

Determinism and Revolution

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By definition, the most important question for a revolutionary is how revolutionary transformation takes place. From this question many other questions follow: the first of these is what has to be changed for this transformation to take place, but also how it took place in the past, what was specific and inimitable about it and what can we transfer to our present, what factors are involved, which of them are beyond our control, what place do will and conscience occupy among them.

The answer we give to these questions sets the coordinates of our action. It is the compass that orients our analysis of social reality and regulates our intervention in it. It is, in short, what constitutes the method from which to develop revolutionary theory and practice.

Materialism

It took time to understand that for real social change to take place, it was necessary to change the material way of producing our lives. For even the very idea of social change, that is, the idea that human beings transform their own conditions of existence, to be possible, was necessary to begin by evicting God from natural reality. Bourgeois philosophy, as a product of the desacralising thrust of the mercantile world, solved this problem during the 17th century with Cartesian mechanicism, granting the divine the realm of consciousness in order to give bodies their own laws, whose explanation could be made without recourse to God and which, therefore, human beings could modify at their convenience. It was not by chance that this first step was taken in the heat of the scientific revolution of the 17th century, to which great bourgeois thinkers such as Descartes, Leibniz and Hobbes undoubtedly contributed, and which would lay the foundations for the rationality of the modern world as we know it.

The next leap was taken by the materialist thinkers of the 18th century. In the midst of the bourgeoisie's battle against the Ancien Régime that would eventually lead to the French Revolution, thinkers such as Helvétius, d'Holbach

and Diderot found in materialism the way to break once and for all with the divine sacralisation of the social order, placing the human being as just another part of the natural world under a monistic vision. In doing so, they sought to situate the functioning of society as a human, not a divine affair, which could therefore be modified by the will assembled in the state through the social contract. However, representatives as they were of the rising bourgeoisie, they could not overcome a contradiction intrinsic to the social relations that had brought them up: the separation between subject and object, between the human being as a member of nature and his life in society, with its institutions, its laws, its educators. As Marx and Engels had already pointed out, and as Plekhanov acutely reiterated, the great bourgeois materialists were entering a dead end by defining the human being as a mechanical product of natural conditions - in the manner of Montesquieu, who explained in *The Spirit of the Laws* the forms of social and political organisation based on the climate - and at the same time by seeking social transformation in the change of laws, political institutions and theoretical and educational doctrines. If our social behaviour is determined by natural conditions, how can we change it? And at the same time, if it is not, how can we avoid falling into the dualism between nature and culture, matter and soul, which legitimises the power of religion and its traditional order over our lives? Or to put it another way, if we are a product of our circumstances, how can we transform them? If our will is independent of them, why hasn't the consciousness of inequality long ago put an end to inequality?

German idealism, with Hegel at its head, would devote itself fully to this contradiction, seeking in it the answer to the failure of the French Revolution and its winds of emancipation, which shook much of the Western world from Russia to the Caribbean. Defending freedom meant founding it on a monistic basis, as the materialists of the 18th century had understood it, but integrating the will into the natural order as a whole. For this it was necessary to introduce into philosophy what the French Revolution had already introduced into history: the transformation of reality, the dynamic by which there can be a continuity (monism) between what was and what is no longer, because it has changed radically, and whose mutation is therefore possible to understand rationally. Reason had to be able to account for the laws of nature which, in their becoming, in their historical movement, would give rise to the succession of human societies in a progressive self-consciousness towards their full freedom. This was an attempt to overcome the contradiction of the old materialists, in which nature and society, determinism and transformation, were opposed to each other. But this was done at the price of making reason the very motor of history. Thus, an attribute of the human being, his consciousness, became the true historical subject of which concrete human beings, their bodies, their action, were but successive incarnations. Consequently, social transformation found its ultimate expression in political transformation, in the transformation of the state as that space of freedom and self-consciousness in the face of a society that acts blindly, subjugated by necessity and its many conflicting interests, as a function

of that war of all against all with which Hobbes had been able to define - without knowing it - not the natural state of the human being, but the natural state of capitalist society.

The experience of the proletariat in that great political revolution, which was the French Revolution, showed that the transformation of the state was not synonymous with social change. Shortly before he went into exile in France and became acquainted with the organised workers' movement that would definitively win him over to communism, Marx broke with Hegel and German idealism in order to go beyond the political - i.e. bourgeois - revolution in Germany. As he would say in the Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right, written at the end of 1843 at the same time as The Jewish Question, it is necessary to turn "*the critique of religion into the critique of law, the critique of theology into the critique of politics*" (p. 211). That is, in order to fight for a true revolutionary transformation, we must move from the critique of religious mystification - initiated by the materialists of the 18th century and taken up by the young Hegelians through Feuerbach and Bruno Bauer - to the critique of the mystification of the state, politics and law. It must be openly stated that the state can be "*a free state without man being a free man*" ("The Jewish Question", p. 184) and that "*political emancipation is not in itself human emancipation*" (p. 193)¹. And this is precisely because, despite the form in which it appears to us in capitalism, the state is not that space of freedom from which to direct civil society, in Hegel's terms. Will and consciousness do not have the capacity to mobilise social change from the state, but rather, on the contrary, it is the concrete and material human beings who make up that civil society, who through it determine what the state is, what it can do and the very false appearance it takes on before our eyes.

Thanks to Engels, to his knowledge of socialist theories and above all to his contact with the organised proletariat in France, in the course of 1844 Marx began to move from the critique of ideas to the critique of the social relations that produce those ideas. In order to understand what this universal emancipation meant, which he would end up putting in the proletariat's struggle for communism, it was necessary to move from the critique of politics to the critique of political economy. It was necessary to understand that real social

¹ Later, in the summer of 1844 in France, he would formulate his criticism of mere political revolution more precisely in "Critical Notes to the article: "The King of Prussia and Social Reform. By a Prussian": "The more cultured and general the political reason of a people is, the more the proletariat wastes its forces - at least at the beginning of its movement - in irrational, useless and blood-drowning riots. Since this people thinks in the form of politics, it sees the reason for all evils in the will and all remedies in the violence and subversion of a precise form of state. The proof: the first outbursts of the French proletariat. The workers of Lyons thought they were pursuing purely political aims, they thought of themselves as mere soldiers of the republic, when in reality they were soldiers of socialism. Thus their political reason obscured to them the root of the social calamity and falsified the knowledge of its true end; thus their political reason lied to their social instinct" (p. 243).

change could not be limited to changing consciences, because *"consciousness can never be anything other than conscious being, and the being of men is their real life process"* (German Ideology, p. 21), nor could it be limited to changing consciousness, because *"consciousness can never be anything other than conscious being, and the being of men is their real life process"* (German Ideology, p. 21), nor to transform the state, because *"social organisation and the state constantly spring from the life process of certain individuals; but of these individuals, not as they may appear to their own or others' imagination, but as they really are; that is to say, as they act and produce materially and, therefore, as they carry out their activities under certain material limits, premises and conditions, independent of their will"* (id.). A radical transformation would then imply a revolution that would directly attack the foundations of society, the way in which material life is produced and reproduced within it.

