Worker* magazine, in which she dealt with the theoretical concept of the French theologian and anarcho-communist Léonce Crenier (1888–1963). He developed a theological-political concept of

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Vladimir Ilyich Lenin, *Imperialism, The Highest Stage of Capitalism*, Foreign Language Press, Paris 2020, pp. 91–102; David Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 2005, pp. 9–19.

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Milenko A. Perović, *Filozofija politike*, Zavod za udžbenike i nastavna sredstva, Podgorica 2019, p. 387.

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D. Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism*, pp. 51–65, 165–172.

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The Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) stated in a 2010 report that the working-age population (15 to 64 years old) increased by an average of more than 7 million in China, almost 6 million in India, about 2 million in Brazil, and about 300,000 in South Africa between 1993 and 2008 (OECD, *Tackling Inequalities in Brazil, China, India and South Africa. The Role of Labour Market and Social Policies*, OECD Publishing 2022, p. 22, doi: <http://doi.org/10.1787/9789264088368-en>). Research by the International Labour Organisation (ILO) indicates that as much as 73% of the global workforce is located in underdeveloped and developing countries. Even more strikingly, 40% of the global workforce is concentrated in the two most populous countries in the world – China and India (See: John Bellamy Foster *et al.*, “The global reserve army of labor and the new imperialism”,

Monthly Review: An Independent Socialist Magazine 63 (2011) 6. Available at: <https://monthlyreview.org/2011/11/01/the-global-reserve-army-of-labor-and-the-new-imperialism/> (accessed on 30 April 2025). Research by Anthony Payne showed that the average wage of workers in Latin America was 1/13 of the wage of workers in capitalist centre countries at the beginning of this millennium. In other parts of the periphery, this difference was even more pronounced, with workers in South Asia earning 1/24 and in Africa even just 1/60 compared to their counterparts in developed countries (Anthony Payne, *Global Politics of Unequal Development*, Palgrave Macmillan, London 2005, cited in John Smith, *Imperialism and Globalisation of Production*, dissertation, University of Sheffield, Sheffield 2010, p. 16).

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International Labour Organisation, *From Precarious Work to Decent Work. Outcome Document to the Worker's Symposium on Policies and Regulations to Combat Precarious Employment*, ILO, Geneva 2012, p. 27.

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Marcel Van der Linden, “San Precario: a new inspiration for labour historians”, *Labor* 11 (2014) 1, pp. 9–21, here p. 20.

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Jean-Claude Barbier, “A survey of the use of the term precarity in French economics and sociology”, *Working document No. 19, CNRS / Centre d'études de l'emploi*, November, 2002.

precarity through which he established the concept of accepting poverty and spiritually healing effect of celebrating precarity in which the poor live.⁹ The history of the term *précarité* can be uncovered by examining the recent history of French sociology. Jean-Claude Barbier analysed the use of this term in (1) sociology dealing with issues of poverty, social protection, family, and unemployment, (2) labour sociology, and (3) sociology in general.¹⁰

Sociologist Agnès Pitrou was among the first to make systematic use of the term *precarity* to study the living conditions of French families. By the late 1970s, the term *précarité* was used to describe the social condition and position of families and households, as well as the process potentially leading to poverty.¹¹ The association of the term *precarity* with *poverty* in this initial phase in French sociology crucially determined the future use of the notion. Recognising that the origin of this social condition lies in the sphere of work, sociologists began to associate this term more strictly with new forms of employment.¹² Among these, they highlighted, above all, so-called atypical jobs. Kalleberg and Vallas¹³ conceptually define precarious work as work that is uncertain, insecure, and unstable. In precarious work, the employee – unlike employers or the government – bears all the risks, in exchange for limited social benefits and legal protection. This definition of precarious work implies far-reaching individual and social consequences. According to Kalleberg and Vallas, the political stability of developed capitalist countries after the Second World War was largely the product of secure employment and decent wages enjoyed by the majority of the workforce in these societies. The erosion of this source of institutional stability in the era of neoliberalism leaves open the question of maintaining the existing social order.

According to their insights, economic sociology has revealed at least four different, but highly intertwined factors that have led to the growth of precarious work.¹⁴ The first factor is *de-unionisation*, or the reduction of the power and influence of unions. This has weakened worker protection, as employers have been given greater power to reduce wages and impose non-standard and flexible work. Second, the *growing power of financial capital*, especially Wall Street, which has led to significantly greater influence of shareholders in comparison with the employees in modern firms, especially in corporations. This resulted in increased outsourcing and reduction in the permanently employed workforce, even in highly profitable enterprises. Third, *globalisation* has rapidly increased competition among workers from different parts of the world and accelerated capital mobility, especially in industrial production. Finally, the fourth significant factor in the spread of precarious work is the *digital revolution*. It has accelerated processes initiated by the previously mentioned factors, reduced the need for human labour, accelerated capital mobility, facilitated the management of global supply chains, and increased the ability of employers and investors to monitor value creation at the enterprise level. The expansion of “smart” mobile phones has enabled companies to use digital platforms to organise work and has redefined the position of workers. They are now becoming independent contractors or freelancers who take on risks that were once borne by companies. In this type of employment relationship, workers are denied access to the social protection system, and lack both job security and any sense of work stability.

