

THE "ECONOMIC FACTOR" IN THE MATERIALIST INTERPRETATION OF HISTORY.

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Your opponent's objections to the Materialist Interpretation are certainly not well founded. One statement he makes, that Marx considered the economic factor the **only factor to influence history** may be disproved by reading Marx. Any number of instances may be found in his writings of where he takes account of other factors. One or two such instances I will quote in due course, and also indicate where others may be found. Marx certainly considered economic factors as basic factors of social progress, and he recognizes that their influence in history is manifested in more ways than through class interest. Continued economic development beyond the primitive subsistence level, once of necessity entailed on all members of the human family, makes freedom from unremitting toil for the essentials of mere physical existence possible, if not for all, at least for increasing numbers as productivity increases. Time, free from the strangling grip of primal needs, is the room of human development. Energies are liberated, observation, enquiry, reflection, speculation, the powers of reason and imagination overstep the narrow bounds of brute necessity, diversity of economic activities ensues, the arts, literatures, religions and philosophies and the sciences, refinements and extensions of our cultural life appear. The "state of the industrial arts" and the "state of the cultural arts" inter-act upon each other and, to a degree, merge into, modify, and become a necessity to each other. Progress becomes cumulative and, in some less than satisfactory degree, rounded off. It has also so happened, as a historic necessity, that economic development has given birth to the principle of private ownership with its corollaries, the competitive principle, and also the social classes having divergent and conflicting economic interests: mastery and servitude has been in various forms, though always composed of property owners and the propertyless, the dominant social relationship of human beings down through the later ages of organized society—antique slave owners and chattel slaves, feudal lords and rising capitalist class, and the land serfs, modern capitalists and propertyless wage proletarians. The political history of those societies is largely a history of their class struggles. These struggles, each in its time and place have ended either in one class attaining supremacy in the struggle and, by obtaining control of the powers of the centralized state, thus direct a reconstruction of society in their own interest, or else, the struggles have ended in the common ruin of the contending classes. The centralized political state evolves out of the necessity for a stabilizing power amidst the anarchic conflicts of economic interests which result from competitive struggle for control of the means of life. But the state enforces stability primarily in the interest of the dominant social class who control it. Marx took account of this two sided effect of the influence of economic factors on history, i.e., (1) economic development, laying the basis of general progress in all the arts of livelihood and culture. And (2) as giving occasion for social classes and the political state, and, class interest, giving rise to class struggles, and, as the outcome of the struggles, political development.

Thus far I have merely indicated in crudest outline the effect of economic factors or forces on general progress and the progress and changes of the forms of social organization. The influence of the economic on history is also to be seen in the inter-tribal, racial, and national conflicts for territory, for trade routes by land or sea, for markets and sources of raw materials, coal, oil and ores, etc. It is in the sense that I have tried to describe, that Marx considered the economic as basic. "The mode of production in material life determines the general character of the social, political and spiritual processes of life." (Preface, "Critique of Political Economy.") The use of the qualifying term "general" implies there are other factors, though they are not so influential. Here I quote one instance where Marx insists on these other than economic factors

being taken account of. In chapter 47 of the third volume of "Capital," he discusses the "Genesis of Capitalist Ground Rent," and in the section devoted to "Labor Rent, or the Unpaid Surplus Labor of Independent Producers," he has, in part, this to say (p. 919):

"The specific economic form, in which unpaid surplus labor is pumped out of the direct producers, determines the relation of rulers and ruled. . . . It is always the direct relation of the owners of the conditions of production to the direct producers, which reveal the innermost secret, the hidden foundation of the entire social construction, and with it the political form of the relations between sovereignty and dependence, in short, of the corresponding form of the state. . . . This does not prevent the same economic basis from showing infinite gradations in its appearance even though its principle conditions are everywhere the same. This is due to innumerable outside circumstances, natural environment, race peculiarities, outside historical influences, and so forth, all of which must be ascertained by careful analysis."

See also quotations in "Geordie's" articles on the "Labor Theory of Value," now appearing in the "Clarion." One feature of these articles is, that they serve to illustrate the cultural power of the material conditions prevalent at any particular time in social life. The concept of "Value" is seen to arise only in certain definite historical conditions of production and exchange, and, that with every change in those conditions, an approximate change takes place in the concept.

