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(a) From the 1967 Preface

I must confine myself here to a critique of *History and Class Consciousness* but this is not to imply that this deviation from Marxism was less pronounced in the case of other writers with a similar outlook. In my book this deviation has immediate consequences for the view of economics I give there and fundamental confusions result, as in the nature of the case economics must be crucial. It is true that the attempt is made to explain all ideological phenomena by reference to their basis in economics but, despite this, the purview of economics is narrowed down because its basic Marxist category, labour as the mediator of the metabolic interaction between society and nature, is missing. Given my basic approach, such a consequence is quite natural. It means that the most important real pillars of the Marxist view of the world disappear and the attempt to deduce the ultimate revolutionary implications of Marxism in as radical a fashion as possible is deprived of a genuinely economic foundation. It is self-evident that this means the disappearance of the ontological objectivity of nature upon which this process of change is based. But it also means the disappearance of the interaction between labour as seen from a genuinely materialist standpoint and the evolution of the men who labour. Marx's great insight that "even production for the sake of production means nothing more than the ***development of the productive energies of man, and hence the development of the wealth of human nature as an end in itself***" lies outside the terrain which *History and Class Consciousness* is able to explore. Capitalist exploitation thus loses its objective revolutionary aspect and there is a failure to grasp the fact that "although this evolution of the species Man is accomplished at first at the expense of the majority of individual human beings and of certain human classes, it finally overcomes this antagonism and coincides with the evolution of the particular individual. Thus the higher development of individuality is only purchased by a historical process in which individuals are sacrificed. In consequence, my account of the contradictions of capitalism as well as of the revolutionisation of the proletariat is unintentionally coloured by an overriding subjectivism.

This has a narrowing and distorting effect on the book's central concept of praxis. With regard to this problem, too, my intention was to base myself on Marx and to free his concepts from every subsequent bourgeois distortion and to adapt them to the requirements of the great revolutionary upsurge of the present. (Above all I was absolutely convinced of one thing: that the purely contemplative nature of bourgeois thought had to be radically overcome. As a result the conception of revolutionary praxis in this book takes on extravagant overtones that are more in

keeping with the current messianic utopianism of the Communist left than with authentic Marxist doctrine. Comprehensibly enough in the context of the period, I attacked the bourgeois and opportunistic currents in the workers' movement that glorified a conception of knowledge which was ostensibly objective but was in fact isolated from any sort of praxis; with considerable justice I directed my polemics against the over-extension and over-valuation of contemplation. Marx's critique of Feuerbach only reinforced my convictions. What I failed to realise, however, was that in the absence of a basis in real praxis, in labour as its original form and model, the over-extension of the concept of praxis would lead to its opposite: a relapse into idealistic contemplation. My intention, then, was to chart the correct and authentic class consciousness of the proletariat, distinguishing it from 'public opinion surveys' (a term not yet in currency) and to confer upon it an indisputably practical objectivity. I was unable, however, to progress beyond the notion of an 'imputed' class consciousness. By this I meant the same thing as Lenin in *What is to be done?* when he maintained that socialist class consciousness would differ from the spontaneously emerging trade-union consciousness in that it would be implanted in the workers 'from outside', i.e. "from outside the economic struggle and the sphere of the relations between workers and employers". Hence, what I had intended subjectively, and what Lenin had arrived at as the result of an authentic Marxist analysis of a practical movement, was transformed in my account into a purely intellectual result and thus into something contemplative. In my presentation it would indeed be a miracle if this 'imputed', consciousness could turn into revolutionary praxis...

Already Bernstein had wished to dominate everything reminiscent of Hegel's dialectics in the name of 'science'. And nothing was further from the mind of his philosophical opponents, and above all Kautsky, than the wish to undertake the defence of this tradition. For anyone wishing to return to the revolutionary traditions of Marxism the revival of the Hegelian traditions was obligatory. *History and Class Consciousness* represents what was perhaps the most radical attempt to restore the revolutionary nature of Marx's theories by renovating and extending Hegel's dialectics and method. The task was made even more important by the fact that bourgeois philosophy at the time showed signs of a growing interest in Hegel. Of course they never succeeded in making Hegel's breach with Kant the foundation of their analysis and, on the other hand, they were influenced by Dilthey's attempts to construct theoretical bridges between Hegelian dialectics and modern irrationalism. A little while after the appearance of *History and Class Consciousness* Kroner described Hegel as the greatest irrationalist of all time and in Lowith's later studies Marx and Kierkegaard were to emerge as parallel phenomena out

of the dissolution of Hegelianism. It is by contrast with all these developments that we can best see the relevance of *History and Class Consciousness*. Another fact contributing to its importance to the ideology of the radical workers' movement was that whereas Plekhanov and others had vastly overestimated Feuerbach's role as an intermediary between Hegel and Marx, this was relegated to the background here. Anticipating the publication of Lenin's later philosophical studies by some years, it was nevertheless only somewhat later, in the essay on Moses Hess, that I explicitly argued that Marx followed directly from Hegel. However, this position is contained implicitly in many of the discussions in *History and Class Consciousness*.

