

OUR PHILOSOPHICAL OUTLOOK AND THE LINE OF MARCH

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Marx's and Engels's philosophical contributions set the foundation to objectively describe the world and how it works, to identify what can be changed and under what conditions. This in turn allows revolutionaries to identify and focus on their role of guaranteeing the consciousness people need in order to achieve the transformation that society is objectively heading toward.

In this spirit, revolutionaries look at the objective situation they face, describe the stages the revolutionary movement has to go through toward its final aim, and identify our role in helping to get it there. In other words, we strive to proceed from a common conception of the line of march of the revolution and what revolutionaries have to focus on at each stage of the revolutionary process. The purpose of this paper is to open up discussion on some questions of philosophy that define our methodology for looking at the world and defining our tasks.

Society is too complex, multi-layered, and fluid to fully and finally describe in words. By the time you describe it, what it is has probably already changed; or what you describe is true on one level but already changing on another. But we can understand the nature of its motion and change. Development and transformation go through definite and indispensable stages that we have called the "stages of the leap." Each aspect of the process — from the economy, to the struggle to distribute society's productive wealth, to the people's consciousness of the process — goes through its own dialectical stages of development. Not that any stage can be described in complete separation from the others or from the objective developments going on around it. The most important point here is that this is the nature of the motion.

THIS STAGE OF THE REVOLUTION

"In the various stages of development which the struggle of the working class against the bourgeoisie has to pass through, [the communists] always and everywhere represent the interests of the movement as a whole.... The communists ... are on the one hand, practically, the most advanced and resolute section of the working class parties of every country, that section which pushes forward all others; on the other hand, theoretically, they have over the great mass of the proletariat the advantage of clearly understanding the line of march, the conditions, and the ultimate general results of the proletarian movement." (Marx & Engels, *The Manifesto of the Communist Party*, 1848)

These guidelines have stood the test of time. They also suggest some other guidelines: "We are dealing with two processes. One is the broad social movement that arises from the contradiction between the static social structure and the highly mobile revolution in the means of production. The second we are dealing with is the subjective, conscious effort to achieve the goals of that proletarian revolution." (Rally, Comrades!, 11/92) The distinction between and interdependence between these two processes should guide us revolutionaries as we set out to examine the process of change in the world and our role in that change.

Other articles, pamphlets, papers and books have described the economic revolution initiated by the introduction of electronics into production. To paraphrase Karl Marx, this material transformation of the economic conditions of production can be described with the precision of natural science.

But the social revolution brought about by these changes cannot be measured and charted so exactly. In an epoch of social revolution, people fight out the material transformation of society. In various ideological forms (legal, political, aesthetic, etc.), people respond to the destruction of the old society and fight out which way to go to deal

with that destruction. Along the way, their thinking goes through many changes. It evolves, and it goes through rapid and radical transformations.

At what stage is the process and how do we work within the current stage in order to prepare for the future stages of the movement?

In response to the growing gap between wealth and poverty, a struggle over the distribution of wealth is taking shape in this country. On the one hand, redistribution of wealth is a reform. No matter what form they take — whether "good" demands, like raising the minimum wage or ending "corporate welfare," or "bad" demands, like redistributing resources from the welfare recipient to the "middle class" — none of the various demands for the redistribution of the wealth directly call into question the capitalist system of private property. On the other hand, this social response is an indispensable stage of the social revolution. What we are seeing is the polarization between the ongoing and changing fight for the distribution of the social product and the entrenched system of exchange. This stage of social struggle must be fought out.

Now that the social response to the economic revolution is taking shape and finding political expression, revolutionaries can and must do more than just describe the economic changes. It's time to focus every ounce of our collective energy at gathering together the revolutionaries so as to be effective at each stage and as the political crisis matures. To do this, we have to dig deeper into the laws of how the introduction of something qualitatively new initiates the stage-by-stage process of change and how that quantitative change leads to qualitative change.

QUALITY AND QUANTITY

"The mechanical conception explains all change from change of place, all qualitative differences from quantitative ones, and overlooks that the relation of quality and quantity is reciprocal, quality can become transformed into quantity." (Engels, Dialectics of Nature)

We will explore the two sides of this reciprocal relation by looking both at the general laws of development and at things we deal with every day as revolutionaries. First we'll look at the introduction of the qualitatively new; then we'll look at the quantitative changes that lead up to the qualitative leap.