From these premises, Marx and Engels developed historical materialism, the method that would guide the whole of their theoretical and practical work for communist revolution. The materialist understanding of history would lead Marx to focus on how the capitalist mode of production is articulated, to critique the political economy and to understand not only its functioning, but also the contradictions that prepare its end. That is why one cannot start from a materialist method without understanding, as he set out in *Capital*, the categories that articulate this mode of production. But neither can one understand anything in *Capital* if one reads it as an economic manual, devoid not only of its revolutionary vocation, but also of the materialist method that situates capitalism as the last class society in history, or rather - in Marx's words - in human prehistory.

Determinism

What needs to change to change everything? The way we produce and reproduce our material life as a society. The mode of production on which the whole social edifice is built and which, under capitalism, is governed by the production of value. However, this approach has been badly misunderstood by the gradualist influence of the Second International and above all by the counter-revolutionary interests of Stalinism, which concentrated on constructing a "proletarian science" that would serve as an ideological justification for the development of national capitalism. Because of this contamination, there has been a tendency to interpret historical materialism as if Marx and Engels reduced the human being to a homo oeconomicus, a homo faber which not only does not correspond to the social logic we see in pre-capitalist societies or in the archaeological remains of the origin of the species, but also looks suspiciously like that capitalist anthropology with which so many bourgeois thinkers naturalised the historical categories of this mode of production, and which Marx and Engels fought against throughout their lives.

But to place them in vulgar materialism is convenient for those who want to oppose homo faber with homo sapiens, economism with the voluntarism of free-thinking culture or, in short, Soviet stakhanovism with capitalist exploitation itself under the cloak of Western democracies. This reproduces the dualism inherent in this mode of production between bourgeois materialism and bourgeois idealism, between the empiricism of "*dead facts [...], still abstract, or the imaginary action of imaginary subjects*" (German Ideology, p. 22) with which historical materialism will break away.

If we start precisely from our materialist method, we will understand that the ideas that individuals have of themselves and of the reality that surrounds them are the product of the way they produce and reproduce their lives. Communists do not oppose one ideology to another ideology, but analyse the social relations that produce the dominant ideology and establish its historical expiration. In this way, one can understand how the logic of value spontaneously produces empiricism and voluntarism at the same time. As befits a society of producers isolated from each other, who operate blindly behind the back of social needs and for whom society is but the means with which to fulfil the ultimate end of their private profit, in capitalism the most intuitive way of understanding reality is from the point of view of the individual. Methodological individualism induces the perception of a heterogeneous multiplicity of isolated facts that have no relation to each other except that of the individual who observes them. From the atomised individual from which Hume started, it cannot be affirmed that the sun will rise tomorrow just because it has been rising until now. The only way to escape from empiricist paralysis is to posit that, in effect, the point of union of all these phenomena is the individual who observes them: he is the Sun around which the planets of external reality revolve. Thus we move from empiricism to idealism, to voluntarism. In a mode of production whose basic social cell is the atomised individual, the individual is thought of as the centre, the motor and the ultimate purpose of the whole social complex and of natural reality itself. Paradoxically, the most impersonal social relations in human history produce the impression, inverted "*as in a camera obscura*" (German Ideology, p. 21), that the will of the individual is omnipotent.

We, communists, oppose determinism and the notion of social totality against the empiricist and voluntarist ideology that emanates from capitalist social relations, and affirm that only from these two nodal points can the possibility of revolutionary transformation of society be understood.

But determinism in what sense? Although the notion of natural law emerged as early as the 17th century with the first scientific revolution of capitalism, it was not until much later that we began to speak of social laws. The emergence of political economy with Adam Smith and David Ricardo would lead to the discovery that not only natural facts, but also human activity is subject to determinations that are beyond the will and conscience of individuals and that

can be studied in a scientific, rational way. The social determinations they posited, however, were dehistoricised and inscribed in the behaviour of all human societies, even if only in germ. This naturalisation of bourgeois categories continues to be reproduced again and again by today's economists, to the extent that they want to see the capitalist form of money already in the cocoa beans used as a means of exchange by pre-Columbian societies.

Against this operation, Marx studies the natural laws of capitalism as determinations which are, in the first place, specific to this mode of production and therefore, secondly and above all, as historically transient determinations, determinations which in turn produce the conditions for the passage to the next mode of production: communism. Thus, *Capital* is not about *"the greater or lesser degree attained, in its development, by the social antagonisms resulting from the natural laws of capitalist production. It is about these laws themselves, about those tendencies which operate and impose themselves with iron necessity"* (p. 7). That is why *"even if a society has discovered the natural law that governs its own movement - and the ultimate aim of this work is ultimately to bring to light the economic law that governs the movement of modern society - it can neither skip natural phases of development nor abolish them by decree. But it can shorten and mitigate the birth pangs"* (p. 8).

This must be well understood: these determinations are not supra-human entities that dictate the course of history in a teleological way like Hegel's Spirit, but supra-individual forces - it is quite another thing for bourgeois thinkers that everything beyond their narrow individuality seems to them to be the Heavenly Father. The real historical agents are not abstract categories, but living, concrete individuals who, in producing and reproducing their material life, also produce their social life, their historical behaviour towards nature and towards each other. However, this they do not do *"at their own free will, under circumstances of their own choosing, but under those circumstances which they encounter directly, which exist and have been bequeathed to them by the past. The tradition of all dead generations oppresses like a nightmare the brains of the living"* (18 Brumaire). These already existing circumstances that *"have been bequeathed by the past"* to individuals are not a circumstantial and random accumulation. They are governed by determinations, by social laws specific to the mode of production in which they act. But what is a mode of production?

In its most general formulation, there are *"three aspects or, to put it in the German way, [...] three "moments" which have existed since the beginning of history and since the first man and which still govern history today"* (German Ideology, p. 24): the production of the indispensable means to satisfy immediate material needs - eating, drinking, shelter, etc. -, the creation of new needs out of this same production, and reproduction, in its more physical sense of the production of other human beings. These elements that constitute the *"production of life"* (id.) do not only consist in the *"reproduction of the physical*

existence of individuals. Rather, it is already a certain mode of activity of these individuals, a certain way of manifesting their life, a certain way of life of these individuals. As individuals manifest their life, so they are. What they are, therefore, coincides with their production, both with what they produce and how they produce" (p. 16).