In a necessarily brief summary it is not possible to undertake a concrete criticism of all the issues raised by the book, and to show how far the interpretation of Hegel it contained was a source of confusion and how far it pointed towards the future. The contemporary reader who is qualified to criticise will certainly find evidence of both tendencies. To assess the impact of the book at that time, and also its relevance today, we must consider one problem that surpasses in its importance all questions of detail. This is the question of alienation, which, for the first time since Marx, is treated as central to the revolutionary critique of capitalism and which has its theoretical and methodological roots in the Hegelian dialectic. Of course the problem was in the air at the time. Some years later, following the publication of Heidegger's *Being and Time* (1927), it moved into the centre of philosophical debate. Even today it has not lost this position, largely because of the influence of Sartre, his followers and his opponents. The philosophical problem raised above all by Lucien Goldmann when he interpreted Heidegger's work in part as a polemical reply to mine – which however was not mentioned explicitly – can be left on one side here. The statement that the problem was in the air is perfectly adequate, particularly as it is not possible to discuss the reasons for this here and to lay bare the mixture of Marxist and Existentialist ideas that were so influential after World War II, especially in France. The question of who was first and who influenced whom is not particularly interesting here. What is important is that the alienation of man is a crucial problem of the age in which we live and is recognised as such by both bourgeois and proletarian thinkers, by commentators on both right and left. Hence *History and Class Consciousness* had a profound impact in youthful intellectual circles; I know of a whole host of good Communists who were won over to the movement by this very fact. Without a doubt the fact that this Marxist and Hegelian question was taken up by a Communist was one reason why the impact of the book went far beyond the limits of the party.

As to the way in which the problem was actually dealt with, it is not hard to see today that it was treated in purely Hegelian terms. In particular its ultimate philosophical foundation is the identical subject-object that realises itself in the historical process. Of course, in Hegel it arises in a purely logical and philosophical form when the highest stage of absolute spirit is attained in philosophy by abolishing alienation and by the return of self-consciousness to itself, thus realising the identical subject-object. In *History and Class Consciousness*, however, this process is socio-historical and it culminates when the proletariat reaches this stage in its class consciousness, thus becoming the identical subject-object of history. This does indeed appear to 'stand Hegel on his feet'; it appears as if the logico-metaphysical construction of the *Phenomenology of Mind* had found its authentic realisation in the existence and the consciousness of the proletariat. And this appears in turn to provide a philosophical foundation for the proletariat's efforts to form a classless society through revolution and to conclude the 'prehistory' of mankind. But is the identical subject-object here anything more in truth than a purely metaphysical construct? Can a genuinely identical subject-object be created by self-knowledge, however adequate, and however truly based on an adequate knowledge of society, i.e. however perfect that self-knowledge is? We need only formulate the question precisely to see that it must be answered in the negative. For even when the content of knowledge is referred back to the knowing subject, this does not mean that the act of cognition is thereby freed of its alienated nature. In the *Phenomenology of Mind*, Hegel rightly dismisses the notion of a mystical and irrationalistic realisation of the identical subject-object, of Schelling's 'intellectual intuition', calling instead for a philosophical and rational solution to the problem. His healthy sense of reality induced him to leave the matter at this juncture; his very general system does indeed culminate in the vision of such a realisation but he never shows in concrete terms how it might be achieved. Thus the proletariat seen as the identical subject-object of the real history of mankind is no materialist consummation that overcomes the constructions of idealism. It is rather an attempt to out-Hegel Hegel, it is an edifice boldly erected above every possible reality and thus attempts objectively to surpass the Master himself.

