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## MIGRACIJA I AKUMULACIJA KAPITALA

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### **CAPITAL ACCUMULATION AND THE IMPORT OF LABOUR A REVIEW OF SOME MARXIST POSITIONS IN THE 1970'S**

AKUMULACIJA KAPITALA I UVOZ RADA  
PREGLED NEKIH MARKSISTIČKIH POZICIJA U 1970-im GOD.

#### SAŽETAK

U ovom radu autor razmatra marksistička gledišta o ulozi rezervne armije imigrantske radne snage u odnosu na akumulaciju kapitala u Zapadnoj Evropi. Teorije Clauda Meillassoux, Andréa Gorza, Mariosa Nikolinakosa, Adriane Marshall, Stephana Castlesa i Godule Cosack podvrgnute su kritičkoj analizi. Autor tvrdi da većina marksističkih promatrača podržava gledište da je kontradiktorni položaj radnika imigranata u smislu rezervne armije rada osnova za njihovu ambivalentnu ulogu u ekonomskoj i političkoj klasnoj borbi, ali da ipak postoji neslaganje gledišta u strukturalnom tumačenju ovog položaja. Nastoji se dokazati da je neslaganje posljedica uopćavanja osnovana na promatranju različitih dijelova zapadnoevropske društvene stvarnosti. Autor razrađuje ovu argumentaciju u odnosu na dva evropska konteksta — prvo, kontekst Savezne Republike Njemačke i Nizozemske; drugo, slučaj Francuske.

Until approximately 1975 Marxist migration research in Europe dealt with questions of migration and the integration of immigrants in terms of three main themes. The first attempted to define the structural economic preconditions for the transfer of labour from the European periphery to the Western European industrial centers. The second focused on emigration as a structural element in the development of underdevelopment in the donor countries. The third was preoccupied with problems of structural integration of immigrants in Western Europe. This included studies of the general living conditions of immigrants, discussions about their position as a reserve army of labour and the role which this reserve army was seen to play in relation to capital accumulation and to the class-struggle in Western European societies.

This paper reviews some Marxist standpoints from the beginning of the 1970's dealing with the role of the reserve army of immigrant labour in relation to processes of capital accumulation. A contradictory position of immigrant workers defined as a reserve army was by most writers understood as the basis for an ambiguous role in the economic and political class struggle. However, there was considerable disagreement about how to define this position in structural terms. We shall discuss some positions in the Marxist debate on the subject and attempt to clarify conflicting views on the background of historical-structural conditions in some Western European societies. We argue that at least some of the theoretical disagreement, which could be discerned in the debate during the early 1970's could be attributed to the fact that different authors tended to derive their generalizations from observations of different parts of Western European social reality.

### Immigrants as a Reserve Army — Some Marxist Positions

Before the Second World War and especially before the First World War migrant workers in Western Europe were used by capital as a directly wage-depressing reserve-army, openly manipulated to infer competition upon the indigenous working class. A number of scholars are of the opinion that this wage-depressing role was one of the main functions of the import of labour even during the 1960's and 1970's (Cf. Cinanni 1969; Geiselberger 1972; Person 1972; Gorz 1970; Meillassoux 1975).

A special version of the theory of the wage-depressing function of migrant workers was put forward by the French social anthropologist, Claude Meillassoux in his book, *Femmes, greniers et capitaux* (1975).

According to Meillassoux, migrant workers form one pole of a labour market split into two sectors each with its own level of wages and reproductive base. One sector of the labour market with a relatively high wage level is reserved to the indigenous Western European working class, the total reproduction of which is paid by capital. The other sector is dominated by migrant workers from South European marginal areas and earlier Western European colonies or semicolonies. Within this sector the level of wages can be kept much lower, Meillassoux argues, due to the social background of the migrant workers as peasantworkers (*paysans-proletaires*), who can be doomed to a lifelong process of »cyclical migration« (*migration tournante*) between their regions of origin in the capitalist periphery and the destination areas in the capitalist industrial centres of Western Europe. Hereby the migrant workers supply capital with a »free rent«, coming into existence by the fact that the labour power of the migrant workers is partly reproduced within non-capitalist enclaves in their countries of origin. Non-capitalist production covers the major share of the »production costs« for new workers — i.e. the reproduction of the family.