The mode of production is thus both physical and social, since it entails a mode of cooperation - a specific type of social organisation - to bring about the production of life. Individuals - those actually existing agents of history - are born into particular material and social circumstances or, in other words, into a particular state of productive forces and corresponding social relations. The productive forces are made up of both untransformed nature - such as the disposition of the territory and its resources, which is particularly important at the beginning of human societies - and nature already transformed by past generations and which is presented as accumulated social labour, whether physical - tools, infrastructures, etc. - or cultural, in the form of knowledge, techniques and skills destined for production and transmitted from one generation to the next. To these must also be added the very arrangement of living forces of labour, i.e. the number of members of society who produce together with a certain degree of specialisation in the tasks in which they are engaged, a certain way of combining in the process of social production. Thus, population growth and the division of labour are also factors in the development of the productive forces, although they are primarily a product of them.

It is important to understand well the role Marx and Engels give to the productive forces in the face of two kinds of deformation brought about by the counter-revolution. On the one hand, it has been understood that the productive forces could be reduced to the kind of technical inventions that would unilaterally and abstractly determine the relations of production and the rest of the social complex. But it is the bourgeoisie, which separates the ages of mankind into the use of stone, bronze and iron, not the communists, who have this kind of vision. For us, human societies are divided into modes of production whose specific difference is the social relations of production, which stimulate or retard the development of productivity according to their own internal logic. This is why we can distinguish the minor importance of the invention of the hydraulic clock in 11th century China - which is not an improvement in productivity but a consumer item, a device for the amusement of the ruling class - from that of the mechanical clock at the origin of capitalism in Europe. That is why we also situate with Marx the feudal mode of production, which occurs in a Europe much more technically backwards than the contemporary societies of Asia and North Africa, at a later stage of development as a mode of production, in which the autonomisation of the means of labour in relation to the land prepares the leap to the capitalist mode of production. Nor do Marx and Engels give a linear and unstoppable progression to the development of the productive forces. On the contrary, it undergoes advances and setbacks according to historical

circumstances, because *"whether or not the productive forces obtained in one locality, and mainly inventions, are lost to further development depends exclusively on the extent of exchange"* (German Ideology, p. 46). That is why there may be a Dark Age between archaic and classical Greece in which writing is forgotten, or why the medieval inhabitants of Rome looked upon the dome of the Pantheon as a product of magic. On the contrary, it is the drive towards globalisation, which has been embedded in capitalist social relations from the very beginning, that prevents - whatever it may be - a reversal of the productive forces, just as it is the logic of value that involves technological and scientific developments in the productive process as never before in history.

And yet the level of development of the productive forces and the division of labour are the material basis of these relations of production. Precisely the second deformation, which comes as a reaction to the first, consists in denying this basis and reducing the social structure to the relations of production that articulate it. Perhaps the clearest formulation of these approaches, albeit from an academic and non-militant point of view, is the one developed by Brenner with the notion of "social property relations", a view vulgarised by Federici in *Caliban and the Witch*. Under this perspective, the causes that provoke the passage from one mode of production to the next cease to have material determinations and are presented as an accumulation of coincidences and unintended results of the class struggle, depriving us of an objective basis for historical explanation. Modes of production are closed systems and the passage from one to the next is basically random, not the product of internal contradictions. Consequently, for Meiksins Wood, who takes Brenner's views to the extreme, capitalism is a mere historical contingency which, logically, since a chance event cannot occur in several places at once, was born in England² But this is not the view of Marx and Engels, for whom the level of the productive forces has its most palpable manifestation in the degree of division of labour, and *"the different stages of development of the division of labour are as many different forms of property; or, in other words, each stage of the division of labour also determines the relations of individuals to each other"* (German Ideology, p. 17). For the development of the productive capacity of societies opens up the possibility of a further division of labour which *"results first of all in the separation of industrial and commercial labour from agricultural labour, and thus in the separation of town and country and in the contradiction of interests between the one and the other. Its further development leads to the separation of commercial and industrial labour. At the same time, the division of labour within these different branches leads, in turn, to the formation of different sectors among the individuals who co-operate in particular jobs"* (ibid.). The increase in productive capacity increases the surpluses which, as many societies have done in history, intuiting their disintegrating potential, can no doubt be redistributed through the logic of the gift or directly destroyed in collective

² For a more in-depth critique of this approach we recommend reading *Transforming the World* by Neil Davidson

rituals, but which in any case make it possible to use them to break down the primary matrix of land cultivation into groups specialised in other activities and thus develop mercantile exchange.

On this basis, Marx, in the "Forms Preceding Capitalist Production" of the *Grundrisse*, develops the processes of disintegration of the various pre-capitalist community forms on the basis of their internal contradictions. "*The aim of all these communal entities is [[their]]³ preservation*", i.e. the reproduction of their members through the conditions of production, access to which ensures their membership of the community, which "*constitutes at the same time the behaviour of the members towards each other and thus constitutes the community itself. But, at the same time, this reproduction is necessarily new production and destruction of the old form. For example, where each individual can own a certain number of acres of land, the mere increase in population is already an impediment. To overcome this, colonisation becomes necessary, and colonisation makes war of conquest necessary. As a result, slaves, etc. Also expansion of the *ager publicus* e.g. and patricians, who represent the community, etc. Thus the preservation of the ancient community implies the destruction of the conditions on which it is based, it becomes its opposite*" (p. 454). In their effort to reproduce their material life through given conditions of production (means and material of labour) and relations of production that condition their access to them, individuals end up transforming these very conditions and the social relations that articulate them.

This notion is central to historical materialism and will run through all of Marx's theoretical work. It consists in understanding that individuals relate to nature through the relations of production and that, by transforming it, they end up transforming their own relations of production and thus themselves. Historical materialism thus overcomes the dualism between bourgeois materialism and idealism, because it breaks with the separation between subject and object by understanding the relationship between human beings and nature through their social, historical and - when the time comes - revolutionary practice.

Already in the Economic-Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844 Marx treats labour as an anthropological characteristic, by which human beings act as human beings - i.e. bring their specifically human attributes into play - when they transform nature: in bourgeois society "*labour, the activity by which he lives, productive life itself are presented to man first of all as a mere means of satisfying a need, that of preserving physical existence. But productive life is the life of the species, it is life that generates life. The kind of action by which a species lives encapsulates its whole character, characterises it specifically, and free, conscious activity is the characteristic of the human species. Life itself presents itself simply as a means of living*" ("Paris Manuscripts", p. 364). This

³ From here on, double square brackets [[]] are introduced by the edition from which the quotation is taken, and single square brackets [] by us

same notion, which in 1844 still had very philosophical features, Marx will bring down to earth in *The German Ideology* and the *Theses on Feuerbach* when he argues that the essence of the human being is social and historical because what the human being is, becomes transformed as he transforms nature to produce his life. By working, by modifying nature to satisfy their needs, individuals transform the social relations that constitute them, thus transforming themselves. It should be noted here that historical nature does not mean social construct, that postmodern concept in which we are beings constructed by heteronomous, alienating and ultimately unassailable forces, but a dynamic vision of human beings in which they are what, determined by the material and historical conditions from which they start, their own action transforms them socially. We can thus understand that "*the human essence is not something abstract and immanent to each individual. It is, in its reality, the whole of social relations*" (Sixth Theses on Feuerbach). For Marx and Engels, for historical materialism, the human being is neither homo faber nor homo sapiens, but homo Gemeinwesen, historically determined homo 'community'.

