

The Importance of Theory

by Louis Althusser

Introduction

By now our readers are no doubt aware of the personal tragedy involving Louis Althusser (Newsweek, Dec. 1, 1980). Engels tells us that Marx used to say: "Death is not a misfortune for the one who dies, but for the ones who live," quoting Epicurus. In this sense, for all of us who look forward to the rebirth of revolutionary Marxism, Althusser's misfortune is ours as well. It may be years before the full extent of his contribution is known, years before we can collectively follow the path which he blazed alone.

The following text, "The Importance of Theory," is taken from a longer work which Althusser wrote in April 1965. It has not previously appeared in English. This is one of Althusser's earlier writings, and on many points he has since changed his views (the most important of these changes we have footnoted). Nevertheless, for its time, it stands out as a remarkable document.

1965 was a year before the Chinese Cultural Revolution began, three years before the May Events in France. World Communism was divided by the Sino-Soviet debate which had only recently surfaced, while in Europe the mass-based Communist Parties were attempting to overcome the legacy of the Stalin period via a new revisionism. Influenced by the post-1956 Soviet Union and, in some circles, "Marxist Humanism," the theoretical and political bases of Eurocommunism were being laid.

In France Althusser was active in the struggle within the Communist Party on the meaning of these events. He was greatly influenced by the anti-revisionist polemics of the Chinese, and coincidence, therefore, that a group of young communists who had been studying under him broke with the Communist Party and founded one of the first important anti-revisionist organizations in France, the Young Communist Union (Marxist-Leninist), less than a year after the following article was written. The group started a journal, *Cahiers Marxist-Leninistes*, for which Althusser wrote a number of articles. The new organization made the workingclass rather than the students its center of attention and was able to play a certain positive role in the events of May 1968.

The following article has a special significance for us in the *Theoretical Review*: it was decisive in the formulation of the "primacy of theory" party building line in the Tucson Marxist-Leninist Collective ten years after it was written. Even today, this 1965 document contains the germs of many of our present positions, and represents a more advanced orientation than the bulk of the US communist movement now holds.

Although the concept itself is not present in the text, Althusser's writing is directed by an understanding of the crisis of Marxism, which he perceives to be theoretical and political. He is clear that Marxism, in order to develop and overcome this crisis, must struggle against both revisionism and dogmatism, and he does not hesitate to identify the origins of this crisis in the Stalin period.

Althusser emphasizes the process of theoretical production and opposes empiricism and spontaneity, which both liquidate this process, reducing theoretical development to a simple and spontaneous by-product of other practices. While not yet correctly identifying the specific character and role of Marxist philosophy within Marxist theory ("philosophy is, in the last instance, class struggle in the realm of theory"), but instead defining it as science, Althusser nonetheless makes a strong case for the rigorous and creative development of both historical and dialectical materialism in all their aspects.

Finally, Althusser recognizes the necessity and irreplaceable role of theory, not for its own sake, but in order to tackle the myriad of political tasks facing the world communist movement and revolutionaries everywhere.

"The Importance of Theory" is a section of a longer work entitled "Theory, Theoretical Practice and Theoretical Development, Ideology and Ideological Struggle," which first appeared in the *Cuban Journal Casa de las Americas* (No. 34, Jan.-Feb. 1966). The second half of the full text appeared in *Theoretical Review* No. 2 under the title, "Toward Fusion: Theoretical Formation and Ideological Struggle." For the present text we have supplied the title, subheadings, and several footnotes.

Paul Costello

If, as we think, Marxist theory is a scientific theory, if all the goals and all the tactics of communist activity are based on the application of the results of Marx's scientific theories, then we have a primary obligation to the *science* which gives us the means with which to understand the world, and the means to change it.

We therefore have a categorical duty to treat Marxist theory (in its two aspects: historical materialism and dialectical materialism) as it is, as a true science.* That is, we must be conscious of what the nature of a science implies, the way it is constituted and its life, in other words, its development.

Today this obligation entails two requirements. In fact, we are not in Marx's position simply because we do not have to repeat the prodigious theoretical labor which Marx completed. For us, Marxist theory exists as the results contained in a certain number of theoretical works and present in its political and social applications.

The theoretical work which went into the production of the science as it now exists is not always easily seen because it has entirely passed into the constituted science. There is a danger here, for we can be tempted to treat Marxist science as it is presently constituted as a *given* or as a totality of finished truths: in short, we can develop a *dogmatist* or an *empiricist* conception of it.