The dual labour market and political-ideological cleavages between the stabilized indigenous proletariat and the migrant workers are reproduced by capital and the state through a number of means; i.e. oppressive immigration laws, racist campaigns in mass-media etc. The so-called »principle of rotation« means that migrant workers are driven back to their countries of origin through the application of various compulsory means after an average sojourn of 2—3 years in the center. They are later allowed to reenter on short-term permits or are replaced by term newcomers, who are foreign to French culture, labour union traditions etc.

André Groz (1970) also stressed the dichotomization of the labour market as being the main function of the import of labour. The migrant workers are to Western Europe what the black proletariat is to the United States, Gorz argues. Through the import of labour to Western Europe a considerable part of the indigenous Western European proletariat was replaced by an imported proletariat, which was to lead a marginalized existence economically and culturally, deprived of political, professional and civic rights. This has effects of a fundamental character for the Western European bourgeoisies, in a political as well as economic sense. According to Gorz, the import of labour weakens the unity and the strength of political action of the working class as a whole, creating simultaneously a petty bourgeois mentality:

»Recourse to foreign workers leads, in particular, to the exclusion of an important part of the proletariat from trade union action; a considerable decrease in the political and electoral weight of the working class; a still

more considerable weakening of its ideological force and cohesion ... for the obverse of the subtraction of indigenous workers from manual jobs is their displacement elsewhere; to diminish the »national« working class by 20 per cent is to »promote« that number of workers into tertiary and technical activities; to depreciate the social and economic value of manual work and manual workers as a whole; to deepen the separation between manual work and technical, intellectual and tertiary work; to *inflate* correspondingly the social and political importance of the »middle strata«, and by racist and chauvinist propaganda, to encourage backward elements in the »national« working class to identify ideologically with the petty-bourgeoisie« (Gorz 1970).

Economically the marginalization of a definite fraction of the working class is an absolute structural necessity for a continued existence of capitalist society, Gorz maintains. In the early 1970's immigrant workers in Western Europe on the average made up twenty percent of all manual workers. They concentrated in economic branches and enterprises characterized by exhausting, dirty and health endangering jobs, and were paid minimal wages. If these jobs were to be performed by Western European workers, labour should be paid at its historical value, Gorz argues.

But to pay labour in the industrial core areas of Western Europe according to its historical value would, according to Gorz, be a structural impossibility in a capitalist society:

»... the payment of this manual labour-power at its historical value — the price that would prevail on the labour market if the criteria of capitalist society were themselves fulfilled — is a structural impossibility for this society... The maintenance of the social hierarchy, and thereby the survival of bourgeois society and its mode of domination, depend on the possibility of *excluding* from this civilization and its labour market a decisive fraction of the working class« (Gorz 1970).

A stop of the import of labour would not mean, however, that indigenous workers could be employed for higher wages, Gorz continues. It would rather lead to a fundamental disturbance of the economic, political and social equilibrium of capitalist society — a general crisis for the capitalist system as such.

A political declaration of solidarity with migrant workers does not simply mean to pose demands for »decent« wages and conditions of living. It would as a matter of necessity imply ...

»... a total challenge to the social hierarchy and type of civilization that are only made possible by the superexploitation of immigrants« (Gorz 1970).

In opposition to scholars, who place the emphasis on the wage-depressing function of migrant workers, generally or in relation to definite sectors, the Greek economist, Marios Nikolinakos in his book, *Politische Ökonomie der Gastarbeiterfrage* (1973) maintained that the import of labour is in the long run a basis for rising wages. By supplying capital with a mobile reserve army of labour, which can be applied in production when and where it is needed, the import of labour secures stability in continued accumulation. Through the maintenance of a stable and high rate of accumulation, a future rationalization and

rise of productivity is made possible, which in the longer run is the only basis for a rising wage-level in the economy as a whole.

