A Dictionary of Marxist Thought

Edited by

Tom Bottomore

Editorial Board

Laurence Harris
V. G. Kiernan
Ralph Miliband

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mode of production Not used in any single, consistent sense by Marx, the term has since been elaborated as the core element of a systematic account of history as the succession of different modes of production (see HISTORICAL MATERIALISM; STAGES OF DEVELOPMENT). This account, which sees epochs of history (or their theoretical characterization) as defined by a dominant mode of production, and revolution as the replacement of one mode by another, was common in the 'economistic' Marxism of the Second International (see ECONOMISM; INTERNATIONALS), and was restated as the correct understanding of Marx's materialist conception of history by Stalin in *Dialectical and Historial Materialism*; thus becoming the foundation of 'Diamat' (see DIALECTICAL MATERIALISM), the official Comintern interpretation of Marxism. The authority for regarding this as Marx's own conception is the famous Preface to *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*:

> In the social production which men carry on they enter into definite relations that are indispensable and independent of their will; these relations of production correspond to a definite stage of development of their material powers of production. The sum total of these relations of production constitutes the economic structure of society – the real foundation on which rise legal and political superstructures and to which correspond definite forms of social consciousness. The mode of production in material life determines the general character of the social, political and spiritual processes of life. At a certain stage of their development, the material forces of production in society come into conflict with the existing relations of production, or – what is but a legal expression for the same thing – with the property relations within which they had been at work before. From forms of development of the forces of production, these relations turn into their fetters. Then comes the period of social revolution.

On this view the DIALECTIC consists of the parallel development of the two elements; the forces developing on the basis of given relations of production and their immanent contradiction becoming manifest only at a 'certain stage of their development' when 'these relations turn into their fetters'. (For a more extended discussion see FORCES AND RELATIONS OF PRODUCTION.) This has given rise to a determinist reading of the process of revolution; when the forces of production have outstripped the relations of production, revolution is not only possible but inevitable. The success of revolution in backward Russia and its failure in advanced Germany pointed, among other things, to the role of consciousness in the revolutionary process, and suggested that something in this determinist account was wrong. The mode of production did not determine the superstructure in the direct, automatic way that Marx seemed to imply, and the collapse of a mode of production was not therefore such a clear cut matter as it had seemed to be. There appeared to be circumstances in which the superstructure determined what was happening in the base, ideological and political factors which affected the economic, to the extent of bringing about or preventing a transformation in the mode of production (see BASE AND SUPERSTRUCTURE; DETERMINISM).

An attempt to deal with this problem, while retaining the mode of production as a central concept, has been made by Althusser particularly in *Reading 'Capital'* (with Étienne Balibar). Althusser rejects the notion of a base determining the superstructure; instead he sees the economic, political and ideological as levels, consisting of specific practices, which together form a structured totality, a social formation. The notion of determination is replaced by that of structural causality (see STRUCTURALISM). The mode of production remains a key concept in so far as it is the economic level, the mode of production, which 'determines' which of the different levels is 'dominant' in the interdependent structured totality. The economic sets limits, within which the other levels can be only 'relatively autonomous', by assigning functions necessary to the reproduction of the mode of production to those non-economic levels.

The mode of production, as defined by Althusser and Balibar, consists of two sets of

was now in the war; their party suffered for this in national esteem.

In China, religion was far less a factor, and modern-style capitalism was less expansive, confined to the coastal towns. During the turmoil of the early 1920s there was a short period of collaboration between communists and the middle-class Kuomintang, led by Sun Yat-sen. He held liberal, even socialist or 'welfarist' views, and his party needed the popular support that the communists could bring against the provincial 'warlords' who had usurped power. Once these were displaced, and with Sun Yat-sen now dead, the help and counsel of Moscow were discarded; from 1928 the Kuomintang and the country fell under the reactionary dictatorship of Chiang Kai-shek, who enjoyed Western backing.

Defeated in the towns, the Communist Party, with Mao Tse-tung as its new leader, turned to the peasantry, thus departing from the traditional Marxist tenet that only an industrial working class could be the proper vanguard of revolution. Japanese invasion gave the party a fresh chance; there has been controversy about whether it won its way to the front and finally triumphed in the civil war against Chiang Kai-shek on the strength of its championship of the peasantry against landlordism and a corrupt semi-feudal government, or on the strength of its energetic leadership in the conflict with Japan. It came to power in 1948–9 without a strong working class to give it ballast, but equally without a strong capitalist class to impede it.

