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TOWARDS  
THE UNDERSTANDING  
OF  
KARL MARX\*

To C. K. H.  
*IN FRIENDSHIP*

TOWARDS  
THE UNDERSTANDING OF  
KARL MARX

*A Revolutionary Interpretation*

by

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## PREFACE

**T**HIS BOOK, written to commemorate the fiftieth anniversary of the death of Karl Marx, offers an interpretation of the activity and thought of one of the outstanding thinkers of the nineteenth century. It is written in the hope that it may clarify some of the fundamental problems and issues of Marx's philosophy around which controversy has raged for decades. To those who are already acquainted with the writings of Marx and his followers, it is hoped that this book will suggest a fresh point of view. To those who are not acquainted with Marx, it is offered as a guide to further study.

The occasion for which this book has been written and the unhomogeneous nature of the reading public to which it is addressed have determined the content and method of its presentation, and have compelled the author to forgo a systematic historical exposition and a detailed critical analysis of the themes treated. These will be given in subsequent studies. But it is hoped that Marx's leading ideas have been here presented with sufficient clarity to produce a lively appreciation of their meaning and impact in the world to-day. If in addition the reader is led to independent reflection upon the material submitted and the point of view from which it has been interpreted in the following pages, the objectives of the author will have been attained.

Experience has shown that no book on Marx can expect to be received with anywhere near the same detachment as a book on the Ammassalik Eskimo or a treatise on the internal constitution of the stars. Marx's ideas are so much a part of what people fear or welcome to-day, his doctrines

so intimately connected with the living faith and hate of different classes and so often invoked by groups with conflicting political allegiances that the very sight of his name arouses a mind-set on the part of the reader of which he is largely unconscious. Every critical student of Marx—as of any disputed text or epoch—must, however, make the effort to distinguish between the meaning disclosed by analysis and his own evaluation of that meaning. Such an effort in Marx's case is singularly difficult, for even when we become aware of our prejudices we do not thereby transcend them ; but it is an effort which must be made if we would do justice to both Marx and ourselves.

In order to facilitate this process of discrimination, the author believes it may be helpful to state explicitly certain methodological cautions that are generally taken for granted in subjects less heatedly controversial. He also hopes that by making his own position clear at the outset, much misunderstanding will be avoided.

This book is not written by an "orthodox" Marxist. Indeed the author regards orthodox Marxism, in the form in which it flourished from 1895 to 1917, as an emasculation of Marx's thought. He holds that Marx himself was not an orthodox Marxist. Orthodoxy is not only fatal to honest thinking ; it involves the abandonment of the revolutionary standpoint which was central to Marx's life and thought. This has been amply demonstrated by the historic experience of the German Social Democracy, the leaders of whose centre and right wing regarded themselves as orthodox Marxists *par excellence*, and who were quick with the epithet of heretic against all who sought to interpret Marxism as a philosophy of action.

The very use of the term "orthodoxy" is an anomaly in any revolutionary movement. Its derivation is notoriously religious. Its meaning was fashioned in the controversies between Roman and Byzantine Christianity. Its associations more naturally suggest a church and the vested

privileges of a church than an organisation of enlightened and disciplined men and women fighting for the emancipation of society. Wherever there are people who insist upon calling themselves orthodox, there will be found dogma ; and wherever dogma, substitution of a blind faith or a general formula for concrete analysis and specific action.

One cannot be orthodox at any price and a lover of the truth at the same time. This was clearly demonstrated by the tenacity with which "orthodox" Marxists, who in practice had long abandoned Marx and Engels, clung to the latter's anthropology in the face of the most conclusive findings of modern anthropologists. If the acceptance of Morgan's outmoded anthropology is necessary to orthodox Marxism, the author must be damned as an heretic on this point as well. Morgan was a great pioneer anthropologist. But no one to-day can accept his universal schema of social development for the family and other institutions, without intellectual stultification.

This book is not an attempt to revise Marx or to bring him up to date. Such a procedure is impermissible in what presumes to be a critical, expository account of Marx's own theories. The fact that the neglected aspects of Marx's thought, to which this book calls attention, have impressive contemporary implications, explains, perhaps, why this study was undertaken, but it does not constitute an introduction of a foreign point of view into the doctrines discussed.

No author can guard himself from the will to misunderstand. But he can diminish the dangers of distortion by inviting the reader to follow the argument in its own terms and to judge it in the context of the views opposed. The emphasis upon the rôle of activity in Marxism, as contrasted with the mechanical and fatalistic conceptions of the social process which prevail in orthodox circles, lays the author open to the charge of smuggling in philosophical idealism. But Marx's *dialectical* materialism has always

appeared to be idealistic to those who, having reduced all reality to matter in motion, find themselves incapable of explaining the interaction between things and thought except on the assumption that the mind produces what it acts upon. This last assumption is frankly idealistic but it is not involved in dialectical materialism.

Due to the limitations of space, a great deal of material bearing upon the central issues of the discussion has been omitted. Some important philosophical problems have not even been mentioned. It should be borne in mind, however, that what is left unsaid on these matters as well as on others—relevant or irrelevant—is not thereby denied, unless it is logically incompatible with the implications of what is said. No form of criticism is more unconscionable than that which proceeds on the assumption that an author intends to exhaust his subject-matter and then urges against the position taken that it implicitly denies views, which, in virtue of necessary selection, it has no opportunity to treat. This caution is added, not to prevent the reader from raising difficulties, but rather to insure that the difficulties which are raised bear relevantly upon the issues discussed. The author is quite aware that the position sketched in this book is not free from difficulties. He even states some of them. A position which has no difficulties is too easy to be true, or if true, too trivial to be of practical import in this world. On the other hand, because all positions have difficulties is no reason for refusing to take one. On some subjects—especially the subjects treated in this book—no one can escape taking a position. For every position towards the question of social change—including the dead point of indifferentism—has social consequences. The intelligent thing to do—so it seems to the author—is to take a position, recognise the difficulties and participate co-operatively, with all those who share the position, in their solution.

