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Historical Momentums and Historical Epochs

An Attempt at a Non-Marxian Historical Materialism)*

Abstract: The paper begins with a proposal for a reconstruction of three major statements of the traditional Marxian version of historical materialism. The general concept of an adaptive mechanism is introduced to explain how, in the Marxian sense, several parts of the superstructure are to be thought of as determined by the economic base. The paper proceeds by asking whether the classical type of economic determination is valid not only for precapitalist and capitalist societies, but for socialist societies as well. An answer in the negative is given. The author tries to outline a type of historical materialism which takes into account the autonomous role of political institutions and social relations as determinants in socialist societies.

1. The Goal of the Paper

There is no doubt that the course of history is far from what Karl Marx predicted it would be. It has been so different, that nobody can maintain that what has taken place is a matter of deviation from the standard established by Marxian historical materialism. If this were merely a matter of deviation, people would sooner or later be able to concretize Marxian social theory and to eliminate the discrepancies between the theoretical picture of social evolution given by the theory and the empirical reality of that evolution. It must be the case, then, that Marxian historical materialism loses its validity.

From this it does *not* follow that historical materialism should simply be overthrown. As a matter of fact, Marxian social theory explains a great period of human history very well. One can only wish that its rivals could explain so many important features of so many societies as Marxian historical materialism does. Hence, the problem which confronts a Marxist — that is, someone who tries to employ the Marxian method in order to say something new (in other words, something not already said by Marx himself) — is the following: How does one overcome Marx? This paper is an attempt at overcoming Marx from the Marxist point of view. I shall try to apply the Marxian method, as I understand it, in order to uncover the main limitation of Marxian historical materialism and to outline one of the possible ways of building a non-Marxian historical materialism.

*) Translation revised by Jeff Edwards

2. The Core of Marxian Historical Materialism

We have, first of all, to understand the nature of Marxian historical materialism. My conviction is that Marx was someone who gave us a purely scientific answer — that is, an answer incompatible with our common sense — to the question of how a society develops. Marx uncovered the decisive material factor which was, and is, the least comprehensible for common-sense thinking: namely, the productive efficiency of the implements people use in their work. On this depend the relations of production among people, according to the following well-know formula:

(1) *The productive forces determine the relations of production.*

And the productive forces together with the relations of production, i.e., the economic base of a given society, give rise to political and legal institutions, i.e., the politico-legal superstructure. This is expressed in another famous formula:

(2) *The socio-economic base determines the politico-legal superstructure.*

Social consciousness is dependent upon both the socio-economic base and the superstructure (that is, upon the state of socio-economic conditions). This is expressed in the third formula:

(3) *The socio-economic conditions determine consciousness.*

The three dependencies expressed in these formulas present the structure of a society of the type:

productive forces	relations of production	
socio-economic base		politico-legal superstructure
socio-economic conditions		social consciousness

Fig. 1

3. The Reconstruction of the Core of Marxian Historical Materialism

The first, and the main, problem of interpretation that one faces is that of understanding the notion of determination in formulas (1)–(3). I think that the formulas refer to a special type of mechanism, which I call the adaptive one. I will try to clarify this by taking formula (1) as an example. No causal relations between the state of the implements of production and the relations of production can occur,

at least in the usual sense of the notion of causality. One might, however, maintain that the mechanism in question is of a causal nature taken in the sense of "functional dependence", by which is expressed that, corresponding to a given state of the implements of production, there is a definite type of relations of production. But this meaning of the term "causality" is decidedly too nebulous. The specific nature of the mechanism expressed in the marxian formulas remains unclear.

According to my interpretation, the real meaning of formula (1) is the following: Out of the set of systems of production existing at a given time, the most optimal one — that is, the one which makes the maximum use of the possibilities created by the given level of productive forces — will become the most widespread. Let us consider this more carefully.

Let us assume that someone invents a new device that ensures increased labour productivity and which, thus, provides an increase of the surplus product to be appropriated by an owner, but on the condition that the mode of production is merely reorganized. By comparing the various known systems of organization of production (those transmitted by tradition, those invented by experts, etc.), the owner selects that one which, when accompanied by the use of the new device, will in his opinion ensure the maximum increase of the surplus product. If the expected increase does not take place, the owner will conclude that he has made a mistake and will try to reorganize production again. If he is too slow in organizing the most effective system of production with respect to the new device, he will go bankrupt. This accounts for the fact that, after a sufficient length of time following the introduction of the new device, those systems of production that objectively ensure the greatest surplus product are adopted in the whole production.