Introduction of the new quality

Transformation is not a simple process of getting bigger or smaller. It begins with the addition or subtraction of something. Once something new (a new quality) is added to a process from outside of that process, the step-by-step (quantitative) process of transformation into something new begins. In this sense, qualitative change begets quantitative change.

How does qualitative change generate quantitative change?

In any process, the new element gets introduced into a particular place in that process. In the dialectic that makes up a process, there is one element that is mobile, that is, the element that evolves within the confines of the process. The other element — the static or immobile element — resists change. The new quality can only be introduced into the mobile element of the process, that which grows and evolves. Once the new quality is introduced, the process of quantitative change begins. Any transformation follows this same pattern: Under certain conditions, and with the addition of something new to the process from outside that process, the new germinates and grows within the old, each step of its growth also destroying the connections within the old process. Step by step, the mobile element breaks through and brings about the destruction of that which can't change within the confines of that process.

Let's look at an example of this that is playing out in the social struggle today. For as long as there is capitalism, there is a daily struggle for the necessities of life. That struggle evolves and changes depending on the objective conditions. Without the addition of something new from the outside, the spontaneous movement can't become anything qualitatively different from what it is — a back and forth battle over the distribution of the wealth, but all within the capitalist system.

But today a new social element is on the scene. Electronics is creating a new class with no relation to the old social contract. Its needs cannot be met except through a system of distribution without money. It has no employers to address its demands to. The struggle of the new class for what it needs introduces something qualitatively new into the ongoing social struggle. People still struggle for what they need. But, objectively, that struggle begins to change from a struggle to reform the capitalist system of distribution to a struggle against the old system of exchange.

The intensification of this social struggle is part of the conditions for revolution. The social struggle ultimately batters and weakens the state. But the intensification of that struggle does not automatically lead to or become political struggle and revolution. The political struggle is a different process. Political revolution develops within the social struggle that is churned up by the economic revolution.

Revolutionaries introduce the theory and politics of revolution into the thinking of the people as they fight out the distribution of the wealth. In an epoch of social revolution, society is destabilized economically and socially, and the new ideas have powerful potential. The new ideas take root and grow within that element of the dialectic that is mobile and evolving, that is, the thinking of the people as they fight against the (static) productive relations.

"Consciousness is conscious existence." ()**

The revolutionaries' responsibility to introduce the "new ideas" is not a matter of getting across alien ideas or ideas that have no material basis. The ideas are new because they do not arise spontaneously on the basis of the capitalist production relations. The only ideology that arises spontaneously on that basis is the ideology of reforms, or fighting within the system. No matter how militant it may be, it is still the ideology of reform. This can include an embryonic sense of group identity and common interests or of who the enemy is. But politics (i.e., the struggle for power), a vision of the reorganization of society on the new foundation, and theoretical concepts have to be brought into the struggle from the outside. These ideas can exist alongside the other ideas, but they do not arise spontaneously or automatically on the basis of the production relations themselves.

Once they are introduced, these qualitatively new ideas begin the step-by-step process of transformation of the thinking of the people. Effective revolutionaries don't try to impose other ideological causes or agendas. They push the process through toward its actual conclusion. For example, participating in a struggle, for example, over housing or health care and keeping it on that track can be done while also skillfully adding the simple idea of distribution according to need or showing that private property is the problem. The new ideas begin to germinate and grow.

The revolutionary potential of the introduction of something new from the outside is the philosophical foundation for revolutionaries accepting their special responsibility. That is, to add something qualitatively new into the process — something that can grow within the thinking of the people as they fight out the questions of the day but that does not arise spontaneously from within it.

To pinpoint how we carry out our responsibility as revolutionaries, we also have to look at how the process goes to its conclusion, that is how quantitative change leads to qualitative change.

Quantitative stages of the leap

"Motion is the mode of existence of matter." (Engels, Anti-Duhring)

And the nature of that motion is dialectical. After the introduction of a quantity of the new quality, the process goes through definite quantitative stages toward transformation. The dialectical motion of the process takes it through stages of backsliding, stagnation, polarization, destruction and leap forward to qualitative transformation. In this sense, quantitative change begets qualitative change.

How does quantitative change generate qualitative change?

