Marx Reaction

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Marx’s division of the world into 2 classes: the Bourgeois and Proletariat seems too simple today. People are not stuck in either – but have the mobility to move between the two. Today’s society gives people the opportunity to learn and improve their skills and move into the other classification. This is called the American dream. My family would likely be labeled as being part of the Proletariat, but when I graduate I am likely to end up with a job in the Bourgeois.

Even the Proletariat today seems worlds away from the powerless wage subsistence of Marx’s time. America created a middle class which was comfortable and able to live within the current system of capitalism. In fact, the capitalism system has seemed to create a higher mean and median standard of living than the communist system – whereas the communist system had that as its explicit goal.

But in other ways, perhaps this dream is fading. Income inequality is rising. My advisor’s book, Race Against the Machine is about how technology is eroding the middle class. Occupy Wall Street has many of the same echos of Marx.

But for the time being, MIT remains a mechanism of the American Dream for the people it admits. 33% of students pay nothing to attend. For the thousand or so who come through here each year it is a great boon. But about the other people of the world who don’t get a spot? I think MITx is a promising beacon of hope for those who want the MIT skill set but don’t make the lottery.