



Karl Korsch: *Karl Marx* part 3 - “History”

Karl Korsch’s *Karl Marx* was originally written in English and published in London in 1938. The book was reissued in 1963, but has been out of print for decades. Ken Knabb corrected obvious typographical errors and occasionally added or deleted a comma where this seemed necessary for clarity, but otherwise left the British spelling and Korsch’s sometimes slightly awkward English style and terminology as in the original edition. In the interest of online readability he omitted the hundreds of footnotes. A few of them include substantive remarks, but the great majority are merely page references to original German editions that would be of no interest to most readers. (Source: [Marxist Internet Archive](#))

Chapter 1. The Materialistic Conception of History

Marx and Engels never considered their new principle of economic and social research as more than a new scientific approach to a strictly empirical investigation of the historical development of the modern capitalistic mode of production. Marx referred to it in 1859 as a “general result” at which he had arrived during the first period of his economic research and which, once gained, served as a “guiding principle” to his subsequent studies. Twenty years later he refuted the erroneous conclusion of the Russian sociologist Michaelovsky who had misinterpreted the general description of the “Historical Tendency of Capital Accumulation” in Marx’s *Capital* as a “supra-historique” principle, that without a previous investigation of the actual historical facts could be applied to any other period and indeed to the whole history of human society. He pointed out that that description, despite its general form, was merely a “résumé” of the materials which had already been examined in detail in the previous chapters and thus was nothing more than a *historical sketch of the rise of capitalism in Western Europe*. His attitude was fully shared by Friedrich Engels who about the same time opposed the old traditional conception of the historical process which “knew nothing of the class struggles based upon material interests, in fact, of no material interests at all,” and dealt with such topics as production and all economic conditions only accessorially, as “subordinate elements of the history of culture.” He confronted that old “*idealistic conception of history*” with the new principle of the proletarian science and, incidentally, gave the

“Materialistic Conception of History” its later and universally accepted name. This name, by the way, was never applied to it by Marx himself who was quite content to describe it as a “materialistic and thus scientific method.”

Just as any other experimental natural and social science, the Marxian theory of society cannot take its departure from a preconceived and dogmatic principle; even less so because the science of Marx is a “critical” rather than a positive science. He criticizes theoretically the doctrines of bourgeois social science which are no longer tenable, just as during the same period the existing forms of bourgeois society which have become untenable at the present stage of historical development are practically criticized and transformed by the revolutionary action of the working class.

Even where Marx departs from that purely critical position, he does not lay down any general propositions as to the essential nature of all society but merely describes the particular conditions and developmental tendencies inherent in the historical form of contemporary bourgeois society.

The critical principle of Marx’s *social science* was during the subsequent development of Marxism converted into a general *social philosophy*. From this first misconception, it was only one step further to the idea that the historical and economic science of Marx must be based on the broader foundation not only of a social philosophy but even of an all-comprehensive “materialistic philosophy” embracing both nature and society, or a general philosophical interpretation of the universe. Thus the definitely scientific forms which the real kernel of the philosophical materialism of the 18th century had assumed in the historical materialism of Marx were ultimately carried back to what Marx himself had once unmistakably repudiated as “the philosophical phrases of the Materialists about matter.”

Marx’s materialistic science, being a strictly empirical investigation into definite historical forms of society, does not need a philosophical support. This most important point made in Marx’s historical materialism was later missed even by those “orthodox” Marx-interpreters who themselves combatted with the utmost energy all attempts made by the later critics, within and without the Marxist camp, to “revise Marxism” by basing it on some or other

contemporary non-materialistic philosophy. In their painstaking efforts to protect the true Marxist materialism from what they quite correctly regarded as an undesirable dilution of the genuine Marxian thought, they overlooked the fact that that most highly developed form of materialistic science which is embodied in Marx's empirical investigation of society is not only far in advance of all idealistic philosophy, but of all philosophical thought whatever. They wanted to strengthen the materialistic character of the Marxian science by giving it a philosophical interpretation. They have, in fact, only superfluously reintroduced their own backward philosophical attitudes into a theory which Marx had previously transformed from a philosophy into a veritable science. It was the historical fate of the Marx-orthodoxy that its opponents, while repulsing the attacks of the "revisionists" ultimately arrived, on all important issues, at the same standpoint as that taken by their adversaries. For example, the leading representative of this school, the philosophical materialist and orthodox Marxist Plechanov, in all his eager search for that "materialistic philosophy" which might be the true foundation of Marxism, finally hit upon the idea of presenting Marxism as "a form of Spinoza's philosophy, freed by Feuerbach from its theological additions."

While both schools of the philosophical interpreters of Marxism ultimately coupled Marx's materialistic theory with a philosophical, that is, an idealistic form of thought, there is still a considerable difference between them historically and theoretically. The association of Marx with Spinoza connects him with an early bourgeois philosophy, which, while in form idealistic, comprised also the germ of the future materialistic mode of thought. On the other hand, those modern philosophical improvisators who wanted to fill a presumed gap in Marx's system with Kant's, Mach's, Dietzgen's, or any other kind of non-materialistic philosophy, utterly ignore the whole historical and theoretical situation. The only reason why the materialistic philosophers Marx and Engels, up from a certain point in their development, turned their backs upon every philosophy, even the materialistic philosophy (leaving far behind such less consistent anti-philosophical gospels as those of Feuerbach and Moses Hess who for a time had preceded them in this tendency) is the fact that they wanted to go one step further and to outbid the materialism of philosophy by a direct materialistic science and practice. This did not prevent them

from opposing, in their own scientific work, every non-materialistic standpoint, no matter in what disguise it appeared. They expressly included in these “*non-materialistic*” or “not univocally materialistic” standpoints, also the whole modern positivism (as represented by Comte and others) which seems on the surface to be closely related to their anti-philosophical materialism, and that “agnostic” attitude which is derived by modern scientists from Hume’s philosophy and which in Marx’s lifetime was represented in England by Thomas Huxley. The fight against all shades of philosophical idealism became even more important when, in the period immediately after Marx’s death “classical German philosophy underwent a kind of revival mainly in England and Scandinavia, but also in Germany.” That is why now even an altogether scientifically and empirically minded Marxist like Friedrich Engels, rehearsed the philosophical materialism of his youth and set himself to work out once more, against the new obscurantist tendencies which were rapidly gaining ground among the various schools of contemporary bourgeois philosophy, the persisting affinity between the materialistic science of Marxism and a general, and therefore in a certain sense “philosophical,” materialistic view of the universe. The same reason applies in a later historical period, to the philosophical battles waged against the so-called “Empirio-Criticism” and other idealistic philosophies by the militant materialist Lenin.

There is then, no reasonable doubt as to the affiliation of Marxism to the most definitely materialistic creed to be found in present-day philosophy and science. But the position is different in regard to the often recurring statement that Marx’s *historical materialism* sprang directly from, and is still now theoretically dependent upon, one or another form of *philosophical materialism*, as for example the revolutionary bourgeois materialism of the 18th century, or the materialistic criticism of religion from Strauss to Feuerbach.

Chapter 2. The Genesis of Historical Materialism

There is no doubt that Marx fully shared, for a time, the tremendous enthusiasm felt during the 40’s by the whole school of Left Hegelians for the materialistic message of Feuerbach. The influence exerted upon his theory by this experience may, perhaps, be best compared

with that of Hume on Kant as summed up by the latter in the formula that “Hume aroused me from the dogmatic slumber.” Yet there is an important difference in the degree to which Marx on the one hand, and the other Hegelians including Engels, were impressed by the particular form of materialism represented by Feuerbach. It is no wonder that Friedrich Engels who had suffered much in his childhood under the pietistic cant of the Wupper valley and had received his first lesson in philosophical materialism from the gospel criticism of the Hegelian David Friedrich Strauss and then passed from the disciple to the master discovering behind the idealistic formulae of Hegel the germs of an altogether different atheistic and materialistic creed, was later decisively influenced by the outspoken materialism to which those germs were developed by Feuerbach. It was certainly otherwise with Marx. He was brought up in a freethinking family and reached his ultimate materialistic standpoint by a much longer road through a study of Democritus and Epicurus, of the materialists of the 17th and 18th centuries, and finally through a detailed critical revision of the whole idealistic philosophy of Hegel. His progress toward materialism was indeed, from the beginning and through all its phases, a progress to revolutionary materialistic politics. He was already a revolutionary materialist in this political sense although still using the language of Hegel’s idealism, when he raved against the “*reprobate materialism*” of the *Prussian State Gazette* which “in considering a Statute on the stealing of wood thought only of wood and did not solve that single and material task *politically*, i.e., not in connection with the reason and ethics of the State as a whole.” He was already a materialistic critic of all existing realizations of the State-idea when he reproached Hegel for “proceeding from the State to make man a subjective form of the State” instead of, “in the sense of modern democracy,” proceeding from man to make the State an objective form of man. He described as early as this “democracy” as being “the general form of the State in which the formal principle is at the same time the *material* principle,” and added the far-reaching remark that “the modern French have understood this to mean that in true democracy the political State must disappear.”

For all these reasons the materialistic rupture with all theological and philosophical idealism which was effected by Feuerbach in his book on the *Essence of Christianity*, 1841, and, even more powerfully, in

his *Preliminary Theses on the Reform of Philosophy*, 1842, did not have that sweeping effect upon Marx that it had upon Engels and, even more persistently, upon Strauss, Bruno Bauer, etc., who, all through their lives, did not emerge from the phase of religious criticism. Thus becomes evident the real meaning of the sentence by which Marx in 1843 described the criticism of religion as “the premise of all criticism.” This oft-quoted phrase had at the time when it was formulated by Marx under the conditions prevailing in Prussia after the change of government, besides its general theoretical a definite political significance. Marx proclaimed the attack of the bourgeois freethinkers against the reactionary religious policy of the new régime to be the first phase of that “political movement” which beginning in 1840 was to lead up to the 1848 revolution. By the same reason a criticism restricted to religion lost the positive significance it had borne for a time as soon as that first phase was brought to a close by the “socialist ideas circulating in Germany since 1843.” While in the first phase the “critique of religion” had served as a veil concealing the political aims of the speedily growing revolutionary movement of the early 40’s, that movement had now reached a point at which, according to Marx, even a political struggle had become a mere transparent veil concealing the social struggle beneath. Marx had already declared before and, in fact, in the very sentence in which he spoke of the criticism of religion as being “the premise of all criticism,” that “the criticism of religion, for all practical purposes, has been concluded in Germany.” It is true that both he and Engels, one year later, reaffirmed their allegiance to the “real humanism” of Feuerbach; they did so with a view to retain an ally indispensable in the impending revolutionary fight. They did not, for that matter, retract their criticism of that “merely naturalistic, not historical and economic materialism” which was represented by Feuerbach then and at all later times. Nor did they except Feuerbach from the final attack they directed during the following year against the whole of the Left Hegelians who still remained rooted in philosophical ground. Marx was by now definitely tired of “any criticism of religion which does not go beyond its proper sphere.” That is to say, he had left religious criticism far behind and had progressed from the “premise” to its political and social consequences, from “criticism of heaven” to “criticism of earth,” from “criticism of religion” to “criticism of law,”

from “criticism of theology” to “criticism of politics,” and from there, in a subsequent stage, to a criticism of the still more earthly forms which the religious reflexion of the real world assumes in the economic sphere, i.e., of the “fetish character of the commodity world” and of the categories of Political Economy derived from it.