Hegel's reluctance to commit himself on this point is the product of the wrong-headedness of his basic concept. For it is in Hegel that we first encounter alienation as the fundamental problem of the place of man in the world and *vis-à-vis* the world. However, in the term alienation he includes every type of objectification. Thus 'alienation' when taken to its logical conclusion is identical with objectification. Therefore, when the identical subject-object transcends alienation it must also transcend objectification at the same time. But as, according

to Hegel, the object, the thing exists only as an alienation from self-consciousness, to take it back into the subject would mean the end of objective reality and thus of any reality at all. *History and Class Consciousness* follows Hegel in that it too equates alienation with objectification (to use the term employed by Marx in the *Economic-Philosophical Manuscripts*). This fundamental and crude error has certainly contributed greatly to the success enjoyed by *History and Class Consciousness*. The unmasking of alienation by philosophy was in the air, as we have remarked, and it soon became a central problem in the type of cultural criticism that undertook to scrutinise the condition of man in contemporary capitalism. In the philosophical, cultural criticism of the bourgeoisie (and we need look no further than Heidegger), it was natural to sublimate a critique of society into a purely philosophical problem, i.e. to convert an essentially social alienation into an eternal ‘condition humaine’, to use a term not coined until somewhat later. It is evident that *History and Class Consciousness* met such attitudes half-way, even though its intentions had been different and indeed opposed to them. For when I identified alienation with objectification I meant this as a societal category – socialism would after all abolish alienation – but its irreducible presence in class society and above all its basis in philosophy brought it into the vicinity of the ‘condition humaine’.

(b) From the 1921 Text

Great disunity has prevailed even in the ‘socialist’ camp as to what constitutes the essence of Marxism, and which theses it is ‘permissible’ to criticise and even reject without forfeiting the right to the title of ‘Marxist’. In consequence it came to be thought increasingly ‘unscientific’ to make scholastic exegeses of old texts with a quasi-Biblical status, instead of fostering an ‘impartial’ study of the ‘facts’. These texts, it was argued, had long been ‘superseded’ by modern criticism and they should no longer be regarded as the sole fount of truth.

If the question were really to be formulated in terms of such a crude antithesis it would deserve at best a pitying smile. But in fact it is not (and never has been) quite so straightforward. Let us assume for the sake of argument that recent research had disproved once and for all every one of Marx’s individual theses. Even if this were to be proved, every serious ‘orthodox’ Marxist would still be able to accept all such modern findings without reservation and hence dismiss all of Marx’s theses in toto – without having to renounce his orthodoxy for a single moment. Orthodox Marxism, therefore, does not imply the uncritical acceptance of the results of Marx’s investigations. It is not the ‘belief’ in this or that thesis, nor the exegesis of a ‘sacred’ book. On the contrary, orthodoxy refers exclusively to *method*. It is

the scientific conviction that dialectical materialism is the road to truth and that its methods can be developed, expanded and deepened only along the lines laid down by its founders. It is the conviction, moreover, that all attempts to surpass or 'improve' it have led and must lead to over-simplification, triviality and eclecticism...

Economic fatalism and the reformation of socialism through ethics are intimately connected. It is no accident that they reappear in similar form in Bernstein, Tugan-Baranovsky and Otto Bauer. This is not merely the result of the need to seek and find a subjective substitute for the objective path to revolution that they themselves have blocked. It is the logical consequence of the vulgar-economic point of view and of methodological individualism. The 'ethical' reformation of socialism is the subjective side of the missing category of totality which alone can provide an overall view. For the individual, whether capitalist or proletarian, his environment, his social milieu (including Nature which is the theoretical reflection and projection of that milieu) must appear the servant of a brutal and senseless fate which is eternally alien to him. This world can only be understood by means of a theory which postulates 'eternal laws of nature'. Such a theory endows the world with a rationality alien to man and human action can neither penetrate nor influence the world if man takes up a purely contemplative and fatalistic stance...

For the destruction of a totalising point of view disrupts *the unity of theory and practice*. Action, praxis – which Marx demanded before all else in his *Theses on Feuerbach* – is in essence the penetration and transformation of reality. But reality can only be understood and penetrated as a totality, and only a subject which is itself a totality is capable of this penetration. It was not for nothing that the young Hegel erected his philosophy upon the principle that "truth must be understood and expressed not merely as substance, but also as subject."<sup>[10]</sup> With this he exposed the deepest error and the ultimate limitation of Classical German philosophy. However, his own philosophy failed to live up to this precept and for much of the time it remained enmeshed in the same snares as those of his predecessors.

It was left to Marx to make the concrete discovery of 'truth as the subject' and hence to establish the unity of theory and practice. This he achieved by focusing the known totality upon the reality of the historical process and by confining it to this. By this means he determined both the knowable totality and the totality to be known. The scientific superiority of the standpoint of class (as against that of the individual) has become clear from the foregoing. Now we see the reason for this superiority: *only the class can actively penetrate the reality of society*

*and transform it in its entirety.* For this reason, ‘criticism’ advanced from the standpoint of class is criticism from a total point of view and hence it provides the dialectical unity of theory and practice. In dialectical unity it is at once cause and effect, mirror and motor of the historical and dialectical process. The proletariat as the subject of thought in society destroys at one blow the dilemma of impotence: the dilemma created by the pure laws with their fatalism and by the ethics of pure intentions...