The author wishes to state his indebtedness to two



contemporary writers : Georg Lukács, whose *Geschichte und Klassenbewusstsein* stresses the significance of the dialectic element in Marx's thought and links Marx up—unfortunately much too closely—with the stream of German classical philosophy ; and to Karl Korsch whose *Marxismus und Philosophie* confirms the author's own hypothesis of the practical-historical axis of Marx's thought, but which underestimates the difficulties involved in treating the formal aspect of Marx's thought from this point of view. The text and footnotes carry acknowledgments to non-contemporary writers.

Some of the material in the early chapters was originally printed as an article in the *Symposium* of July 1931 ; thanks are due to the editors for permission to reprint it here. The *Symposium* article together with an earlier article on "Dialectical Materialism" in the *Journal of Philosophy* for 1928 contained material whose phrasing has given rise to serious misinterpretation. This has been corrected in the body of the book.

SIDNEY HOOK.

*New York,*  
*January 1, 1933.*

# CONTENTS

## PART I

### THE QUEST FOR MARX

<i>Chapter I.</i> Introduction	<i>page</i>	15
II. On Historical Understanding		20
III. "Der Kampf Um Marx"		27
IV. The Orthodox Canonisation		32
V. The Revisionist Exegesis		40
VI. The Syndicalist Heresy		47
VII. Lenin : The Return to Marx and Forward		54
VIII. Marxism as Method		63

## PART II

### THE PHILOSOPHY OF MARX

IX. The Marxian Dialectic	71
X. Dialectic and Truth	94
XI. The Materialistic Conception of History	105
XII. What Historical Materialism is Not	125
XIII. Problems of Historical Materialism	142
XIV. Marx's Sociological Economics	161
XV. The Philosophy of Political Economy	179
XVI. The Class Struggle and Social Psychology	193
XVII. The Theory of the State	210
XVIII. The Theory of Revolution	230
XIX. Dictatorship and Democracy	250
XX. Appendix : Four Letters by Frederic Engels on Historical Materialism	269
Index	285

## APPENDIX

### FOUR LETTERS ON HISTORICAL MATERIALISM

by FREDERIC ENGELS

*Translated by Sidney Hook*

#### 1. ENGELS' LETTER TO CONRAD SCHMIDT

London, Oct. 27, '90

*Dear Schmidt :*

I seize the first free moment to write you. I think you would be well advised to accept the position at Zurich.<sup>1</sup> You can always learn considerably about economic matters there especially if you bear in mind that Zurich is still only a third-rate money and business market, and that, consequently, the effects which make themselves felt there are weakened, and indeed deliberately falsified, by double and triple-fold manipulations. But one acquires a practical knowledge of the business and is compelled to follow first-hand market reports from London, New York, Paris, Berlin, Vienna—and that's the world market in its reflected form as money and security market. Of the economic, political and other reflections the same thing is true as of the images in the human eye. They all pass through a convex lens and therefore appear upside down, standing on their head. Only the nervous system is lacking to set them right on their feet again. The money-market expert sees the movements of industry and the world market only in the inverted reflections of the money and security market, and takes the effect for the cause. I saw that take place already in the forties in Manchester. The London market reports were absolutely useless as a guide to the development of industry and its periodic maxima and minima because m'lords wanted to explain everything as arising from the crises in the money market which were, after all, only symptoms. Behind the matter at that time was the desire to explain away the fact that industrial crises

<sup>1</sup> Conrad Schmidt had written Engels that he intended to take over the commercial section of a Zurich newspaper.

arose out of temporary overproduction ; in addition there was a bias which invited distortion. This last is now for us irrelevant ; besides it is a fact that the money market can also have its own crises in which direct industrial disturbances play only a subordinate rôle or none whatever. In this connection there is much to be investigated especially in the last twenty years.

Wherever there is division of labour on a social scale, there will also be found the growing independence of workers in relation to each other. Production is in the last instance the decisive factor. However, as soon as the commercial exchange of commodities separates itself from real production it follows a movement which, although as a whole still dominated by production, obeys in its particular details and within the sphere of its general dependence its own laws. These flow from the nature of the new factors involved. This movement has its own phases and reacts in turn upon the course of production. The discovery of America resulted from the hunger for money, which had already driven the Portuguese to Africa (Cf. Soetbeer's *Edelmetall-Produktion*), because the tremendous expansion of European industry in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries together with the corresponding commercial activity demanded more currency than Germany—the great silver country from 1450 to 1550—could provide. The conquest of India by the Portuguese, Dutch and English from 1500 to 1800 was undertaken for the sake of *imports from India*. At that time no one thought of exports. And yet what colossal counter-effects these discoveries and conquests which were determined purely by interests of trade, had upon exports from those countries and upon the development of large scale industry.

The same is true for the money market. Just as soon as dealing in money [*Geldhandel*] is separated from commodity exchange it develops its own special laws and phases. These follow from its own particular nature, yet they all take place within the given limits and conditions of production and commodity exchange. Where dealing in money is extended to include securities that are not merely government consols but industrials and railroad stocks, and thereby wins direct control over a phase of the production which as a whole controls it, the reaction of the money market upon production becomes all the stronger and more complicated. The investment bankers are the owners of railroads, mines, steel mills, etc. These means of production take on a double aspect. Business has to be run now with an eye to the immediate interests of production, and now with an eye to the needs of the stock-holders in

so far as they are money lenders. The crassest illustration of this is furnished by the activities of the North American railroads which at the present time depend completely upon the market operations of Jay Gould, Vanderbilt and others—operations that are totally foreign to the needs and interests of the railroads as common carriers. And even here in England we have witnessed years of struggle between different railway companies in competitive territories in which an enormous amount of money went up in smoke not in the interest of production and communication but solely because of a rivalry whose main function was to make possible the market operation of the wealthy stock-holders.

