

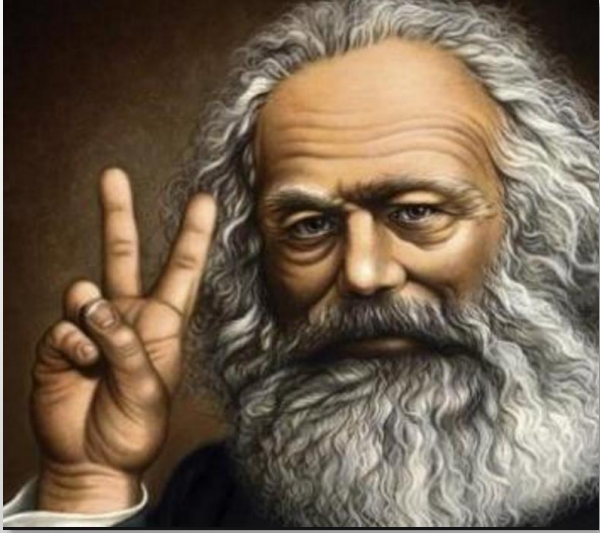
READ

Marx: A Very Short Introduction

By Peter Singer

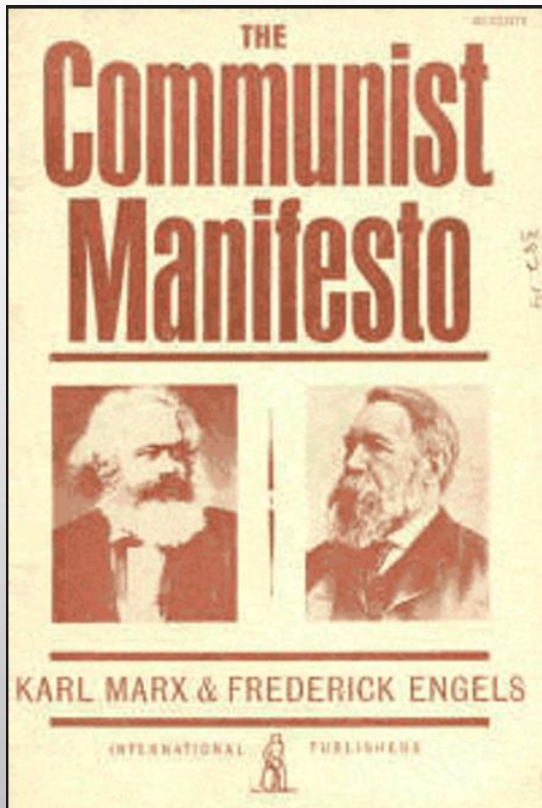
CHAPTER 5, 8

Karl Marx: Life Summary



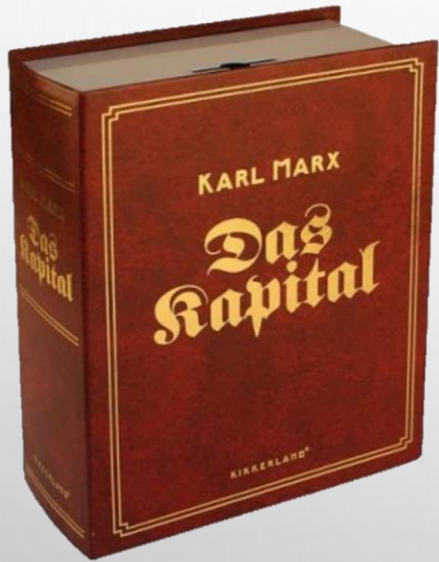
- Karl Marx was born in Trier, in the German Rhineland, in 1818.
- At the age of seventeen, he went to study law at the University of Bonn. Within a year he had been imprisoned for drunkenness and slightly wounded in a duel.
- He transferred to the more serious University of Berlin. Marx's interests became more intellectual, and his studies turned from law to philosophy.
- In 1841, Marx became interested in journalism. He wrote on social, political, and philosophical issues for a newly founded liberal newspaper.
- A series of articles by Marx on the poverty of wine-growers in the Moselle valley may have been considered especially inflammatory; in any case, the government decided to suppress the paper.
- He wanted to leave Germany, where he could not express himself freely.

Karl Marx: Life Summary



- Karl arrived in Paris in the autumn of 1843.
- Throughout 1844 Marx worked at articulating his philosophical position in a very broad sense, including politics, economics, and a conception of the historical processes at work in the world.
- By now Marx was prepared to call himself **a communist** – which was nothing very unusual in those days in Paris.
- Meanwhile the Prussian government was putting pressure on the French to do something about the German communists living in Paris.
- To obtain permission to stay in Brussels, Marx had to promise not to take part in politics.
- He soon breached this undertaking by organizing a Communist Correspondence Committee which was intended to keep communists in different countries in touch with each other.

Karl Marx: Life Summary



- Marx had an opportunity to make his own ideas the basis of communist activities when he went to London, to attend a Congress of the newly formed **Communist League** in December 1847.
- The result was **The Communist Manifesto**, published in February 1848, which was to become the classic outline of Marx's theory.
- The Belgian government gave him twenty-four hours to get out of the country. The Marxes went first to Paris and then, following news of revolution in Berlin, returned to Germany.
- On 24 August 1849, he sailed for England and lived in London for the rest of his life.
- In 1867 Marx finally completed the first volume of **Capital**.