In any process, this transformation is actually the process of the mobile element evolving or going through quantitative changes until it can no longer be contained within the

confines of the static element. It lurches ahead and falls back as the mobile element strains against, breaks through and is pulled back by its old and immobile limits. The process of growth of the new is also the process of destruction of the old. As the old can no longer contain or coexist with the new, the process polarizes. Eventually, the connections that held things together under the old circumstances break. The opposing elements confront each other as externally opposed forces, each on a course of the destruction of the other.

Let's go back to the social struggle to see how this plays out. The struggle over the distribution of the wealth goes, step by step, through changes until it can no longer exist within the confines of the system of exchange, which itself is being destroyed. This struggle has to be fought to its conclusion, but it doesn't just get bigger and more intense until it becomes the struggle for political power. Polarization is an indispensable stage of transformation. Opposing interests polarize to the extent that the two sides in the social struggle step outside of — or are forced outside of — that which holds them together in society and then begin to confront each other politically, that is, in a struggle over political power.

Depending on the objective conditions, the actual conclusion of the struggle over the distribution of the wealth is different at different times. During the 1930s, people at every point on the political spectrum had ideas and solutions about how to redistribute the wealth. The practical struggle over this question took the form of the fights for food, jobs, unionization, and so on. These fights were fought all the way to their actual conclusion. For objective reasons, their conclusion at that time was the expansion of capitalism and major reforms to the system.

While it still may be possible to get concessions from the capitalists, the actual conclusion of today's struggle over the distribution of the wealth of society is not within the capitalist system of exchange. Today, "distribution according to need" is the actual resolution of the practical struggle. With the introduction of the new class into the practical struggle, that struggle begins to go through the quantitative stages of the leap.

"Communism is for us not a state of affairs which is to be established, an ideal to which reality will have to adjust itself. We call communism the real movement which abolishes the present state of things." (Marx and Engels, *German Ideology*)

This "real movement" goes through definite stages.

Revolution doesn't happen through a one-dimensional process of winning people over to the idea of revolution. Yet revolutionaries play a decisive role. As revolutionaries introduce consciousness of the process into the thinking of the people, they promote the accomplishment of the stages of the revolution. Class political independence from the ruling class, for example, is an indispensable stage of development of the thinking and activity of people as they fight out the question of the distribution of the wealth. It is not a category or an ideal to win people over to. The struggle itself has to go through this stage. We revolutionaries add the intellectual aspect that ensures its completion.

Nor does revolution happen simply through an intensification of the practical struggle. Political revolution develops within social revolution. Therefore, the tasks of revolutionaries address two interconnected processes: the social movement against the current conditions and the conscious efforts to achieve the goals of that movement through political revolution. The two processes are distinct but mutually dependent.

The tasks of revolutionaries reflect the dialectics of this process. We can't approach either one without taking into account the other, and neither process can go to its conclusion in isolation from the other. For the transformation of society to complete itself, the combatants must fight it out consciously and politically. We work within the practical struggle to push it ahead toward its actual conclusion. And at each stage of the revolution we also strive to gather together and consolidate a core of revolutionaries consciously striving for the resolution of the problems through political revolution.

Effective revolutionaries proceed from an understanding of the "line of march of the revolution," an understanding of the quantitative stages that struggle and its thinking will

have to go through and how those quantitative stages set the conditions in which the qualitative transformation is possible.

PEOPLE FIGHT IT OUT

"Men make their history themselves, only they do so in a given environment, which conditions it, and on the basis of actual relations already existing, among which the economic relations ... are still ultimately the decisive ones, forming the keynote which runs through them and alone leads to understanding." (Engels, letter to Borgius, January 25, 1894)

The polarization between wealth and poverty opens the way for the people to begin to fight out the actual content of our time — that is, the material transformation of society — and not some other questions. But they fight it out in forms handed down by history. In some countries, the relative uniformity of the ethnic make-up of the population shapes how people fight out their class interests. In other countries, a historical adoration of the royalty influences the forms in which people arrive at a class identity.

Neither one of these is true for us. The American people have a historically evolved hostility to the elite and wealthy. In *Boiling Point*, for example, Kevin Phillips chronicles the history of elections. (Phillips, Kevin. *Boiling Point – Republican's, Democrats and the Decline of Middle-Class Prosperity*. Random House. New York. 1993) He shows how the powers-that-be use the two-party system to accomplish a back-and-forth manipulation of the resentment and hostility on the part of the "common people" against the rich — appealing to that resentment when they can and backing off to social questions when they can't. Populism is successful because it appeals to the anti-rich sentiment. The ruling class use of the color question has been their key to accomplishing this manipulation. Historians have also noted that the American people fight over these questions most forcefully when they feel their political rights are threatened. History shapes the ideological forms within which people fight out whatever is before them. Effective

revolutionaries appreciate and rely on these forms in order to add the qualitatively new ideas that will complete a stage of the struggle.