A materialistic criticism of the prevailing *social and political conditions* could not be built upon the mainly naturalistic materialism which had been professed by Feuerbach. Feuerbach had conceived of the human being as “an abstract entity inherent in the single individual.” He had not, like Marx, described it as “the ensemble of the social conditions.” He understood the world “only in the form of an *object* or of contemplation. It was, however, of decisive importance for historical materialism to understand the given reality and its development also from a subjective viewpoint as “a human sensual activity, i.e., practice,” and thus to conceive of human action itself as an “objective activity.” The naturalistic materialism of Feuerbach which “excluded the historical process,” was not capable of fulfilling that most important task even in its own peculiar and limited sphere, the criticism of religion. Only “historical materialism” which on an economic, historical, and social (not only natural and biological) basis “explains the active behaviour of man towards nature, the direct production of his life, and thus also of his social conditions and of the ideas arising from them,” provides a truly materialistic development of the religious ideas. “All history of religion which ignores this material basis is uncritical.” It was in this context that Marx added the statement quoted in a previous chapter that “it is, in fact, much easier to find by analysis the secular kernel of the religious mysteries than, conversely, to derive their exalted forms from the prevailing real conditions. The latter is the unique materialistic and therefore the scientific method.”

While the “Feuerbach cult” which Marx had shared with the other young Hegelians for an extremely short time, did on the whole not leave a deep mark on his materialistic theory, he was much more impressed by that earlier form of bourgeois materialism which had been inaugurated by “the English and French” in the course of the 17th and 18th centuries. The attitude of Marx and Engels to the different phases of bourgeois social theory and economics which we have dealt with in the First and Second Parts of this book exactly

repeats itself in their attitude towards the different historical phases of bourgeois materialism. They dismissed with utter contempt that “shallow and vulgarized form in which 18th century materialism continues today in the minds of the natural scientists and physicians, and which was preached on their lecture tours in the 50’s by Büchner, Vogt, and Moleschott.” On the other hand, they always regarded their new proletarian and revolutionary materialism as a continuation and more highly developed stage of that classical bourgeois materialism which had formed the driving force of the bourgeoisie in its revolutionary epoch and had then already temporarily begun to branch off directly into socialism and communism. This relation, however, is more of a general affiliation than a definite adoption of methods and results. On the entirely new field now opened by the extension of the materialistic principle to the historical and social sciences, and under the changed historical conditions of the 19th century, Marx and Engels could no longer utilize the primitive forms of those early forerunners for their own research, although they went on to admire and to praise the bourgeois materialism of the 18th century for its militant revolutionary tendency.

The bourgeois materialists had not developed any adequate principles for the historical and social studies. They had, indeed, boldly proclaimed their materialistic principle as fundamental for all fields of existence and knowledge. They did not dream of the half-heartedness of present-day natural scientists who actually apply a materialistic principle within the limited branch in which they happen to do their professional scientific work, but carefully avoid any further extension of that materialism and cheerfully regard themselves (to use an expression applied to Feuerbach by Engels) as “materialists underneath and idealists on top.” Yet even the early bourgeois materialists had in fact directed their attention mainly to the field which of necessity attracted them because of its importance for modern industry, the very basis of bourgeois society. Thus they had worked out primarily a materialistic science of nature, and dealt with “society” only in passing as a secondary part of the natural world. The more definite and more threatening the forms of the proletarian class-movement became in the further development of bourgeois society, the more was bourgeois materialism driven back from the thorny ground of “society” to “nature” as a field of scientific research. The

bourgeois social science of the 19th and 20th centuries, in forgetting its revolutionary character generally, also forgot the materialism of its youthful phase and was able to reproduce it, if at all, only in the spasmodic and counter-revolutionary form, in which it appears for instance in Pareto's "materialistic" doctrine of ideologies.

Bourgeois materialism has revolutionized the natural sciences. The proletarian materialism of Marx and Engels proposed from the outset to subject the historical and social world to the same materialistic principle. Just as the materialism of natural science had built up its theoretical form in a critical fight against the surviving remainders of the theological metaphysics of the Middle Ages, so did historical and social materialism work out its new theoretical form by opposing that new metaphysics which in the meantime had settled on the field neglected by the old materialism, i.e., of historical and social phenomena, and had found its temporary conclusion in the German idealistic philosophy from Kant to Hegel.

Marx found hidden beneath the idealistic speculative forms of Hegel's Philosophy of Law, History, Aesthetics, Religion, etc., of Logic and History of Philosophy, just that which he had not been able to find anywhere else in the whole of past and contemporary philosophy and science: namely, a methodical starting point for an empirical investigation of the so-called "spiritual nature of man," i.e., the realm of *history* or *society* as opposed to *nature*. The first importance of Hegel's philosophy for Marx's materialist science derives from the fact that here the sphere of "nature" had been confronted for the first time with the new sphere of the social relations of men as an equally comprehensive Universe of Research, both to be ultimately subordinated to one and the same supreme principle of knowledge. There is, of course, the difference that for Hegel that ultimate principle had been spiritual, while for Marx it was material. Hegel started from the "idea." Marx, on the contrary, in all his philosophical, juridical, and political studies took his start from a strictly empirical principle. He approached the historical, social, and practical world of man with the firm decision to investigate this so-called "world of the mind" which until then had been treated as something essentially different from physical and material nature, with the same "precision" which had been applied for several centuries by the great scientists to their study of physical nature. In so doing he carried out the programme

which he had first formulated as a student of nineteen years when he was still inspired by the “idealism of Kant and Fichte,” but just on the verge of succumbing to the lure of the great Hegelian philosophy. It was at that time, that young Karl Marx confessed to his alarmed father that he had now resolved “to plunge into the sea once more,” but this time “with a definite intention of finding the nature of mind to be just as necessary, concrete, and tightly rounded as the nature of physics.” Hegel had indeed introduced into the investigation of the history of society and of the so-called “mind,” somewhat more of the empirical attitude of the scientist who aims at a precise description and definition of really existing and verifiable connections than up to that time had been usual with the idealistic philosophers, adherents of the “organic” theory of the State, and the whole of the so-called “historical school.” It was just this fact which definitely won over young Marx to the Hegelian philosophy, and held him under its spell for a considerable period of his life. He adhered, in truth, from the very beginning only to the “natural scientist” of society whom he had discovered beneath the mystifying disguise of the philosophical explorer of the human mind. He left Hegel at once when he felt able to represent in a direct and rational way those material connections between men and things, and between men and men which formed the real contents hidden under an apparent speculative connection of ideas. The real contribution of Hegel to a materialistic investigation of society was that he had seen this material connection, in an idealistic form, and made it the subject of a philosophico-scientific exposition.

Hegel’s philosophical system, the latest and most complete elaboration of that “natural system of the sciences of the mind” by which the theologico-metaphysical system of the Middle Ages had been replaced during the practical and theoretical struggles of the previous centuries, can be traced everywhere in the materialistic scheme of society. In an as comprehensive though idealistic and not materialistic sense had already Hegel (therewith translating into his “profound” philosophical slang the empirical discoveries of the English and French of the 17th and 18th centuries) distinguished between the two realms of reality, i.e., the “world of the mind” or “history” on the one hand, and the external world or “nature” on the other. He, too, had subdivided that historical world into definite strata. Above the world of the “objective mind” (Family, Civil Society, State) there came the world of the

“absolute mind” (Religion, Philosophy, Art). He, too, had regarded this world, at variance with itself, as a world in a process of development. There was only the characteristic difference that Hegel had superimposed on the *real* dependence of the “higher” strata of society upon the “lower,” and on the *real* process of an historical development going on in time, of which he was fully aware, another reversed and “idealistic” order of the universe in the shape of an imagined, *timeless development* and a similarly imagined *dependence of the lower forms of reality from the higher and more “spiritual” forms*. Hegel, too, had “dialectically” presented this development as being a “contradictory” process, in which the driving force is the negation of each position, the conflict resulting from that contradiction to be ultimately readjusted through the negation of the negation in a higher “synthesis.” This order of the historico-social world, which in Hegel’s philosophy “stood on its head,” was put on its feet again by Marx through his “materialistic reversal of the Hegelian idealism.”

Marx struck out of Hegel’s scheme the *idea of the State* which Hegel had presented as the crowning conclusion and consummation of the mind standing in the world and consciously realizing itself within it. One must not confound the Hegelian “idea of the State” with that ordinary earthly phenomenon which with him is merely “the State as a civil society.” “One must not think of particular States, or particular institutions, one must consider rather the real God, the idea.”

When the real God was dethroned the whole kingdom fell. Just as the “State” and the “law,” so all the “higher” forms of the mind – religion, art, philosophy – were now ousted from their superhuman position and degraded to the rank of simple “forms of social consciousness,” dependent upon the material conditions of existence. Marx had “materialistically” criticized those “higher” ideological manifestations of the social consciousness even before he extended his materialistic criticism to the phenomena of the legal and political spheres. He began his attack on the existing world with a materialistic criticism of religion, art, and philosophy, and thus criticized, at first religion philosophically, and afterwards religion and philosophy politically. Since he had now discovered the real basis of law and State in material production, it was only obvious that he would trace to the same real basis also those “higher” ideologies, which he had already previously traced to law and politics.

In the same way the Hegelian idea of “development” was completely “reversed” by Marx. He put in the place of the timeless development of the “idea” the real historical development of society on the basis of the development of its material mode of production. The Hegelian “contradiction” was replaced by the struggle of the social classes; the dialectical “negation” by the proletariat and the dialectical “synthesis” by the proletarian revolution and the transition to a higher stage of society.

Chapter 3. The Materialistic Scheme of Society

As early as 1843 it had become clear to Marx that Political Economy was the keystone to all social science. In the following years as a political exile in Paris and Brussels and during a first visit to London and Manchester from July to August 1845, he completed the first important portion of that Herculean task to which after a short interruption in 1848-50, he was to devote his energies throughout his life. This was not merely an investigation of particular economic topics resulting in a solution of particular economic problems. It was the initiation of a hitherto mainly politically interested philosopher into the newly discovered field of a really “materialistic” science. In the retrospective account given in the *Preface* to his *Critique of Political Economy*, 1859, he sums up the general result:

In the social production of their means of existence human beings enter into definite and necessary relations which are independent of their will – production-relations which correspond to a definite stage in the development of their material forces of production. The aggregate of these production-relations constitutes the economic structure of society, the real basis on which a juridical and political superstructure arises, and to which definite forms of social consciousness correspond. The mode of production of the material life

conditions the whole process of the social, political, and intellectual life. It is not men's consciousness that determines their existence, but their social existence that determines their consciousness.