In these few words about my conception of the relation between production and commodity exchange, and of both to the money market, I have already answered in essence your questions concerning *historical materialism* in general. The matter can most easily be grasped from the standpoint of the *division of labour*. Society gives rise to certain public functions which it cannot dispense with. The people who are delegated to perform them constitute a new branch of the division of labour *within society*. They acquire therewith special interest in opposition to those who have elected them; make themselves relatively independent of them, and the *state* is already here. The same thing takes place, as we observed, in commercial exchange and later in money exchange. The new independent power must, of course, submit to the movement of production as a whole. But it also *reacts*, by virtue of the strength of its immanent, *i.e.*, its once borrowed but gradually developed relative independence, upon the conditions and course of production. There is a *reciprocity* between two *unequal* forces; on the one side, the economic movement; on the other, the new political power which strives for the greatest possible independence and which having once arisen is endowed with its *own movement*. The economic movement, upon the whole, asserts itself but it is affected by the reaction of the relatively independent political movement which it itself had set up. This political movement is on the one hand the state power, on the other, the opposition which comes to life at the same time with it. Just as the money market reflects as a whole, with the qualifications indicated, the movement of the industrial market, but naturally in an *inverted* fashion, so there is reflected in the struggle between government and opposition, the struggle between already existing and opposing classes but again in an inverted form, no longer direct but indirect, not as open class struggle but as a struggle between *political principles*. So inverted is

this reflection that it required thousands of years to discover what was behind it.

The reaction of the state power upon economic development can take a three-fold form. It can run in the same direction, and then the tempo of development becomes accelerated ; it can buck up against that development in which case to-day among every large people the state power is sure to go to smash before long ; or it can block economic development along some directions and lay down its path along others. This last case is ultimately reducible to one of either of the foregoing two. It is clear that in the second and third cases the political power can do great damage to the course of economic development and result in a great waste of energy and materials.

We must add to the above the cases of conquest and brutal destruction of economic resources in which under certain circumstances it was possible in the past for a local or national economic development to be completely destroyed. To-day situations of this kind produce opposite effects at least among the large nations. Often it is the conquered who in the long run wins more economically, politically and morally than the conqueror.

The same is true for law. Just as soon as the new division of labour makes necessary the creation of *professional jurists*, another new independent domain is opened which for all its dependence upon production and trade in general, still possesses a special capacity to react upon these fields. In a modern state, law must not only correspond to the general economic situation and be its expression ; it must also be a *coherently unified expression* and free from glaring internal inconsistencies. In order to achieve this, the fidelity with which the law directly reflects economic conditions becomes less and less. This is all the truer, in those rare cases, when the legal code expresses the harsh, unrelieved and naked fact of class rule. For that contradicts the very *principle of justice* and law. The pure and consistent jural concept of the revolutionary bourgeoisie of 1792-96 already appears falsified in many respects in the Code Napoleon. And in so far as it is carried out, it is subject to daily modification because of the growing power of the proletariat. That doesn't prevent the Napoleonic code from serving as a legal model for new codifications of law in all parts of the world. The course of legal development is to be explained in large part first by this attempt to erect an harmonious system of law by eliminating the contradictions between jural propositions which are themselves the direct translation of economic relations ; and then by the

influence and compulsion exerted by the further economic development which keeps on upsetting the system and plunging it into new contradictions. (I speak here for the time being only of civil law.)

The reflection of economic relations as principles of law is necessarily an inverted one. The process takes place without the participants becoming conscious of it. The jurist imagines that he is operating with *a priori* propositions while the latter are only reflections of the economic process. And so everything remains standing on its head. This inverted reflex so long as it is not recognised for what it is constitutes what we call *ideological conceptions*. That it is able to set up a counteraction on the economic basis and within certain limits to modify it, seems to me to be self-evident. The foundations of the law of inheritance, corresponding stages in the development of the family being presupposed, are economic. Nonetheless it would be very hard to prove that, e.g., the absolute freedom of testamentary disposition in England, and the strongly restricted right in France, in all particulars have only economic causes. Yet both methods react in a very significant way upon the economic system in that they influence the distribution of wealth.

And now as concerns those ideological realms which tower still higher in the clouds—*religion, philosophy, etc.*—they all possess from pre-historical days an already discovered and traditionally accepted fund of—what we would to-day call bunk [*Blödsinn*]. All of these various mistaken ideas of nature, of the creation of man, of spirits and magical forces have as their basis, in the main, negative economic grounds. False ideas of nature are supplementary to the primitive economic development of the pre-historical period; but in places they are often conditioned and even caused by economic development. However, even if economic need has been the chief driving force in the advance of natural knowledge, and has become even more so, it would be altogether pedantic to seek economic causes for all this primitive original superstition. The history of science is the history of the gradual elimination of this superstition, *i.e.*, its replacement by new, but always less absurd, superstitions. The people who supply it belong again to a special sphere in the division of labour and imagine that they are working in an independent domain. And in so far as they constitute an independent group within the social division of labour, their production, inclusive of their errors, exerts a *counter-acting influence* upon the entire social development, even upon the economic. Nonetheless they still remain under the *dominant influence of economic development*. For example, in philosophy this is easiest to demonstrate for the