Insofar as the notion of human nature is dynamic and historical, both the condition of the subject and its conditions of existence are an essentially practical problem. The difficulty of understanding the human being's belonging to the natural world without reducing it to a mechanical accumulation of muscles and nerves - which scientific thought still reproduces today, as can be seen in the polarization between mechanism and idealism in neuroscience - is not a theoretical problem but a practical one: it is the necessary emanation of social relations that de facto separate the human being from his conditions of existence, from nature as his inorganic body. This separation between subject and object, between culture and nature - which led the materialists of the 18th century into a dead end and which the German idealists of the 19th century could only resolve by mystifying this relationship through the realisation of the Spirit - Marx situates as a product of the relations of production, that is, of the practice of individuals towards nature through a historically determined society, because "*the problem of whether an objective truth can be attributed to human thought is not a theoretical problem, but a practical problem*" (Second Thesis on Feuerbach). Its solution, therefore, is not to be found in philosophy but in practice itself which, first unconsciously by transforming its conditions of existence and then consciously by transforming the very relations of production, is a revolutionary practice: "*the coincidence of the change of circumstances with that of human activity or change of men themselves can only be rationally conceived and understood as revolutionary practice*" (third Theses on Feuerbach).

The Succession of Modes of Production

In tracing the history of this separation between subject and object, between the individual and his conditions of existence, there is not in Marx the

linearity and etatism that Stalinism would use to justify its interclassist policy in other countries. On the contrary, the "Forms" outlines a complex path from what Engels would later describe in the Origin of the Family as primitive communism to the point where producers are completely separated from their conditions of existence under capitalism, becoming labour power suspended in mid-air. Far from being a straight line through which every human society must pass, history is more like a tree with many branches that rise in different directions, that take longer or stop early in their development, that cross each other, but whose trunk nevertheless always grows upwards. This is so not because history is teleologically determined, but because once a society has reached a higher level of development, the other human groups - especially the more interconnected they become through trade - cannot remain indifferent. *"All the collisions of history arise, then, according to our conception, from the contradiction between the productive forces and the form of exchange. It is not, moreover, necessary that this contradiction, in order to provoke collisions in a country, should be aggravated precisely in that country itself. Competition with industrially more developed countries, brought about by increased international exchange, is sufficient to generate a similar contradiction in countries with less developed industry (thus, for example, the latent proletariat in Germany has been brought to the fore by competition from English industry)"* (German Ideology, p. 64).

In historical materialism, what marks the degree of development of the modes of production is not their technical or cultural character, but the type of relationship the individual has with his conditions of existence, and thus the degree of dissolution of the original community - non-class societies, whether foraging or sedentary - where individual, community and objective conditions of existence are not yet separated. At the beginning, the conditions of production are fundamentally the land, that matrix which is at the same time a means of labour and raw materials, and to which the production of the rest of the instruments is subordinated. The individual has access to it thanks to the community and as a member of the community. There is no difference between him and the human group which constitutes his being and which guarantees, through cooperation, the production of his life through the land. Individual, community and conditions of existence are united.

But primitive communism is communism within the community, not outside. War often becomes the primary collective task, which facilitates, especially with slavery, the emergence of private property and the beginning of class societies. A second phase of development⁴ begins in which the individual is no longer guaranteed access to the conditions of production by the mere fact of being a member of the community. Conversely, only by having access to these

⁴ We take the division established by the PCInt in *Succession of forms of production and society in Marxist theory* (1957) into five phases, from primitive communism to integral communism, passing through secondary forms (from China to ancient Rome), feudalism and capitalism

conditions, only by owning land can he remain a member of the community. Thus debt slavery, whereby one ceases to be a member of the community to become a means of production, is widespread at this stage in all territories, from traditional China to ancient Rome. This second stage is then characterised by the fact that the individual remains the possessor of his means of production, but at the risk of losing them and becoming one of them, and that these are still fundamentally auxiliary to the land, so that the city is only an *"already developed seat (centre) of the peasants (landowners)"* ("Forms", p. 436) which is based on the ownership of land and agriculture. Manufacture is not the preserve of the citizens, only of foreigners and former slaves, and trade in these societies is mainly sumptuary and long-distance: commodities have not been at the heart of production, nor do they mediate the relations of exploitation.

The emergence of the feudal mode of production will be a qualitative leap, a third stage of development which prepares for the definitive separation of the individual from his conditions of existence. This is precisely because what is essential is not the level of technological development in itself, but the type of social dynamism that introduces the autonomy of the means of labour from the land and, consequently, the autonomy of the city from the countryside. For *"classical ancient history is urban history, but of cities based on land ownership and agriculture; Asian history is a kind of indifferent unity of city and countryside (in this case the really big cities are to be considered merely as a manorial camp, as a superfetation on the properly economic structure); the Middle Ages (Germanic epoch) arises from the earth as the seat of history, history whose further development then becomes a contrast between city and country; modern [[history]] is urbanisation of the country, not, as among the ancients, ruralisation of the city"* (p. 442).

In ancient Rome the city was the seat of the landowners, from which they exercised their political and military dominion. It is therefore natural that, as the slavery on which the ancient classical mode of production rests shows increasing signs of exhaustion, the ancient city begins to dissolve and a process of ruralisation of the population begins - the opposite of the capitalist mode of production, whose exhaustion leads to a process of exponential and limitless urbanisation. Precisely because in nascent feudalism the towns have a peripheral role in class exploitation, they will be able to develop an economic, legal and political autonomy which will be the correlate of the progressive autonomy of the means of labour from the land. This feature characterises feudalism as the third stage of development in the modes of production: *"wherever this form of the worker as owner or of the worker-owner as an autonomous form is placed alongside and outside land ownership ([[i.e., where there is]] the artisanal and urban development of labour)"*, wherever the means of labour have become detached from the land as the medium which dominated the whole of production, wherever the artisanate reproduces itself autonomously in relation to

the rural classes, *"a second⁵ historical stage is already presupposed alongside and at the same time outside the first"* (p. 460).

