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# Dialectical and Historical Materialism

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Purple Text: Comments inserted by Bastillo for explanations.

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Dialectical materialism is the world outlook of the Marxist-Leninist party. It is called dialectical materialism because its approach to the phenomena of nature, its method of studying and apprehending them, is *dialectical*, while its interpretation of the phenomena of nature, its conception of these phenomena, its theory, is *materialistic*.

Historical materialism is the extension of the principles of dialectical materialism to the study of social life, an application of the principles of dialectical materialism to the phenomena of the life of society, to the study of society and of its history.

When describing their dialectical method, Marx and Engels usually refer to Hegel as the philosopher who formulated the main features of dialectics. This, however, does not mean that the dialectics of Marx and Engels is identical with the dialectics of Hegel. As a matter of fact, Marx and Engels took from the Hegelian dialectics only its "rational kernel," casting aside its Hegelian idealistic shell, and developed dialectics further so as to lend it a modern scientific form.

"My dialectic method," says Marx, "is not only different from the Hegelian, but is its direct opposite. To Hegel, ... the process of thinking which, under the name of 'the Idea,' he even transforms into an independent subject, is the demiurgos (creator) of the real world, and the real world is only the external, phenomenal form of 'the Idea.' With me, on the contrary, the *ideal is nothing else than the material world reflected by the human mind and translated into forms of thought.*" [emphasis mine: P.B] (Marx, Afterword to the Second German Edition of Volume I of *Capital*.)

Note: In other words, Hegelian dialectics regards ideas as primary and the material world secondary. There exists an 'absolute idea', and reality reflects it.

“Hegel was an idealist. To him, the thoughts within his brain were not the more or less abstract pictures of actual things and processes, but, conversely, *things and their evolution were only the realized pictures of the ‘Idea’, existing somewhere from eternity before the world was.* This way of thinking turned everything upside down, and *completely reversed* the actual connection of things in the world.” – (Engels, [Socialism: Utopian and Scientific, chapter 2](#), 1880.).

When describing their materialism, Marx and Engels usually refer to Feuerbach as the philosopher who restored materialism to its rights. This, however, does not mean that the materialism of Marx and Engels is identical with Feuerbach's materialism. As a matter of fact, Marx and Engels took from Feuerbach's materialism its "inner kernel," developed it into a scientific-philosophical theory of materialism and cast aside its idealistic and religious-ethical encumbrances [impediments]. We know that Feuerbach, although he was fundamentally a materialist, objected to the name materialism. Engels more than once declared that "in spite of" the materialist "foundation," Feuerbach "remained... bound by the traditional idealist fetters," and that "the real idealism of Feuerbach becomes evident as soon as we come to his philosophy of religion and ethics." (Marx and Engels, Vol. XIV, pp. 652-54.)

Dialectics comes from the Greek *dialego*, to discourse, to debate. In ancient times *dialectics was the art of arriving at the truth by disclosing the contradictions in the argument of an opponent and overcoming these contradictions.* There were philosophers in ancient times who believed that the disclosure of contradictions in thought and the clash of opposite opinions was the best method of arriving at the truth. This dialectical method of thought, *later extended to the phenomena of nature, developed into the dialectical method of apprehending nature, which regards the phenomena of nature as being in constant movement and undergoing constant change, and the development of nature as the result of the development of the contradictions in nature, as the result of the interaction of opposed forces in nature (an example of dialectical materialism) [emphasis mine: P.B].*

In its essence, dialectics is the direct opposite of metaphysics.

Note: Metaphysics is a branch of philosophy that postulates that physical objects exist statically, never moving or changing. Because of this, things must always equal themselves, become “self-identical” in the Hegelian sense. This implies that these static objects lack any contradictions whatsoever, hence they never change.

“To the metaphysician, things and their mental reflexes, ideas, are isolated, are to be considered one after the other and apart from each other, are objects of investigation fixed, rigid, given once for all. He thinks in absolutely irreconcilable antitheses

[...]

For him, a thing either exists or does not exist; a thing cannot at the same time be itself or something else. Positive and negative absolutely exclude one another; cause and effect stand in a rigid antithesis, one to the other.” – [brackets mine: P.B] (ibid).

Note: Though Greek dialectics represented a big advancement in human thinking, it is unlike the dialectics of Marx and Engels. Trotskyist Rob Sewell explains their laws:

“For the Greeks, however, dialectical thought was simply an anticipation. Their major contribution, especially Aristotle, was the development of formal logic, which has held sway for more than two thousand years. Its three basic laws are: law of identity (a thing is always equal to itself, or A equals A); law of contradiction (if a thing is always identical with itself, it cannot be different from itself, or if A equals A, it can never equal non-A); law of excluded middle (everything must be either one of two things; when two opposing statements confront one another, both cannot be true or false; the correctness of one implies the incorrectness of its contrary). These inseparable laws, which were deduced from argument, were the axioms of Aristotle's system of thought” (Sewell, [Introduction to The ABC of Materialist Dialectics](#), 2009.).

How is formal logic dialectical then, if everything is equal to itself and static?

This is not the full picture of formal logic. While many aspects of this way of thinking were certainly undialectical, some aspects of it were the opposite:

“This primitive, naive but intrinsically correct conception of the world is that of ancient Greek philosophy and was first clearly formulated by Heraclitus: everything is and is not, for everything is fluid, is constantly changing, constantly coming into being and passing away” (Engels, [Socialism: Utopian and Scientific, chapter 2](#), 1880.).

Lenin came to a similar conclusion:

“Here we have the point of view of dialectical materialism, but accidentally, not consistently, not elaborated, in passing.” (V.I. Lenin, [Conspectus of Aristotle's Book \*Metaphysics\*](#), 1930.).

## 1) Marxist Dialectical Method

The principal features of the Marxist dialectical method are as follows:

### a) Nature Connected and Determined

Contrary to metaphysics, dialectics does not regard nature as an accidental agglomeration of things, of phenomena, unconnected with, isolated from,

and independent of, each other, *but as a connected and integral whole, in which things, phenomena are organically connected with, dependent on, and determined by, each other.*

The dialectical method therefore holds that no phenomenon in nature can be understood if taken by itself, *isolated from surrounding phenomena*, inasmuch [just] as any phenomenon in any realm of nature may become meaningless to us if it is not considered in connection with the surrounding conditions, but divorced from them; and that, vice versa, any phenomenon can be understood and explained if considered in its inseparable connection with surrounding phenomena, as one conditioned by surrounding phenomena.

#### b) Nature is a State of Continuous Motion and Change

Contrary to metaphysics, dialectics holds that nature is not a state of rest and immobility, stagnation, and immutability, but a state of continuous movement and change, of continuous renewal and development, where something is always arising and developing, and something always disintegrating and dying away.

The dialectical method therefore requires that phenomena should be considered not only from the standpoint of their interconnection and interdependence, but also from the *standpoint of their movement*, their change, their development, their coming into being and going out of being.

The dialectical method regards as important primarily not that which at the given moment seems to be durable and yet is already beginning to die away, *but that which is arising and developing*, even though at the given moment it may appear to be not durable, for the dialectical method considers invincible only that which is arising and developing.

"All nature," says Engels, "from the smallest thing to the biggest. from grains of sand to suns, from Protista (the primary living cells – J. St.) to man, has its existence in eternal coming into being and going

out of being, in a ceaseless flux, in unresting motion and change (Ibid., p. 484.)

Note: While socialism may not seem “durable” or “developed,” what is important is that it is “arising and developing” from the vestiges of capitalism. Thus, we must pay attention to it and facilitate its development (ultimately through revolution).

Therefore, dialectics, Engels says, "takes things and their perceptual images essentially in their interconnection, in their concatenation, in their movement, in their rise and disappearance." (Marx and Engels, Vol. XIV,' p. 23.)

### c) Natural Quantitative Change Leads to Qualitative Change

Contrary to metaphysics, dialectics does not regard the process of development as a simple process of growth, where quantitative changes do not lead to qualitative changes, *but as a development which passes from insignificant and imperceptible quantitative changes to open' fundamental changes' to qualitative changes*; a development in which the qualitative changes occur not gradually, but rapidly and abruptly, taking the form of a leap from one state to another; they occur not accidentally but as the natural result of an accumulation of imperceptible and gradual quantitative changes.