bourgeois period. Hobbes was the first modern materialist (in the sense of the eighteenth century) but an absolutist at a time when in the whole of Europe absolute monarchy was enjoying the height of its power and in England had taken up the struggle against the people. Locke was, in religion as in politics, a son of the class-compromise of 1688. The English Deists, and their more consistent followers, the French materialists, were the genuine philosophers of the bourgeoisie—the French, even of the bourgeois revolution. In German philosophy from Kant to Hegel the German philistine makes his way—now positively, now negatively, But as a definite domain within the division of labour the philosophy of every age has as its presuppositions a certain intellectual material which it inherits from its predecessors and which is its own point of departure. That is why philosophy can play first violin in economically backward countries ; e.g., France in the eighteenth century as opposed to England upon whose philosophy her own was based ; and later Germany as opposed to both. But in France as in Germany, philosophy and the general outburst of literary activity of that time, were a result of an economic upswing. The final supremacy of economic development even in these realms is established but it takes place within the conditions which are set down by the particular realm ; in philosophy, e.g., through the effect of economic influences (which again exert influence through disguised political, etc., forms) upon the existing philosophical material which our philosophical predecessors have handed down. Of itself economics produces no effects here directly ; but it determines the *kind of change* and development the already existing intellectual material receives, and even that, for the most part, indirectly, since it is the political, jural and moral reflexes which exercise the greatest direct influence upon philosophy.

I have said what is necessary about religion in the last section of my *Feuerbach*.

If Barth<sup>1</sup> imagines that we deny all and every counteraction of the political, etc., reflexes of the economic movement upon that movement itself, *he is simply contending against windmills*. Let him take a glance at Marx's *Eighteenth Brumaire*, which almost restricts itself to the treatment of the *special rôle* that political struggles and events play, naturally within the sphere of their *general* dependence upon economic conditions ; or in *Capital*, e.g., the section on the working day, where legislation, which certainly is a political art,

<sup>1</sup> Schmidt had called Engels' attention to the book of Prof. Paul Barth—*Die Geschichtsphilosophie Hegels und seiner Nachfolger*.



operates so decisively ; or the section on the history of the bourgeoisie (*Chap. 24*). Why are we struggling for the political dictatorship of the proletariat, if political power has no economic effects. Force (*i.e.*, the state authority) is also an economic power !

But I have no time at present to criticise the book. The third volume must first come out, and besides I believe that Bernstein can do the job quite well.

What all these fellows lack is dialectic. They see cause here, effect there. They do not at all see that this method of viewing things results in bare abstractions ; that in the real world such metaphysical polar opposites exist only in crucial situations ; that the whole great process develops itself in the form of reciprocal action, to be sure of very unequal forces, in which the economic movement is far and away the strongest, most primary and decisive. They do not see that here nothing is absolute and everything relative. For them Hegel has never existed.

Yours, etc.

## 2. ENGELS' LETTER TO J. BLOCH

London, Sept. 21, 1890

Dear Sir :—

Your letter of the 3rd inst. was forwarded to me at Folkestone ; but as I did not have the book in question there, I could not answer you. Returning home on the 12th I discovered such a pile of important work waiting for me, that only to-day have I found the time to write you a few lines. This in explanation of the delay which I hope you will kindly pardon.

To Point I.<sup>1</sup> First of all you will please note on p. 19 of the *Origin* that the process of development of the Punaluan family is presented as having taken place so gradually that even in this century marriages of brother and sister (*of one mother*) have taken place in the royal family of Hawaii. And throughout antiquity we find examples of marriages between brother and sister, *e.g.* among the Ptolemies. Secondly, we must here distinguish between brother and sister deriving from the side of the mother, or deriving only from the side of the father ; *adelphos, adelphā* comes from *delphas*, womb, and originally signified, therefore, only brother and sister on the *side of the mother*. The feeling had survived a long time from

<sup>1</sup> Bloch had asked how it came about that even after the disappearance of the consanguine family, marriages between brother and sister were not forbidden among the Greeks.

the time of the *Mutterrecht* that the children of the same mother who have different fathers are more closely related than the children of the same father who have different mothers. The Punaluan form of the family excludes only marriages between the first group (*i.e.*, children of one mother but of different fathers) but by no means between the second who according to the existing notion are not even related (since *Mutterrecht* rules). As far as I know the cases of marriage between brother and sister in ancient Greece are restricted either to those individuals who have different mothers or to those about whom this is not known, and for whom, therefore, the possibility is not excluded; nor is it in absolute contradiction to the Punaluan usage. You have overlooked the fact that between the time of the Punaluan family and the time of Greek monogamy there lies the jump from the matriarchate to the patriarchate, which alters matters considerably.

According to Wachsmuth's *Hellen. Althertümern*, in the heroic age of Greece, "there is no sign of any concern about the too close blood relationship of husband and wife except for the relation of parent and child." (III, p. 156.) "Marriage with the *leiblichen* sister was not disapproved of in Crete" (*ibid.*, p. 170). The last also according to Strabo (Bk. X), (for the moment however I cannot find the passage because of the absence of chapter divisions). By *leiblichen* sister I understand, unless there is proof to the contrary, sisters on the father's side.