Karl Marx: Life Summary



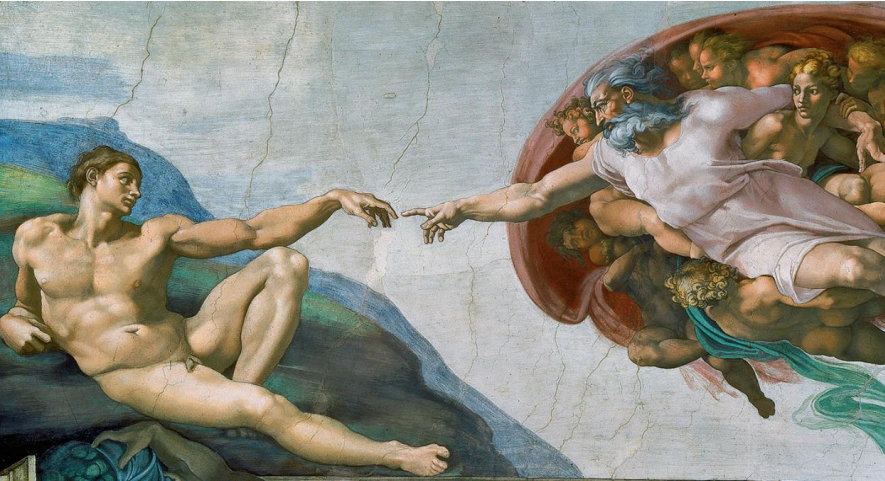
- Marx's forceful intellect and strength of personality soon made him a dominant figure in ***The International Workingmen's Association*** – later known as the ***First International*** – was founded at a public meeting in London in 1864.
- Marx became a well-known figure through the publication, in 1871, of *The Civil War in France*, that he wrote to the *International* on the *Paris Commune*, the workers' uprising which took over and ruled Paris for two months.
- Marx's ideas were spreading at last. By 1871 a second edition of *Capital* was needed. A Russian translation appeared in 1872 – Marx was very popular among Russian revolutionaries – and a French translation soon followed.
- He died on 14 march 1883.

PHILOSOPHICAL INFLUENCES



- The philosophy of **G.W.F. Hegel**, Who had taught at the University of Berlin, had influence in the period when Marx began to form their ideas.
- ‘Mind’ was read as ‘human self-consciousness’
- Since human society is the manifestation of mind in the world, everything is right and rational as it is.
- The ‘inner core’ of Hegel was his account of mind overcoming **alienation**, reinterpreted as an account of human self-consciousness freeing itself from the illusions that prevent it achieving self-understanding and freedom.

PHILOSOPHICAL INFLUENCES



- E.g. 'Christianity' makes human alienated from their mortal existence and the world in which they actually live
- The goal of history became the liberation of humanity; but this could not be achieved until the religious illusion had been overcome.
- Wisdom, love, benevolence – these are really attributes of the human species, but we attribute them, in a purified form, to God.
- The more we enrich our concept of God in this way, however, the more we impoverish ourselves.

PHILOSOPHICAL INFLUENCES



- Marx had applied Hegelian philosophy to more practical issues like censorship, divorce, a Prussian law prohibiting the gathering of dead timber from forests, and the economic distress of Moselle wine-growers.
- Marx saw economic life, not religion, as the chief form of human alienation.



PHILOSOPHICAL INFLUENCES



Money is the universal, self-constituted value of all things. Hence it has robbed the whole world, the human world as well as nature, of its proper value. Money is the alienated essence of man's labour and life, and this alien essence dominates him as he worships it.

The capitalist system, as illustrated
by International Worker



PHILOSOPHICAL INFLUENCES

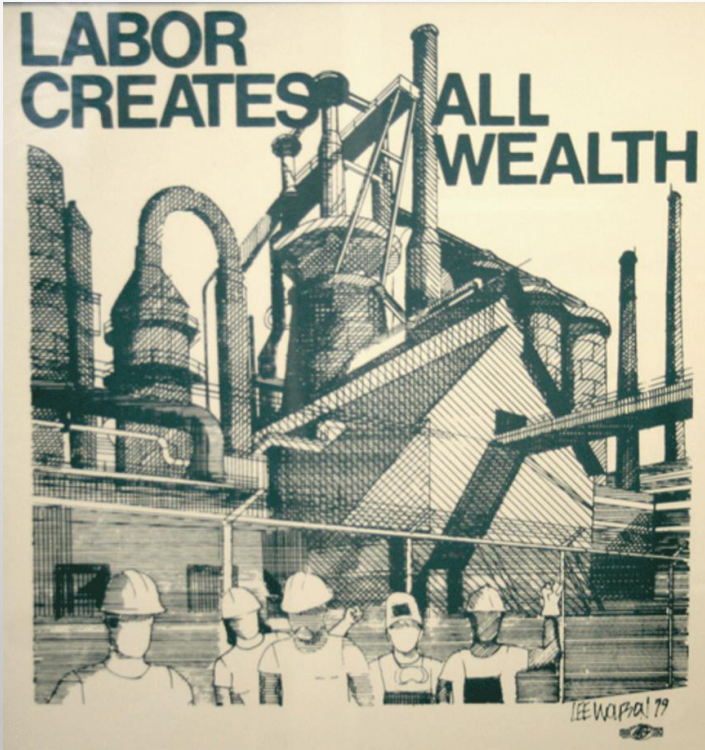
- The property-owning middle class could win freedom for themselves on the basis of rights to property – thus excluding others from the freedom they gain
- The property-less working class possess nothing but their title as human beings. Thus they can liberate themselves only by liberating all humanity.
- Marx introduces ***the proletariat*** as the material force that will bring about the liberation of humanity