We could consider Marxism to be absolute, perfected knowledge which poses no problems for development or investigation. If so, we would be treating it in a dogmatist manner. We could just as easily believe, given that Marxism offers us knowledge of the world, that it *reflects reality directly and naturally*, and that it was enough for Marx to *see* accurately, to *read* accurately, that is, to *reflect* accurately in his abstract theory the essence of things themselves, without taking into account the enormous labor of theoretical production necessary to increase human knowledge. If so, we would be treating Marxism in an *empiricist* manner.

These two interpretations, dogmatism and empiricism, provide us with a false conception of science inasmuch as they consider knowledge of the truth to be a pure given, while, in fact, it is instead *a complex process of the production of knowledge. Our conception of science is decisive for the Marxist science itself.* If we have a dogmatic conception of it we will do nothing to develop it, we will repeat its results indefinitely, and it will not only cease to grow, but it will begin to degenerate. If we have an empiricist conception of it we also run the risk of being incapable of advancing Marxism, since we would be blind to the nature of the real process *of the production of knowledge*, and we would be left behind by events and new developments. If, on the contrary, we have a correct conception of science, of its nature and of the appropriate conditions for the production of knowledge, then we can develop it and give to it the life which is its nature, without which it would not be a science, but a dead and sterile dogma.

Theoretical Practice

To understand science is above all to know *how* it is constituted, how it is *produced*: by an immense specific

theoretical labor, by an irreplaceable theoretical practice, extremely lengthily, arduous and difficult. As Marx wrote: "There is no royal road to science, and only those who do not dread the fatiguing climb of its steep paths have a chance of gaining its luminous summits."¹ This practice presupposes a series of specific theoretical conditions, the details of which we cannot discuss here. The most important point is that science, far from reflecting the immediate data of daily experience and practice, is only constituted by transcending them, so that its results, once acquired, often appear to be the *opposite* of the experimental evidence of daily life, rather than its reflection. As Marx explained: "Scientific truth is always paradox, if judged by everyday experience, which catches only the delusive appearance of things."² Engels made the same point when he declared that the laws of capitalist production "assert themselves without entering the consciousness of the participants and can themselves be abstracted from daily practice only through laborious theoretical investigation . . ."³

This difficult theoretical study is not an abstraction in the sense of empiricist ideology: the production of knowledge is not like extracting the pure essence of reality from the impurities which contain it, the way gold is extracted from the dross and earth in which it is found. The production of knowledge is the *production* of the appropriate concept of the object being examined by the setting into motion of theoretical means of production (theory and method), applying them to a given raw material. The *production* of knowledge in a given science is a *specific practice*, which we ought to call *theoretical practice*, a specific practice *distinct from the other existing practices* (economic practice, political practice, ideological practice). *On its own terrain and given its function, theoretical practice is absolutely irreplaceable.* It must be understood that this practice exists in an organic relationship to the other practices; it is based upon and articulated with them, *but it is irreplaceable in its own field. This means that science, as such, is produced by a specific practice, theoretical practice, which cannot, in any way be replaced by any of the other practices.* The point bears repeating because it is an empiricist and idealist error to say that scientific knowledge is the product of "social practice in general," or of political and economic practice. If we are content to speak about practice in general, or if we speak only about economic practice and political practice, without speaking about *theoretical practice, as such*, we help to sustain the idea that the non-scientific practices, *by themselves, spontaneously*, produce the equivalent of scientific practice, and we neglect the irreplaceable character and function of scientific practice.

Marx and Lenin were quite specific in warning us about this point by showing us, for example, that the economic and political practice of the workingclass was incapable, by itself, of producing the *science* of society, and consequently the science of workingclass practice, being only capable of producing utopian or reformist ideologies of society. The Marxist-Leninist science, which is in the service of the objective interests of the workingclass, could not be the spontaneous product of the practice of the proletariat: it was produced by the theoretical practice of intellectuals who possessed a high level of culture, Marx, Engels and Lenin, and was *imported* into the practice of the proletariat, which it immediately modified by profoundly transforming it. It is a theoretical "left" error to say that Marxism is a

*For Althusser's new understanding of philosophy see *Lenin and Philosophy* (MR, 1971) and *Essays in Self-Criticism* (NLB, 1976).