To Point II.<sup>1</sup> I qualify your first major proposition as follows: According to the materialistic conception of history, the production and reproduction of real life constitutes in the *last instance* the determining factor of history. Neither Marx nor I ever maintained more. Now when someone comes along and distorts this to mean that the economic factor is the *sole* determining factor he is converting the former proposition into a meaningless, abstract and absurd phrase. The economic situation is the basis but the various factors of the superstructure—the political forms of the class struggles and their results—constitutions, etc., established by victorious classes after hard-won battles—legal forms, and even the reflexes of all these real struggles in the brain of the participants, political, jural, philosophical theories, religious conceptions

<sup>1</sup> Bloch had asked how the fundamental principle of the materialistic conception of history was understood by Marx and Engels themselves; whether the production and reproduction of life constituted the *sole* determining factor or was only the foundation upon which all other relations developed a further activity of their *own*.

which have been developed into systematic dogmas, all these exercise an influence upon the course of historical struggles, and in many cases determine for the most part their form. There is a reciprocity between all these factors in which, finally, through the endless array of contingencies (*i.e.*, of things and events whose inner connection with one another is so remote, or so incapable of proof, that we may neglect it, regarding it as non-existent) the economic movement asserts itself as necessary. Were this not the case, the application of the theory to any given historical period would be easier than the solution of a simple equation of the first degree.

We ourselves make our own history, but, first of all, under very definite presuppositions and conditions. Among these are the economic, which are finally decisive. But there are also the political, etc. Yes, even the ghostly traditions which haunt the minds of men play a rôle albeit not a decisive one. The Prussian state arose and developed through historical, in the last instance, economic causes. One could hardly, however, assert without pedantry that among the many petty principalities of North Germany, just Brandenburg was determined by economic necessity and not by other factors also (before all, its involvement in virtue of its Prussian possessions, with Poland and therewith international political relations—which were also decisive factors in the creation of the domestic power of Austro-Hungary) to become the great power in which was to be embodied the economic, linguistic and, since the Reformation, also the religious differences of North and South. It would be very hard to attempt to explain by economic causes without making ourselves ridiculous the existence of every petty German state of the past or present, or the origin of modern German syntax, which reinforced the differences that existed already in virtue of the geographical separating wall formed by the mountains from Sudeten to Taunus.

Secondly, history is so made that the end result always arises out of the conflict of many individual wills in which every will is itself the product of a host of special conditions of life. Consequently there exist innumerable intersecting forces, an infinite group of parallelograms of forces which give rise to one resultant product—the historical event. This again may itself be viewed as the product of a force acting as a Whole without consciousness or volition. For what every individual wills separately is frustrated by what every one else wills and the general upshot is something which no one willed. And so the course of history has run along

like a natural process ; it also is subject essentially to the same laws of motion. But from the fact that the wills of individuals—who desire what the constitution of their body as well as external circumstances, in the last instance economic (either personal or social) determine them to desire—do not get what they wish but are sunk into an average or common result, from all that one has no right to conclude that they equal zero. On the contrary, every will contributes to the result and is in so far forth included within it.

I should further like to beg of you to study the theory from its original sources and not at second hand. It is really much easier. Marx hardly wrote a thing in which this theory does not play a part. The *Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Napoleon* is an especially remarkable example of its application. There are many relevant passages also in *Capital*. In addition, permit me to call your attention to my own writings, *Herrn E. Dühring's Umwälzung der Wissenschaft* and *L. Feuerbach und der Ausgang der klassischen deutschen Philosophie* where I give the most comprehensive exposition of historical materialism which to my knowledge exists anywhere.

Marx and I are partly responsible for the fact that at times our disciples have laid more weight upon the economic factor than belongs to it. We were compelled to emphasise its central character in opposition to our opponents who denied it, and there wasn't always time, place and occasion to do justice to the other factors in the reciprocal interactions of the historical process. But just as soon as it was a matter of the presentation of an historical chapter, that is to say, of practical application, things became quite different ; there, no error was possible. Unfortunately it is only too frequent that a person believes he has completely understood a new theory and is capable of applying it when he has taken over its fundamental ideas—and even then in an incorrect form. And from this reproach I cannot spare many of the recent "Marxists." They have certainly turned out a rare kind of tommy-rot.

To Point I again. Yesterday (I am writing now on the 22nd of Sept.) I found the following decisive passage, in Schoemann's *Griechische Altertümer* (Berlin, 1855, I, p. 52), which completely confirms the view taken above : "It is well known that marriages between half-brothers or sisters of *different mothers* was not regarded as incest in late Greece."

I hope that the appalling parenthetical expressions which for brevity's sake have slipped from my pen won't frighten you off.

Yours, etc.

### 3. ENGELS' LETTER TO HANS STARKENBURG

London, January 25, 1894

Dear Sir,

Here are the answers to your questions<sup>1</sup>:

1. By economic relations, which we regard as the determining basis of the history of society, we understand the way in which human beings in a definite society produce their necessities of life and exchange the product among themselves (in so far as division of labour exists). Consequently the *whole technique* of production and transportation is therein included. According to our conception, this technique determines the character and method of exchange, further, the distribution of the products and therewith, after the dissolution of gentile society, the relationships of ruler to ruled, and thence, the state, politics, law, etc. Under economic relations are included further, the geographical foundations upon which they develop and the actually inherited remains of earlier economic stages of development which have persisted, often through tradition only or *vis inertiae*, and also, naturally, the external surrounding milieu of society.

If the technique, as you properly say, is to a large extent dependent upon the state of science, how much more is science dependent upon the *state* and *needs* of technique. If society has a technical need, it serves as a greater spur to the progress of science than do ten universities. The whole of hydrostatics (Torricelli, etc.) was produced by the needs of controlling the mountain streams in Italy in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. We only acquired some intelligible knowledge about electricity when its technical applications were discovered. Unfortunately, in Germany, people have been accustomed to write the history of the sciences as if the sciences had fallen from the sky.

2. We regard the economic conditions as determining, in the last instance, historical development. But there are two points here which must not be overlooked.