Concrete analysis means then: the relation to society *as a whole*. For only when this relation is established does the consciousness of their existence that men have at any given time emerge in all its essential characteristics. It appears, on the one hand, as something which is *subjectively* justified in the social and historical situation, as something which can and should be understood, i.e. as ‘right’. At the same time, *objectively*, it by-passes the essence of the evolution of society and fails to pinpoint it and express it adequately. That is to say, objectively, it appears as a ‘false consciousness’. On the other hand, we may see the same consciousness as something which fails *subjectively* to reach its self-appointed goals, while furthering and realising the *objective* aims of society of which it is ignorant and which it did not choose.

This twofold dialectical determination of ‘false consciousness’ constitutes an analysis far removed from the naive description of what men in *fact* thought, felt and wanted at any moment in history and from any given point in the class structure. I do not wish to deny the great importance of this, but it remains after all merely the *material* of genuine historical analysis. The relation with concrete totality and the dialectical determinants arising from it transcend pure description and yield the category of objective possibility. By relating consciousness to the whole of society it becomes possible to infer the thoughts and feelings which men would have in a particular situation if they were *able* to assess both it and the interests arising from it in their impact on immediate action and on the whole structure of society. That is to say, it would be possible to infer the thoughts and feelings appropriate to their objective situation. The number of such situations is not unlimited in any society. However much detailed researches are able to refine social typologies there will always be a number of clearly distinguished basic types whose characteristics are determined by the types of position available in the process of production. Now class consciousness consists in fact of the appropriate and rational reactions ‘imputed’ [*zugerechnet*] to a particular typical position in the process of production.<sup>[11]</sup> This consciousness is, therefore, neither the sum nor the average of what is thought or felt by the single individuals who make up the class. And yet the

historically significant actions of the class as a whole are determined in the last resort by this consciousness and not by the thought of the individual – and these actions can be understood only by reference to this consciousness.

This analysis establishes right from the start the distance that separates class consciousness from the empirically given, and from the psychologically describable and explicable ideas which men form about their situation in life. But it is not enough just to state that this distance exists or even to define its implications in a formal and general way. We must discover, firstly, whether it is a phenomenon that differs according to the manner in which the various classes are related to society as a whole and whether the differences are so great as to produce *qualitative distinctions*. And we must discover, secondly, the *practical* significance of these different possible relations between the objective economic totality, the imputed class consciousness and the real, psychological thoughts of men about their lives. We must discover, in short, the *practical, historical function* of class consciousness.

Only after such preparatory formulations can we begin to exploit the category of objective possibility systematically. The first question we must ask is how far is it *intact* possible to discern the whole economy of a society from inside it? It is essential to transcend the limitations of particular individuals caught up in their own narrow prejudices. But it is no less vital not to overstep the frontier fixed for them by the economic structure of society and establishing their position in it. <sup>[12]</sup> Regarded abstractly and formally, then, class consciousness implies a class-conditioned *unconsciousness* of ones own socio-historical and economic condition. <sup>[13]</sup> This condition is given as a definite structural relation, a definite formal nexus which appears to govern the whole of life. The ‘falseness’, the illusion implicit in this situation is in no sense arbitrary; it is simply the intellectual reflex of the objective economic structure. Thus, for example, “the value or price of labour-power takes on the appearance of the price or value of labour itself ...” and “the illusion is created that the totality is paid labour.... In contrast to that, under slavery even that portion of labour which is paid for appears unpaid for.” <sup>[14]</sup> Now it requires the most painstaking historical analysis to use the category of objective possibility so as to isolate the conditions in which this illusion can be exposed and a real connection with the totality established. For if from the vantage point of a particular class the totality of existing society is not visible; if a class thinks the thoughts imputable to it and which bear upon its interests right through to their logical conclusion and yet fails to strike at the heart of that totality, then such a class is doomed to play only a subordinate role. It can never influence the course of history in either a conservative or progressive direction. Such classes are normally



condemned to passivity, to an unstable oscillation between the ruling and the revolutionary classes, and if perchance they do erupt then such explosions are purely elemental and aimless. They may win a few battles but they are doomed to ultimate defeat.