The dialectical method therefore holds that the process of development should be understood not as movement in a circle, not as a simple repetition of what has already occurred, but as an onward and upward movement, as a transition from an old qualitative state to a new qualitative state, as a development from the simple to the complex, from the lower to the higher.

Note: One may bring up the possibility of a counter-revolution to try to refute this claim, as that would mean a mode of production is taking a step backwards instead of forwards. What Stalin is saying here, is that *generally* the process of development is in one direction. As comrade Kovalchik put it:

“Stalin didn’t mean: 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10.

Rather, he meant: 1, 2, 5, 6, 3, 4, 2, 4, 6, 5, 7, 5, 6, 7, 8, 4, 9, 3, 10.”

"Nature," says Engels, "is the test of dialectics. and it must be said for modern natural science that it has furnished extremely rich and daily increasing materials for this test and has thus proved that in the last analysis nature's process is dialectical and not metaphysical, that it does not move in an eternally uniform and constantly repeated circle. but passes through a real history. Here prime mention should be made of Darwin, who dealt a severe blow to the metaphysical conception of nature by proving that the organic world of today, plants and animals, and consequently man too, is all a product of a process of development that has been in progress for millions of years." (Ibid., p. 23.)

Describing dialectical development as a transition from quantitative changes to qualitative changes, Engels says:

"In physics ... every change is a passing of quantity into quality, as a result of a quantitative change of some form of movement either inherent in a body or imparted to it. For example, the temperature of water has at first no effect on its liquid state; but as the temperature of liquid water rises or falls, a moment arrives when this state of cohesion changes and the water is converted in one case into steam and in the other into ice.... A definite minimum current is required to make a platinum wire glow; every metal has its melting temperature; every liquid has a definite freezing point and boiling point at a given pressure, as far as we are able with the means at our disposal to attain the required

temperatures; finally, every gas has its critical point at which, by proper pressure and cooling, it can be converted into a liquid state.... What are known as the constants of physics (the point at which one state passes into another – J. St.) are in most cases nothing but designations for the nodal points at which a quantitative (change) increase or decrease of movement causes a qualitative change in the state of the given body, and at which, consequently, quantity is transformed into quality." (Ibid., pp. 527-28.)

Passing to chemistry, Engels continues:

"Chemistry may be called the science of the qualitative changes which take place in bodies as the effect of changes of quantitative composition. He was already known to Hegel.... Take oxygen: if the molecule contains three atoms instead of the customary two, we get ozone, a body definitely distinct in odor and reaction from ordinary oxygen. And what shall we say of the different proportions in which oxygen combines with nitrogen or sulfur, and each of which produces a body qualitatively different from all other bodies!" (Ibid., p. 528.)

Finally, criticizing Dühring, who scolded Hegel for all he was worth, but surreptitiously [secretively] borrowed from him the well-known thesis that the transition from the insentient world to the sentient world, from the kingdom of inorganic matter to the kingdom of organic life, is a leap to a new state, Engels says:

"This is precisely the Hegelian nodal line of measure relations in which at certain definite nodal points, the purely quantitative increase or decrease gives rise to a qualitative leap, for example, in the case of

water, which is heated or cooled, where boiling point and freezing point are the nodes at which – under normal pressure – the leap to a new aggregate state takes place, and where consequently quantity is transformed into quality." (Ibid., pp. 45-46.)

#### d) Contradictions Inherent in Nature

Contrary to metaphysics, dialectics holds that internal contradictions are inherent in all things and phenomena of nature, for they all have their negative and positive sides, *a past and a future, something dying away and something developing; and that the struggle between these opposites, the struggle between the old and the new, between that which is dying away and that which is being born, between that which is disappearing and that which is developing, constitutes the internal content of the process of development, the internal content of the transformation of quantitative changes into qualitative changes (great explanation of the Unity of Opposites).*

The dialectical method therefore holds that the process of development from the lower to the higher takes place not as a harmonious unfolding of phenomena, but as a disclosure of the contradictions inherent in things and phenomena, as a "struggle" of opposite tendencies which operate on the basis of these contradictions.

"In its proper meaning," Lenin says, "dialectics is the study of the contradiction *within the very essence of things.*" (Lenin, *Philosophical Notebooks*, p. 265.)

And further:

"Development is the 'struggle' of opposites." (Lenin, Vol. XIII, p. 301.)

Such, in brief, are the principal features of the Marxist dialectical method.



It is easy to understand how immensely important the extension of the principles of the dialectical method to the study of social life and the history of society is, and how immensely important is the application of these principles to the history of society and to the practical activities of the party of the proletariat.

If there are no isolated phenomena in the world, if all phenomena are interconnected and interdependent, then it is clear that every social system and every social movement in history must be evaluated not from the standpoint of "eternal justice" or some other preconceived idea, as is not infrequently done by historians, *but from the standpoint of the conditions which gave rise to that system or that social movement and with which they are connected*

*The slave system would be senseless, stupid, and unnatural under modern conditions. But under the conditions of a disintegrating primitive communal system, the slave system is a quite understandable and natural phenomenon since it represents an advance on the primitive communal system (emphasis mine: P.B).*

The demand for a bourgeois-democratic republic when tsardom and bourgeois society existed, as, let us say, in Russia in 1905, was a quite understandable, proper, and revolutionary demand; *for at that time a bourgeois republic would have meant a step forward*. But now, under the conditions of the U.S.S.R., the demand for a bourgeois-democratic republic would be a senseless and counterrevolutionary demand; for a bourgeois republic would be a retrograde step backwards compared with the Soviet republic *(emphasis mine: P.B)*.

Everything depends on the conditions, time, and place.

It is clear that without such a *historical* approach to social phenomena, the existence and development of the science of history is impossible; for only such an approach saves the science of history from becoming a jumble of accidents and an agglomeration of most absurd mistakes.

Further, if the world is in a state of constant movement and development, if the dying away of the old and the upgrowth of the new is a law of development, then it is clear that there can be no "immutable" social systems, no "eternal principles" of private property and exploitation, no "eternal ideas" of the subjugation of the peasant to the landlord, of the worker to the capitalist.

Hence, the capitalist system can be replaced by the socialist system, just as at one time the feudal system was replaced by the capitalist system.

Note: This entire section is somewhat of a mention of negation of negation.

*Hence, we must not base our orientation on the strata of society which are no longer developing, even though they at present constitute the predominant force, but on those strata which are developing and have a future before them, even though they at present do not constitute the predominant force (emphasis mine: P.B).*

In the eighties of the past century, in the period of the struggle between the Marxists and the Narodniks [populists], the proletariat in Russia constituted an insignificant minority of the population, whereas the individual peasants constituted the vast majority of the population. But the *proletariat was developing as a class, whereas the peasantry as a class was disintegrating*. And just because the proletariat was developing as a class the Marxists based their orientation on the proletariat. And they were not mistaken; for, as we know, the proletariat subsequently grew from an insignificant force into a first-rate historical and political force.

Hence, in order not to err in policy, one must look forward, not backward.

*Further, if the passing of slow quantitative changes into rapid and abrupt qualitative changes is a law of development, then it is clear that revolutions made by oppressed classes are a quite natural and inevitable phenomenon.*

Note: So, what does Stalin mean when talking about quantity when it is about class struggle? Leading up to the revolution, agitation can take

peaceful forms; the proletariat, working within the legal system to push for certain reforms and concessions to be thrown their way, for example. However, even if this agitation gradually goes from peaceful to violent, the revolution still has not occurred. Hence, once it does later on, this goes from an abrupt change of protest (however peaceful it may be) to a full-out revolution. To put it another way:

- Stage 1: no revolution
- Stage 2: no revolution
- Stage 3: no revolution
- Stage 4: **revolution**

The last stage is a leap because it occurs in a relatively short amount of time, is qualitatively different from past forms of struggle, and comes into existence *after a certain amount* of said struggle. Kovalchik gives an example of his own:

“Here’s [Bloody Sunday] a peaceful protest, a *really* peaceful one headed by a member of the clergy to petition (beg) for concessions from the Tsar, was met with gunfire. As a result, a revolution broke out (sadly was not victorious, but what matters is, a peaceful protest **and the brutal reaction** were a catalyst)”

The working the transition from capitalism to socialism and the liberation of the working class from the yoke of capitalism cannot be effected by slow changes, by reforms, but only by a qualitative change of the capitalist system, by revolution.