At a certain stage of their development the material productive forces of society come into contradiction with the existing production-relations, or what is only a legal expression for them with the property-relations within which they hitherto moved. From being forms of development, those relations turn into fetters upon the forces of production. Then a period of social revolution sets in. With the change in the economic foundation, the whole of the vast superstructure is more or less rapidly overturned.

In considering such revolutionary processes one must always distinguish between the economic conditions of production whose material changes can be determined with the precision of natural science, and the legal, political, religious, artistic, or philosophical, in short, ideological forms in which men become conscious of this conflict and fight it out. As one cannot judge an individual by what he thinks of himself, just as little can he judge such a revolutionary epoch by its own consciousness; he must, on the contrary, explain that consciousness by the contradictions of its material life, by the existing conflict between the social

forces of production and the production-relations.

A formation of society never perishes until all the forces of production for which it is wide enough have been developed; new and higher production-relations never come into being until the material conditions for their existence have ripened within the womb of the old society itself. Therefore mankind always sets itself such tasks only as it can solve; for looking closer, we shall always find that the task itself arises only when the material conditions for its solution are already existent or, at least, in process of formation.

In broad outline the Asiatic, the Antique, the Feudal, and the modern Bourgeois modes of production can be designated as epochs in progress of the economic formation of society. The bourgeois production-relations are the final antagonistic form of the social production-process – antagonistic not in the sense of individual antagonism, but as growing out of the social conditions determining the life of the individuals. The forces of production developing within the womb of bourgeois society create at the same time the material conditions for the solution of that antagonism. That is why with that formation of society the prehistory of human society comes to an end.

The foregoing propositions which Marx, after fifteen years of labours presented as the carefully tested principles of his materialistic research of society, give a clear insight into the connection established by the

materialistic conception of history between the social conditions of life, their historical development, and their practical overthrow.

The connection appears at first as a

static connection

linking together the different strata lying, as it were, above each other in a given socio-economic formation. That connection is alternately described as a similarity of “structure,” a relation of “basis” and “superstructure,” or a “correspondence” between those forms of social organization which directly spring from the process of material production and such other phenomena as arise from various other social, political and intellectual activities in any particular historical period.

This apparently static connection is, however, simply a particular case of the

dynamic connection

through which all sections and cross-sections of social life are bound together in their development. In the various phases of the origin, rise, and fall of a given socio-economic formation and its revolutionary replacement by the new and higher production-relations of a further developed social formation, that particular connection between all social conditions which, at first, from a static approach, appeared as a “consensus” undergoes a change of form. From a harmonious “consensus” it is at a certain point transformed into a “dissensus.” (To use the Hegelian formula: the “correspondence” already contains within itself the “contradiction” through whose further development the production-relations and, even more, the legal relations, forms of State, and ideologies based upon them, in due course are turned from forms of development of the forces of production into fetters restraining the further development of such forces of production.)

But this dynamic connection is not yet the final and definite form of the materialistic connection which forms the subject matter of the Marxian research. With all its apparent comprehensiveness the Marxian formula hitherto discussed in this chapter does not aim at a complete description of the materialistic principle. It was inserted into the Preface of his main theoretical work (*Critique of Political Economy* or, as it was to be renamed later: *Capital*) for the definite

purpose of disclosing to his readers the theoretical principles underlying his investigation of Political Economy as the “anatomy of bourgeois society.” The historical development of society is, accordingly, represented here mainly as an objective process. History is explained as an objective development of the material forces of production at first corresponding to and then contradicting the existing production-relations, which thus from being forms of development are turned into fetters. The historical “subject” of that development is not mentioned in the formula. The production-relations of all hitherto existing economic forms of society are shown to be “antagonistic” forms of the social process of production, but the closer definition of this social antagonism as a class opposition and a class war is not given. The violent overthrow of the existing order of society by the oppressed class appears in the formula as an “epoch of social revolution” in which the superstructure of society is transformed with the change taking place in the economic foundation. And in striking contrast to the severe criticism previously raised by Marx and Engels against such a metaphysical language, we read here that “mankind” sets itself certain tasks, and even the “epoch of transformation” itself possesses a consciousness. The aim of the whole development is not concretely defined as a transition to socialist and communist society, but is only implied in the description of present bourgeois society as being the conclusion of the “prehistory of human society.”

The full sense of the materialist investigation of society results from the statements by which Marx and Engels at other times and in other contexts opposed their materialistic principle to the various conflicting opinions with which they had to deal.

The objective formula in the Preface to the *Critique of Political Economy*:

The history of society is the history of the material production and of the contradictions between the material forces of production and the production-relations which arise and are solved in the course of development

is supplemented by the subjective formula in the *Communist Manifesto*:

The history of all hitherto existing society is a history of class struggles.

The subjective formula clarifies the objective formula. It calls by its proper name the class which brings about the objective development by a practical action. The same production-relations which fetter the forces of production (at the present stage, Capital and Wage Labour), are also the bonds of the labouring masses. The oppressed workers who in the revolutionary class struggle burst their own fetters, at the same time liberate production. The acting subject of history at the present stage is the proletariat.

Only by taking into account this

practical connection

can the theoretical statements of the materialistic investigation of society be put to their fullest use. The *theoretical fact* that according to the materialistic principle of Marx legal conditions and forms of State no longer form an independent subject matter which is to be understood by virtue of its inherent qualities or derived from a higher immaterial principle but, on the contrary, are rooted in the material conditions of existing bourgeois society, coincides with the *practical fact* that in modern bourgeois society, after the abolition of all the privileges of the superior orders of the feudal society, the inequalities destroyed in the political and legal sphere are preserved in the opposition of social classes arising from the material conditions of life. By a radical elucidation of this state of affairs Marx breaks through the ideological confusion with which the panegyrists of the modern democratic State distract the attention of the proletariat from its real position, as an economically oppressed and exploited class, and from the measures to be taken for a practical change of that basic condition. Furthermore, the materialistic exposure of the illusions of the State and the law, and of all other high-pitched ideologies of modern bourgeois society, serves as a caution for the revolutionary proletarian class to keep itself free, as far as possible, from those new illusions, with which, in earlier epochs, revolutionary parties concealed from themselves the real content of the conflicts they were engaged in. For this reason Marx instilled into the minds of the workers the materialistic lesson that their emancipation from the particular form of oppression and exploitation which they suffer in the

present epoch cannot result from any change of the existing political, legal, and cultural conditions, but must be brought about by themselves through a social revolution penetrating to the economic basis of existing bourgeois society.

Chapter 4. Nature and Society

Marx comprised in his materialistic investigation of society all the phenomena of a comprehensive field of experience which until then had been dealt with by a number of altogether different, old and new, sciences. On the one hand he recognized no “higher” spheres of a so-called “spiritual” life which would be exempted from the crude material necessities of the historical and social spheres. All juridical, political, religious, philosophical and artistic conceptions, the whole of the so-called “consciousness” of man and all its philosophical disguises as, for example, the Hegelian terms of an “objektiver” and “absoluter Geist,” the Kantian concepts of “Gattungsvernunft,” and “Bewusstsein überhaupt,” the philosophical “idea” generally, and all other, even the most “universal” categories of thought exist only as given forms of a “*social consciousness*,” temporary products of a continuous development, attributes of a definite historical epoch and of a definite economic order of society. To all “legal conditions and forms of the State” there applies the materialistic principle that they can neither be understood (as the exponents of dogmatic jurisprudence and political science believe) “out of themselves” nor (as the philosophers had believed) “out of the so-called general development of the human mind,” but are rooted in the material conditions of the present-day bourgeois society. To all forms of social consciousness there applies the twofold antithesis formulated by Marx in contrast both to the philosophical idealism of Kant, Fichte and Hegel, and to the naturalistic materialism of Feuerbach: “It is not the consciousness of men that determines their existence but, on the contrary, their *social existence* which determines their consciousness.”

On the other hand, Marx comprised in his materialistic formula also the natural foundation of all historical and social phenomena and, for this purpose, conceived and represented even nature itself in the terms of a strictly historical and social science as “Industry,” “Economy,” or “Material Production.” In spite of a genuine recognition of the

“priority of external nature” he does not derive the historical development of society from any kind of extra-historical and extra-social natural factors like climate, race, struggle for existence, man’s physical and mental powers, etc., but from a “nature” which has itself been already “modified” by an historical and social process or, more distinctly, from the historically and socially conditioned developments of material production. The materialist philosopher Plechanov, in supporting his contrary opinion, reminds us, that “Hegel had already noted in his *Philosophy of History* the important part played by the geographical foundations of the world history.” He did not see that the scientific advances made by Marx’s historical and social materialism over the idealism of Hegel and the materialism of Feuerbach consists just in this difference that he conceived of “matter” itself in historical terms, while all his philosophical predecessors, both the idealistic and the materialistic brand had conceived of “matter” as a dumb, dead or, at the utmost, biologically animated nature only.

While according to Hegel “physical nature, indeed, exerts a direct effect upon world history,” Marx started from an altogether different viewpoint from the outset. Physical nature according to him, does not directly enter into history. It does so by indirection, i.e., as a process of material production which goes on not only between man and nature, but at the same time between man and men. Or, to use a phraseology which will be clear even to the philosophers, in the strictly social research of Marxian materialism that “pure” nature which is presupposed to all human activity (the economic *natura naturans*) is replaced everywhere by a “nature” mediated and modified through human social activity, and thus at the same time capable of a further change and modification by our own present and future activity, i.e., by nature as *material production* (or the economic *natura naturata*).

Being “social,” nature has a specifically historical character varying in the different epochs. As an historical and social nature it has above all, a distinct class character. For example, as emphasized by Marx in his controversy with Feuerbach, that cherry tree before the philosopher’s window, whose ancestors were “artificially” transplanted to Europe a few hundred years ago, is thereby for the modern European no nature-given growth; just as, on the same grounds, the potato is no “nature-given” food for the modern European poor, or, at most, only in the same sense as the adulterated bread and the “sophisticated” wine sold

in the back streets are “nature-given” products of the modern capitalist mode of production. The den of the modern poor is even less than the lair of the wild beast a “nature-given” shelter in which he can move at ease like the fish in the water. It is not a house where he can feel at home, but it is the house of his landlord who will evict him when he cannot afford to pay his rent. “My house is my castle” originating from the world of simple commodity production, holds good for the slum barracks of our big cities no more than it did for the cots of the English farm-labourers of 1860, as described in *Capital*. Modern “hunger,” which satisfies itself with cooked meat, eaten with knife and fork, is quite another thing than that hunger which “swallowed raw meat with the aid of hand, nail and tooth.” So do those “normal” periods of hunger natural to primitive hordes, that have been artificially reintroduced in modern capitalist society for those sections of the unemployed who, for some reason or another, have been taken off the dole, represent a vastly different thing from the hunger, be it ever so great, that may occasionally, by the accident of a temporary stoppage of their regular food supplies, cause a “thrilling” sensation to the idle rich.

