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# Glossary

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**CLASSES AND CLASS STRUGGLE** Social *classes* are antagonistic social groups in which one group appropriates the labor of the other based on the different places which they occupy in the economic structure of a given mode of production. The places occupied by these groups are fundamentally determined by the specific relations in which they are situated to the means of production and by necessary political and ideological conditions of existence.

No society exists (that is to say, continues in history) except by reproducing the material and social conditions of its existence (of its production). And the conditions of existence in capitalist society are the exploitation to which the capitalist class subjects the working classes in the production process—the extraction of unpaid surplus labor and surplus value. *Class struggle* is the confrontation which is produced between these two antagonistic classes when they are struggling for their class interests.

Class struggle is not a one-way affair; in capitalism it is the struggle of the capitalist class to exploit the working class and the struggle of the working class to resist the exploitation of which it is the victim. It is important to note that this struggle can only take place in specific *social formations* (q.v.) which involve other classes. Class struggle, therefore, is not reducible to the two antagonistic classes, the capitalists and the workers, even though they are fundamental in understanding capitalist society. Class struggle is the whole ensemble of struggles between classes dominated by the two fundamental classes.

Historically, the dominance of the capitalist class was exercised over the working class with extraordinary ferocity, long before the working class began to reply, to organize and mobilize itself, and to engage in its great historical battles for a more humane existence. The principal form of exploitation is the appropriation of surplus labor by the capitalist class, but other forms and effects of this exploitation also appear, for example, the continuation of poverty, hunger, discrimination and war at a time when technological and scientific means exist to virtually eliminate them. For the conditions of existence of the capitalist society are the *conditions of exploitation* to which the capitalist class subjects the working class: the capitalist class must reproduce them at all cost.

The capitalist class as a whole cannot assure the stability and continuance of exploitation (which it imposes in production) except by conducting a permanent class struggle against the working class. This class struggle is conducted by perpetuating and/or reproducing the material ideological, economic and political conditions of exploitation. It is conducted in the production process by the reduction of wages, repressive work rules, unemployment, a division of labor based on racial and sexual discrimination and the rigid distinction between mental and manual labor, anti-union activities, etc. And it is conducted at the same time outside of production where the role of the state takes the dominant and determinate position. Both the repressive apparatuses (police, courts,

army, etc.) and the ideological apparatuses (political system, schools, churches, media, the entertainment industry, etc.) intervene *primarily* to subjugate the working class by means of repression and the maintenance of ideological and political *hegemony* (q.v.), though these institutions themselves contain class *contradictions*, and are not simply tools of the ruling class. The class struggle of the capitalists never ceases, it is part of the very system of the capitalist mode of production.

The working class at first only resisted the attacks of the exploiting class as individuals. Necessity forced the working class to organize itself and develop its consciousness; in other words, it was forced to constitute itself as a class. The labor union movement was the first form of the class' organized defense, which led to their counter-offensive for better wages and working conditions, etc. This *struggle* is limited, however, when it is kept within the bounds of economic struggle. Only when the workers' movement takes up the political struggle for socialist revolution will it finally be able to end exploitation, and thereby begin to eradicate the bases of classes and class struggle.

In the capitalist mode of production a starting point for examining classes is the economy. On the one hand the working class exists in a society where it only possesses its "ability to labor," (the commodity labor power) and must sell its labor power to the capitalists in order to survive. The working class has no other means of producing the necessities of life. It is compelled by hunger to sell its labor power. On the other hand, the capitalist class not only possesses the means of production, but they, through their domination and control of the production process, also control the products of this mode of production. They, therefore, control the distribution and circulation of the wealth produced.

This relationship of the workers selling their labor power and the capitalist buying it is not an equal relationship. Labor has the unique ability to produce more value than it receives in wages. The difference between the value given to the working class in wages as a means of subsistence and the total value produced is appropriated by the capitalist. The difference in value produced and the value paid in wages is called surplus value (or surplus labor). This surplus value is expropriated by the owners of the means of production and is transferred into two parts: one part as high and fancy living for the capitalist, and the other part is transformed into capital in order to reinvest and expand the domination of capital. This appropriation of surplus labor is nothing more than a process of robbing the working class of its surplus labor.

