

Hannah Arendt's Thoughts on Labor and Totalitarianism

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1. Nazism and Labor Policy

It is well known that the slogan “Arbeit macht frei” (Labor makes people free) was hung on the entrance of Auschwitz and other Nazi concentration camps. This fact is appalling when we consider that more than six million people were killed, and many prisoners were forced into labor until they were sent to the gas chambers. Moreover, we know that many famous companies such as Heinkel, I.G. Farben, BMW¹⁾, and Benz, made use of prisoners for cheap (almost “free”) labor (Gellately 2002: Ch.9). From these grotesque paths, a deep connection between *Labor and Totalitarianism* can be inferred.

Importantly, the Nazis' complete name is *Nationalsozialistische Deutsche Arbeiterpartei* (NSDAP) or the National Socialist German Workers' Party, which means that the Nazis originally professed to be the party for German workers. After Hitler came to power, he implemented many policies aimed at stimulating the economy and succeeded in dramatically decreasing the unemployment rate. Unemployment significantly decreased from 4.8 million in 1933 to 910,000 in 1937 (Ishida 2015: 207), a substantial improvement that garnered strong support from the German people.

Hitler also dissolved conventional worker unions and organized the German Labor Front (Deutsche Arbeitsfront), into which most workers were made to incorporate. He stated in “Decree on the Nature and Aim of the DAF” in 1934 as follows: “The objective of the German Labor Front is to foster a genuine sense of unity among the people, encompassing all Germans. It is imperative to ensure that each individual actively participates in the nation's economy in a state of both mental and physical well-being that enables them to perform at their peak, thereby securing maximum benefits for the entire national community”.²⁾

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1) In March 2016, on its 100th anniversary, BMW apologized for its wartime past, expressing its “profound regret” for supplying Nazis with vehicles and using slave laborers. Refer to the article titled, “BMW admits ‘profound regret’ for using Nazi slave labor during the Second World War” from *The Independent*, published on March 8, 2016, accessible at <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/business/news/bmw-admits-profound-regret-for-the-enormous-suffering-it-caused-by-using-nazi-slave-labour-during-the-second-world-war-a6919081.html>.

2) Hitler, “Decree on the Nature and Aim of the DAF”, 1934, § 2[7]

All these facts indicate that Nazi policies effectively utilized labor policies. As Daisuke Tano verified in detail, Hitler tried to unite the German people as diligent workers (*Fleißig Arbeiter*) to overcome class struggles and boost their morale. The images of male workers with shovels were shown in various posters, newspapers, and magazines under the Nazi regime to inspire and motivate hard work (Tano 2007: Ch. 4).

Similar images prevailed in many posters and pictures of Stalinism.³⁾ Under the First Five-Year Plan, centralized labor unions were established, promoting the rallying cry of “putting a face to production.” A succession of concentration camps emerged to detain political dissidents, criminals, and other individuals deemed “asocial.” These facilities subjected inmates to brutal forced labor under the guise of ‘rehabilitation’ through “work and discipline” (Gill 1998: Ch. 2).

Martin Heidegger, as the rector of Freiburg University, encouraged students to engage in Labor Service [*Arbeitsdienst*] in addition to Military Service [*Wehrdienst*] and Knowledge Service [*Wissensdienst*], supporting fiercely the Nazi regime in his inaugural speech as rector, “The Self-Assertion of the German University” (Heidegger 2000, S.107-117). He emphasized the role of the Labor Service in binding students with the nation [*Volk*] and realizing an ideal national community [*Volksgemeinschaft*].