In regions where communists were fewer than in Vietnam, such as Burma and Indonesia, many nationalists had welcomed the Japanese as liberators, and this left a legacy of division. In Indonesia the two wings (communist and nationalist) joined in 1945 to drive out the Dutch, but 1965 was to see a nationalist government with foreign backing crush the Communist Party after allegations that it was plotting to seize power, and then carry out a large-scale massacre of its supporters. In the Philippines, power was handed over by the USA to an elite consisting mainly of rich landowners, who had been content with mild constitutional opposition; communists then headed a smouldering peasant resistance. In Malaya, a guerrilla rising against the British was launched in 1948, but failed because of the country's ethnic, as well as social, divisions; most of the insurgents were immigrant Chinese, who received little sympathy from the native Malay population. It was to conservative Malay leaders that power was eventually handed over.

In Africa, Marxism found its way much more slowly, but it played a prominent part in the rebellions in all the three Portuguese territories, and made itself felt in Rhodesia and in the anti-apartheid movement in South Africa. Class divisions have mattered far less than in Asia; on the other hand, ethnic differences have in some areas been an analogous weakness. Soviet material aid counted, and, in Angola, Cuban troops. Russian withdrawal from the Third World, noticeable for some time, can be expected to continue. If Marxism is to survive as a force there, it will clearly have to go through much overhauling and adaptation. One task to be undertaken everywhere will be a critical review of communist policies and methods, and their successes and failures, in the era of struggle against colonialism. Indian Marxists have made a useful start by beginning to reconsider their estimate of what Gandhi represented in Indian history.

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V. G. KIERNAN

commodity All human societies must produce their own material conditions of existence. The

commodity is the form products take when this production is organized through exchange. In such a system products once produced are the property of particular agents who have the power to dispose of them to other agents. Agents who own different products confront each other in a process of bargaining through which they exchange the products. In exchange a definite quantity of one product changes places with a definite quantity of another. The commodity, then, has two powers: first, it can satisfy some human want, that is, it has what Adam Smith calls USE VALUE; second, it has the power to command other commodities in exchange, a power of exchangeability that Marx calls VALUE. Because commodities exchange with each other in definite quantitative proportions each commodity can be thought of as containing a certain amount of value. The whole mass of commodities produced in a period can be seen as a homogeneous mass of value, though looked at in another way it is a heterogeneous collection of different and incomparable use values. As values commodities are qualitatively equal and differ only quantitatively in the amount of value they contain. As use values commodities are qualitatively different, since each product is specific and cannot be compared with another.

The labour theory of value analyses this mass of value as the form the total social labour expended takes in a commodity-producing system. The labour that produces commodities can thus be thought of either concretely, as labour of a particular kind which produces a particular use value (in the way that weaving is a particular kind of labour that produces cloth), or abstractly, as being the source of value in general, as ABSTRACT LABOUR.

Value becomes visible as exchange value when commodities confront each other in exchange, and exchange value comes to have an existence independent of any particular commodity as MONEY. The quantity of money for which a particular commodity can be bought or sold is its price. The prices of individual commodities may deviate from their values as measured by the amount of abstract labour they contain: on average or in the aggregate the total money price of commodities newly produced must equal their total value (see VALUE AND PRICE; PRICE OF PRODUCTION AND THE TRANSFORMATION PROBLEM). The commodity, analytically, is the dialectical union of use value and value. The analysis of the commodity form is the basis for the theory of abstract labour and the theory of money.

The theory of the commodity establishes the fundamental categories within which capital can be described and analysed. Capital is value which expands through the process of production and exchange. A capitalist starts production with a certain amount of money, which he uses to purchase labour power and means of production; the resulting product he sells for more money than the amount originally advanced, the excess being the surplus value. Thus capital is a form which rests on the existence of a commodity system of production and the emergence of the money form of value. The basic concepts used to describe and study capital, the commodity, money, purchase, sale, and value, are grounded in the analysis of the commodity form of production.