(a) The political, legal, philosophical, religious, literary, artistic, etc., development rest upon the economic. But they all react upon one another and upon the economic base. It is not the case that the economic situation is the *sole active cause* and everything else only a passive effect. But there is a reciprocal interaction

<sup>1</sup> (I) To what extent are economic relations *causally* effective, *i.e.*, are they sufficient causes or necessary conditions or occasions, etc., of social development? (II) What rôles do the factors of *race* and historical *personality* play in Marx-Engels' conception of history?

within a fundamental economic necessity which *in the last instance* always asserts itself. The state, *e.g.*, exerts its influence through tariffs, free-trade, good or bad taxation. Even that deadly supineness and impotence of the German philistine which arose out of the miserable economic situation of Germany from 1648 to 1830 and which expressed itself first in pietism, then in sentimentalism and crawling servility before prince and noble, were not without their economic effects. They constituted one of the greatest hindrances to a progressive movement and were only cleared out of the way by the revolutionary and Napoleonic wars which made the chronic misery acute. It is not true, as some people here and there conveniently imagine, that economic conditions work themselves out automatically. Men make their own history, but in a given, conditioning milieu, upon the basis of actual relations already extant, among which, the economic relations, no matter how much they are influenced by relations of a political and ideological order, are ultimately decisive, constituting a red thread which runs through all the other relations and enabling us to understand them.

(b) Men make their own history but until now not with collective will according to a collective plan. Not even in a definitely limited given society. Their strivings are at cross purposes with each other, and in all such societies there therefore reigns a *necessity* which asserts itself under the form of contingency. The *necessity* which here expresses itself through all those contingencies is ultimately, again, economic. Here we must treat of the so-called great man. That a certain particular man and no other emerges at a definite time in a given country is naturally pure chance. But even if we eliminate him, there is always a need for a substitute, and the substitute is found *tant bien que mal*; in the long run he is sure to be found. That Napoleon—this particular Corsican—should have been the military dictator made necessary by the exhausting wars of the French Republic—that was a matter of chance. But that in default of a Napoleon, another would have filled his place, that is established by the fact that whenever a man was necessary he had always been found: Cæsar, Augustus, Cromwell, etc. Marx, to be sure, discovered the materialistic conception of history—but the examples of Thierry, Mignet, Guizot, the whole school of English Historians up to 1850 show they were working towards it; and its re-discovery by Morgan serves as proof that the time was ripe for it, and that it *had* to be discovered.

So with all other accidents and apparent accidents in history.

The wider the field we investigate, the further removed from the economic, the closer to the domain of pure, abstract ideology, the more we find that it reveals accidents in its development, the more does the course of its curve run in zig-zag fashion. But fit a trend to the curve and you will find that the longer the period taken, the more inclusive the field treated, the more closely will this trend run parallel to the trend of economic development.

The greatest obstacle to the correct understanding of the theory in Germany is the inexcusable neglect of the literature of economic history. It is hard not only to get rid of historical conceptions which have been drummed into one's head at school but even more so to gather the material together necessary to do it. Who has even read, e.g., old G. v. Gülich whose dry accumulation of material nonetheless contains so much stuff which explains innumerable political facts?

In addition I believe that the beautiful example which Marx himself gives in his *Eighteenth Brumaire* ought to give you considerable information on your questions just because it is a practical illustration. I also believe that in the *Anti-Dühring*, ch. I, 9-11; II, 2-4; III, 1, as well as in the introduction and final section of *Feuerbach*, I have already treated most of the points.

I beg of you not to weigh gingerly each separate word of the above by itself but to take the connections into account. I am sorry that I have not the time to work things out and write you with the same exact detail that I would have to do for publication.

Yours, etc.

#### 4. FROM A LETTER OF ENGELS TO F. MEHRING

July 14, 1893

You have expressed the main facts admirably and for every open-minded person convincingly.<sup>1</sup> If I were to take exception to anything it would be to the fact that you ascribe more credit to me than I deserve, even if I include everything I could have possibly discovered in the course of time by myself; but which Marx with his quicker *coup d'oeil* and wider view, discovered much sooner. When one has had the good fortune to work together for forty years with a man like Marx, one does not during his lifetime receive the appreciation one believes he deserves. But just as soon

<sup>1</sup> The reference is to an essay of Mehring's reprinted as an appendix to the first edition of his *Lessinglegende*. Mehring reprinted this section of Engels' letter in his *Geschichte der deutschen Sozial-demokratie*, 2nd ed. (1903,) Vol. I, pp. 385 ff.

as the greater of the two dies, the lesser is easily overrated. That seems to be true for me now. History, however, will take care of all that and by that time one is happily here no longer and cares nothing at all about it.

Only one point is lacking which Marx and I did not sufficiently stress and in relation to which we are equally to blame. We both placed and *had to place* the chief weight upon the *derivation* of political, legal and other ideological notions, as well as the actions which they led up to, from fundamental economic facts. In consequence we neglected the formal side, *i.e.*, the way in which these ideas arose, for the sake of the content. That gave our opponents a welcome occasion for misunderstanding. Paul Barth is a striking example.

Ideology is a process which of course is carried on with the consciousness of so-called thinkers but with a false consciousness. The real driving force which moves it remains unconscious otherwise it would not be an ideological process. It imaginatively creates for itself false or apparent driving forces. Because it is a thought process, it derives both its content and form from pure thought, either its own or that of its predecessors. It works with pure conceptual material which it unwittingly takes over as the product of thought and therefore does not investigate its relations to a process further removed from and independent of thought. Indeed it seems to be self-evident that since all activity is mediated by thought, it is ultimately *grounded* in thought. The historical ideologist (and historical means here political, juristic, philosophical, theological, in short, all domains which belong to society and not merely to nature)—the historical ideologist is confronted in every scientific field by material which has been built up independently out of the thought of earlier generations, and which through the minds of these successive generations has undergone an independent development peculiar to itself. External facts from this or other fields may have contributed to determine this development, but these facts, according to the tacit presuppositions made, are themselves mere fruits of a thought process. And so we still remain in the realm of pure thought which has succeeded so well in digesting the hardest facts.