Contrary to popular belief,¹⁵ the precariat is not a new social class, nor is it exclusively a contemporary category in the workforce resulting from the implementation of neoliberal doctrine in the economy. It can be confidently stated

that descriptions of this category of the workforce can be found in Marx's and Engels' critique of political economy. In *The Condition of the Working Class in England* (1845), Engels noted that the character of bourgeois society was essentially determined by the competition that prevailed in its economic sphere. Just as members of the bourgeoisie compete with each other in the market, workers compete with each other on the labour market. From this, it follows that there is always a part of the working class that is in search of any kind of work to satisfy the needs of material reproduction. Engels called this category of the workforce the "surplus population".¹⁶ It *multiplies with the centralisation of capital* and during economic crises that occur cyclically under capitalism. According to Engels, uncertainty is a defining category of the capitalist economy. Some of the theses that Engels put forward in this work were further developed by Marx in subsequent years at the highest theoretical level. In Chapter 25 of the first volume of *Capital*, titled *The General Law of Capitalist Accumulation*, Marx analysed the fraction of the working class that he called the *relatively surplus population* or the *industrial reserve army* and concluded that its existence was a necessary condition for the accumulation of capital at a higher stage of development of this socio-economic system (Marx, 1961: 628–640).¹⁷ The role of this fraction of the working population in the capitalist system is to constantly keep the employed working population under pressure, as a readily available replacement, so that the price of labor force can be continually maintained at a very low level precisely thanks to the existence of the reserve army of labour.

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Rob Lambert, Andrew Herod, "Neoliberalism, Precarious Work and Remaking the Geography of Global Capitalism", in: Rob Lambert, Andrew Herod (eds.), *Neoliberal Capitalism and Precarious Work: Ethnographies of Accommodation and Resistance*, Edward Elgar publishing limited, Cheltenham 2016, pp. 1–36, here p. 4.

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J.-C. Barbier, "A survey of the use of the term precarite in French economics and sociology", p. 9.

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Ibid., pp. 10–18.

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The conceptual foundations of precarious work were crucially shaped by the research of the ILO in the late 1980s. This research focused on the alarming flexibilisation of the labour market and the increase in informal and atypical (non-standard) employment in Western European countries. In order to distinguish informal and non-standard forms of employment from formal ones, ILO theorist Gary Rodgers identified four dimensions of precarity: (1) Temporal: Precarious jobs are characterised by short duration, with a high risk of job loss. (2) Organisational: Work is becoming more insecure, and workers (individually and collectively) have less control over working conditions, wages, or the pace of work. (3) Social: The level of worker

protection in the work process is decreasing, either through state laws or by weakening workers' collective organisations; workers' access to the social protection system is decreasing. (4) Economic: Low-income jobs can be considered precarious if they are associated with poverty and social exclusion. (See: Gerry Rodgers, "Precarious Work in Western Europe. The State of Debate", in: Gerry Rodgers, Janine Rodgers (eds.), *Precarious Jobs in Labour Market Regulation. The Growth of Atypical Employment in Western Europe*, International Institute of labour studies, Geneva 1989, pp. 1–16, here p. 3).

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Arne L. Kalleberg, Steven P. Vallas, "Probing Precarious Work. Theory, Research and Politics", in: Arne L. Kalleberg, Steven P. Vallas (eds.), *Precarious Work*, Emerald Publishing Limited, Bingley 2017, pp. 1–30.

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Ibid., p. 5.

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Guy Standing, *The Precariat. The New Dangerous Class*, Bloomsbury, New York 2011.

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F. Engels, *Condition of the Working Class in England*, p. 75.

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K. Marx, *Capital*, pp. 628–640.

“The third category of the relative sur-plus population, the stagnant, forms a part of the active labour army, but with extremely irregular employment. Hence it furnishes to capital an inexhaustible reservoir of disposable labour-power. Its conditions of life sink below the average normal level of the working class; this makes it at once the broad basis of special branches of capitalist exploitation. It is characterised by maximum of working-time, and minimum of wages. [...] It recruits itself constantly from the supernumerary forces of modern industry and agriculture, and specially from those decaying branches of industry where handicraft is yielding to manufacture, manufacture to machinery. Its extent grows, as with the extent and energy of accumulation, the creation of surplus-population advances. But it forms at the same time a self-reproducing and self-perpetuating element of the working class, taking a proportionally greater part in the general increase of that class than the other elements.”¹⁸

The fact that critical social thought had noted the existence of precarious work and what we now call the precariat as early as the mid-19th century, does not mean that the manifestations of this phenomenon today are identical to those in the past. On the contrary, permanent advancement of productive forces (technology and technique), which is a fundamental characteristic of capitalism, has resulted in the emergence of contemporary forms of precarious work that differ significantly from its forms in the previous epochs of this mode of production. While precarious workers in 19th-century England performed temporary jobs in factory districts, craft workshops, or agricultural farms, today they perform this type of work in the digital economy, seeking jobs in various forms of “platform” work, in the service industry, etc. However, although the forms of precarious work and the character of the precariat have changed, its essential role in the system of capital accumulation has remained the same as in previous phases of capitalism, which is why descriptions of precarious work can be found in the writings of Marx and Engels from the 19th century. Accordingly, one cannot speak of the precariat as a completely new and separate class, or as a class at all.