Only this autonomisation of the means of production from the land could prepare the leap to the fourth stage, capitalism. With the medieval cities, a type of economy is established which, based on craftsmanship and the accompanying trade, revolves around the circulation of merchandise and money. Thus, the city was no longer just the seat of long-distance trade, but began to nurture an intense proximity trade between the city and the surrounding rural areas. At the same time, it will offer an incentive to serfs and feudal lords to trade agricultural products and to transform rent in kind into monetary rent, as well as a space of resistance in which serfs can escape from feudal power and which will thus become a factor in weakening it. Through the monetisation of feudal rent and the progressive accumulation of former serfs in the cities, without the capacity of the guilds to absorb them - like the Florentine *ciompi* - the foundations are prepared for the definitive separation of the individual from his objective conditions of existence, creating the bare labour force necessary for the emergence of capitalist social relations.

On the other hand, with the autonomisation of the means of labour there is a leap in the relation of the individual to his conditions of existence, which cease to appear as a gift of nature and become a product of his conscious labour, as does the community itself. In craftsmanship, the individual ceases to appear as a product of social relations and his objective conditions of existence and begins to manifest himself as an agent of them: *"the instrument itself is already a product of labour and, consequently, the element which constitutes the property is already placed as a result of labour, the communal entity can no longer appear here in the natural form, as in the first case - the communal entity, on which this type of property is founded - but as a communal entity which is itself already produced, generated, secondary, produced by labour itself"* (p. 461). Thanks to the development of the productive forces, the division of labour and the relations of production that accompany it, the individual becomes aware of his own historical agency, of his role in the constitution of his natural and social environment, an element that will be distinctive of the rising bourgeois class and that will provide the material basis for the very notion of social change to emerge. This process which feudalism makes possible will be culminated by capitalism, which cleanses *"the earth then from its superfluous mouths, tears the children of the earth from the breast which bred them, and thus transforms agriculture itself, which according to its nature presents itself as a direct source of subsistence, into a mediated source of subsistence, completely dependent on social relations. (Reciprocal dependence must have reached its full*

⁵ In the "Forms" Marx speaks of feudalism as a second stage because, at the time he wrote them (1857-1858), Engels and he had not yet begun the anthropological study that bases his description of primitive communism as a phase in itself, the first of humanity and clearly different from the secondary modes of production that social classes are born

height before one can think of a real social community. All relations as placed by society; not as determined by nature). Only then, therefore, is the application of science possible and productive force fully developed" (Grundrisse, vol. 1, p. 218).

There is no teleology of history, no absolute categories that make use of the bodies and minds of individuals to carry out their designs. It is living, real, concrete individuals who make history. But they do not do it at their own free will, but according to the social determinations that are inherited from past generations and that make up a social totality with its own internal logic, with its own contradictions, with its own specific historical dynamics. Our determinism consists in understanding these social determinations, these natural laws of the modes of production, in search of the material possibility of subverting them.

Capitalism was not prescribed in the late Roman society of the 5th century. The tendency towards the autonomisation of the medieval city was, although, as a tendency, it could have been neutralised, for example, by a state centralisation of a tributary type, as in the case of the Eastern Roman Empire. Whether a tendency within specific relations of production is stronger or not will depend on the dynamism of those relations themselves. As we explained above, the development of the productive forces is the material basis on which we can explain the passage from one mode of production to the next, but it is the social relations of production that slow down or exacerbate this same development. Thus, social relations in which the commune collectively works the land because its nominal ownership cannot be fragmented, but is monopolised by a tributary state, are a homeostatic, very conservative type of relations, in which there may well be great dynamism among the representatives of the ruling class, but the relations of production remain stable over time: *"because of the form of income in products, linked to a certain type of product and of the production itself, because of the combination of agriculture and home industry which is indispensable to it, because of the almost complete self-sufficiency which the peasant family acquires as a result of it, because of its independence of the market and of the movement of production and of the history of the part of society outside it, in short, because of the character of the natural economy in general, this form is eminently suited to provide the basis of stationary social situations such as we see, for example, in Asia"* (Capital, Book III, vol. 8, pp. 1012-1013). Apart from these characteristics, once private property has taken on autonomy from the community and, even more, once the means of labour have been separated from the land, the tendency towards the disintegration of the primitive community becomes stronger and stronger.

The development of the productive forces here does not merely act as a condition of possibility for the next mode of production⁶, but as a driving force that feeds back on itself as it advances and that strengthens the tendencies intrinsic to the contradictions of the relations of production that articulate it. If capitalism was not prescribed in the fifth century, by the twelfth century the development of the productive forces, of the division of labour, of the mercantile dynamism that had made the feudal mode of production possible, made the historical tendency leading to it increasingly inescapable. It would be several centuries before the bourgeoisie, the class which was the bearer of this new mode of production, could impose itself by seizing and transforming the state. It was defeated politically and militarily in the Italy of the medieval communes, in the Spain of the comunards, in the Germany of the peasant wars, but the contradiction between the productive forces and the medieval relations of production was becoming more and more convulsive, stronger and more decisive for the historical transformation of medieval Europe and, because of the world power of capitalism, for the transformation of the planet itself.

Social Totality

When we speak of a mode of production, we run the risk of understanding it as a concept in the usual sense of the term. That is, as an artificial classification of a series of objects on the basis of certain common features, as an abstraction of their differences in order to make them fit into the chosen taxonomy. If this were so, the mode of production would be merely a category for interpreting reality, not a system of determinations capable of governing human action in the course of history and our own interpretations of it.

The bourgeois vision of social becoming, as we explained at the beginning, is inevitably split - by its social determinations - into subject and object. This being so, history is presented as a chaotic accumulation of events that only the subject, that Sun around which the planets of external reality revolve, can order through the elaboration of more or less descriptive abstractions of the phenomena according to his ability and lucidity. Perhaps the best known example of this methodology is Max Weber's ideal types, by which political power in different societies is classified according to whether traditional, charismatic or legal-rational authority predominates. Beyond their greater or lesser descriptive interest, however, these categories have no explanatory capacity. They are abstractions that say nothing about the specific societies they include, but only about their common traits that have been selected by comparison, nor do they explain why one society passes from one to another. If anything, they serve to give a certain interpretation of social reality, but they do not serve to transform it.