“proletarian science,” if by this is meant that it was or is produced *spontaneously by the proletariat*: this error is only possible when the existence and irreplaceable function of *scientific practice*, the practice which produces science, is denied or ignored. That this scientific practice works on the data provided by the experience of the economic and political practice of the proletariat and other classes is a fundamental condition of its existence. But it is only one of its conditions since all *scientific labor*, which starts with the experience and results of these concrete practices, is correctly concerned with producing *knowledge*, which is the result of another practice, of a specific theoretical labor. We can get an idea of the tremendous importance of this labor and of its considerable difficulties by reading *Capital* and by knowing that Marx worked for thirty years to establish its foundations and develop its conceptual analysis.

It is therefore necessary to repeat that no science is possible without the existence of a specific practice, distinct from the other practices: scientific or theoretical practice.

Marxism Must Constantly Develop

To know what a science is, is, at the same time, to know that it cannot live without *developing itself*. A science which repeats itself, without discovering anything, is a dead science: it is not even a science, but a fixed dogma. A science only lives through its development, that is, through its discoveries. This point is equally important because we can be tempted into believing that the presently existing historical materialism and dialectical materialism are finished sciences, which would make us distrustful, on principle, of any new discovery. Certainly the workers' movement has good reason to be on guard against the revisionists, who have always cloaked themselves in the mantle of “newness” and “renovation.” This necessary defense has nothing in common, however, with mistrust of the discoveries of a living science. If we fall into this error our attitude toward the science in question will be dominated by it and we will be diverted from our *duty*: the dedication of all our forces to develop it, to compel it to produce new knowledge, new discoveries.

Without any equivocation Marx, Engels and Lenin made this same point. When Marx, in a well known expression of his sense of humor, said “I am not a Marxist,” he was saying that he considered his own work as the simple beginning of a science, and not as a set of finished truths, inasmuch as the notion of finished truth is meaningless, and sooner or later leads to non-science.

Engels said it in 1877 when he wrote:

With these [Marx's discoveries] socialism became a science. The next thing was to work out all its details and relations. . . . Political economy, however, as a science of the conditions and forms under which the various human societies have produced and exchanged . . . political economy in this wider sense has still to be brought into being. Such economic science as we possess up to the present is limited almost exclusively to the genesis and development of the capitalist mode of production. . . .⁴

Lenin expressed the same viewpoint with even greater force, if that is possible, in 1899:

There can be no strong socialist party without a revolutionary theory which unites all socialists, from

which they draw all their convictions, and which they apply in their methods of struggle and means of action. To defend such a theory, which to the best of your knowledge you consider to be true, against unfounded attacks and attempts to corrupt it is not to imply that you are an enemy of *all* criticism. We do not regard Marx's theory as something completed and inviolable; on the contrary, we are convinced that it has only laid the foundation stones of the science which socialists must *develop* in all directions if they wish to keep pace with life. We think that an *independent* elaboration of Marx's theory is especially essential for Russian socialists; for this theory provides only general *guiding* principles which, *in particular*, are applied in England differently than in France, in France differently than in Germany, and in Germany differently than in Russia.⁵

Lenin's text contains a number of significant theses:

(1) Marx left us, in the theoretical field, the “corner stones,” the “guiding principles,” that is, the basic theoretical principles of a theory, *the development of which is an absolute necessity*.

(2) For all socialists this theoretical development is an obligation owed to science, without which we will fail in our obligation to socialism itself.

(3) It is necessary not just to develop theory in general, but to develop its *particular applications* in accordance with every concrete instance.

(4) The defense and development of the Marxist science presupposes both the greatest steadfastness against all those who would *retreat* from Marx's scientific principles—and the *broadest freedom of criticism and scientific investigation* conducted on the basis of Marxist theoretical principles for those who can and desire to *advance* them. This freedom is indispensable for the life of the Marxist science, and any other science.