POLITICAL ECONOMY



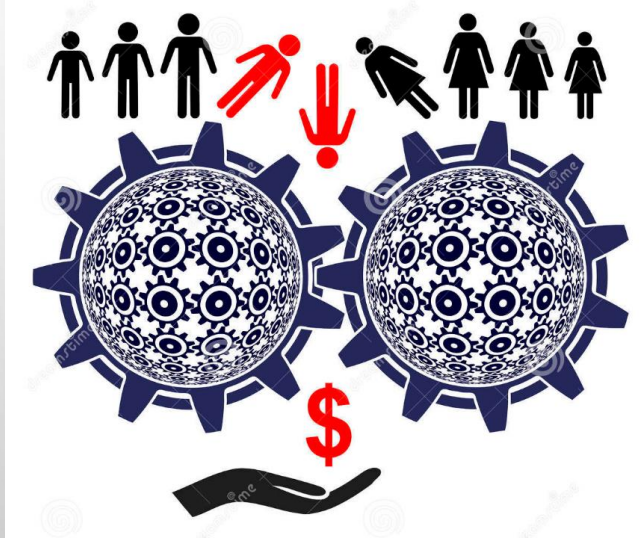
- Marx showed that according to Classical economics the worker becomes a commodity, the production of which is subject to the ordinary laws of supply and demand.
- If the supply of workers exceeds the demand for labour, wages fall and some workers starve.
- Wages therefore tend to the lowest possible level compatible with keeping an adequate supply of workers alive.

POLITICAL ECONOMY



- Those who employ the workers – **the capitalists** – build up their wealth through the labour of their workers. They become wealthy by keeping for themselves a certain amount of the value their workers produce.
- **Capital** is nothing else but accumulated labour. The worker's labour increases the employer's capital which are used to build bigger factories and buy more machines.
- This increases the **division of labour** and puts more self-employed workers out of business. They must then sell their labour on the market.
- This intensifies the competition among workers trying to get work, and lowers wages.

POLITICAL ECONOMY



- Marx wants to ask larger questions, ignored by economists:
- ‘what in the evolution of mankind is the meaning of this reduction of the greater part of mankind to abstract labour?’
- By ‘**abstract labour**’ Marx means work done simply in order to earn a wage, rather than for the worker’s own specific purposes.
- Thus making a pair of shoes because one wants a pair of shoes is not abstract labour; making a pair of shoes because that happens to be a way of getting money is.

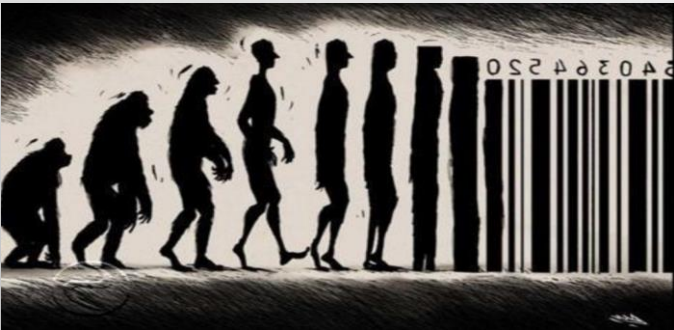
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=A-rEb0Kuopl>

POLITICAL ECONOMY

The more the worker exerts himself, the more powerful becomes the alien objective world which he fashions against himself, the poorer he and his inner world become, the less there is that belongs to him. It is the same in religion. The more man attributes to God, the less he retains in himself. The worker puts his life into the object; then it no longer belongs to him but to the object . . . The externalization of the worker in his product means not only that his work becomes an object, an external existence, but also that it exists outside him, independently, alien, an autonomous power, opposed to him. The life he has given to the object confronts him as hostile and alien.

(EPM 78-9)

POLITICAL ECONOMY



- A consequence of this alienation of humans from their own nature is that they are also alienated from each other.
- Productive activity becomes 'activity under the domination, coercion and yoke of another man'.
- This other man becomes an alien, hostile being. Instead of humans relating to each other co-operatively, they relate competitively.
- Love and trust are replaced by bargaining and exchange.
- Human beings cease to recognize in each other their common human nature; they see others as instruments for furthering their own egoistic interests.

POLITICAL ECONOMY



- Marx rejects the idea that anything would be achieved by an enforced wage rise.
- Higher wages Marx describes as 'nothing but a better slave-salary'. It would not restore significance or dignity to workers or their labour.
- The solution is the abolition of wages, alienated labour, and private property in one blow.
- In a word, **Communism**.

POLITICAL ECONOMY

Communism . . . is the genuine resolution of the antagonism between man and nature and between man and man; it is the true resolution of the conflict between existence and essence, objectification and self-affirmation, freedom and necessity, individual and species. It is the riddle of history solved and knows itself as this solution.