For a class to be ripe for hegemony means that its interests and consciousness enable it to organise the whole of society in accordance with those interests. The crucial question in every class struggle is this: which class possesses this capacity and this consciousness at the decisive moment? This does not preclude the use of force. It does not mean that the class-interests destined to prevail and thus to uphold the interests of society as a whole can be guaranteed an automatic victory. On the contrary, such a transfer of power can often only be brought about by the most ruthless use of force (as e.g. the primitive accumulation of capital). But it often turns out that questions of class consciousness prove to be decisive in just those situations where force is unavoidable and where classes are locked in a life-and-death-struggle. Thus the noted Hungarian Marxist Erwin Szabo is mistaken in criticising Engels for maintaining that the Great Peasant War (of 1525) was essentially a reactionary movement. Szabo argues that the peasants' revolt was suppressed *only* by the ruthless use of force and that its defeat was not grounded in socioeconomic factors and in the class consciousness of the peasants. He overlooks the fact that the deepest reason for the weakness of the peasantry and the superior strength of the princes is to be sought in class consciousness. Even the most cursory student of the military aspects of the Peasants' War can easily convince himself of this.

It must not be thought, however, that all classes ripe for hegemony have a class consciousness with the same inner structure. Everything hinges on the extent to which they can become conscious of the actions they need to perform in order to obtain and organise power. The question then becomes: how far does the class concerned perform the actions history has imposed on it 'consciously' or 'unconsciously'? And is that consciousness 'true' or 'false'. These distinctions are by no means academic. Quite apart from problems of culture where such fissures and dissonances are crucial, in all practical matters too the fate of a class depends on its ability to elucidate and solve the problems with which history confronts it. And here it becomes transparently obvious that class consciousness is concerned neither with the thoughts of individuals, however advanced, nor with the state of scientific knowledge. For example, it is quite clear that ancient society was broken economically by the limitations of a system built on slavery. But it is equally clear that neither the ruling classes nor the classes that rebelled against them in the name of revolution or reform could perceive this. In consequence the practical

emergence of these problems meant that the society was necessarily and irremediably doomed...

To say that class consciousness has no psychological reality does not imply that it is a mere fiction. Its reality is vouched for by its ability to explain the infinitely painful path of the proletarian revolution, with its many reverses, its constant return to its starting-point and the incessant self-criticism of which Marx speaks in the celebrated passage in *The Eighteenth Brumaire*.

*Only the consciousness of the proletariat can point to the way that leads out of the impasse of capitalism.* As long as this consciousness is lacking, the crisis remains permanent, it goes back to its starting-point, repeats the cycle until after infinite sufferings and terrible detours the school of history completes the education of the proletariat and confers upon it the leadership of mankind. But the proletariat is not given any choice. As Marx says, it must become a class not only “as against capital” but also “for itself”; <sup>[43]</sup> that is to say, the class struggle must be raised from the level of economic necessity to the level of conscious aim and effective class consciousness. The pacifists and humanitarians of the class struggle whose efforts tend whether they will or no to retard this lengthy, painful and crisis-ridden process would be horrified if they could but see what sufferings they inflict on the proletariat by extending this course of education. But the proletariat cannot abdicate its mission. The only question at issue is how much it has to suffer before it achieves ideological maturity, before it acquires a true understanding of its class situation and a true class consciousness.

Of course this uncertainty and lack of clarity are themselves the symptoms of the crisis in bourgeois society. As the product of capitalism the proletariat must necessarily be subject to the modes of existence of its creator. This mode of existence is inhumanity and reification. No doubt the very existence of the proletariat implies criticism and the negation of this form of life. But until the objective crisis of capitalism has matured and until the proletariat has achieved true class consciousness, and the ability to understand the crisis fully, it cannot go beyond the criticism of reification and so it is only negatively superior to its antagonist. Indeed, if it can do no more than negate some aspects of capitalism, if it cannot at least aspire to a critique of the whole, then it will not even achieve a negative superiority. This applies to the petty-bourgeois attitudes of most trade unionists. Such criticism from the standpoint of capitalism can be seen most strikingly in the separation of the various theatres of war. The bare fact of separation itself indicates that the consciousness of the proletariat is still fettered by

reification. And if the proletariat finds the economic inhumanity to which it is subjected easier to understand than the political, and the political easier than the cultural, then all these separations point to the extent of the still unconquered power of capitalist forms of life in the proletariat itself...

Thus even the individual object which man confronts directly, either as producer or consumer, is distorted in its objectivity by its commodity character. If that can happen then it is evident that this process will be intensified in proportion as the relations which man establishes with objects as objects of the life process are mediated in the course of his social activity. It is obviously not possible here to give an analysis of the whole economic structure of capitalism. It must suffice to point out that modern capitalism does not content itself with transforming the relations of production in accordance with its own needs. It also integrates into its own system those forms of primitive capitalism that led an isolated existence in pre-capitalist times, divorced from production; it converts them into members of the henceforth unified process of radical capitalism. (CL merchant capital, the role of money as a hoard or as finance capital, etc.)