Let us now consider what are the magnitudes under which formula (1) establishes a relationship. There are three such magnitudes: (a) the level of the productive forces; (b) the set of the historically given systems of production — i. e. systems of the relationships of production; (c) the system of production that objectively ensures the highest level of surplus product. The formula itself states that, for a specific level of productive forces, the optimal system of production is adopted. Accordingly, the formula describes a certain social process which need not be, and usually is not, realized by anyone, and *a fortiori* need not be decreed by anyone but which is an actual result of partial decisions consciously made by various participants in that process.

Regarding the process under consideration, it may be said that we have to do with the adaption of systems of production (systems of the relations of production) to the level of the productive forces. The mechanism of this adaption can be described in the form of the following relationship:

(G I) *Out of the set of historically given systems of production, that system becomes widespread which, for a given level of the productive forces, ensures the greatest surplus product to be appropriated by the owner of the means of production.*

It should be noted that the set of given systems of production functions in that formula as a parametric variable: that set is not fixed in advance, and the value of that variable can be found only for a given place and a given epoch, when one takes into account which systems of production were known at that time and place — i. e. were used in practice or at least designed.

An analogous mechanism of adaption is also revealed by the remaining two above mentioned laws formulated by historical materialism.

The ruling class strives to maximize its exploitation of the class of direct producers and adopts to that end not only the systems of production, but also the whole organization of public life. In particular, the political and legal system is adapted to the economic base. This means that out of the various historically given systems of organization of public life, that system is adopted which, for a given state of the economic base, ensures an organization of production that is the most advantageous for the ruling class; in other words, an organization of production which enables that class to maximize the surplus profit for a given level of the productive forces. This can be described in the form of the following relationship:

(G II) *In a given society out of the set of historically given political and legal systems there is adopted that system which, for a given state of the economic base, ensures that system of production which is the most advantageous for the ruling class.*

Now, that system which is the most advantageous for the ruling class is the system “indicated” by (G I), i. e., that system which, for a given level of the productive forces, ensures the greatest surplus product. This relationship thus states that, out of the historically given political and legal system (transmitted by tradition, conceived by lawyers or philosophers, etc.), that system is adopted which provides the objectively most effective organizational framework for the exploitation of the working-class. Other choices are rejected as a result of a more or less conscious opposition on the part of the class of owners of the means of production.

Furthermore: the dependence of social consciousness on given socio-economic conditions is also a process of adaption. In its selection of ideas, the ruling class operates in such a way, that only those ideas reach the consciousness of the masses which, under given socio-economic conditions, ensure the stability of the existing political and legal system. The system of selection of ideas results in the fact that the set of current beliefs is full of values justifying what is done by members of the ruling class. For example, in capitalist society the set of current beliefs includes the model of the self-made man whose enterprise turns him into a millionaire, as well as other beliefs that veil the true causes of the dominant position of the ruling class. In a word, as has been pithily stated by Marx, “the ideas of the ruling class are the ruling ideas”. Hence, the third of the said fundamental relationships can be formulated as follows:

(G III) *In a given society, out of the set of historically given ideas those ideas are adopted, which, for the given socio-economic conditions, ensure the greatest stability of a given political and legal system.*

The relationships (1)–(3), which are fundamental for the theory of historical materialism, thus may be interpreted as adaptive relationships.

4. Adaptive Dependencies

I shall now attempt to define the concept of adaptive mechanism and discuss some problems connected with it.

Given a set of states of affairs

$$A = A_1, \dots, A_n$$

and a conjunction of states of affairs B , let a state of affairs A_i , together with conditions B , result in a state of affairs r_i . The set of such results

$$R = r_1, \dots, r_n$$

is claimed to be ordered in a way dependent on conditions B . This means that those results have a definite property k and may be ordered according to the intensity of this property and according to different conditions different properties of the kind are assigned. Now the adaptive formula says:

(ad) *Out of the set of states of affairs A , that one becomes widespread which, after a period of time and under given conditions B , yields the result, possessing the property k to the maximum degree.*

That one state of affairs in A which is referred to in the formula (ad) is termed to be the optimal one (with respect to A and B) and symbolized as A_{opt} . The property k is called the criterion of adaptation, while the dependence in question is termed adaptive dependence.