The existence of antagonistic classes is thus inscribed in production itself, in the heart of production itself: in the relations of production. The working class is under the domination of the relations of production which are relations of exploitation. The function (*raison d'être*) of the capitalists is to increase the amount (both relatively and absolutely) of surplus value expropriated from the working class. The capitalist system exploits because of inherent necessity.

Since the goal of the capitalist class is to increase its profit (surplus value), it is out of necessity forced to constantly attempt to increase the length of the work period and the intensity of the labor process (increase absolute and relative surplus value) in its drive for more profit. The capitalists are

also forced to minimize costs, improve efficiency, and improve productivity which has historically resulted in greater concentration and centralization of the production process. However, these movements lead to countervailing tendencies. The more the capitalists amplify the exploitation by lengthening the work day and increasing the intensity of the labor process, the more the class contradiction becomes apparent. And the more the capitalists centralize and concentrate the means of production, the more they also concentrate and centralize the work force, exposing the facade of 'individual' circumstances and/or misfortunes—exposing the fact of class exploitation. Both of these countervailing tendencies force the exposure of the class nature of the production process which cultivates class consciousness and class organization. Here again, it is clear that the relations of production intervene at every level of the production process.

Schematically, we can say that the capitalist mode of production emerged from a previous mode of production. This emergence was marked by numerous factors; among them are: the level of development of the previous mode, relative strength of the emerging classes, the balance of class forces within both the dying mode and the emerging mode of production, the bonding and/or separation of the various social forces in alliances, the technical development of the means of production, the development of the cultural, ideological and political movements and their resultant interventions, etc. (We can only abstractly outline some of the elements here. Concrete historical analysis of a specific social formation is necessary to articulate the hierarchy of these relationships and elements.)

We assume the existence of a given pre-capitalist society in which the capitalist mode emerges. This development is determined primarily by the laws of capitalist development. But this determination is not absolute, any new society is marked (birthmark of the old society: Marx) in its development; and at a number of points, the new society is overdetermined by the old. (Marx provides a concrete demonstration of a form of this *overdetermination* (q.v.) in his work *The 18th Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*.) No social formation develops simply. Remnants of the old classes remain, some by transforming themselves (landowners), others by operating in the niches and crannies existing within society (petty bourgeoisie), and others are reproduced in new forms (peasants). However, most pre-capitalist social classes are destroyed. While pre-capitalist relations are being replaced by the fundamental class struggle between the capitalists and the working class, there also exist the conditions for the development of new elements necessary for the capitalist mode of production; these elements include: commercial, financial, technical, and governmental employees who assume positions in the hierarchy of social relations within society.

It is not possible to concretely predetermine the nature of this historical development, but it is historically true that capitalism has tended to constantly increase its domination at the expense of previous modes, thereby destroying the foundation in which pre-capitalist classes exist. The significant aspect of this examination of pre-capitalist classes is that they not only mark the emergence of the classes of capitalist society, they are also residues and holdovers which have the ability to constantly intervene within the whole ensemble of social relations. Capitalism,

with its constituent classes, does not develop 'purely' or 'simply'.

A society only exists as a social formation where the economy plays the dominant and determinate role; but the does not mean that we liquidate the other social practices (political and ideological) in the determination of classes, forms of class struggle, and their reproduction. In a particular capitalist social formation the other social practices play an important part, especially in the maintenance of capitalist hegemony in society. This hegemony is maintained through a number of mechanisms and apparatuses; here we shall mention only two: *ideology* (q.v.) and the specific form of the capitalist state. While each particular social formation is the result of a whole ensemble of social relations, culture and traditions, history of class struggles, etc., the dominant and determinate character of the economic structure and relationships constantly intervenes within this social ensemble, insuring the conditions for its own existence and continued reproduction. This interaction, intervention and mediation result in a social unity which in turn acts upon the ensemble of elements. This is not a simple or pure process; rather it is a process characterized by the dominance of social relations in every aspect of the formation of society. A result is the knowledge that every process, structure, apparatus, and mechanism of capitalism is not simply a tool of capital; nor are they totally controlled by the ruling class, even though the capitalists attempt to use them to insure their hegemony and power at every level; rather they are fields of *class struggle*. [Sources: Louis Althusser, "Marxism-Leninism and the Class Struggle," *TR* No. 3, pp. 17-20; Marta Harnecker, "The Class Struggle," *TR* Nos. 20 and 21, pp. 31-35; Nicos Poulantzas, *Classes in Contemporary Capitalism*, 1975, pp. 13-35; Louis Althusser, *Essays in Self-Criticism*, 1976, pp. 47-54.]