A similar point of view was elaborated by the economist Adriana Marshall in her book *The Import of Labour* (1973). The employment of migrant labour has mainly been relevant to the more traditional, labour intensive branches of industry, Marshall argues. Marshall does not regard these branches from a static point of view and does not find any theoretical or historical reason to universalize the existence or the necessity of a permanent sector of depressed wages as Gorz does, for instance. The employment of immigrants in the traditional, relatively labour intensive branches has, besides providing an easily mobile, flexible labour force, the merits of keeping wages *relatively* low. The purpose of this is to prevent a *too quick* expansion of real wages, whereby these industries gain time and capital for an extended implementation of new labour saving and more productive techniques. As such, the import of labour can be regarded as one of the preconditions for a rising productivity, an increase of relative surplus value, and on the basis of this, in turn create possibilities to raise the level of real income. For this reason the import of labour has as a rule taken place in more or less concordance with the trade unions. Marshall stresses that the function of migrant workers as a reserve army should not be seen on the background of the formal economic character of capital accumulation as such. Capital accumulation is a social process determined by the concrete, historical forms of organization and relationships of forces between capital and labour within various social formations. Essential for a determination of the effects of employment of foreign labour on wages is to establish to which extent trade unions are politically able to secure a regulation of the import of labour as a *socially controlled process* and to which degree working class organizations are able to solve the question of integrating migrant workers into the class-struggle, once they become enrolled into the total army of labour within the centers.

On the surface it *appears* as if Castles and Cosack (1972) arrive at a similar conclusion. But they do not manage to mediate between seemingly structural incompatibilities. On one hand Castles and Cosack analyze the import of labour as a direct tool of capital in the class struggle. By importing immigrant labour, capital endeavours to split up the working class (by putting against one another indigenous and foreign workers). Migrant workers are accredited with a clear and simple wage-depressing function by the two authors. At the same time, however, it is maintained that a part of the extra-profits realized by the employment of immigrant labour is applied for »bribing« an indigenous labour aristocracy to enter an opportunistic and short-sighted alliance with capital. By putting a brake on the rise of wages, migration becomes an essential precondition for capital-accumulation and thereby the development of the forces of production.

But on the other hand, the authors continue, wages can in the long run rise more in a country into which there is a continuous large-scale immigration than in a country where this is not the case, 'on account of the dynamic effect an increased capital accumulation has on productivity' (ibid). However, Castles and Cosack turn the import of labour into an independent variable, used for the construction of a monocausal explanation. This monocausal explanatory model is clearly exposed, when Castles and Cosack attempt to explain the difference in economic development in England and the Federal Republic of Germany with sole reference to the extent of the import of immigrant labour in the post war period.

»Germany has had large and continuous increases in labour force due to immigration. At first wages were held back. The resulting capital accumulation allowed fast growth and continuous rationalization. Britain has had virtually no growth in labour force due to migration (immigration has been cancelled out by emigration of British people to Australia, etc.) Every phase of expansion has collapsed rapidly as wages rose due to labour shortages. The long-term effect has been stagnation. By the sixties, German wages overtook those of Britain, while economic growth and rationalization continued at an almost undiminished rate« (ibid: 18).

Instead of looking for monocausal generalizations we suggest to investigate the structural specificities of each immigration country. By structural comparison we have arrived at the conclusion that the import of labour plays different roles in relation to capital accumulation, depending on the economic structure and the forms of class-struggle into which it enters as one of several factors. In the following we shall confront the referred views on the relationship between capital accumulation and import of labour with a provisory class analysis of two types of immigration countries on the European continent. We arrive at the conclusion that besides starting from alternative theoretical premises, these diverging theses dealing with the function and effects of the employment of migrant workers seem to be speculating about structurally dissimilar parts of Western European reality.

### The Case of Germany and the Netherlands

The two pieces of analyses referred to, made by Nikolinaikos (1973) and Marshall, are centered around the function of labour migration in the Federal Republic of Germany and the Netherlands respectively.

Within the Federal Republic of Germany immigrant workers have at an early date (the 1950's and the 1960's) formed a substantial part of the labour market. Whole branches became dependent upon the disposal of migrant workers. In the Netherlands large scale immigration was of a more recent date. However, the features of the immigration process as well as the two cited pieces of analyses, are similar in the two cases.

To more closely delimit the utility of the concept of the reserve army in the post war period I shall at some length address theoretical propositions in Marshall's study (1973).

In *Capital*, Karl Marx put forward his well known theory of the general trends of wage fluctuations in capitalist society. His »capitalist population law« was a theoretical conception of the dynamics of reproduction, expansion and contraction of the reserve army of labour, which would in turn have a decisive influence on wage fluctuations. But like other social laws, Marshall argues, the actual functioning of the law of population is socially determined; that it is dependent upon the actual socio-economic conditions within definite social formations and in relation to definite historical phases of capitalist development.

Marshall stresses the necessity to elaborate theoretically on Marx's law of population in order to reach a correct understanding of the function of migrant workers as a reserve army for West European capital in the 1960's and the 1970's.