The mechanism of adaption as outlined above has a number of variations. Here are some examples.

1. The mechanism of rational decision-making (under certainty). A_1, \dots, A_n are interpreted as the actions which can be performed in the light of the knowledge that a given agent has, and B as those initial situations in which such actions are undertaken. The states of things which are elements of the matrix of consequences (results) of undertaking an action indicated by a given column in the initial situation indicated by a given row. We mean here such consequences which are to take place according to the knowledge of the agent, and not those which take place in fact. The criterion of ordering, k , stands here for the agent's preference.

In such a case the criterion of rationality (under certainty) is a special case of the relationship of adaption. It states that, out of a number of possible actions, that action is undertaken which is the optimal one in the sense of yielding the most preferred result in a given initial situation. The principle of rationality, which in the antecedent has the description of the conditions imposed on the agent and, in the consequent, the description of the criterion of rationality, is a special kind of a theorem on adaption.

2. The functional-genetic mechanism. A_1, \dots, A_n are interpreted as above, but r_1, \dots, r_n stand here for the objective results of actions, and not those results which are expected by the agent. This is so because B stands for actual initial situations, and not those which are assumed by the agent. This means that they stand for those situations which come into question objectively, but not necessarily in the opinion of the agent. That situation which actually takes place — it is identified with the socio-economic conditions of action — accounts for the fact that when an action is undertaken with a specified state of things in view, it yields a certain *de facto* result. If that result differs from the goal, the agent tries to find out the causes of his failure. He finds it in the inadequacy of his knowledge of the actual conditions under which he has to act, and he corrects his knowledge of those conditions accordingly. This process goes on until the agent acquires the knowledge which enables him to act so that he obtains the desired result. The repetition of that process on a mass scale spreads the knowledge which enables the various individuals to attain their respective goals under given socio-economic conditions.

As can be seen, the criterion of adaptation k amounts here to the proximity of the result obtained to the expected goal. That proximity is maximal when the objective result is identical with the goal. The “functional-genetic relationship” explains why those actions out of the possible ones are repeated which yield the desired results. It can be seen that this is a special case of the relationship of adaptation.

5. Adaptive Systems

Let us now see whether the mechanism described by the relationships (G I)–(G III) is one of the variations of the adaptation mechanism mentioned above. The mechanism of rational decision-making does not come into question, since that which comes to prevail (e. g., a certain system of production, a political and legal system, social consciousness) need not be — and as a rule is not — foreseen by anyone. The functional-genetic mechanism is out of the question as well, since in the case now under consideration the criterion of adaptation does not consist in the proximity of results to anyone's goals; that criterion consists in the degree of attainment of certain total magnitudes which may, but need not be intended by someone.

Consider now the mechanism of the adaptation of systems of production to the level of productive forces. Let A_1, \dots, A_n stand for the possible systems of produc-

tion (e.g., those already used in practice or those especially designed by management experts), and B for the state of productive forces. The application of a given system of production by an individual producer combined with the use of specified implements results in that producer's attaining his goal to some degree, that goal being his making a profit. But the relationship (G I) does not indicate in the least what an individual producer obtains as a result of the application of a given system of production combined with the use of given implements. That relationship holds between the level of productive forces in a given society and that system of production (that type of relations of production) which comes to prevail in that society. The criterion of adaptation is thus not proximity to the maximum profit of a given producer, but proximity to the maximum surplus product acquired by the ruling class as a whole. On the social scale, that system of production comes to prevail which, for a given level of productive forces, yields the maximum total surplus value. It is, thus, not a functional-genetic mechanism, even though it would perhaps be possible to explain the mechanism of adaptation indicated by (G I) by referring to functional-genetic mechanisms working in individual producers.