It is our responsibility to draw the theoretical and practical conclusions from these principles. In particular, if historical and dialectical materialism are both scientific disciplines, we *must necessarily develop them*, make them produce new knowledge. We must expect from them, as from any living science, *discoveries*. This is usually recognized to be the case with historical materialism, *but it has not been as clearly understood with regard to dialectical materialism*. Because we have not had a precise idea of its character as a scientific discipline, because we retain the idealist notion that philosophy is not in reality a discipline of a scientific character. In fact, since Lenin, not enough effort has gone into the development of new discoveries in the field of dialectical materialism, with the result that it has practically remained at the point where Lenin left it in *Materialism and Empiriocriticism*. If this is so, it is a state of affairs which must be seriously examined and rectified. Equally, if historical materialism benefited from Lenin's great theoretical contributions (the theory of imperialism, the theory of the communist party, the beginnings of the theory of the specific nature of the first phase of transition between the capitalist and socialist modes of production**) it has been a long time since it was subject to important *theoretical* developments, developments which are

**Althusser abandoned the notion of a “socialist mode of production” in 1973. See *Essays in Self-Criticism*, p. 17.

absolutely indispensable for the solution of the problems posed by our times. To cite only one of them: the problem of the forms of transition from the complex, combined modes of production in the so-called "underdeveloped" countries to socialism. In the same manner the difficulty of *theoretically* grasping an historical fact as important as the "cult of the personality" obviously is related to the undeveloped state of our theory of the specific forms of the transition from capitalism to socialism.

The Conditions for Theoretical Practice

If the development of the Marxist science (in its two fields) is an *obligation* for communists, this obligation must be confronted concretely. In order for a science to develop itself, first it is necessary for it to have a correct idea about its own nature, in particular, about the means by which it develops and, consequently, all the real conditions required for its development. It is necessary to secure these conditions of development for science, and to especially recognize, theoretically and practically, the irreplaceable role of *scientific practice* in its development. It is also necessary to have a clear conception of our theory of science, rejecting all dogmatist and empiricist interpretations, and to fight for this conception in our words and deeds. It is equally necessary to secure the conditions of scientific freedom, which theoretical investigation requires, *in practice*, to supply the material conditions required for the attainment of this freedom (organizational forms, theoretical journals, etc.). Finally, it is necessary to create the appropriate conditions for scientific investigation or theoretical investigation in the field of Marxism itself. The establishment of the Center for Marxist Studies and Investigations and the Maurice Thorez Institute in France*** were a response to this need. Yet we still have not coordinated these various distinct forces, we have not viewed them as means which form part of a whole. In matters of theory and theoretical investigation we must conceive and apply a policy of joint work which cannot proceed without the party, in order to provide historical and dialectical materialism with the possibility of developing themselves, living a truly scientific life, and producing new discoveries.

It must also be acknowledged that theoretical investigation cannot consist of the simple repetition or simple commentary on already acquired knowledge, and even more importantly, it can have nothing in common with the development of simple ideological themes or simple personal opinions. Theoretical investigation only begins in the zone which separates already fully acquired and assimilated knowledge from the unknown. To be an investigator one must reach this zone and cross over into it. Naturally, this theoretical investigation demands a high level of theoretical development, which presupposes the possession of a highly developed understanding not only of Marxism (which is absolutely indispensable) but also of

science and philosophy in general, which must be based on a *developed Marxist theory* which is indispensable for any Marxist and scientific theoretical investigation.

The Importance of Theory

Without any hesitation we are convinced that the development of Marxist theory, in all its fields, is a necessity of the greatest urgency in our times, and an absolutely essential task for communists, for two sets of reasons.

The first set of reasons relates to the very nature of the new tasks which "life," that is, history imposes upon us. Since the 1917 revolution and the epoch of Lenin, immense transformations have occurred in world history. The growth of the USSR, the victory over Nazism and fascism, the great Chinese revolution, the passage of Cuba into the socialist camp, the liberation of the former colonies, the revolts in the Third World against imperialism, have all altered the balance of world forces. At the same time they have posed a considerable number of new problems, some without precedent, the solutions to which require the development of Marxist theory—and in the first place the development of what are referred to as the *forms of transition* from one mode of production to another. This theory cannot be concerned only with the *economic* problems of the transition (problems of the forms of planning, of the adaptation of forms of planning to the specific different stages of the transition period corresponding to the particular conditions of each country); it must also concern itself with the *political* problems (forms of the state, forms of the political organization of the revolutionary party, the forms and nature of the intervention of the party in the different fields of economic, political and ideological activity) and the *ideological* problems of the transition period (policy in the religious, moral, juridical, aesthetic, philosophical spheres, etc.). The theory which must be developed does not only concern the passage of the so-called "underdeveloped" countries to socialism, but also the problems of the countries already committed to the socialist mode of production (USSR) or those just embarking upon it (China). These include all the problems of planning, new juridical and political forms which must be brought into correspondence with the new relations of production (pre-socialist, socialist and pre-communist), and certainly all the problems posed by the existence of a socialist camp which maintains complex economic, political and ideological relations as a result of the uneven development of the socialist countries.

