

Once again on the Composition of the International Working Class

Some additional information which confirm the shift away from the old imperialist countries towards the South as well as China

Article (with 3 Graphs) by Michael Pröbsting, International Secretary of the Revolutionary Communist International Tendency (RCIT), 10 March 2020, www.thecommunists.net

Two weeks ago, we have published an article in which we outlined important changes in the international working class in the past two decades.¹ We demonstrated, based on actual information released by the UN's *International Labour Office*, that the global working class has grown in this period and, for the first time in history, became the majority of the working people globally. We also showed that the focus of the global proletariat is shifting away from the old imperialist countries (U.S., Western Europe and Japan) towards the semi-colonial countries in the south as well as towards the new emerging imperialist Great Powers China and Russia.

Furthermore, we demonstrated, among others, that more than half of the global working class (862.7 millions) lives in Eastern Asia, South-Eastern Asia and South Asia alone. We also pointed out that the huge majority of the working people in that region which has constituted the centre of the global class struggle in the past decade – the Arab world – are wage laborers (81.2% in the Arab States and 63.9% in North Africa).

In this article we want to add some more information on these developments. For this we will use new material from the recently published *Industrial Development Report 2020*, the latest issue of a bi-annual report by the *United Nations Industrial Development Organization*.²

In particular we want to point out two major developments: the shift of manufacturing production and the shift of the industrial proletariat between the years 1990 and 2018.

Before doing this we must make a brief remark about the terminology used by UNIDO. As this is a bourgeois institution, it does not apply Marxist characterizations to the countries but rather categories used by bourgeois economists today. Hence they don't speak about imperialist and semi-colonial countries but rather about "*Least Developed Countries*", "*Developing and Emerging Industrial Economies*" and "*Industrialized Economies*". We will not elaborate our criticism of these categories as we have done so somewhere else.³

However, in this case these categories do not present a significant problem for our research since the category "*Industrialized Economies*" consists mostly of the old imperialist states as well as Russia (plus several smaller semi-colonial countries resp. colonies of imperialist states). China, the most important

¹ Michael Pröbsting: On the Composition of the International Working Class. A new report of the UN's International Labour Office with interesting figures about social developments between 2000 and 2018, 25 February 2020, <https://www.thecommunists.net/theory/on-the-composition-of-the-international-working-class/>

² United Nations Industrial Development Organization: *Industrial Development Report 2020. Industrializing in the digital age*, Vienna 2019

³ See e.g. Michael Pröbsting: *The Great Robbery of the South. Continuity and Changes in the Super-Exploitation of the Semi-Colonial World by Monopoly Capital Consequences for the Marxist Theory of Imperialism*, RCIT Books, Vienna 2013, <http://www.great-robbery-of-the-south.net/>

emerging imperialist Great Power, is listed as a separate category. In turn, the categories “*Least Developed Countries*” as well as “*Developing and Emerging Industrial Economies*” contain mostly semi-colonial countries.

Let us deal first with the shift of manufacturing production between the years 1990 and 2018. In Graph 1 (see Appendix) we can see that there has been a dramatic shift in global industrial production from the old imperialist countries towards China. Chinese manufacturing sector increased its share in world production from 3% in 1990 to 25% in 2018. Conversely, the share of the old imperialist countries decreased from 79% to 55% during that time. It is worth pointing out that these calculations are done on the basis of *constant \$ 2010* which reflects more accurately the global shares than the so-called *Purchasing Power Parity* (PPP) which is often used in bourgeois economic statistics today.

The share of the other categories – the so-called “*Least Developed Countries*” and the “*Developing and Emerging Industrial Economies*” – remained roughly the same. While the share of the “*Least Developed Countries*” is negligible, the share of the “*Developing and Emerging Industrial Economies*” remained at about 20%.

At this point it is necessary to make an important objection. Naturally, the bourgeois economic statistics do not take into account the capitalist value creation but rather reflect the price reflection of the surplus appropriation by the capitalists. For example, most parts of a T-Shirt or a smart phone might be produced in the semi-colonial countries or in China. But when the final compilation is done in a Western country, a disproportional high share of the price is reflected as produced in these Western countries while, in fact, most value has been created in the semi-colonial countries or in China.

As a result, the share of 20% for the semi-colonial countries (“*Least Developed Countries*” and “*Developing and Emerging Industrial Economies*”) is much too low while the share of the old imperialist countries (“*Industrialized Economies*”) is much too high. We will demonstrate this in more detail below when we deal with the shift of the global working class.

But before doing this we want to demonstrate some more interesting details about the shift of global industrial production. In Graph 2 we can see how the 12 countries with the highest share of manufacturing production have developed in the past three decades. These countries are China, United States, Japan, Germany, India, South Korea, Italy, United Kingdom, Russia, Indonesia, Brazil and France. Confirming our thesis on the shift towards Asia, the only four of the 12 manufacturing countries which increased their share of world industrial production are China, India, Indonesia and South Korea.