It is this appearance of an independent history of state constitutions, systems of law, of ideologies in every special field, which, above all, has blinded so many people. When Luther and Calvin "transcend" the official catholic religion; when Hegel "transcends" Fichte and Kant; and Rousseau, indirectly with his social



contract, the constitutionalist, Montesquieu,—it is a process which remains within theology, philosophy, and political science. It merely reveals a stage in the history of these intellectual domains and never emerges from the field of pure thought at all. Ever since the illusion of the eternity and ultimacy of the system of capitalist production arose, the refutation of the Mercantilists through the physiocrats and A. Smith has been regarded not as the intellectual reflection of different economic facts, but only as a victory of thought, as a correct insight, won at last, into actual conditions existing always and everywhere. If only Richard the Lion-hearted, and Philip Augustus had introduced free trade, instead of involving themselves in crusades, five hundred years of misery and stupidity would have been spared us.

This side of affairs, which I can here only indicate, we have all neglected, more than is necessary. It's the old story. In the beginning the form is always neglected for the content. As already said, I myself have made that error and it has always been thrown up to me. I am far from reproaching you with it. As an older sinner in this respect I have hardly the right. But I wish to call your attention to this point for the future.

This is bound up with the stupid conception of the ideologists. Because we denied that the different ideological spheres, which play a part in history, have an independent historical development, we were supposed therewith to have denied that they have any *historical efficacy*. At the basis of this is the ordinary undialectical notion of cause and effect as fixed, mutually opposed, polar relations, and a complete disregard of reciprocity. These gentlemen forget, almost intentionally, that an historical factor, once it has been brought into the world by another—ultimately economic fact—is able to re-act upon its surroundings and even affect its own causes. . . .

## INDEX

- AMERICA, MARK ON, 244**  
 Antithesis, 80  
 Aquinas, 148  
 Archimedes, 145  
 Aristotle, 81, 86, 122, 148  
 Art, distinction between origin and acceptance, 140; Greek, 82
- BACH, 81**  
 Bakunin, 43, 47, 63, 65  
 Bastiat, 236  
 Bauer, B., 64  
 Beer, M., 188  
 Bentham, 91, 131  
 Bergson, 111; logic, 50  
 Bernoulli, 145  
 Bernstein, 31, 40, 42, 43, 44, 45, 48, 54, 57; on Marx, 46; neo-Kantianism of, 41  
 Bismarck, 207  
 Blanqui, 47  
 Bruno, 81  
 Buckle, 114  
 Bukharin, 73, 81, 126, 148  
 Butler, Samuel, 162
- CÆSAR, 144, 147, 148**  
 Capital, constant and variable, 173ff.  
 Capitalism, defined, 166; and crises, 177ff; good and bad side, 80, 84  
 Carlyle, 143  
 Castiglione, 122  
 Charlemagne, 143  
*Charte D'Amiens*, 52  
 Christianity, of social principles, 92  
 Class, character of economic, 36; and country, 44; consciousness of class, 202; obstacles to class consciousness, 208ff; definition of, 194; kinds of, 194ff; Marx's conception of, 197; and public, 44; and people, 44; and science, 67; struggle between classes, 193ff, 198; and state, 204; and religion, 205ff; and truth, 99
- Clive, 246  
 Cohen, Hermann, 43  
 Columbus, 144  
 Communism, and democracy, 262ff; and inevitability, 102  
 Consciousness, class, 201ff; obstacles to, 208ff; as social, 89; in history, 102  
 Cromwell, 123, 144, 148, 246, 250  
 Crusades, 150  
 Culture, Spenglerian theory of, 76; Marx's philosophy of, 78; organic character of, 117; formal aspect of, 133, 140-1; lag in, 136; change in, 81  
 Cunow, 148
- DAVID, 139**  
 Democracy, 254; and communism, 262ff; and dictatorship, 250ff  
 Determinism, 33  
 Dialectic, 71, 72; some contrasting conceptions of dialectic, 74; and social change, 79; and the future, 90; and history, 93; of social revolution, 211; and social psychology, 84; and perception, 87  
 Dialectical materialism, 37, 211; and epistemology, 37; and correspondence theory of truth, 37; whole, 56; method, 68  
 Dictatorship, 58; and democracy, 250ff; and the proletariat, 250ff; organs of, 258-61