None of those things, in the definite forms in which they appear in present bourgeois society or for that matter in any earlier or later epochs, comes from “nature” alone. They depend upon the existing historical conditions of material production and can be changed with the change of those conditions. This happens through an historical development, which may take a shorter or longer time, but which is nowhere stopped by any absolute barrier, through an objective process which is at the same time a struggle between social classes.

This viewpoint of a strictly *social*, that is of an *historical* and *practical* science dominated from the very beginning the whole novel system of concepts which Marx and Engels built up in their controversy with the then existing idealistic and materialistic currents of thought. The existence of physical man, the external world in which he moves, and the natural objective development of those natural conditions in large periods of “cosmological time,” independent of that altogether different development of the social forms which is accomplished by man’s action in “historical time,” all these “real presuppositions” of history and society are, of course, real presuppositions also for the materialistic research of Marx. They do

not, however, appear as theoretical premises within the system of the new social science which starts from its own materialistic principles defined in historical and social terms.

This is no way contradicted but, on the contrary, even more clearly demonstrated by the terms of so-called “*naturally grown forms of society*” and of so-called “*social laws of nature*” which are continually used by Marx in the presentation of his theory. The concept of “*natural growth*” as applied to historical forms, has with Marx an altogether different meaning than it had with the historians, poets, and philosophers of the “Romanticist School” who in a conscious opposition to the preceding period of Enlightenment and Revolution glorified everything “naturally grown.” Marx, on the contrary, used the term in a negative sense for the description of such conditions, relations, connections which have not as yet been subjected to a conscious human action. In this sense Marx speaks in his *Critique of the German Ideology* and twenty years later, in *Capital*, of the “nature-grown” (“*naturwüchsige*”) forms of division of labour, of a worldwide historical connection between individuals, of the State, of legal conditions, of language, and of such apparently immutable differences as the variations of race. In all these cases the “*naturwüchsige*” form of a social relation is in contrast to those other forms which this relation assumes in the course of social development when it is either consciously maintained and further worked out, or changed to a greater or lesser extent by a conscious human action. The “*naturwüchsige*” forms are thus described as social forms which have arisen historically just as all other, more or less consciously created forms and are therefore capable of a further change both in the present and the future. Thus they are not eternal forms of all social life but can be overthrown by the united individuals in a deliberate action, which will finally strip them of their present crude and oppressive “nature-grown” character. One sees at first glance the positive bearing of this thought not only on the theoretical extension of the realm of social knowledge but also on the practical socialistic and communistic tendencies which are necessarily bound up with this knowledge.

The same holds good for the other apparently nature-bound term of the new Marxian science, which we have already discussed when dealing with the economic law of value, i.e., the so-called “*social laws of nature*.” Here again we have to deal with a term which is at first

defined in a negative manner only. The economic laws prevailing in the capitalistic mode of production do not have within the new materialistic science of society that positive and final meaning which the real “laws of nature” have for the physicist and which, according to their first discoverers and inventors, pertained also to those “natural” laws which would in future govern the new “civil” mode of existence emerging from the artificial fetters of mediaeval feudalism. They are even less what Marx and Engels in their earlier, philosophical, period called a “law of the mind” as opposed to a “mere law of nature” and what recurs in their later writings when they speak of a “leap from the realm of necessity into the realm of freedom” and of the “true realm of freedom blossoming out of the realm of necessity in the fully developed Communist Society of the future.”

However, just from the negative definition that the so-called “laws of nature” of the bourgeois economists are, in fact, not laws of nature at all, there derives the positive significance which the term of the “social” laws of nature assumes in the revolutionary science of Marx. The fact that the general conditions of bourgeois society which had been proclaimed as laws by the bourgeois economists, are restricted to a definite historical epoch, implies that in the further development of society all those apparent laws can be abrogated through the conscious social act of the class which is at present oppressed by them, to be replaced by another, a willed and planned form of the social activities of man.

Thus neither of the two Marxian terms conforms with the perpetuation of the so-called economic laws asserted by the classical economists; even less with that further extension of the realm of “natural growth in society” which had been the dream of the early counter-revolutionary theorists in France and of the German and English romanticists. Marx, on the contrary, applies both terms for the purpose of extending the realm of history and society, i.e., of a conscious social action as against the so-called eternal necessities of an altogether inaccessible “realm of nature.” Far behind the “immutable laws” invented and maintained by the bourgeois economists for the preservation of an order of production allegedly “natural” and “rational,” but in fact ever more artificial, more arbitrary, and ever more dependent on force, and at the same time more hampering to the further development of society and more destructive of human life, stand those real necessities

of nature which condition the whole life of man and which are also recognized by the Marxists as unchangeable facts and as natural presuppositions of all social development. Even this recognition applies to a given time only. There is, from the historical and social principle of Marxian science, no absolute and predetermined limit beyond which an apparently “naturwüchsige” foundation of all social life might not in future be discovered to be no more than an historical and historically changeable form, and thus a form which can be modified and overthrown by a conscious action. “Even the naturally-grown variations of the human species such as differences of race, etc., can and must be abolished in the historical process.”

As with all other innovations embodied in the new materialistic theory, Marx’s methodical extension of society at the expense of nature is proved mainly on the field of economic science. The Marxian critique of the fetish character of the commodity and of all other economic categories refutes once and for all those mystical ideas by which the earlier economists had attributed economic phenomena to an immediate physical cause, be it some external force of nature, or the physical constitution of man or, finally, his so-called “innate” psychological qualities. There is, above all, no such thing as an immediate “natural basis of the surplus value.” The only significance which can be claimed for physical conditions in the genesis of the socio-historical phenomenon of the exploitation of propertyless wage-labourers by property-owning capitalists, is that of a natural limit or barrier fixing the points at which the labour-time necessary for the maintenance and reproduction of the labourer ceases and thus “labour for others can begin.” *“In proportion as industry advances, those natural limits recede.”*

The same applies to the so-called “natural basis of the State” which is asserted by a whole school of modern bourgeois sociologists. The political phenomenon of the State results, in fact, as little from unchangeable physical conditions as the economic phenomenon of the surplus value upon which it depends as a secondary and derived form. Just as things useful for human needs and produced by human labour are “commodities,” and gold and silver are “money,” under definite social conditions only and not by any inherent physical qualities, so is the physically weaker individual or race the slave of the physically stronger not by any eternal necessity but through the accident of

temporary circumstances. By a definite historical process the class which under the social conditions prevailing in the present epoch produces all social wealth, has been separated from the material means of production and is now ruled and exploited by the class which through the same historical process has monopolized for itself the means of social production as “capital.” The apparently “naturalistic” theory which assigns such existing social and political facts to the Command of Nature is but a secularized form of those older theories which derived the same facts from the Command of God or, for that matter, from such intermediate agencies as the philosophical unfolding of an eternal Idea, Reason, or Humanity itself.

Chapter 5. Productive Forces and Production-Relations

The driving forces of the revolutionary development of society, according to Marx, are the potential powers of production inherent in a given epoch of the socio-economic formation. Like all other terms of the new social science, the concept of the “productive forces” is defined by Marx not a priori but empirically. It is described in terms of economics and history and in reference to a specific mode of production, not in terms of a general sociology; not dogmatically, but critically; not from the viewpoint of a pre-established harmony, but from that of class opposition; not for the purpose of theoretical knowledge and contemplation, but with a view to social action or “revolutionary practice.” Thus the productive forces as conceived by Marx are much more than a mere philosophical concept of “matter” resulting from the “materialistic reversal” of the Hegelian “idea” and, like its predecessor, presupposed to all empirical knowledge. They form, together with the “production-relations” in which they function and develop, the real whole of the given “mode of material production” which can be determined “with the precision of a natural science.”

There is in this Marxian term nothing mystical and nothing metaphysical. A “productive force” is, at first, nothing else than the real labour power of working men; the force incorporated in these living human beings by which, with definite material means of production and within a definite form of social cooperation

conditioned by those material means of production, they produce through their labour the material means of satisfying the social needs of their existence, that is – under capitalistic conditions, “commodities.” In a second and even more important sense, everything that increases the productive effect of the human labour power (and thereby, under capitalistic conditions, inevitably increases at the same time the profit of its exploiters) is said by Marx to be a “productive force.” To the productive forces in that dynamic sense belongs the progress of technique and science; there belongs above all the social organization itself or the immediately “social” forces created by cooperation and division of labour. In this sense, Adam Smith had emphasized in his economic work the “*proportionable increase of the productive powers of labour*” occasioned by the division of labour under the conditions of modern industry, and we may say without exaggeration that the basic term of Marx’s revolutionary theory, the concept of the “social” productive forces, originated just from that Smithian thought though the implications of the new term were but partially and one-sidedly described by Smith and were brought out in their full economic and social significance only by the new materialistic theory of the proletarian revolution.

“The production of the human life,” as stated by Marx in an early exposition of his new principle, “appears from the outset as a twofold relation. It is, on the one hand, a natural relation and on the other hand a social relation, social in the sense of a cooperation between several individuals no matter under what conditions, in what way, and for what purpose. It follows that a definite mode of production or industrial stage always concurs with a definite mode of cooperation or social stage, and *this mode of cooperation is itself a productive force.*” So does the real point in all later developments of the revolutionary theory of Marx consist in the emphasis laid on that “*new potential of productive force*” which, increasing continually in the course of the development of human society, inexhaustibly flows from the many single forces melded together into one united force. Under capitalistic conditions this new force seems to spring from the productivity of “capital.” In truth it springs from the growing productivity of social labour.

From this derives a third and final sense in which the Marxian term is applied to the workers themselves who by a revolutionary action as a

class set free the forces potentially existing in social labour today. That potential power will be fully actualized by the proletarian revolution which will break the restraints put on the productivity of society by the present capitalistic form of commodity production and unite the hitherto incompletely coordinated forces of the single labourers into an organized collective labour force. It is partially realized today wherever in the various forms of the proletarian class struggle, the strike, the stay-in strike, and the general strike, the united workers stand up against the oppressive forces of capital. Thus it may be said that under the present conditions of an ever increasing sabotage of the powerful capacities of modern industry by the existing capitalistic production-relations the new potential of productivity inherent in the working class reveals itself most clearly in those cases when, according to the isolating and static concepts of the bourgeois ideologists the labourers cease to function as a “productive force” at all, but in fact only cease to function as a “productive force of capital” and stand ready to realize that incomparably greater power of productivity which is potentially existent in the material means of production and in the hands and brains of the toiling masses today. *“De tous les instruments de production, le plus grand pouvoir productif, c’est la classe révolutionnaire elle-même.”*

It follows from the foregoing discussion that those recent Marx interpreters are quite mistaken who, by a direct inversion of the order in which theory and practice were blended by Marx into a dynamic whole, wanted to degrade the opposition between the social classes to a temporary appearance of the underlying “economic” contradiction between the productive forces and production-relations as a larger and assumedly more “material” entity. They inflate the scientific principle of Marx’s economic research to a universal and eternal Dialectic pervading the whole development of nature and man and thus fall back not only far behind historical materialism, but behind the historical idealism of Hegel and his equally idealistic philosophical predecessors.

