



MARXISM
FREQUENTLY
ASKED
QUESTIONS

ECONOMIC FREEDOM FIGHTERS
POLITICAL EDUCATION NOTES

Marxism F.A.Q.

Q. What is Marxism?

A. Marxism is the system of Karl Marx's views and teachings. Marx was the genius who continued and consummated the three main ideological currents of the 19th century, as represented by the three most advanced countries of mankind: classical German philosophy, classical English political economy, and French socialism combined with French revolutionary doctrines in general. Acknowledged even by his opponents, the remarkable consistency and integrity of Marx's views, whose totality constitutes modern materialism and modern scientific socialism, as the theory and program of the working-class movement in all the countries of the world.

Q. What are Marxism/Leninism and Trotskyism?

A. This term is generally used to describe what are considered revolutionary Marxists (those who see that the present system must be replaced by a new one), as opposed to reformists (those who believe that the capitalist system can be made "kinder and gentler" - which is not possible!). Leninism is really nothing more than the extension of Marx's ideas into the age of imperialism (the age of the domination of finance capital and monopolies, and the total subjugation of the colonial world to the will of the major powers).

But there is still some confusion as far as Marxism/Leninism goes. There are those who follow Stalin, Mao, or Trotsky. Stalin and Mao were NOT Marxists, they were actually quite anti-Marxist in that they led regimes based not on democratic control of the state by the workers, but rather based on totalitarian control by an elite stratum of bureaucrats who were a parasite on the workers' state.

Trotskyism, or those who follow Leon Trotsky (who led the opposition to Stalin's reactionary policies after Lenin's death in 1924) is actually a continuation of Marxism/Leninism, but many people use the word Trotskyism to distinguish themselves from the Stalinists. Personally, I am in agreement with Trotsky, and see him as the continuer of Marxism/Leninism, but due to the negative connotations associated with Trotskyism (due to the fanatical and often ultra-left tactics and policies of many of his followers), I am content to stick with calling myself Marxist/Leninist, as Trotsky's ideas are an extension of that. Among Trotsky's most important contributions to Marxist theory are his scientific analysis of the nature of Stalinism and his ideas on the [permanent revolution](#) especially as regards the colonial world.

Q. What do people mean when they say they are "socialists"?

A. As for "socialist" well, there are again 2 types - genuine ones fighting for the abolishment of wage labor and the rule of capital, and reformists. Many reformists call themselves "socialist" but have generally imperialist policies. For example, the French government is currently "socialist" - yet they are pursuing criminal imperialist aims such as the bombing of Yugoslavia!

In Marxist terms, socialism is generally regarded as the period of transition between capitalism and communism - the transition to a system in which we can truly have "from

each according to his abilities, to each according to his needs". So genuine Marxists can be interchangeably called socialists so long as they have as their goal the abolishment of capitalism and the establishment of genuine worker controlled, democratic socialism. Just remember, those who call themselves "socialists" need to be taken with a grain of salt - look at the contents of the jar before you eat it - don't rely only on the label! :)

Q. What is the difference between 'Communism' and 'communism'?

A. 'Communism' is generally used when it is the name of a formal party (like the Communist Party of France) and 'communism' is used when one is discussing the communist socio-economic system or ideas in general.

Q. What is the Difference between Socialism and Communism?

A. Due to the media and the educational system, many people have a different understanding of the words "socialism" and "communism" than the founders of Marxism intended. It's easy to understand this confusion: many modern day, so-called "socialist" parties are nothing of the sort, and most people associate "communism" with the Stalin's totalitarian USSR. But for scientific socialists (the original term for Marxists), these words have precise meanings, and describe definite social forms. For Marxists, socialism is a transitional phase between the exploitative capitalist system of private property of the means of production, and the classless society of communism, where there is no longer a state in the proper sense of the word, no compulsion to work, no national borders, etc.

Under capitalism, society is governed by a handful of rich elites who exploit the working class in order to extract profits. They are not concerned with what or how they produce commodities, as long as these bring them a profit. They have developed the state - bodies of armed men; the laws, courts, prisons, military, police - in order to preserve their privileged position. Under communism, the whole of society will be the "owners" of the means of production, and will produce in the interests of all people in harmony with the environment. But between these two phases of human social development lies the transitional period of socialism.

Despite the illusions of the anarchists that we can somehow magically abolish the state and capitalism overnight, what is required is a transitional period in order to usher in a new era of peace, freedom and plenty. The material basis for communism is to be able to provide enough to go around for everyone. While we have already developed the technology and the know-how to make this possible very quickly, we still cannot jump from the poverty and want of capitalism to full-fledged communism overnight. For Marxists, this transitional phase is called socialism. As Marx explained in the "Critique of the Gotha Program":

"Between capitalist and communist society lies the period of the revolutionary transformation of the one into the other. Corresponding to this is also a political transition period in which the state can be nothing but the revolutionary dictatorship of the proletariat."

The first step in this process is the seizure of political power by the working class majority of society; known in Marx's day as the "dictatorship of the proletariat" as opposed to the "dictatorship of the bourgeoisie" we currently live under. Once in political power, the working class can then move to assert its control over the economy. Once the working

class democratically runs the economy in the interests of all, instead of in the interests of a handful of capitalists, then very quickly we will be able to provide the basic necessities and then much more to everyone. We will be able to abolish unemployment, provide free, quality healthcare, education, housing, and more to everyone. The creative and productive potential of humanity will be unleashed.

As Engels explained, this socialist "state", which would truly democratically represent the vast majority of society, would already be withering away in the proper sense of the word. The capitalist state represents a tiny minority of society, which is why they resort to such brutal measures to keep the majority under their boot. But once the state is run in the interests of the majority, then the need for police, a military, etc. will rapidly disappear along with the inequality and oppression of the capitalist system. Gradually, the coercion and compulsion of the capitalist system will disappear, replaced by the democratic administration of things in the interests of everyone.

From Lenin's "State and Revolution":

"Only in communist society, when the resistance of the capitalists have disappeared, when there are no classes (i.e., when there is no distinction between the members of society as regards their relation to the social means of production), only then 'the state... ceases to exist', and 'it becomes possible to speak of freedom'. Only then will a truly complete democracy become possible and be realized, a democracy without any exceptions whatever. And only then will democracy begin to wither away, owing to the simple fact that, freed from capitalist slavery, from the untold horrors, savagery, absurdities, and infamies of capitalist exploitation, people will gradually become accustomed to observing the elementary rules of social intercourse that have been known for centuries and repeated for thousands of years in all copy-book maxims. They will become accustomed to observing them without force, without coercion, without subordination, without the special apparatus for coercion called the state.

"The expression 'the state withers away' is very well-chosen, for it indicates both the gradual and the spontaneous nature of the process. Only habit can, and undoubtedly will, have such an effect; for we see around us on millions of occasions how readily people become accustomed to observing the necessary rules of social intercourse when there is no exploitation, when there is nothing that arouses indignation, evokes protest and revolt, and creates the need for suppression.

"And so in capitalist society we have a democracy that is curtailed, wretched, false, a democracy only for the rich, for the minority. The dictatorship of the proletariat, the period of transition to communism, will for the first time create democracy for the people, for the majority, along with the necessary suppression of the exploiters, of the minority. Communism alone is capable of providing really complete democracy, and the more complete it is, the sooner it will become unnecessary and wither away of its own accord.

"In other words, under capitalism we have the state in the proper sense of the word, that is, a special machine for the suppression of one class by another, and, what is more, of the majority by the minority. Naturally, to be successful, such an undertaking as the systematic suppression of the exploited majority by the exploiting minority calls for the utmost ferocity and savagery in the matter of suppressing, it calls for seas of blood, through which mankind is actually wading its way in slavery, serfdom and wage labor.

"Furthermore, during the transition from capitalism to communism suppression is still necessary, but it is now the suppression of the exploiting minority by the exploited majority. A special apparatus, a special machine for suppression, the 'state', is still necessary, but this is now a transitional state. It is no longer a state in the proper sense of the word; for the suppression of the minority of exploiters by the majority of the wage slaves of yesterday is comparatively so easy, simple and natural a task that it will entail far less bloodshed than the suppression of the risings of slaves, serfs or wage-laborers, and it will cost mankind far less. And it is compatible with the extension of democracy to such an overwhelming majority of the population that the need for a special machine of suppression will begin to disappear. Naturally, the exploiters are unable to suppress the people without a highly complex machine for performing this task, but the people can suppress the exploiters even with a very simple 'machine', almost without a 'machine', without a special apparatus, by the simple organization of the armed people (such as the Soviets of Workers' and Soldiers' Deputies, we would remark, running ahead).

"Lastly, only communism makes the state absolutely unnecessary, for there is nobody to be suppressed - 'nobody' in the sense of a class, of a systematic struggle against a definite section of the population. We are not utopians, and do not in the least deny the possibility and inevitability of excesses on the part of individual persons, or the need to stop such excesses. In the first place, however, no special machine, no special apparatus of suppression, is needed for this: this will be done by the armed people themselves, as simply and as readily as any crowd of civilized people, even in modern society, interferes to put a stop to a scuffle or to prevent a woman from being assaulted. And, secondly, we know that the fundamental social cause of excesses, which consist in the violation of the rules of social intercourse, is the exploitation of the people, their want and their poverty. With the removal of this chief cause, excesses will inevitably begin to 'wither away'. We do not know how quickly and in what succession, but we do know they will wither away. With their withering away the state will also wither away.

"Without building utopias, Marx defined more fully what can be defined now regarding this future, namely, the differences between the lower [socialism] and higher [communism] phases (levels, stages) of communist society."

So when asked if we are socialists or communists, we can say that we are both. We are fighting for communism, but the first stage toward that is democratic socialism. But above all, we are Marxists - the ideas of Marxism are the "guide to action" that helps us get our bearings in order to fight the capitalist system and hasten the building of socialism.

For further reading on this subject, be sure to check out Chapter 5 of Lenin's masterpiece "The State and Revolution":

Q. What About "Human Nature"?

A. The question of so-called "human nature" is one of the most commonly raised arguments against socialism - but it is also one of the easiest to debunk. Many people believe that the way people think has always been the same, and that we will always think the way we do now. But a few examples will show that nothing could be further from the truth. The fact of the matter is, like all things in nature, human consciousness and society are always in a state of change. Marx explained that "conditions determine consciousness". In other words, our environment determines to a large degree how we think. We know what rap music, Hollywood movies, and a Boeing 747 are because they exist in our world. For example, if we were born 5,000 years ago as peasants in China, our world-view would be

very different! If we were born as royalty in China 5,000 years ago, we would also have a very different view of things than if we were peasants.

Human beings rose to the top of the food chain not by competing against each other and crushing one another in the struggle to "get ahead", but through cooperation. Only by cooperating were humans able to combine their resources to hunt, build shelters, and eventually domesticate plants, animals, develop pottery, build the pyramids, etc., etc. Just look at a human baby! Compared to a deer, which can stand up and run within minutes of birth, human young are totally helpless for years. Baby humans could not survive even a few days without the help of others! So you see, primitive humans needed to cooperate if they were to survive the elements, wild animals, find enough to eat, etc. For the vast majority of human existence, there were no classes, and we lived communally in small bands, dividing up the work and dividing up the wealth in the interests of everyone.

And although on the surface it appears that nowadays we are all "individuals", the truth is we are even more dependant on literally thousands and even millions of other humans around the world. Can any one person design a car, mine and process the metals and other materials needed, build the factory, and then put together a car themselves? To even pose the question shows how absurd the idea is. And what about the gasoline to fuel it? Or the roads to drive it on? What about the food we eat? The list goes on and on - and we have only scratched the surface. Think about it carefully, and you will see that under capitalism, almost everyone is indirectly linked to everyone else through the world market and the exchange of commodities.

We work together, live together, hang out together, go to the movies together, go to the park together, etc. Do we have police around 24 / 7 to make sure we don't all kill each other? Do we run around murdering each other "to get ahead"? If that were the case, then nothing would ever get done and we would all starve to death in a matter of days! So why do people have this strange idea that we are all "individuals"? Well, getting back to the first point we made, which is that conditions determine consciousness - the ruling class (the capitalists) do everything in their power to affect the way we think. Through our education, through the media, religion, etc., we are raised to have the values of the capitalist system. And what values are these? Precisely the "dog eat dog" attitude which states that the only way to get ahead is to stomp on your opponents. We are raised to look away and think nothing of the homeless, the starving, those killed in war, etc. - or at most to say a prayer for them and give a little "charity" to ease our conscience.