Hence, in order not to err in policy, one must be a revolutionary, not a reformist.

Note: It should also be noted that, much to the dismay of the ultra-leftists, Stalin is not saying that workers can never use reform as a means to advance towards socialism. What he is, however, saying is that achieving socialism *only* by reformism is undialectical. Remember that contradictions are not carried out harmoniously. Us Marxist Leninists advocate for reforms as long as they ultimately help enable more forms of agitation to

advance past capitalism. As Rubin says:

“The forms will vary with the general level of legality among the masses which the Party has achieved throughout the country and according to the circumstances of the club and its individual members, but in every situation the effort must be to use to the fullest every opportunity for increasing the Party’s mass acceptance”

(Rubin, How a Communist Club Functions, 1971.).

Further, if development proceeds by way of the disclosure of internal contradictions, by way of collisions between opposite forces on the basis of these contradictions and so as to overcome these contradictions, *then it is clear that the class struggle of the proletariat is a quite natural and inevitable phenomenon (emphasis mine: P.B).*

Hence, we must not cover up the contradictions of the capitalist system but *disclose and unravel them; we must not try to check the class struggle but carry it to its conclusion (emphasis mine: P.B).*

Hence, in order not to err in policy, one must pursue an uncompromising proletarian class policy, not a reformist *policy of harmony* of the interests of the proletariat and the bourgeoisie, not a compromisers' policy of the "growing" of capitalism into socialism (*emphasis mine: P.B).*

Note: Stalin is saying that using reformism as the only way to achieve socialism is undialectical because it violates quantity into quality. But couldn't a certain number of reforms (quantity) lead to an abrupt change in quality (socialism)?

Or, to put it another way:

1. Reform (capitalism still exists)
2. Reform (capitalism still exists)
3. Reform (capitalism still exists)
4. Reform (capitalism still exists)
5. Reform (capitalism still exists)
6. Reform (capitalism still exists)

## 7. No more reform (socialism is achieved)

This is not possible for multiple reasons. For one, even beating the bourgeoisie at their own game by winning their rigged elections would still leave the still-existing-capitalist-state to overthrow you. Secondly, simply reforming your way out of capitalism does not change the fundamental relations of production. As Marx points out:

“All these “socialists” since Colins have this much in common that they leave wage labor and therefore capitalist production in existence and try to bamboozle themselves or the world into believing that if ground rent were transformed into a state tax all the evils of capitalist production would disappear of themselves. The whole thing is therefore simply an attempt, decked out with socialism, to save capitalist domination and indeed to establish it afresh on an even wider basis than its present one.” (Marx, [Marx to Friedrich Adolph Sorge In Hoboken, 1881.](#))

Let us say that these reformists want to reform away the fundamental relations of production within capitalism. This is an impossible task, as doing so would use the superstructure (“The superstructure is the political, legal, religious, artistic, philosophical views of society and the political, legal and other institutions corresponding to them” (Stalin, [Marxism and Problems of Linguistics](#), 1950.) of capitalism to upheave its base (“The base is the economic structure of society at the given stage of its development” (ibid.), *despite the superstructure existing to protect the base*. The principled stance is to go against both at the same time.

Such is the Marxist dialectical method when applied to social life, to the history of society.

As to Marxist philosophical materialism, it is fundamentally the direct opposite of philosophical idealism.

## 2) Marxist Philosophical Materialism

The principal features of *Marxist philosophical materialism* are as follows:

### a) Materialist

Contrary to idealism, which regards the world as the embodiment of an "absolute idea," a "universal spirit," "consciousness," Marx's philosophical materialism holds that the world is by its very nature *material*, that the multifold phenomena of the world constitute different forms of matter in motion, that interconnection and interdependence of phenomena as established by the dialectical method, are a law of the development of moving matter, and that the world develops in accordance with the laws of movement of matter and stands in no need of a "universal spirit."

"The materialistic outlook on nature," says Engels, "means no more than simply conceiving nature just as it exists, without any foreign admixture." (Marx and Engels, Vol. XIV, p. 651.)

Speaking of the materialist views of the ancient philosopher Heraclitus, who held that "the world, all in one, was not created by any god or any man, but was, is and ever will be a living flame, systematically flaring up and systematically dying down" Lenin comments: "A very good exposition of the rudiments of dialectical materialism." (Lenin, *Philosophical Notebooks*, p. 318.)

### b) Objective Reality

Contrary to idealism, which asserts that *only our consciousness really exists, and that the material world, being, nature, exists only in our consciousness' in our sensations, ideas and perceptions*, the Marxist philosophical materialism holds that matter, nature, being, *is an objective reality existing outside and independent of our consciousness*; that matter

is *primary*, since it is the source of sensations, ideas, consciousness, and that consciousness is secondary, derivative, since it is a reflection of matter, a reflection of being; that *thought is a product of matter which in its development has reached a high degree of perfection*, namely, of the brain, and the brain is the organ of thought; and that therefore *one cannot separate thought from matter without committing a grave error* (*emphasis mine: P.B*). Engels says:

"The question of the relation of thinking to being, the relation of spirit to nature is the paramount question of the whole of philosophy.... The answers which the philosophers gave to this question split them into two great camps. Those who asserted the primacy of spirit to nature ... comprised the camp of idealism. The others, who regarded nature as primary, belong to the various schools of materialism." (Marx, *Selected Works*, Vol. I, p. 329.)

And further:

"The material, sensuously perceptible world to which we ourselves belong is the only reality.... Our consciousness and thinking, however supra-sensuous they may seem, are the product of a material, bodily organ, the brain. *Matter is not a product of mind but mind itself is merely the highest product of matter.*" (Ibid., p. 332.)

Concerning the question of matter and thought, Marx says:

*"It is impossible to separate thought from matter that thinks. Matter is the subject of all changes."* (Ibid., p. 302.)

Describing Marxist philosophical materialism, Lenin says:

"Materialism in general recognizes objectively real being (matter) as independent of consciousness, sensation, experience.... Consciousness is only the reflection of being, at best an approximately true (adequate, perfectly exact) reflection of it." (Lenin, Vol. XIII, pp. 266-67.)

And further:

– "Matter is that which, acting upon our sense-organs, produces sensation; matter is the objective reality given to us in sensation.... Matter, nature, being, the physical-is primary, and spirit, consciousness, sensation, the psychical-is secondary." (Ibid., pp. 119-20.)

– "The world picture is a picture of how matter moves and of how '*matter thinks*.'" (Ibid., p. 288.)

– "The brain is the organ of thought." (Ibid., p. 125.)

### c) The World and Its Laws Are Knowable

Contrary to idealism, which denies the possibility of knowing the world and its laws, which does not believe in the authenticity of our knowledge, does not recognize objective truth, and holds that the world is full of "things-in-themselves" that can never be known to science, Marxist philosophical materialism holds that the world and its laws are fully knowable, that our knowledge of the laws of nature, tested by experiment and practice, is authentic knowledge having the validity of objective truth, and that there are no things in the world which are unknowable, but only things which are as yet not known, but which will be disclosed and made known by the efforts of science and practice.

Note: Since idealism regards thought as the only 'real thing' and the



material world a reflection of it, having an object that exists *outside of our senses* automatically admits that objects do indeed exist independent of our consciousness, and therefore matter is primary while our perceptions are secondary.