On the other hand, the Marxian “contradiction of productive forces and production-relations” means much more than a lack of adjustment between technical results and their social application. The Marxian concept of “social” productive forces has nothing in common with the idealistic abstractions of the old and new “Technocrats” who imagine

that they can define and measure the productive powers of society apart from all social conditions in terms of natural science and technology. There is no doubt that the productive forces include, along with the social nature of the labour engaged in material production, also the “improvements in the field of intellectual production, especially in natural science and its practical application.” The “fettering character” of the existing capitalistic production-relations appears also in the frustration of intellectual labour, which results from the fact that the ruling class of present capitalistic society is interested in technical progress only indirectly, i.e., only in so far as it can thereby increase its profits. A scientific investigation into the definite forms of the growing repression of technical progress by the so-called necessities of the capitalistic production is a powerful indictment against the existing capitalistic system. But the conflict of technical and social possibilities is by no means the only form in which the struggle between the progressive tendency of the material productive forces and the stagnation resulting from the fixed form of the social relations of production manifests itself in present society. Technical knowledge and “technocratic” prescriptions are not sufficient in themselves to remove the material obstacles which oppose any important change in present-day capitalistic society, and these can, indeed, not be removed by intellectual weapons alone. There is more power of resistance in the mute force of economic conditions and in the economically and politically organized forces of the class interested in the maintenance of those conditions than well-meaning technocrats have ever dreamt of. “Technocracy,” said Trotzky in a bold forecast of *The Future of Socialism in America*, “can only be realized in a soviet régime when the barriers of private property have fallen.”

Even before Marx had discovered in the so-called “economic-law” of the *accumulation of capital* the ultimate material reason of the characteristic historical fact that capitalistic production cannot exist without a continuous progress, he had been aware of this fundamental law of modern society. The revolutionary role of the bourgeoisie determined by it is described in the *Communist Manifesto*:

The bourgeoisie cannot exist without constantly revolutionizing the instruments of production, and thereby

the relations of production, and with them the whole relations of society. Conservation of the old modes of production in unaltered form was, on the contrary, the first condition of existence for all earlier industrial classes. A constant overthrow of production, uninterrupted disturbance of all social conditions, everlasting uncertainty and agitation distinguish the bourgeois from all earlier epochs. All stable, rust-fixed relations, with their train of ancient and venerable views and opinions, are swept away, those which are newly formed become antiquated before they can ossify. All that is established and has a status, evaporates, all that is holy is profaned, and man is at last compelled to face with sober senses his real position in life and his actual conditions.

In the first ascending phase of the bourgeois epoch this law of a society based on the capitalistic mode of production was naïvely and candidly formulated by its ideological supporters as a “law of progress.” When afterwards, especially since Darwin, the simple concept of “progress” was supplanted by the more elaborate concept of “evolution,” that change resulted at first only in a further development and wider application of the same fundamental principle. The concept of a permanent “progressive evolution” was raised to a fundamental principle of sociological science. In this sense, Herbert Spencer endeavoured to represent the study of sociology as “the study of Evolution in its most complex form.”

Later bourgeois sociology from the standpoint of its higher learning smiled at the unsophisticated belief in progress which had been characteristic of its own beginnings. Spencer himself although still adhering to the idea of a general progress involving as its inevitable consequence a higher moral development, formulated at the same time

the far more neutral definition of development as “a progress from a simple to a complex form.” Huxley emphasized the ethical indifference of the idea of evolution by pointing to the lack of a necessary connection, and even partial contradiction, between socio-economic and ethical progress. That “pluralist” approach was during the further development of bourgeois sociology transformed into a complete scepticism of progress, and finally into social pessimism, glorification of reaction and “*Decline of the West.*”

As the original idea of progress expressed the ascendant phase of capitalist production, its declining phase is manifested in the gradual transformation of that idea into the “neutral” and “non-evaluative” concept of development current among the modern bourgeois sociologists. With the further development of capitalistic production, with the increase of accumulated capital and wealth, the capitalist ceased to be a mere incarnation of that uninterrupted and uninterruptedly accelerated accumulation of capital which in the earlier phase had been reflected as a “fanaticism of progress” in the social consciousness of the time. A long hangover followed upon the previous state of rapture and intoxication with progress.

The idea of progress abandoned by bourgeois science was kept alive by the class which represented the progressive tendency within the practical development of the new epoch. The criticism directed by the Utopian socialism of Saint-Simon and Fourier and by the materialistic communism of Owen and Marx against the bourgeois concept of “progress” is, in part, a restoration and further development of the rational kernel of that same early bourgeois idea. Socialism achieves in a changed form and in an enormously increased measure once more that unfettering of the material forces of production which capitalism had endeavoured to achieve in a form adapted to the time and in which ultimately it had more or less failed. The working class must adhere to the bourgeois principle of progress through all the phases of the long struggle in which it is still striving to work out its own emancipation and with it a new and higher form of society. Not until that phase of the communist society of the future, when the enslaving subordination of man under the existing system of division of labour and the resulting antagonism between intellectual and physical labour will have been finally conquered; when labour will have developed from being a means of living to a spontaneous activity of man and, along

with a development of all creative powers of the human individual the productive forces of society will also have increased; not till all springs of cooperative wealth are in full flow – not until then will the inhuman sacrifice of the present for the future of society become superfluous and the single-track idea of “progress” branch out into the *universal development of free individuals in a free society*. Not till then will the modern working class, by its conscious action, realize the old dream of the oppressed classes of all times which already in Aristotle had been a mythical expression for the real goal of the revolutionary self-emancipation of the helot class.

Until then the proletariat reproaches the ruling classes much less for realizing the productive forces only in a capitalist fashion and thus burdening the working class with the enormous costs and sufferings of this capitalistic form of progress than it reproaches them for carrying out that progress less and less efficiently, for adhering, in an ever increasing degree, to their own narrow class interests which become more and more irreconcilable with the further development of the social productive powers, and, for a direct and conscious sabotage of every social progress. The first result of the proletarian class-struggle is to force upon the bourgeoisie, against its own will, the continuation of its historical vocation as a capitalistic class.

Long before the proletariat will overthrow the ruling bourgeoisie, and constitute itself a ruling class and the official bearer of social development, it does anticipate this great change by its own development into an independent revolutionary class, by the gradual growth of its class consciousness and by the multiple forms of a veritable class war waged against the existing capitalistic production-relations and their political superstructure. Even the progress thus imposed upon the bourgeoisie is, from the viewpoint of the proletariat, no longer a bourgeois progress, but the workers’ own affair. The progressive development of the social productive forces becomes the action of the proletarian class.

The bourgeoisie had become conscious of the economic law of its own development in a mystified form only; it had expanded the accumulation of capital into a cosmic law of progress. The proletariat puts in place of that ideological mystification, a clear and scientific

orientation of its own social theory and practice to a further progressive development of the hitherto evolved productive forces.

In order to fulfil that progressive task, the proletariat will first find it necessary to tear asunder in a social revolution those strongest fetters of the productive forces which are formed by the capitalistic mode of production. *“The real historical barrier of capitalistic production is capital itself.”*

Even the bourgeois revolution of the preceding epoch which was described one-sidedly by its ideological supporters as a change of civil constitution, the laws, and the State, in short, as a “political” revolution only, was in fact an overthrow of the whole socio-economic formation. The historical blindness of the bourgeois revolutionaries which persists in the bourgeois conception of the revolutionary process today lies, above all, in the fact that they considered the change in the economic conditions of life not yet as a direct task, but as a “natural” consequence resulting, as it were, spontaneously from the essential achievement of the political revolution.

The proletarian criticism of the traditional bourgeois concepts of progress, evolution, and of a merely political revolution, is based on the materialistic discovery that the social “production-relations” corresponding to each stage of the development of the material productive forces do not develop either in an independent economic “evolution” or as a “natural result” of a merely political revolution. They have to be changed by man. Nay more, the new political and ideological conditions temporarily achieved by a mere political revolution can only be upheld against the powers of reaction by a radical social revolution reaching down to the very roots of the existing order of society, that is, right down to material production.

The only “evolution” that is possible and actually takes place within the framework of the existing production-relations of an historical epoch, i.e., the only process of development which leaves the basic structure of a given society “on the whole” or “essentially” unchanged is the intrinsic development of the social “productive forces.” The material conditions of the new and higher production-relations which are to be substituted for the existing production-relations by a social revolution are brought to maturity within the womb of the old society. Thus the production-relations, unable to develop by themselves,

nevertheless fulfil for a certain time and up to a certain point a positive function on the development of material production. Within them there proceeds the further development of the old, and the growth of the new productive forces.

The latent, potential, dynamic further development of material production going on within a fundamentally unchanged system of production-relations occupies the first phase of every historical epoch. As soon as the harmonious development, or rather an externally “harmonious” development only, which contains the hidden germs of a future conflict, has reached a certain point, it loses even that outwardly harmonious aspect. “At a certain stage of their development,” said Marx, “the material productive forces of society come into contradiction with the existing production-relations within which they hitherto moved. From being forms of development they turn into fetters of the productive forces. Then an epoch of social revolution sets in. With the change in the economic foundation the whole of the vast superstructure is more or less rapidly overturned.”

This dynamic conception of *material production* itself, distinguishes the Marxian theory of the social revolution from all other revolutionary theories. Although revelling in “dynamics” and “development,” the bourgeois sociologists remain the slaves of a fundamentally “static” concept at the most important point; they are not able to extend their “dynamic” terms to the very foundation of society. The material mode of production in a given epoch of society forms for them a closed system which is determined throughout. In it production is carried on in definite forms. The whole of the existing productive forces of society is actualized in these forms. There is no room in this conception for any surplus or unutilized fund of productive powers that might possibly be added to those really active productive powers. They take seriously what was presented as a terrific indictment against the existing capitalistic system by the late German socialist leader, August Bebel: “Without profits, no chimney smokes.” According to this view, the capitalistic production relations together with the corresponding relations of distribution are just as indispensable for the productive process as is the land, the raw materials, machines, and labouring “hands.” From this static viewpoint it amounts almost to a miracle that production has been able to develop at all and thus to get from its past to its present stage. This

miracle is either explained by a pseudoscientific disintegration of real change into smaller and smaller steps of a gradual and imperceptible evolution, or else it is disposed of by reference to the supernatural creative forces of the “great bourgeois revolution” of the past which exploded once for all the obsolete feudal order that was in itself no longer capable of any further development and created the modern industrial system capable of an unlimited evolution.