During the post war period the struggles of unions in combination with the reorientation of capitalist monopolies towards class alliance (*Sozial-partnerschaft*) have partly been capable of breaking the negative consequences



of »the capitalist population law« on the formation of wages. This reorientation is among other things connected to an increased need for valorization (need for expanding markets) of the sector for production of consumers goods. This makes an unlimited use of wage-depressing means unfeasible for capital itself, at any case during periods of economic expansion. Moreover the general technical and social development in late capitalism demands a larger, well-educated, and increasingly qualified labour force, which in itself calls for a higher level of reproduction of labour. Likewise »full employment« is in principle, according to Keynesian logic, a valuable element in securing longer lasting periods of »maximal economic growth«. This implies at least partial approval by capital of increased state-intervention into the economy.

Secondly, capital has in the period since the Second World War, to a growing extent introduced new, more subtle repressive measures than manipulating the »population law«, in order to safeguard accumulation. Here belong measures such as policies of inflation, income policies etc., which complement and in some cases completely substitute the wage-controlling functions of the industrial reserve army.

Such economic conditions and class alliances have allowed a continuous growth of real income in Western Europe to follow pace with an increased productivity of labour. Extended accumulation of capital has through the major part of the post war period — if we look only at the period before 1975 — overstepped the average rise in productivity. This generated a steadily growing demand for fresh labour to the economy, which led to a depletion of domestic Western European labour reserves. During the early period following the Second World War, large scale labour recruitment has taken place from a modernizing Western European agriculture and from Western Europe's »internal periphery«; that is, economically stagnant regions within Western Europe itself. Later, most additional labour has been mobilized among Western European women, who formed a large potential reserve army of labour. These groups were drawn into production as far as this was possible and feasible under prevailing economic as well as social conditions in the individual Western European countries.

This increased demand for labour cannot simply be attributed to the expansion of Western European industry during the long periods of »sustained growth« in the 1950's and 1960's. In order to understand the background of large scale import of labour from external sources, that is, large scale immigration during the 1960's and early 1970's, it is important to understand that structural transformations in patterns of employment acted to make labour shortage for industry acute. This is connected with rapid expansion of tertiary activities and public administration. The expansion of these alternative occupational sectors is in turn tightly connected to a rapidly increasing productivity and to qualitatively transformed production processes in the economy. Rising productivity implied consequent problems of the valorization of capital, calling in turn for the expansion of new economic sectors attached to advertisement, marketing, banking etc., and for the rise of a ramified system of public institutions which have become a necessity for highly developed market economies with widespread state intervention. Moreover, a growing socialization of processes of labour reproduction, through expansion of the system of education, and growth in the quantity and quality of institutions for children and adolescents, which was connected with the entry of women into the labour market, induced significant expansion of new types of employment in the social services.

On the basis of continuous expanded reproduction and qualitative transformations in the economy a marked »scarcity of labour power« developed du-

ring the 1960's in most of the leading industrial countries of Western Europe. However, scarcity of labour power is always, Marshall argues, scarcity in a *relative* sense. Scarcity in the labour supply is relative, because it should be analyzed in relation to both the rate of accumulation and to the »normal« functions of a relative surplus population under capitalism — not in relation to the *total* army of labour or its biological reproduction. A relative lack of labour power can very well manifest itself together with a rapidly growing working population, if ...

»... the labour reserves are nearly depleted, open unemployment is very small, and the rate of capital accumulation is even more rapid than the rate of growth of the labour force and the rate of growth of labour productivity ... There is scarcity of labour ... when workers cannot be *rapidly* incorporated into production (this is scarcity in the strict sense), or when workers can be found and employed, but only at the expense of a *significant* rise in the level of wages (this is scarcity in the broader sense). This lattercase of »scarcity« can coincide with the moment ...« when inflation begins, because a change in the distribution of income is not permitted by the capitalists, who feed the increase in wages totally or partially to prices (since the defensive mechanism of a large scale recreation of the reserve army is no longer possible« (Marshall 1973 : 12).