Standing argues that the contemporary precariat is characterised by a state of anger, anomie, anxiety, and alienation.¹⁹ The state of anger arises from frustrations caused by a sense of deprivation and the inability to establish a meaningful and fulfilling life. The origin of this state lies not only in flexible work, but also in the absence of meaningful professional relationships. The almost complete absence of social mobility conditions existence in a vicious circle of precarity that inevitably leads to a state of anger. Understanding Durkheim’s concept of anomie as a state of social apathy that is the product of personal and social hopelessness, Standing believes that the demonization of this population as lazy and socially irresponsible further perpetuates anomie. Anxiety is the consequence of the nature of precarious work. Permanent insecurity is also reflected in the realisation that a single mistake at work could lead to the loss of already modest income. Alienation is the result of alienated labour, the awareness that work is not done for one’s own needs.²⁰ Additionally, the possibility for long-term planning in precarious work conditions is significantly limited. The consequence of the aforementioned is living “from day to day”, which leads to *elimination of the future dimension of time* for precarious workers. These circumstances significantly determine the everyday lives of precarious workers.

2. Marxist Critique of Everyday Life

Although Engels, and especially Marx, influenced by the legacy of German classical philosophy (specifically Hegel), engaged in a critique of political

economy using speculative thinking, that is, the dialectical method,²¹ the critique of everyday life occupies a significant place in the overall intellectual legacy of the two founders of this orientation in social sciences. Marx's experience as a collaborator, and later editor-in-chief of the *Rheinische Zeitung*, had a significant influence on his intellectual maturation. As a promising Doctor of Philosophy, faced with increased repression of critical voices within the university by the Prussian state, he rejected an academic career in Berlin and went to Cologne, where he began his career in journalism. Observations on the daily lives of the lower classes of Prussian society at that time significantly shaped the direction of Marx's intellectual development. Significant observations about everyday life can be found in numerous later writings and letters that appear in his collected works, among which *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte* (1852)²² and *The Class Struggles in France* (1850)²³ stand out in importance. In those writings Marx - in addition to the political analysis of society and class relations – also conducted an analysis of the everyday life of French society.

On the other hand, Friedrich Engels authored the first study of factory life, or the everyday life of the industrial working class. *The Condition of the Working Class in England* represents the first anthropological-ethnographic study of the life of wage labourers. At the centre of this book is the idea of the *concretum*, or reality of capitalism from the perspective of the industrial worker. Depictions of everyday factory life significantly influenced Marx's understanding of social classes and class struggle in capitalism, as well as the historical mission of the proletariat.²⁴ Observing the life of the working class, Engels realised that the industry, or the factory, is the axis around which a specific way of living and everyday life is formed, giving rise to an authentic culture of the proletariat. Intolerable living conditions of the industrial working class shaped the direction of their political struggle for shorter working hours and improved general living conditions, which evolved into a struggle of this class against the capitalist class. The social reality of the working class is

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Ibid., p. 643.

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G. Standing, *The Precariat*, p. 19.

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Ibid., pp. 19–21.

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“My dialectical method is not only different from the Hegelian, but is its direct opposite. To Hegel, the life-process of the human brain, i.e., the process of thinking, which, under the name of ‘the Idea’, he even transforms into an independent subject, is the demiurgos of the real world, and the real world is only the external, phenomenal form of ‘the Idea’. With me, on the contrary, the ideal is nothing else than the material world reflected by the human mind, and translated into forms of thought. [...] The mystification which dialectics suffers in Hegel’s hands, by no means prevents him from being the first to present its general form of working in a comprehensive and conscious manner. With him it is standing on its

head. It must be turned right side up again, if you would discover the rational kernel within the mystical shell.” – K. Marx, *Capital*, pp. 19–20.

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Karl Marx, Friedrich Engels, *Selected Works in Two Volumes. Vol. 1*, Foreign Languages Publishing House, Moscow 1962, pp. 247–344.

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Ibid., pp. 139–242.

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Marx considers that the historical mission of the proletariat (as the class-conscious working class) is the abolition of existing production relations based on exploitation. This standpoint is based on the insight that the proletariat is a class of producers that has no need for another (subordinate) class in order to sustain its existence. This makes the proletariat a universal class that has the potential to establish a classless society.

crucial for establishing its self-awareness as a prerequisite for political struggle. Everyday life of the working class depicted in Engels's studies led Marx to the fundamental conclusion that the structural contradictions of the capitalist system can only be overcome by its complete abolition. Almost three decades later (1872), Engels, in his study on the housing question,²⁵ again addressed the everyday life of the working class, but this time in Germany. By focusing on the housing problem of the working class in Germany in this book, Engels provided a vivid portrayal of the daily life of working class and also discussed the issues of private property and the state.