In his 1934 speech “The German Student as Worker [*Der Deutsche Student Als Arbeiter*],” he describes that “the essence of work [*Arbeit*] thoroughly and fundamentally determines human *Dasein*” and “Work [*Arbeit*] transposes and organizes the *Volk* in the sphere of activity of all essential powers of Being.” He declares that “The structure of *völkisch Dasein*, taking shape in work and through work, is the State. The National Socialist State is the work state [*Arbeitsstaat*]” (Heidegger 2000, S.205-206). Strongly influenced by Ernst Junger’s *The Worker* [*Der Arbeiter: Herrschaft und Gestalt*], during this period Heidegger repeatedly addressed *Arbeit* as the ontological value that “fundamentally determines human *Dasein*” and integrates the ethnic state [*Volksstaat*] (Mori 2018: Ch. 9).

While these historical studies have extensively documented the utilization of labor policies by totalitarian regimes to achieve national unity, there is a notable dearth of philosophical or theoretical inquiries into the nuanced relationship between labor and totalitarianism. In this paper, I address this critical gap in the scholarly discourse. It is

3) During the Second World War, the Japanese government used the slogan “*Kinrou Houshi* (勤勞奉仕),” which means “to work hard and serve the nation.” As in Nazi Germany, the Japanese government attempted to unite people as diligent workers dedicating themselves to the state. The government directed people, including students and housewives, to work selflessly to win the war. Here, we also observe the connection between labor and totalitarian regime, although Arendt did not recognize the Japanese wartime regime as totalitarian, but as one form of fascism. Yasushi Yamaguchi argued that Japan fascism as with German and Italian fascism was based on the will of mass workers, not only the proletariat class but also middle class and intellectual workers (Yamaguchi 2006: 111-114). This regime enabled the government to mobilize the entire nation and proclaim national unity, that is called as the slogan “*Kyokoku Icchi* (挙国一致).”

worth noting that one philosopher who might have recognized the connection between labor and totalitarianism is Hannah Arendt, despite not having fully expounded upon the concept.

As a student of Heidegger and a Jewish person who personally endured Nazi persecution and a lengthy exile, Arendt rose in prominence with the publication of *The Origins of Totalitarianism* in 1951 and established her reputation with *The Human Condition* in 1958. Nevertheless, to probe her undeveloped theory regarding labor and totalitarianism requires exploring the interlude between these two pivotal works, represented by her drafts of “Karl Marx and the Tradition of Western Political Thought” in 1953. Consequently, an examination of her critique of Marx becomes necessary to unlock the latent potential within the theory that Arendt herself never fully articulated.

2. Arendt's study of Marx

After the publication of the first edition of *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, Arendt devoted herself to studying Marx's ideas. According to her proposal for a Guggenheim Foundation grant, Arendt initially planned to investigate “Totalitarian Elements of Marxism.” She writes, “The most serious gap in *The Origins of Totalitarianism* is the lack of an adequate historical and conceptual analysis of the ideological background of Bolshevism”.⁴ Therefore, her study of Marx was initially a continuation of her analysis of totalitarianism.⁵ However, less than a year later, she realized that her plan was too narrow and began to tackle the broader project of re-examining the entire tradition of Western political thought (Young-Bruehl 1982: 277). What caused her change of plan was Marx's idea of *animal laborans* [laboring animals]. Arendt believed that Marx had radically reversed Western tradition by glorifying labor and defining human beings as *animal laborans* as opposed to the traditional definition of *zoon politikon* [political animal] provided by Aristotle.

According to Elisabeth Young-Bruehl, Arendt prepared “a Marxist book” between 1952 and 1956, although it was not published during her lifetime (Young-Bruehl 1982: 279). Instead, her critical study of Marx and the Western tradition foreshadowed another great work, *The Human Condition*. The famous distinctions between labor and work stemmed from a critique of Marx's theory of labor and his non-distinction between labor and work.⁶ Although unpolished, these drafts present numerous intriguing insights that are

4) Arendt, “Project: Totalitarian Elements of Marxism,” undated, ca. winter 1952, to Guggenheim Foundation, Library of Congress. Also see Young-Bruehl (1982: 276).