**CONJUNCTURE** The *conjuncture*, or "current moment," is the particular state of the combination of social contradictions and balance of class forces in any concrete *social formation* (q.v.) at a particular time or period of time. The conjuncture reflects the relative strength of the various *classes* (q.v.), their forms of consciousness and struggle, their relations to each other and to the state. Within a given social formation dominated by a particular mode of production there can be a number of different conjunctures representing new complex interactions and contradictions. Since the general character of the conjuncture can provide communists with insights into the nature and degree of social contradictions and *class struggle* (q.v.), it also indicates the character, forms and extent of communist intervention in the social practice of that formation (i.e., strategy, tactics, mass line). Thus, the analysis of a particular social formation is very important in understanding the changing relationships which directly and immediately affect the application and intervention of communist *political practice* (q.v.). Communists, insisting on the centrality of class struggle in class society always work to intervene in the multiplicity of contradictions. They must also always work to recognize the changing relationship between classes and the multiplicity of contradictions which make up the character of the conjunctures in a specific social formation to guide their political intervention.

The concept of the conjuncture embodies the unity of theoretical practice and political practice, of a scientific understanding of social reality and a conscious and directed intervention in it. If the concept of the conjuncture is to serve and extend the unity of theory and practice, all communist theoretical practice must ultimately be directed toward producing knowledge of the conjuncture and the necessary requirements of communist intervention in it. If communists are to successfully intervene in the ever-present class struggle, we must have a concrete knowledge of the social formation at the moment in which we are going to intervene (Lenin's "current moment"); in other words, a concrete knowledge of the conjuncture. For example, we must ask: precisely what is the character of the present conjuncture for US capitalism and our movement? What is the nature of the connection between the different sectors of the world capitalist system and the connections with the US in particular? What is the state of capital accumulation in the US and the affect of the current struggles of the working class on it? What are the prospects and options for the capitalist class as a whole in the present economic crisis? And for the working class? What is the nature and character of class alliances that exist and can be developed?

Within any particular social formation there is a consecutive development of a series of conjunctures within which the form of class struggle and the balance of class forces express themselves. Each conjuncture is ultimately determined by internal contradictions present within a specific social formation, and the character of the conjuncture determines the possible outcome; but external relations have serious effects on internal contradictions.

Because we can understand that any particular social formation is changing and contradictory, the intervention of communists must reflect this movement in their political practice. This calls for a continuous and rigorous investigation and analysis to increase our understanding of this changing conjuncture in order to advance the interests of the working class in the generalized class struggle. A mistaken view is that any social formation is static, where the hope is that revolution is always possible, and all that is necessary is to apply the traditional "orthodox" formula that has succeeded in the past. This mistaken view treats the social formation as mechanically rigid and eternal; but such a conception also conforms to, and is consistent with, the dogmatic *problematic* (q.v.) where the "universal" theory need only be "applied" to the "universal" conditions to be successful. The conceptual rigidity of dogmatic theory thus finds its match in the supposed rigidity of the social formation. The concept of the conjuncture serves as a real tool which can be used to guard against dogmatic and sterile "universal" formulas.

It is very important that we recognize that every conjuncture within which we act is unique and has to be analyzed separately. Communists must assimilate the lessons to be learned from class struggles at other times and in other countries, but these must be tested for their relevance against the concrete analysis of the concrete situation in which they are operating. It is, however, possible to divide conjunctures into certain general types according to broadly defined states of class struggle, to each of which there corresponds a general orientation of communist work. These general types are drawn up to aid recognition of the courses of action most likely to be fruitful. It is not, however,

sufficient to recognize the general types of conjuncture—the *conjunctural analysis must be carried out* and deepened as time and experience provide new information. Schematically, we can say there are three general types of conjunctures:

(1) The socially *stable conjuncture* is characterized by the latent rather than explosive nature of capitalist contradictions and the relatively smooth process of capitalist development.