Labour expended in commodity production is social labour. The product is not consumed by its immediate producer, but by someone else who obtains it through exchange. Commodity producers depend on other producers to provide them, through exchange, with their required means of production and subsistence. But labour in commodity production appears to producers as their own private labour, expended independently of the society as a whole to meet their private wants and needs through exchange on the market. The real complex relations a commodity producer has with other human beings through the social division of labour promoted by commodity production are reduced to impersonal and uncontrollable market forces. The producers, whose world is in fact created by the people, see themselves as existing in a world of things, the commodities. The commodity form of production simultaneously makes private labour social as products are exchanged, and fragments social labour into private labour. This confusion of relations between people with relations to things is the fundamental contradiction of commodity production. Marx calls it the *fetishism of commodities* (see COMMODITY FETISHISM), the process by which the products of human labour come to appear as an independent and uncontrolled reality apart from the people who have created

them. The historical mission of socialism, in Marx's view, is to transcend not just the contradictions of capitalist production, but the contradictions of the commodity form on which capitalist production rests.

The concept of the commodity is used by Marx to analyse forms which arise on the basis of a well-developed commodity production and exchange, but which are not themselves in the primitive sense commodities, that is, products produced for a system of exchange. For example labour power is sold for a price, the wage, and hence appears on the market as a commodity, though labour power is not produced as a commodity, nor does its value arise directly from the labour expended in producing it. In economies with highly developed financial markets, capital itself becomes a 'commodity', in the sense that it has a price (the rate of interest) and is exchanged on a market (see CREDIT AND FICTITIOUS CAPITAL; FINANCIAL CAPITAL AND INTEREST). In both these cases the concept of the commodity is used by analogy and extension rather than in its primitive sense.

Reading

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commodity fetishism Marx's analysis of commodity fetishism is more or less confined to *Capital* I (ch. 1, sect. 4). Having established that COMMODITY production constitutes a social relationship between producers, a relationship that brings different types, skills and quantities of labour into equivalence with each other as values (see VALUE), Marx enquires how this relationship appears to the producers or more generally to society. For the producers, it 'is presented to them as a social relation, existing not between themselves, but between the products of their labour'. The social relationship between tailor and carpenter appears as a relationship between coat and table in terms of the ratio at which those things exchange with each other rather than in terms of the labours embodied in them. But Marx is quick to point out that this appearance of commodity relations as a relationship between things is not false. It exists, but conceals the relationship between the producers: 'the relations connecting the labour of one individual with that of the rest appear, not as direct social relations between individuals at work, but as what they really are, material relations between persons and social relations between things'.

Marx's theory of commodity fetishism is never taken up again explicitly and at length, in *Capital* or elsewhere. Nevertheless its influence can clearly be discerned in his criticisms of classical political economy. Commodity fetishism is the simplest and most universal example of the way in which the economic forms of capitalism conceal underlying social relations; for example whenever CAPITAL, however understood, rather than SURPLUS VALUE is seen as the source of profit. The simplicity of commodity fetishism makes it a starting point and example for analysing non-economic relations. It establishes a dichotomy between appearance and concealed reality (without the former necessarily being false) which can be taken up in the analysis of IDEOLOGY. It discusses social relations conducted as and in the form of relations between commodities or things and this has application to the theory of REIFICATION and ALIENATION. (See also FETISHISM.)

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communism Marx referred to communism – the word originated in the secret revolutionary societies of Paris in the mid-1830s – in two different but related senses: as an actual political movement of the working class in capitalist society, and as a form of society which the working class, through its struggle, would bring into existence. In the first sense – influenced not only, in all probability, by Lorenz von Stein's account (1842) of the proletariat and communism ('the response of a whole class') but also by his personal contacts with French communists in the *Ligue des Justes* – he wrote that 'the whole

forces and relations of production Throughout the mature Marx's economic works the idea that a contradiction between forces and relations of production underlies the dynamic of the capitalist mode of production is present. More generally, such a contradiction accounts for history existing as a succession of modes of production, since it leads to the necessary collapse of one mode and its supersession by another. And the couple, forces/relations of production, in any mode of production underlies the whole of society's processes, not just the economic ones. The connection between them and the social structure was stated in some of Marx's most succinct sentences:

> In the social production of their life men enter into definite relations that are indispensable and independent of their will, relations of production which correspond to a definite stage of development of their material productive forces. The sum total of these relations of production constitutes the economic structure, the real basis on which rises a legal and political superstructure. . . . (*Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*, Preface.)