5) Arendt describes, “The shocking originality of totalitarianism ... is easily overlooked if one lays too much stress on the only element which has behind it a respectable tradition and whose critical discussion requires a criticism of some of the chief tenets of Western political philosophy—Marxism” (ibid.).

6) The distinction of labor (Arbeit), work (Herstellen) and action (Handeln) first appeared in her *Denktagebuch* in May 1952 (DT1: 203). She begins this note with the following statement: “The really pernicious thing

absent in *The Human Condition* and other works. They also provide valuable insights into how her exploration of the “Totalitarian Elements of Marxism” became transformed into her reevaluation of the Western political tradition.

Margaret Canovan asserts that Arendt’s study of Marx is the missing link between *The Origins of Totalitarianism* and *The Human Condition*. Arendt lectured using the title “Karl Marx and The Tradition of Western Political Thoughts” in the 1953 Christian Gauss Seminar at Princeton University and wrote in the acknowledgments of *The Human Condition* that these lectures had become the book’s foundation. Manuscripts of these lectures appeared in *Social Research* (2002) and were published as *Hannah Arendt Papers* on the Library of Congress website. Subsequently, many scholars began to study the relationship between Arendt and Marx (Geisen 2011, Holman 2011, Weisman 2013, Barbour 2014, Ince 2016, Momoki 2018). The first volume of The Critical Edition of Hannah Arendt’s Complete Work, *The Modern Challenge to Tradition: Fragmente eines Buchs* and *Thinking Without a Banister: Essays in Understanding 1953-1975*, both published in 2018, also contains drafts of “Karl Marx and the Tradition of Political Thought,” which demonstrate the importance and high profile of this draft.

After delving into Arendt’s criticism of Marx, Tama Weisman concludes that “Marxian thought is not in and of itself totalitarian, but its theoretical construct does contain the conditions for the possibility of transformation into a totalitarian ideology” (Weisman 2013: 143). I agree with Weisman’s assessment. Nevertheless, Weisman overlooks the fact that Arendt’s criticism of Marx holds the potential to develop a theory that elucidates the connection between labor and totalitarianism. This prospect should be further explored by examining *between The Origins of Totalitarianism* and *The Human Condition*.

3. “He who does not labor shall not eat”

Arendt begins the first draft of her study on Marx’s totalitarian elements with the following: “It has never been easy to think and write about Karl Marx” (*MCT*: 245). Although Arendt severely criticizes Marx in many of her works, she recognizes that Marx is one of the greatest thinkers to grasp the core problem of modern society⁷⁾. “Marx is the

seems to be to define relationships between people as relationships between workers [Arbeitern].” Just before this note, she wrote about Marx’s definition of human beings as laboring creatures [arbeitendes Wesen] (*DTI*: 202). These notes indicate that her distinction between labor, work and action derived from her critique of Marx.

7) Arendt describes that “Marxism in this sense has done as much to hide and obliterate the actual teachings of Marx as to propagate them” and “Through Marxism, Marx has been praised or blamed for many things of which he was entirely innocent” (*MCT*: 246). Here Arendt distinguishes Marx’s thought from so-called Marxism and tries to save the former from the latter. Arendt wrote to Jaspers in 1951, “I don’t mean to defend him [Marx] as a scholar... and surely not as a philosopher, but as a rebel and revolutionary.” (Arendt/Jaspers 1992: 167).

only thinker in the 19th century who took its central event, the emancipation of the working seriously in philosophic terms.” She adds that this fact “explains why he could have become so useful for totalitarian domination” (*MCT*: 252). While Arendt refuses to accuse Marx of being the direct father of totalitarianism⁸⁾, she believes that Marx’s thought was “used and misused” by totalitarianism (*MCT*: 251). According to Arendt, this misuse is due to Marx’s prediction that “all men, independent of class origin, were destined to become laborers sooner or later, and that those whom one could not adjust into this process might be seen and judged by society as mere parasites” (*MCT*: 248). Although this is not precisely what Marx meant, as I will elaborate below, this description is significant for comprehending her analysis of labor and totalitarianism.