The apparently undivided whole of a given material production is split by Marx into fixed production-relations and elastic productive forces. Thus material production is stripped of its closed character, its immovability, and unchangeability. The production-relations are now no longer asked whether production can go on within them. They are asked, above all, whether a further development of production can go on within them. They are the forms that either advance or block the development of the productive forces. Conversely, the existence and extent of the potential productive forces inherent in the present mode of production cannot be tested by a technological calculation so long as they cannot be tested in their actual working within a given social process of production, and as the way for the real test has not been cleared by the revolutionary destruction of the capitalistic barrier. Like the mutations of animals and plants which have replaced the older evolutionary concepts in modern biology, the “*social mutations*” occurring in the material mode of production are not completely determined and determinable in advance. Just as the mutation is a “leap of nature,” in spite of Aristotle, so is the social revolution in its actual process, with all materialistic determination of its premises and forms, a “leap,” not from an absolute “realm of necessity” into an absolute “realm of freedom,” but from a rigid system of long-established and repressive social relations to a flexible system of new and more plastic forms of social life as yet in the process of formation, with plenty of room for a further development of the productive forces and for new forms of human activity.

The social revolution of the proletariat is an action of men united in a definite social class and engaged in a war against other social classes, with all the chances and all the risks attached to such a real practical effort. This is in no way contradicted by the Marxian statement of 1859 that “a formation of society never perishes before all the forces of production for which it is wide enough have developed”; and that

“new and higher production-relations never come into being before the material conditions for their existence have matured within the womb of the old society itself.” There is no reason to suspect, as some bourgeois and reformist opponents of Marx’s revolutionary theory have done, that Marx had by this time abandoned the practical materialistic standpoint of his earlier writings (*Theses on Feuerbach*, *German Ideology*, *Misère de la philosophie*, and *Communist Manifesto*) and had adopted a “fatalistic” conception of the revolutionary process as a purely economic development brought about by the working of an inevitable law. Marx had formed his materialistic opinion that “l’organisation des éléments révolutionnaires comme classe suppose l’existence de toutes les forces productives qui pouvaient s’engendrer dans le sein de la société ancienne,” long before the failure of the bourgeois revolution of 1848 and the ensuing reaction and despair could have turned him from a “militant propagandist of the revolutionary class struggle” into a “detached scientific observer of the real historical development.” Such difference as there is between the earlier and later formulations of the materialistic principle, consists in a shift of emphasis from the subjective factor of revolutionary class war to its connection with the underlying objective development. This shift of emphasis appears for the first time in a document of the autumn of 1850 in which Marx and Engels drew attention to the restored prosperity and the consequent temporary close of the revolutionary movement. “Under the conditions of this general prosperity, when the productive forces of bourgeois society develop as abundantly as is at all possible within existing bourgeois conditions, there can be no question of a real revolution. Such a revolution is only possible in those periods when the two factors, the modern productive forces and the bourgeois forms of production, come to contradict one another.” By this sober, materialistic statement they disowned “the illusions of the vulgar democracy grouped around the would-be provisional governments in partibus” and thus separated themselves once for all from the leaders of the revolutionary bourgeois emigration of 1848 “who later, almost without exception, have made their peace with Bismarck – so far as Bismarck found them worth the trouble.” More important, by the same act they broke with the so-called “partisans of action” who at that time under the leadership of Willich and Schapper had swept with their

illusionary hopes of a speedy new outbreak of the defeated revolutionary movement the majority of the reconstituted Communist League of 1850. So bitter was the ensuing fight that it led to a formal split within the then most advanced proletarian party and to an eventual dissolution of the whole organization.

As we have seen in discussing the successive phases of Marx's economic theory, the new form of Marx's revolutionary materialism was due to the changed conditions which were henceforth given for the practical development of the proletarian class struggle. The stronger emphasis now laid on the objective presuppositions of a victorious proletarian revolution which cannot be replaced by good will, by the right theory, or by the most efficient organization of the revolutionaries, appears from this point of view in the main as a lesson drawn from the experiences of the European revolution and counter-revolution of 1848 for the benefit of the new phase of the revolutionary labour movement which began in 1850. In a similar manner, the revolutionary Marxist, Lenin, on a closely analogous occasion, summed up for the benefit of the Russian and international militant party the tactical experiences of the three Russian revolutions of the 20th century. In what he now called the "fundamental law of revolution," he stated the indispensable objective conditions of a "direct, open, really revolutionary struggle of the working class." Just as Marx and Engels, after the final defeat of the 1848 revolution, had confronted the subjective and emotional hopes of the Leftists of 1850 with the cruel materialistic analysis of the objective economic position and the sober perspective resulting therefrom, so Lenin came to grips with the activist revolutionary tendencies of the left communists of 1920 who in an objectively changed situation adhered to the slogans of the direct revolutionary situation released by the Great War. While thus warning the vanguard of the working class not to stick too conservatively to the direct revolutionary tactics which were no longer justified by objective conditions, both Marx and Lenin did not think for a moment of supplanting the real revolutionary action of the working class by a passive belief in a mere economic process of development which would after a considerable amount of waiting finally achieve the revolutionary change with the inevitability of a natural process. The class which stands in the midstream of historical development and by its own movement determines that development,

must by its conscious activity finally prove the maturity reached by the productive forces within the existing production-relations. They must with their own hands break the fetters that obstruct the development of the productive forces and establish the higher production-relations of a new progressive epoch of society.

Chapter 6. Basis and Superstructure

What are the particular relations between the “economic structure of society” and its political and juridical “superstructure,” between “social existence” and “social consciousness”? In what definite forms is the material connection between the various fields of social life realized? What is their significance for a materialistic investigation of the different spheres of a given economic order of society?

We know already that all these apparently separated and widely different spheres form together a universe of society in which, just as in a living organism, every part is connected with every other part. This “just as,” by the way, is to be read as meaning “just as much and just as *little*.” The author does not want in either case to be regarded as adhering to that mystic and unscientific theory of “whole-ism” according to which this connection is previously granted and needs only to be discovered in detail by the endeavours of the investigator. He would rather, with old Kant, regard the idea of whole-ism as a working principle which guides our strictly empirical research and may or may not hold good even in a given instance. The position today is different from that which prevailed at the time when Marx had first to establish the materialistic principle against a host of deep-rooted idealistic prejudices. Marx himself nowhere discussed the question in a general way. But it follows from his criticism of the equally metaphysical bourgeois concept of Evolution, from the principles of specification and change underlying his whole work and, even more, from the methods actually applied by him in the investigation of the economic sphere in *Capital*, that he would have ruled out the words “all” and “every” just as well from that broader universe of a strictly empirical and critical research which he called alternately “history” or “society” or the realm of “practical action.” He would have replaced those vague and meaningless generalities by a specific description of a given state of society, its historical genesis,

and its inherent developmental tendencies from the practical viewpoint of the working class.

Marx had not passed in vain through the school of Hegel which had been for the whole generation of the revolutionaries of the 30's and 40's the great school of philosophical thought. He brought to his materialistic research a method of inquiry ranging from the most exact theoretical to the most direct practical knowledge. Unfortunately, that broadness and subtlety of Marx's thought has been less and less understood by its later exponents and opponents. Thus one group fell into the error that, according to the materialistic theory, a full material reality pertained only to the economic phenomena, while all other social phenomena – State, law, forms of consciousness possessed a lesser and lesser degree of “reality” and ultimately were lost in pure “ideology.” According to this first misconception which will hereafter be called the “economistic” tendency, it is only the economic struggle of the workers and the forms of social struggle springing directly from it which are recognized as a direct proletarian and revolutionary action, whereas all other forms of struggle, and more especially “political action,” are regarded as an undesirable deviation from the real revolutionary aims. This economistic tendency was represented during Marx's lifetime, within the Working Men's International Organization, by the adherents of Proudhon, by Bakunin, and other “anti-authoritarian,” “anti-political,” and “anti-party” groups of the day. The violent battle waged by Marx and his followers against that heterodoxy led to the formal expulsion of the dissident groups from the “International” and, finally, to the dissolution of the whole organization. A direct descendant of this earliest form of an economistic and anti-political tendency is that second current of socialistic thought which was represented by revolutionary syndicalism and anarcho-syndicalism and is actually responsible for that second great rallying of the proletarian forces after the Russian Revolution of October 1917, which formed during the last seven years the real driving force of the revolutionary movement in Spain. The same revolutionary economistic tendency was represented, in a weaker form, within the Marxist movement itself.

We do not mean here that pseudo-economistic school of the German and other European Social Democratic parties and Trade Unions which under the pretext of an “economistic” principle actually

contested all forms of the workers' movement going beyond the mere "economic" wage struggle within the framework of the bourgeois production and of the bourgeois State. On the basis of that pseudo-economistic principle, they opposed, in the period preceding the World War, among other political activities of the workers, the Social Democratic campaign for the abolition of the property qualification on the franchise in Prussia, the militant Liebknecht campaign against militarism, and the so-called "révolution Dreyfusienne" in France. They did so not for any particular dislike of the very moderate political aims of those campaigns, but on the ground of the "revolutionary" weapons (general strikes, street demonstrations, etc.) employed therein. Thus they did not oppose politics but only the alliance of the workers with a radical bourgeois politics. They opposed on the same grounds, during the war, even the slightest attempts of the socialist workers in Germany to endanger the "Burgfrieden" thrust upon them in the interest of the ruling class.

While this group emphasized the "materialistic" importance of a so-called "economic action" only for the purpose of avoiding the revolutionary implications of an unrestricted political fight, the real importance of an *economic* action in a social struggle for power was worked out, both against the pseudo-economism of the reformists and against the merely political radicalism of the party leadership, by that small revolutionary group of the German Social Democratic Party which then centred around Rosa Luxemburg. That left-wing radicalism of the pre-war period developed during the war, and the ensuing phase of a direct revolutionary struggle, into the anti-parliamentary and anti-trade union tendency of the left communists, who with several directly anarchistic and syndicalistic currents, took a considerable share in the foundation of the new international organization of the revolutionary working class to be later shoved into the background again by the increasing stabilization of the old capitalist conditions. They were then, after a vehement internal struggle, finally expelled from the ranks of the communist Third International by a process begun by Lenin himself, and followed out to the bitter end by the "queue de Lenin" after his death.

As shown by this brief historical outline, the "economistic tendency" of Marxism has played, on the whole, an important part in the revolutionary development of the European labour movement

comparable to the contribution which during the same period was made by the Industrial Workers of the World to the revolutionary development of the class war in the U.S.A. This was recognized even by such an arch-political Marxist as Lenin when, on looking back to his own battles against the reformist and centrist deformation of revolutionary Marxism within the German Social Democracy, he made the characteristic statement: "Anarchism is the punishment for the sins of opportunism." Even from a merely theoretical viewpoint the connection of the Marxist theory with the whole of the revolutionary proletarian class war was preserved most efficiently by this "economistic" group, although the original Marxian idea of a continuous struggle waged simultaneously on all fronts of the social life was kept alive by them only in the "abstract" and almost mystical form of a direct identification of the objective economic development with the active revolutionary movement of the proletarian class.