Criticizing the thesis of Kant and other idealists that the world is unknowable and that there are "things-in-themselves" which are unknowable, and defending the well-known materialist thesis that our knowledge is authentic knowledge, Engels writes:

"The most telling refutation of this as of all other philosophical crotchets is practice, namely, *experiment and industry*. If we are able to prove the correctness of our conception of a natural process by making it ourselves, *bringing it into being out of its conditions and making it serve our own purposes into the bargain, then there is an end to the Kantian ungraspable 'thing-in-itself.'* The chemical substances produced in the bodies of plants and animals remained such 'things-in-themselves' *until organic chemistry began to produce them one after another*, whereupon the 'thing-in-itself' became a thing for us, as, for instance, alizarin, the coloring matter of the madder [red dye of a plant], which we no longer trouble to grow in the madder roots in the field but produce much more cheaply and simply from coal tar. For 300 years the Copernican solar system was a hypothesis with a hundred, a thousand or ten thousand chances to one in its favor, but still always a hypothesis. But when Leverrier, by means of the data provided by this system, not only deduced the necessity of the existence of an unknown planet, but also calculated the position in the heavens which this planet must necessarily occupy, and when Galle

really found this planet, the Copernican system was proved." (Marx, *Selected Works*, Vol. I, p. 330.)

Accusing Bogdanov, Bazarov, Yushkevich and the other followers of Mach of fideism (a reactionary theory, which prefers faith to science) and defending the well-known materialist thesis that our scientific knowledge of the laws of nature is authentic knowledge, and that the laws of science represent objective truth, Lenin says:

"Contemporary fideism does not at all reject science; all it rejects is the 'exaggerated claims' of science, to wit, its claim to objective truth. If objective truth exists (as the materialists think), if natural science, reflecting the outer world in human 'experience,' is alone capable of giving us objective truth, then all fideism is absolutely refuted." (Lenin, Vol. XIII, p. 102.)

Such, in brief, are the characteristic features of the Marxist philosophical materialism.

It is easy to understand how immensely important the extension of the principles of philosophical materialism to the study of social life is, of the history of society, and how immensely important is the application of these principles to the history of society and to the practical activities of the party of the proletariat.

If the connection between the phenomena of nature and their interdependence are laws of the development of nature, it follows, too, that the connection and interdependence of the phenomena of social life are laws of the development of society, and not something accidental.

Hence, social life, the history of society, ceases to be an agglomeration of "accidents", for the history of society becomes a development of society according to regular laws, and the study of the history of society becomes a science.

*Hence, the practical activity of the party of the proletariat must not be based on the good wishes of "outstanding individuals." not on the dictates of "reason," "universal morals," etc., but on the laws of development of society and on the study of these laws (emphasis mine: P.B).*

Further, if the world is knowable and our knowledge of the laws of development of nature is authentic knowledge, having the validity of objective truth, it follows that social life, the development of society, is also knowable, and that the data of science regarding the laws of development of society are authentic data having the validity of objective truths.

Hence, the science of the history of society, despite all the complexity of the phenomena of social life, can become as precise a science as, let us say, biology, and capable of making use of the laws of development of society for practical purposes.

Hence, the party of the proletariat should not guide itself in its practical activity by casual motives, *but by the laws of development of society, and by practical deductions from these laws.*

*Hence, socialism is converted from a dream of a better future for humanity into a science (emphasis mine: P.B).*

Hence, the bond between science and practical activity, between theory and practice, their unity, should be the guiding star of the party of the proletariat.

Hence, the source of formation of the spiritual life of society, the origin of social ideas, social theories, political views, and political institutions, should not be sought for in the ideas, theories, views, and political institutions themselves, *but in the conditions of the material life of society*, in social being, of which these ideas, theories, views, etc., are the reflection.

Hence, if in different periods of the history of society different social ideas, theories, views and political institutions are to be observed; if under the slave system we encounter certain social ideas, theories, views and political institutions, under feudalism others, and under capitalism others still, this is

not to be explained by the "nature", the "properties" of the ideas, theories, views and political institutions themselves but by the different conditions of the material life of society at different periods of social development.

Whatever is the being of a society, whatever are the conditions of material life of a society, *such are the ideas, theories, political views and political institutions of that society.*

In this connection, Marx says:

*"It is not the consciousness of men that determines their being, but, on the contrary, their social being that determines their consciousness."*  
(Marx *Selected Works*, Vol. I, p. 269.)

Hence, in order not to err in policy, in order not to find itself in the position of idle dreamers, the party of the proletariat must not base its activities on abstract "principles of human reason", but on the concrete conditions of the material life of society, as the determining force of social development; not on the good wishes of "great men," but on the real needs of development of the material life of society.

The fall of the utopians, including the Narodniks, anarchists and Socialist-Revolutionaries, *was due, among other things to the fact that they did not recognize the primary role which the conditions of the material life of society play in the development of society*, and, sinking to idealism, did not base their practical activities on the needs of the development of the material life of society, but, independently of and in spite of these needs, on "ideal plans" and "all-embracing projects", divorced from the real life of society (*emphasis mine: P.B.*).

The strength and vitality of Marxism-Leninism lies in the fact that it does base its practical activity on the needs of the development of the material life of society and never divorces itself from the real life of society.

It does not follow from Marx's words, however, that social ideas, theories, political views, and political institutions are of no significance in the life of

society, *that they do not reciprocally affect social being*, the development of the material conditions of the life of society. We have been speaking so far of *the origin of social ideas*, theories, views, and political institutions, of the way they arise, of the fact that the spiritual life of society reflects the conditions of its material life. As regards the significance of social ideas, theories, views, and political institutions, as regards their role in history, historical materialism, far from denying them, *stresses the important role and significance of these factors in the life of society, in its history* (emphasis mine: P.B).

There are different kinds of social ideas and theories. There are old ideas and theories which have outlived their day, and which serve the interests of the moribund forces of society. Their significance lies in the fact that they hamper the development, the progress of society. Then there are new and advanced ideas and theories which serve the interests of the advanced forces of society. Their significance lies in the fact that they facilitate the development, the progress of society; and their significance is greater the more accurately they reflect the needs of development of the material life of society.

New social ideas and theories *arise only after the development of the material life of society has set new tasks before society*. But once they have arisen, they *become a most potent force which facilitates the carrying out of the new tasks set by the development of the material life of society*, a force which facilitates the progress of society. It is precisely here that the tremendous organizing, mobilizing, and transforming value of new ideas, new theories, new political views, and new political institutions manifests itself. New social ideas and theories arise precisely *because they are necessary to society, because it is impossible to carry out the urgent tasks of development of the material life of society without their organizing, mobilizing, and transforming action*. Arising out of the new tasks set by the development of the material life of society, the new social ideas and theories force their way through, become the possession of the masses, mobilize, and organize them against the moribund forces of society, and thus facilitate the overthrow of these forces, which hamper the development of the material life of society.

Note: If this is true, and capitalism has already reached its highest stages, giving rise to the ‘development of the material life of society,’ why is there no ‘tremendous organizing, mobilizing, and transforming value of new ideas, new theories, new political views, and new political institutions?’ Why isn’t everyone becoming a revolutionary?

Even if a mode of production has reached its most developed form, this does not automatically guarantee a revolution to the next mode. Socialism, and by extension, communism, are not an inevitability. The antagonisms and contradictions existing between the proletariat and bourgeoisie have two possible ways of resolving. One of these possibilities entails that the bourgeoisie will overpower and suppress any revolutionary movement within the working class, keeping them subservient, thus retaining the status quo. Capitalism's survival will entail the certain extinction of humanity, whether it manifests itself in ever-increasing imperialist wars, climate change crises, etc. On the other hand, the other option shows the workers successfully building up a revolutionary communist party, ultimately liquidating the capitalist class, and saving humanity from certain demise from the aforementioned futures. In this respect, Marx and Engels commented:

"Freeman and slave, patrician and plebeian, lord and serf, guild-master and journeyman, in a word, oppressor and oppressed, stood in constant opposition to one another, carried on an uninterrupted, now hidden, now open fight, a fight that each time ended, either in a revolutionary reconstitution of society at large, or in the common ruin of the contending classes." (Marx, Engels, Manifesto of the Communist Party, page 14, 1848.)