Marx understood that “Labor itself had undergone a decisive change in the modern world” and dignified labor as the most fundamental human activity (*MCT*: 248). As a result, modern society has become a society for laborers, in which the primary concern revolves around it. In the Western political tradition, labor had historically occupied the lowest position, and liberation from labor was the requisite condition for political participation. However, Marx challenged this traditional hierarchy by elevating labor to the highest level of human activity (*MCT*: 254). According to Arendt, Marx “reinterpreted of all human activities into laboring activities” and foresaw the time when nobody has any rights who is not a laborer (*MCT*: 249).

This prophecy would be summed up in the slogan, “Those who do not work shall not eat.” The phrase was not invented by Marx, but was originally a New Testament aphorism by Paul the Apostle and was later cited by Vladimir Lenin during the early Russian Revolution. Lenin wrote in *The State and Revolution*, “The socialist principle, ‘He who does not work shall not eat,’ is already realized; the other socialist principle, ‘An equal amount of products for an equal amount of labor,’ is also already realized.” (Lenin 1993: 85). This is what Nazism and Stalinism abused in their ideologies. They construed this slogan as meaning that all men who do not (cannot) work shall not eat and should be punished (or killed) because they are idle parasites.

Nazi and Soviet concentration camps proclaimed that they would “educate,” “correct” and “cure” the “idle” prisoners by enforcing severe labor. We can interpret these camps as extensions of Victorian workhouses or poorhouses in England in the 19th century, which were intended to provide work and shelter for poor people who had no means of supporting themselves (Foucault 2009: Ch. 2)⁹⁾. Jews were sent to concentration camps

8) Although she admits that “there is more direct connection between Marx and the Bolshevik domination ... than between Nazism and any of its so-called predecessors” (*MCT*: 247), she rejects this criticism as too simplistic to grasp the essence of the problem. She asserts that “it could never have been foreseen or forethought, much less predicted or ‘caused,’ by any single man” (*MCT*: 251).

9) Foucault discusses the emergence of poorhouses and workhouses in the 16th and 17th centuries as follows. “This complex unity brings together a new sensibility to poverty and the duty to relieve it, new forms of reaction to the economic problems of unemployment and idleness, a new work ethic, and the dream of a city

charged for being lazy greedy parasites, although this is an unreasonable labeling. Here the slogan, “He who does not labor shall not eat” was (ab)used to justify the interning of Jews and rebels into concentration camps and enforcing them to labor there until they died.

Although Arendt does not directly refer to these historical examples, we can understand the significance of Arendt’s indication that Marx’s thoughts were (ab)used in totalitarian policy. She interprets Marx’s glorification of labor as misapplied in the vindication of the Nazi and Soviet regimes. In concluding her drafts of Marx, she again writes, “... we see today in the totalitarian laws that non-laborers have not even the right to stay alive the least objectionable and the most modern and acceptable feature of this newest form of government” (*MCT*: 412). In Arendt’s view, Marx did not invent totalitarianism, but his thoughts on glorifying labor paved the way toward it. Marx’s challenge to tradition predicts the advent of a totalitarian society.

4. The Victory of the *Animal Laborans*

Arendt’s veiled thoughts regarding labor and totalitarianism also can be seen in her 1953 essay “Ideology and Terror” written around the same time as “Karl Marx and the Western Tradition of Political Thought.” Here, Arendt’s analysis of totalitarianism had deepened through her critical examination of Marx. This essay is included in the 2nd edition of *The Origins of Totalitarianism* published in 1958, the same year as *The Human Condition*. It suggests that we can also see “Ideology and Terror” as the bridge that connects her two major books, alongside labor and totalitarianism.