If the position of trade unions in the economic class struggle is strong in a situation of full employment or shortage of labour, real wages might rise faster than productivity — in spite of income policy and inflation policy — thereby putting a break on further accumulation. In such situations a scarcity of labour power has occurred »in the broader sense«. In other words it is no longer possible to recruit new members for the process of production without threatening the profits of certain sectors by *too sudden* rises in the wage level, i.e. if workers are to be recruited to these sectors of the system of production from internal labour reserves. Likewise this could infer too large costs on capital as a totality (via the state) when, for instance, more public institutions for child care and socialization would need to be quickly erected, supposing that added numbers of women were suddenly to be drawn into the labour market. Recruiting excessive amounts of labour from internal peripheral regions would in turn mean increasing »internal underdevelopment« by a massive exodus of local populations to industrial centers. Thus such regions would in the longer run lose their value as markets and objects of investment for capital, if they partly or totally depleted of their human resources.

A short-sighted alternative in this situation, Marshall argues, was for capital to intensify the import of foreign labour. As a drop in accumulation and possible recessions could mean a drop in working class income, the trade unions have normally accepted a *controlled import* of labour in this case. Thus the unions expected to reap their share of added value in favour of the working class in the event of renewed economic expansion and increased wages.

Marshall argues that labour substitution (rationalization, the introduction of new technology etc.) could never be an *immediate* alternative to the import of labour. Labour substitution demands long term development of new techniques and methods of organization and new technologies which cannot be invented and applied immediately according to often unpredictable fluctuations of market opportunities, rhythms of business cycles etc. Thus the import of labour represents »a buffer of economic cycles«, which can be used in order to accumulate time and capital for more long-sighted development and investment strategies.

Although the conceptions of Marshall have a clear applicability to the post-war development of all highly industrial countries of Western Europe, her propositions are, according to our opinion, *most generally valid* in the case of countries like Holland, the Federal Republic of Germany and Sweden. These countries are characterized by a strong position of advanced monopoly capital — i.e. multinational companies, which dominate the reproduction of the economy as a whole. This means among other things:

- 1) An absolute and relative increase of the monopolized sector.
- 2) An intensified exploitation of labour marked by the increased share of relative surplus value in the accumulation process as a whole.
- 3) An increased elimination of backward capitalist enterprises and the traditional petty bourgeoisie.

In these countries stability in the processes of monopolization were secured through *Sozialpartnerschaft* between monopoly capital and strong reformist working class movements.

The model of capital accumulation and the import of labour presented by Marshall is, as a matter of fact, a reflection of the long period of relatively stable and accelerating accumulation, which characterized Western European capitalism through most of the post-war time. It does not however explain the role of migrants as a reserve army in a situation of economic crisis. Thus the group of authors in *Schwarzbuch: Ausländische Arbeiter* (Geiselerberger ed. 1972) argue that the wage-depressing function of labour import remains relatively veiled in periods of high conjuncture, but comes into the open in the case of recession or crisis.

This seems to be a valid point of view — with some modification. By insisting on a controlled import of labour the trade unions have been able to ensure that the wage-depressing function of immigrant labour has been kept at a level acceptable to the working class, and the import of labour has in the long run even been conceptualized as a growth and income-sustaining device. However, it is evident that the possibility of control over the function of this internationally mobile reserve army decreases in the event of a large scale structurally induced rise in unemployment as has been seen since the middle of the 1970's all over Europe. In this situation unemployed foreign workers together with indigenous workers swell a growing reserve army, making up a convenient background for a tightened income-policy as one of the elements of crisis-management.

On the other hand, the degree to which a growing reserve-army will manifest itself in decreasing wage levels is dependent upon a number of social factors: forms and degree of organization among indigenous as well as migrant workers within the sectors which employ migrant labour, as well as organizational integration and solidarity within the working class organizations as a whole.

At the same time it is important not to plunge into the pitfall of arguing that a *massive* production and reproduction of a reserve army of labour is in the unambiguous interest of capital. Under the ruling conditions of the social contract, this means the unproductive drainage of the system for unemployment benefits and social welfare, as well as the multiplication of »social problems« and social »deviation«, which in the last instance threatens to question the very ideological foundations of bourgeois society (Gorz 1980). In periods of economic crisis and reconstruction it is definitely in the interest of capital to maintain a reserve army that puts pressure on the work-force as a whole, but not to such a degree that it could threaten the control over the processes of material production and social reproduction as such. Thus it is important for capital



to keep the reserve army at a certain optimal level and condition depending on the prevailing specific conditions of accumulation and the relationships of forces in the class struggle. One element in such a policy of regulation has been to send back a certain part of the unemployed migrant workers to their countries of origin. This happened in Germany during the recession of 1967—68 and again after 1973 in connection with accelerated structural transformation of the economy and a rapid and uncontrolled expansion of the reserve army of labour.