These forms of capital are objectively subordinated, it is true, to the real life-process of capitalism, the extraction of surplus value in the course of production. They are, therefore, only to be explained in terms of the nature of industrial capitalism itself. But in the minds of people in bourgeois society they constitute the pure, authentic, unadulterated forms of capital. In them the relations between men that lie hidden in the immediate commodity relation, as well as the relations between men and the objects that should really gratify their needs, have faded to the point where they can be neither recognised nor even perceived.

For that very reason the reified mind has come to regard them as the true representatives of his societal existence...

The divorce of the phenomena of reification from their economic bases and from the vantage point from which alone they can be understood, is facilitated by the fact that the [capitalist] process of transformation must embrace every manifestation of the life of society if the preconditions for the complete self-realisation of capitalist production are to be fulfilled...

To give a detailed analysis of the various forms taken by the refusal to understand reality as a whole and as existence, would be to go well beyond the framework of this study. Our aim

here was to locate the point at which there appears in the thought of bourgeois society the double tendency characteristic of its evolution. On the one hand, it acquires increasing control over the details of its social existence, subjecting them to its needs. On the other hand, it loses – likewise progressively – the possibility of gaining intellectual control of society as a whole and with that it loses its own qualifications for leadership.

Classical German philosophy marks a unique transitional stage in this process. It arises at a point of development where matters have progressed so far that these problems can be raised to the level of consciousness. At the same time this takes place in a milieu where the problems can only appear on an intellectual and philosophical plane. This has the drawback that the concrete problems of society and the concrete solutions to them cannot be seen. Nevertheless, classical philosophy is able to think the deepest and most fundamental problems of the development of bourgeois society through to the very end – on the plane of philosophy. It is able – in thought – to complete the evolution of class. And – in thought – it is able to take all the paradoxes of its position to the point where the necessity of going beyond this historical stage in mankind's development can at least be seen as a problem...

Of course, the history of the dialectical method reaches back deep into the history of rationalistic thought. But the turn it now takes distinguishes it qualitatively from all earlier approaches. (Hegel himself underestimates the importance of this distinction, e.g. in his treatment of Plato.) In all earlier attempts to use dialectics in order to break out of the limits imposed by rationalism there was a failure to connect the dissolution of rigid concepts clearly and firmly to the problem of the logic of the content, to the problem of irrationality.

Hegel in his *Phenomenology* and *Logic* was the first to set about the task of consciously recasting all problems of logic by grounding them in the qualitative material nature of their content, in matter in the logical and philosophical sense of the word. [56] This resulted in the establishment of a completely new logic of the *concrete concept*, the logic of totality – admittedly in a very problematic form which was not seriously continued after him.

Even more original is the fact that the subject is neither the unchanged observer of the objective dialectic of being and concept (as was true of the Eleatic philosophers and even of Plato), nor the practical manipulator of its purely mental possibilities (as with the Greek sophists): the dialectical process, the ending of a rigid confrontation of rigid forms, is enacted essentially *between the subject and the object*. No doubt, a few isolated earlier dialecticians

were not wholly unaware of the different levels of subjectivity that arise in the dialectical process (consider for example the distinction between ‘ratio’ and ‘intellectus’ in the thought of Nicholas of Cusa). But this relativising process only refers to the possibility of different subject-object relations existing simultaneously or with one subordinated to the other, or at best developing dialectically from each other; they do not involve the relativising or the interpenetration of the subject and the object themselves. But only if that were the case, only if “the true [were understood] not only as substance but also as subject”, only if the subject (consciousness, thought) were both producer and product of the dialectical process, only if, as a result the subject moved in a self-created world of which it is the conscious form and only if the world imposed itself upon it in full objectivity, only then can the problem of dialectics, and with it the abolition of the antitheses of subject and object, thought and existence, freedom and necessity, be held to be solved...

In addition to the mere contradiction – the automatic product of capitalism – a *new* element is required: the consciousness of the proletariat must become deed. But as the mere contradiction is raised to a consciously dialectical contradiction, as the act of becoming conscious turns into a *point of transition in practice*, we see once more in greater concreteness the character of proletarian dialectics as we have often described it: namely, since consciousness here is not the knowledge of an opposed object but is the self-consciousness of the object *the act of consciousness overthrows the objective form of its object*...