But if we look a little harder, we will see that these "values" benefit only a tiny handful of people - the ultra-rich capitalists! The rest of us, in our daily lives, gain nothing from this. What we want above all is peace, stability, a decent job, no worries about healthcare or education, time off for family and loved ones, etc. It is only the capitalist class which thrives off the individual competition between one company and another. One of the main contradictions of capitalist society is that we have social production (meaning we produce the things we use socially - like the example of the car), but private appropriation of the surplus wealth produced. In other words, we produce the wealth socially, but the profit goes into private hands! The thousands of workers who actually know how to produce the cars in a factory do not get to decide what to produce or how, or what to do with the extra wealth - the capitalist class does. Socialists want to end this contradiction by having social control over the socially produced wealth. The surplus wealth produced by working people would be used to provide better wages, benefits, healthcare, education, safety conditions, new technology that could reduce the working day, etc. -

instead of for the private gain of a handful of people while millions starve, are homeless, and unemployed. This is not a utopian idea - the material pre-requisites for this exist now! The only barrier to this is the grip the capitalist class has on political and economic power. Only unity of the world working class can put an end to this situation, and end the horror, degradation, poverty, and instability of the capitalist system once and for all. Then a whole new world will open up!

So just imagine a baby born into a world with no hunger, no want, no poverty, no lack of jobs, etc. Since conditions determine consciousness, they would see the world in an entirely different way than we do today. Even babies born today do not notice differences in race, language, etc. until these are pointed out to them as they get older. Under socialism, people will relate to each other as people, and not as mere commodities to be bought and sold.

The reason for the vast bulk of the problems we suffer under capitalism is scarcity - there is simply not enough to go around. To take an example from nature, if you take 100 rats and put them in a cage with enough food for 100 rats and then a little bit more, you will have docile, friendly, and gregarious animals before you. But if you put those same 100 rats in a cage with only enough food for only 50 of them, you will quickly see the situation deteriorate into a murderous, greedy, self-interested orgy of violence and bloodshed. Of course, humans and their society are much more complex and on a different level than 100 rats in a laboratory cage, but the example illustrates an important point.

As we all know, much of the scarcity we find is artificially produced. We have all heard the stories of farmers being paid not to plant or to destroy crops, even though there are millions of hungry and malnourished children right here in the United States, let alone around the world; of shoe or clothing stores which punch or tear holes in their old stock, to make them unusable, even though millions of people could use those products; of restaurants firing employees for taking food home, insisting instead that this perfectly good food be thrown in the dumpster; or of perfectly healthy, capable, and willing people being paid not to work, or forced into unemployment when they are willing to work, instead of creating meaningful jobs for them.

"Human nature", like all things, in a constant state of change. To accept that it is set in stone for all time does not stand up to even the most simple analysis. Humans have created wonderful tragedies, comedies, songs, poems, paintings, sculptures and countless other expressions of artistic creativity which are a reflection of our changing world view at any given time. Just take a walk through an art, science, or historical museum and you will see the changing consciousness of humanity graphically portrayed. As Marx explained, "the philosophers have interpreted the world in various ways - the point however, is to change it!" Our way of thinking will change with it!

Q. What Will Socialist Society Look Like?

A.. Although no one can provide a blueprint in advance of what such a society would look like, we can say that this form of social ownership and democracy would mean the beginning of the end of the class division of society, and indeed of the social division of labor. The working class having taken power will proceed to radically transform the way the economy and society is run. Socialism is democratic or it is nothing. This refers not to some formal democracy on paper - more accurately bourgeois democracy where you are allowed to vote every few years for a committee (parliament) who then run things in the interests of capitalism - but a democracy where we all play a full and active part not just

in voting but in actually running our communities, our workplaces, and our society. Once the modern economy, industry, science, and technology, is in the hands of all members of society, we will be able to achieve full employment and shorter working hours - giving us the time as well as the resources we need to really begin to realize our talents. We could see the economy forge ahead at 10 or even 20% a year! This would be entirely possible once we have done away with the anarchy of private ownership and the profit motive. Such growth could double the wealth of society in five years!

The reduction of the working day, and an increase in the productivity of society are the prerequisites for the disappearance of the class division of society, and for the birth of socialism. It would be, as Marx put it, a society where everyone contributes according to their abilities and receives according to their needs. Such a society is no utopia but the only alternative to a slow and painful descent into barbarism. But it will not come about automatically even in a million years. Only a socialist revolution, that is, the conscious movement of the working class to take control over their own lives, can effect this change. This requires the building in advance of a trained and educated leadership that can ensure its success. For the last hundred years, at least since World War I, the capitalist system has ceased to play an historically progressive role. It stands like a roadblock in the path of human progress. We cannot wait for its instability to drive us back into the dark ages. There will be many opportunities for us in the coming years. But the success of socialism is not inevitable, it can only be guaranteed in advance by the extent to which we begin preparing for it today.

Q. What about individualism under socialism?

A.. Often, people's idea of individualism under socialism is based on the idea that socialism is represented by either Stalin's Russia or Mao's China. This brings to mind everyone running around in uniform, in terms of both their clothing and their behavior, and an all-powerful state to which the rights and wishes of the individual are subservient, in the "interests of the whole of society". In reality it was not the whole of society whose interests were being served in those cases but the interests of the small bureaucratic clique who led a parasitic existence on the backs of the working class, and on the back of the nationalized, planned economy.

This bureaucratization had a fatal impact on all the gains made by the revolution in Russia, not just economically but in every sphere of life. Bureaucratism has a stifling, suffocating effect not just on production but also on art, science and culture. The Stalinists were terrified of any potential opposition, and especially the intellectuals that they could not control. They were snuffed out, in many cases quite literally. Individual expression was portrayed as counter-revolutionary, even culture was subjugated to the "collective will" - not of society but of a handful of bureaucrats desperate to cling on to their power and privilege. Not just economy but all aspects of life require the oxygen of democracy if they are to flourish.

The capitalist society we live in today is supposedly individualistic, and this is made to sound positive. In reality the profit based society is one that engenders greed, selfishness, and egotism. It is a society based on the idea of "kill or be killed", and under capitalism people will do anything to "get ahead". In the name of profit, the talents and abilities of the vast majority of people are squandered on the production line, or the unemployment line. We don't have the right to a job, the right to an education, the right to healthcare, the rights that could ensure the bare bones of a civilized existence, let alone the right to express ourselves and contribute, to fulfil our potential.

The collective society of genuine socialism is one where the rights of the individual can truly flourish for the first time, without any force or coercion. It will be a society without borders and frontiers, based on the democratic running of all aspects of life by the whole of society on the basis of an economy of super-abundance, where all our needs and more can be catered for. With modern technology we can produce more than enough for all the needs and desires of humanity with relatively minimal effort. For example, it used to take many workers to build a television set. But now, with automation, robotics and other improvements in efficiency, it takes many less workers. But under capitalism, the machines replace the workers, who must then find other, usually lower-paying jobs or be unemployed - wasting their potential away. Under socialism, improvements in technology will be put to the use of humanity. Machines will be made to work for us - the time we save due to their efficiency can then be spent pursuing other goals in life. We will be freed from the drudgery of human labor that is our existence under capitalism, and we will have the time to breathe in life, to study, to travel, to mingle with other cultures, to realize our talents.

The development of our economy, will enable us to spend less time in work, and free us to participate in those fields blocked off from us today either by money or by overwork. Art, science, music, etc. will all be able to blossom once they are unshackled from the constraints of capitalist society. How many Shakespeares or Beethovens have existed to date? Barely a handful. Or rather barely a handful whose talent we've been able to enjoy. How many more have been confined to the factory, the field or the office? Having done away with the outmoded private profit system and the anarchy it introduces into our economy, not only the rights of the individual, of all individuals, but their aspirations and their dreams will be set loose as well. New heights of human culture will be attained, and from those summits on the horizon ever newer peaks will emerge. Standing on the shoulders of all previous experience, men and women will stand head and shoulders above history. With our primitive past behind us, and with a democratic plan on how to use our resources and technology, humanity will be free to develop and realize its true potential as a whole and as individuals.

Q. What do Marxists think about technological innovation?

A. As we have seen, the main area of expansion in the present economic cycle (1991-2000) has been the new information technology. Former Labour secretary Robert R. Reich believes that as much as 70 percent of credit for expansion belongs to computers and the Internet. From a Marxist point of view there is nothing new in all of this. It is already anticipated in the *Communist Manifesto*, never mind *Capital*. The *Manifesto* already explains what is ABC for any Marxist - namely, that the capitalist system, unlike any previous system in history can only exist by constantly revolutionising the means of production.

It has become fashionable to talk about the far-reaching effects of information technology. Clearly these are important developments. But there have been such developments in every economic cycle. We refer here not to the trade cycle as such, but to broader historical periods that have characterised different phases of capitalist development, such as the period of the post-War upswing as opposed to the period between the World Wars, for instance. Even the most superficial examination of the broad cycles of capitalism will reveal that every one of them since the Industrial Revolution has been characterised precisely by investment in new technology, with very far reaching consequences. Steam power was the basis of the Industrial Revolution. It revolutionised

the production of textiles. This was followed by the railways boom in the second half of the 19th century.

In every cycle, the capitalists seek a profitable field of investment. At present this role is being played by IT. The Internet is without doubt an extremely significant and important invention, with enormous consequences particularly for a socialist planned economy in the future. But to argue that it has so modified the productive system that the boom-slump cycle has been eliminated is simply absurd. In every cycle, as we pointed out in *On a Knife's Edge*, there were inventions that were no less revolutionary, and often far more so. The effect of the railways, the steamship and the telegraph was far more revolutionising in linking the world together than the Internet. After the railways we had the motor car ("Fordism"), electricity, energy, chemicals, plastics, radio, television, aeroplanes, radar, nuclear power - all these represented great advances.

All these tremendous and impressive technological advances serve to provide us with a glimpse of what would be possible in a future socialist society. *However, from the fact that technology exists, one cannot deduce that the economic cycle does not exist.* This conclusion does not follow, even from the point of view of formal logic. Seen from a historical perspective it is merely absurd. For example, in the 1920s and 1930s the most staggering technology existed: telephones, electricity, aeroplanes, cars, television and a host of other things, but it could not be developed. Why could it not be developed?

In order for a given technology to be developed, it must be in the interest of that class which has the material power to develop it. This can be shown even in ancient times. The Greeks invented steam power and actually built functioning models of steam engines. But it could not be developed and remained a mere toy and a curiosity. Why? Because the slave economy was based on an apparently unlimited supply of unpaid human labour. Why then should the slave-owners be interested in labour-saving machinery? An analogous situation existed under feudalism, which was based on the bonded labour of the serfs. The feudal landowner also had no interest in investing his surplus on machinery and technology. Why should he when he had at his disposal the labour of the serfs? Only with the advent of capitalism and the industrial revolution does the economy of labour time acquire a crucial importance, and this has been seen at every stage in the development of capitalism for the past 200 years. As Marx explains, capitalism is the only socio-economic system that has ever existed which bases itself on the constant revolutionising of the productive forces.

However, this does not at all mean that the capitalists are interested in investing in technology for its own sake. The bourgeois will invest only insofar as they get a suitable return on their investment, and not one moment longer. At a certain point in the investment cycle, the return on capital is no longer sufficient to warrant further investment. At that point, the capitalists cease to invest and the boom collapses. The mere fact of the existence of technology and productive potential is therefore no guarantee against a crisis. Rather the contrary. It is the uncontrolled flood of investment into new avenues that eventually gives rise to over-investment, over-production, a fall in the rate of profit and ultimately a fall in the mass of profit, leading to a crisis.

Q. If socialism is the next stage of human society, why bother fighting for it?

A. Under capitalism, the material means for creating a socialist society are created, but the capitalist system will never suffer a "final" collapse - it won't go on its own, it needs to be pushed. If it were to continue in existence for any length of time it would lead the whole of humanity back into barbarism. Even today that barbarism is spreading across Africa and parts of Asia. The tragic shootings of students by students is another example of barbarism. During the course of such a decline the working class internationally will be forced into struggle time and time again. If they fail in conquering power, then over their bones the capitalist system will continue, only maintaining any kind of stability through dictatorship, wars and counter revolutions. Eventually if the working class does not succeed in capturing power and creating a democratic, socialist society, the whole of humanity could descend into chaos. Ordinary people like you and me need to get involved to educate others and spread the ideas of genuine Marxism so that when revolutionary opportunities arise, the working class is able to take power as quickly and peacefully as possible.

Q. How can democracy and Socialism exist at the same time?

A. First of all, the idea that Marxism and democracy are opposites is false. The fact is that under capitalism (which is usually referred to as "democracy") there is no real democracy. Yes, you can vote every few years in the presidential and congressional elections. But look at who stands in those elections. Only those who have enough money to do so. Who finances their campaigns? The big corporations. So you do not have a REAL choice. In practice, there is democracy only for the rich and powerful - bourgeois democracy.

More important than that, the government which is elected does not really have much choice of what policies to follow. When the 3 richest people in the US have a combined wealth equal to more than 115 million ordinary Americans, they are the ones who really run the country. With their economic decisions they determine the lives of millions of ordinary people, their job prospects, their access to health care, education, etc. When the interests of these big corporations are threatened they use the government to save them. For example when the democratically elected government of Allende in Chile in 1973 decided to nationalize the copper mines and the telecomms (owned by US companies), these corporations gave millions and the CIA organized a military coup in Chile which replaced the DEMOCRATICALLY elected government of Allende with the military DICTATORSHIP of Pinochet.