At the current moment, the grip the capitalist class has over the workers is slowly losing its hold. More and more workers, after witnessing the inherently self-destructive nature of capitalism, become politically conscious enough to understand that capitalism cannot save humanity’s future. As we see in the world today, there is indeed ‘tremendous organizing,’ against capitalism’s brutality, but is it under the need to advance the development of the material life of society, or are they on abstract, ambiguous ideas for “justice and equality?” Unless the masses rely on (to put it shortly) a social scientific theory that reflects the aforementioned needs on the development

of society, these forces will be in jeopardy of being countered and suppressed. On this point, Stalin says:

Thus, social ideas, theories, and political institutions, having arisen on the basis of *the urgent tasks of the development of the material life of society*, the development of social being, themselves then react upon social being, upon the material life of society, creating the conditions necessary for completely carrying out the urgent tasks of the material life of society, and for rendering its further development possible. In this connection, Marx says:

"Theory becomes a material force as soon as it has gripped the masses." (Marx and Engels, Vol. I, p. 406.)

Hence, in order to be able to influence the conditions of material life of society and to accelerate their development and their improvement, the party of the proletariat must rely upon such a social theory, *such a social idea as correctly reflects the needs of development of the material life of society*, and which is therefore capable of setting into motion broad masses of the people and of mobilizing them and organizing them into a great army of the proletarian party, prepared to smash the reactionary forces and to clear the way for the advanced forces of society.

The fall of the "Economists" and the Mensheviks was due, among other things, to the fact that they did not recognize the mobilizing, organizing, and transforming role of advanced theory, of advanced ideas and, sinking to vulgar materialism [materialism that posits that only material conditions determine the mode of production, excluding the superstructure], reduced the role of these factors almost to nothing, thus condemning the Party to passivity and inaction.

The strength and vitality of Marxism-Leninism is derived from the fact that it relies upon an advanced theory which correctly reflects the needs of development of the material life of society, that it elevates theory to a proper level, and that it deems it its duty to utilize every ounce of the mobilizing, organizing, and transforming power of this theory.

That is the answer historical materialism gives to the question of the relation between social beings and social consciousness, between the conditions of development of material life and the development of the spiritual life of society.

### 3) *Historical Materialism.*

It now remains to elucidate the following question: What, from the viewpoint of historical materialism, is meant by the "conditions of material life of society" which in the final analysis determine the physiognomy [appearance] of society, its ideas, views, political institutions, etc.?

What, after all, are these "conditions of material life of society," what are their distinguishing features?

There can be no doubt that the concept "conditions of material life of society" includes, first of all, nature which surrounds society, geographical environment, which is one of the indispensable and constant conditions of material life of society and which, of course, influences the development of society. What role does geographical environment play in the development of society? Is geographical environment the chief force determining the physiognomy of society, the character of the social system of man, the transition from one system to another, or isn't it?

Historical materialism answers this question in the negative.

Geographical environment is unquestionably one of the constant and indispensable conditions of development of society and, of course, influences the development of society, accelerates, or retards its development. But its influence is not the *determining* influence, inasmuch as the changes and development of society proceed at an incomparably faster rate than the changes and development of geographical environment. In the space of 3000 years three different social systems have been successively superseded in Europe: the primitive communal system, the slave system and the feudal system. In the eastern part of Europe, in the U.S.S.R., even four social systems have been superseded. Yet during this



period geographical conditions in Europe have either not changed at all, or have changed so slightly that geography takes no note of them. And that is quite natural. Changes in geographical environment of any importance *require millions of years*, whereas a few hundred or a couple of thousand years are enough for even very important changes in the system of human society.

It follows from this that geographical environment cannot be the chief cause, the *determining* cause of social development; for that which remains almost unchanged in the course of tens of thousands of years cannot be the chief cause of development of that which undergoes fundamental changes in the course of a few hundred years.

Note: Despite nature not being the chief determinant of society, it certainly had been for a period during the primitive commune. The only reason it stopped doing so was due to the eventual mastery of man over nature, enabling humans to migrate and settle in a greater amount of areas, no longer bound down to their material surroundings.

Further, there can be no doubt that the concept "conditions of material life of society" also includes growth of population, density of population of one degree or another; for people are an essential element of the conditions of material life of society, and without a definite minimum number of people there can be no material life of society. Is growth of population the chief force that determines the character of the social system of man, or isn't it?

Historical materialism answers this question too in the negative.

Of course, growth of population does influence the development of society, does facilitate or retard the development of society, but it cannot be the chief force of development of society, and its influence on the development of society cannot be the *determining* influence because, by itself, growth of population does not furnish the clue to the question why a given social system is replaced precisely by such and such a new system and not by another, why the primitive communal system is succeeded precisely by the slave system, the slave system by the feudal system, and the feudal system by the bourgeois system, and not by some other.

If growth of population were the determining force of social development, then a higher density of population would be bound to give rise to a correspondingly higher type of social system. But we do not find this to be the case. *The density of population in China is four times as great as in the U.S.A., yet the U.S.A. stands higher than China in the scale of social development*; for in China a semi-feudal system still prevails, whereas the U.S.A. has long ago reached the highest stage of development of capitalism. The density of population in Belgium is 19 times as great as in the U.S.A., and 26 times as great as in the U.S.S.R. Yet the U.S.A. stands higher than Belgium in the scale of social development; and as for the U.S.S.R., Belgium lags a whole historical epoch behind this country, for in Belgium the capitalist system prevails, whereas the U.S.S.R. has already done away with capitalism and has set up a socialist system.

It follows from this that growth of population is not, and cannot be, the chief force of development of society, the force which *determines* the character of the social system, the physiognomy of society.

#### a) What Is the Chief Determinant Force?

What, then, is the chief force in the complex conditions of material life of society which determines the physiognomy of society, the character of the social system, the development of society from one system to another?

This force, historical materialism holds, is the *method of procuring the means of life* necessary for human existence, the *mode of production of material values* – food, clothing, footwear, houses, fuel, instruments of production, etc. – which are indispensable for the life and development of society.

In order to live, people must have food, clothing, footwear, shelter, fuel, etc.; in order to have these material values, people must produce them; and in order to produce them, people must have the instruments of production with which food, clothing, footwear, shelter, fuel, etc., are produced, they must be able to produce these instruments and to use them.

The *instruments of production* wherewith material values are produced, the *people* who operate the instruments of production and carry on the production of material values thanks to a certain *production experience* and *labor skill* – all these elements jointly constitute the *productive forces* of society.

Note: This is not to say that the productive forces include the entire class of people who work on the instruments of production, rather only individuals, chiefly their skill in producing and their productive capacity.

But the productive forces are only one aspect of production, only one aspect of the mode of production, **an aspect that expresses the relation of men to the objects and forces of nature which they make use of for the production of material values.** Another aspect of production, another aspect of the mode of production, is the relation of men to each other in the process of production, men's *relations of production*. Men carry on a struggle against nature and utilize nature for the production of material values **not in isolation from each other, not as separate individuals, but in common, in groups, in societies.** Production, therefore, is at all times and under all conditions social production. In the production of material values men enter into mutual relations of one kind or another within production, into relations of production of one kind or another. These may be relations of co-operation and mutual help between people who are free from exploitation; they may be relations of domination and subordination; and, lastly, they may be transitional from one form of relations of production to another. But whatever the character of the relations of production may be, always and in every system, they constitute just as essential an element of production as the productive forces of society.

"In production," Marx says, "men not only act on nature but also on one another. They produce only by co-operating in a certain way and mutually exchanging their activities. In order to produce, they enter into definite connections and relations with one another and only within these social connections and relations does their action

on nature, does production, take place." (Marx and Engels, Vol. V, p. 429.)

**Consequently, production, the mode of production, embraces both the productive forces of society and men's relations of production, and is thus the embodiment of their unity in the process of production of material values.**

#### b) The First Feature of Production

*The first feature of production is that it never stays at one point for a long time and is always in a state of change and development, and that, furthermore, changes in the mode of production inevitably call forth changes in the whole social system, social ideas, political views, and political institutions – they call forth a reconstruction of the whole social and political order.* At different stages of development people make use of different modes of production, or, to put it more crudely, lead different manners of life. In the primitive commune there is one mode of production, under slavery there is another mode of production, under feudalism a third mode of production and so on. And, correspondingly, men's social system, the spiritual life of men, their views and political institutions also vary.