(EPM 89)

POLITICAL ECONOMY

**THE THEORY OF
COMMUNISM MAY BE
SUMMED UP IN THE
SINGLE SENTENCE:
ABOLITION OF
PRIVATE PROPERTY**

KARL MARX

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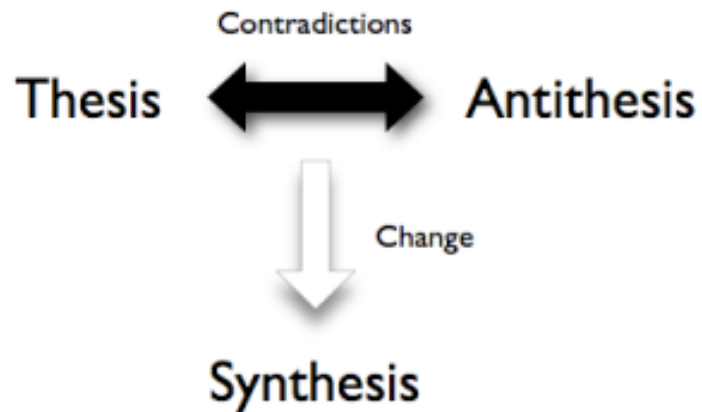
- All human senses, he claims, are degraded by **private property**.
- The dealer in minerals sees the market value of the jewels he handles, not their beauty.
- In the alienated condition caused by private property we cannot appreciate anything except by possessing it, or using it as a means.

POLITICAL ECONOMY

- The abolition of private property will liberate our senses from this alienated condition
- It would enable us to appreciate the world in a truly human way just as the musical ear perceives a wealth of meaning and beauty where the unmusical ear can find none
- So will the senses of social human beings differ from those of the unsocial.
- These are the essential points of '**the first Marxism**'.

ALIENATION AS A THEORY OF HISTORY

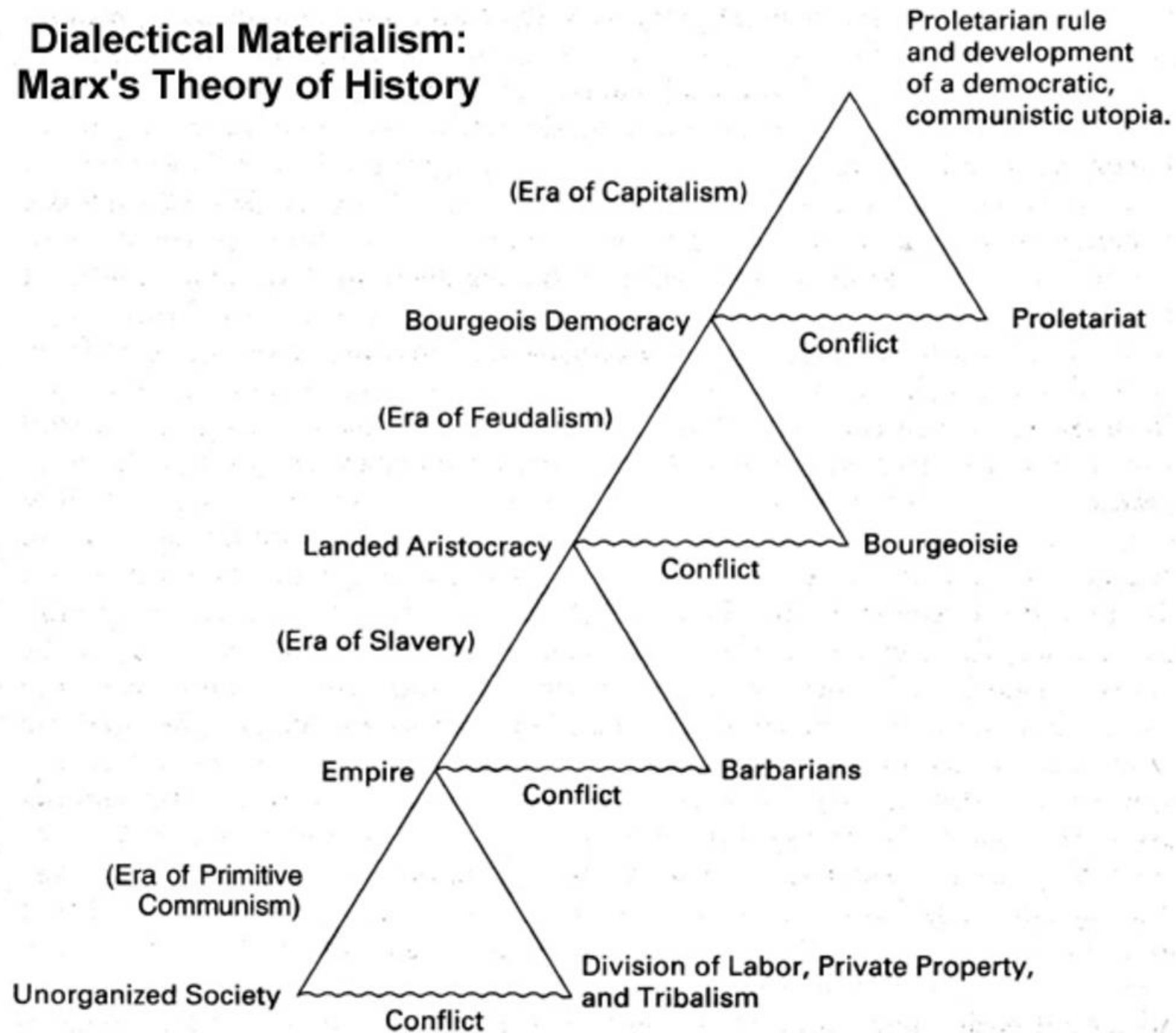
- The aim of world history is **human freedom**.
- Human beings are not now free, for they are unable to organize the world so as to satisfy their needs and develop their human capacities.
- The immediate task of revolutionary theory is to understand in what way the present situation is a stage in **the dialectical progress** to liberation.
- Then it will be possible to encourage the movements that will end the present stage, ushering in the new age of freedom.