A more recent example is the ongoing trade war between Europe and the US over bananas. Leaving aside the issue of who's right and who's wrong, the point is that the interests of banana companies in Central America are threatened. All these companies are US corporations (Chiquita, Del Monte, Fruit Co.) who have decided and chosen the governments in the region for the last 100 years. As they feel their economic interests are threatened, they use the US government to fight against decisions of the European Union. How are they able to do that? Because they have millions of dollars invested in BOTH the Democratic and the Republican parties. Government and political parties are in the last instance a tool of big business and they are the ones who determine the policies which are implemented. These parties do not exist in a vacuum but are directly funded and influenced by the billionaires and corporations. Therefore they do not really act in the name of "law", "truth", or "justice", but in the interests of the hand that feeds them.

Under socialism on the other hand, the economic resources of the country and world would not be in private hands, but in the hands of the majority of the population who would run and control them democratically. This would be a REAL democracy where the people

would have real control over their lives. They would be able to democratically elect their representatives in government, and at the same time these representatives would have real power over the economy, to really change things. These officials would be subject to immediate recall if they did not satisfactorily do the jobs they were elected for. The people would then elect someone else who they thought would do things better. Also, these elected officials would not earn any more than a skilled worker. Unlike today where the "perks" often outweigh the salary of our "elected" officials. This will get rid of careerists and make sure that the people doing the jobs are there because they want to be there, not so they can get extra benefits from the job. These elected officials would also come from all members of society - as Lenin said, "any cook should be able to be prime minister" - it would be a truly people's democracy.

A further complication to this issue is that people generally identify Marxism with the regime which existed in the Soviet Union. As you can see there was no democracy of any kind there. We say that that was NOT socialism. It was Stalinism, that is, a regime where the economy was in the hands of the state, but the citizens had no way of participating in running it. The bureaucratic caste took control over the state apparatus, and used it in their own interests. This had nothing to do with socialism and in fact, in order to come to power Stalin had first to kill hundreds of thousands of socialist and communist militants, including most of the members of the central committee of the Bolshevik Party who organized the Russian Revolution in 1917. But the bottom line is that genuine socialism and genuine Marxism are based on the ultimate democracy - workers' democracy - democracy by and for the vast majority of people. As Leon Trotsky said, "socialism needs democracy like the human body needs oxygen."

Q. How will production be socialized and wealth distributed under socialism?

A. Modern production is already socialized - for example, one person alone cannot build a car from start to finish, or the computer you are typing on. The modern economy is so complex it requires the efforts of millions around the globe in order to put together a final product such as a computer. From the people who get the raw materials, to those who design the hardware. From those who assemble it to those who ship it to your door. It is a collective process. Yet the wealth created by all these workers is not shared equally - the corporations and billionaires keep a very unequal share for themselves (can anyone say 'Bill Gates?').

The modern working class are the ones who really run the factories and businesses on a day to day basis, they are the ones who produce the wealth of society collectively. Yet they do not really share in the reward for their efforts. Sure they may receive a few crumbs in the form of bonuses and minor raises, but this is nothing compared to the 'bonuses' the capitalists get (it is not uncommon for corporate CEOs to get multi-million dollar 'Christmas bonuses!'). What is needed is for this wealth to be distributed among those who actually produce it.

Q. What is the attitude of Marxists to small farmers and business people?

A. From a long historical point of view, the development of large scale farming is obviously progressive. It allows for a greater productivity of labour and thus means that the bulk of the population can be provided with its food needs by a tiny minority of the population. In the USA, only about 2-3% of the working population works on the land. That liberates the overwhelming majority of the population for other productive activity.

Thus, under Socialism we would have a situation where mechanization and large scale farming would be the norm throughout the world. Obviously we would oppose the widespread use of toxic pesticides, and damaging chemical fertilizers, etc., which is a consequence of the profit motive driven capitalist system.

So what do we say to small farmers? In fact, what do we say to all small business people, small shopkeepers, etc.? From a historical point of view these elements are condemned to disappear under capitalism due to the relentless competition of the big farmers, the big supermarkets, etc.

But they still exist in this society and it is our duty to develop a program that would win them to the revolutionary party. Trotsky takes this up in the Transitional Program, and also in other writings. These layers are potential allies of the proletariat and can be won on the basis of a clear program. That means we demand cheap credits for the small farmers and small businessmen. Under capitalism these layers are crushed by the big monopolies and banks. They have to pay big levels of interest on their loans that they take out to develop their business, but end up unable to pay or being limited by the huge amount of their income which is eaten up by the interest. We explain to them that we demand cheap credits to purchase machinery, but also cheap fertilizers, cheap seeds, etc., but that leads us to demand to take over the banks, take over the big monopolies that control the production of fertilizers, seed, etc. In this way we can show the small farmers (and small shopkeepers) that they should unite with the workers against the big capitalists and thus remove them from the influence of the capitalists.

Q. Where is the incentive under Socialism?

A. "Where is the incentive under Socialism?" is a commonly asked question. "If everyone is paid the same wage than where is the incentive for the worker to produce more than he has to or even the quota amount?"

Lenin explains in the "State and Revolution", and Marx explains in "Critique of the Gotha Program", it is impossible to jump straight from capitalism to the most advanced stage of human society - a classless society based on the democratic administration of things in the interests of all. Communism is based on being able to provide more than needed for everyone - and though in the US we could reach that level fairly quickly, it is still not there right now. This is why a transitional period, which we often refer to as socialism, is necessary.

During this time there will still be elements of the old society (some market economy, some armed forces until the whole world is in the democratic hands of the workers, etc.) But already things will be moving rapidly towards the complete dissolution of the state, of the market economy and so on. Once the workers begin to democratically all plan the BIG industries - the ones which dominate our lives - energy, banking, agriculture, pharmaceuticals, etc., then we will be putting the surplus produced by the workers towards improving our lives.

New technology and greater productivity of labor will lead to a decrease in the working day, to more time for study, travel, exploration, research, music, art, culture, etc. Nowadays the incentive to work harder is "work so you can pay your rent, your mortgage, your interest on credit card and school loans, your over-priced food, healthcare, transportation, and entertainment, and so on or STARVE". THAT is the only incentive

capitalism offers us! Why work more efficiently at work if you know you have to be there for 8 hours no matter what?

Under socialism, the incentive to come up with more efficient ways to do things is that we'd have to work less time to do the same amount of work! The amount of NECESSARY labor needed to produce the things we NEED like food, housing, etc. would gradually decrease so that eventually we may only need to "work" for 2 hours a week or less! Of course as humans we would not be lazy and sit around - humans are curious, exploratory, and want to learn, invent, etc. Our "free" time would be spent creating ever better works of art, scientific research, cures for diseases, etc. After a period of time, the new generations will not even know what it was like under capitalism, and the productivity of labor will be tremendously high. The barrier between "work" and raw human exploration and mastery over its environment (in harmony with the environment!) will disappear also - no more coercive state, police, etc. No more chaos in the markets - the workers will plan what we need and then reinvest a portion to continually make even better things. EVERYONE will be "rich" so to speak - able to travel, to live comfortably, to eat what they wish, to continue their education throughout life.

Q. Why is it only the working class which can develop a collective, socialist consciousness?

A. It is precisely the social nature of capitalist production, the collective nature of production, that brings workers together in a common struggle. The working class, unlike the petty bourgeoisie (small business people, small land holders, intellectuals isolated from the masses), develops a collective consciousness and that is precisely why Marxists base themselves on the working class. It is the only class that can develop such a consciousness, precisely because of its position in production. Of course, without organization, as Marx explains, the working class is only raw material for exploitation. That is why the bourgeois constantly attacks the trade unions and labor organizations, hoping to reduce the proletariat to an atomized state. But the whole experience of the class struggle invariably compels the workers to get organized. By contrast, the individualism of the petty bourgeoisie is the result of its role as a class of small producers, small business people, professionals and the like, who are indeed isolated from each other and compete against each other. Even before going into business, as students, they compete against each other in exams. While the working class must certainly draw broad layers of the petty-bourgeoisie behind it by linking their troubles with the fight against capitalism, the petty-bourgeoisie simply cannot play an independent role in the struggle for socialism.

Q. What is the Class Struggle?

As explained by [V.I. Lenin](#).

A. "It is common knowledge that, in any given society, the striving of some of its members conflict with the strivings of others, that social life is full of contradictions, and that history reveals a struggle between nations and societies, as well as within nations and societies, and, besides, an alternation of periods of revolution and reaction, peace and war, stagnation and rapid progress or decline. Marxism has provided the guidance -- i.e., the theory of the class struggle -- for the discovery of the laws governing this seeming maze and chaos. It is only a study of the sum of the strivings of all the members of a given society or group of societies that can lead to a scientific definition of the result of those strivings. Now the conflicting strivings stem from the difference in the position and mode of life of the *classes* into which each society is divided.

"The history of all hitherto existing society is the history of class struggles," Marx wrote in the *Communist Manifesto* (with the exception of the history of the primitive community, Engels added subsequently). "Freeman and slave, patrician and plebeian, lord and serf, guild-master and journeyman, in a word, oppressor and oppressed, stood in constant opposition to one another, carried on an uninterrupted, now hidden, now open fight, a fight that each time ended, either in a revolutionary reconstruction of society at large, or in the common ruin of the contending classes.... The modern bourgeois society that has sprouted from the ruins of feudal society has not done away with class antagonisms. It has but established new classes, new conditions of oppression, new forms of struggle in place of the old ones. Our epoch, the epoch of the bourgeoisie, possesses, however, this distinctive feature: it has simplified class antagonisms. Society as a whole is more and more splitting up into two great hostile camps, into two great classes directly facing each other: Bourgeoisie and Proletariat."

Ever since the Great French Revolution, European history has, in a number of countries, tellingly revealed what actually lies at the bottom of events -- the struggle of classes. The Restoration period in France [12] already produced a number of historians (Thierry, Guizot, Mignet, and Thiers) who, in summing up what was taking place, were obliged to admit that the class struggle was taking place, were obliged to admit that the class struggle was the key to all French history. The modern period -- that of complete victory of the bourgeoisie, representative institutions, extensive (if not universal) suffrage, a cheap daily press that is widely circulated among the masses, etc., a period of powerful and every-expanding unions of workers and unions of employers, etc. -- has shown even more strikingly (though sometimes in a very one-sided, "peaceful", and "constitutional" form) the class struggle as the mainspring of events. The following passage from Marx's *Communist Manifesto* will show us what Marx demanded of social science as regards an objective analysis of the position of each class in modern society, with reference to an analysis of each class's conditions of development:

"Of all the classes that stand face to face with the bourgeoisie today, the proletariat alone is a really revolutionary class. The other classes decay and finally disappear in the face of Modern Industry; the proletariat is its special and essential product. The lower middle class, the small manufacturer, the shopkeeper, the artisan, the peasant, all these fight against the bourgeoisie, to save from extinction their existence as fractions of the middle class. They are therefore not revolutionary, but conservative. Nay more, they are reactionary, for they try to roll back the wheel of history. If by chance they are revolutionary, they are so only in view of their impending transfer into the proletariat; they thus defend not their present, but their future interests; they desert their own standpoint to place themselves at that of the proletariat."

In a number of historical works, Marx gave brilliant and profound examples of materialist historiography, of an analysis of the position of *each* individual class, and sometimes of various groups or strata within a class, showing plainly why and how "every class struggle is a political struggle." The above-quoted passage is an illustration of what a complex network of social relations and *transitional* stages from one class to another, from the past to the future, was analyzed by Marx so as to determine the resultant of historical development.

Marx's economic doctrine is the most profound, comprehensive and detailed confirmation and application of his theory.

Q. What is Dialectics?

As explained by [V.I. Lenin](#).

A. As the most comprehensive and profound doctrine of development, and the richest in content, Hegelian dialectics was considered by Marx and Engels the greatest achievement of classical German philosophy. They thought that any other formulation of the principle of development, of evolution, was one-sided and poor in content, and could only distort and mutilate the actual course of development (which often proceeds by leaps, and via catastrophes and revolutions) in Nature and in society.

"Marx and I were pretty well the only people to rescue conscious dialectics [from the destruction of idealism, including Hegelianism] and apply it in the materialist conception of Nature.... Nature is the proof of dialectics, and it must be said for modern natural science that it has furnished extremely rich [this was written before the discovery of radium, electrons, the transmutation of elements, etc.!] and daily increasing materials for this test, and has thus proved that in the last analysis Nature's process is dialectical and not metaphysical.

"The great basic thought," Engels writes, "that the world is not to be comprehended as a complex of ready-made things, but as a complex of processes, in which the things apparently stable no less than their mind images in our heads, the concepts, go through an uninterrupted change of coming into being and passing away... this great fundamental thought has, especially since the time of Hegel, so thoroughly permeated ordinary consciousness that in this generality it is now scarcely ever contradicted. But to acknowledge this fundamental thought in words and to apply it in reality in detail to each domain of investigation are two different things.... For dialectical philosophy nothing is final, absolute, sacred. It reveals the transitory character of everything and in everything; nothing can endure before it except the uninterrupted process of becoming and of passing away, of endless ascendancy from the lower to the higher. And dialectical philosophy itself is nothing more than the mere reflection of this process in the thinking brain." Thus, according to Marx, dialectics is "the science of the general laws of motion, both of the external world and of human thought."