Whatever is the mode of production of a society, such in the main is the society itself, its ideas and theories, its political views, and institutions.

Or, to put it more crudely, whatever man's manner of life is his manner of thought.

**This means that the history of development of society is above all the history of the development of production, the history of the modes of production which succeed each other in the course of centuries, the history of the development of productive forces and of people's relations of production [emphasis mine: P.B].**

Hence, the history of social development is at the same time the history of the producers of material values themselves, the history of the laboring

masses, who are the chief force in the process of production and who carry on the production of material values necessary for the existence of society.

**Hence, if historical science is to be a real science, it can no longer reduce the history of social development to the actions of kings and generals, to the actions of "conquerors" and "subjugators" of states but must above all devote itself to the history of the producers of material values, the history of the laboring masses, the history of peoples.**

**Hence, the clue to the study of the laws of history of society must not be sought in men's minds, in the views and ideas of society, but in the mode of production practiced by society in any given historical period; it must be sought in the economic life of society [emphasis mine: P.B].**

Hence, the prime task of historical science is to *study and disclose the laws of production*, the laws of development of the productive forces and of the relations of production, the laws of economic development of society.

Hence, if the party of the proletariat is to be a real party, it must above all acquire a knowledge of the laws of development of production, of the laws of economic development of society.

Hence, if it is not to err in policy, the party of the proletariat must both draft its program and in its practical activities proceed primarily from the laws of development of production from the laws of economic development of society.

### c) The Second Feature of Production

The *second feature* of production is that its changes and development always begin with changes and development of the productive forces, *and in the first place, with changes and development of the instruments of production*. Productive forces are therefore the most mobile and revolutionary element of production. First, the productive forces of society change and develop, and then, *depending* on these changes and *in*

*conformity with them*, men's relations of production, their economic relations, change.

Note: The first change in production occurs with the development of new instruments, which affect the productive forces, which affect the relations of production, and eventually, the entire mode of production.

This, however, does not mean that the relations of production do not influence the development of the productive forces and that the latter are not dependent on the former. While their development is dependent on the development of the productive forces, the relations of production in their turn react upon the development of the productive forces, accelerating or retarding it.

Note: One example we can see from this, as comrade Mason pointed out, is from the Luddites:

“The Luddites were workers, artisans, and peasants in America [the United States] who had lost their jobs as a result of technological advancements rendering their crafts obsolete. As a result, they began destroying industrial machinery in order to secure their own employment. In this way the relations of production and the interests it created led to a retardation of the productive forces.”

On another note, for those familiar with Dengism, Stalin here beautifully debunks its faulty logic, as Dengists are only concerned about advancing the productive forces. While relations of production are based on productive forces, they too can in turn react upon the material life of society, advancing it or hampering it. If one thinks you need to advance the productive forces to reach a new mode of production, they are incorrect. Stalin says:

“Comrade Yaroshenko’s chief error is that he forsakes the Marxist position on the question of the role of the productive forces and of the relations of production in

the development of society, that he inordinately overrates the role of the productive forces, and just as inordinately underrates the role of the relations of production, and ends up by declaring that under socialism the relations of production are a component part of the productive forces

[...]

Comrade Yaroshenko thinks that it is enough to arrange a “rational organization of the productive forces,” and the transition from socialism to communism will take place without any particular difficulty. He considers that this is quite sufficient for the transition to communism. He plainly declares that “under socialism, the basic struggle for the building of a communist society reduces itself to a struggle for the proper organization of the productive forces and their rational utilization in social production.”<sup>11</sup> Comrade Yaroshenko solemnly proclaims that “Communism is the highest scientific organization of the productive forces in social production

[...]

It is not true, in the first place, that the role of the relations of production in the history of society has been confined to that of a brake, a fetter on the development of the productive forces. When Marxists speak of the retarding role of the relations of production, it is not all relations of production they have in mind, but only the old relations of production, which no longer conform to the growth of the productive forces and, consequently, retard their development. But, as we know, besides the old, there are also new relations of production, which supersede the old. Can it be said that the role of the new relations of production is that of a brake on the productive forces? No, it cannot. On the contrary, the new relations of production are the chief and decisive force, the one which in fact determines the further, and, moreover, powerful, development of the productive forces, and without which the latter would be doomed to stagnation, as is the case today in the capitalist countries” [brackets mine: P.B] (Stalin, Economic Problems in the USSR, page 59, 1951.).

In this connection it should be noted that the relations of production cannot for too long a time lag behind and be in a state of contradiction to the growth of the productive forces, inasmuch [to an extent] as the productive forces can develop in full measure only when the relations of production correspond to the character, the state of the productive forces and allow full scope for their development.

Note: To give an example under primitive communism:

“As populations/surpluses continued to increase, implements became more complex, the threat of warfare became increasingly looming over society, social structures inevitably became more complex to manage society. The egalitarian redistributors, over thousands of years, likely centralized authority to such a point that they could appropriate surplus and unequally redistribute it. These newer forces of the primitive commune inherently held irreconcilable contradictions between the older, moribund forces of society, chiefly communal ownership. In other words, the old production relations of society ceased to correspond to the new productive forces. Thus, the equal distribution of resources *[...] began to act as a brake on the development of new productive forces*’ (*Political Economy, Economics Institute of the Academy of Sciences of the U.S.S.R., 1954.*)” (Bastillo, [Primitive Communism – A Comprehensive View on the Origins of Society](#), 2024.).

How did this incongruity between the relations of production and the productive forces resolve? A more rigid social hierarchy was established, centralizing power to the redistributors. This new class of people was necessary to redistribute surplus, command large swaths of the economy, oversee economic exchange, etc.

Engels talks about the same process under the creation of capitalism:

“This industrial revolution was precipitated by the discovery of the steam engine, various spinning machines, the mechanical loom, and a whole series of other mechanical devices. These machines, which were very expensive and hence could be bought only by big capitalists, altered the whole mode of production, and displaced the former workers, because the machines turned out cheaper and better commodities than the workers could produce with their inefficient spinning wheels and handlooms

[...]

The result was that the capitalists soon had everything in their hands, and nothing remained to the workers. This marked the introduction of the factory system into the textile industry.” (Engels, [Principles of Communism](#), 1847.).



From the introduction of more advanced machinery to produce, the skill of the worker increased. Relations of production changed, where hundreds or thousands of previously considered serfs and peasants were proletarianized.

Therefore, however much the relations of production may lag behind the development of the productive forces, they must, *sooner or later, come into correspondence with – and actually do come into correspondence with – the level of development of the productive forces, the character of the productive forces. Otherwise, we would have a fundamental violation of the unity of the productive forces and the relations of production within the system of production, a disruption of production as a whole, a crisis of production, a destruction of productive forces* [emphasis mine: P.B].

An instance in which the relations of production do not correspond to the character of the productive forces, conflict with them, is the economic crises in [current/modern] capitalist countries, where private capitalist ownership of the means of production is in glaring incongruity with the social character of the process of production, with the character of the productive forces. This results in economic crises, which lead to the destruction of productive forces. Furthermore, this incongruity itself constitutes the economic basis of social revolution, the purpose of which IS to destroy the existing relations of production and to create new relations of production corresponding to the character of the productive forces.

Note: This is not to say that capitalism has these incongruities from the beginning. As Stalin says, all modes of production (during their beginning) have their productive forces and relations of production at the same level of development. Capitalism is no exception:

“In the epoch following the bourgeois revolution, when the bourgeoisie had shattered the feudal relations of production and established bourgeois relations of production, there undoubtedly were periods when the bourgeois production relations did fully conform with the character of the productive forces” (Stalin, Economic Problems in the USSR, page 53, 1951.).”

As productive forces progressed, the private ownership of the means of production not only hindered productive progress, but it caused economic collapse.

