

Lecture Notes on Marxist Theory (part3) by Tony Cliff

Forces of production

This does not just mean technology and machinery, or the physical level of output.

- (a) At first it means nothing more than the real labour power of working men.
- (b) Anything which increases this productive capacity is also a productive force. So:
 - (1) The application of science and technique to industry is a productive force.
 - (2) Cooperation of workers in production is a productive force.
 - (3) Force itself is a productive force, e.g. the violence involved in forcing the peasantry off the land in the early stages of capitalism.
- (c) In a special sense the term productive force may be applied to the proletariat itself, which by its revolutionary action can set free the forces potentially existing in the social labour on which capitalist society is based. "Of all the instruments of production, the greatest productive force is labour."

Relationships of production

This refers to the social organisation of production, the mode of cooperation under which production is carried out. In legal terms this is expressed by the property relations. (Though legal terms as part of the superstructure can conceal as much as they express the existing reality---as the Russian constitution showed).

The Conflict between forces of production and relations of production

As the conflict at the base heightens, there are three possibilities:

- (a) The productive forces (embodied in the activity of a rising social class) break through, eg the bourgeois revolutions of France and England.
- (b) The productive forces fail to break through, e.g. the decline of Roman slave society.
- (c) There is a stagnation, e.g. the Oriental (hydraulic, irrigation) societies of Ancient Egypt, Babylon and the Chinese Empire.

The motor of social development, of the change of one form of society to another is class struggle. This is crucial, for the end of capitalism is not something which will happen one day when the system grinds to a halt, and is then replaced the next day by socialism.

Capitalism, which is a dynamic system, constantly rationalising the means of production, has shown that given time it can recover from any crisis and start up again. The cost of this has already been catastrophic--in the 20th century alone there has already been two world wars, fascism, imperialist exploitation of the underdeveloped world, massive unemployment of the industrial working class in the 1930s especially, gigantic waste of resources on armaments since the Second World War, and so on.

The system won't perish until there has been the fullest development of the productive forces within it, Now the working class is the crucial productive force. In its full development in terms of consciousness and or- organisation will lie the great development of the productive forces capable under capitalism---only then can the system be destroyed once and for all.

This subjective factor, arising on the basis of the objective contradictions within capitalist production, completes the development of the conflicts within the economic base.

Base and Superstructure

On the economic base arise the superstructure of society---the legal, political, aesthetic, religious and philosophical realms. These are attempts to make sense of people's activities in the world—and, like all attempts at understanding; they may be true or false. That is to say, the “economic base” refers to people's conscious productive activity which aims at creating and preserving the conditions of human life: the “superstructure” attempts to justify, legitimise, understand, etc. the forms this activity has taken.

In general to date such attempts at understanding have been partial, one sided attempts. Such attempts become specifically *ideological* when they “forget” to relate their perspective (e.g. religious or philosophical one) to humankind's real activity, and try to build systems of interpretation in their own right—e.g. an attempt to write history in terms of what great men (e.g. Kings etc.) thought and did.

Or to write history from the growth of freedom in terms of the development of law, so as to apply to everyone equally---forgetting that because people are not socially and economically equal, that such “freedom” is often purely academic.

As the writer Anatole France put it, “The law in its majesty forbids both the rich and the poor to sleep under bridges.” Or again, the social-democratic view that separates economic and political struggles, and fights each separately, “forgets” the relationship between the two and becomes ideological in theory, leading to disastrous betrayals in practice.

Bourgeois political economy wasn't ideological because it at least attempted to understand the effective basis on which the society moved and developed---Marx criticised it for its *inadequacy*. Modern economics has given up this concern and has become mere apologetics in the main.

In the area of political theory, modern democratic views are partial, one sided views of what actually happens—they cover up the reality of class society by saying there can be effective political democracy (we all have the vote) while there is still no economic and social democracy.

So to in the “communist states”, they said there was socialism because the means of production was owned by the state. They forgot to ask who “owns” the state, and it certainly wasn't the working class.

These super structural elements must all be criticised and undermined, but it isn't enough to do so just in theory. For instance, there have been lots of criticisms of religion as an illusion, but it still remains. Such a criticism, if it is correct, can only be tested also by overthrowing a social condition which requires illusions.

By building socialism and showing that the “kingdom of heaven” is nothing but an metaphor for what human kind can accomplish by its own efforts here on earth, one will destroy the need for religion