Critical considerations of the everyday life of working class in bourgeois society were thus at the root of the critique of political economy, which later developed into Marxist theory. However, at the end of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th century, Marxist theory primarily dealt with issues of imperialism and political theory. These topics reflected the historical moment in which the growth of imperial powers led to their inevitable conflict in the First World War. Additionally, the subject of Marxist theory was further influenced by the successful social revolution in Russia and the series of unsuccessful revolutions in Central Europe.

The theme of everyday life re-emerged in Marxist theory in the 1930s, influenced by the discovery of Marx's unpublished early writings. Works such as the *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844*, *The German Ideology*, or the *Grundrisse*, which were made available to the public by the Moscow Institute of Marx and Engels, shed light on the philosophical roots of Marx's thought. In the *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts*,²⁶ Marx identified alienated labour as the root of human alienation in bourgeois society.²⁷ Labour is the specific characteristic of humans through which they affirm themselves as a species-being. The ability to produce material conditions for life distinguishes the human species from other living beings. Labour is, therefore, a specifically human attribute – a process of humanising nature and naturalising humanity. Observing the capitalist economy, Marx perceived its commodity character, recognising capitalism as a commodity mode of production. Therefore, Marx began his analysis of the capitalist mode of production, which “presents itself as an immense accumulation of commodities”,²⁸ with an analysis of the commodity. Further investigation led him to the conclusion that human labour, under conditions of the commodity mode of production, also acquires the character of a commodity that is bought and sold on the market like any other. Thus, human labour in capitalism takes on a wage character. Since the labour force is hired on the market by capitalists or owners of the means of production, the products of human labour do not belong to the direct producers but to those who hire their labour-power – i.e., capitalists. Therefore, the products of labour appear to their direct producers as something alien. In this antagonistic relationship between labour and capital, Marx found the root of all human alienation in bourgeois society.²⁹

With the discovery of Marx's early works, the question of alienation became the central issue of a specific trend in Marxist thought, which is most commonly referred to today as “Western Marxism”.³⁰ Western Marxism offered a different reading of Marx's work compared to the theoretical orthodoxy that characterised Soviet Marxism. The direction of this Marxist orientation was shaped by Marx's philosophical standpoint, which was not as clearly expressed in the *Capital* as it was in his earlier writings.³¹ Seeking to overcome the often economic interpretation of Marx and the so-called *reflection theory* that was

the main orientation in Soviet philosophy, Western Marxist theorists examined why the revolution achieved in the Soviet Union did not lead to full human self-liberation, and why the revolution did not occur in the West.²⁵

Problematizing everyday life in Marxist thought took place during two related periods: first, immediately after the discovery of Marx's early writings during the 1930s within the framework of the Frankfurt School, which included theorists such as T. Adorno, M. Horkheimer, E. Fromm, H. Marcuse, K. Korsch, and others; and second, during the 1960s in the works of H. Marcuse, K. Kosík, A. Lefebvre, Á. Heller, and the Budapest School, among others. Of course, Marxist authors often had different interpretations of the concept of everyday life and approached it in different ways and to varying degrees.

Unlike theorists of the Frankfurt School who dealt with everyday life incidentally, K. Kosík,²⁶ Á. Heller and H. Lefebvre dedicated entire studies to the

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Friedrich Engels, *The Housing Question*, Foreign Languages Press, Paris 2021.

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Karl Marx, *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844*, transl. Martin Milligan, Progress Publishers, Moscow 1959.

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According to M. A. Perović's interpretation, Marx's analysis of labour and production intensifies in the relationship between human beings. "The analysis of this relationship in Marx is conducted through a complex network of categories, partly borrowed from Hegel's vocabulary of dialectics. The foundation consists of the concepts of alienation (Entäusserung), objectification (Vergegenständlichung), appropriation (Aneignung), and estrangement (Entfremdung) of labour. The objectification of labour is the realisation, embodiment (Verwirklichung) of labour as the essential, alienated essence of man. The power of negation in the alienation of this essence makes its duplication in embodiment possible. This conditions that realisation appears as disembodiment (Entwirklichung), as the loss of the object created by labour. This loss is the consequence of the possibility of differentiation in the appropriation of objects, or the products of labour. This differentiation is established through the character of people's relationship to labour and its results. By objectifying itself in the product, labour can gain from it an independent existence and appear to the worker as a 'self-sustaining power'. In this respect, labour becomes the 'act of alienating practical human activity'." – Milenko A. Perović, "Marksov pojam dijalektike", *Arhe: časopis za filozofiju* 4 (2007) 7, pp. 7–34, here p. 26.

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K. Marx, *Capital*, p. 35.