This revolutionary aspect of Hegel's philosophy was adopted and developed by Marx. Dialectical materialism "does not need any philosophy standing above the other sciences." From previous philosophy there remains "the science of thought and its laws -- formal logic and dialectics." Dialectics, as understood by Marx, and also in conformity with Hegel, includes what is now called the theory of knowledge, or epistemology, studying and generalizing the original and development of knowledge, the transition from *non-knowledge* to knowledge.

In our times, the idea of development, of evolution, has almost completely penetrated social consciousness, only in other ways, and not through Hegelian philosophy. Still, this idea, as formulated by Marx and Engels on the basis of Hegel's philosophy, is far more comprehensive and far richer in content than the current idea of evolution is. A development that repeats, as it were, stages that have already been passed, but repeats them in a different way, on a higher basis ("the negation of the negation"), a development, so to speak, that proceeds in spirals, not in a straight line; a development by leaps, catastrophes, and revolutions; "breaks in continuity"; the transformation of quantity into quality; inner impulses towards development, imparted by the contradiction and conflict of the various forces and tendencies acting on a given body, or within a given phenomenon, or within a given society; the interdependence and the closest and

indissoluble connection between *all* aspects of any phenomenon (history constantly revealing ever new aspects), a connection that provides a uniform, and universal process of motion, one that follows definite laws -- these are some of the features of dialectics as a doctrine of development that is richer than the conventional one. (See Marx's letter to Engels of January 8, 1868, in which he ridicules Stein's "wooden trichotomies," which it would be absurd to confuse with materialist dialectics.)

Q. What is Philosophical Materialism?

As explained by [V.I. Lenin](#).

A. Beginning with the years 1844-45, when his views took shape, Marx was a materialist and especially a follower of Ludwig Feuerbach, whose weak point he subsequently saw only in his materialism being insufficiently consistent and comprehensive. To Marx, Feuerbach's historic and "epoch-making" significance lay in his having resolutely broken with Hegel's idealism and in his proclamation of materialism, which already "in the 18th century, particularly French materialism, was not only a struggle against the existing political institutions and against... religion and theology, but also... against all metaphysics" (in the sense of "drunken speculation" as distinct from "sober philosophy"). (*The Holy Family*, in *Literarischer Nachlass*)

"To Hegel...," wrote Marx, "the process of thinking, which, under the name of 'the Idea', he even transforms into an independent subject, is the demiurgos (the creator, the maker) of the real world.... With me, on the contrary, the ideal is nothing else than the material world reflected by the human mind, and translated into forms of thought." (*Capital*, Vol. I, Afterward to the Second Edition.) In full conformity with this materialist philosophy of Marx's, and expounding it, Frederick Engels wrote in *Anti-Duhring* (read by Marx in the manuscript):

"The real unity of the world consists in its materiality, and this is proved... by a long and wearisome development of philosophy and natural science...."

"Motion is the mode of existence of matter. Never anywhere has there been matter without motion, or motion without matter, nor can there be.... But if the... question is raised: what thought and consciousness really are, and where they come from; it becomes apparent that they are products of the human brain and that man himself is a product of Nature, which has developed in and along with its environment; hence it is self-evident that the products of the human brain, being in the last analysis also products of Nature, do not contradict the rest of Nature's interconnections but are in correspondence with them...."

"Hegel was an idealist, that is to say, the thoughts within his mind were to him not the more or less abstract images [*Abbilder*, reflections; Engels sometimes speaks of "imprints"] of real things and processes, but on the contrary, things and their development were to him only the images, made real, of the 'Idea' existing somewhere or other before the world existed."

In his *Ludwig Feuerbach* -- which expounded his own and Marx's views on Feuerbach's philosophy, and was sent to the printers after he had re-read an old manuscript Marx and himself had written in 1844-45 on Hegel, Feuerbach and the materialist conception of history -- Engels wrote:

"The great basic question of all philosophy, especially of more recent philosophy, is the relation of thinking and being... spirit to Nature... which is primary, spirit or Nature.... The answers which the philosophers gave to this question split them into two great camps. Those who asserted the primary of spirit to Nature and, therefore, in the last instance, assumed world creation in some form or other... comprised the camp of idealism. The others, who regarded Nature as primary, belonged to the various schools of materialism."

Any other use of the concepts of (philosophical) idealism and materialism leads only to confusion. Marx decidedly rejected, not only idealism, which is always linked in one way or another with religion, but also the views -- especially widespread in our day -- of Hume and Kant, agnosticism, criticism, and positivism in their various forms; he considered that philosophy a "reactionary" concession to idealism, and at best a "shame-faced way of surreptitiously accepting materialism, while denying it before the world." On this question, see, besides the works by Engels and Marx mentioned above, a letter Marx wrote to Engels on December 12, 1868, in which, referring to an utterance by the naturalist Thomas Huxley, which was "more materialistic" than usual,, and to his recognition that "as long as we actually observe and think, we cannot possibly get away from materialism", Marx reproached Huxley for leaving a "loop hole" for agnosticism, for Humism.

It is particularly important to note Marx's view on the relation between freedom and necessity: "Freedom is the appreciation of necessity. 'Necessity is blind only insofar as it is not understood.'" (Engels in *Anti-Duhring*) This means recognition of the rule of objective laws in Nature and of the dialectical transformation of necessity into freedom (in the same manner as the transformation of the uncognized but cognizable "thing-in-itself" into the "thing-for-us", of the "essence of things" into "phenomena). Marx and Engels considered that the "old" materialism, including that of Feuerbach (and still more the "vulgar" materialism of Buchner, Vogt and Moleschott), contained the following major shortcomings:

1. This materialism was "predominantly mechanical," failing to take account of the latest developments in chemistry and biology (today it would be necessary to add: and in the electrical theory of matter);
2. The old materialism was non-historical and non-dialectical (metaphysical, in the meaning of anti-dialectical), and did not adhere consistently and comprehensively to the standpoint of development;
3. It regarded the "human essence" in the abstract, not as the "complex of all" (concretely and historically determined) "social relations", and therefore morely "interpreted" the world, whereas it was a question of "changing" it, i.e., it did not understand the importance of "revolutionary practical activity".

Q. What is Alienation?

A. The basis of alienation under capitalism is the alienation of the worker from the product of his labour and the mystification of capitalist exploitation that tries to hide the real relation between wage labour and capital. Out of this hidden exploitation arises the fetishism of commodities whereby things (commodities) take on the attributes of living beings and humans are degraded to the level of "things". These distorted, mystified ("alienated") relations sink deep into human consciousness and are then regarded as something natural and inevitable. Thus, in the English language, workers are referred to as "hands", wa we often refer to a man as being "worth a billion dollars". But the basis of this alienation is to be found in the relations of production and in property relations, which is merely a legal expression for the same thing. This is explained in the very profound and

dialectical chapter in the first volume of *Capital* "On the Fetishism of commodities, and the Secret Thereof".

Q. What is the Materialist Conception of History?

As explained by [V.I. Lenin](#).

A. A realization of the inconsistency, incompleteness, and oneness of the old materialism convinced Marx of the necessity of "bringing the science of society... into harmony with the materialist foundation, and of reconstructing it thereupon." Since materialism in general explains consciousness as the outcome of being, and not conversely, then materialism as applied to the social life of mankind has to explain *social* consciousness as the outcome of *social* being. "Technology," Marx writes (*Capital*, Vol. I), "discloses man's mode of dealing with Nature, the immediate process of production by which he sustains his life, and thereby also lays bare the mode of formation of his social relations, and of the mental conceptions that flow from them." In the preface to his *Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*, Marx gives an integral formulation of the fundamental principles of materialism as applied to human society and its history, in the following words:

"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 of society, the real foundation, on which rises a legal and political superstructure and to which correspond definite forms of social consciousness. The mode of production of material life conditions the social, political and intellectual life process in general. It is not the consciousness of men that determines their being, but, on the contrary, their social being that determines their consciousness. At a certain stage of their development, the material productive forces of society come in 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 have been at work hitherto. From forms of development of the productive forces these relations turn into their fetters. Then begins an epoch of social revolution. With the change of the economic foundation the entire immense superstructure is more or less rapidly transformed. In considering such transformations a distinction should always be made between the material transformation of the economic conditions of production, which can be determined with the precision of natural science, and the legal, political, religious, aesthetic or philosophic -- in short, ideological forms in which men become conscious of this conflict and fight it out.

"Just as our opinion of an individual is not based on what he thinks of himself, so we cannot judge of such a period of transformation by its own consciousness; on the contrary, this consciousness must be explained rather from the contradictions of material life, from the existing conflict between the social productive forces and the relations of production.... In broad outlines, Asiatic, ancient, feudal, and modern bourgeois modes of production can be designated as progressive epochs in the economic formation of society." [See Marx's brief formulation in a letter to Engels dated July 7, 1866: "Our theory that the organization of labor is determined by the means of production."]

The discovery of the materialist conception of history, or more correctly, the consistent continuation and extension of materialism into the domain of social phenomena, removed the two chief shortcomings in earlier historical theories. In the first place, the latter at

best examined only the ideological motives in the historical activities of human beings, without investigating the origins of those motives, or ascertaining the objective laws governing the development of the system of social relations, or seeing the roots of these relations in the degree of development reached by material production; in the second place, the earlier theories did not embrace the activities of the *masses* of the population, whereas historical materialism made it possible for the first time to study with scientific accuracy the social conditions of the life of the masses, and the changes in those conditions. *At best*, pre-Marxist "sociology" and historiography brought forth an accumulation of raw facts, collected at random, and a description of individual aspects of the historical process. By examining the *totality* of opposing tendencies, by reducing them to precisely definable conditions of life and production of the various *classes* of individual aspects of the historical process. By examining the choice of a particular "dominant" idea or in its interpretation, and by revealing that, without exception, all ideas and all the various tendencies *stem* from the condition of the material forces of production, Marxism indicated the way to an all-embracing and comprehensive study of the process of the rise, development, and decline of socio-economic systems. People make their own history but what determines the motives of people, of the mass of people -- i.e., what is the sum total of all these clashes in the mass of human societies? What are the objective conditions of production of material life that form the basis of all man's historical activity? What is the law of development of these conditions? To all these Marx drew attention and indicated the way to a scientific study of history as a single process which, with all its immense variety and contradictoriness, is governed by definite laws.

Q. What is the Role of the Individual in History?

As explained by [V.I. Lenin](#).

A. Marxism does not at all deny the importance of the role of the individual in history, but only explains that the role played by individuals or parties is circumscribed by the given level of historical development, by the objective social environment which, in the last analysis, is determined by the development of the productive forces. This does not mean - as has been alleged by the critics of Marxism - that men and women are merely puppets of the blind workings of "economic determinism". Marx and Engels explained that men and women make their own history, but they do not do so as completely free agents, but have to work on the basis of the kind of society that they find in existence. The personal qualities of political figures - their theoretical preparation, skill, courage and determination can determine the outcome in a given situation. There are critical moments in human history when the quality of the leadership can be the decisive factor that tips the balance one way or another. Such periods are not the norm, but only arise when all the hidden contradictions have slowly matured over a long period to the point when, in the language of dialectics, quantity is changed into quality. Although individuals cannot determine the development of society by the force of the will alone, yet the role of the subjective factor is ultimately decisive in human history.

Q. What Was Marx's View on the Tactics of the Class Struggle of the Proletariat?

As explained by [V.I. Lenin](#).