The theory which has to be developed finally relates to the present nature of imperialism, to the transformations of the capitalist mode of production occurring in the present conjuncture, the development of the productive forces, the new forms of economic concentration and of political government of the monopolies, and all the strategic and tactical problems of the communist parties in the present phase of the class struggle. In the final analysis all these problems are related to the future of socialism, and must be posed and resolved in this context. With regard to all these problems we find ourselves on the same terrain as Lenin who solemnly urged communists to produce the knowledge appropriate for each country, developing Marxist theory beginning with knowledge already acquired, the knowledge

***Institutes for theoretical work established by the Communist Party of France.

Toward a Genuine Communist Party

Such is, in broad outline, our view of what must be the new communist party. Still to be answered is the question of how are we to go from the scattered collectives of today to such a national organization. Given the recent origin of genuine communist forces, their lack of unity and geographical isolation, it would be premature for any one group to expect unanimity around its own line on each issue as the basis for the new party. Rather a balance will have to be achieved between unity on a definite number of lines which clearly demarcate our trend in contrast to that of the dogmatists and revisionists, and unity around the general direction in which the new party must develop.

The concept of "unity around the direction of development" rather than around a fully developed line, is not a defense of the agnosticism which is a dangerous current among genuine communist forces. Rather it is a recognition that, given our limited theoretical work and practical experience, our forces can neither expect that they are at present sufficiently developed, nor that it is possible for this work and experience to reach a sufficiently high level nationally under present circumstances, before we begin to build the party.

To begin the process of coalescence of our movement we propose that consultations and conferences on party building and related problems be held around the country consisting of organizations and individuals who consider themselves part of the genuine communist movement and who endorse a minimal number of points of unity. We suggest the following as starting points of discussion and as the basis for future cooperation:

(1) US imperialism is the main enemy of the peoples of the world.

(2) The revisionist-dogmatist problematic is the main historical and current problem which has to be overcome in the US communist movement.

(3) There does not and should not exist an international center in the world communist movement. US communists need to develop Marxism-Leninism on the basis of our own analyses while critically assimilating the lessons and experiences of the world communist and revolutionary movements.

(4) We recognize the central importance of the need for the development of Marxist-Leninist theory, both historical and dialectical materialism, in all its aspects.

(5) We recognize the need to unite the broadest sections possible of the communist movement and the revolutionary left in the US in the party building movement.

The results of these consultations and conferences around the country should be the eventual convocation of a national conference in which a form of a provisional organizing committee would be constituted of all the participating organizations and adherent individuals who support its results and resolutions. The provisional organizing committee would then proceed with the creation of a propaganda newspaper on the one hand and a theoretical-discussion journal on the other. Through participation in the provisional organizing committee on a national and local level the basis of the new communist party would be laid.

In the words of William Shakespeare:

There is a tide in the affairs of men,
Which, taken at the flood, leads on to fortune;
Omitted, all the voyage of their life
Is bound in shallows and in miseries.
On such a full sea are we now afloat,
And we must take the current when it serves
Or lose our ventures.

(Julius Caesar, IV,3,218)

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which was provided for us by the "cornerstones": Marx's discoveries.