In contrast, an instance in which the relations of production completely correspond to the character of the productive forces is the socialist national economy of the U.S.S.R., where the social ownership of the means of production fully corresponds to the social character of the process of

production, and where, because of this, economic crises and the destruction of productive forces are unknown.

*Consequently, the productive forces are not only the most mobile and revolutionary element in production but are also the determining element in the development of production [emphasis mine: P.B].*

Whatever are the productive forces such *must be the relations of production* [emphasis mine: P.B].

Note: Thus, to have a high state of the productive forces, the relations of production must be equally developed (checkmate, Dengists!)

While the state of the productive forces furnishes the answer to the question – with what instruments of production do men produce the material values they need? – the state of the relations of production furnishes the answer to another question – who owns the *means of production* (the land, forests, waters, mineral resources, raw materials, instruments of production, production premises, means of transportation and communication, etc.), who commands the means of production, whether the whole of society, or individual persons, groups, or classes which utilize them for the exploitation of other persons, groups or classes?

Here is a rough picture of the development of productive forces from ancient times to our day. The transition from crude stone tools to the bow and arrow, and the accompanying transition from the life of hunters to the domestication of animals and primitive pasturage; the transition from stone tools to metal tools (the iron axe, the wooden plow fitted with an iron coulter, etc.), with a corresponding transition to tillage and agriculture; a further improvement in metal tools for the working up of materials, the introduction of the blacksmith's bellows, the introduction of pottery, with a corresponding development of handicrafts [skilled workers who create articles with their hands], the separation of handicrafts from agriculture, the development of an independent handicraft industry and, subsequently, of manufacture; the transition from handicraft tools to machines and the transformation of handicraft and manufacture into machine industry; the transition to the machine system and the rise of modern large-scale

machine industry – such is a general and far from complete picture of the development of the productive forces of society in the course of man's history. *It will be clear that the development and improvement of the instruments of production was effected by men who were related to production, and not independently of men; and, consequently, the change and development of the instruments of production was accompanied by a change and development of men, as the most important element of the productive forces, by a change and development of their production experience, their labor skill, their ability to handle the instruments of production [emphasis mine:P.B].*

Note: Again, as I mentioned before, Stalin is saying that the first change in production occurs with the development of new instruments, which affect the productive skill and capacity, which affect the relations of production, and eventually, the entire mode of production.

*In conformity with the change and development of the productive forces of society in the course of history, men's relations of production, their economic relations also changed and developed [emphasis mine: P.B.].*

### *Main types of Relations of Production*

Five *main* types of relations of production are known to history: primitive communal, slave, feudal, capitalist, and socialist.

The basis of the relations of production under the primitive communal system is that the means of production are socially owned. This in the main corresponds to the character of the productive forces of that period. *Stone tools, and, later, the bow and arrow, precluded the possibility of men individually combating the forces of nature and beasts of prey.* In order to gather the fruits of the forest, to catch fish, to build some sort of habitation, men were obliged to work in common if they did not want to die of starvation or fall victim to beasts of prey or to neighboring societies. Labor in common led to the common ownership of the means of production, as well as of the fruits of production. Here the conception of private ownership of the means of production did not yet exist, except for the personal ownership of certain implements of production which were at the same

time means of defense against beasts of prey. Here there was no exploitation, no classes.

The basis of the relations of production under the slave system is that the slave-owner owns the means of production, he also owns the worker in production – the slave, whom he can sell, purchase, or kill as though he were an animal. Such relations of production in the main correspond to the state of the productive forces of that period. Instead of stone tools, men now have metal tools at their command; instead of the wretched and primitive husbandry of the hunter, who knew neither pasturage nor tillage, there now appear pasturage tillage, handicrafts, and a division of labor between these branches of production.

*Note: It should be noted that the division of labor started under the primitive communal system (at least all the way back to Homo Erectus).*

There appears the possibility of the exchange of products between individuals and between societies, of the accumulation of wealth in the hands of a few, the actual accumulation of the means of production in the hands of a minority, and the possibility of subjugation of the majority by a minority and the conversion of the majority into slaves. Here we no longer find the common and free labor of all members of society in the production process – here prevails the forced labor of slaves, who are exploited by the non-laboring slave-owners. Here, therefore, there is no common ownership of the means of production or of the fruits of production. It is replaced by private ownership. Here the slaveowner appears as the prime and principal property owner in the full sense of the term.

Rich and poor, exploiters and exploited, people with full rights and people with no rights, and a *fierce class struggle between them – such is the picture of the slave system.*

The basis of the relations of production under the feudal system is that the feudal lord owns the means of production and does not fully own the worker in production – the serf, whom the feudal lord can no longer kill, but whom he can buy and sell.

Alongside feudal ownership there exists individual ownership by the peasant and the craftsman of his implements of production and his private enterprise based on his personal labor. Such relations of production in the main correspond to the state of the productive forces of that period. Further improvements in the smelting and working of iron; the spread of the iron plow and the loom; the further development of agriculture, horticulture [garden cultivation/management], viticulture [cultivation of grape vines for winemaking] and dairying; the appearance of manufactories alongside of the handicraft workshops – such are the characteristic features of the state of the productive forces.

The new productive forces demand that the laborer shall display some kind of initiative in production and an inclination for work, an interest in work. The feudal lord therefore discards the slave, as a laborer who has no interest in work and is entirely without initiative, and prefers to deal with the serf, who has his own husbandry, implements of production, and a certain interest in work essential for the cultivation of the land and for the payment in kind of a part of his harvest to the feudal lord.

Here private ownership is further developed. Exploitation is nearly as severe as it was under slavery – it is only slightly mitigated. A class struggle between exploiters and exploited is the principal feature of the feudal system.

The basis of the relations of production under the capitalist system is that the capitalist owns the means of production, but not the workers in production – the wage laborers, whom the capitalist can neither kill nor sell because they are personally free, but who are deprived of means of production and) in order not to die of hunger, are obliged to sell their labor power to the capitalist and to bear the yoke of exploitation. Alongside of capitalist property in the means of production, we find, at first on a wide scale, private property of the peasants and craftsmen in the means of production, these peasants and craftsmen no longer being serfs, and their private property being based on personal labor. In place of the handicraft workshops and manufactories there appear huge mills and factories equipped with machinery. In place of the manorial estates tilled by

the primitive implements of production of the peasant, there now appear large capitalist farms run on scientific lines and supplied with agricultural machinery.

The new productive forces require that the workers in production shall be better educated and more intelligent than the downtrodden and ignorant serfs, that they be able to understand machinery and operate it properly. Therefore, the capitalists prefer to deal with wage-workers, who are free from the bonds of serfdom and who are educated enough to be able properly to operate machinery.

*But having developed productive forces to a tremendous extent, capitalism has become enmeshed in contradictions which it is unable to solve. By producing larger and larger quantities of commodities, and reducing their prices, capitalism intensifies competition, ruins the mass of small and medium private owners, converts them into proletarians and reduces their purchasing power, with the result that it becomes impossible to dispose of the commodities produced. On the other hand, by expanding production and concentrating millions of workers in huge mills and factories, capitalism lends the process of production a social character and thus undermines its own foundation, inasmuch as the social character of the process of production demands the social ownership of the means of production; yet the means of production remain private capitalist property, which is incompatible with the social character of the process of production [emphasis mine: P.B].*

Note: As the productive forces developed, a higher quantity of products was made, requiring proletarians to work in the millions together in factories manned by the capitalist. However, social production demands social ownership of the means of production. The social character of production is not reinforced by the relations of production; thus, the productive forces are not at the same level as the relations of production. Thus, capitalism digs its own grave by embellishing itself in contradictions it inherently cannot solve. Understanding the material needs of society (i.e. going from capitalism to socialism) consequently becomes ever-more evident as a

result. Here, this is where the role of ideas becomes the most potent and revolutionary force to change society.