In this essay, Arendt underscores that totalitarianism is an entirely novel and unprecedented form of governance, distinct from traditional tyranny, despotism, or dictatorship. Unlike tyranny, which arbitrarily defies all laws, totalitarianism is far from “lawless,” despite it is tempted to interpret it as a modern tyranny characterized by lawlessness. In fact, totalitarian rule adheres to suprahuman forces such as the laws of Nature or History, endeavoring to actualize them. Therefore, it can be viewed as a form of highly lawful domination. Ideology, whether it be antisemitism or Bolshevism, serves as the law of the totalitarian movement, while terror executes the judgements of the law. The following statement is indicative of her critical study of Marx. “The ‘natural’ laws of the survival of the fittest is just as much a historical law and could be used as such by racism as Marx’s law of the survival of the most progressive class” (*OT*: 463). Totalitarian movement driven by ideology and terror attempts to annihilate spontaneity and plurality, and to transform plural men into One Man abolishing the spaces between men. “By pressing men against each other, total error destroys the spaces between them” (*OT*: 466).

where moral obligations go hand in hand with civic duties, all held together by the authoritarian forms of constraint”. (Foucault 2009: 53)

Arendt argues that while tyrannical rule is based on isolation, totalitarian rule is based on loneliness. While isolation is the mode of being alone in work, which fabricates durable things and creates the world as a human artifice, loneliness is the mode of being alone in labor, which produces necessary things for life itself. While “man remains in contact with the world as a human artifice” in isolation, loneliness is “the common ground for terror, the essence of totalitarian government.” When isolated man is no longer recognized as *homo faber* but treated as an *animal laborans*, he will be “deserted by the world of things” as well as the political realm (OT: 475). When “chief values are dictated by labor” and “all human activities have been transformed into laboring”, isolation becomes loneliness, and “tyranny based on isolation” turns into “tyranny over laborers,” which automatically becomes a “rule over lonely men” and tends to be totalitarian (ibid.). Here, it is evident that Arendt is actively seeking to establish a connection between labor and totalitarianism¹⁰⁾.

She continues that “loneliness, the common ground for terror, [...] is closely connected with uprootedness and superfluosity which have been the curse of modern masses since the beginning of the industrial revolution (OT: 475). “To be uprooted means to have no place in the world” and “to be superfluous means not to belong to the world at all” and “uprootedness can be the preliminary condition for superfluosity.” These features are precisely identified with characteristics of *animal laborans* in *The Human Condition*.

Although Arendt does not refer directly to totalitarianism in *The Human Condition*, she leaves several statements suggesting that labor societies lead to totalitarianism, which can be found in the final chapter entitled “The Victory of the *Animal Laborans*.”

The last stage of laboring society, the society of jobholders, demands of its members a sheer automatic functioning, as though individual life had been submerged in the overall life process of the species and the only active decision still required of the individual were to let go, so to speak, to abandon his individuality . . . and acquiesce in a dead ‘tranquilized,’ functional type of behavior. (HC: 322)

In the last stage of the laboring society—the society of jobholders—people must abandon individuality and participate in sheer automatic functioning, “as though individual life had actually been submerged in the overall life process of the species” (ibid.). This is a decisive step toward a totalitarian society.¹¹⁾ In such a laboring society, “What was left

10) Morikawa Terukazu points out, the philistines “who thought of nothing but safeguarding their private lives” have become the main supporters of Nazism (Morikawa 2010: 241-242). Arendt describes, “For the ruthless machines of domination and extermination, the masses of co-ordinated philistines provided much better material and were capable of even greater crimes than so-called professional criminals, provided only that these crimes were well organized and assumed the appearance of routine jobs” (OT: 337).