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"Therefore, three interconnected social conditions for the emergence of alienated labour are

wage labour, private property, and the division of labour. Thus conditioned, alienated labour produces four interconnected forms of human alienation (alienation of the worker): 1) alienation of the human from the product of labour (from things); 2) alienation of the human from the process (act) of production; 3) alienation of the generic, species-being of humans, i.e., alienation of the human from oneself, and 4) alienation of the human from other humans, i.e., alienation of the human from other people." – Miloš Perović, "Rad i podela rada u delu Karla Marksa", *Arhe: časopis za filozofiju* 13 (2016) 26, pp. 259–274, here p. 268.

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More in: Miloš Perović, "Istorija recepcije Marksovog mišljenja (I deo)", *Arhe: časopis za filozofiju* 15 (2018) 29, pp. 255–277.

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"According to Marcuse, Marx's critique of political economy begins in a philosophical form because the 'capture of labour' in capitalism, as well as the question of its liberation, are questions that go beyond the scope of political economy. These are questions that deal with the generic essence of humanity and that 'affect the very foundations of human existence. Later, when he developed his own theory, Marx largely abandoned philosophical terminology [...]' – Ibid., p. 273.

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Ivana Spasić, *Sociologije svakodnevnog života*, Zavod za izdavanje udžbenika, Beograd 2004, p. 121.

33

Karel Kosík, *Dialectics of the Concrete. A Study on Problems of Man and the World*, transl. Robert S. Cohen – Marx W. Wartofsky, D. Reidel Publishing Company, Dordrecht 1976, p. 119.

concept of everyday life. Ágnes Heller scrutinises the everyday life in capitalism by establishing a solid conceptual framework in her book *Everyday Life*. She considers production, or labour, as the basic form of the species. Everyday life is shaped by labour, and “all other actions of everyday life are centred around and gravitate to labour”.³⁴ Therefore, labour plays a central role in the everyday life of contemporary society. Heller defines everyday life as “the aggregate of those individual reproduction factors which, *pari passu*, make social reproduction possible”.³⁵ The everyday life of an individual in capitalist society is essentially determined by their place in the division of labour. The everyday life of a manual labourer is quite different from the everyday life of a production manager or an owner of the means of production. In this sense, Heller emphasises the importance of the dichotomy between community and society. In a community, everyday life is determined by an unquestioned system of customs and collective representations. With the emergence of modern (class) society, or the emergence of the social division of labour, this system breaks down, and social relations and identities of individuals become more complex. Considering the alienation of labour in commodity production, an individual’s entry into a social milieu (class) by birth represents the appearance of alienation.³⁶ They adopt the behaviour patterns of their class, its culture, customs, language, etc. This means that individuals adopt only certain aspects of the capabilities of the human race, developed at the given time. Other aspects of the species are alienated from them, standing before them as a foreign world, and they mostly stand opposed to it in a hostile manner.³⁷

Heller believes that labour manifests itself in two ways: as everyday work and as immediate species-activity. Everyday consciousness does not perceive labour as its generic essence but rather as something that needs to be done in order to meet existential needs. Therefore, everyday consciousness experiences it as a necessity without which survival is impossible. That is why Heller adopts the distinction between the concepts of “labour” and “work” from Marx. “Labour” refers to everyday work necessary for the reproduction of the individual and can be understood as a synonym for alienated labour. On the other hand, the concept of “work” defines labour as a social species-activity that transcends everyday life.³⁸ Given the wage character of labour in capitalism, the work that a person does appears to them as an alienated activity whose purpose is solely and exclusively their reproduction. Therefore, “work becomes an inorganic integral part of everyday life, a curse”.³⁹

The theorist who has devoted the most attention to the phenomenon of everyday life within the framework of Marxism is certainly Henri Lefebvre. In his three-volume *Critique of Everyday Life*, Lefebvre argues that everyday life was fundamentally determined by alienation, or the alienation of labour. Leisure occupies a significant place in Lefebvre’s views on everyday life. Considering the Marxist demand for a critique of everyday life, Lefebvre believes that this critique is carried out precisely in leisure. Leisure and everyday life are inseparably linked, existing simultaneously in unity and opposition, thus in a dialectical relationship. Leisure is fundamentally determined by work; without work, it cannot exist. Consequently, Lefebvre posits the demand for an understanding of the unity of work and leisure:

“Therefore, with its fragmentation of labour, modern industrial civilisation crates both a *general need for leisure* and differentiated *concrete needs* within that general framework.”⁴⁰

Like Heller, albeit with different concepts, Lefebvre also emphasises the importance of the distinction between community and society – highlighting the difference between the household and the family.

“What distinguished peasant life so profoundly from the life of industrial workers, even today, is precisely this inherence of productive activity in their life in its entirety. The workplace is all around the house; work is not separate from the everyday life of the family.”⁴¹

With the emergence of bourgeois society, productive work moved out of the household, where it was intertwined with everyday life, and into the realm of civil society. By asking whether everyday life is, therefore, found in work, leisure, or family life, Lefebvre answers that everyday life encompasses all three elements. It is the unity of work, leisure, and family life that determines the concrete individual:

“Thus, leisure and work and ‘private life’ make up a dialectical system, a global structure. Through this global structure we can reconstruct a historically real picture of man and the human at a certain step in their development: at a certain stage of alienation and disalienation.”⁴²

Naturally, alienation in the sphere of work is transferred to leisure. As the only purpose of leisure in the capitalist system is a simple escape from work, leisure becomes commodified. The entertainment character of leisure is emphasised, and for this purpose, *leisure machines* such as television, radio, etc., are produced.⁴³ Thus, the profit-oriented organisation of labour in capitalism is transferred to leisure.