A. After examining, as early as 1844-45, one of the main shortcomings in the earlier materialism -- namely, its inability to understand the conditions or appreciate the importance of practical revolutionary activity -- Marx, along with his theoretical work, devoted unremitting attention, throughout his lifetime, to the tactical problems of the proletariat's class struggle. An immense amount of material bearing on this is contained in *all* the works of Marx, particularly in the four volumes of his correspondence with Engels,

published in 1913. This material is still far from having been brought together, collected, examined and studied. We shall therefore have to confine ourselves here to the most general and brief remarks, emphasizing that Marx justly considered that, without *this* aspect, materialism is incomplete, onesided, and lifeless. The fundamental task of proletarian tactics was defined by Marx in strict conformity with all the postulates of his materialist-dialectical *Weltanschauung*. Only an objective consideration of the sum total of the relations between absolutely all the classes in a given society, and consequently a consideration of the objective stage of development reached by that society and of the relations between it and other societies, can serve as a basis for the correct tactics of an advanced class. At the same time, all classes and all countries are regarded, not statistically, but dynamically -- i.e., not in a state of immobility -- but in motion (whose laws are determined by the economic conditions of existence of each class). Motion, in its turn, is regarded from the standpoint, not only of the past, but also of the future, and that not in the vulgar sense it is understood in by the "evolutionists", who see only slow changes, but dialectically: "... in developments of such magnitude 20 years are no more than a day," Marx wrote to Engels, "thought later on there may come days in which 20 years are embodied" At each stage of development, at each moment, proletarian tactics must take account of this objectively inevitable dialectics of human history, on the one hand, utilizing the periods of political stagnation or of sluggish, so-called "peaceful" development in order to develop the class-consciousness, strength and militancy of the advanced class, and, on the other hand, directing all the work of this utilization towards the "ultimate aim" of that class's advance, towards creating in it the ability to find practical solutions for great tasks in the great days, in which "20 years are embodied". Two of Marx's arguments are of special importance in this connection: one of these is contained in *The Poverty of Philosophy*, and concerns the economic struggle and economic organizations of the proletariat; the other is contained in the *Communist Manifesto* and concerns the asks of the proletariat. The former runs as follows:

"Large-scale industry concentrates in one place a crowd of people unknown to one another. Competition divides their interests. But the maintenance of wages, this common interest which they have against their boss, unites them in a common thought of resistance -- combination.... Combinations, at first isolated, constitute themselves into groups... and in face of always united capital, the maintenance of the association becomes more necessary to them [i.e., the workers] than that of wages.... In this struggle -- a veritable civil war -- all the elements necessary for coming battle unite and develop. Once it has reached this point, association takes on a political character. (Marx, *The Poverty of Philosophy*, 1847) Here we have the programme and tactics of the economic struggle and of the trade union movement for several decades to come, for all the lengthy period in which the proletariat will prepare its forces for the "coming battle." All this should be compared with numerous references by Marx and Engels to the example of the British labor movement, showing how industrial "property" leads to attempts "to buy the proletariat to divert them from the struggle; how this prosperity in general "demoralizes the workers"; how the British becomes "bourgeoisified" -- "this most bourgeois of all nations is apparently aiming ultimately at the possession of a bourgeois aristocracy and a bourgeois proletariat alongside the bourgeoisie"; how its "revolutionary energy" oozes away how it will be necessary to wait for a more or less lengthy space of time before "the British workers will free themselves from their apparent bourgeois infection" how the British labor movement "lacks the mettle of the Chartists how the British workers' leaders are becoming a type midway between "a radical bourgeois and a worker" (in reference to Holyoak, Vol. 4, p.209); how, owing to Britain's monopoly, and as long as that monopoly lasts, "the British workingman will not budge" The tactics of the economic struggle, in connection with the general course (*and outcome*) of the working-class movement, are considered here from a remarkably broad, comprehensive, dialectical, and genuinely revolutionary standpoint.

The *Communist Manifesto* advanced a fundamental Marxist principle on the tactics of the political struggle:

"The Communists fight for the attainment of the immediate aims, for the enforcement of the momentary interests of the working class; but in the movement of the present, they also represent and take care of the future of that movement." That was why, in 1848, Marx supported the party of the "agrarian revolution" in Poland, "that party which brought about the Krakow insurrection in 1846." In Germany, Marx, in 1848 and 1849, supported the extreme revolutionary democrats, and subsequently never retracted what he had then said about tactics. He regarded the German bourgeoisie as an element which was "inclined from the very beginning to betray the people" (only an alliance with the peasantry could have enabled the bourgeoisie to completely achieve its aims) "and compromise with the crowned representatives of the old society." Here is Marx's summing-up of the German bourgeois-democratic revolution -- an analysis which, incidentally, is a sample of a materialism that examines society in motion, and, moreover, not only from the aspect of a motion that is *backward*:

"Without faith in itself, without faith in the people, grumbling at those above, trembling before those below... intimidated by the world storm... no energy in any respect, plagiarism in every respect... without initiative... an execrable old man who saw himself doomed to guide and deflect the first youthful impulses of a robust people in his own senile interests..." (*Neue Rheinische Zeitung*, 1848; see *Literarischer Nachlass*, Vol. 3, p.212.)

About 20 years later, Marx declared, in a letter to Engels (*Briefwechsel*, Vol. 3, p.224), that the Revolution of 1848 had failed because the bourgeoisie had preferred peace with slavery to the mere prospect of a fight for freedom. When the revolutionary period of 1848-49 ended, Marx opposed any attempt to play at revolution (his struggle against Schapper and Willich), and insisted on the ability to work in a new phase, which in a quasi-"peaceful" way was preparing new revolutions. The spirit in which Marx wanted this work to be conducted is to be seen in his appraisal of the situation in Germany in 1856, the darkest period of reaction: "The whole thing in Germany will depend on the possibility of backing the proletarian revolution by some second edition of the Peasant War" (*Briefwechsel*, Vol. 2, p.108). While the democratic (bourgeois) revolution in Germany was uncompleted, Marx focused every attention, in the tactics of the socialist proletariat, on developing the democratic energy of the peasantry. He held that Lassalle's attitude was "objectively... a betrayal of the whole workers' movement to Prussia" (Vol. 3, p.210), incidentally because Lassalle was tolerant of the Junkers and Prussian nationalism.

"In a predominantly agricultural country," Engels wrote in 1865, in exchanging views with Marx on their forthcoming joint declaration in the press, "... it is dastardly to make an exclusive attack on the bourgeoisie in the name of the industrial proletariat but never to devote a word to the patriarchal exploitation of the rural proletariat under the lash of the great feudal aristocracy" (Vol. 3, p.217).

From 1864 to 1870, when the period of the consummation of the bourgeois-democratic revolution in Germany was coming to an end, a period in which the Prussian and Austrian exploiting classes were struggling to complete that revolution in one way or another *from above*, Marx not only rebuked Lassalle, who was coquetting with Bismarck, but also corrected Liebknecht, who had lapsed into Austrophilism" and a defense of particularism; Marx demanded revolutionary tactics which would combat with equal ruthlessness both Bismarck and the Austrophiles, tactics which would not be adapted to the "victor" -- the

Prussian Junkers -- but would immediately renew the revolutionary struggle against him *despite the conditions* created by the Prussian military victories (*Briefwechsel*, Vol. 3, pp. 134, 136, 147, 179, 204, 210, 215, 418, 437, 440-41). In the celebrated Address of the International of September 9 1870, Marx warned the French proletariat against an untimely uprising, but when an uprising nevertheless took place (1871), Marx enthusiastically hailed the revolutionary initiative of the masses, who were "storming heaven".

Q. What was Marx's view on the inevitability of Socialism?

A. From the foregoing, it is evident that Marx deduces the inevitability of the transformation of capitalist society into socialist society and wholly and exclusively from the economic law of the development of contemporary society. The socialization of labor, which is advancing ever more rapidly in thousands of forms and has manifested itself very strikingly, during the half-century since the death of Marx, in the growth of large-scale production, capitalist cartels, syndicates and trusts, as well as in the gigantic increase in the dimensions and power of finance capital, provides the principal material foundation for the inevitable advent of socialism. The intellectual and moral motive force and the physical executor of this transformation is the proletariat, which has been trained by capitalism itself. The proletariat's struggle against the bourgeoisie, which finds expression in a variety of forms ever richer in content, inevitably becomes a political struggle directed towards the conquest of political power by the proletariat ("the dictatorship of the proletariat"). The socialization of production cannot but lead to the means of production becoming the property of society, to the "expropriation of the expropriators." A tremendous rise in labor productivity, a shorter working day, and the replacement of the remnants, the ruins, of small-scale, primitive and disunited production by collective and improved labor -- such are the direct consequences of this transformation. Capitalism breaks for all time the ties between agriculture and industry, but at the same time, through its highest developed, it prepares new elements of those ties, a union between industry and agriculture based on the conscious application of science and the concentration of collective labor, and on a redistribution of the human population (thus putting an end both to rural backwardness, isolation and barbarism, and to the unnatural concentration of vast masses of people in big cities). A new form of family, new conditions in the status of women and in the upbringing of the younger generation are prepared by the highest forms of present-day capitalism: the labor of women and children and the break-up of the patriarchal family by capitalism inevitably assume the most terrible, disastrous, and repulsive forms in modern society. Nevertheless,

"modern industry, by assigning as it does, an important part in the socially organized process of production, outside the domestic sphere, to women, to young persons, and to children of both sexes, creates a new economic foundation for a higher form of the family and of the relations between the sexes. It is, of course, just as absurd to hold the Teutonic-Christian form of the family to be absolute and final as it would be to apply that character to the ancient Roman, the ancient Greek, or the Eastern forms which, moreover, taken together form a series in historic development. Moreover, it is obvious that the fact of the collective working group being composed of individuals of both sexes and all ages, must necessarily, under suitable conditions, become a source of human development; although in its spontaneously developed, brutal, capitalistic form, where the laborer exists for the process of production, and not the process of production for the laborer, that fact is a pestiferous source of corruption and slavery." (*Capital*, Vol. I, end of Chapter 13)

The factory system contains "the germ of the education of the future, an education that will, in the ease of every child over a given age, combine productive labor with instruction and gymnastics, not only as one of the methods of adding to the efficiency of social production, but as the only method of producing fully developed human beings." (*ibid*)

Marx's socialism places the problems of nationality and of the state on the same historical footing, not only in the sense of explaining the past but also in the sense of a bold forecast of the future and of bold practical action for its achievement. Nations are an inevitable product, an inevitable form, in the bourgeois epoch of social development. The working class could not grow strong, become mature and take shape without "constituting itself within the nation," without being "national" ("though not in the bourgeois sense of the word"). The development of capitalism, however, breaks down national barriers more and more, does away with national seclusion, and substitutes class antagonisms for national antagonism. It is, therefore, perfectly true of the developed capitalist countries that "the workmen have no country" and that "united action" by the workers, of the civilized countries at least, "is one of the first conditions for the emancipation of the proletariat" (*Communist Manifesto*) That state, which is organized coercion, inevitably came into being at a definite stage in the development of society, when the latter had split into irreconcilable classes, and could not exist without an "authority" ostensibly standing above society, and to a certain degree separate from society. Arising out of class contradictions, the state becomes "... the state of the most powerful, economically dominant class, which, through the medium of the state, becomes also the politically dominant class, and thus acquires new means of holding down and exploiting the oppressed class. Thus, the state of antiquity was above all the state of the slave-owners for the purpose of holding down the slaves, as the feudal state was the organ of the nobility for holding down the peasant serfs and bondsmen, and the modern representative state is an instrument of exploitation of wage labor by capital." (Engels, *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State*, a work in which the writer expounds his own views and Marx's.) Even the democratic republic, the freest and most progressive form of the bourgeois state, does not eliminate this fact in any way, but merely modifies its form (the links between government and the stock exchange, the corruption -- direct and indirect -- of officialdom and the press, etc.). By leading to the abolition of classes, socialism will thereby lead to the abolition of the state as well. "The first act," Engels writes in *Anti-Duhring* "by virtue of which the state really constitutes itself the representative of society as a whole -- the taking possession of the means of production in the name of society -- is, at the same time, its last independent act as a state. The state interference in social relations becomes superfluous in one sphere after another, and then ceases of itself. The government of persons is replaced by the administration of things and by the direction of the processes of production. The state is not 'abolished,' it withers away." (*Anti-Duhring*)

"The society that will organize production on the basis of a free and equal association of the producers will put the whole machinery of state where it will then belong: into the Museum of Antiquities, by the side of the spinning wheel and the bronze axe." (Engels, *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State*) Finally, as regards the attitude of Marx's socialism towards the small peasantry, which will continue to exist in the period of the expropriation of the expropriators, we must refer to a declaration made by Engels, which expresses Marx's views:

"... when we are in possession of state power we shall not even think of forcibly expropriating the small peasants (regardless of whether with or without compensation), as we shall have to do in the case of the big landowners. Our task relative to the small peasant consists, in the first place, in effecting a transition of his private enterprise and

private possession to co-operative ones, not forcibly but by dint of example and the proffer of social assistance for this purpose. And then of course we shall have ample means of showing to the small peasant prospective advantages that must be obvious to him even today." (Engels *The Peasant Question in France and Germany*, published by Alexeyeva; there are errors in the Russian translation. Original in *Die Neue Zeit*.)

Q. What is Trotsky's Theory of the Permanent Revolution?

A. The theory of the permanent revolution was first developed by Trotsky as early as 1904. The permanent revolution, while accepting that the objective tasks facing the Russian workers were those of the bourgeois democratic revolution, nevertheless explained how in a backward country in the epoch of imperialism, the "national bourgeoisie" was inseparably linked to the remains of feudalism on the one hand and to imperialist capital on the other and was therefore completely unable to carry through any of its historical tasks. The rottenness of the bourgeois liberals, and their counterrevolutionary role in the bourgeois-democratic revolution, was already observed by Marx and Engels. In his article *The Bourgeoisie and the Counter-revolution (1848)*, Marx writes:

"The German bourgeoisie has developed so slothfully, cravenly and slowly that at the moment when it menacingly faced feudalism and absolutism it saw itself menacingly faced by the proletariat and all factions of the burgers whose interests and ideas were akin to those of the proletariat. And it saw inimically arrayed not only a class behind it but all Europe before it. The Prussian bourgeoisie was not, as the French of 1789 had been, the class which represented the whole of modern society vis-a-vis the representatives of the old society, the monarchy and the nobility. It had sunk to the level of a kind of social estate, as distinctly opposed to the crown as to the people, eager to be in the opposition to both, irresolute against each of its opponents, taken severally, because it always saw both of them before or behind it; inclined to betray the people and compromise with the crowned representative of the old society because it itself already belonged to the old society; ". (K. Marx, *The Bourgeoisie and the Counter-revolution*, in MESW, vol. 1, p. 140-1.)

