

Marxism

Conceptions and definitions are the basis of all thought processes. We call our method "Marxism" because the fundamental theoretical work was in the main accomplished by Marx. Three interrelated principles--the materialist conception of history, the class struggle and the theory of surplus value – worked together to initiate this method.

Through long and persistent intellectual and organizational work, Marx made his remarkable declaration in 1859 in the *Preface* to his *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy* as follows:

“My inquiry led me to the conclusion that neither legal relations nor political forms could be comprehended whether by themselves or on the basis of a so-called general development of the human mind, but that on the contrary they originate in the material conditions of life, the totality of which Hegel, following the example of English and French thinkers of the eighteenth century, embraces within the term "civil society"; that the anatomy of this civil society, however, has to be sought in political economy. The study of this, which I began in Paris, I continued in Brussels, where I moved owing to an expulsion order issued by M. Guizot. The general conclusion at which I arrived and which, once reached, became the guiding principle of my studies can be summarised as follows.

“In the social production of their existence, men inevitably enter into definite relations, which are independent of their will, namely relations of production appropriate to a given stage in the development of their material forces of production. The totality of these relations of production constitutes the economic structure of society, the real foundation, on which arises a legal and political superstructure and to which correspond definite forms of social consciousness. The mode of production of material life conditions the general process of social, political and intellectual life. It is not the consciousness of men that determines their existence, but their social existence that determines their consciousness. At a certain stage of development, the material productive forces of society come into conflict with the existing relations of production or – this merely expresses the same thing in legal terms – with the property relations within the framework of which they have operated hitherto. From forms of development of the productive forces these relations turn into their fetters. Then begins an era of social revolution. The changes in the economic foundation lead sooner or later to the transformation of the whole immense superstructure.

“In studying such transformations it is always necessary to distinguish between the material transformation of the economic conditions of production, which can be determined with the precision of natural science, and the legal, political, religious, artistic or philosophic – in short, ideological forms in which men become conscious of this conflict and fight it out. Just as one does not judge an individual by what he thinks about himself, so one cannot judge such a period of transformation by its consciousness, but, on the contrary, this consciousness must be explained from the contradictions of material life, from the conflict existing between the social forces of production and the relations of production. No social order is ever destroyed before all the productive forces for which it is sufficient have been developed, and new superior relations of production never replace older ones before the material conditions for their existence have matured within the

framework of the old society.

“Mankind thus inevitably sets itself only such tasks as it is able to solve, since closer examination will always show that the problem itself arises only when the material conditions for its solution are already present or at least in the course of formation. In broad outline, the Asiatic, ancient, feudal and modern bourgeois modes of production may be designated as epochs making progress in the economic development of society. The bourgeois mode of production is the last antagonistic form of the social process of production – antagonistic not in the sense of individual antagonism but of an antagonism that emanates from the individuals' social conditions of existence – but the productive forces developing within bourgeois society create also the material conditions for a solution of this antagonism. The prehistory of human society accordingly closes with this social formation.”¹

Engels pointed out in his brilliant book *Socialism: Utopian and Scientific*, “The materialist conception of history starts from the proposition that the production of the means to support human life and, next to production, the exchange of things produced, is the basis of social structure; that in every society that has appeared in history, the manner in which wealth is distributed and society divided into classes or orders, is dependent upon what is produced, how it is produced, and how the products are exchanged. From this point of view the final causes of all social changes and political revolutions are to be sought, not in man's brains, not in man's better insight into eternal truth and justice, but in changes in the modes of production and exchange. They are to be sought, not in the philosophy, but in the economics of each particular epoch.”²

Therefore, materialist conception of history arises out of the use of the dialectical-materialist method in political economy. It is materialist as it recognises the primacy of matter in the surrounding world. It is dialectical because it recognises the universal interconnection of complex and dynamic objects and events within a single form-and-content totality.

It regards motion and development as the result of both the unity and the struggle of opposites. It explains change, reveals causes and analyses effects by locating the source of the motion of the processes within which contradictions are embodied. It shows how these contradictions determine the level of development of these processes, and it brings out the conditions for their resolution.

This method is not a dogma. It too develops in a dynamic fashion, is subject to change within its own framework, and is able to understand and review its own basis.

In contradistinction to idealist theories, this universal scientific understanding of the world develops upon the premise that it is not our consciousness that determines our life but our life that determines our consciousness and that consciousness, in turn, influences our life. In other words, being determines thinking and thinking influences being.

This understanding of history is not derived from any philosophical or contemplative premises, or from any better insight into eternal truth and justice, but from production. In

two senses, production of the life of the species itself and its needs together with production of the means to meet those needs.

Progress is ultimately determined by the changing character of human productive powers giving rise to more improved modes of production and resultant social structures, such as primitive communism, chattel slavery, feudalism and capitalism, the latter three being forms of class society.

The origin of class society dates back several thousand years to when private property and the state originated and social relationships were turned into exploitative and antagonistic class relationships with their array of economic categories such as rent, interest, exchange, barter, simple commodity production, buying and selling, market, money, capital, commodity, value and price, profit vis-à-vis wages.

Marxian economics regards relations of production as manifestations of levels of technological progress. Nevertheless, within a given mode of production, developing productive powers eventually come into conflict with the existing relations of production, which from forms of their development turn into their fetters.