Let us now deal with the shift of the global working class employed in the manufacturing sector. As it is well known the industrial sector is the heart of capitalist production since most of the capitalist value created here.

As we can see in Graph 3 the share of the world working class living in the old imperialist countries has dramatically declined. While it was 30.2% in 1990, this share dropped to 17.5% in 2018, i.e. the share nearly halved.

China’s share grew in the same period slightly from 33.6% to 36.4%. However, one has to take into account that in 1990 China was still a deformed workers state, i.e. the relations of productions were still based on Stalinist planning and not on capitalist ownership (the restoration of capitalism took

only place in the early 1990s).⁴ Hence, in 1990 the Chinese proletariat in its majority was not a working class exploited by capitalists and hence it contributed very little to the global capitalist surplus value.

At the same the semi-colonial countries experienced a massive increase of their share of the world proletariat. The share of the “*Developing and Emerging Industrial Economies*” grew from 33.1% in 1991 to 40.0% in 2018. The share of the so-called “*Least Developed Countries*” also doubled from 3.1% to 6.1%.

In summary, 82.5% of the global industrial proletariat lives outside the old imperialist countries today. More than 1/3 lives in China and more than 46%, i.e. nearly half, of the industrial workers live in the semi-colonial world. Readers will now understand why we emphasized above that the share of global production in the South is strongly underestimated due to price distortions.

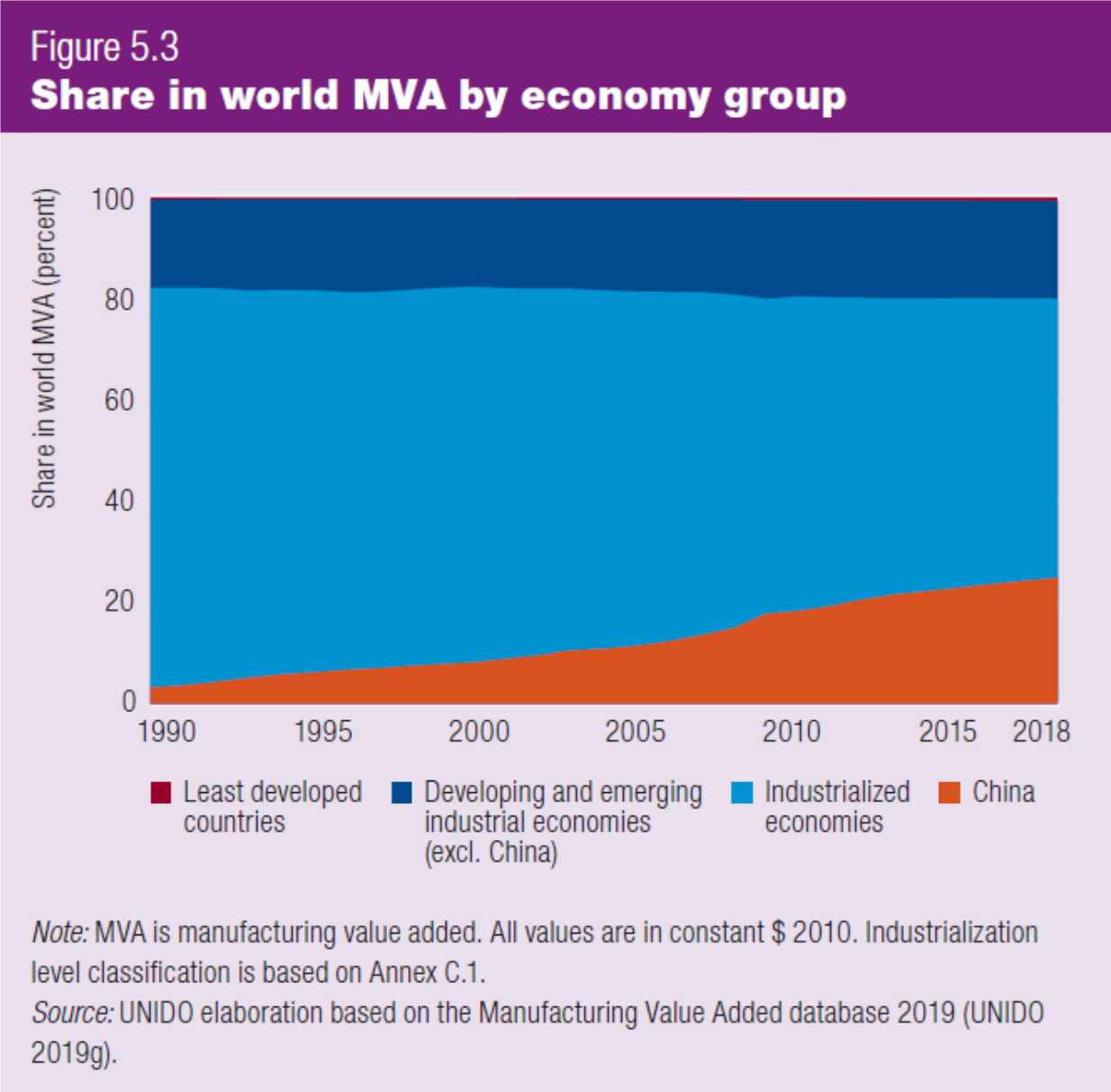
We conclude this article by repeating the thesis of the RCIT that it is of utmost importance for revolutionaries to understand the massive shift of the global working class to the South and the East, i.e. outside of the old imperialist states in Western Europe, North America and Japan. From this follows that revolutionaries have to reflect in their program, their tactics and their practical perspectives the huge weight of the Southern proletariat.⁵