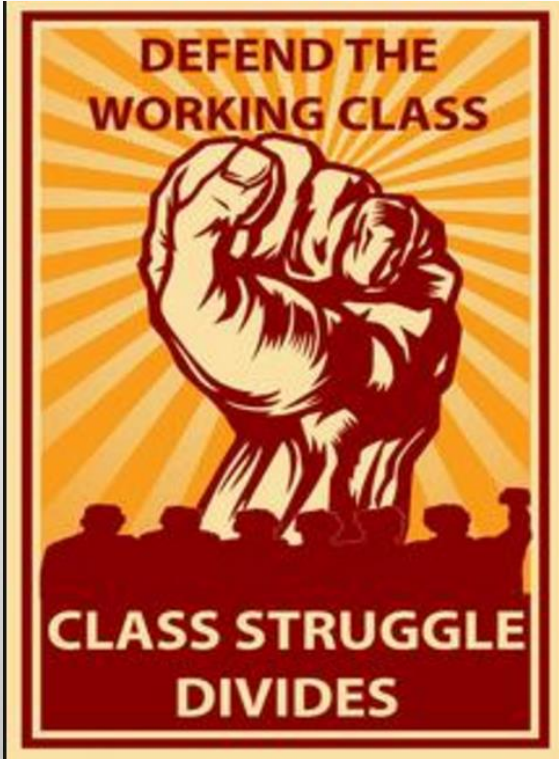
ALIENATION AS A THEORY OF HISTORY

The propertied class and the class of the proletariat represent the same human self-alienation. But the former feels comfortable and confirmed in this self-alienation, knowing that this alienation is its own power and possessing in it the semblance of a human existence. The latter feels itself ruined in this alienation and sees in it its impotence and the actuality of an inhuman existence.