11) In “Organized Guilt and Universal Responsibility” (1945), Arendt suggests that Himmler, who was a

was a ‘natural force,’ the force of the life process itself, to which all men and all human activities were equally submitted . . . and whose only aim . . . was [the] survival of man” (*HC*: 321). This description inevitably evokes parallels with the descriptions found in the previously cited in the origins of Totalitarianism. Under mass society and a totalitarian government, humans lose their plurality and spontaneity, and submit to automatic movement and absolute power. “Individual life became part of the life process, and to labor, to assure the continuity of one’s own life and the life of his family, was all that was needed” (*ibid.*). For Arendt, this serves as a “serious danger that humans may be willing to develop into animalistic species (*HC*: 322).

Canovan accurately summarizes what I have described thus far. According to her, Arendt suggests that “people in modern times may be vulnerable to ‘loneliness,’ and therefore to totalitarianism, because of a gradual shift in the balance of activities as a result of which ‘all human activities have been transformed into laboring.’ Labor simultaneously locks each individual inside his own private experience of material life and turns the mass of individuals into a socialized man, a species that behaves as one. In combination, these characteristics make laborers ideal subjects for totalitarianism” (Canovan 1992: 93).

Likewise, Dana Villa maintains, “Arendt’s indictment of the ‘laboring society’ in *The Human Condition* seems to place her in the company of such totalizing critics of capitalist modernity” (Villa 1999: 188).¹²⁾ Canovan and Villa acknowledge the intimate connection between a laboring society and a totalitarian society, grasping the nuances implied by Arendt, although she did not explicitly articulate them.

5. Beyond Arendt’s misunderstanding of Marx

Finally, I will comment on Arendt’s misreading of Marx.

Many scholars have argued that Arendt misunderstood many of Marx’s points, as is particularly evident in her interpretation of Marx’s theory of labor.

Firstly, Marx never defined human beings as *animal laborans* [laboring animals]. Although Arendt argued that Marx’s insistence that “labor is the creator of man” was a revolutionary challenge to the Western tradition, Marx never made such a claim in his texts. Marx contends in *Capital* that animals, like humans, produce “their means of subsistence (Marx 1991: Ch.7).” The distinction between humans and animals lies not in

bourgeois with an outer aspect of respectability, has built up the newest terror organization, on the assumption that “most people are not Bohemians nor fanatics, nor adventurers, nor sex maniacs, nor sadists, but first and foremost jobholders, and good family men” (*EU*: 128).

12) Dana Villa also notes, “Both totalitarianism and modern technological capitalism, with its transformation of man into the *animal laborans*, do their utmost to swamp this artifice in processes of destruction or reproduction” (Villa 1999: 188). I suggest that her critical attitude toward laboring society corresponds to Marx’s indictment of capitalism society.

the act of laboring for survival, which is common to both, but in the manner of creation. Humans engage in purposeful labor by utilizing imagination before creation, whereas animals instinctively create without imagination. This implies that human labor is executed rationally and with intention, aligning closely with Arendt's concept of work¹³⁾ (Momoki 2018). Citing Marx, Arendt noted that "they [men] begin to distinguish themselves from animals as soon as they begin to produce their means of subsistence, a step which is conditioned by their physical organization" (Marx 1998: 37). However, Marx uses the word *Production* in Germany, not *Arbeit* [labor]. Marx's conception of *Production* comprises both labor and work, which create not only life's necessities but also durable things (Sayers 2007, Holman 2011).

Second, as Bikhu Parekh and Christopher Holman point out, Arendt's labor and Marx's *Arbeit* fundamentally differ, and the latter includes aspects of all three activities that Arendt conceptualized: labor, work, and action (Parekh 1977, Holman 2011). For Marx, *Arbeit* produces the materials needed to sustain life, construct a world of objects, and communicate with others. Parekh and Holman also argued that Arendt's sense of labor is similar to Marx's notion of "alienated labor," but she does not adequately distinguish between Marx's ideas of alienated labor in capitalist societies and non-alienated labor in future communist societies.