In opposition to that first extreme stands another and apparently much more comprehensive interpretation of revolutionary Marxism which will hereafter be called the "sociological tendency." While the former school overemphasized the importance of economics and more or less "one-sidedly" reduced all social relations and developments to the unique "reality" of material production, this other school of Marxian thought, in an equally one-sided manner, strove to supplant the basic importance of the production-relations for all political, legal, ideological phenomena occurring in a given socio-economic formation by a "coordination" of the "interactions" going to and fro between the various departments of social life and, ultimately, by a "universal interdependence of all social spheres." The materialistic conception of history, then, no longer appears as the principle of a materialistic science, investigating all facts of history from the point of view of their specific relation to *material production*. It appears at its best as a *general empirical and positivistic method* which represents all facts in their own contexts and not in connection with any preconceived "idea" at all. Thus the materialistic *Critique of Political Economy* is no longer regarded as the foundation of the whole materialistic investigation of society, but is transformed into a mere application of the general principles formulated by the materialistic conception of history to one particular section of historical data. Besides the system of materialistic economics, which has been represented in detailed

form by Marx in *Capital*, there are, according to this second school, other partial systems which have not yet been fully carried out but which are theoretically equally important parts of the whole of an all-comprehensive materialistic system. There are, for example, the “materialistic” systems of politics, law, philosophy, culture, etc.

Thus the economic materialism of Marx is disintegrated into a series of separate and coordinated “sociological” sciences and thereby stripped of all definite historical contents as well as of its distinct revolutionary character. From a radical attack upon the whole of the present-day capitalistic mode of production it is transformed into a theoretical criticism of various aspects of the existing capitalistic system as its economic organization, its State, its educational system, its religion, art, science; a criticism which no longer necessarily leads up to a revolutionary practice, but may just as well spend itself (and actually has already spent itself) in all kinds of reforms, which nowhere surpass the bounds of the existing bourgeois society and its State.

In order to restore the full theoretical and practical meaning of Marx’s critical materialistic principle we start with the statement that the materialistic principle of Marx does not need any such completion of its propositions as was offered by the theory of the so-called “interactions.” When Marx and Engels formulated their materialistic principle, they were fully aware of the fact that “the same economic basis by innumerable different empirical circumstances, natural conditions, race differences, external historical influences, etc., may appear in an unlimited range of variations and gradations which can only be understood by an analysis of those given empirical circumstances.” They comprised, in their investigation of the effects of the economic basis upon the superstructure, and of the social existence upon the consciousness, as a matter of course, the concrete forms in which, e.g., the master and servant relation that naturally grows from the given mode of production, afterwards reacts upon the mode of production itself. Nor have they treated the so-called “intellectual production” as a simple reflex of material production, but rather they have represented along with the existing historical forms of material production also “the definite forms of the intellectual production corresponding to that material production and their mutual connection.”

To gain a clearer insight into the manner in which Marx and Engels dealt with the links between the economic basis and the superstructure of a given society, it is advisable to study first the manner in which they dealt with the same connection appearing within the economic structure itself. While they described the more general aspects of their materialistic method in a half-philosophical form when historical materialism was still in the making, they applied it in detail to the economic sphere in the scientific writings of their later period. It is here that they finally proved the superiority of their method of dealing with historical and social connections over that “crude and conceptless manner” in which the bourgeois economists first arbitrarily tore asunder the existing links between production, distribution, circulation, consumption, and then, by an afterthought, reunited them as though they were really independent existences and had not been arbitrarily separated by theoretical reflection. They likewise opposed the insufficient form in which some philosophers, historians, and “social belletrists” had treated those various fields as directly “identical.”

The positive standpoint of historical materialism appears from a statement in which Marx summed up a thorough analysis of the various ways in which the different spheres of production, distribution, etc., can be said to condition each other: “The result is not that production, distribution, exchange, consumption, etc., are identical, but that they all are ‘moments’ of a totality, differences within a unity. *Production encroaches over the other ‘moments.’* From it the whole process begins always anew ... It follows that a definite form of production conditions definite forms of consumption, distribution, exchange, and the definite relations prevailing between those different ‘moments’ themselves. It is true that *production in its narrower definition is in turn determined by other ‘moments’*; for instance, when the market expands, i.e., when the sphere of exchange enlarges, production grows in extent and subdivides within itself. Again production is affected by a change in the distribution, e.g., by a concentration of capital, by a change in the distribution of the population between town and country, etc. Finally, the needs of consumption determine production. There is an interaction between the various ‘moments.’ Such is the case with every organic unity.”

There was then, as against the manner in which the materialistic principle had been applied by its initiators themselves, no need of that violent criticism which was at a later time directed by Friedrich Engels against the so-called “one-sidedness” of the materialistic principle.

This apparent “self-criticism” which is embodied in a series of letters written by Engels in the 90’s to several younger adherents of the Marxian theory and which since then has been the main source of inspiration to all revisionist and bourgeois “improvers” of Marx’s revolutionary materialistic principle, was in truth directed against a too dogmatic and abstract interpretation of historical materialism, which had then arisen in the writings of some of the younger of its most ardent supporters, e.g., in the “*Lessing Legend*” of Franz Mehring.

There is no doubt that here as in many other cases, Engels overstated his own and Marx’s responsibility for the mistakes committed by their followers, when he declared that “at first we all have neglected the formal aspect too much in favour of the contents.” He thus unintentionally supported that other school of the younger generation of Marxists who under the cover of an attack on a too simple and “vulgar” interpretation of Marx’s materialism really aimed at depriving the new doctrine of its revolutionary implications in order to make it acceptable to the bourgeoisie. It was just the struggle waged by that new Marxist school in the theoretical arena against Mehring’s somewhat abstract presentment of Marx’s materialism, that opened the way for the new “revisionistic” tendency which was later to get the upper hand in the German Marxist party and trade union movement and to lead it through the events of 1914 to 1918 to its complete annihilation in 1933.

The assumed one-sidedness of the Marxian materialistic conception of history exists in truth only in its abstract formulation. A theoretical statement of the connections between the economic, political, juridical, and intellectual structure of a given society unavoidably generalizes, to a certain extent, the definite historical facts, from which it is derived and to which it is to be applied as a working principle by the scientific investigator and by the practical politician. They are indeed “one-sided” as compared with the imaginary “completeness” of the actual historical “experience” or, for that matter, with the mere copying of reality which is the aim of a purely descriptive historical

science, or with that “concrete” reproduction of the real which may be achieved by an artistic representation. But that “one-sidedness” is only another name for the generality of the scientific form. One might as well complain of the “one-sidedness” of the physicists who subject the many different kinds of movement of inanimate and animate bodies to the law of gravity, without taking into account the “modifications” brought about by secondary conditions. Just as with the laws of physics and technology, the apparent “one-sidedness” adhering to the “laws” of social being, historical development, and practical action as formulated by Marx, in no way interferes with their practical and theoretical utility, nay more, that utility depends upon the “one-sidedness” of their theoretical formulation.

The “watering” process applied to the materialistic scheme by the Marxist “sociologists” does not therefore so much correct a faulty “one-sidedness” as it impairs the scientific utility of the scheme itself. The doctrine of an indifferent play of “actions” and “interactions,” or of the general “interdependence of the social spheres” does not give us the slightest hint whether we should seek for the cause of a change occurring in any definite sector of social life – and thus also for the practical means of bringing about a change of the conditions existing in that sector – in the “action” of the basis on the superstructure or in the “reaction” of the superstructure on the basis. Nor is that want of definiteness supplanted by describing in unprecise terms the economic basis as a “primary,” and the superstructure as a “secondary,” factor of the historical development, or by referring to the economic conditions as the “finally decisive moment.” No scientist can be contented with the answer given by Engels to one of his correspondents, in which he said that, of all the conditions that form the given “environment” for human actions, “the economic conditions, however much they may be influenced themselves by conditions of a political and ideological order, are still in the last instance the decisive ones, forming the red thread which runs through the whole and alone leads to a real understanding.”

All these phrases are but useless attempts to adhere to the “dialectical” unity of substance, causality, and interaction in the Hegelian philosophical “idea”, as against an altogether changed mode of thought prevailing during the second half of the 19th century. When that first generation of Marxist theorists who had been through the

school of Hegel, or that new generation of Marxist Hegelians who have arisen in Russia since the 90's, were confronted with the question originating from quite a different general attitude and tradition of thought: – “In what sense are economic conditions *causal* (as sufficient reason? occasion? permanent condition, etc.?) to development?” their first reaction was a flood of protests against this new generation which had fallen so low that it no longer understood anything about that *ars magna* – Dialectics. Said Engels: “What all these gentlemen lack, is dialectics. They never see anything but here cause and there effect. That this is an empty abstraction, that such metaphysical polar opposites exist in the real world only in time of crisis, while the whole vast process moves in the form of interactions, although of very unequal forces among which the economic movement is by far the strongest, the most original, and the most decisive; that here nothing is absolute and everything is relative, this they never begin to see; for them there has been no Hegel.” In all that semi-defence of Hegelian philosophy, they were nevertheless unable to save from Hegel's dialectical “idea” more than that one meagre concept of “interaction” which for Hegel had been closely connected with other concepts in the unity of a truly philosophical thought. Thus they succeeded only in adding to the abstract scientific form of causality another scientific term equally abstract, though not at all equally well-defined. This was not Hegel's philosophical concept, but merely that “abstract” concept which had been described by him contemptuously as a mere “refuge of reflection,” and a “poor category” which was no longer sufficient for the “observation of nature and of the living organism,” let alone for “historical observation.” “If we consider, e.g., the customs of the Spartans as the effect of their constitution and thus, contrariwise, the latter as the effect of their customs, no matter how correct such a statement otherwise may be, yet this view will never give us final satisfaction because in truth neither the constitution nor the customs of that people are grasped in it.”

Hence those “interactions” which were supposed to preserve within the materialistic scheme of Marxism the philosophical dialectics of Hegel are neither fish nor fowl nor good red herring, they are neither Hegelian philosophy, mystically vague yet full of matter, nor are they scientific terms precisely defined on the model of modern physics. As

long as there is no sufficiently exact determination of the quantitative amount of action and reaction and of the precise conditions under which at a given time the one or the other will take place, the original statement of the materialistic principle will be in no way clarified or improved by the super-addition of so-called “interactions” which are deemed to be at one and the same time coordinate and subordinate to the original “causes.” It is, on the contrary, deprived of all precise meaning by that utterly meaningless addition and thus transformed into a scientifically useless phrase.

There is much more to be said about the peculiar quality of “one-sidedness” attached to every great revolutionary epoch-making theory. Already the earlier form of the “milieu” theory advanced by bourgeois materialists and worked out more consistently by Robert Owen in his system of communism, owed its progressive importance to that very one-sidedness which of the manifold factors in historical development stressed just the one – and the one only – which until then had been entirely neglected. It loses all importance and even the semblance of originality and depth which gives a certain flashy appearance even to the caricatured form which it subsequently assumed in Taine’s belated indictment of the bourgeois revolution of the 18th century, if it is enlarged to the “impartial” statement that man is, indeed, on the one hand a product of his conditions but on the other hand is, conversely, also the cause or the “producer” of his own conditions of existence. Even more superfluous and damaging are such “supplements” to the historical and social materialism which has been developed from the “milieu” theory of early bourgeois materialism by Marx. His statement that “property relations are a juridical expression of existing production-relations” was transformed into a hackneyed commonplace by that modern German philosopher who concluded that, though on the one hand all law is to be considered as a mere form of the economic contents, on the other hand economic phenomena must themselves be understood as mere “mass-phenomena of legal relations” and thus both are to be interchangeably explained by each other.