PUTTING IT ALL BACK TOGETHER

"Only from this universal reciprocal action do we arrive at the real causal relation. In order to understand the separate phenomena, we have to tear them out of the general interconnection and consider them in isolation, and then the changing motions appear, one as cause and the other as effect." (Engels, *Dialectics of Nature*)

We have had to break down different aspects of the process in order to describe them. But in the real world, the processes are interconnected, with reciprocal relations among them. When the various aspects of the revolutionary process interrelate — each at its critical point — we have the complete conditions for revolution.

The revolutionary process plays out on the economic, social and political levels. The economic process is the environment for and lays the basis for the social process, and the social process is the environment for and lays the basis for the political process. These processes are all going on at the same time, and each process goes through its own dialectical process of the leap. There is no way to categorize each stage into a definite time frame, but we can define the stages of the leap of each process. And, most important, we can understand the dialectical nature of the motion.

The interconnectedness of the whole revolutionary process is what makes it work. Each aspect of the process — the economic, social, ideological, and so on — has to go through its own stages of the leap. But each one affects the other.

The qualitative transformation of the ongoing struggle over the distribution of the wealth began with the creation of a new class. This struggle will go through all the stages of the leap. Its progress through these stages will be influenced by both objective and subjective

factors. For example, a rapid and massive expression of the destruction of wealth (as in a financial crisis) could, overnight, spread and intensify the struggle over the distribution of the wealth. As the anger and hostility of the people erupts into popular rage and takes to the streets, we will see the large-scale destruction of the old ideas that hold back the struggle.

But just the destruction of the old is not enough to prevent a fascist resolution. Reconstruction on a new foundation demands the conscious introduction of the politics and ideology of communism into the thinking of the people as they fight out the destruction of the old. To develop the consciousness that prepares the people to take the struggle over the distribution of the wealth to its actual resolution, there needs to be a large organization of propagandists with a structure for the widespread distribution of the press.

The process of the material transformation of society sets the objective conditions. But in no way does that leave out of the picture the role of the conscious element or the reciprocal action of each process on the other. On the contrary, it is precisely when society is going through a material transformation that conscious revolutionaries can be effective and when the thinking and political activity of millions of people shapes the direction of that material transformation.

History is full of examples. The Russian revolution played out on the material basis of industry beginning to shove aside the dominance of agriculture and handicraft. The Bolsheviks pushed ahead the struggle of the people for bread, peace and land. As they stayed within the struggle itself at each stage of its development and pushed it ahead from the inside, they also relied on it to gather together the conscious revolutionaries and united them around a conscious effort to achieve the goals of that struggle for bread, peace and land through political revolution. When the material, political and social conditions had matured and laid the basis for an overall political crisis, the Bolsheviks had done their preparation and conditions were set for the seizure of political power.

Thus, material conditions set the basis for people to make history.

People react to the destruction of society without being conscious of its cause and its resolution. But that resolution will be a qualitative leap in society's development. Bringing about the resolution will depend on the consciousness of the millions and millions who are fighting out the changes.

It is the responsibility of revolutionaries to introduce the qualitatively new ideas into the thinking of the people. But it is not the ideas alone that make the revolution and all this will take more than the general commitment of revolutionaries to adding the qualitatively new ideas. We introduce the qualitatively new ideas under definite conditions and with definite aims. An organization of revolutionaries has to carefully identify and add what has to be added to complete each stage. We rely on the struggle at each of its stages to gather the revolutionaries who can prepare for the future stages of the movement.

Summing up and projecting the line of march allows us to prepare for the struggle as it matures. It equips us to, as Marx said, not simply interpret the world, but to change it.

Karl Marx & Frederick Engels, *Communist Manifesto*. 1848.

Rally, Comrades! November 1992

Frederick Engels, *Dialectics of Nature*.

Frederick Engels, *Anti-Duhring*. 1878.

Karl Marx & Frederick Engels, *The German Ideology*. 1846.

Frederick Engels, letter to Borgius, January 25, 1894.

Kevin Phillips, *Boiling Point*. (Random House) 1993.