To sum up, we see that A_1, \dots, A_n stand for possible systems of production, B stands for the level of productive forces and r_1, \dots, r_n stand for those states of affairs which consist in the appropriation by the ruling class of corresponding quantities of surplus value. The criterion of adaptation k orders those states of affairs by indicating how much surplus value, given a certain level of productive forces, will be obtained by the ruling class, if it uses a certain system of production. The relationship (G I) is a special kind of relationship of adaptation. It indicates that out of the various possible systems of production that one comes to prevail which lets the ruling class obtain the maximum total surplus product.

Similar comments could be made concerning the other fundamental relationships formulated in the theory of socio-economic formations. In all cases we have to do with one and the same mechanism of adaptation, which we shall call the mechanism of social adaptation and which is to be distinguished from the cases discussed above.

Note first that a certain specific relation holds among theorems (G I)–(G III): The magnitude defined in the preceding theorem becomes the criterion of adaptation in the theorem that comes next in the sequence specified above. This is a formal manifestation of the fact that the first theorem describes the fundamental mechanism of adaptation, whereas the second and third theorems describe derivative mechanisms of the first and second degree respectively. The fundamental mechanism of adaptation, as described in theorem (G I), is that of the adaptation of systems of production to the level of productive forces, the criterion of adaptation being the maximization of the total surplus product. That mechanism makes that system of production prevail which is the most advantageous for the ruling class (i. e., that system which, at the actual level of productive forces, enables the ruling class to acquire the maximum surplus product). The mechanism of the adaptation of a given system of political and legal institutions (i. e., the superstructure) to the base,

as described in theorem (G II), is derivative with respect to the said fundamental mechanism. The theorem states that the political and legal system that comes to prevail is that which makes it possible to introduce the said optimal system of production in the most effective way. The variable defined in the previous theorem becomes the criterion of adaptation in the theorem now under consideration. And, as we have seen, the optimal system of production enables the ruling class to maximize the surplus product. In turn, the mechanism described in theorem (G III), namely that of adaptation of social consciousness to a given political and legal system, is directly derivative with respect to that one described in (G II) and indirectly with respect to the fundamental one, described in (G I). Theorem (G III) states that system of social consciousness comes to prevail which, under given socio-economic conditions, is the most effective in consolidating that political and legal system which is the most advantageous for the ruling class. The magnitude defined in the previous theorem now becomes the criterion of adaptation. That optimal political and legal system contributes to the consolidation of that system of production which is the most advantageous for the ruling class under a given state of the economic base; that optimal system of production enables the ruling class to acquire the maximum surplus product at a given level of productive forces.

The specific relation that holds between (G I) and (G II) on the one hand, and between (G II) and (G III) on the other, shall be called the relation of subordination. A sequence t_1, \dots, t_n of theorems between which the relation of subordinative adaptation processes holds (beginning with t_1) is termed an "adaptation-system"; the theorem t_1 is in that sequence the "principle of adaptation", the term being explained by the fact that that theorem describes the fundamental mechanism of adaptation, while the theorems that follow describe the successive derivative mechanisms.

It follows from the above that the sequence of theorems (G I)–(G III) is an adaptation-system, and the first of these theorems, which describes the fundamental mechanism of adaptation, is the principle of adaptation.

As it has been shown, the theory of socio-economic formation is of the adaptive nature. Since this theory constitutes the core of historical materialism, one may expect that other theories included in the body of historical materialism (e.g., the theory of motion of socio-economic formations) will be of a similar nature, too.

One should note that formulas (G I)–(G III) are supposed to be valid merely under strong idealizing assumptions. First of all, they present only the "cross-section" of a society which may be illustrated by Fig. 1. Therefore they do not describe transition from one socio-economic formation to another, but rather the state of a particular formation of a given type. They also abstract from the existence of a plurality of societies, assuming that there is only one society in the world. And so on. Since it is not my intention here to present an adaptive reconstruction of the whole of Marxian historical materialism (see: Nowak 1975; Buczkowski 1978; Klawiter 1978; and others), I shall omit the problem of possible amplifications of the Marxian model composed of formulas (G I)–(G III).

6. *The Limitations of the Marxian Discovery*¹⁾

Let us try to state whether the Marxian model of a society interpreted in an adaptive manner is a true one, or not. The usual answer is, I think: partly yes, partly no. The model is approximately correct for some societies, while for others it is not. It holds, approximately, for slave, feudal and capitalist societies. But it does *not* hold, I think, for socialist societies.