Neither “dialectical causality” in its philosophical definition, nor scientific “causality” supplemented by “interactions,” is sufficient to determine the particular kinds of connections and relations existing between the economic “basis” and the juridical, political, and

ideological “superstructure” of a given socio-economic formation. Twentieth century natural science is aware that the “causal” relations occurring in a particular field of knowledge are not to be defined by a general concept or “law” of causality, but must be determined specifically for each separate sphere. The most important pioneer work for the establishment of the same scientific principle in the sphere of the historical, social, and practical life of man was done in a philosophical form by the dialectics of Hegel and continued in a form, no longer philosophical and yet not entirely separated from the Hegelian philosophy, by the materialistic dialectics of Marx and Engels. The greater part of the results thus obtained do not consist in theoretical formulae, but in the specific application of the new principle to a number of questions which are either of fundamental practical importance or of an extremely subtle nature theoretically, and which had not, up to that time, been so much as touched by other investigators. Even in the future the main task of scientific research in this field will not lie in the theoretical statement of any new formulae. To a great extent, the new results will come from a further application and testing of the principles implicit in Marx. Nor should we adhere too strictly to the words of Marx who often used his terms only figuratively as, for instance, in describing the connections here considered as a relation between “basis” and “superstructure,” as a “correspondence,” etc. He presented the history of society at one time as a development of material productive powers and production-relations; at another time, as a history of the class struggle. In the same broad way, he used the terms of “basis” and “superstructure” applying them on one occasion to production-relations and such institutional phenomena as “State” and “law” and, on another occasion, to the proletariat and the “higher” strata of official society borne by that lower stratum and to be rent asunder by its upheaval. There is no need to smooth over such apparent contradictions by a scholastic interpretation; to say, e.g., that the organization of the workers as a social class rests on the economic conditions of a given epoch but that, at the same time, the further historical development of the economic conditions is influenced by the class struggle or, conversely, that the class struggle develops under the stimulus of the productive forces but determines, within a given period, the existing economic conditions. By the former interpretation, the term of the “productive forces,” by

the latter, the concept of the “class struggle” is deprived of what was with Marx their main content. While these terms may be applied also to a mere description of a given historical state of society they both attain their full and true significance only when applied to the genetic and revolutionary process by which each given form is transformed into a new and higher form of development.

As a matter of fact, the “objective” description of the historical process as a development of the productive forces and the “subjective” description of history as a class struggle are two independent forms of Marxian thought, equally original and not derived one from the other, which are worked out in an objective and simultaneously subjective materialistic theory for the use of the investigator and which, at the same time, are meant to be applied by the proletarian class in its practical struggle. In either case, they are to be applied singly or together, according to the conditions of each given position, as an instrument for the most precise solution of the task in hand. The Marxian concepts (as among the later Marxists was most clearly realized by Sorel and Lenin) are not new dogmatic fetters or pre-established points which must be gone through in a particular order in any “materialistic” investigation. They are an undogmatic guide for scientific research and revolutionary action. “The proof of the pudding is in the eating.”

Chapter 7. Conclusions

Marx’s most important contributions to social research are that he:

- (1) related all phenomena of the life process of society to economics;
- (2) conceived of economics itself as a social science;
- (3) defined all social phenomena historically and, indeed, as a revolutionary process which results from the development of the material forces of production and is realized by the struggle of the social classes.

These three general results of the Marxian science of society include as particularly important partial results:

- (4) an exact definition of the relation between economics and politics;
- (5) a reduction of all phenomena of the so-called “mind” to definite forms of social consciousness pertaining to a definite historical epoch.

A detailed analysis of topics (4) and (5) is beyond the scope of this work.

To arrive at these results, Marx used a conceptual framework of his own, which he composed largely of philosophical elements reshaped from Hegel, but into which he absorbed as well all the new tendencies of the social knowledge of his time. In conscious opposition to Hegel’s idealistic system, he called this new set of ideas his *materialism*. As against the various other materialism tenets, he described it more precisely by the addition of one or more such adjectives as historical, dialectical, critical, revolutionary, scientific, or proletarian.

Historical materialism is in its main tendency no longer a philosophical, but rather an empirical and scientific, method. It contains the premises for a real solution of the task which naturalistic materialism and positivism had only apparently solved by an eclectic application to the science of society of the highly specialized methods which, through centuries of study, the natural scientists had invented and meticulously adapted to their particular fields of investigation. Instead of transferring those scientific methods ready-made to the new sphere of society, Marx developed specific methods of social research, a *Novum Organum* which would permit the investigator in this newly opened field to penetrate the “*eidola*” standing in the way of unbiased research, and to determine “with the precision of natural science” the real subject-matter hidden behind an interminable confusion of “ideological” disguises. This is the kernel of Marxian materialism.

Just as positivism could not move with freedom in the new field of social science, but remained tied to the specific concepts and methods of natural science, so Marx’s historical materialism has not entirely freed itself from the spell of Hegel’s philosophical method which in its day overshadowed all contemporary thought. This was not a materialistic science of society which had developed on its own basis. Rather it was a materialistic theory that had just emerged from

idealistic philosophy; a theory, therefore, which still showed in its contents, its methods, and its terminology the birthmarks of the old Hegelian philosophy from whose womb it sprang. All these imperfections were unavoidable under the circumstances out of which Marx's materialistic social research arose. With all these faults, it was far and away in advance of the other contemporary schools of social thought. It remains superior to all other social theories even now, in spite of the comparatively negligible progress which Marxists have in the meantime made in the formal development of the methods discovered by Marx and Engels. In a partly philosophical form, it has yet achieved a great number of important scientific results which hold good to this day.

Through Hegel, the new proletarian materialism linked itself to the sum of bourgeois social thought of the preceding historical period. It did so in the same antagonistic manner in which, during the same period, the historical movement of the bourgeoisie was continued by the new revolutionary movement of the proletarian class.

The philosophical idealism of Hegel corresponded to a further advanced stage of the material development of society than did the old bourgeois materialism. Hegel had embodied in his "idealistic" system a greater number of elements that could be used by the new historical materialism. He had also presented them in a more highly developed form than had any of the 18th century materialists. We have seen in a former chapter how loosely Hegel's doctrine of "civil society" was connected with the whole of his idealistic system. Similarly, many other sections of Hegel's system can without difficulty be read materialistically instead of idealistically.

The fact that the new proletarian theory had incorporated in its methods and contents some important results of Hegel's philosophy, did not in any way infer an obligation. Marx and Engels disrupted the elements which in Hegel had been bound up in an idealistic system. They welded together the parts which they found suitable for their purpose, with elements taken from other sources into the new whole of a materialistic science.

Hegel had been in his time an encyclopaedic thinker, a genius at annexation, a "philosopher" hungry both for theory and reality, who brought within the scope of his system an incomparably greater field

of experience than anyone since Aristotle. The mass of thought-material stored up in Hegel's philosophy is, nevertheless, only one of the tributaries which Marx and Engels directed into the broad stream of their new materialistic doctrine of society. They took from all sides. From the bourgeois historians of the French Restoration they took the historical importance of class and class struggle; from Ricardo, the conflicting economic interests of the social classes; from Proudhon, the description of the modern proletariat as the only revolutionary class; from the feudal and Christian assailants of the new political order born of the 18th century revolution, the ruthless unmasking of the liberal ideas of the bourgeoisie, the piercing invective full of hatred. Their ingenuous dissection of the unsolvable antagonisms of the modern mode of production they took from the petty-bourgeoisie socialism of Sismondi; the accents of humanism perceptible even in their later materialistic writings from earlier companions among the left Hegelians, especially from Feuerbach; the relevance of politics to the struggle of the working class from the contemporary labour parties, French Social Democrats and English Chartists; the doctrine of the revolutionary dictatorship from the French Convention, and from Blanqui and his followers. Finally, they took from Saint-Simon, Fourier, and Owen the ultimate goal of all socialism and communism, the complete overthrow of existing capitalistic society, abolition of all classes and class oppositions, and transformation of the political State into a mere management of production. These were the annexations they had made from the beginning. During the further development of their theory, they made others, adopting, for instance, at one stroke the results of that first age of discovery in primaeval research which began early in the 19th century and concluded with Morgan.

Just as Marx's new science is in its form above all a strictly empirical investigation and critique of society, so in its content it is, above all, economic research. Marx, who had begun his materialistic investigation of society as a critic of religion, of philosophy, of politics, and of law, later concentrated more and more upon economics. He did not thereby narrow down the realm of his all-comprehensive social science. The critique of Political Economy as embodied in *Capital* deals with the State and the law, and with such "higher," i.e., still more ideological, social phenomena as philosophy, art, and religion only in occasional remarks which light up, in sudden

flashes, extensive fields of social activity; yet it remains a materialistic investigation into *the whole of existing bourgeois society*. It proceeds methodically from the view that when we have examined the bourgeois mode of production and its historical changes we have thereby examined everything of the structure and development of present-day society which can be the subject-matter of a strictly empirical science. In this sense, Marx's materialistic social science is not sociology, but economics.

For the other branches of the so-called social science there remains then, according to the materialistic principle of Marxism, a scale of phenomena which become in proportion to their increasing distance from the economic foundation, less and less accessible to a strictly scientific investigation, less and less "material," more and more "ideological," and which, finally, cannot be treated in a theoretical manner at all, but only critically and in the closest connection with the practical tasks of the revolutionary class war.

The last foundation of the new Marxian science is neither Hegel nor Ricardo, neither bourgeois philosophy nor bourgeois economy. Marx's materialistic investigation into the movement of modern bourgeois society received its decisive impulses from the reality of historical development, that is, from the great bourgeois revolutions of the 17th and 18th centuries and from the historical movement of the 19th century, the revolutionary rise of the proletarian class. A genetic presentation would show with what precision and at the same time with what weight every new phase of the real history of society, every new experience of the proletarian class struggle, is reflected in each new turn of the theoretical development of Marx's doctrine. This close connection between the real history of society and Marx's materialistic science does not rest upon a mere passive reflection of reality in theory. What Marx and Engels gained in theoretical views and concepts from their study of the real history of the proletarian movement, they gave back immediately in the form of direct participation in the class conflicts of their time and of powerful impulses which historically continue to enlarge and stimulate the proletarian movement up to the present day.

To be instrumental in the historical movement of our time is the great purpose of Marx. This revolutionary principle which shapes all his

later theoretical work he had formulated in his earliest youth when he concluded his violent criticism of Feuerbach's politically insufficient materialistic philosophy with a last mighty hammer stroke: "Philosophers have only *interpreted* the world differently; the important thing, however, is to *change it*."