The bourgeoisie, Marx explains, did not come to power as a result of its own revolutionary exertions, but as a result of the movement of the masses in which it played no role: "The Prussian bourgeoisie was hurled to the height of state power, however not in the manner it had desired, by a peaceful bargain with the crown but by a revolution". (K. Marx, *The Bourgeoisie and the Counter-revolution*, MESW, vol. 1, p. 138.)

Even in the epoch of the bourgeois-democratic revolution in Europe, Marx and Engels mercilessly unmasked the cowardly, counterrevolutionary role of the bourgeoisie, and emphasised the need for the workers to maintain a policy of complete class independence, not only from the bourgeois liberals, but also from the vacillating petty bourgeois democrats:

"The proletarian, or really revolutionary party," wrote Engels, "succeeded only very gradually in withdrawing the mass of the working people from the influence of the democrats whose tail they formed in the beginning of the revolution. But in due time the indecision weakness and cowardice of the democratic leaders did the rest, and it may now be said to be one of the principal results of the last years' convulsions, that wherever the working class is concentrated in anything like considerable masses, they are entirely freed

from that democratic influence which led them into an endless series of blunders and misfortunes during 1848 and 1849." (F. Engels, *Revolution and Counter-revolution in Germany*, MESW, vol. 1, p. 332.)

The situation is clearer still today. The national bourgeoisie in the colonial countries entered into the scene of history too late, when the world had already been divided up between a few imperialist powers. It was not able to play any progressive role and was born completely subordinated to its former colonial masters. The weak and degenerate bourgeoisie in Asia, Latin America and Africa is too dependent on foreign capital and imperialism, to carry society forward. It is tied with a thousand threads, not only to foreign capital, but with the class of landowners, with which it forms a reactionary bloc that represents a bulwark against progress. Whatever differences may exist between these elements are insignificant in comparison with the fear that unites them against the masses. Only the proletariat, allied with the poor peasants and urban poor, can solve the problems of society by taking power into its own hands, expropriating the imperialists and the bourgeoisie, and beginning the task of transforming society on socialist lines.

By setting itself at the head of the nation, leading the oppressed layers of society (urban and rural petty-bourgeoisie), the proletariat could take power and then carry through the tasks of the bourgeois-democratic revolution (mainly the land reform and the unification and liberation of the country from foreign domination). However, once having come to power, the proletariat would not stop there but would start to implement socialist measures of expropriation of the capitalists. And as these tasks cannot be solved in one country alone, especially not in a backward country, this would be the beginning of the world revolution. Thus the revolution is "permanent" in two senses: because it starts with the bourgeois tasks and continues with the socialist ones, and because it starts in one country and continues at an international level.

The theory of the permanent revolution was the most complete answer to the reformist and class collaborationist position of the right wing of the Russian workers' movement, the Mensheviks. The two stage theory was developed by the Mensheviks as their perspective for the Russian revolution. It basically states that, since the tasks of the revolution are those of the national democratic bourgeois revolution, the leadership of the revolution must be taken by the national democratic bourgeoisie. For his part, Lenin agreed with Trotsky that the Russian Liberals could not carry out the bourgeois-democratic revolution, and that this task could only be carried out by the proletariat in alliance with the poor peasantry. Following in the footsteps of Marx, who had described the bourgeois "democratic party" as "far more dangerous to the workers than the previous liberals", Lenin explained that the Russian bourgeoisie, far from being an ally of the workers, would inevitably side with the counter-revolution.

"The bourgeoisie in the mass" he wrote in 1905, "will inevitably turn towards the counter-revolution, and against the people as soon as its narrow, selfish interests are met, as soon as it 'recoils' from consistent democracy (and it is already recoiling from it!). (Lenin, *Collected Works*, vol. 9, p. 98.)

What class, in Lenin's view, could lead the bourgeois-democratic revolution? "There remains 'the people', that is, the proletariat and the peasantry. The proletariat alone can be relied on to march on to the end, for it goes far beyond the democratic revolution. That is why the proletariat fights in the forefront for a republic and contemptuously rejects stupid and unworthy advice to take into account the possibility of the bourgeoisie recoiling" (*Ibid.*)

In all of Lenin's speeches and writings, the counter-revolutionary role of the bourgeois-democratic Liberals is stressed time and time again. However, up until 1917, he did not believe that the Russian workers would come to power before the socialist revolution in the West--a perspective that only Trotsky defended before 1917, when it was fully adopted by Lenin in his April theses. The correctness of the permanent revolution was triumphantly demonstrated by the October Revolution itself. The Russian working class--as Trotsky had predicted in 1904--came to power before the workers of Western Europe. They carried out all the tasks of the bourgeois-democratic revolution, and immediately set about nationalising industry and passing over to the tasks of the socialist revolution. The bourgeoisie played an openly counterrevolutionary role, but was defeated by the workers in alliance with the poor peasants. The Bolsheviks then made a revolutionary appeal to the workers of the world to follow their example. Lenin knew very well that without the victory of the revolution in the advanced capitalist countries, especially Germany, the revolution could not survive isolated, especially in a backward country like Russia. What happened subsequently showed that this was absolutely correct. The setting up of the Third (Communist) International, the world party of socialist revolution, was the concrete manifestation of this perspective.

Had the Communist International remained firm on the positions of Lenin and Trotsky, the victory of the world revolution would have been ensured. Unfortunately, the Comintern's formative years coincided with the Stalinist counter-revolution in Russia, which had a disastrous effect on the Communist Parties of the entire world. The Stalinist bureaucracy, having acquired control in the Soviet Union developed a very conservative outlook. The theory that socialism can be built in one country--an abomination from the standpoint of Marx and Lenin--really reflected the mentality of the bureaucracy which had had enough of the storm and stress of revolution and sought to get on with the task of "building socialism in Russia". That is to say, they wanted to protect and expand their privileges and not "waste" the resources of the country in pursuing world revolution. On the other hand they feared that revolution in other countries could develop on healthy lines and pose a threat to their own domination in Russia, and therefore, at a certain stage, sought actively to prevent revolution elsewhere.

Instead of pursuing a revolutionary policy based on class independence, as Lenin had always advocated, they proposed an alliance of the Communist Parties with the "national progressive bourgeoisie" (and if there was not one easily at hand, they were quite prepared to invent it) to carry through the democratic revolution, and afterwards, later on, in the far distant future, when the country had developed a fully fledged capitalist economy, fight for socialism. This policy represented a complete break with Leninism and a return to the old discredited position of Menshevism--the theory of the "two stages".

Q. What are the elements required for proletarian (workers') democracy?

A. Socialism is democratic or it is nothing. From the very first day of the socialist revolution, there must be the most democratic regime, a regime that will mean that, for the first time, all the tasks of running industry, society and the state will be in the hands of the majority of society, the working class. Through their democratically-elected committees (the soviets), directly elected at the workplace and subject to recall at any moment, the workers will be the masters of society not just in name but in fact. This was the position in Russia after the October revolution. Let us recall that Lenin laid down four basic conditions for a workers' state--that is, for the transitional period between capitalism and socialism:

1. Free and democratic elections with right of recall of all officials.
2. No official must receive a higher wage than a skilled worker.
3. No standing army but the armed people.
4. Gradually, all the tasks of running the state should be carried out by the masses on a rotating basis. When everybody is a bureaucrat in turn, nobody is a bureaucrat. Or, as Lenin put it, "Any cook should be able to be prime minister."

Q. What Do Marxists Think About Terrorism?

A. Marxism has always waged a struggle against the methods of individual terrorism (hijackings, bombings) as well as against state terrorism (the imperialist bombing of Iraq, Yugoslavia, etc.). Acts of individual terror do little but alienate the mass of the people from the cause you are supposed to be promoting. Bombing a market place where women and children are killed does not make the average working Joe too sympathetic to your cause. Our power and strength are in our numbers, not in individual acts.

While we can all certainly sympathize with people being frustrated by the oppressive conditions they live under, these methods have nothing in common with Marxism, and have historically proven to be impotent at bringing about any serious change. Take for example the terrorist acts of the PLO in Israel/Palestine in the last decades. These bombings and hijacking did nothing for promoting working class unity between Jews and Arabs against their common oppressor - the ruling class which keeps them divided in order to continue to oppress them. The ruling classes in the Middle East do not want real peace, they just want the tension lessened so that they can continue with their business without interruptions. If there were actual "peace" then the workers of all ethnicities and religions would unite against the ruling class. The terrorist methods of the PLO got the Palestinian people nowhere. It was only with the Intifadah (uprising) of the masses of Palestinians that the Israeli ruling class feared the movement and began to give concessions. This is why we need to condemn individual terrorism.

Another example is the current war in Chechnya. The real reason for the war is that the Russian military is sick of being humiliated by the West since the fall of the USSR (10 years ago NATO would NEVER have bombed Russia's ally Serbia!). They want to make an example of the Chechen people - to show the other peoples of the former republics (especially in the Caucasus and the Caspian Sea region which is rich in oil, gas, etc.) what happens if they mess with Russia. But what was the excuse given for the war? To fight terrorism. There were some bombings of working class apartments allegedly instigated by Chechen terrorists (though it was more probably done by the ruling class itself as an excuse for the war), and this is the excuse used to raze a whole country. Whether the Chechens bombed those apartment buildings or not, the point is that individual terrorism does not promote cultural and ethnic unity, but rather gives the ruling class an excuse for further repression.

In addition, it is not very comforting to think about the heightened border security (another indication of growing isolationism and nationalism in the U.S.) and police/FBI presence due to the supposed "terrorist" plots around the Millenium. It is entirely possible that there are some plots, and we would oppose these acts of terror, but the government is using the hysteria over this possibility to slowly reduce our civil liberties. They are using it as an excuse to perhaps begin a tracking system for all foreign nationals who visit this country! This is scary, and yet the press (which is a mere mouthpiece for the ideas of the ruling class) gives these stories front page billing. If a socialist group were to commit an act of terrorism the ruling class would use that as an excuse to shut down our websites, newspapers, meetings, etc.

I think the following quote from Leon Trotsky from the article "Why Marxists Oppose Individual Terrorism" puts it very eloquently:

"In our eyes, individual terror is inadmissible precisely because it belittles the role of the masses in their own consciousness, reconciles them to their powerlessness, and turns their eyes and hopes towards a great avenger and liberator who some day will come and accomplish his mission. The anarchist prophets of the 'propaganda of the deed' can argue all they want about the elevating and stimulating influence of terrorist acts on the masses. Theoretical considerations and political experience prove otherwise. The more 'effective' the terrorist acts, the greater their impact, the more they reduce the interest of the masses in self-organisation and self-education. But the smoke from the confusion clears away, the panic disappears, the successor of the murdered minister makes his appearance, life again settles into the old rut, the wheel of capitalist exploitation turns as before; only the police repression grows more savage and brazen. And as a result, in place of the kindled hopes and artificially aroused excitement comes disillusionment and apathy."

Q. What do Marxists think about Guerrillaism?

A. It is not in the tradition of Marxism to support a movement of peasant war separate and apart from the movement of the [working class](#), which is decisive. The efforts and work of Marxists should be largely concentrated in the cities and among the proletariat. Always of course, under all conditions, the struggle of other oppressed classes must be supported by Marxists.

Guerrillaism as Lenin has explained is the method of the lumpen proletariat and of the peasants. While it is somewhat understandable for the guerrilla movements to develop in countries where there is virtually no proletariat, there can be no justification whatsoever for urban guerrillaism! In most countries in the world today the proletariat makes up the vast majority of the population. India for example has more industry than her former colonial master Britain. Peasant wars even if victorious can only lead to the victory of Bourgeois Bonapartism (Dictatorship) or Proletarian Bonapartism (Stalinism). They can never result in the victory of a socialist revolution in the classical form which requires a conscious movement by the proletariat. Urban guerrillaism tries to replace the movement of the proletariat by students, lumpens and even some de-classed workers and is absolutely against all the teachings of Marxism. Invariably it has ended in disaster. That has been the experience in Latin America and in other continents.

The task of Marxists is not merely to overthrow the capitalist regime, but to prepare the way for the socialist future of mankind. The destruction of capitalism and landlordism in the colonial countries is an immense step forward which raises the level of all mankind. But precisely because of the helplessness of the [peasantry](#) as a class to rise to the future Socialist tasks, it nevertheless can only succeed in raising new obstacles in its path. The victory of the peasant war, given the relationship of forces in the world and the crisis of capitalism and imperialism in the underdeveloped countries can result in a form of deformed workers' state (Stalinism). It cannot result in the conscious control by the workers and peasants of industry, agriculture and the state.