- Distribution, in transitional period, 265  
 Dühring, 236, 240
- ECONOMICS**, and self-interest, 129ff; Marx's sociological, 161ff; and history, 165; contradiction in Marx's theory of, 184; cell form of, 186; moral element in, 191; and law, 224  
 Economism, 54, 57  
 Eddington, 159  
 Eleutheropoulos, 137  
 Empiricism, 72  
 Engels, 35, 37, 38, 66, 107, 116, 157, 232, 244; and experimentalism, 38  
 England, and revolution, 246  
 Equality of rights, 266  
 Experiment, 38
- FATALISM**, 33, 56, 61, 88, 191  
 Fetishism of commodities, 36, 162ff  
 Feuerbach, 37, 64-6, 87-9, 106, 114, 131  
 Fichte, 210  
 Force and Non-Violence, 235ff  
 Franklin, 86  
 Frederick II, 144  
 French Enlightenment, 43
- GALILEO**, 144  
 Gandhi, 144, 238, 239  
 General Strike, 50-3  
 Germany, social reform in, 27; economic development, 27; trade unions, 90; stabilisation and expansion, 32; Republic, 60  
 Goethe, 146  
 Government, 214
- HARTMAN, E. VON**, 111  
 Hastings, 246  
 Hegel, 58, 64, 72, 75, 90, 111, 116, 118, 119, 220  
 Helander, 188  
 Helvetius, 144  
 Herder, 114  
 Herz, 134  
 Hess, 191  
 Hilferding, 32, 33, 210
- Historical Materialism, 105ff; what it is not, 125ff; problems of, 142; reciprocity in, 152; human nature and, 85  
 Historical Understanding, 20ff, 158  
 History; nature of, 95; and human choice, 96; and economics, 165; and law, 97; and value, 98; and chance, 103, 149ff; materialistic conception of, 105ff; Marx's definition of, 106; philosophy of, 107; alternative conceptions of, 111ff; idealistic theory of, 111-16; technological interpretation of, 125; and great men, 143; and mysticism, 152  
 Hitler, 144  
 Hobbes, 88, 113  
 Hume, 157, 210  
 Huntington, Ellsworth, 114
- IDEALISM**, 88  
 Ideas, as patterns of action, 122  
 Ideology, 55, 121  
 Immediate demands, 59  
 Inevitability, 102; of social revolution, 100; and communism; 103  
 Ingres, 140  
 I.W.W., 52
- JAMES**, 92  
 Jeans, 159
- KAMPFUM MARX**, 27ff  
 Kant, 41, 81, 148  
 Kautsky, 32, 34, 45, 137, 147, 210  
 Kepler, 144  
 Kugelmann, 102, 151
- LABOUR-POWER**, 172; **VALUE OF**, 171  
 Labriola, 35  
 Lagardelle, 48  
 Lange, F. A., 43  
 Lassalle, 25, 43, 65, 220, 227, 264  
 Law, economic, 224; equality before the, 226  
 Leibnitz, 145

Lenin, 54-6, 58, 98, 144, 147, 149, 211, 232, 246; his theory of sensation, 62; and philosophy, 61-2  
de Leon, Daniel, 59, 259  
Liebknecht, Karl, 110, 188, 210  
Luther, 205  
Luxemburg, Rosa, 53-5, 58, 232

#### MACHINERY, 126

Mahomet, 144

Marxism, as scientific method, 18, 63ff; class character of, 18, 94; subjective aspects of, 18; as theory and practice of social revolution, 20, 100; conflicting doctrinal interpretations of, 22; as science of social development, 32, 35, 40; as theodicy, 34; as social reform, 46; as theory and practice of class struggle, 49; pseudo-, 81; and utilitarianism, 91; and truth, 95, 104; and monism, 132ff; dynamic character of, 156; and hypothesis, 182

Masaryk, 35

Materialism, 79, 89

Maxwell, Clerk, 134, 144

Means and ends, 58

Methodology, in reference to interpretation of Marx, 64, 180ff

Michelangelo, 81

Michels, Robert, 260

Millikan, 159

Milukov, 207

Minuet, 138

Mondolfo, 95

Monism, Marxism and, 132ff

Montesquieu, 114

Morgan, 212

Most, 65

Mussolini, 240

Myth, 50, 188

#### NAPOLÉON, 144, 147, 148

Natorp, 43

Naturalistic activism of Marx, 37

Need, 267; and purposes, 80; and want, 101, 126

Neo-Kantians, 15

Nietzsche, 91

#### OBJECTIVISM, 93

Objectivity and presupposition, 95, 99

Ockham, 81

Opposition, class and social, 197

Orthodox, Marxism, 32

Owen, 67, 109

#### PELLOUTIER, 48

Perception as interaction, 89

Pericles, 144

Personality in history, 143ff

Philosophies of Science, 72; of History, 107

Plato, 74, 75, 81, 111; historical interpretation of, 23

Plechanov, 58, 138, 148, 203

Plotinus, 111

Pokrovsky, 149

Political Economy, philosophy of, 179ff

Praxis, 38, 74

Presupposition and objectivity, 95, 99

Production, 267; and consumption, 85; relations defined, 120-2; forces of, 123; technique and Feudalism, 128; technique and Slavery, 129

Profits, theories of, 168; average rate of, 186ff

Proudhon, 47, 63, 87, 126

#### REFORMISM, 59

Religion and class struggle, 205ff

Revisionism, 45

Revolution, theory of, 230ff; and England, 247; Russian, 60, 97, 209, 241

Revolutionary situation, 233

Robespierre, 250

Rousseau, 81

Russell, Bertrand, 240

Russian Revolution, 60, 97, 209, 241

#### ST. SIMON, 63

Say, J. B., 169

Schelling, 88

Schopenhauer, 72, 111

Second International, 34, 102

Sensation, 88

Shakespeare, 146

- Simplicity, 16
- Social causation, 155
- Social Democratic Party, 30, 41, 264
- Socialism, as ethics, 42; *wahre Sozialisten*, 65; astronomic, 33; and inevitability, 100
- Socrates, 81
- Sombart, 63
- Sorel, 48, 49, 54
- Sorokin, 90
- Soviets, 258
- Spengler, 76-9
- Spontaneity, theory of, 60
- State, 214; and class struggle, 204; Marxian theory of, 216
- Staudinger, 43
- Stirner, 65, 131
- Surplus-value, absolute and relative, 173ff
- Syndicalism, 47
- Synthesis, 80
- TAIL-ENDERS, 54
- Terrorism, nature of, 256
- Theory and practice, 211
- Thesis, 80
- Tolstoy, 240
- Tradition, 133, 135
- Trotsky, 73, 147
- UNITY, 16
- VALUE, theory of, 183; of labour-power, 172; surplus, 173ff
- Vorländer, 43
- WASHINGTON, GEORGE, 144
- Watson, 73, 88
- Whitehead, 73

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