



*Extended Abstract*

## **The Capital of Communism: Critical Evaluations of Peer Production's Strategic Alliance with the Capital**

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A commonist or communist internet and society require a multitude of different kinds of struggles. This contribution to the debate develops on the strategic alliances of peer production with capital, mainly the use of externally paid wage labour as a way to out-compete, in the long run, capitalism, rather than focusing on classical forms of class struggle. Empirical examples will be taken from a study of Swedish language version of Wikipedia.

Capitalist controlled platforms using crowdsourcing of so called user generated content or data mining of the activities exploit the voluntarily engaged users to get a slice of the value production, theirs or the society's depending on theoretical perspective. The process depends either on some kind of capture of unpaid value production or a kind of appropriation of redistributed value from other value producing sectors (which theoretically goes back to Marx thought of the equilibrium of the general profit ratio in society, money or investment flow to the crowdsourcing projects with low expenditure of variable capital and these projects get rewarded by un-proportionate profit relative the small amount of wage labour directly connected to them; the added value mostly being a kind of rent).

Peer controlled platforms' strategic alliances with capital, in the form of donations of money or abstract labour to the project, are different. Looking at it from a traditional critical point of view it could, as above, either be regarded as exploitation of unpaid abstract labour when a state institution or a company like IBM uses Wikipedians or free software programmers to develop their services or production, or as a new form of exploitation of their own wage labour with the help of voluntary engaged work, understood as concrete labour in the Marxian sense, by the peer producers. The differences here, once again, being if you stress the exploitation of the voluntary peers or the already hired labour force by the capitalist when it comes to value production (or a combination of both); or if

you see the exploitation of unpaid work as a source of rent rather than value production. Both perspectives have been proposed within autonomist Marxism and by other Marxists.

Yet, it is also possible to stress the emancipatory potentials of these alliances from the peer production's viewpoint. Instead of different interpretations of communism of capital, as post-Fordist capitalism has been called by Paolo Virno, it is possible to talk of a *capital of communism*, but the perspective brings some apparent paradoxes to the radical analysis. Counter-production is stressed before counter-politics mediated by the content. In the case of Wikipedia the policy of *neutral point of view* is one of the biggest obstacles for company control and power. The policy is therefore a main disciplining tool within the peer community's strategic alliance-work with a capital that wants more of subjective interactivity on the digital platforms for the construction of their customer relations. The policy of neutral point of view results in practice in a liberal point of view, which is even admitted by some wikipedians in the core of the project. But this liberal view comes with a twist and makes the peer project Wikipedia more competitive within a broader range of people than a progressive and radical encyclopaedia would have. To sum up: maybe peer production as a practice is more subversive than critical theory in today's capitalism, but that does not mean that critical theory is without a mission.

Critical theory is needed to supervise and guide the strategic work on the alliances with capital. Not all kinds of cooperation strengthen the peer production. How does Google's presentation of central parts of Wikipedia articles, within their corporate search engines' interface, affect the encyclopaedia? How does the increasing use of wage labour within the Wikimedia Foundation, as well as increasing sums of money from fundraising, affect the processes of peer producing? How does the increasing number of co-operations with institutional actors within the GLAM-sector (Galleries, Libraries, Archives and Museums) affect the peer production with its division of the community into an A- and B-team of participants? And where should a line be drawn up against companies contributions to "their" articles (knowing that company-related articles are suffering from bad quality and a lack of voluntary engagement in Wikipedia)? Is there realistic to organize courses, conferences and contests in editing for companies (as a way of controlling them)? And how should the peer producing community and its foundation react in relation to PR-consultant firms like Wiki-PR that helps firms to edit "their" articles? All these questions are questions for a new and revitalized critical theory to address. Some tentative answers from the study of the community behind the Swedish language version and its WMF-Sweden local organization, suggest that it comes down to finely tuned calibrations of the co-operation with the enemy, if these should result in the capital of communism rather than the communism of capital.

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