It is many people's prejudice that Marxian historical materialism applies to the socialist societies just as it does to the capitalist ones. But this is, in point of fact, not the case. Let us recall the standard definition of socialism as a social system in which the means of production is social property. It follows from the definition that I am one of the owners of means of production in my society. But what does this explain with regard to my social status in my society? The evident answer is: nothing, since everybody in my society is a partial owner of means of production. In other words, the definition of socialism with reference merely to the basic category of Marxian historical materialism — that of relations of property — lacks any explanatory power. What is more, the situation in question is quite different from that of a capitalist society, for instance. In a capitalist society, the statement that such and such a person is one of the owners of the means of production has rather immense explanatory power — at least each Marxist believes so.

In general, categories of Marxian historical materialism lose their validity for socialist societies. Let us take the simplest example. Let us ask whether an economic plan belongs to the "socialist economic base" or, rather, to the "socialist politico-legal superstructure"? It cannot belong to the economic base, since it is a set of rules of behavior for firms enacted by the organs of the state. Then it must belong to the politico-legal superstructure. But if this is so, then how can one explain from the Marxian point of view that socialist firms aim mainly at the execution of the plan? Is the "economic base" to be seen as subordinate to the "politico-legal superstructure"? Maybe, the Marxian laws do not work? *Yes*, that is what actually takes place — the economy is not the "base" and politics are not the "superstructure" of a socialist society. This standard Marxian order is upturned and the Marxian laws do not work at all. This is not a matter of "deviation" of any kind which could be explained through amplification of the Marxian model. It is, rather, a matter of the structural difference between socialist and economic societies.

7. *An Attempt at a Non-Marxian Generalization of Historical Materialism*

If I am right in my analysis, Marxian historical materialism would be falsified in the adaptive interpretation. Of course, it may be the case that I misunderstood the Marxian ideas concerning historical materialism, and that global formulas like (G I)–(G III) are, from the historical point of view, inappropriate interpretations of the Marxian ideas. If this were so, I would say simply that formulas (G I)–

(G III), which seem to be rather similar to the traditional Marxian ideas, are my own invention and, despite my own expectations, they do not hold for socialist societies. But I still believe that the formulas (G I)–(G III) are admissible interpretations of the Marxian laws; at any rate, they are no worse than the numerous obscurities contained in the regular handbooks of Marxism. That is why I am saying that the Marxian model of historical materialism in the proposed interpretation seems to fail for socialist societies. However, I do think that its explanatory power for slave, feudal and capitalist societies is entirely sufficient in comparison with what we have at our disposal as far as other global theories of history are concerned. That is why I am postulating here a non-Marxian generalization of historical materialism which would maintain the validity of the Marxian model for these societies where it seems to work satisfactorily.

There is nothing easier than postulating the construction of a new theory, and there are people who make a living by the programming of new theories. Since I would not like to join them, I shall try to outline one of the possible non-Marxian historical materialisms despite the fact that this attempt must be rather sketchy, not only because of the lack of space but also because of my own lack of clarity in all the matters involved.

Let us come back to the Marxian laws (G I)–(G III). As I have already said, they are valid under numerous idealizing assumptions. In particular, they are formulated on a high level of abstraction. By this I mean that the internal structure of social complexes like economics, politics, social consciousness is not taken into account. Let us consider this more carefully.

As for the economic sphere, it can rather easily be seen, that each element of the whole global structure of a given society (see Fig. 1) has other elements as its counterparts. Therefore one may distinguish implements of production, relations of organization of labour, civil law, and economic consciousness of the people involved in productive activities. Regarding the population, one should distinguish between owners of means of production and producers. Hence, the internal structure of the sphere of economics may be represented thus:

means of production	relations of organization of labour		
economic base		civil law	
economic conditions			economic consciousness

Fig. 2

It is, in a sense, isomorphic with the global structure of the whole society as presented in Fig. 1. Furthermore, dependencies governing this particular sphere

of a society are, in a sense, isomorphic with global ones expressed by the Marxian formulas (G I)–(G III):

- (B I) *Out of the set of historically available systems of organization of labour that one becomes widespread which, in the given state of implements of production, yields maximum surplus value for the owners of means of production.*
- (B II) *Of the historically available systems of civil law that one survives which, in the given state of the economic base, ensures the most efficient establishment of the optimal system of organization of labour.*
- (B III) *Of the historically available systems of economic ideas that one becomes widespread which, in the given state of economic conditions, ensures the greatest stability for the optimal system of civil law.*

And the optimal system of civil law is that one which ensures the most efficient establishment of the optimal system of labour, while the latter is that system, which yields maximum surplus value for the owners of means of production.