Q. What is the basic role of the state and the police in society?

A. The state apparatus, armed bodies of men, the police, the army, and their appendages the courts and so on, are tools for the oppression of one layer of society by another, usually of one class over another (for example the capitalist class oppresses the working class). At a certain stage in the social evolution of humanity, the state came into being as a result of the division of society into classes. Once it became possible to produce a surplus above the needs of the producers then it became possible for a minority to free itself from the need to labor, living instead off the surplus produced by the majority. Inevitably however such a small minority required a special force to keep the majority in order, and thus the earliest forms of state apparatus were born out of the division of society into classes. This earliest class division between slave owners and slaves, has been replaced by other forms of class division (feudal lords and serfs under feudalism, capitalists and workers under capitalism). But even to the present day under capitalism it was always only a minority who could live off the surplus produced by the majority. Capitalism has played a progressive role in building up the economy through investment to a point where it would be possible for the first time to do away with this archaic class division. Since the task of socialism is precisely to abolish that division, the state itself should increasingly whither away, passing from the government of people to the administration of things before disappearing altogether.

In his masterpiece on Stalinism, *The Revolution Betrayed*, Trotsky explained that wherever there are shortages there is want. Wherever there is want there are lines, wherever there are lines you need police to keep order, and the police will find themselves at the front of the line. The police, as instruments of state repression, inevitably abuse their privileged position. Under socialism, there will be no separate police force or standing army, but rather the armed people - if everyone is a policeman, then no one is really a policeman - sort of like a big neighborhood watch.

Q. Why did Russia degenerate into a totalitarian, Stalinist dictatorship, and how does the planned economy work to develop the productive forces without the "check" of the market?

A. In order to be able to understand the process of the socialist transformation of society, and why it has not yet succeeded, we must be able to give a scientific answer to the question *what happened to the USSR?* There is an entire book online about this question, called "[Russia: from Revolution to Counter-Revolution](#)". But a brief generalization of the events is as follows.

First of all, the general historic appraisal that we make of the Russian Revolution is extremely positive. For the first time, the mass of workers and peasants proved in practice that it was possible to run society without landlords, capitalists and bankers. The superiority of a planned economy over the anarchy of capitalist production was proved, not in the field of ideas but on the concrete arena of industrial development, raising living standards, education and health. Russia, in a short period of time, went from being a backward, mainly agricultural, and imperialist dominated country into being one of the first industrial and economic powers on earth. And this was achieved only because of the planned economy. If you take any other backward capitalist country of that time and you see its evolution over the last 80 years, with very few exceptions, you will see that it remains backward and dominated by imperialism. You can use as examples India, Pakistan, the Philippines, most of Latin America, etc.

But at the same time we must be able to explain why the Stalinist states with their potentially very productive planned economies then entered into crisis at the end of the 1980s and eventually collapsed in the early 1990s. We think that the explanation lies in the lack of democratic control over the planning of the economy. Under capitalism, the market represents, to a certain extent, a check on the economy. If you own a shoe making factory, and the shoes you produce are of very poor quality and more expensive than others in the market, you will probably go bankrupt. If you invest in a sector of the economy where there is already overproduction you will probably go bankrupt (that is what is happening with all those who invested in the SE of Asia in computer making factories, car making factories, etc.).

So the market, although in an anarchic way and through devastating cyclical crises, represents a certain check on the productive forces (although this has been diminished by the concentration of the economy in the hands of a few multinational corporations). That does not exist under a planned economy. The only possible control is that of the democratic participation of working people (consumers and producers themselves) in the planning of the economy. Who knows better than the workers themselves the needs that there are in their neighborhoods? Who better than them knows how the factories should be organized? The problem in the Soviet Union was that these democratic controls did not exist at all. A handful of bureaucrats at the top of the "Communist Party" and the state apparatus dictated everything. .

It is clear that an economy which produced one million different commodities every year could not be controlled without real genuine workers' democracy. So, why was there no workers' democracy in the USSR? The bourgeois critics will tell us that this was the inevitable consequence of the struggle for socialism. "Communism is anti-democratic and means dictatorship". We reply: these are all lies and slanders.

If you read Lenin's [State and Revolution](#) (highly recommended for all comrades), you can see how Lenin establishes a series of conditions for the functioning of workers' democracy, which he draws mainly from the experience of the 1871 Paris Commune, the first workers' government in history. There are four main conditions:

- 1) All public officials to be elected and with the right to recall (that is that they can be changed immediately when they longer represent the interests of those who elected them).
- 2) No public official to receive a wage higher than that of a skilled worker. Marx said that "social being determines consciousness", in other words the way you live determine the way you think. One of the main causes for reformism amongst labour movement leaders is precisely the inflated salaries they receive as members of the government, or even trade union top officials. They therefore think that capitalism is "not so bad" after all.
- 3) No standing army, but general arming of the people.
- 4) Over a period of time everyone would participate in the tasks of running the economy and the state. In the words of Lenin "if everyone is a bureaucrat, no one is a bureaucrat".

Even a superficial analysis of these conditions will immediately lead us to the conclusion that none of them applied in the old Soviet Union. But why? In the first years of the Revolution, Lenin and the other leaders of the revolution struggled to establish what was probably the most democratic regime which has ever existed. The soviets (workers' and peasants' councils) were running the state and the economy and everyone was allowed to

participate in them. All political parties were allowed to participate in soviet elections and debates and put forward their ideas. It is a little known fact that the first Soviet government was in fact a coalition between the Bolshevik party and the Left Social Revolutionaries. The only parties not allowed were those which had taken arms against Soviet power.

Within the Communist Party there was the widest of democracies. During the discussion of the Brest-Litovsk peace agreement with Germany there were at least three different fractions within the CP with different opinions. One of them, the Left Communists, headed by Bukharin, even published for a while a daily paper, "The Communist", opposing Lenin's position on the issue! So, how could such a democratic regime become a dictatorship?

Lenin, in [State and Revolution](#) also deals with the questions of the economic preconditions for the establishment of socialism. The democratic planning of the economy can only be established if you have the economic and material basis to produce plenty for all. As soon as there is scarcity of the basic goods, inevitably, there must be someone to control in an authoritarian way, the distribution of these scarce goods. In short, in Russia in 1917 the material conditions for socialism did not exist.

So why did the Bolsheviks organize the revolution in Russia then? Their perspective was never building socialism in Russia in isolation. They saw the Russian revolution as the beginning of the European revolution. They thought that the taking of power by the workers in Russia would lead to a wave of revolutionary struggle all over Europe. Workers' power in Europe would provide the material means for a fast development of backward Russia. And in fact, the Russian revolution opened the way for a massive revolutionary wave in Europe. There was the 1918-19 German revolution, the Hungarian Soviet Republic, the Spanish revolutionary general strike, factory occupations in Italy and in general mass movements of the working class all over the continent. But unfortunately, all these revolutions were defeated.

There were various reasons for these defeats, but to summarize it, the labor movement was still very much under the influence of the social democratic reformist leaders, and the Communists had not had time to organize properly and made a number of fatal mistakes in this period. So, in this way, the Russian revolution became isolated in a backward, mainly peasant country, ruined by the First World War. If that was not enough, immediately they were sucked into a vicious civil war, in which the counter-revolution with the support of 21 foreign armies of intervention tried to overthrow the young soviet republic (and they nearly succeeded).

Finally the Red Army won the civil war but at a very high cost. Not only the economy was completely destroyed and the masses were starving, but also the cream of the cream of revolutionary communist cadres had been killed over these difficult years. One of the preconditions for workers' democracy is precisely a general shortening of the working week, in order to allow all working people time enough to raise their level of education and to participate in politics and the running of society. In Russia we actually had a longer working week and very bad conditions in general. Participation in the soviets slowly dropped and a layer of officials started to emerge which slowly started to push the normal workers out of politics and discourage participation.

One of the first to warn against the danger of bureaucratization was actually Lenin in his last writings, which were suppressed by Stalin for many years. But even under these extremely difficult conditions it was not easy for the Stalinist bureaucracy to firmly

establish a grip on power. There was a very big opposition in the ranks and the leadership of the Communist Party. In fact, the bureaucracy had to physically eliminate most of the party in order to succeed. If you take the Central Committee of the party in 1917, the revolutionary leaders who carried out the October revolution, by 1940 there was only one survivor apart from Stalin. Most of the others had been shot dead by Stalin, died in prisons and labor camps, some were missing and a few had died of old age. Thousands of honest and loyal Communists were killed or died in the concentration camps. The person who waged the most comprehensive opposition against the rise of bureaucracy was Trotsky, who with Lenin had led the October Revolution and later organized the Red army.

The figure of Trotsky has been obscured for many years in the Communist movement, precisely by those who defended unconditionally the Stalinist bureaucracy. That is why it is to be welcomed for example that the documents of the last Congress of the South African Communist Party (ex-Stalinists) recommend the reading of his writings. Communists can only learn from an open and frank debate about the reasons for the rise of Stalinism. See also [Lenin and Trotsky: What They Really Stood For](#).

Q. On the Material Basis of Society

A. Just as Darwin discovered the law of evolution in organic nature, so Marx discovered the law of evolution in human history: he discovered the simple fact, hitherto concealed by an overgrowth of ideology, that mankind must first of all eat and drink, have shelter and clothing, before it can pursue politics, science, religion, art, etc., and that therefore the production of the immediate material means of subsistence and consequently the degree of economic development attained by a given people or during a given epoch, form the foundation upon which the state institutions, the legal conceptions, the art and even the religious ideas of the people concerned have been evolved, and in the light of which these things must therefore be explained, instead of vice versa as had hitherto been the case. (Engels, "Speech at the Graveside of Karl Marx" - 1883)

Q. On the Laws of Social Development

A. The general conclusion at which I arrived and which, once reached, continued to serve as the leading thread in my studies, may be briefly summed up as follows: 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. It is not the consciousness of men that determines their existence, but, on the contrary, their social existence determines their consciousness. At a certain stage of their development, the material forces of production in society come in 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. With the change of the economic foundation the entire immense superstructure is more or less rapidly transformed.

In considering such transformations the distinction should always be made between the material transformation of the economic conditions of production which can be

determined with the precision of natural science, and the legal, political, religious, aesthetic, or philosophic - in short ideological forms in which men become conscious of this conflict and fight it out. Just as our opinion of an individual is not based on what he thinks of himself, so can we not judge of such a period of transformation by its own consciousness; on the contrary, this consciousness must rather be explained from the contradictions of material life, from the existing conflict between the social forces of production and the relations of production. No social order ever disappears before all the productive forces, for which there is room in it, have been developed; and new higher relations of production never appear before the material conditions of their existence have matured in the womb of the old society.

Therefore, mankind always takes up only such problems as it can solve; since, looking at the matter more closely, we will always find that the problem itself arises only when the material conditions necessary for its solution already exist or are at least in the process of formation. In broad outlines we can designate the Asiatic, the ancient, the feudal, and the modern bourgeois methods of production as so many epochs in the progress of the economic formation of society. The bourgeois relations of production are the last antagonistic form of the social process of production - antagonistic not in the sense of individual antagonism, but of one arising from conditions surrounding the life of individuals in society; at the same time the productive forces developing in the womb of bourgeois society create the material conditions for the solution of that antagonism. This social formation constitutes, therefore, the closing chapter of the prehistoric stage of human society.

Q. On the Historical Tendency of Capitalist Accumulation

A. The expropriation of the immediate producers is accomplished with merciless vandalism, and under the stimulus of passions the most infamous, the most sordid, the pettiest, the most meanly odious. Self-earned private property [of the peasant and handicraftsman], that is based, so to say, on the fusing together of the isolated, independent laboring-individual with the conditions of his labor, is supplanted by capitalistic private property, which rests on exploitation of the nominally free labor of others.... That which is now to be expropriated is no longer the laborer working for himself, but the capitalist exploiting many laborers. This expropriation is accomplished by the action of the immanent laws of capitalistic production itself, by the centralization of capital. One capitalist always kills many. Hand in hand with this centralization, or this expropriation of many capitalists by few, develop, on an ever extending scale, the cooperative form of the labor process, the conscious technical application of science, the methodical cultivation of the soil, the transformation of the instruments of labor into instruments of labor only usable in common, the economizing of all means of production by their use as the means of production of combined, socialized labor, the entanglement of all people in the net of the world market, and with this the international character of the capitalistic regime. Along with the constantly diminishing number of the magnates of capital, who usurp and monopolize all advantages of this process of transformation, grows the mass of misery, oppression, slavery, degradation, exploitation; but with this too grows the revolt of the working class, a class always increasing in numbers, and disciplined, united, organized by the very mechanism of the process of capitalist production itself. The monopoly of capital becomes a fetter upon the mode of production, which has sprung up and flourished along with, and under, it. Centralization of the means of production and socialization of labor at last reach a point where they become incompatible with their capitalist integument. The integument is burst asunder. The knell of capitalist private property sounds. The expropriators are expropriated. (Marx, *Capital*, Volume I)

Q. What is Marx's Economic Doctrine?

As explained by [V.I. Lenin](#).