Dialectical Materialism: Marx's Theory of History

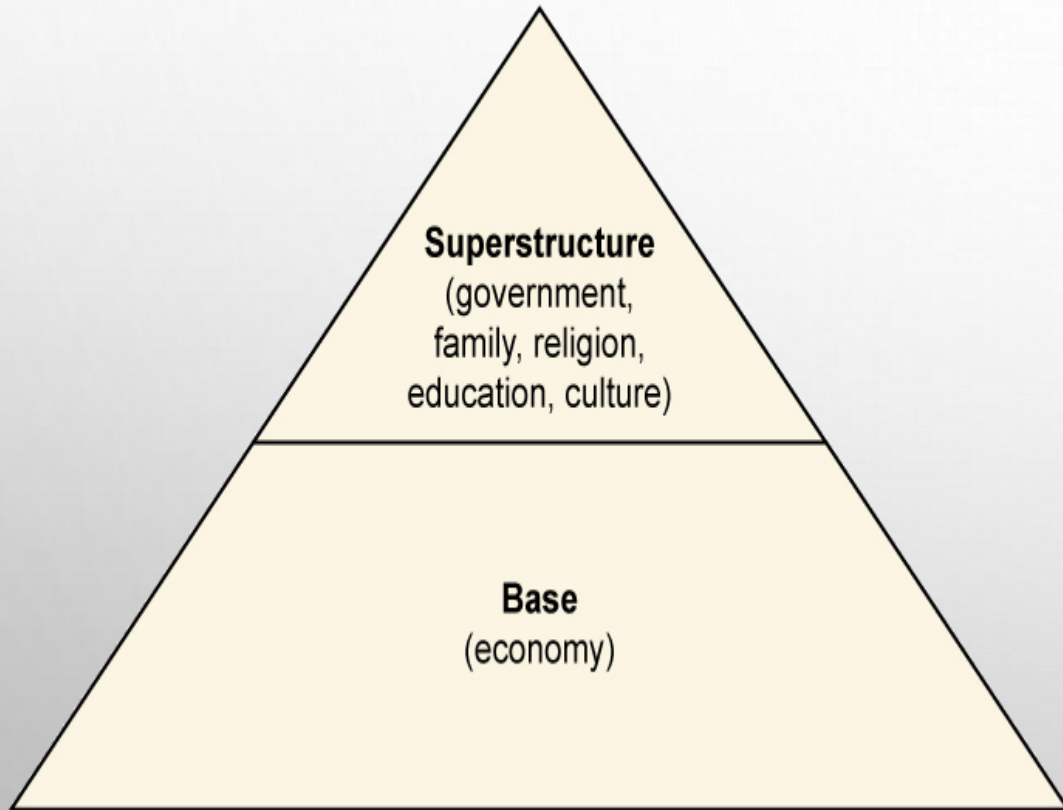


ALIENATION AS A THEORY OF HISTORY



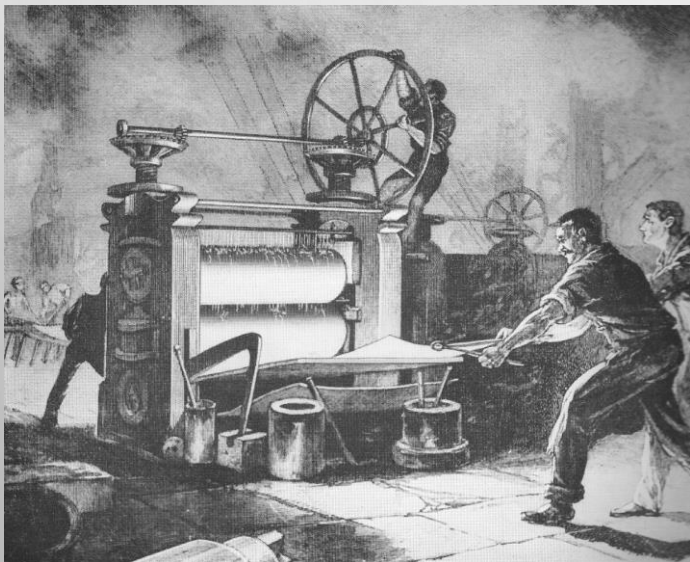
- The proletariat becomes conscious of its misery, and therefore seeks to overthrow capitalist society, but this consciousness arises only because of the situation of the proletariat in society.
- It is to solve philosophical problems that **we must change the world.**

MODE OF PRODUCTION



- Marx divided society into two elements, the '**economic base**' and the '**superstructure**', and maintained that the base governs the superstructure.

MODE OF PRODUCTION



Economic base

- **Productive forces** are things used to produce. They include labour-power, raw materials, and the machines available to process them.
- If a miller uses a handmill to grind wheat into flour, the handmill is a productive force.
- The productive forces give rise to relations of production, and it is these relations – not the forces themselves – which constitute the economic structure of society.

MODE OF PRODUCTION

Economic base

- **Relations of production** are relations between people, or between people and things.
- The miller may own his mill, or may hire it from its owner. *Owning* and *hiring* are relations of production.
- Relations between people, such as 'Smith employs Jones' or 'Ramsbottom is the serf of the Earl of Warwick', are also relations of production.



The Overseer's Rod
(from Queen Mary's Psalter)

MODE OF PRODUCTION

The handmill gives you society with the feudal lord; the steam mill, society with the industrial capitalist.

(PP 202)

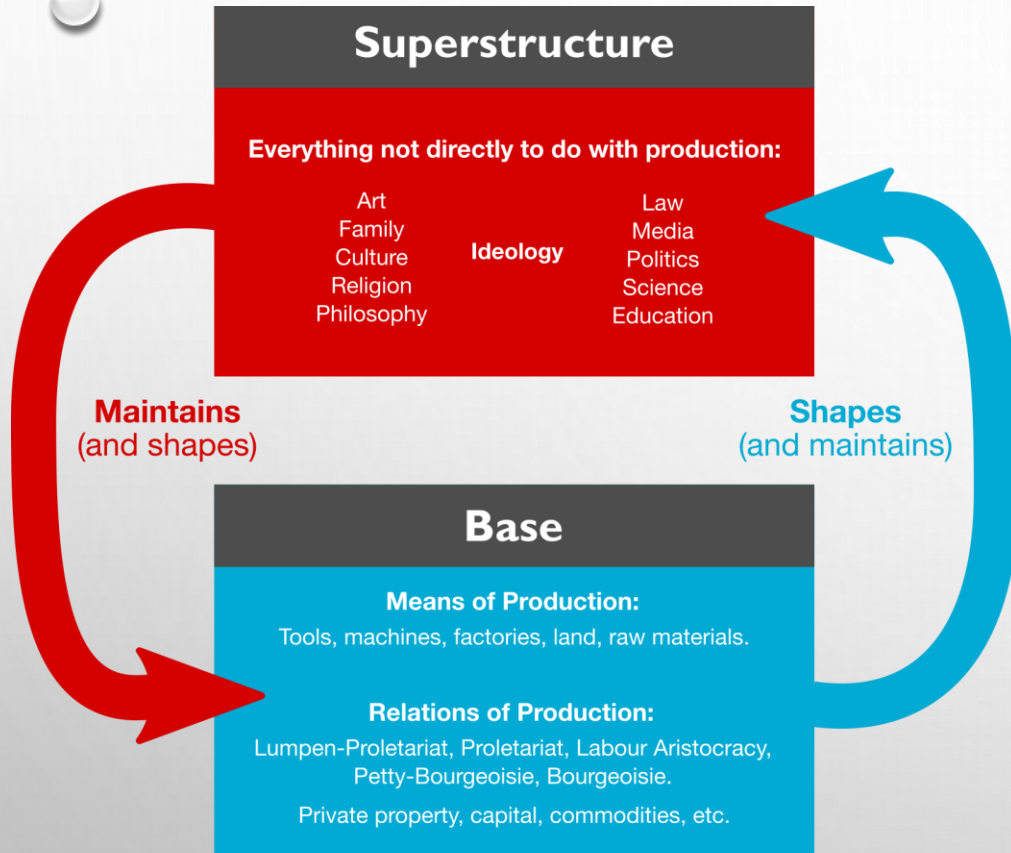
- When the productive forces are developed to the stage of manual power, the typical relation of production is that of lord and serf.
- The most efficient use of steam power is in large factories which require a concentration of free labourers rather than serfs tied to their land.
- So the relation of lord and serf breaks down, to be replaced by the relation of capitalist and employee.