Similar elements may be distinguished in the sphere of politics, too. In this sphere there is a special kind of material implement – a means of repression and control. There is also a kind of a division in a society between those who have the means of repression and control at their disposal (the analogue to the class of owners of means of production) and those who have not (“citizens”, but not in a juridical sense). One may also distinguish (in analogy to the relations of the organization of labour) autonomous social relations among “citizens”, that is, all those relations which hold independently of the disposers of the means of repression and control. And within the political sphere one may also distinguish between constitutional law (in the largest sense) and political consciousness of the people. All of these form the internal structure of the political sphere of a given society and may be represented thus:

means of repression & control	autonomous social relations		
political base		constitutional law	
political conditions			political consciousness

Fig. 3

Furthermore, just as the owners of the means of production, when left to themselves, tend to apply each achievement in the field of techniques and thereby reorganize production in order to obtain more and more surplus value, the disposers

of the means of repression and control, when left to themselves, tend to apply each achievement in the field of techniques and thereby alter the previously autonomous social relations among "citizens" in order to increase the scope and intensity of their power. Institutions of this kind may be expressed in the formula:

(P I) *Of the set of historically available systems of autonomous social relations among "citizens" that one survives which, in the given state of the means of repression and control, allows for the maximum growth of scope and intensity of power for disposers of the means of repression and control.*

In other words, the hierarchy of power, when left to itself, changes relations among people in order to assure the maximum growth of its influence possible in the given state of the means of repression and control. The typical way of doing so is by simply using these means; that is, by applying force.

And when social relations advantageous to the disposers of the means of repression are established, the law that confirms this state of affairs will be the following:

(P II) *Out of the set of historically available systems of constitutional law (in the largest sense of the term) that system survives which, in the given state of the political base, ensures the most efficient establishment of the optimal system of social relations for the disposers of the means of repression and control.*

The optimal system of relations of this kind is that system which allows, for the maximum growth of the scope and intensity of power for the hierarchy of power. Now, when relations among people are adopted in light of the interests of the hierarchy of power, and when this is sanctioned by law, then social consciousness must be appropriately altered. People are to believe that all of this is necessary as dictated by God, by history, or by whatever. Hence the last thesis says:

(P III) *Of the historically given systems of political ideas that system becomes widespread which, in the given state of the political conditions, ensures the greatest stability for the optimal system of the constitutional law.*

The latter system is that one which sanctionizes those relationships between the hierarchy of power and "citizens" which are the most advantageous for it at a given level of the means of repression and of control.

One may, in a similar manner, describe the internal structure of the third sphere of a society, that of "intellectual production", but let us omit it.

As we have seen, the internal structure of both the economic sphere and that of politics are, in a rather loose sense, isomorphic. Let us call each sphere of a society

that is in this sense structurally and nomologically similar to that of economics a "historical momentum". (This term has been used by Engels with a similar meaning.)

Until now historical momentums were considered to be independent of each other, something which, in fact, does not take place at all. Let us consider some external connections among them, limiting ourselves, at first, to a society of the type Marx has spoken about. Within this type of society the political momentum is subordinated to the economic one, roughly, in the sense that the internal criteria of adaptation of the latter have priority over those of the former. That is, in case of conflict, it is the maximizing of surplus value which is satisfied, but not the maximization of power. The sociological meaning of this is that the interests of the class of owners of the means of production are satisfied before those of the disposers of the means of repression and control. Let us formulate this a bit more carefully:

- (G' I) *Of the set of historically available systems of production, those systems become widespread which, on the given level of productive forces, yield the maximum of surplus value for the owners of the means of production; and, out of the set of systems of production yielding maximum surplus value, there remains that system which, in the given state of means of repression and control, ensures the maximum growth of the scope and intensity of power for the disposers of the means of repression and control.*

This statement may be considered to be the concretization of the Marxian law (G I) with respect to the internal structure of two historical momentums. In a similar manner one could modify laws (G II) and (G III). These modifications show the economic momentum as dominant over the political and the intellectual production.