⁶ This is the vision, in our view insufficient, that the academic historian Chris Wickham proposes, for example, in *Productive forces and economic logic of the feudal mode of production*

Borrowed from Hegelian dialectics, the method Marx uses is very different. The mode of production is not an abstraction, but the basis that articulates a social totality, an organic whole "*of multiple determinations*" (Grundrisse, vol. 1, p. 21). To the current notion of concept we thus oppose that of totality, a real and operating organism whose functioning can only be explained by unpacking the simplest and most abstract categories that presuppose it, the more complex categories that these produce in their relation to each other and, ultimately, the contradictions that these relations entail and how they are overcome in order to keep this complex organism that is a social totality the same as itself, but in movement, in transformation. In "The Method of Political Economy" of the Grundrisse Marx gives an illustrative example: if we want to explain the political economy of a country, it would be logical to begin by analysing the population, which is the real and concrete agent of that economy. But when we begin to analyse it, we would find that we cannot understand the population in general, but that we have to look at the classes that compose it. But classes in themselves are no more than abstractions if we do not look at the elements on which they rest: thus, to speak of the proletarian class and the capitalist class we would have to analyse what is wage-labour and what is capital. It is impossible, however, to understand wage-labour and capital without understanding money, commodity, value. In this way we would break down the concrete - and therefore complex - entity of the population into its multiple, increasingly abstract - and therefore simpler - categories, in order, at a certain point, to take the way back, already recomposing in a precise way, on the basis of its internal logic, how these categories are really related and how they produce other, more complex ones in turn - for example, how the contradictory relation between value and capital is related to each other and how they produce other, more complex ones in turn - for example, how the contradictory relation between value and capital is related to each other, how the contradictory relation between use-value and value is transformed into the contradiction between commodity and money - and in this process "*to come back to the population, but this time it would not have a chaotic representation of a whole, but a rich totality with multiple determinations and relations*" (ibid.). In contrast to the bourgeoisie, which tries to understand concrete societies by including them in ideal types that are constructed at the cost of denying the specific differences between them, for Marx a concrete society can only be understood as a synthesis of the different abstract categories which, when related to each other, give rise to a complex organism. This, which may seem simply a different strategy for thinking reality, nevertheless involves a gulf: in the first, the whole is seen as an invention of the thinking subject to bring together its parts, not something real; in the second, in ours, the totality only exists through the parts that compose it and the relationship between them, but it exists as a totality, as a complex organism with its own mode of functioning. In the first, society cannot be transformed, only its individuals, their particular behaviours, their wills and consciences. We know that society is real and that it exists through the way in

which concrete individuals relate to each other, giving rise to supra-individual forces which, produced by them, are nevertheless beyond their control. That is why what can and must be transformed is society, not its isolated individuals, by doing away with the social determinations that generate the behaviours, wills and consciences of those individuals.

Precisely because in our method the differences of concrete societies are not annulled in order to affirm more general categories, but are explained on the basis of the logic of these categories, we can analyse societies precisely as totalities that are different from one another. This is essential to understand why there are categories that we can find in different modes of production but, because of the place they occupy within each social totality, are different from each other. Thus, for example, we can find money in the different modes of production, but it does not have the same functions as in capitalism. Moreover, money is above all a medium of exchange in pre-capitalist modes of production, but it is not until it becomes a subordinate category in capitalism, a metamorphosis of value, that it acquires all its functions. Or, for example, land rent has been the classical form of extraction of surplus labour before capitalism, but in capitalism it is only a concrete form that surplus value acquires once the average profit of capital has been formed.

Similarly, to the extent that our method does not abstract differences but explains them in terms of the totality in which they are embedded, we can understand real societies without eclecticism or intersections. Societies are not due to a multiplicity of factors with diverse origins and functions which, when they intersect at a certain point, give rise to a society at a precise place and time, such as gender, race, domination through knowledge-power, economic interests, attitude towards nature, etc. Nor do they consist of a combination of different (ahistorical) sources of social power that would give a particular tone to each society according to the weight of each one. On the contrary, they are social wholes which have one and the same logic and with it articulate the different categories which compose them, even if some of them came from previous modes of production with their own specific logic.

Although the idea of totality comes from Hegelian dialectics, for Marx, unlike Hegel, not all manifestations of social life articulated in it have the same structural character. The way in which individuals produce and reproduce their lives, establishing relations among themselves according to a certain degree of productive forces, marks the dynamic that "*engenders its own juridical institutions, its own form of government*" (Grundrisse, vol. 1, p. 8). This is not to say that they are mere ideological emanations, mechanical reflections or forms of false consciousness of an economic structure that would be outside them. Economics and politics are presented as separate spheres in capitalism, but they are part of the same common logic. Thus, law and democracy are direct products of the logic of value which, in turn, tend to govern the way in which capitalist

relations of production are reproduced. They are intrinsic determinations of that social totality governed by the commodity. In the same way it happens in all modes of production: *"the specific economic form in which the unpaid surplus labour is extracted from the direct producer determines the relation of domination and servitude, as it arises directly from production itself and in turn reacts in a determinant way on it"* (Capital, Book III, vol. 8, p. 1007). This does not prevent it from having *"infinite variations and nuances in its manifestations, which are only comprehensible through the analysis of these empirically given circumstances"* (ibid.), but its governing element will always be the mode of production on which they are based. In the case of a global mode of production, such as capitalism, this is all the more true. We can find many political and legal variations between different states, from Islamic monarchies and republics to multi-national and indigenous states, from secular republics validating the ideals of the Enlightenment to party states whose only religion is the cult of the national leader, but all these states are equally capitalist states, governed by the imperatives of value, the exploitation of the proletariat, the legal equality between exploiters and exploited or competition on the world market, and consequently behave in a similar way.

The forms of social consciousness which correspond to these political and legal forms are themselves manifold and can be opposed to each other - such as traditionalist and democratic ideology - but they can only be oppositions within the same crucible of the dominant ideology, because *"the dominant ideas are nothing other than the ideal expression of the dominant material relations, the same dominant material relations conceived as ideas; therefore, the relations which make a given class the dominant class are also those which confer the dominant role on its ideas"* (German Ideology, p. 39). From this point on, the ruling class naturally seeks to consciously promote its ideology through schools, religion or the media. Undoubtedly, its various factions are in opposition to each other in order to transmit one form of ideology or another through these mechanisms. None of them, however, can oppose the mandates of capital and survive in the attempt.

It will therefore be normal that in times of social peace, in which the relations of production reproduce themselves normally and smoothly, the dominated class will share the dominant ideas, even with their working-class variants such as Proudhonian self-management, trade unionism or radical democracy. But this happens not so much through the influence of institutions specialised in producing ideology - that is, through the will of the ruling class - but because the state of social consciousness corresponds spontaneously to the relations of production in which it is embedded as long as social normality is maintained.

And the fact is that *"it is not men's consciousness that determines their being, but, on the contrary, it is their social existence that determines their*

consciousness" ("Foreword" to the Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy, p. 5). This implies that the history of ideas, of the representations that individuals make of their own social doing, does not have a historical existence independent of that same social doing. It does not mean, however, that the economic factor is the only variable to be taken into account in explaining how social phenomena are produced. This is something that both Marx and Engels were at pains to emphasise throughout their lives.