Third, it is not accurate that Marx "dignified labor" and "reinterpreted all human activity as laboring activity." Although Marx indeed regarded labor as a central human activity and reinterpreted human history, in *Capital* vol. 3 he describes that "the realm of freedom actually begins only where labor which is determined by necessity and external expediency ends" (Marx 1993: 958-959). While Arendt posits that Marx contends "not freedom but compulsion makes man human," Marx himself argues that human freedom emerges only after the cessation of labor driven by necessity. In other words, Marx envisioned human freedom not in labor, but in activities other than labor¹⁴⁾. According to him, "the true realm of freedom, the development of human powers as an end in itself, begins beyond the realm of necessity" (Marx 1993: 959).

Nevertheless, I maintain that Arendt's misinterpretations of Marx's labor theory do not diminish the value of her critiques and the theories influenced by those criticisms. From my perspective, the importance of Arendt's critique of Marx can be underscored by exploring the link between labor and totalitarianism. It is essential to further develop this theory's potential by transcending Arendt's misconceptions about Marx. Weisman states, "Looking backward from the Marx Project toward *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, when comparing Marx's discussions of human superfluity in *Capital* with Arendt's discussion of

13) Arendt herself admits, "Marx no longer speaks of labor but of work—something with which he is not concerned" (HC: 99).

14) As Weisman argues, Arendt should have addressed that fact that Marx himself did not theorize human existence in terms of animal necessity (Weisman 2014: 147).

the role of superfluous humans in totalitarianism, it is difficult to avoid noting the similarities” (Weisman 2014:143). We should synthesize Arendt’s critique of totalitarianism with Marx’s critique of capitalism, using the concept of labor as a bridge. Such integration promises to offer valuable insights into contemporary society.

6. Conclusion

Almost only in the first draft of “Karl Marx and the Tradition of Western Political Thought” did Arendt touch on the relationship between labor and totalitarianism. Subsequent drafts shifted her focus toward broader review of Western political intellectual traditions. In her later works, Arendt did not explicitly address this relationship, although there are implications that mass society in the era of “the triumph of *animal laborans*” provided fertile ground for totalitarianism’s rise. Despite numerous scholars referencing Arendt’s criticism of Marx since the publication of her drafts, few have explored the close association between labor and totalitarianism. In this paper, I endeavor to develop the potential of this theme, which Arendt herself had not fully explored.

To clarify, I do not suggest that all labor inherently leads to totalitarianism or that all workers support it. Totalitarian regimes often exploit labor as a tool for national unity, leveraging slogans such as, “He who does not labor shall not eat.” In this sense, Marx’s theory was abused. Arendt did not claim that Marx’s thought is totalitarian. Her contention is that, while Marx’s ideas were misused by totalitarian regimes, his concepts contributed to the emergence of a society of laborers, creating fertile ground for the growth of totalitarianism.

This theme is not limited to 20th-century totalitarianism and is relevant to contemporary political crises. Jason Stanley underscores that the “hard work” versus “laziness” dichotomy was, like “law-abiding” versus “criminal,” at the heart of the fascist division between “us” and “them in 1930s Germany.” And “what is most terrifying about these rhetorical divides is that it is typical of fascist movements to attempt to transform myths about ‘them’ into reality through social policy” (Stanley 2018: Ch.10). Stanley proceeds to cite Arendt’s descriptions, highlighting that hallmark fascist propaganda was “not satisfied with lying but deliberately proposed to transform its lies into reality.” (EU: 147). This analysis is relevant to contemporary populist movements such as Trumpism.

In conclusion, I believe that we can apply Arendt’s thought on labor and totalitarianism not only to Nazism and Stalinism, but also to other historical and contemporary societies, including our neoliberal economic system. For example, Zygmunt Bauman suggests that a new work ethic that excludes non-working, unemployed, and superfluous people from society has appeared in neoliberal economy (Bauman 2005), and Patrick Hayden suggests that these exclusions can be transformed into a new totalitarian ideology (Hayden 2009). Further contemplation is necessary for this subject, considering its diverse historical context.

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