THESES FOR MAPPING THE CONTOURS
OF THE MARXIST TRADITION
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I. Diagnostic Theses: What is Wrong with Capitalism?

Thesis 1. The conditions for Human Flourishing thesis: *Human flourishing for the broad masses of people would in general be broadly enhanced if they lived (a) in <u>economic conditions</u> of a radically egalitarian distribution of the material conditions of life; (b) in <u>political conditions</u> of deep, participatory democracy; and (c) in <u>social conditions</u> of solidaristic communities of mutual support and reciprocity.*

Thesis 2. Material possibility thesis: *Under conditions of a highly productive economy, it becomes <u>materially possible</u> to organize society in such a way that the three conditions of human flourishing, if they were established , could be sustainable.*

Thesis 3. Capitalism's Progressiveness thesis: *Capitalism spurs the development of the forces of production in ways that systematically increase the productivity of the economy.*

Thesis 4. Capitalism's Inegalitarianism thesis: *Capitalism massively fosters material inequality, and supports institutions which block the possibility of achieving a radically egalitarian distribution of the material conditions of life.*

Thesis 5. Capitalism's erosion of community thesis: *Capitalism erodes community of solidaristic reciprocity by fostering intense competition among individuals, by normatively legitimating narrow individualistic self interest, and by reinforcing pervasive material inequalities.*

Thesis 6. Capitalism's obstruction of deep democracy thesis: *While capitalism is compatible with robust forms of liberal, representative democracy, it obstructs the realization of deep democracy.*

Thesis 7. **Anti-capitalism thesis**. *To achieve radical egalitarianism, sustainable community of solidaristic reciprocity, and deep democracy requires challenging and transforming capitalism.*

II. Historical Possibility Theses: the problem of dynamics & strategies of social change

Alternative I: Classical Historical Materialism as a Theory of the Future

> **Thesis 8. The long-term nonsustainability of capitalism thesis:** *In the long-run capitalism is an unsustainable social order. Its internal dynamics (laws of motion) will eventually destroy the conditions of its own reproducibility.*

> **Thesis 9. The intensification of anticapitalist class struggle thesis**. *The dynamics of capitalist development systematically tend to (a) increase the proportion of the population – the working class – whose interests are pervasively hurt by capitalism while at the same time (b) increase the collective capacity of the working class to challenge capitalism. The result is an intensification of class struggle directed against capitalism.*

> **Thesis 10. The revolutionary transformation thesis.** *Since capitalism becomes increasingly unsustainable (thesis 8) while the class forces arrayed against capitalism become increasingly numerous and capable of challenging capitalism (thesis 9), eventually the social forces arrayed against capitalism will be sufficiently strong and capitalism itself sufficiently weak that capitalism can be overthrown.*

> **Thesis 11. The transition to socialism thesis**: *Given the ultimate non-sustainability of capitalism (thesis 8), and the interests and capacities of the social actors arrayed against capitalism (thesis 9), in the aftermath of the destruction of capitalism through intensified class struggle (thesis 10), socialism, defined as a society in which the working class collectively controls the system of production) is its most likely successor (or in an even stronger version of the thesis: its inevitable successor).*

> **Thesis 12. The Communism Destination Thesis**. *The dynamics of socialist development tendentially leads to a strengthening of community solidarity and a progressive erosion of material inequalities so that eventually classes and the state will "wither away", resulting in the emergence of a communist society: "to each according to need, from each according to ability"*

Alternative II: Sociological Marxism as a theory of the contradictory reproduction of capitalism

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Thesis 13. The social reproduction of class relations thesis: *By virtue of (a) the exploitative conflict-generating character of capitalist class relations and (b) the negative social externalities of capitalist market competition, capitalism is an inherently unstable form of social relations and requires active institutional arrangements for its reproduction.*

Thesis 14. The contradictions of capitalism thesis. *By virtue of the dynamics of capitalist society, the institutional solutions to the problems of social reproduction of capitalism at any point in time have a systematic tendency to erode and become less functional over time.*

Thesis 15. Institutional Crisis and Renovation thesis. *Because of the continual need for institutions of social reproduction (thesis 13) and the tendency for the reproductive capacity of given institutional arrangements to erode over time (thesis 14), institutions of social reproduction in capitalist societies will tend to be periodically renovated.*

Thesis 16. Nonevitability of Functional Optimality thesis. *The institutions of social reproduction that are constructed out of contradictions and crises need not be optimal for the functioning of capitalism or the interests of capital. The actual form of these institutional solutions and the extent to which they intensify or mute the inegalitarian, exploitative and oppressive logics of capitalism depends upon the balance of class (and other) social forces.*

Thesis 17. The Real Utopias Thesis. *The historical trajectory of capitalist development does not create an immanent necessity of emancipatory transformation, but nevertheless the contradictory functioning of capitalism opens up the possibility for emancipatory futures. The realization of that possibility depends upon struggles within capitalism to create and advance institutional spaces for radical egalitarian redistributions of material conditions, deepened democratic forms of governance, and solidaristic communities.*