Ivana Spasić identified what is common to all interpretations of the Marxist critique of everyday life. First of all, everyday life in its full sense is found only in *modern society*, i.e., with the establishment of capitalist economic relations and the bourgeois society that grew out of them. Marxist considerations of everyday life are always *critical*. The critique of everyday life places the concept of *alienated labour* at its centre and, in relation to it, examines the alienation of everyday life. Everyday life has a *class dimension*. The class differentiation of everyday life manifests itself in different everyday lives of members of different social classes. The theoretical understanding of everyday life is a necessary element of revolutionary practice.⁴⁴

Work, or the production of material life, is the axis around which the entire everyday life in bourgeois society revolves. This insight is crucial for the subject of analysis of this paper because it raises the question – to what extent does the precarisation of labour affect everyday life in modern society?

34
Ágnes Heller, *Everyday Life*, Routledge, London 1984, p. 63.

35
Ibid., p. 3.

36
Ibid., pp. 8–10.

37
Ibid., p. 15.

38
Ibid., pp. 60–61.

39
Ibid., p. 64.

40
Henri Lefebvre, *Critique of Everyday Life*, transl. John Moore, Verso, London 2014, p. 58.

41
Ibid., p. 56.

42
Ibid., p. 66.

43
Ibid., pp. 58–59.

44
I. Spasić, *Sociologije svakodnevnog života*, pp. 121–123.

If industrial production, embodied in the factory organisation of work, directly shaped the consciousness and particular culture of the working class in the 19th century, then it can be assumed that new forms of work arising from technological development as a logical consequence of capital accumulation also brings about changes in the consciousness of the working class in the 21st century. However, considering that it was established in the previous chapter that the precarity of labour is a structural feature of the capitalist mode of production that has been somewhat abandoned only in a brief historical period in a small number of the most developed countries, the question imposes itself – how contemporary forms of precarious labour differ from their previous manifestations and to what extent their evolution affects the change in everyday life practices of the social group that exists within them?

3. The Precarity of Everyday Life

Standing's observations on the state of anger, anomie, anxiety, and alienation that characterise the contemporary precariat are largely supported by a study on the attitudes of precarious workers in Australia conducted in 2009 by the Australian Bureau of Statistics.⁴⁵ Although the results of an individual study conducted in one country cannot be absolutised, they can serve as an indication of trends within the observed population category, especially considering that Australia belongs to the so-called capitalist centre comprising countries with very similar social structures and positions in the international division of labour. In the presented study, casual workers expressed significantly lower agreement with the statement that the job they were doing was interesting, that it provided them with an opportunity to improve their skills, or that it allowed them independence. The majority of casual workers (58%) stated that they were not free to decide on the organisation of their daily work.⁴⁶ The research also showed that job insecurity had a measurable impact on housing insecurity. Households whose members have insecure jobs are much less likely to own property.⁴⁷ The status of precarious employment has implications in the political sphere. The research showed that precarious workers participated in electoral processes to a much lesser extent than other population categories.⁴⁸ This data can lead to the conclusion that the precariat is not politically represented in the existing liberal democratic system. In other words, almost no one in the existing political spectrum addresses the precariat.⁴⁹ The consequence of this is a high degree of electoral abstention among this segment of population. Various studies have also shown that people in Australia who are in a state of work and housing insecurity mostly prefer a lower level of immigration and are more inclined to think that “immigrants are taking jobs from Australians”. In contrast, people who enjoy job security have a lower level of hostility towards immigrants.⁵⁰

Wilson and Ebert conclude that coping with precarity in everyday life strategies among this population category is most commonly manifested in two ways: either through abuse of psychoactive substances – alcohol and drugs – or through expression of “positive thinking”, the need for “networking”,⁵¹ and other patterns of the neoliberal ideology of hyper-individualism that places responsibility for the state in which individual members of society find themselves always and exclusively in themselves, and never in structural social inequalities, the class structure of society, or the profit-oriented

commodity economy based on exploitation of human labour. In addition to the economic side that we previously explained, regulations categorising these workers as “independent contractors” or “self-employed” also contain a significant ideological dimension. An independent contractor is perceived as an individual completely equal to other participants on the free market. The free market is conceived as a perfect, impartial system in which all independent contractors have the same starting positions and opportunities for success. Therefore, their individual economic position is solely the result of their individual performance on the free market, i.e., their willingness to work hard (provide more labour), to improve professionally, etc. This ideological content represents one of the most damaging patterns of the laissez-faire ideology of neoliberalism that suppresses awareness of the class character of capitalist society and class reproduction, meaning that not everyone has the same starting positions in a society that continuously reproduces economic inequality.