### The Case of France

I have briefly presented the theory of Claude Meillassoux (Meillassoux 1975) concerning the importance of migration and the employment of migrant labour for capitalism; for Meillassoux this is synonymous with CMP, the Capitalist Mode of Production. To recapitulate the central argument, Meillassoux argued that the level of wages in a sector of the labour market (in the capitalist periphery or in certain parts of the center states) should be kept below the actual value of labour power. This is, according to Meillassoux, an absolute precondition for the survival of CMP. Hereby capital obtains a »free rent«. The origin of this rent is to be found in non-capitalist systems of production in the countries or areas of destination of migrants — i.e. kin or family—based production systems categorized under the heading of »the domestic mode of production« (*la mode de production domestique*). This rent is necessary for capital by nature of the essential structure of CMP as such, which allows only the reproduction of the individual labourer himself during the span of time he is actually working for the capitalist. The non-capitalist rent must therefore compensate for the reproduction of the labourer during the time, when he is not directly working as well as for the total socio-biological reproduction of the working class as such. Through imperialist bonds of domination, extra profits are extracted from underpaid migrant workers, in order to bribe a Western European labour aristocracy whose labour, implicated by the specific logic of Meillassoux's argument, is being paid over its actual value. The reproduction of most of the Western European proletariat takes place within the orbit of a »domestic« type of social relationships only to a marginal degree, that is within the modern nuclear working class family is stripped of most of its productive functions.

It ought to be evident to everybody who is acquainted with Marxist political economy, or who commands a bit of common sense, that the argument which Meillassoux here brings to the fore does not hold as a kind of »law« valid for capitalism in a structural and general historical sense. But the argument nevertheless shelters a rational nucleus. A certain sector of the French economy is marked by the existence of low-productive enterprises and workshops; that is with a productivity markedly below that of the French and the Western European average.<sup>1</sup> These enterprises lack economic potential for an increase of the technical composition of capital. Therefore they are increasingly forced, in a period of intensified technological competition, to sell their products below their value upon a marginal market. Their very existence is dependent on the condition that the level of wages in one sector of the labour market could be kept on a minimal level — a level markedly below the average level of wages for proletarianized labour in France.

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<sup>1</sup> For a detailed analysis of the development in post-war French labour market, class struggle migration see Lefebvre 1980.

The enterprises and workshops, farms etc., have earlier to a marked degree subsisted upon the employment of semiproletarianized indigenous labour (peasant-workers). Through the progressing proletarianization of labour and by the advancement of other sections of French capitalism, these have by and large been made dependent upon extremely low-paid labour imported from the periphery of the capitalist system — most often »peasant-workers« from earlier French colonies in Africa.

It is the existence of substantial stratas of such marginal enterprises (owned by certain fractions of the French bourgeoisie and petty bourgeoisie) which makes up the structural and material background for the presence of the markedly »super-exploited« part of the working class. This section of the working class consists of immigrant workers, whose labour is reproduced at a level far below the present historical value of labour in France — even down to the margin of mere physical subsistence.

This is as a matter of fact approaching a situation similar to the one Meillassoux describes (and then tries to generalize): Capital sustains the reproduction of the labourer only during the time when the labourer is directly working for capital. But this is not due to any *essential* characteristic of CMP as such. It is the way the marginal economic level of the French economy compensates for the fact that it has to sell its commodities at a price undercutting the actual costs of production — if these had to be fully paid according to the present historically derived claims and needs of the French working class at large. This happens through a *de facto* appropriation of a »non-capitalist rent«. A complementary reproduction of labour takes place outside the orbit of CMP in the centers — in the context of non — capitalist production relations in the migrants' countries of origin.

But the attempt of Claude Meillassoux to *generalize* these conditions as *the function, the rationality* of labour migration from periphery to center as a whole is not historic and non-realistic. First, it veils the historical fact that a large part of the workers, who are recruited as migrant workers, actually have their origin among the fully *proletarianized* working population in their home-countries — either as members of the active army of workers or of the reserve army of marginally employed in the town. Second, the value of labour is essentially historically determined and cannot be defined economically by reference to an invariant structure of the CMP — whatever this structure is arrived at in an essentialist or empiricist way (as in the case of Meillassoux).<sup>2</sup>

This represents an economistic and static conception of the value of labour. However, it functions to provide Meillassoux with a basis for postulating that when the labour of migrant workers is *generally* paid at a lower price than that of indigenous workers, then the necessary extra reproduction cost must come from somewhere else — that is, from somewhere else than CMP — which could only be non-capitalist »domestic« production systems.