(2) The *crisis conjuncture* is characterized by capitalism's fundamental need for restructuring of one kind or another in order to maintain itself, but the possibility of state power passing out of the hands of the capitalists is not yet present.

(3) The *revolutionary* or *transitional conjuncture* is characterized by the possibility of state power passing from the hands of the ruling class.

We must keep in mind that this description of these general types of conjunctures is schematic in form. The social, political, and ideological elements internal to each conjuncture may combine and interact in myriad ways, resulting in differing expressions particular to a specific social formation. This knowledge stresses and reinforces the thesis of Lenin and Mao on the importance of grasping the "key link" through continuous concrete analysis of concrete conditions.

In summary, the importance of the concept of the *conjuncture* lies in its constant demand for analysis of the balance of class forces, the state of the communist movement, the state of the workers movement, etc. This knowledge determines strategy and forms of intervention in a particular social formation at a given moment. [Sources: Louis Althusser, *For Marx*, p. 250; *Theoretical Review* editorial board, "An Introduction to Theoretical Practice," *TR* No. 4, pp. 5 & 6; Scott Robinson, "Anti-Revisionist Lessons for Party Building Today," *TR* No. 13, p. 20; Paul Costello, "Leninist Politics and the Struggle Against Economism," *TR* No. 15, p. 7; Marta Harnecker, "Mode of Production, Social Formation, and Political Conjuncture," *TR* No. 17, p. 28; Communist Formation (Scotland), "The Distinguishing Features of Leninist Political Practice," *TR* No. 4, pp. 12-21.]

**DOGMATISM** is the transformation of Marxism-Leninism from a reliance on the "spirit, the sense, the lessons" (Lenin) of revolutionary experience, to a practice of mechanically applying frozen formulas and definitions of the past to the complex and varied material realities of today. In this way the living science of Marxism-Leninism becomes increasingly superceded by the "orthodoxy" of its works, which while always present, cannot take the place of theoretical development itself. Theory increasingly becomes a series of abstract truths, general enough to be dogmatically and mechanically imposed.

Instead of serving as a guide to practice, dogmatic theory more and more comes to serve as a justification for the requirements of practical expediency. In this way, theory functions as a facade masking the real character of the practice it was invoked to justify. This role blunts theory, robs it of its critical edge, and reduces it to a state where it is incapable of playing the central role Lenin ascribed to it when he wrote: "without revolutionary theory there can be no revolutionary movement."

Because dogmatism blocks the forward development of theory and the independent (independent of political expediency) elaboration of Marxism-Leninism to concrete conditions, theory loses its scientific character. It becomes more and more a non-scientific orthodoxy whose principle aspect is a dogmatist method and a static conceptual framework. By means of this domination, dogmatism acts to envelope and transform the revolutionary discoveries of Marx and Lenin, which remain within it, into harmless and abstract ideas divorced from the actual political and ideological practice of the communist and workers' movements.

A major aspect of this dogmatism is the failure to analyze, elaborate and rectify the fundamental tools of Marxist analysis. In typically *empiricist* (q.v.) fashion, analysis usually consists of merely "applying" *Marxist-Leninist theory* (q.v.) to concrete conditions. The assumption here is that Marxist-Leninist theory is a fully understood and complete body of principles which is imposed on material reality. As Bettelheim states: "Saying that theory is 'complete' means no longer permitting anything but commentaries on it, and thus means putting forward a metaphysical proposition which forbids any elaboration or further research. It means trying to sterilize theory and cause it to wither, for if theory fails to advance it must retreat." [Sources: Charles Bettelheim, "The Great Leap Backward," *Monthly Review*, July-August, 1978, p. 82 (As cited in *TR* No. 8); Ann Arbor Collective (ML), 1976, "Against Dogmatism and Revisionism: Toward a Genuine Communist Party," *TR* No. 20, p. 27 (Hereafter, "Toward a Genuine . . ."); Tucson ML Collective, "Party Building Tasks in the Present Period: On Theory and Fusion," 1977, p. 3 (Hereafter, "Theory and Fusion"); Scott Robinson, "The Communist Movement and the Struggle Against Racism," *TR* No. 8, p. 28; Paul Costello, "Anti-Revisionist Communism in the United States, 1945-1950," *TR* No. 11, p. 17; Paul Costello, "Party Building: Our Aim is True," *TR* No. 12, p. 5.]