This reveals the structure of an economic society as seen from a more general point of view than that of Marx (compare Fig. 1). But as long as an economic society is under consideration, one should note that all the essential points of the Marxian model are still maintained, especially the subordination of the political sphere to the economic. This latter aspect entails that the category of the disposers of the means of repression and control are, in fact, "political representatives" of the class of owners of the means of production. But from this more general perspective one thing may be seen quite clearly, that could not be seen from the point of view of the Marxian historical materialism: that it is not inherently necessary that the economic momentum be predominant in the whole period of development of society. Under certain historical conditions, it may be the case that the internal regularities (P I)–(P III) governing the political momentum become in a sense global regularities of the whole society, and that the political momentum becomes the predominant one.

8. Epochs and Formations

Let us ask what happens when, according to the Marxian programme, the class of owners of the means of production is eliminated. The Marxian historical materialism is unable to give a definite answer. Let us, then, look at this from the more general point of view I have tried to outline.

According to this point of view, within the capitalist society there are three basic social divisions: the owners of the means of production and the rest of society, the disposers of repression and control and the rest of society, the disposers of the means of intellectual production and the rest of society (the latter will be omitted for the sake of simplicity). These divisions overlap, but in all three cases the same criterion is involved: inequality in the disposal of some material means used in a given type of social activity. Now, Marx was perfectly right in maintaining that as long as there is private appropriation of the means of production, the category of disposers of the means of repression and control is subordinate to the category of owners of the means of production. This holds true as long as there still exists private property. But what will happen if the class of major property owners is eliminated? What social force will be able to hinder the “natural tendency” (according to the dependencies expressed in (P I)–(P III)) of the new disposers of repression and control to increasingly enlarge their sphere of power? What will be able to stop them?

These questions were never posed by Marx. This is not surprising, since from the standard point of view expressed in his own laws (G I)–(G III), they could not at all be formulated. But they may be formulated from the more general point of view of our non-Marxian historical materialism. And the answer can easily be seen: Under the conditions of the lack of major private property, the political momentum is left to itself, and the previous internal regularities (P I)–(P III) become the global dependencies of a society of quite a new type. It is, in fact, a society in which everybody is an owner of the means of production, but from the non-Marxian point of view this very fact can no longer be an expression of the central aspect of such a society. The political momentum becomes the predominant one, while the economic momentum is a subordinate to it, as is the intellectual one. Therefore, this new type of society is governed by the following non-Marxian — but I believe, still Marxist — dependencies of the global nature:

- (M I) *Out of the set of historically available systems of autonomous social relations that one becomes widespread which, in the given state of the means of repression and control, allows for the maximum growth of the scope and intensity of power for the disposers of the means of repression and control.*

I shall call this new type of society a political society. It is a society whose hidden nature is not the accumulation of surplus product for the owners of the means of

production but the accumulation of power for the possessors of the means of repression and control. Hence, the second dependency in this context is the following:

(M II) Out of the set of historically available systems of production that one becomes widespread which, in the given state of the political base ensures the the most efficient establishment of the optimal system of autonomous social relations.

And the optimal system of autonomous social relations is that system which allows for the maximum growth of the scope and intensity of power. In such a system, the economic moment is subordinate to something of a quite non-economical nature. It is not surprising that, in societies of the political type, the economic moment does not function satisfactorily.

The third dependency is the following:

(M III) Out of the set of historically available system of ideas that one becomes widespread which, under the given socio-political conditions, ensures the greatest stability for the optimal economic system.

The optimal economic system is that one which ensures the most efficient establishment of the optimal system of autonomous social relations, while the latter is that one which allows for the maximum growth of power for the disposers of the means of repression and control.

It should be noted that, following Marx, formulas (M I)–(M III) may be maintained only under rather strong idealizing assumptions; for instance, that there is but one single society of the political type in the world. Following this assumption, all relationships between political societies, not to mention those between political and economic societies, are abstracted from. It should also be noted that the formulas in question are of a global nature and should be concretized by showing historical momentums contained within a political society. And so on.