The theoretical untenability of the argument ought to be clear. As to its empirical bearing in connection with the employment of immigrant labour in France it has actually only been a certain stratum of immigrant workers in France, who have been employed within the marginal sector of the French economy. The majority of immigrant workers in the 1960's and 1980's worked within capitalist large scale industry and within municipal services. Wage and working conditions were and are usually stipulated through agreements between unions and employers. Wages were generally lower than wages for the same work in,

<sup>2</sup> See a detailed outline of Meillassoux' argument in Schierup 1977. and a Critique of his major propositions.

for example, the Federal Republic of Germany and in some specific instances wages came close to those in marginal enterprises. Mostly, however, the wages of migrants come close to or oscillate around the historical value of labour power in France.<sup>3</sup>

As a whole, the material buying power of the wages of immigrant workers in France, and in other Western European countries, when transferred to the countries of origin of the migrants, covers several times over the historically established costs of reproduction of fully proletarianized labour in the countries in the capitalist periphery, from where the immigrant workers originate. The historically constituted material level of reproduction of labour is in other words lower in the periphery than within the centres.

This is also valid for those immigrant workers, who originate in the semi-proletarianized peasant-population of the periphery. These as well, through the wages they acquire within the centres, are made able to reproduce themselves (as labour power) at a material level, much higher than the established level of reproduction in the areas of origin.

To discuss why immigrant workers are often willing and able to sell their labour at a lower price than the historical value of labour in the centres, it is theoretically essential to depart from the historically established level of reproduction and the concrete historical conditions of reproduction of labour in the periphery, and not from the assumed so-called »partial reproduction« under non-capitalist conditions.

An understanding of the conditions of the reproduction of labour power and its effects upon the material level of reproduction of labour within the periphery should rest on an analysis of the class struggle and its historical conditions and background within the various social formations in the periphery. It cannot be stressed enough that the position and role of immigrant workers in the class struggle of *the centres* can in no way be *deduced* from their level of material reproduction within the periphery. Nevertheless, this is an essential part of the background for specific ideological and political elements which the immigrant reserve army introduces into the Western European class struggles, once they become enrolled in Western European labour markets and working classes.

We shall not go into detail discussing Meillassoux' interpretation of the function of migrant labour in Western Europe (for this see Schierup 1977). Instead we propose a structural delimitation of what we have called the *rational nucleus* of his speculations — i. e. the existence of a specific marginal level within the economic structure of the French social formation where labour power as a *matter of necessity* must be paid at a level, where its full costs of reproduction are not covered.

To arrive at a more complete understanding of the perspectives for the marginal level of the economy as well as for the function of the employment of migrant labour as a whole, we must try to embrace conceptually French capitalism as a structural totality. For historical reasons France, among other factors due to its colonialist past and present, is characterized by other types of relationships among dominating fractions of the bourgeoisie than in the case of, for example, the Federal Republic of Germany.

Finance capital, establishing itself firmly during the colonialist past, still holds a relatively strong position in relation to state capital connected with the

<sup>3</sup> According to Lefebvre (1980:71) the average wage difference between French indigenous and migrant workers was 17% by the mid-seventies.

state bureaucracy and highly monopolized capital represented by the technocracy of modern expanding multinational companies.<sup>4</sup> The relatively strong position of finance capital and its (to a large degree) speculative character has put a brake on concentration and centralization of productive capital in France, which has been relatively subordinated within the framework of interimperialist rivalry in the post war period; i.e. being a »second rank« capitalist center. Connected to this selective integration/elimination of intermediate capital the liquidation of the petty bourgeoisie has been retarded when compared to Germany, Holland and Sweden. These social strata, and therefore traditionally organized and non-monopolized sectors of the economy, manage to sustain themselves through a continuous symbiotic relationship to finance capital.