The power of the contradiction between relations and forces to act as the motor of history is also stated in the same place: 'at a certain stage of their development, the material productive forces of society come in conflict with the existing relations of production . . . within which they have been at work hitherto'; and 'from forms of development of the productive forces these relations turn into their fetters', thereby initiating social revolution.

The productive forces were conceived by Marx as including means of production and labour power. Their development, therefore, encompasses such historical phenomena as the development of machinery, changes in the LABOUR PROCESS, the opening up of new sources of energy, and the education of the proletariat. There remain, however, several elements whose definition is disputed. Some writers have included science itself as a productive force (not just the changes in means of production that result), and Cohen (1978, ch. II) includes geographical space as a force.

Relations of production are constituted by the economic ownership of productive forces; under capitalism the most fundamental of these relations is the bourgeoisie's ownership of means of production while the proletariat owns only its labour power. Economic ownership is different from legal ownership for it relates to the control of the productive forces. In a legal sense the workers with rights in a pension fund may be said to own the shares of the companies in which the pension fund invests and thus to be, indirectly, legal owners of their means of production (although even this interpretation of the legal position is open to criticism on the grounds that share ownership is a legal title to revenue rather than to means of production); but if so, they are certainly not in control of those means of production and hence have no economic ownership (see PROPERTY).

The manner in which the development of the forces and relations of production occurs, and the effects of this development, have been the subject of one of the main controversies in Marxist thought. The most straightforward interpretation of the celebrated passage from the *Preface* is this: within a mode of production there is a correspondence both between forces and relations, and as a result of this, between the relations of production and legal, ideological and other social relations (the second correspondence being one between BASE AND SUPERSTRUCTURE). The correspondence appears to be one where the forces of production are primary, the relations of production are determined by the forces, and they themselves determine the superstructure. These respective positions of the three elements in the chain of causation acquire significance from their implications for historical development. Thus, the development of the forces of production *leads to* a contradiction between them and the relations of production (which 'turn into their fetters'), and the intensification of this contradiction *leads to* the breakdown of the existing mode of production and its superstructure. One problem with this interpretation of the central historical role of forces and relations of production turns on the central question. Is it valid to conceive of the forces of production as the prime movers?

In the revival of Marxist theory in the third quarter of this century this particular interpretation of Marx's thesis has been subjected to considerable criticism. An important consideration for some was that the thesis appeared to carry a political implication which was rejected: it was argued that Stalin's policy of rapid industrialization with its forced collectivization and political repression stemmed from his conception of the primacy of the forces of production (and that Trotsky shared this conception), so that if the productive forces in the Soviet Union could become those of modern industry, socialist relations of production would have their proper basis. Moreover, Marx's own writings appeared to be ambiguous on the primacy of the productive forces, and in places he writes as though the relations of production dominate and generate changes in the forces. In *Capital* I, for example, especially in the discussion of the development of the real subsumption of labour to capital (in a manuscript chapter 'Results of the Immediate Process of Production' which was first published in 1933), Marx writes as though the capitalist relations of production revolutionize the instruments of production and the labour process. Such formulations need not be a problem for the idea that the forces of production are primary if Marxism were to offer a conception of the articulation between forces and relations such that they interact, but with the forces being determinant, in some sense, both of the relations and of the way the two elements interact. But Marx's own texts are silent on this, and some writers have argued that they preclude the possibility of such interaction between two distinct elements because they collapse or 'fuse' forces and relations together, with the forces becoming a form of the relations (Cutler *et al.* 1977, ch. 5; Balibar 1970, p. 235).

The idea that the productive forces are primary, despite the problems it presents, has been vigorously reasserted by Cohen (1978; see also Shaw 1978). Cohen demonstrates the coherence of the thesis in its own terms and argues that it does have a valid, logical centrality in Marx's own writing. The basic difficulty in understanding the connection between forces and relations of production is that whereas the two are seen as necessarily compatible with each other within a mode of production, one of them has to develop in such a way that a contradiction or incompatibility matures; their progress, therefore, has an element of asymmetry, and it has to be a systematic rather than accidental asymmetry. Thus 'compatibility' cannot mean mutual and even determination. It could mean that the relations develop, causing development of the forces, which then react back on the relations but in such a way that the effect of relations on forces is multiplied while that of forces on relations is muted; if that occurred the relations of production would be primary but the maturation of the forces would run up against the 'fetters' which characterize the contradiction. Cohen, however, does not adopt this interpretation.