This conflict expresses itself in the struggle between two opposing classes, with the owning and exploiting minority class having a vested interest in maintaining the existing relations and a new propertyless exploited class working towards the further development of the productive forces; this requires a revolutionary replacement of the antiquated relations with new ones. Resolution of the conflict is obtained with the seizure of political power by the new class in order to use it to usher in the new mode of production.

Marxists are not ideologues who invent social systems. For us social systems are the necessary outcome of history. Ideas, in all epochs, are basically the products of production. This is not to uphold economic determinism. Ideas do develop also in the realm of "pure" thought and fantasy. But, however they originated, their seed-bed is the economic soil of society wherein only some take root and spread because they correspond to reality.

In a class society, the ideas of the ruling class rule over the ideas of the ruled. Since the early days of their comradeship, Marx and Engels went on defining and refining their ideas and method – the *materialist conception of history* – as against all kinds of idealist conceptions of history. In the mid-1840s in the *German Ideology*, they wrote: “The ideas of the ruling class are in every epoch the ruling ideas; i.e., the class which is the ruling *material* force in society is at the same time its ruling *intellectual* force. The class, which has the means of material production at its disposal, consequently also controls the means of mental production, so that the ideas of those who lack the means of mental production are on the whole subject to it. The ruling ideas are nothing more than the ideal expression of the dominant material relations, the dominant material relations grasped as ideas; hence of the relations which makes the one class the ruling one, therefore, the ideas of its dominance.”³ Then again, in their *Manifesto* they pointed out: “The ruling ideas of each age have ever been the ideas of its ruling class.”⁴ History has shown that the intellectual

production changes its character in proportion as the material production is changed.

Thus, the social selection of ideas applicable to a given mode of production depends on the class that is in a position to select and on the method it applies.

With the emergence of the world market and the world-historical co-operation of individuals, history has been transformed into world history. Hence, the *working class* exists only world-historically and their activities, world socialism can only have world-historical existence. Communism or Socialism (alternative name of the same relations) for Marx and Engels is *not* a state of affairs that is to be established. It is *not* an ideal to which reality will have to adjust itself. According to them, it is the *real movement* which abolishes the present state of things. The conditions of this movement are the necessary outcome of the existing premise. Socialism is the replacement of ownership in its capitalist (individual, joint stock and state-run) form with democratically run universal ownership.

Marxism, as the theory of world socialist revolution, defines the object, the means, and the method as a practical worldwide movement. This revolution is necessary “not only because the ruling class cannot be overthrown in any other way, but also because the class overthrowing it can only in a revolution succeed in ridding itself of all the muck of ages and become fitted to found the society anew. ... Circumstances make men just as much men make circumstances.”⁵

Further, “Men make their own history but they do not make it just as they please; they do not make it under circumstances chosen by themselves, but under circumstances directly encountered, given and transmitted from the past. The tradition of all the dead generations weighs like a nightmare on the brain of the living.”⁶

The historical materialist method is the science of the working class, which consists in the criticism of class economy. As Marx aptly said, "So far as such criticism represents a class, it can only represent the class whose vocation in history is the overthrow of the capitalist mode of production and the final abolition of all classes – the proletariat"⁷

Could it be otherwise? Could anyone ever be thinking of grasping the science of the working class without having already rejected the capitalist interest and adopted the working class interest? Certainly not.

An array of assorted ‘Marxists’ have been building up their structures without reading little or any of Marx and Engels in original and habitually accepting without verification the distorted and false views of all vulgar and wretched ‘Marxist’ leaders and their clannish followers. Already, Marx had cautioned, “as in private life one differentiates between what a man thinks and says of himself and what he really is and does, so in historical struggles one must distinguish still more the phrases and fancies of parties from their real organism and their real interests, their conception of themselves, from their reality.”⁸

Thus, workers of the world will have to think for themselves, learn the lessons of history and organize into the working *class-for-itself* to achieve freedom as the appreciation of necessity. They have to because it is the necessity of humanity as a totality. However, necessity is blind only as far as it is not understood. Therefore, they must understand what is necessary in the first place.

Since humans are shaped by environment, their environment must be made human in the first place. Since humans are social by nature, they will develop their true nature only in society and the power of their nature must be measured not by the power of alienated individuals but by the power of society.

The immense majority of the collective working class of the world will have to bring their “being” into harmony with their “essence” in a practical way, by means of a revolution. For genuine socialists, the scientists of the working class, it is a question of workers educating and uniting themselves intellectually and organizationally as a *class-for-itself*, in order to seize political power in each state and world wide with a view to replacing the existing state of affairs of life with a democratically run universal ownership.

Notes:

- 1 Marx, *Preface to A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*, Moscow, 1978, pp. 20-22. Also see:
<http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1859/critique-pol-economy/preface.htm>
- 2 Engels, *Socialism: Utopian and Scientific*, CW 24, p.306
- 3 Marx and Engels, *The German Ideology*, CW 5, Moscow, 1976, pp.59
- 4 Marx and Engels, *Manifesto of the Communist Party*, Moscow, 1977, p.57
- 5 Marx and Engels, *The German Ideology*, CW 5, Moscow, 1976, pp.53-54
- 6 Marx, *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*, SW 1, Moscow, 1969, p. 398
- 7 Marx, *Afterword to the Second German Edition*, 1873, *Capital*, Moscow 1974, pp. 25-26
- 8 Marx, *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*, SW 1, Moscow, 1969, p. 421