The more marginal sections of the French economy have traditionally been marked by a labour force often directly recruited from the French peasantry with a poorly developed union tradition and a lack of working class consciousness. During the 1960's this reserve was by and large emptied out, at the same time as the marginal pole of the economy was economically squeezed by intensified competition. These conditions together made the marginal stratum of the economy dependent on immigrant workers, who had entered the country illegally, whose whole life in France was spent in a *state of illegality*, and who are in many cases exploited down to an even physical minimum of existence without consideration to official regulations or agreements between capital and labour on the French labour market.

Contrary to the situation in most European labour-importing countries, illegal migration into France has not been a question of individual cases, but a very widespread phenomenon. That this has been politically possible can be attributed to the continued strong political influence of marginal bourgeois and traditional petty bourgeois social strata in certain regions of France. The influence of these elements has been upon the state apparatus and accordingly on the concrete ways in which immigration laws and labour regulations are implemented.

Their very state of illegality has deprived this stratum of migrant workers of any rights of citizenship whatsoever, from possibilities of organized political action and placed them outside the organized workers' movement. Their very presence in France was, and is criminalized as such. Many who have illegally entered have lived for years at a physical minimum of existence.

However, it is not only the marginal buyers of labour, who derived benefits from the many illegal entries during the 1960's and 1970's. Illegal employment at any greater scale within the centres of large-scale industry, would have created insurmountable conflicts in relation to the organizations of the French working class: But nevertheless, the illegal entries functioned for many years as a kind of more or less officially sanctioned informal channel of attraction of foreign labour (cf. Lefebvre 1980). A considerable part of the migrant working force in French industrial centres consists of persons who originally entered illegally. Later they had their status »regulated«. Their sojourn in France was legalized and they attained official work-permits. Thus illegal entries were, during the economic boom periods of the 1960's and early 1970's, used indirectly as a mechanism of wage-depression also within central economic sectors. From the point of view of employers, they were used much more effectively than in

<sup>4</sup> The theoretical inspiration and background to these propositions can be found in the work of Nicos Poulantzas about the contradictions within the bourgeoisie in modern capitalism (Poulantzas 1974.), which especially analyzes the structure of French capitalism.



countries where the import of labour has occurred as a more tightly controlled process following formalized agreements between capital and labour.<sup>5</sup>

This seems to justify Gorz' proposition of a *dual labour market*, characterized by the reproduction of (immigrant) labour at a level (which was lower than the level historically established through the struggles of the indigenous working class. But this cannot, as Gorz argues, be proposed as absolute pre-conditions for the continued existence of capitalist Western European society *as such*. The existing conditions should be analysed concretely historically — as an expression of the conditions for, and relationships of forces in the class struggles in post war France. In the context of the economic and political conjunctures, which have predominated in France since the middle of the 1970's, the question of illegal entries has ever more frequently entered the agenda of important political bodies in France (*ibid*), represented as a serious social and political problem and a stigma on the French nation. This should be seen in the structural context of alternate liberal (Giscard D'Estaing) and social-democratic (Mitterand attempts to »modernize« the French economic structure, at the same time favouring the development of a French version of the model of *Sozialpartnerschaft* instead of clashing confrontations of capital and labour. These political-economic conjunctures have led to a progressive elimination of the marginal pole of the economy as a factor of political power in French society and to a diminishing importance of illegally entered immigrants in the labour force.

Gorz' (1970) point of view — like that of Meillassoux (1975) — reflects a static and a historic comprehension of capitalism; an empiricist generalization of some conspicuous structural features of a specific formation under certain specific historically existing conditions of accumulation and relationships in the class struggle.

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<sup>5</sup> For discussions of the questions of illegal entry into France see Granotier 1970., Pinot 1973. and Lefebvre 1980.

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#### SUMMARY

In this paper the author discusses various Marxist views on the role of the reserve army of immigrant labour in relation to capitalist accumulation in Western Europe. Critical analysis is given of the theories of Claude Meillassoux, André Gorz, Marios Nikolinakos, Adriana Marshall, Stephen Castles and Godula Cosack. The author maintains that although most Marxist writers uphold the view that the contradictory position of immigrant workers as a reserve army of labour provides a basis for their ambiguous role in the economic and political class struggle that there is still disagreement in regard to defining this position in structural terms. It is argued that this disagreement is the result of generalizations made by observing different parts of the Western European reality. The author pursues this argument in two European contexts — first, the Federal Republic of Germany and the Netherlands; second, the case of France.