These formulas, which are analogous to the Marxian ones, may be considered as composing the initial model (the most idealized one) of one of the possible non-Marxian historical materialisms. The idea of a non-Marxian historical materialism implies that the vision of history which has been presented by Marx should be generalized. According to Marx, and the standard point of view accepted by the majority of Marxists, social history is to be divided primarily according to socio-economic formations. In this context, it is interesting that Engels' later analyses of so-called primitive societies cannot be incorporated into the framework provided by the standard Marxian point of view, but that they may be incorporated into the framework on the non-Marxian historical materialism. Now, from the point of view outlined here, the fundamental division of social history is that of social epochs: the primitive (or "natural"), the economic, and the political epoch. Epochs are secondarily divided into specific formations. The economic epoch is divided

in terms of socio-economic formations like slavery, feudalism and capitalism. There are, thus, at least three historical materialisms: that which pertains to the natural epoch, that which pertains to the economic epoch and that which pertains to the political epoch. All of them are historical materialisms in the sense that they maintain a kind of generalized Marxian idea: that social relations in a given sphere of activity depend primarily upon the material implements people use; that the institutional structures are, in turn, based on these; and that the consciousness of those subjects acting in that sphere of activity depends, in its turn, upon the two previous levels. Hence, historical materialism for the political epoch is one possible version of the generalized Marxian idea that I have attempted to schematize, and which I call non-Marxian.

The outline of the non-Marxian historical materialism I have presented here is certainly a very oversimplified one. It requires removing the idealizing assumptions it presupposes and getting it gradually closer to reality. Despite this fact, even this simplified version consisting of formulas (M I)–(M III) analogous to the Marxian global laws (G I)–(G III), enables us to pose a question of great importance: the question of a characterization of a communist society. Accordingly to the main line of argumentation in this paper, at least a generalized definition of a communist society may be given actually in terms of historical materialism, and not simply in axiological terms.

The usual definition is the following: communism is a classless society. It is assumed here that a class is a set of people, having the same basic relationship to the means of production. Within societies Marx has spoken about, there are – in the most idealized model – two classes: one is composed of the owners of the means of production and the other is composed of the rest or society. Secondary criteria, as I have tried to show elsewhere (Jasińska/Nowak 1975), were added in further developed, increasingly realistic models of the theory of social classes. It is clear that the idea of a communist society conceived according to these assumptions is entirely based on Marxian historical materialism.

But how does all this look from the point of view of the non-Marxian historical materialism of the type I have tried to outline in this paper, for instance? One may note that within a society there are at least three momentums, the economic, the political and the intellectual one. Each of them generates, so to speak, a specific type of division of society: between those who own the means of production and those who do not; between those who dispose of the means of repression and control and those who do not; and finally between those who dispose of the means of intellectual production and those who do not. Which one of these categorial divisions of a society becomes the basic social division depends upon the dominancy of the respective momentum within the whole society. Let us call this basic social division a class division in a generalized sense. Certainly, in the special case of economic societies, where the economic momentum dominates, classes in the generalized sense are identical with classes in the Marxian sense. But within a political society, in which the political momentum dominates, the basic social

division is based upon those who have power and those who are powerless. In a society of this kind, the predominant political moment generates a specific class division (in the generalized sense of the term "class").

If this is so, then the idea of a classless society means much more within the framework of the generalized, non-Marxian historical materialism than within that of the Marxian one. This means that not only economic exploitation has to be excluded from a communist society, but political inequality as well. Not only does a different relationship to the means of production have to be established in a communist society. A different relationship to the means of repression is also required. It seems to me that this agrees with our moral intuitions. There can be no doubt that capitalist exploitation (i. e., private appropriation of the surplus product) is a social evil — but so is political non-autonomy.

It is to be questioned whether a society in this generalized sense is actually attainable. One has also to enquire into whether it can be achieved within still existing economic societies or rather within political ones. These are completely open questions. But they may at least be posed on the basis of the generalized, non-Marxian historical materialism.

Note

- 1 §§ 6–8 of this paper were included in my "Epochs and Formations: An Attempt at a Non-Marxian Generalization of Historical Materialism", in: *Proceedings of the IIIrd Wittgenstein Symposium* (to appear).

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