It is not simply the new stage of history and its problems which necessitates the development of Marxist theory. In this respect we have a *second set of reasons* which relates to the theoretical lag which built up during the period of the "cult of the personality." Lenin's command: *develop theory in order not to lag behind life* takes on a particular significance here. The fact that we encounter difficulties in citing major discoveries in many areas of Marxist discovery after the works of Lenin, we owe in large measure to the conditions under which the international workers' movement was forced to operate by the policies of the "cult of the personality," to the uncounted victims for which it was responsible in the ranks of party militants, intellectuals and scholars of great merit, and to the ravages which dogmatism left on their spirits. If the policies of the "personality cult" did not compromise the material basis of socialism**** it sacrificed and literally blocked for years any development of Marxist-Leninist theory. It disregarded all the indispensable conditions for theoretical reflection and study, and because of the political suspicion with which it regarded anything new theoretically, it struck a terrible blow against freedom of scientific investigation and discovery. The effects of this political dogmatism in matters of theory are still being felt today, not only in the residue of dogmatism, but, paradoxically enough, also in the often anarchistic and confused aspects of the responses of many Marxist intellectuals who are now regaining the freedom of reflection and investigation which was so long denied them. Today this phenomenon is relatively widespread, not only in Marxist circles, but even in the Marxist parties themselves, and in the socialist countries. The greatest danger which is expressed in the important, but often ideologically confused works of this tendency, lies in the fact that the period of the "personality cult," far from contributing positively, has, on the contrary, impeded the theoretical development of an entire generation of Marxists, the loss of whose works is sorely missed. Time is required, a great deal of time, to form true theoreticians, and all the time lost is paid for in the absence of works, in a lag in the production of science, in a delay, if not a retreat from knowledge.

Above all else, the positions which Marxists were not able to occupy in the fields of knowledge did not remain empty: they were filled, especially in the field of the "social sciences" by bourgeois "scholars" and "theoreticians," with all the practical, political and theoretical consequences which flow from this fact, and the disastrous consequences of which it

****For Althusser's later views of the negative impact of the Stalinian deviation on the superstructure and the base of Soviet society see the "Note on 'The Critique of the Personality Cult'" in *Essays in Self-Criticism*.

is possible to observe even where they are *not even suspected*. Not only do we have to make up for our own lag, but we must also take back for ourselves the fields which by right belong to us (to the degree to which they depend on either historical or dialectical materialism), and we must take them back under difficult conditions, since we must struggle by means of a lucid criticism against the deceptive results achieved by their present occupants.

For these two sets of reasons, historical and theoretical, it is clear that the task of developing Marxist theory in all its aspects is a political and a theoretical task of the first order.

NOTES

¹ Marx's letter to La Chatre, March 18, 1872.

² Karl Marx, *Value, Price and Profit* (section VI).

³ Frederick Engels, "Supplement to *Capital*, Volume III," *Capital* vol. III, p. 899.

⁴ Engels, *Anti-Duhring*, pp. 43, 207-8.

⁵ Lenin, "Our Programme," *Collected Works*, vol. 4, pp. 211-12.

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Returning now to our definition, to say that the classes are the *bearers* of determined structures is the same as saying that they are the *effects* of these structures.

Thus we can come to define the social classes as the effects of the total social structure on the individuals who participate in one way or another in social production.

By this have we abandoned the concept of relations of production to define the classes?

We think this would be the case if we were to conceive of the total social structure as a simple relationship among levels (economic, ideological, and political), as does Poulantzas. In this case it is a theoretical impossibility to study this effect as an effect of a global structure and one is obliged to analyze it as a series of partial effects at the level of each regional structure.

On the other hand if the relationship between the different levels of the social structure is thought by beginning with the *relations of production* everything changes. For Marx these relations are what serve as the structuring center or matrix of the social whole, as we have seen from studying the concept of the mode of production. And for this reason it is these relations which are the basis for the constituting of social classes. To deny this, qualifying it as an economist deviation, is to deny the basic contribution of marxism to the study of the social classes, and it is, therefore, a step backward in respect to marxist thought.

Finally, we want to clarify that it is one thing to speak of the classes as *effects* of the social structure, which finally only means that they are fundamentally the effect of the relations of production, and another thing to speak of the *effects which the classes can produce* in the different levels of the society: ideological effects, political effects, or economic effects. When we refer to these effects, we are referring to the concrete practice of these classes. This practice will be studied in the next chapter.

Summary

In this chapter we have referred to the marxist concept of social class. First we have defined it at the level of the mode of production in order to later examine the new determinations which it acquires at the level of the social formation and the political conjuncture. Lastly we have

clarified the definition of the classes as "bearers" of determined structures.