These irreconcilable contradictions between the character of the productive forces and the relations of production make themselves felt in periodical crises of over-production, when the capitalists, finding no effective demand for their goods owing to the ruin of the mass of the population which they themselves have brought about, are compelled to burn products, destroy manufactured goods, suspend production, and destroy productive forces at a time when millions of people are forced to suffer unemployment and starvation, not because there are not enough goods, but because there is an overproduction of goods. This means that the capitalist relations of production have ceased to correspond to the state of productive forces of society and have come into irreconcilable contradiction with them.

Note: Here is a concrete example of productive forces developing to a high degree without the relations of production. As the instruments to produce develop, the skill and output of the individual worker increases. This consequently requires more organized and complex social structures to maintain production at this higher stage. However, the productive forces develop to such a point without the relations of production that keeping up with the former becomes impossible with the current stage of the latter. This incongruity manifests itself by the destruction of the economy, and by extension the productive forces, setting back capitalist society to a certain period.

Marx and Engels have similar comments in the Manifesto:

“Modern bourgeois society, with its relations of production, of exchange and of property, a society that has conjured up such gigantic means of production and of exchange, is *like the sorcerer who is no longer able to control the powers of the nether world whom he has called up by his spells*. For many a decade past the history of industry and commerce is but the history of the revolt of modern productive forces against modern conditions of production, against the property relations that are the conditions for the existence of the bourgeois and of its rule. It is enough to mention the commercial crises that by their periodical return put the

existence of the entire bourgeois society on trial, each time more threateningly. In these crises, a great part not only of the existing products, but also of the previously created productive forces, are periodically destroyed. *In these crises, there breaks out an epidemic that, in all earlier epochs, would have seemed an absurdity – the epidemic of over production. Society suddenly finds itself put back into a state of momentary barbarism; it appears as if a famine, a universal war of devastation, has cut off the supply of every means of subsistence; industry and commerce seem to be destroyed; and why? Because there is too much civilization, too many means of subsistence, too much industry, too much commerce. The productive forces at the disposal of society no longer tend to further the development of the conditions of bourgeois property; on the contrary, they have become too powerful for these conditions, by which they are fettered, and so soon as they overcome these fetters, they bring disorder into the whole of bourgeois society, endanger the existence of bourgeois property.*” [emphasis mine: P.B] (Marx, Engels, Manifesto of the Communist Party, page 17, 1848.)

As well as:

“Big industry created in the steam engine, and other machines, the means of endlessly expanding industrial production, speeding it up, and cutting its costs. With production thus facilitated, the free competition, which is necessarily bound up with big industry, assumed the most extreme forms; a multitude of capitalists invaded industry, and, in a short while, more was produced than was needed. As a consequence, finished commodities could not be sold, and a so-called commercial crisis broke out. Factories had to be closed, their owners went bankrupt, and the workers were without bread. Deepest misery reigned everywhere. After a time, the superfluous products were sold, the factories began to operate again, wages rose, and gradually business got better than ever. But it was not long before too many commodities were again produced and a new crisis broke out, only to follow the same course as its predecessor. Ever since the beginning of this (19th) century, the condition of industry has constantly fluctuated between periods of prosperity and periods of crisis; nearly every five to seven years, a fresh crisis has intervened, always with the greatest hardship for workers, and always accompanied by general revolutionary stirrings and the direct peril to the whole existing order of things



[...]

We see with the greatest clarity:

- (i) That all these evils are from now on to be ascribed solely to a social order which no longer corresponds to the requirements of the real situation; and
- (ii) That it is possible, through a new social order, to do away with these evils altogether.” (Engels, [Principles of Communism](#), 1847.).

This means that capitalism is pregnant with revolution, whose mission it is to replace the existing capitalist ownership of the means of production by socialist ownership.

This means that the main feature of the capitalist system is a most acute class struggle between the exploiters and the exploited.

The basis of the relations of production under the socialist system, which so far has been established only in the U.S.S.R., is the social ownership of the means of production. Here there are no longer exploiters and exploited. The goods produced are distributed according to labor performed, on the principle: "He who does not work, neither shall he eat." Here the mutual relations of people in the process of production are marked by comradesly cooperation and the socialist mutual assistance of workers who are free from exploitation. *Here the relations of production fully correspond to the state of productive forces; for the social character of the process of production is reinforced by the social ownership of the means of production* [emphasis mine: P.B.].

For this reason, socialist production in the U.S.S.R. knows no periodical crises of over-production and their accompanying absurdities.

For this reason, the productive forces here develop at an accelerated pace; for the relations of production that correspond to them offer full scope for such development.

Such is the picture of the development of men's relations of production in the course of human history.

*Such is the dependence of the development of the relations of production on the development of the productive forces of society, and primarily, on the development of the instruments of production, the dependence by virtue of which the changes and development of the productive forces sooner or later lead to corresponding changes and development of the relations of production [emphasis mine: P.B.].*

"The use and fabrication of instruments of labor," says Marx, "although existing in the germ among certain species of animals, is specifically characteristic of the human labor-process, and Franklin therefore defines man as a tool-making animal. Relics of bygone instruments of labor possess the same importance for the investigation of extinct economical forms of society, as do fossil bones for the determination of extinct species of animals. It is not the articles made, but how they are made that enables us to distinguish different economical epochs. Instruments of labor not only supply a standard of the degree of development to which human labor has attained, but they are also indicators of the social conditions under which that labor is carried on." (Marx, Capital, Vol. I, 1935, p. 121.)

And further:

– "Social relations are closely bound up with productive forces. In acquiring new productive forces men change their mode of production; and in changing their mode of production, in changing the way of earning their living, they change all their social relations. The hand-mill gives you society with the feudal lord; the steam-mill, society with the industrial capitalist." (Marx and Engels, Vol. V, p. 564.)

– "There is a continual movement of growth in productive forces, of destruction in social relations, of formation in ideas; the only immutable thing is the abstraction of movement." (Ibid., p. 364.)

Speaking of historical materialism as formulated in The Communist Manifesto, Engels says:

"Economic production and the structure of society of every historical epoch necessarily arising therefrom constitute the foundation for the political and intellectual history of that epoch; ... consequently (ever since the dissolution of the primeval communal ownership of land) all history has been a history of class struggles, of struggles between exploited and exploiting, between dominated and dominating classes at various stages of social development; ... this struggle, however, has now reached a stage where the exploited and oppressed class (the proletariat) can no longer emancipate itself from the class which exploits and oppresses it (the bourgeoisie), without at the same time for ever freeing the whole of society from exploitation, oppression

and class struggles...." (Engels' Preface to the German Edition of the *Manifesto*.)

Note: What can we take away from this article:

### 1. Dialectics

- 1.1 – Dialectical materialism posits that matter is in constant movement.
- 1.2 – Understanding its roots and combating idealism.
- 1.3 – Phenomenon are interconnected, mutually affecting each other. All matter is in a constant state of change and motion, leading to the development and dying away of something.
- 1.4 – Laws: Quantity to Quality, Negation of Negation, and Unity of Opposites

### 2. Materialism

- 2.1 – Matter is the source of mankind's consciousness.
- 2.2 – Material reality exists independent of our consciousness.
- 2.3 – Reality, through scientific practices, is able to be fully and unambiguously understood.
- 2.4 – The role of ideas, stemming from the material needs of society, becomes the most revolutionary element to carry them out to a new level of production.

### 3. Historical Materialism

- 3.1 – The chief determinant of the physiognomy of society is based on the mode of production.
- 3.2 – Dialectically Speaking, the mode of production is always under constant development, never staying in one position for too long before becoming something else.
- 3.3 – Productive forces are the most mobile/revolutionary element under the mode of production; once the tools to produce develop, they in turn develop the skill and

productive output of the worker, affecting their relations of production, and ultimately the mode of production itself

- 3.4 – However, the relations of production can in turn react progressively or in a reactionary way, hampering development, retarding it, or advancing it.
- 3.5 – If either the relations of production or the productive forces are at a quantitatively unequal level, they can cause economic collapse, as the current relations of production cannot support the higher level of productive forces.
- 3.6 – Relations of production and their characteristics: Primitive Communism, Slave Society, Feudalism, Capitalism, and Socialism.

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