MODE OF PRODUCTION

Suprasructure

- These new relations of production constitute the economic structure of society,
- A capitalist legal and political superstructure rises, with its own religion and morality: freedom of religious conscience, freedom of contract, a right to disposable property, egoism, and competitiveness

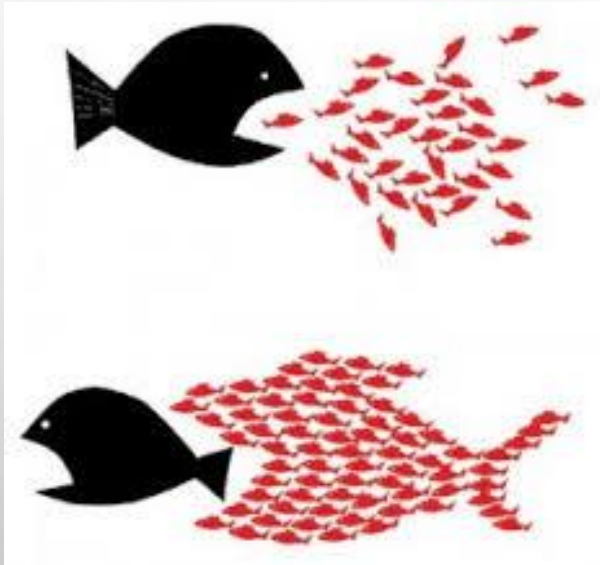
MODE OF PRODUCTION



- We have a **three-stage process**: productive forces determine relations of production, which in turn determine the superstructure (ideas of society).
- Superstructure then lead to the further development of productive forces, which lead to new relations of production, to which correspond new ideas.
- Economic changes lead to changes in other areas of society. The productive forces are fundamental. Their growth provides the momentum for the whole process of history.

**This moves in a spiral pattern.
The base is generally dominant.**

MODE OF PRODUCTION



- To which goal these forces are heading?
- The superstructure acts only as the 'unconscious tool' of history.
- England's colonial policy is no more the ultimate cause of the social revolution in Asia than my spade is the ultimate cause of the growth of my vegetables.
- The productive forces always finally assert themselves, but they do so through the actions of individual humans who may or may not be conscious of the role they are playing in history.
- Marx was acting as the tool – a fully conscious tool – of history.

CAPITALISM

- Under capitalism workers are forced to sell their labour – which Marx regards as the essence of human existence – to the capitalists, who use this labour to accumulate more capital, which further increases the power of the capitalists over the workers.
- Capitalists become rich, while wages are driven down to the bare minimum needed to keep the workers alive.

CAPITALISM



- Despite of the situation in which capital was growing, and hence the demand for labour, and the price of labour, was rising, Marx was unsatisfied.
- The reason for poverty and affluence being relative to the standard of our neighbours is that our desires are of a social nature.
- They are produced by our life in society, rather than by the objects we desire themselves.
- Thus rising wages do not produce greater satisfaction if the standard of living of the capitalist has risen even more.

CAPITALISM

A house may be large or small; as long as the surrounding houses are equally small it satisfies all social demands for a dwelling. But let a palace arise beside the little house, and it shrinks from a little house to a hut . . . however high it may shoot up in the course of civilization, if the neighbouring palace grows to an equal or even greater extent, the occupant of the relatively small house will feel more and more uncomfortable, dissatisfied and cramped within its four walls.

(WLC 259)

CAPITALISM



- If capital grows, the domination of capital over workers increases.
- Wage labour 'produces the wealth that rules over it'.
- This occurs because competition between capitalists forces them to make labour ever more productive, and the greater the scale on which they can produce, and the greater the division of labour, the more productive labour is.

CAPITALISM

THE INCREASING DIVISION OF LABOUR HAS SEVERAL EFFECTS.

- **First**, it enables one worker to do the work of ten, and so increases the competition among workers for jobs, thus driving wages down.
- **Second**, it simplifies labour, eliminates the special skills of the worker and transforms him into 'a simple, monotonous productive force'.
- **Third**, it puts more small-scale capitalists out of business. They can do nothing but join the working class.
- **Finally**, as the scale of production increases and new markets are needed to dispose of the production, economic crises become more violent.

CAPITALISM

- The classical economists see capital as natural, rather than socially conditioned, because they see it as material products – machines, raw materials, etc.
- These material products, however, are also **commodities** which can be exchanged against
- other items – for instance, a pound of sugar may be exchangeable for two pounds of potatoes, or half a pound of strawberries.
- They therefore have **exchange-value**.

CAPITALISM

- **'Exchange-value'** is contrasted with **'use-value'**.
- The use-value of a pound of sugar is its power to satisfy people's desires for something sweet.
- The exchange-value of a pound of sugar is two pounds of potatoes or, expressed in terms of money, say, 20p.
- Use-values therefore exist independently of a market or any other system of exchange: exchange-values do not.