"According to the materialist conception of history, the factor that ultimately determines history is the production and reproduction of real life. Neither Marx nor I have ever asserted more than this. If anyone distorts it by saying that the economic factor is the only determinant, he will turn that thesis into an empty, abstract, absurd phrase. The economic situation is the basis, but the various factors of the superstructure which is built upon it (the political forms of the class struggle and its results, the constitutions which, after a battle has been won, the triumphant class draws up, etc.), the juridical forms, even the legal forms, and even the factors of the superstructure, which are the basis of the economic situation, the legal forms, and even the reflections of all these real struggles in the brains of the participants, the political, legal, philosophical theories, the religious ideas and the further development of these into a system of dogmas) also exert their influence on the course of the historical struggles and determine, predominantly in many cases, their form." - Letter from Engels to Bloch, 21 September 1890

As long as the development of the productive forces has not yet made the contradictions intrinsic to each mode of production appear, the ideas and representations which individuals make of their social activity - their consciousness - tend to be in conformity with the social relations which govern the mode of production. This is precisely because these relations condition the very way in which individuals act, perceive themselves and understand their relationship with others. They are determinations inherent to their subjectivity, not something external to it, because *"the human essence is not something abstract and immanent to each individual. It is, in its reality, the whole of social relations"* (Sixth Thesis on Feuerbach). The role of consciousness and will in the revolution must start from this material, deterministic basis, at the risk of turning the possibility of ending capitalist society into an entelechy, in which *"all attempts to explode it would be as many quixotadas"* (Grundrisse, vol. 1, p. 87).

Revolution

The question of the material possibility of emancipation is, at bottom, the question of the passage from one mode of production to another, from one social totality to another. Marx attaches as much importance to understanding the specific difference, the specific and non-transferable determinations of each social totality, as he does to studying the way in which this social totality gives way to the next. The dialectical method is thus characterised by an understanding of social organisms in movement, in evolution, because dialectics

"in the positive intellection of what exists also includes, at the same time, the intelligence of its negation, of its necessary ruin; because it conceives every developed form in the flow of its movement, and therefore without losing sight of its perishable side; because nothing pushes it back and it is, by essence, critical and revolutionary" ("Epilogue to the second edition" of Capital, p. 20). If we are subject to the social determinations of the mode of production into which we are born, the possibility of revolutionary theory and, with it, of the consciousness with which we fight to end this social system, is given by the way it generates its own negation through the historical assumptions of the next mode of production.

The new productive forces and the social relations that go with them are not born out of nothing, but are generated in the mode of production that precedes them and are counterposed to it. This happens through the production of the foundations, the assumptions of the new society, which erode the old mode of production as the productive forces come into collision with the existing social relations. Some of these assumptions remain as fully constitutive elements of the new social totality that is about to emerge, no longer *"as conditions of its genesis, but as results of its existence"* (Grundrisse, vol. 1, p. 421). Others, however, disappear with the definitive death of the old society. Thus, *"if on the one hand the pre-bourgeois phases are presented as purely historical, i.e. abolished, assumptions" of capitalism, "on the other hand the present conditions of production are presented as abolishing themselves and thus as laying down the historical assumptions for a new ordering of society"* (p. 422).

The question of how communism comes to be must be answered from here. Integral communism, i.e. the organisation of social life on a world level for the satisfaction of the needs of the species as a whole, could not come into being at any moment in history. First of all, a process of globalisation of the relations of production was necessary, a process that only capitalism has inscribed in its logic. Faced with the fragmentation of previous societies, capitalism needs to export its own social relations outside the territories over which it dominates. The conquest of America, trade networks and later colonialism would be the way in which it would impose, by blood and fire, a single mode of production on a global scale. This would establish the forms of communication, interdependence and exchange which, together with migratory movements - forced or not - would integrate all human groups under the same social organism, with the same contradictions, the same crises, the same exploited class and, in short, the same material bases for international revolution and the constitution of a world human community that recognises itself as part of the same species.

Secondly, the development of the productive forces in capitalism takes on an exponential speed due to the imperative of competition between companies and states. This dynamic is both a growing threat to the very survival of the species and a social power that makes not only the possibility but also the

necessity of communism ever more obvious. By increasing the amount of accumulated social labour of past generations, both in terms of technology and knowledge, it makes immediate work increasingly superfluous, as we see in the automation of the economy and the rising levels of unemployment and underemployment. This, which is a reason for the structural crisis of capitalist relations of production, entails at the same time, once abolished, the *"free development of individualities, and thus no reduction of the necessary labour time with a view to putting in plustrable labour, but in general reduction of the necessary labour of society to a minimum, to which then corresponds the artistic, scientific, etc., training of individuals thanks to the time that has become free and the means created for all"* ("Fragment of the Machines", Grundrisse, vol. 2, p. 229). With the satisfaction of needs through the productive capacity of society, not that of the individual, all material basis for the maintenance of private property ends, where the individual can say this is mine to the product of his particular effort. Thus begins a new stage in which, with the end of private appropriation of the product - capitalist social relations - consumption and distribution become as social as production already is; in which the social division of labour is abolished and the technical division is greatly qualified by the provision of truly free time and the overall development of human attributes into that "social individual" of which Marx speaks in the "Fragment of the Machines". By ending the social division of labour and production for production's sake, it also makes possible the abolition of the rural-urban separation that has characterised all class societies, and which capitalism is bringing to its exasperation.

These two historical assumptions are essential for the possibility of communism. The globality of the species will remain a constitutive element of the new mode of production, albeit with very different forms of interconnection, since they will no longer pass through mercantile exchange and its imperatives. The development of the productive forces, which acts as a power of negation of value and private property, will cease to be spurred on by the new relations of production and in many cases, as in all those techniques, knowledge and technologies that are destructive for the species and the planet, will be directly forgotten. Nevertheless, however much they accentuate the contradictions of capitalist social relations and exacerbate their catastrophic character, these two assumptions would serve no purpose without the creation of the proletarian class worldwide.

Being a product of capital, the proletariat is determined to become its historical undertaker. That it is determined does not mean that its victory is inevitable, but that in the determinations that characterise it as a social class is inscribed the programme for the transition to communist society. Therefore, it can only act as a class if it fights around this programme. It is in this sense that Marx's statement in his letter to Schweitzer (13 February 1865) that *"the working class is either revolutionary or it does not exist"* must be understood.

Whenever the proletariat initiates a struggle to defend its immediate needs against capital, it either extends and deepens it by calling into question the social order or it is defeated - the social "conquests" are only defeats deferred until the next crisis of capital, as Engels reminds us in speaking of the "vicious circle" of trade unionism ("Trade Unions", *The Labour Standard*, 20 May 1881).