But now it becomes quite clear that the social development and its intellectual reflex that was led to form ‘facts’ from a reality that had been undivided (originally, in its autochthonous state) did indeed make it possible to subject nature to the will of man. At the same time, however, they served to conceal the socio-historical grounding of these facts in relations between men “so as to raise strange, phantom powers against them.” <sup>[48]</sup> For the ossifying quality of reified thought with its tendency to oust the process is exemplified even more clearly in the ‘facts’ than in the ‘laws’ that would order them. In the latter it is still possible to detect a trace of human activity even though it often appears in a reified and false subjectivity. But in the ‘facts’ we find the crystallisation of the essence of capitalist development into an ossified, impenetrable thing alienated from man. And the form assumed by this ossification and this alienation converts it into a foundation of reality and of philosophy that is perfectly self-evident and immune from every doubt. When confronted by the rigidity of these ‘facts’ every movement seems like a movement *impinging on* them, while every tendency to change them appears to be a merely subjective principle (a wish, a value judgement, an ought). Thus only

when the theoretical primacy of the ‘facts’ has been broken, only when *every phenomenon is recognised to be a process*, will it be understood that what we are wont to call ‘facts’ consists of processes. Only then will it be understood that the facts are nothing but the parts, the *aspects* of the total process that have been broken off, artificially isolated and ossified. This also explains why the total process which is uncontaminated by any trace of reification and which allows the process-like essence to prevail *in all its purity* should represent the authentic, higher reality. Of course, it also becomes clear why in the reified thought of the bourgeoisie the ‘facts’ have to play the part of its highest fetish in both theory and practice. This petrified factuality in which everything is frozen into a ‘fixed magnitude’<sup>[49]</sup> in which the reality that just happens to exist persists in a totally senseless, unchanging way precludes any theory that could throw light on even this immediate reality.

This takes reification to its ultimate extreme: it no longer points dialectically to anything beyond itself: its dialectic is mediated only by the reification of the immediate forms of production. But with that a climax is reached in the conflict between existence in its immediacy together with the abstract categories that constitute its thought, on the one hand, and a vital societal reality on the other. For these forms (e.g. interest) appear to capitalist thinkers as the fundamental ones that determine all the others and serve as paradigms for them. And likewise, every decisive turn of events in the production process must more or less reveal that the true categorical structure of capitalism has been turned completely upside down.

Thus bourgeois thought remains fixated on these forms which it believes to be immediate and original and from there it attempts to seek an understanding of economics, blithely unaware that the only phenomenon that has been formulated is its own inability to comprehend its own social foundations. Whereas for the proletariat the way is opened to a complete penetration of the forms of reification. It achieves this by starting with what is dialectically the clearest form (the immediate relation of capital and labour). It then relates this to those forms that are more remote from the production process and so includes and comprehends them, too, in the dialectical totality...

Among the factors that determine the direction to be taken, *the proletariat’s correct understanding of its own historical position is of the very first importance*. The course of the Russian Revolution in 1917 is a classic illustration of this. For we see there how at a crucial moment, the slogans of peace, self-determination and the radical solution to the agrarian problem welded together an army that could be deployed for revolution whilst completely

disorganising the whole power apparatus of counter-revolution and rendering it impotent. It is not enough to object that the agrarian revolution and the peace movement of the masses would have carried the day without or even against the Communist Party. In the first place this is absolutely unprovable: as counter-evidence we may point e.g. to Hungary where a no less spontaneous agrarian uprising was defeated in October 1918. And even in Russia it might have been possible to crush the agrarian movement or allow it to dissipate itself, by achieving a 'coalition' (namely a counter-revolutionary coalition) of all the 'influential' 'workers' parties'. In the second place, if the 'same' agrarian movement had prevailed against the urban proletariat it would have become counter-revolutionary in character in the context of the social revolution.

This example alone shows the folly of applying mechanical and fatalistic criteria to the constellation of social forces in acute crisis-situations during a social revolution. It highlights the fact that the proletariat's correct insight and correct decision is *all-important*; it shows the extent to which the resolution of the crisis *depends upon the proletariat itself*. We should add that in comparison to the western nations the situation in Russia was relatively simple. Mass movements there were more purely spontaneous and the opposing forces possessed no organisation deeply rooted in tradition. It can be maintained without exaggeration, therefore, that our analysis would have an *even greater validity* for western nations. All the more as the undeveloped character of Russia, the absence of a long tradition of a legal workers' movement — if we ignore for the moment the existence of a fully constituted Communist Party — gave the Russian proletariat the chance to resolve the ideological crisis with greater dispatch.<sup>[12]</sup>