We have looked at the following concepts of the general theory of historical materialism: *social class, class fraction, class interest, class consciousness, class instinct, class structure, transitional class, class situation, class position, social force, motor force, principal force, directing force.*

Questions

1. In what condition did Marx leave his studies of the social classes?
2. What is Marx's innovation with respect to the social classes?
3. How are the social classes defined at the level of the mode of production?
4. Why does Marx speak of three classes when he refers to the capitalist system?
5. How many classes exist in each mode of production?
6. What is the relation between the reproduction of the mode of production and the social classes?
7. Do all the individuals in a society belong to a given class?
8. What is a class fraction?
9. What is immediate, spontaneous interest?
10. What is class interest?
11. What is class consciousness?
12. What is class instinct?
13. Can the proletariat spontaneously acquire a proletarian class consciousness?
14. What is class structure?
15. Why do the social classes acquire new determinations at the level of the social formation? What kinds, for example?
16. What is a transitional class?
17. Can you explain why the word "bearer" is used to define the role of the classes?
18. What is class situation?
19. What is class position?
20. What is a social force?
21. What are the motor forces?
22. What is a principal force?
23. What is a directing force?
24. Does marxism reduce the social classes to merely economic categories?
25. Why does Marx not define the social classes by using as criteria income differences?

Themes for Reflection

1. What prior knowledge is needed to make a scientific analysis of the social classes in Latin America?
2. Why is the criterion of greater or lesser exploitation not a marxist criterion for the definition of the revolutionary possibilities of a class?
3. What are the effects of imperialist action on the Latin American class structure?

NOTES

¹ Marx, Engels, *Selected Correspondence* (Progress, 1965), p. 69.

² Lenin, *Collected Works*, vol. 29, p. 421.

³ Marx, *Capital*, vol. III, pp. 790-91.

⁴ Lenin, *Collected Works*, vol. 29, p. 421.

⁵ *Ibid.*, vol. 5, p. 121.

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In This Issue

The problem of the State under capitalism and its general political crises, the constitution of social classes, the history of the world and US communist movements, and the importance of theoretical production in analysing all these processes are discussed in this issue of the *Theoretical Review*. A fresh and critical examination of all these questions is decisive to correctly orienting the left toward what appears to be the beginning of a new political conjuncture in the United States, one which requires new kinds of intervention and a coherent strategy and tactics.

Our opening article by editor Paul Costello, *Capitalism, the State and Crises*, attempts to develop a theoretical framework (drawn from Gramsci and Poulantzas) which critiques instrumentalist approaches to State analysis and lays the basis for understanding the direction of development of US capitalism in the 1980s.

In order to place the present conjuncture in its historical context, as well as the context within which the theoretical orientation of this journal has developed, we are publishing two articles in this issue. The first is a reprint of *Against Dogmatism and Revisionism: Toward a Genuine Communist Party*, first published in 1976 by the Ann Arbor Collective, one of the first organizations to advance the "primacy of theory" party building line. The document, while four years old, is still relevant in identifying some of the major problems which have faced, and are still facing the American left, and in pointing the way forward for US communists.

We have also translated for the first time in English a portion of an article by Louis Althusser which we have entitled "The Importance of Theory." Originally published in Cuba in 1965 it discusses some of the common errors in Marxist theoretical practice and demonstrates how the

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complex political questions facing the international communist movement will only find their solution if advanced theoretical work is brought to bear upon them.

Finally, we are continuing our serialization of Marta Harnecker's *Elementary Concepts of Historical Materialism*. In this issue is an exceptionally good chapter on social classes which provides a very good introduction to the most important Marxist studies presently available on this question.

continued from page 39

⁶ Marx, *Theories of Surplus Value*, Part II, pp. 44-45.

⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 152-53.

⁸ Marx, *Capital*, vol. 1, pp. 541-2.

⁹ *Ibid.*, vol. III, pp. 292-3.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 300-01.

¹¹ Lenin, *Collected Works*, vol. 5, p. 375.

¹² *Ibid.*, pp. 382-3.

¹³ *Ibid.*, vol. 6, p. 368.

¹⁴ "What the 'Friends of the People' are and How They Fight the Social Democrats."

¹⁵ Marx, *Capital*, vol. I, p. 689.

¹⁶ Marx, Engels, *Selected Works* (FLPH, 1958), vol. 1, p. 288.

¹⁷ Lenin, "What the 'Friends of the People' are and How They Fight the Social Democrats."

¹⁸ Georg Lukacs, *History and Class Consciousness* (MIT, 1971), pp. 59-60.

¹⁹ Marx, *The Poverty of Philosophy*.

²⁰ Nicos Poulantzas, *Political Power and Social Classes* (NLB, 1973), p. 79.

²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 80.

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