Similar tendencies in the everyday life of the precariat are also noted by Standing. He believes that members of this population category are characterised by a lack of self-esteem and a sense of very low social value of their work.⁵² Therefore, unlike the industrial working class, which is significantly characterised by an awareness that its work is highly valuable to society, leading to a sense of class belonging and pride, precarious workers struggle to build a sense of solidarity and belonging to the precariat.⁵³ The constant need for professional requalification imposed by the flexible labour market and insecure working conditions results in an almost complete absence of professional identity among precarious workers.

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Shaun Wilson, Norbert Ebert, “Precarious work: economic, sociological and political perspectives”, *The Economic and Labour Relations Review* 24 (2013) 3, pp. 268–270.

46

Ibid., p. 269.

47

Ibid., pp. 269–270.

48

Ibid., p. 270.

49

The same observation applies to the entire working class. Class-oriented politics that questioned the very survival of capitalism represented the interests of the working class during the second half of the 19th century and almost the entire 20th century. With the collapse of the Soviet Union and “real socialism”, class-based politics suffered a major historical blow from which they have yet to recover. The disappearance of politics representing the interests of specific social classes does not mean the disappearance of social classes in modern society, as some authors have claimed (See: Jan Pakulski, Malcolm Waters, *The Death of Class*, SAGE Publications, London

1996). It simply means that a significant part of the world’s population, rightfully called the “working majority”, has been left without representation in the political sphere of contemporary society over the past few decades. The consequences are numerous – from the hegemony of “identity politics” in the neoliberal political sphere of Western societies, through a high percentage of electoral abstention, to the rise of far-right and fascist political organisations that, through a combination of nationalism and social populism, fill the political void created by the weakness or disappearance of the revolutionary left.

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S. Wilson, N. Ebert, “Precarious work”, p. 271.

51

Ibid., p. 274.

52

G. Standing, *The Precariat*, p. 21.

53

Ibid., p. 22.

A significant characteristic of the precariat is a very low level of association, or collective action against employers. Referring to Chris Wright's article,⁵⁴ which examines actions of trade unions in response to the growth of precarious work in Britain, Wilson and Ebert note that precarious work is on the rise in those segments of the labour market that are least unionised or in industries characterised by low wages and non-standard forms of employment.⁵⁵ However, the increase in precarious work in recent decades is precisely an expression of the capitalist class's desire to reduce the power of organised labour movements. Workers that have insecure status are much less willing to risk losing their jobs by demanding better working conditions or higher wages from their employer. The awareness of replaceability arising from direct work experience is a limiting factor in their union organising. This employer strategy has resulted in appropriate legal regulation, i.e., legalisation of precarious work in the legislation of most countries.

4. Conclusion

Two processes have played a significant role in the growth of precarious work in contemporary society, as previously mentioned: the “drain” of industry from the developed centre to the capitalist periphery due to lower labor force costs, and the development of technology that reconfigures the character of capitalist production, resulting in the decline of former industries and emergence of entirely new ones. In the same process of automation that has reduced human labour required in older industries, entirely new sectors of the economy have emerged, such as the digital economy. This transformation of the nature of work indirectly affects the change in patterns of daily life of the working class. When we talk about precarious workers today, we usually have in mind workers in the service sector, delivery workers who work through digital platforms specialised for this type of work. Although this type of work is just one, by no means the most significant manifestation of precarious work, it is the most visible in contemporary society. Workers in the digital platform sector in the tertiary sector are a typical example of flexible workers – they choose how much and when to work. This type of precarious worker is characterised by the absence of any direct physical contact with the employer, as the employer appears to them as a complete abstraction, in the form of a smartphone application.

The mentioned developments have far-reaching consequences for the daily lives of precarious workers. The “machines for leisure” that Lefebvre wrote about have seen significant expansion in the present day with the development of information technology and the emergence of the internet. For a segment of precarious workers – those who work through digital platforms – the smartphone serves as both a tool for work and a means of leisure. For precarious workers who perform “work on demand”, defined in legislation as “zero-hour contract”, work and leisure are completely intertwined. Workers

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Chris F. Wright, “The response of the unions on rise of precarious work in Britain”, *The Economic and Labour Relations Review* 24 (2013) 3, pp. 279–296, doi: <https://doi.org/10.1177/1035304613496697>.

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S. Wilson, N. Ebert, “Precarious work”, p. 272.

employed under this type of contract are available “on demand” to the employer who pays them an hourly wage for the work done. The employer is not obliged to pay a weekly or monthly wage, only a wage for the number of hours worked. Workers are not obligated to accept the offered job. Although this type of work is promoted by employers as the ideal type of flexible employment in which the worker has the opportunity to choose when to work and for how long, the logic of material reproduction generally does not leave the worker with much choice. Furthermore, this type of work is characterised by the complete erasure of the boundary between the “realm of necessity” (work) and the “realm of freedom” (leisure), with far-reaching consequences such as the inability of proper worker reproduction, the inability to plan one’s time, etc.