Your opponent says that Engels modified Marx's statement. If he means by "modified," moderated, it is only necessary to read Engels to disprove that. What Engels did in his later years was not to detract the power of the economic as a factor in history, but to make war on some who were over-emphasizing its influence to the neglect of other factors. It is significant of the virility of the Materialist Conception that Engels, and others since, by reason that they stand on Marx' shoulders, who himself had only one man's life time to work in and the comparatively limited material of the science of his day to draw upon, have to take account in a more exhaustive manner of other factors than the strictly economic which also influence human conduct and cultural growth. As my quotation of Marx shows, it was a question with him as to the relative efficiency of various material factors in enforcing habits of life, whose daily discipline shapes men's habits of thought, and not a question of the economic factor alone. Another quotation from Marx will show that that was his position. See "Geordie's" article in the August 1st issue, in which the quotation from vol. 1, p. 69, states, in effect: that the notion of human equality must have acquired the fixity of a popular prejudice before all kinds of human labor (human labor in general) could come to be regarded as equal and equivalent.

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per cent (10 percent) reduction would be more reasonable, especially in view of the fact of the slight percentage in the decrease of the cost of living as given by the "Labor Gazette." The reduction made this year in the pay of the masters (captains) and engineers was only ten per cent. (10 per cent). It is difficult to understand why only a ten per cent. reduction was made in their cases, and nearly thirty per cent. in the cases of the rest of the crew, unless it be that it was anticipated that there would be considerable difficulty in replacing the certificated staff, whereas in the latter case, it was expected to take full advantage of the widespread unemployment of labor on shore."

The task was not so "difficult" when a little consideration is given the subject, to ascertain why the master class can take such a large slice out of the plug: it only requires a favorable opportunity when they pounce on the worker with full force, never considering the wage-slave as human. "Mr. Enderby testified that when his schedules were being made the company had solely in view what they could afford to pay, but did not consider, in any case, the conditions of living imposed upon their men. It would

appear to be evident that the reduction this year was made with the object in view of taking advantage of the abundance of men and labor conditions generally throughout the territory served by the company from which their men are recruited."

As the vulture treats its prey so the capitalist class use their slaves; but their motto seems to be, where there's life the pickings are good. Men drift around in the aimless sort of way, no record behind them and very little to look forward to, no record except that of a pitiable slave with the sweat and blood sapped out, to furnish the parasite with the luxuries of life but, "Britannia rules the waves." Many of these men listened to the call of their master and accepted the invitation to take part in "the war to end war"; some of the men have returned only to find that a greater war is going on—the war to end classes. In order to ensure some measure of protection for themselves against the rapacity of the employers the men join in union with one another, but the masters refuse recognition of the union.

Union men are discriminated against. "General manager Mr. Enderby has admitted in his evidence that at least one officer had been reprimanded for this practice, he having collected and insisted upon the surrender of union books by those men who were being employed." With the men in poor financial shape the union must likewise be in the same position: not even satisfied with this the master class intends to break all power of resistance of the workers, smash the unions, disintegrate them, then impose conditions that no person could stand any longer than one trip, when he jumps off without his paycheck, glad of relief. The company is safe, as there are many men willing to try the west and as many more anxious to make their way east. The married man tries to stick to the ship; he cannot jump off so easily, unless it be overboard. He tries to provide for his family; when he sees he cannot do so sometimes a note is found in his clothes, as: "The Board had reported to it the case of an assistant cook whose body was recently found in the river, on whose person was found a letter stating that he had committed suicide because he found it impossible to keep his family going on the small wages he was in receipt of."

The Board made some recommendations in order to ameliorate these stunning conditions, but please notice how our kind-masters deal with the suggestions. The company writes the following: "I am instructed to advise you that the Canada Steamship Lines, Limited, cannot accept the recommendations of the Board for the adjustment of the alleged dispute in question." While the workers endure these tortuous conditions, both in the fire-hole and on decks, with no prospect of better things in view, the company advertises its services in the daily paper as follows: "There is never a dull moment aboard ship, a wonderful orchestra plays every day and you enjoy a masquerade ball, when prizes are presented to the best dressed ladies and gentlemen. Round trip from Toronto, \$108.00." ("Mail and Empire," Toronto).

The working class, owning nothing but labor power, are divorced from the machinery of wealth production, they are permitted to work only when it is profitable to the capitalist class. The sole function of the wage slave (in the case under review, workers aboard ship) under the present system of society is to produce and provide the luxuries of life for a parasite class. What the workers produce is taken from them, excepting the few miserable crumbs that are grudgingly thrown to them and upon which they are supposed to raise successors to fill their places in the fire-hole or on deck as the case may be. These few crumbs constitute the diet of the wage working class under the wages system, and while the workers will be compelled to unite in order to resist the arbitrary will and dictation of the capitalist class, if only to preserve the power of combat, the goal must be the social ownership of all wealth socially produced. When that condition is reached a sailor on the Great Lakes may more closely resemble a human being than the water rat his present conditions make him resemble now.

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