**ECONOMISM** *Economism* is the view that the development of the productive forces, not the *class struggle* (q.v.) is the driving force in history. Economism transforms what Marx had seen as a possible outcome of class struggle into an economic inevitability. The historical tendency toward a crisis resulting from the contradiction between production forces and production relations was transformed into an inevitable law of nature by "economists." The centrality of class struggle at all levels of a *social formation* (q.v.) in the overthrow of capitalism was replaced by the centrality of an inevitable economic breakdown.

For revolutionary Marxism, the economic collapse of capitalism is in no sense inevitable, nor by any means will it come from a contradiction at the economic level alone. The economic tendencies of capitalism act against each other, some to fetter the productive forces, others to develop them. In no sense do production relations act as an absolute block to expansion of the productive forces. Finally, no matter what favorable conditions the economic contradictions produce, it is only when they are reinforced by political and ideological conditions, and acted upon by the class struggle of the masses and the conscious activity of communists that

the possibility of revolution exists.

Economism reduced the other levels of the social formation to a mere "expression" of the economy, and the social contradictions at all levels of an "expression" of the contradictions between forces and relations of production. In the end class struggle, too, becomes either a secondary characteristic and/or itself an expression of economic forces.

An economist deviation is characterized by an overemphasis on the economic level. That is, it is assumed that once the economic level has developed, once the forces of production have developed, the superstructure will more or less automatically follow along. Thus, economists look to the economic level as the dominant factor, regardless of the *conjuncture* (q.v.). [Sources: Paul Costello, "Stalin and Historical Reality," *TR* No. 8, p. 17; Paul Costello, "Leninist Politics and the Struggle Against Economism," *TR* No. 15, pp. 5-6; Harry Eastmarsh, "Analyzing China Since Mao's Death," *TR* No. 16, p. 29.]

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<sup>40</sup>Louis Althusser, "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses," *Lenin and Philosophy* (MR, 1971); Rosalind Coward and John Ellis, *Language and Materialism* (RKP, 1977); Ernesto Laclau, *Politics and Ideology in Marxist Theory* (Verso, 1979); Goran Therborn, *The Ideology of Power and the Power of Ideology* (Verso, 1980).

<sup>41</sup>On economism see the Glossary elsewhere in this issue. On instrumentalism see "Capitalism, the State and Crises," in *TR* No. 20 (Jan.-Feb. 1981). On class reductionism see Laclau, pp. 100-111.

<sup>42</sup>The (in)famous line of the Progressive Labor Party beginning in the late 1960s.

<sup>43</sup>Coward and Ellis, p. 72.

<sup>44</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 73.

<sup>45</sup>Therborn, p. 18.

<sup>46</sup>Althusser, p. 162.

<sup>47</sup>Laclau, pp. 100-111.

<sup>48</sup>For an interesting discussion of this question see Manning Marable, pp. 93-128.

<sup>49</sup>Michael Banton, *Race Relations* (Basic Books, 1967), p. 8.

<sup>50</sup>Eugene D. Genovese, *The World the Slaveholders Made* (Vintage, 1971), p. 150.

<sup>51</sup>Michael Banton, *The Idea of Race* (Tavistock, 1977), pp. 19-24.

<sup>52</sup>Genovese, p. 105.

<sup>53</sup>Robert L. Allen, *Reluctant Reformers* (Anchor, 1975), pp. 264-65.

<sup>54</sup>Banton, *Race Relations*, p. 125.

<sup>55</sup>Allen, p. 276.

<sup>56</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 289.

<sup>57</sup>Marable, pp. 93-128.

<sup>58</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 156-61.

<sup>59</sup>"Toward a Contemporary Strategy: Lessons of the 1930s," in *TR* No. 21 (Mar.-April, 1981).

<sup>60</sup>Lenin, *Collected Works*, Vol. 23, pp. 24-25.

<sup>61</sup>Marx, Engels, Lenin, Stalin, *The Woman Question* (International, 1951), p. 82.

<sup>62</sup>Gideon Ben-Tovim, "The Struggle Against Racism: Theoretical and Strategic Perspectives," *Marxism Today* (July, 1978).