Unlike the industrial working class of the 19th century described by Engels, contemporary precariat is largely not concentrated in either the workplace or in a specific living space. The atomisation of precarious workers is the main obstacle to the creation of an appropriate precariat culture. Furthermore, much more than in the 19th century, the consciousness of precarious workers is influenced by the ideology of the ruling class. Like other parts of capitalist totality, its ideological expressions have become immensely complex. Unlike the 19th and early 20th centuries, the ideology of the ruling class now has the ability to be transmitted multiple times through mass media and the internet. Even a superficial analysis of the nature of social networks, which today occupy a significant place in the lives of most of humanity, leads to the realisation that they are designed to promote hyper-individualism, and even narcissism among their users. In this way, ideology of the ruling class spreads through all the segments of society and is internalised even by those against whom it is fundamentally directed and who have no interest in being guided by it.

Miloš Perović

Prekarni rad i svakodnevnica

Sažetak

U ovom članku, autor cilja primijeniti nasljeđe marksističke kritike svakodnevice radi analize fenomena prekarnog rada u suvremenom društvu. S obzirom na to da je pitanje otuđenja rada središte marksističkog tumačenja svakodnevice, postavlja se pitanje o tome kako prekarnost, kao apsolutno otuđenja rada, pogađa svakodnevicu nesigurno zaposlenih pojedinaca. Autorov je temeljni stav taj da je prekarni rad strukturno obilježje kapitalističkog načina proizvodnje, čije manifestacije evoluiraju u skladu s tehnološkim razvojem. U toj perspektivi autor slijedi Marxov opći zakon kapitalističke akumulacije izražen u pogl. 25, sv. 1 Kapitala, koji sadrži zoran opis »viška populacije« ili »rezervne vojske industrije«. U središtu je ovoga istraživanja pitanje toga kako suvremene manifestacije prekarnog rada utječu na svakodnevicu prekarijata.

Ključne riječi

prekarni rad, svakodnevnica, nesigurnost, neizvjesnost, sociologija svakodnevice, marksizam, otuđenje rada, Karel Kosík, Ágnes Heller, Henri Lefebvre

Miloš Perović

Prekäre Arbeit und alltägliches Leben

Zusammenfassung

In dieser Abhandlung beabsichtigt der Autor, das Erbe der marxistischen Kritik am alltäglichen Leben zu nutzen, um das Phänomen prekärer Arbeit in der gegenwärtigen Gesellschaft zu analysieren. Angesichts der Tatsache, dass die Frage der Entfremdung der Arbeit in marxistischen Interpretationen des alltäglichen Lebens eine zentrale Stellung einnimmt, stellt sich die Frage, inwiefern sich Prekarität als absolute Form der Arbeitsentfremdung auf das tägliche Leben von Personen in unsicheren Beschäftigungsverhältnissen auswirkt. Die grundlegende Haltung des Autors besteht darin, dass die Prekarität der Arbeit eine strukturelle Eigenschaft der kapitalistischen Produktionsweise darstellt, deren Ausprägungen sich im Einklang mit dem technologischen Fortschritt entspinnen. Ausgehend von dieser Perspektive folgt der Autor Marx' allgemeinem Gesetz der kapitalistischen Akkumulation, wie es in Kapitel 25 des ersten Bandes von „Das Kapital“ dargelegt und anhand der Begriffe der „Surplusarbeiterpopulation“ bzw. der „industriellen Reservearmee“ anschaulich illustriert wird. Im Mittelpunkt dieser Studie steht die Frage, wie zeitgenössische Erscheinungsformen prekärer Arbeit den Alltag des Prekariats durchdringen.

Schlüsselwörter

prekäre Arbeit, alltägliches Leben, Unsicherheit, Ungewissheit, Soziologie des Alltagslebens, Marxismus, Arbeitsentfremdung, Karel Kosik, Ágnes Heller, Henri Lefebvre

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Travail précaire et vie quotidienne

Résumé

Dans cet article, l'auteur propose de mobiliser l'héritage de la critique marxiste de la vie quotidienne afin d'analyser le phénomène du travail précaire dans la société contemporaine. Étant donné que la question de l'aliénation du travail occupe une place centrale dans les interprétations marxistes de la vie quotidienne, il convient de se demander comment la précarité – en tant que forme d'aliénation absolue du travail – affecte la vie quotidienne des individus engagés dans des emplois instables. La thèse fondamentale de l'auteur est que la précarité du travail constitue une caractéristique structurelle du mode de production capitaliste, dont les manifestations évoluent en fonction du progrès technologique. Dans cette optique, l'auteur s'appuie sur la loi générale de l'accumulation capitaliste exposée par Marx au chapitre 25 du livre I du Capital, avec sa description saisissante de la « population excédentaire » ou « armée industrielle de réserve ». Au cœur de cette étude se trouve la question de savoir comment les formes contemporaines du travail précaire influencent la vie quotidienne du précaire.

Mots-clés

travail précaire, vie quotidienne, insécurité, incertitude, sociologie de la vie quotidienne, marxisme, aliénation du travail, Karel Kosik, Ágnes Heller, Henri Lefebvre