While the emergence of revolutionary theory is a historical process as such, and requires its development from the lessons drawn from the flashpoints in the class struggle, the communist programme is neither a collective nor an individual invention. It is shaped by the determinations intrinsic to the existence of the proletarian class. On the one hand, because capitalism's need to socialise production pushes the proletariat to work in partnership, combining their knowledge, skills and energies in the same common production process - even if carried out in separate productive units. On the other hand, the very global nature of capitalism means that *"workers have no country"* (Manifesto), because they are a commodity wherever they are. For this very reason, the proletariat cannot have a national victory - there is no socialism in one country - but to win the revolutionary process must extend to the whole world. When it has historically constituted itself as a party, it has consequently done so as an international party. Finally, the only way the proletariat can put a definitive end to its exploitation is to put an end to wage labour, but to do this it needs to put an end to commodity production, to value and money. And it will only be able to abolish value if it breaks with the separation of isolated productive units which, sooner or later, end up exchanging their products - be they cooperatives or confederated communes -, plans production and socialises the distribution of the product. That is, the proletariat can only put an end to its exploitation by erasing from history the material basis of the commodity, which is the same as that of previous class societies: private property, and with it the social classes themselves, the state and the family.

Two assumptions and a historical gravedigger: in this way capital denies itself. That is why communism *"is not a state to be established, an ideal to which reality must be subjected. We call communism the real movement which annuls and surpasses the present state of affairs"* (German Ideology, p. 29). This real movement is no absolute Spirit, no teleology, but is produced by real individuals in the course of this mode of production. At a certain point, the socialisation of production comes into contradiction with the private appropriation of the product, and this contradiction slips into the consciousness of the individuals who are developing it. Then the conditions for revolutionary theory are in place:

"Just as economists are the scientific representatives of the bourgeois class, so socialists and communists are the theoreticians of the proletarian class. So long as the proletariat is not yet sufficiently developed to constitute itself as a class; So long, therefore, as the struggle of the proletariat itself against the bourgeoisie does not yet have a political character, and so long as the productive forces have not yet developed within the bourgeoisie itself to such an extent that

the material conditions necessary for the emancipation of the proletariat and for the building of a new society are in sight, these theoreticians are only utopians who, in order to alleviate the hardships of the oppressed classes, improvise systems and devote themselves to the search for a regenerative science. But as history advances, and with it the struggle of the proletariat begins to stand out in ever clearer lines, they no longer need to look for science in their heads: it is enough for them to realise what is unfolding before their eyes and to become spokesmen for that reality. As long as they limit themselves to looking for science and constructing systems, as long as they are on the threshold of the struggle, they see in poverty only poverty, without noticing its revolutionary, subversive aspect, which will eventually overthrow the old society. Once this aspect is realised, science, the product of the historical movement in which it participates with full knowledge of the facts, ceases to be doctrinaire and becomes revolutionary." - Poverty of Philosophy, p. 81.

Revolutionary theory is a historical product of the struggle of the proletariat which, on the basis of its determinations, becomes conscious of its historical task. It is for this reason, not because of a democratic ideal or a moral imperative, that communists *"have no interests of their own which are distinguishable from the general interests of the proletariat. They profess no special principles by which they aspire to shape the proletarian movement"* (Manifesto). The communist party is a specific organ of the class, a product of its struggle and its determinations, not a group of ideologues aspiring from outside to represent it as the politicians do with their electoral merchandise. Determinism is essential to understand this: that the relation of party and class is not a democratic relation but a dialectical, organic one.

Thus, for communist consciousness to be possible its material basis needed to begin to form. But the development of revolutionary theory is certainly not equivalent to the development of revolution. With the beginning of the collision between productive forces and social relations, with the formation of an autonomous workers' movement, with such high points of the class struggle as 1848 and 1871, comrades like Marx, Engels and so many others were able to begin to forge revolutionary theory. However, the consciousness of the proletariat, like the capitalist mode of production itself, does not have a gradual or cumulative dynamic. It advances and retreats, sometimes as lastingly and profoundly as with the Stalinist counter-revolution, but it always does so in leaps and bounds: from moments of social polarisation in which the proletarians cease to be dispersed social molecules to agglutinate around a vector of transformation. And whenever, driven by the accumulation of material contradictions, they initiate a class movement which tends to spread, generalise and endow itself with its own organisms of action, their determinations resurface, however confusedly they may be. Whether they abandon their confusion, whether they acquire a clarity of their ultimate aims, will depend on that part of it which in past struggles and within this one is characterised by defending its historical interests. When it struggles, the class produces its party.

And at the same time, for the proletariat to fully constitute itself as a class - in Marx's sense - its party must function as a catalyst of social polarisation, as a vector of programmatic clarification.

Determinism, far from denying the role of consciousness and will in history, is the only basis on which there can be a truly revolutionary, communist consciousness and will. As we explained in 'Capitalist Catastrophe and Revolutionary Theory', whenever militants have allowed themselves to be guided by voluntarism, an emanation of this society, they have ended up by homologating themselves with it and joining the ranks of the left of capital. The role of consciousness and will is to be found in moments of rupture, of polarisation. Here the proletariat's clarity of its class interests and the ability of communists, in the heat of struggle, to promote this clarification, is essential. For determinism does not imply a spontaneist or objectivist position, in which the revolution and the passage to the next mode of production are self-made. Determinism is not fatalism. Communist revolution may not succeed. Revolutionary theory may not become flesh, consciousness and will in the struggle of the proletariat against capital. For this to happen, there must be a reversal whereby, if it was first being and then consciousness, if it was first action driven by the material contradictions of capital and then the conscious clarification of its ends, at the opening of the revolutionary process the proletariat becomes a class and therefore a party, and thus sets the communist programme as the guiding principle of its action and of its historical future.

Recommended Readings

- Marx, Karl: Works of Marx and Engels, vol. 5, ed. Crítica (1978), available at this link. The following texts are quoted:
- "The Jewish Question".
- "Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right".
- "Critical notes on the article: "The King of Prussia and social reform. By a Prussian""
- "Paris Manuscripts"
- Marx, Karl and Engels, Friedrich: The German Ideology, ed. Akal (2014).
- Marx, Karl: Misery of Philosophy, ed. Siglo XXI (1970), available at this link
- Marx, Karl and Engels, Friedrich: Manifesto of the Communist Party, available at this link
- Marx, Karl: Fundamental Elements for the Critique of Political Economy (Grundrisse) 1857-1858, ed. Siglo XXI (1975), available at this link
- Marx, Karl: Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy, ed. Siglo XXI (1980), available at this link
- Marx, Karl and Engels, Friedrich: Capital, ed. Siglo XXI (1975), available at this link

- Engels, Friedrich: Letter to Bloch, 21 September 1890, available at this link
- Engels, Friedrich: "Trade Unions", The Labour Standard, 20 May 1881, available at this link