⁴ On our analysis of the capitalist restoration in China see e.g. Michael Pröbsting: China’s transformation into an imperialist power. A study of the economic, political and military aspects of China as a Great Power, in: *Revolutionary Communism* No. 4, <http://www.thecommunists.net/publications/revcom-number-4>. On the issue of Stalinism see e.g. Michael Pröbsting: Cuba’s Revolution Sold Out? The Road from Revolution to the Restoration of Capitalism, August 2013, RCIT Books, <https://www.thecommunists.net/theory/cuba-s-revolution-sold-out/>. See also LRCI: The Degenerated Revolution: The Origin and Nature of the Stalinist States, <https://www.thecommunists.net/theory/stalinism-and-the-degeneration-of-the-revolution/>.

⁵ See on this Revolutionary Communist International Tendency (RCIT): The Revolutionary Communist Manifesto, published in 2012, pp. 28-30; online on the RCIT website at www.thecommunists.net/rcit-manifesto

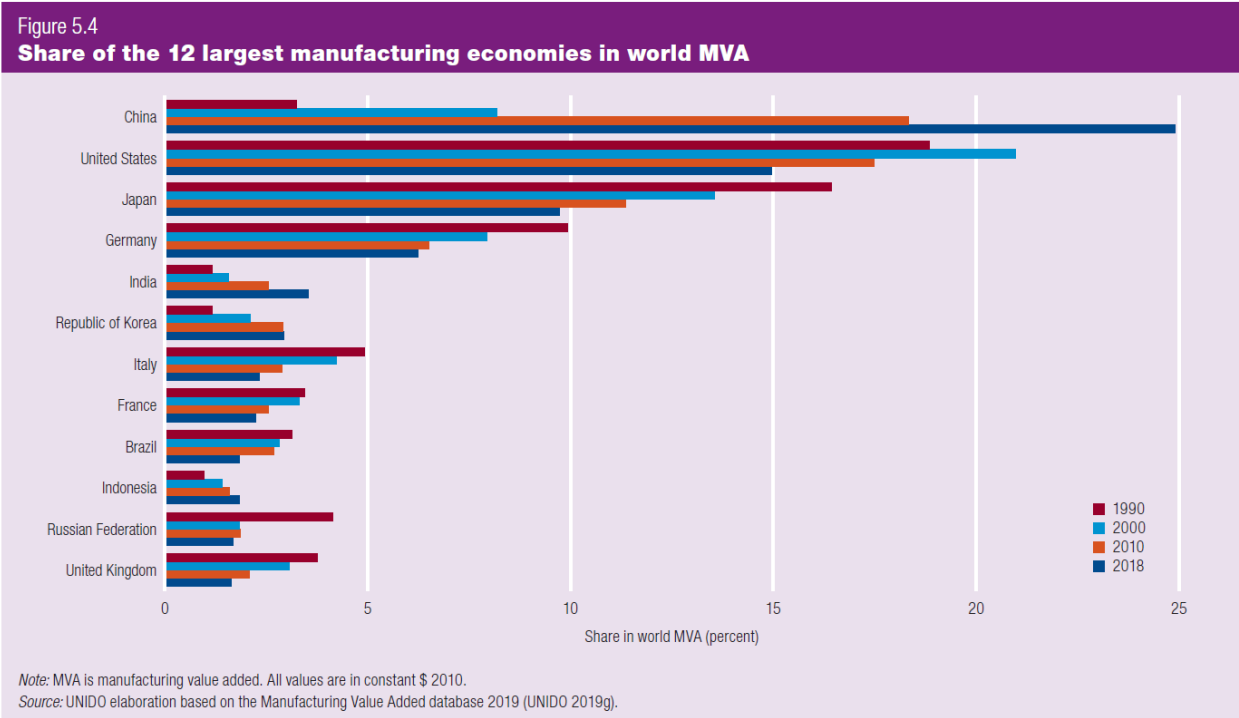
Appendix

Graph 1. Share of Global Industrial Production, 1990 and 2018 ⁶



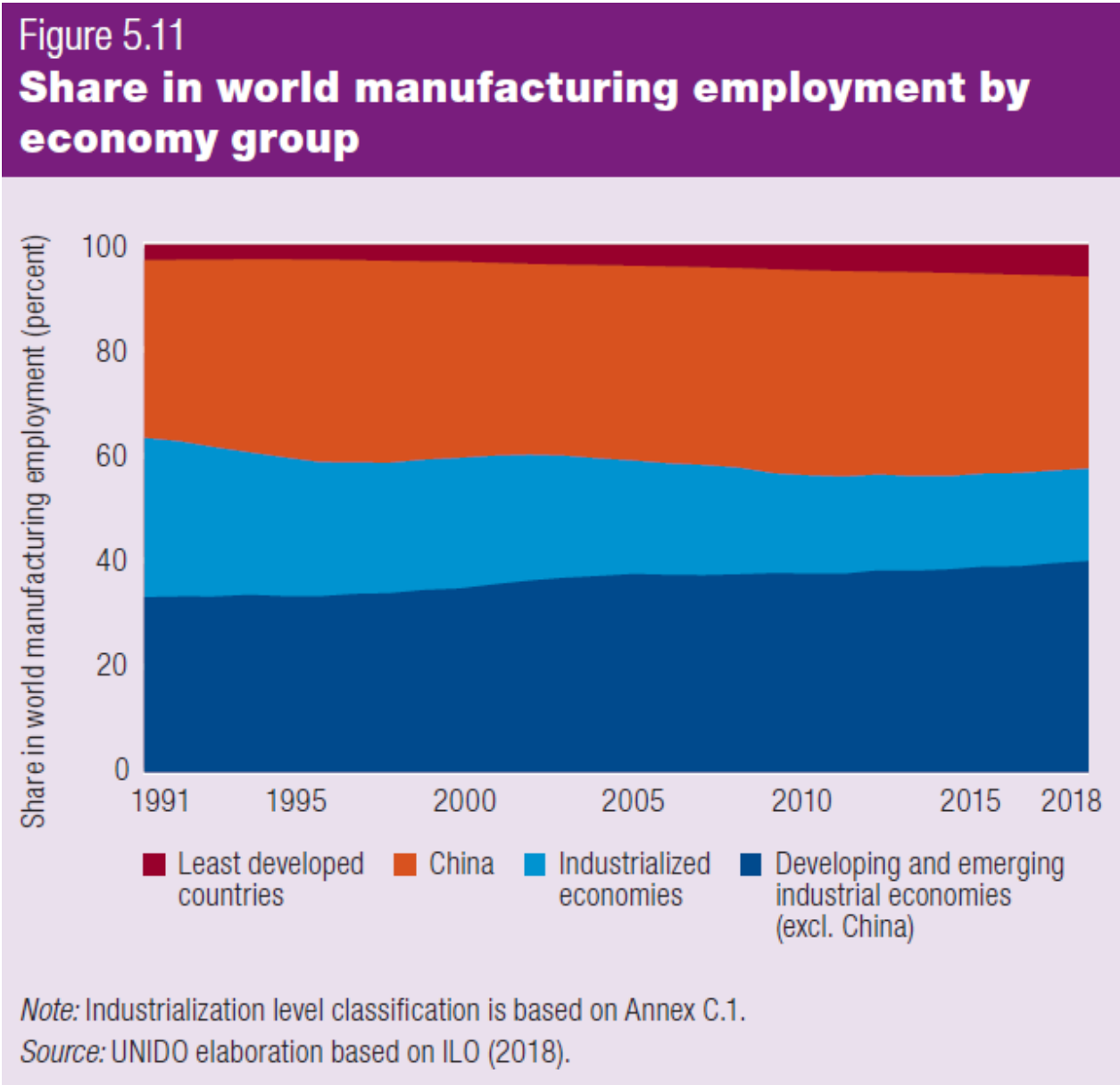
⁶ United Nations Industrial Development Organization: Industrial Development Report 2020. Industrializing in the digital age, Vienna 2019, p. 144

Graph 2. Share of the 12 largest Manufacturing Economies in Global Production, 1990, 2000, 2010 and 2018⁷



⁷ United Nations Industrial Development Organization: Industrial Development Report 2020. Industrializing in the digital age, Vienna 2019, p. 145

Graph 3. Share of the Global Industrial Proletariat, 1990 and 2018 ⁸



⁸ United Nations Industrial Development Organization: Industrial Development Report 2020. Industrializing in the digital age, Vienna 2019, p. 149