A. "It is the ultimate aim of this work to lay bare the economic law of motion of modern society, i.e., capitalist, bourgeois society," says Marx in the preface to *Capital*. An investigation into the relations of production in a given, historically defined society, in their inception, development, and decline -- such is the content of Marx's economic doctrine. In capitalist society, the production of *commodities* is predominant, and Marx's analysis therefore begins with an analysis of commodity.

Q. What is *value* According to Marx?

As explained by [V.I. Lenin](#).

A. A commodity is, in the first place, a thing that satisfies a human want; in the second place, it is a thing that can be exchanged for another thing. The utility of a thing makes it a *use-value*. Exchange-value (or, simply, value), is first of all the ratio, the proportion, in which a certain number of use-values of one kind can be exchanged for a certain number of use-values of another kind. Daily experience shows us that million upon millions of such exchanges are constantly equating with one another every kind of use-value, even the most diverse and incomparable. Now, what is there in common between these various things. Things constantly equated with one another in a definite system of social relations? Their common feature is that they are *products of labor*. In exchanging products, people equate the most diverse kinds of labor. The production of commodities is a system of social relations in which individual producers create diverse products (the social division of labor), and in which all these products are equated with one another in the process of exchange. Consequently, what is common to all commodities is not the concrete labor of a definite branch of production, not labor of one particular kind, but *abstract* human labor - human labor in general. All the labor power of a given society, as represented in the sum total of the values of all commodities, is one and the same human labor power. Thousands upon thousands of millions of acts of exchange prove this. Consequently, each particular commodity represents only a certain share of the *socially necessary* labor time. The magnitude of value is determined by the amount of socially necessary labor, or by the labor time that is socially necessary for the production of a given commodity, of a given use-value.

"Whenever, by an exchange, we equate as values our different products, by that very act, we also equate, as human labor, the different kind of labor expended upon them. We are not aware of this, nevertheless we do it." [*Capital*]. As one of the earlier economists said, value is a relation between two persons; only he should have added: a relation concealed beneath a material wrapping. We can understand what value is only when we consider it from the standpoint of the system of social relations of production in a particular historical type of society, moreover, or relations that manifest themselves in the mass phenomenon of exchange, a phenomenon which repeats itself thousands upon thousands of time. "As values, all commodities are only definite masses of congealed labor time." [*A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*].

After making a detailed analysis of the twofold character of the labor incorporated in commodities, Marx goes on to analyze the *form of value* and *money*. Here, Marx's main task is to study the *origin* of the money form of value, to study the *historical process* of the development of exchange, beginning with individual and incidental acts of exchange

(the "elementary or accidental form of value", in which a given quantity of one commodity is exchanged for a given quantity of another), passing on to the universal form of value, in which a number of different commodities are exchanged for one and the same particular commodity, and ending with the money form of value, when gold becomes that particular commodity, the universal equivalent. As the highest product of the development of exchange and commodity production, money masks, conceals, the social character of all individual labor, the social link between individual producers united by the market. Marx analyzes the various functions of money in very great detail; it is important to note here in particular (as in the opening chapters of *Capital* in general) that what seems to be an abstract and at times purely deductive mode of exposition deals in reality with a gigantic collection of factual material on the history of the development of exchange and commodity production.

"If we consider money, its existence implies a definite stage in the exchange of commodities. The particular functions of money, which it performs either as the mere equivalent of commodities or as means of circulation, or means of payment, as hoard or as universal money, point, according to the extent and relative preponderance of the one function or the other, to very different stages in the process of social production." [*Capital*].

Q. What is *surplus value* According to Marx?

As explained by V.I. Lenin.

A. At a certain stage in the development of commodity production money becomes transformed into capital. The formula of commodity circulation was C-M-C (commodity -- money -- commodity) -- i.e., the sale of one commodity for the purpose of buying another.

The general formula of capital, on the contrary, is M-C-M -- i.e., the purchase for the purpose of selling (at a profit).

The increase over the original value of the money that is put into circulation is called by Marx surplus value. The fact of this "growth" of money in capitalist circulation is common knowledge. Indeed, it is this "growth" which transforms money into *capital*, as a special and historically determined social relation of production. Surplus value cannot arise out of commodity circulation, for the latter knows only the exchange of equivalents; neither can it arise out of price increases, for the mutual losses and gains of buyers and sellers would equalize one another, whereas what we have here is not an individual phenomenon but a mass, average and social phenomenon. To obtain surplus value, the owner of money "must ... find... in the market a commodity, whose use-value possesses the peculiar property of being a source of value" [*Capital*]. -- a commodity whose process of consumption is at the same time a process of the creation of value. Such a commodity exists -- human labor power. Its consumption is labor, and labor creates value. The owner of money buys labor power at its value, which, like the value of every other commodity, is determined by the socially necessary labor time requisite for its production (i.e., the cost of maintaining the worker and his family). Having bought enough labor power, the owner of money is entitled to use it, that is, to set it to work for a whole day -- 12 hours, let us say. Yet, in the course of six hours ("necessary" labor time) the worker creates product sufficient to cover the cost of his own maintenance; in the course of the next six hours ("surplus" labor time), he creates "surplus" product, or surplus value, for which the capitalist does not pay. Therefore, from the standpoint of the process of production, two parts must be distinguished in capital: constant capital, which is expended on means of production

(machinery, tools, raw materials, etc.), whose value, without any change, is transferred (immediately or part by part) to the finished product; secondly, variable capital, which is expended on labor power. The value of this latter capital is not invariable, but grows in the labor process, creating surplus value. Therefore, to express the degree of capital's exploitation of labor power, surplus must be compared not with the entire capital but only with variable capital. Thus, in the example just given, the rate of surplus value, as Marx calls this ratio, will be 6:6, i.e., 100 per cent.

There were two historical prerequisites for capital to arise: first, the accumulation of certain sums of money in the hands of individuals under conditions of a relatively high level of development of community production in general; secondly, the existence of a worker who is "free" in a double sense: free of all constraint or restriction on the scale of his labor power, and free from the land and all means of production in general, a free and unattached laborer, a "proletarian", who cannot subsist except by selling his labor power.

There are two main ways of increasing surplus value: lengthening the working day ("absolute surplus value"), and reducing the necessary working day ("relative surplus value"). In analyzing the former, Marx gives a most impressive picture of the struggle of the working class for a shorter working day and of interference by the state authority to lengthen the working day (from the 14th century to the 17th) and to reduce it (factory legislation in the 19th century). Since the appearance of *Capital*, the history of the working class movement in all civilized countries of the world has provided a wealth of new facts amplifying this picture.

Analyzing the production of relative surplus value, Marx investigates the three fundamental historical stages in capitalism's increase of the productivity of labor: (1) simple co-operation; (2) the division of labor, and manufacture; (3) machinery and large-scale industry. How profoundly Marx has here revealed the basic and typical features of capitalist development is shown incidentally by the fact that investigations into the handicraft industries in Russia furnish abundant material illustrating the first two of the mentioned stages. The revolutionizing effect of large-scale machine industry, as described by Marx in 1867, has revealed itself in a number of "new" countries (Russia, Japan, etc.), in the course of the half-century that has since elapsed.

To continue. New and important in the highest degree is Marx's analysis of the *accumulation of capital* -- i.e., the transformation of a part of surplus value into capital, and its use, not for satisfying the personal needs of whims of the capitalist, but for new production. Marx revealed the error made by all earlier classical political economists (beginning with Adam Smith), who assumed that the entire surplus value which is transformed into capital goes to form variable capital. In actual fact, it is divided into *means of production* and variable capital. Of tremendous importance to the process of development of capitalism and its transformation into socialism is the more rapid growth of the constant capital share (of the total capital) as compared with the variable capital share.

By speeding up the supplanting of workers by machinery and by creating wealth at one extreme and poverty at the other, the accumulation of capital also gives rise to what is called the "reserve army of labor", to the "relative surplus" of workers, or "capitalist overpopulation", which assumes the most diverse forms and enables capital to expand production extremely rapidly. In conjunction with credit facilities and the accumulation of

capital in the form of means of production, this incidentally is the key to an understanding of the *crises* of overproduction which occur periodically in capitalist countries -- at first at an average of every 10 years, and later at more lengthy and less definite intervals. From the accumulation of capital under capitalism we should distinguish what is known as primitive accumulation: the forcible divorcement of the worker from the means of production, the driving of the peasant off the land, the stealing of communal lands, the system of colonies and national debts, protective tariffs, and the like. "Primitive accumulation" creates the "free" proletariat at one extreme, and the owner of money, the capitalist, at the other.

Q. One Economic Determinism

A. According to the materialist conception of history the determining element in history is *ultimately* the production and reproduction in real life. More than this neither Marx nor I have ever asserted. If therefore somebody twists this into the statement that the economic element is the *only* determining one, he transforms it into a meaningless, abstract and absurd phrase. The economic situation is the basis, but the various elements of the superstructure—political forms of the class struggle and its consequences, constitutions established by the victorious class after a successful battle, etc.—forms of law—and then even the reflexes of all these actual struggles in the brains of the combatants: political, legal, philosophical theories, religious ideas and their further development into systems of dogma—also exercise their influence upon the course of the historical struggles and in many cases preponderate in determining their *form*. There is an interaction of all these elements, in which, amid all endless *host* of accidents (i.e., of things and events whose inner connection is so remote or so impossible to prove that we regard it as absent and can neglect it), the economic movement finally asserts itself as necessary. Otherwise the application of the theory to any period of history one chose would be easier than the solution of a simple equation of the first degree.

We make our own history, but in the first place under very definite presuppositions and conditions. Among these the economic ones are finally decisive. But the political, etc., ones and indeed even the traditions which haunt human minds, also play a part, although not the decisive one. (Engels, Letter to Joseph Bloch - 1890)

Q. What exactly is the Revolutionary Party?

A. A party is not just an organizational form, a name, a banner, a collection of individuals, or an apparatus. A revolutionary party, for a Marxist, is in the first place program, methods, ideas and traditions and only in the second place, an organization and an apparatus (important as these undoubtedly are) in order to carry these ideas to the broadest layers of the working people. The Marxist party, from the very beginning, must base itself on theory and program, which is the summing up of the general historical experience of the proletariat. Without this, it is nothing. The building of a revolutionary party always begins with the slow and painstaking work of assembling and educating the cadres, which forms the backbone of the party throughout its entire lifetime. That is the first half of the problem. But only the first half. The second half is more complicated: how to reach the mass of the workers with our ideas and program? This is not at all a simple question. For more on the task and methods of reaching the broad layers of masses, see [On the Mass Organizations](#), a letter to Russian Marxists from Ted Grant.

Q. Why Must There be a Revolutionary Party?

A. The task of a Marxist tendency is to act as the memory of the working class, generalizing the vast experience of the workers' movement. There is no other point to our existence as a separate tendency within the movement. If we are to learn anything from history - and surely the only point in studying it is to try to learn its lessons - the lessons of both successes and defeats - it is that that if the working class is to succeed in transforming society, then it is necessary to painstakingly build such a party trained and educated in theory, in strategy and in experience in the workers' movement in advance, over a period of years. Revolutionary opportunities do not last indefinitely. If they do not succeed in transforming society, then inevitably the ruling class will crush them in defense of their own system. That unfortunately is the history of many attempts by the working class to take power - in Chile from 1970-73 for example. A revolutionary party cannot simply be expected to spring up out of the blue, but must be consciously built, and built internationally out of the struggles of the workers movement and within their already existing organizations, parties and unions.

The presence of a revolutionary party and leadership is no less decisive for the outcome of the class struggle as is the quality of the army and its general staff in the wars between nations. The revolutionary party cannot be improvised on the spur of the moment, any more than a general staff can be improvised on the outbreak of war. It has to be systematically prepared over years and decades. This lesson has been demonstrated by the whole of history, especially the history of the twentieth century. Rosa Luxemburg, that great revolutionary and martyr of the working class, always emphasised the revolutionary initiative of the masses as the motor force of revolution. In this, she was absolutely right. In the course of a revolution the masses learn rapidly. But a revolutionary situation, by its very nature, cannot last for long. Society cannot be kept in a permanent state of ferment, nor the working class in a state of white-hot activism. Either a way out is shown in time, or the moment will be lost. There is not enough time to experiment or for the workers to learn by trial and error. In a life and death situation, errors are paid for very dearly! Therefore, it is necessary to combine the "spontaneous" movement of the masses with organisation, program, perspectives, strategy and tactics - in a word, with a revolutionary party led by experienced cadres.

There will be no automatic collapse of capitalism, and each crisis will make things worse for us. Only the conscious struggle of the workers internationally and the building of a revolutionary leadership can drive the final nail into capitalism's coffin. This of course requires not a coup, or putsch, but rather the conscious movement of the majority of society, the working class. We are all different and cannot be expected to automatically draw the same conclusions overnight, waking up simultaneously one morning and proceeding to carry out a revolution. We all learn at different times through different events. A revolutionary tendency must exist to draw these people together into the task of changing society.



MARXISM FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

EFF POLITICAL EDUCATION NOTES