CAPITALISM

- The capitalist obtains the use of the worker's labour-power for the prescribed period – say, one day – and can use this labour-power to produce as much wealth as he is able to get out of it.
- This is what Marx means when he says that capital buys 'living labour'. The worker gets a fixed sum, regardless of what the capitalist can make out of his labour-power.
- **Surplus value** is the value the capitalist is able to extract from the labour-power he buys, above the exchange-value of the labour that he must pay.

CAPITALISM

- Suppose that the cost of keeping a worker alive and reproducing for one day is £1, and suppose that a day's work consists of twelve hours.
- Then the exchange-value of twelve hours' labour will be £1.
- If worker's labour-power can be used to add £ 1 to the value of some raw materials in only six hours. Then the worker effectively earns his wages in six hours.
- But the capitalist has bought twelve hours of labour power for his £ 1, and can now use the remaining six hours to extract surplus value from the worker.
- **The capitalist obtains the use-value of the worker's labour-power, and pays only the exchange-value.**
- This is, Marx claims, the secret of how capital is able to use the worker's creative power to increase its domination over the worker.

CAPITALISM

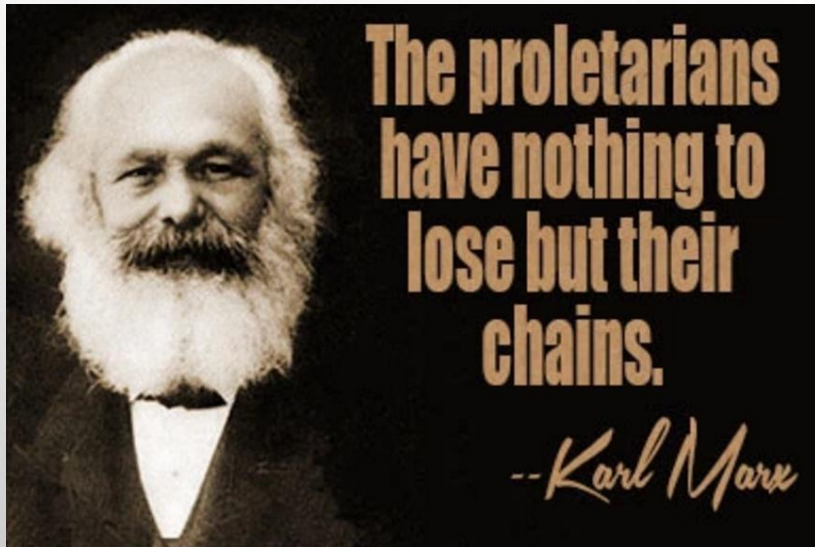
- How does this happen?
- It happens only when we begin to produce things not because they directly serve our wants, but in order to exchange them!
- When we produce in order to exchange, the value of our labour becomes its exchange value, rather than its use-value.
- Marx says, a 'mystical veil' over these 'life-processes of society' which would not exist if we produced 'as freely associated men', consciously regulating our production in a planned way.

CAPITALISM



- Capitalism is thus a society 'in which the process of production has the mastery over man, instead of being controlled by him'.
- Marx's Capital is based on the idea that human beings are in a state of alienation, a state in which their own creations appear to them as alien, hostile forces and in which instead of controlling their creations, they are controlled by them.

CAPITALISM



- Marx sketches how the laws of capitalism will bring about the destruction of capitalism.
- Capitalists will lead to an ever-diminishing number of monopoly capitalists
- On the other hand the 'misery, oppression, slavery, degradation, exploitation' of the working class grows
- The ensuing revolution will be on co-operation and common possession of land and the means of production.
- All that is now necessary is for the mass of the people to expropriate these few expropriators.

COMMUNISM

- Marx derided as 'utopian' those socialists who sought to bring about communism by producing blueprints of a future communist society.
- He condemned conspiratorial revolutionaries who wished to capture power and introduce socialism before the economic base of society had developed to the point at which the working class as a whole is ready to participate in the revolution.
- Marx suggests that in communist society the division of labour would not force us into narrow occupational roles.
- Capitalism, however, heightened the conflict between individual interests and community interests by turning everything into a commodity with 'cash payment'

COMMUNISM



- I could, Marx says, 'hunt in the morning, fish in the afternoon, breed cattle in the evening, criticize after dinner, just as I like, without ever becoming a hunter, a fisherman, a herdsman, or a critic' (*GI* 169).
- Citizens of the new society would find their own happiness in working for the good of all.
- Hence a communist society would have a new ethical basis.

COMMUNISM

- The change from one form of society to another occurs when the existing structure of society acts as a fetter on the further development of the productive forces.
- But **communism is the final form of society**.
- Communism would differ from all previous societies in that there would be no false consciousness. False consciousness involves failing to see things as they really are.
- Production will be co-operatively planned for the benefit of all, not wasted in socially fruitless competition between individual capitalists for their own private ends.
- With communist production there would be no exploitation to be concealed.
- The idea of labour as 'life's prime want' is very different from the clock-watching attitude that takes the shortening of the working day as the prerequisite of freedom.

MARX TODAY?

- Judged by the standards of Marx's time, the gap between rich and poor has narrowed dramatically throughout the industrialized world.
- Factory workers today earn considerably more than they need in order to remain alive and reproducing
- Capitalism has gone through several crises, but nowhere has it collapsed as a result of its alleged internal contradictions.
- However, As a philosopher, Marx's work endures. It has altered our understanding of our own nature, and deepened our grasp of what it is to be free.
- Marx says we are not free because we do not control our own society