Thus the economic development of capitalism places the fate of society in the hands of the proletariat. Engels describes the transition accomplished by mankind *after* the revolution has been carried out as "the leap from the realm of necessity into the realm of freedom".<sup>[13]</sup> For the dialectical materialist it is self-evident that despite the fact that this leap is a leap, or just because of it, it must represent in essence a *process*. Does not Engels himself say in the passage referred to that the changes that lead in this direction take place "at a constantly increasing rate" ? The only problem is to determine the *starting-point* of the process. It would, of course, be easiest to take Engels literally and to regard the realm of freedom simply as a *state* which will come into being after the completion of the social revolution. This would be simply to deny that the question had any immediate relevance. The only problem then would be to ask whether the question would really be exhausted by this formulation, which admittedly does correspond to Engels' literal statement. The question is whether a situation is even conceivable,

let alone capable of being made social reality, if it has not been prepared by a lengthy *process* which has contained and developed the elements of that situation, albeit in a form that is inadequate in many ways and in great need of being subjected to a series of dialectical reversals. If we separate the ‘realm of freedom’ sharply from the process which is destined to call it into being, if we thus preclude all dialectical transitions, do we not thereby lapse into a utopian outlook similar to that which has already been analysed in the case of the separation of final goal and the movement towards it?

If, however, the ‘realm of freedom’ is considered in the context of the process that leads up to it, then it cannot be doubted that even the earliest appearance of the proletariat on the stage of history indicated an aspiration towards that end — admittedly in a wholly unconscious way. However little the final goal of the proletariat is able, even in theory, to influence the initial stages of the early part of the process directly, it is a principle, a synthesising factor and so can never be completely absent from any aspect of that process. It must not be forgotten, however, that the difference between the period in which the decisive battles are fought and the foregoing period does not lie in the extent and the intensity of the battles themselves. These quantitative changes are merely symptomatic of the fundamental differences in quality which distinguish these struggles from earlier ones. At an earlier stage, in the words of the *Communist Manifesto*, even “the massive solidarity of the workers was not yet the consequence of their own unification but merely a consequence of the unification of the bourgeoisie”. Now, however, the process by which the proletariat becomes independent and ‘organises itself into a class’ is repeated and intensified until the time when the final crisis of capitalism has been reached, the time when the decision comes more and more within the grasp of the proletariat.

This state of affairs should not be taken to imply that the objective economic ‘laws’ cease to operate. On the contrary, they will remain in effect until long *after the victory* of the proletariat and they will only wither away — like the state — when the classless society wholly in the control of mankind comes into being. What is novel in the present situation is merely — merely!! — that the blind forces of capitalist economics are driving society towards the abyss. The bourgeoisie no longer has the power to help society, after a few false starts, to break the ‘deadlock’ brought about by its economic laws. And the proletariat has the *opportunity* to turn events *in another direction* by the conscious exploitation of existing trends. This other direction is the conscious regulation of the productive forces of society. To desire this *consciously*, is to desire the ‘realm of freedom’ and to take the first conscious step towards its realisation.



This step follows ‘necessarily’ from the class situation of the proletariat. However, this necessity has itself the character of a leap.<sup>[14]</sup> The practical relationship to the whole, the real unity of theory and practice which hitherto appeared only unconsciously, so to speak, in the actions of the proletariat, now emerges clearly and consciously. At earlier stages, too, the actions of the proletariat were driven to a climax in a series of leaps whose continuity with the previous development could only subsequently become conscious and be understood as the necessary consequence of that development. (An instance of this is the political form of the Commune of 1871.) In this case, however, the proletariat must take this step *consciously*. It is no wonder, therefore, that all those who remain imprisoned within the confines of capitalist thought recoil from taking this step and with all the mental energy at their disposal they hold fast to necessity which they see as a law of nature, as a ‘law of the repetition’ of phenomena. Hence, too, they reject as impossible the emergence of anything that is radically new of which we can have no ‘experience’. It was Trotsky in his polemics against Kautsky who brought out this distinction most clearly, although it had been touched upon in the debates on the war: “For the fundamental Bolshevik prejudice consists precisely in the idea that one can only learn to ride when one is sitting firmly on a horse.”<sup>[15]</sup> But Kautsky and his like are only significant as symptoms of the state of affairs: they symbolise the ideological crisis of the working class, they embody that moment of its development when it “once again recoils before the inchoate enormity of its own aims”, and when it jibs at a task which it must take upon itself. Unless the proletariat wishes to share the fate of the bourgeoisie and perish wretchedly and ignominiously in the death-throes of capitalism, it must accomplish this task *in full consciousness*.